

# Celebrating the Gift of the Stigmata 1224-2024



## SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

OHANA O' KE ĀNUENUE REGION  
HAWAI'I & GUAM



# THE STIGMATA OF ST. FRANCIS AND THE HOLY ROSARY

*[This prayer exercise was prepared in commutation of the 800th Centenary Celebration of The Stigmata of Saint Francis of Assisi, 2024 A.D.]*



## Opening Prayer





## ***Jesus Suffers His Agony in the Garden FOR ME...***

Meditating on the wound in the right hand of Francis and Christ, remember how Jesus used the power of his touch to heal the sick, the lame, the deaf the dumb and the possessed. Remember how Francis used the power of his touch to embrace the leper with sincere and fearless love.

**(Liz)** We use the power of our touch when we aid those who suffer physical ailments and torturous pain. We hold their hands in loving and unconditional support.

**(Silent Meditation)**



## ***Jesus is Scourged at the Pillar FOR ME...***

Meditating on the wound in the left hand of Francis and Christ, remember that we use our hands to comfort our brothers and sisters in times of agony and distress.

***(Theresa)*** We use our hands to write a note of encouragement to our homebound and infirmed fraternity members. We use our hands to bring offerings of food, medicine and other basic needs to our brothers and sisters in need. We use our hands to comfort in times of grief.

**(Silent Meditation)**





## ***Jesus is Crowned with Thorns FOR ME...***

Meditating on the wound in the right foot of Francis and Christ, remember that we use our feet to carry us to our Fraternity Gatherings. It is there that we feed our souls and bodies with the nourishment we need to continue our witness of the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ as instructed by Francis.

**(Toni)** May we be conscious of the thorns that come with Fraternity life and our diverse personalities, striving to live in peace as brothers and sisters of penance.

**(Silent Meditation)**



## ***Jesus Carries His Cross FOR ME...***

Meditating on the wound in the left foot of Francis and Christ, remember how Jesus walked obediently to Calvary with the weight of the sins of humanity on His shoulders. Remember how Francis so desired to walk in the footsteps of Christ that he received the five wounds of Christ in the Stigmata.

***(Candie)*** May we carry our own crosses in union with Jesus and Francis as we do what is ours to do in the rebuilding of His church.

***(Silent Meditation)***



## ***Jesus is Nailed to the Cross and Dies FOR ME...***

**Meditating on the wound in the side of Francis and Christ, remember how the saving power of God poured forth from the side of our Savior! Remember that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise of Salvation offered to each and every one of His children.**

***(JoAnn)*** May we continue to be followers of Francis and Christ as we graciously and gratefully continue in our Franciscan vocations. We pray for the salvation of all souls, in Jesus' name... Amen

**(Silent Meditation)**

**ICE BREAKER**

**BOOKS OF THE BIBLE**



# Celebrating the Stigmata of Saint Francis

The two sources given to us to ponder are the **first life of Celano** and the **Major Legend of St. Bonaventure** . Both accounts have similarities in their accounts of what happened when Saint Francis received the Stigmata, as well as some interesting differences worth noting.

## Celebrating the Stigmata of Saint Francis

Both accounts speak of a profound experience of **prayer** and **union** with God that St. Francis experienced shortly before receiving this wondrous gift.

## Celebrating the Stigmata of Saint Francis

Upon experiencing such an **intense infusion of God within his soul** , he wanted to understand exactly what it was that God was asking of him in this moment of his life.

# Celebrating the Stigmata of Saint Francis

With the seraphic ardor of desires, therefore, he was being borne aloft into God; and by **compassionate sweetness** he was being **transformed** into Him Who chose to be crucified out of the **excess of his love** .

# Celebrating the Stigmata of Saint Francis

He marveled exceedingly at the sight of so **unfathomable a vision** , knowing that the weakness of Christ's passion was in no way compatible with the immortality of the seraphic spirit. Eventually he understood from this, through the Lord revealing it, that **Divine Providence** had shown him a vision of this sort so that the friend of Christ might learn in advance that he was to be **totally transformed into the likeness of Christ crucified** , not by the martyrdom of his flesh, but by the enkindling of his soul. As the vision was disappearing, it left in his heart a marvelous fire and imprinted in his flesh a likeness of signs no less marvelous.



## Breakout Discussion

**EXTREME JOY**

**EXTREME PAIN**

S

SORROW: How could someone hurt me so much?

SALVATION: Lord, I unite my suffering to yours.

T

TORN: Why do I feel like my heart has been ripped from my chest?

TENDERNESS: Lord, help me to treat others with kindness.

I

IGNOMINY: How could they lie about me like that?

INDULGENCE: Lord, thank you for granting me forgiveness.

G

GRIEF: How could God take my loved one from me?

GRACE: Lord, grant me the graces of wisdom and understanding.

M

MISERY: Why can't I live a "normal" life?

MERCY: Lord, be merciful to me for my ingratitude.

A

ANGER: Why do I become angry when things don't go my way?

AGREEABLE: Lord, help me to rid myself of selfishness.

T

TROUBLED: Why am I afflicted with anxiety?

TRUST: Lord, reveal to me your abiding peace.

A

AVARICE: Why do I feel like I never have enough?

ALMSGIVING: Lord, help me to give of myself to others.

S

T

I

G

M

A

T

A

**Great JOY and CONSOLATION  
of God's closeness**

*CWhen I was 7 years old preparing for the sacrament of confirmation I was learning also about St Francis because the parish where I grew up was run by the Franciscans. Later, when I finished my college education, I joined the OFS right away. Since then, my life has changed a lot. I decided to leave my country due to the political situation. The most difficult thing to accept about it was the separation from my fraternity and the church. However, I have assured myself everything I desire, and need is engraved in my heart. The transit from Eritrea to Uganda wasn't easy. I had to be prepared for the worst scenario. I kept thinking of St Francis and he accompanied me on the journey.*

*Life of a refugee means the life on hold with no freedom at all to exercise any right to education, work, and other rights. Even with legal documents you are always under the shadows of so many uncertainties. During these years reflection on the stigmata of St Francis helped me and it is still helping me to regain my balance in life. St Francis loved Jesus and through him I always find guidance in what I could to do, how I need to treat others in all kinds of situations. I live among people with various beliefs and cultures. We all deal with our fears and pain what often leads to hurting behaviors. Besides that, I deal with financial, employment and security problems. Yet I believe that suffering has a meaning, which is the participation in the mystery of Christ. Like Francis, we will all encounter suffering on our journey with Christ. Let us never look at suffering as if God was absent. Rather, let us see together with St. Francis of Assisi that God works through our suffering, teaching us to love, to trust, and to bear our burden with humility and patience, because he is always with us, and we can draw on his love at any time.*

Veronica Ghebrehiwet Mehari OFS  
Kampala, Uganda





*When I was a little girl, the first saint who became my friend was Francis of Assisi. I think he even preceded the Virgin Mary in timing. He won me over with his love for creation and with his desire to be united with God and thus to form a family with everything that breathes and praises the Lord.*

*As I grew up, Saint Francis also grew in me, and Christ did as well. Francis gradually began to call me to get to know Christ through his own eyes, ears, mouth, and hands more and more. And so, we have been slowly walking together on the path of peace and good. He teaches me to sing the song of Brother Sun and to put on new clothes – a habit – that is, the body of Christ and his cross. He introduces to me the blessed ones with a pure heart and the noble Lady Poverty, until it culminates with Sister Obedience, which welcomes Francis on Mount La Verna, while I am waiting below. Francis was obedient unto death, unto death to sin and unto the meeting with Sister Death. He teaches me that for God there is forever Sister Death as Brother Life, war as peace, darkness as light and pain as joy.*

*As I sit in my room in Bratislava, sometimes it seems to me that Francis on Mount La Verna is too distant and inaccessible. But when I get quiet, I hear him singing and calling me not to be afraid to leave the world of wealth and seductive chivalry of our time, but to ascend the mountain into silence, poverty, and solitude. And this song is so catchy and beautiful that I'm gradually getting it, and I must admit that the fool after all, is me and the world, not Francis. I am fascinated by how incredibly natural and authentic he is. And that's why his stigmata, and Christ's wounds, are slowly becoming more and more natural and meaningful for me. They are open – open to anyone who wants to put their finger in them and to believe. They are the living engraved tablets, brought to the world by Francis from Mount La Verna (like those two tablets of the Law, given out of love and brought by Moses from the Mount Sinai), so that we may turn away from the sin of idolatry and discover the nature and nearness of God's Law. They, the stigmata become a new creation in Francis, and although I know only a little about them, at least I understand that I can greet them as Sisters Wounds, because they were created by "God's finger", and they are good, beautiful, and creative.*



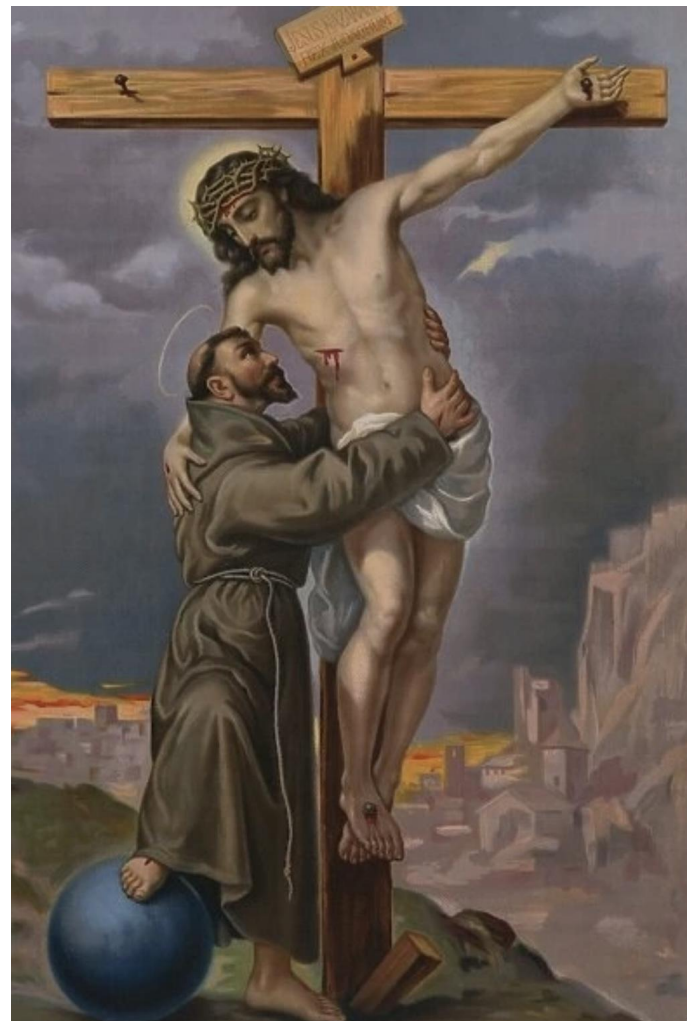
*Our life is strewn with various encounters.*

*"The true love of Christ has transformed the lover into the exact image of the Beloved" (Major Legend 13: 5). Our lives are strewn with various encounters. Some are only momentary, some appeal to us for a time, others leave certain mark, but there are also those that last for a lifetime. Time seems to stand still... Not in the sense of stiffness, closedness, on the contrary, many things do happen, but the passage of time takes on a different dimension.*

*At the beginning of this encounter there is a touch, one feels the touch of love. If he responds to it, it will start guiding him. Perhaps each one of us has had this experience in some form. The touch of love is even more powerful when it comes from its source, from God. It was experienced by Francis, who met the Crucified in San Damiano and could not forget him any more..., it has been experienced by many of his followers. I have experienced it as well...*

*Years ago, as I was entering the side hallway adjacent to the Franciscan church, I saw a life-size statue. It represented Christ on the cross trying to embrace Francis and he was reaching out to him with all his being. It was a joy, every morning, to watch this silent, strong yearning of one for the other, this struggle of love to overcome the distance that was yet separating them. The short distance was full of silence, of gazes fixed at each other, of devotion and surrender, but also of the desire that it would no longer separate them. Love overcomes distances, but it does not walk alone. Its inseparable companion is pain. Love without pain could turn into complacency, and pain without love would be devastating. Both are the faithful guides on the journey to the Beloved. Francis asked for them at the end of his pilgrimage, on Mount La Verna. At that time Love and pain showed fully their power to transform wounds into the precious signs of Christ's love. That short distance, between Christ on the cross and me, is a journey of love in surrender, in participation in the life of the Beloved, in the good and in the difficulties. It is open to every pain, hurt, disappointment... which, in Love and with Love, acquire their meaning and true character.*

Sr. Pacifika OSF, Rome, Italy





## A POOR SISTER OF ST. CLARE

### *Francis meeting with Christ at La Verna*

*My experience of the stigmata is that in all truth you cannot be Christ's disciple without the Cross. The Bugambilia (Vogabilla) flowers in our Monastery constantly remind me of this beautiful reality. These flowers are not only beautiful in their multi – color but also resistant and strong. What is inspiring me and it's unique in them is the life that comes from their thorns. They bloom from the thorns. With that, they have taught me that if my life in the cloister is to be fruitful and meaningful, it has to be wounded in whichever way it pleases my Beloved Spouse. He brought me to the enclosure to be fertile, not to be barren. The difficulties of life have to be there in order to mature my faith in Jesus and to deepen my roots in the reality of my religious and Christian vocation: The time of adoration and prayer, when I listen to God, and entrust to Him all the hopes and anxieties of our world in living Silence and seclusion...that embrace the whole Church in heaven and on earth...these are mine most cherished moments in the cloister.*

*For me this is what means the stigmatization or the encounter of Francis with the Crucified Christ at La Verna on those special moments.*

Sr. Maria Tamele, Zimbabwe



*The stigmata of St Francis are the manifestation of Christ's wounds on a person who has a deep spiritual bond with him. I am a Zimbabwean priest and a Franciscan Capuchin, and I will reflect on the meaning and significance of the stigmata for my life and ministry.*

*Zimbabwe is a country that has faced political and economic crises, violence, and poverty for decades. I have seen the suffering and resilience of our people, especially the poor and marginalized.*

*I joined the Franciscan order, which follows the example and teachings of St Francis of Assisi. He was a man who renounced worldly riches and pleasures and embraced a life of poverty, simplicity, and service. He had a profound love for God, creation, and all creatures, especially the poor and the lepers. He also had a special devotion to the passion of Christ, which led him to receive the stigmata in 1224.*

*The stigmata of St Francis are the signs of his intimate union with Christ, who suffered and died for our salvation. They are also the sign of his compassion for the suffering of humanity, which he shared in his own flesh. The stigmata are not a reward or a privilege, but a gift and a responsibility. It is a call to follow Christ more closely, to imitate his love and humility, and to be his instruments of peace and justice in the world.*

*As a Zimbabwean priest, I find the stigmata of St Francis very relevant and inspiring for my ministry and mission. It reminds me that I am called to be a witness of Christ's love and mercy in a wounded world, especially among the poor and oppressed. It challenges me to live in solidarity with those who suffer, to share their joys and sorrows, and to offer them hope and healing.*

*The stigmata of St Francis are the universal message for the church and the world. They invite us to contemplate God's love revealed in Christ crucified and risen, to respond to his call to conversion and holiness, and to participate in his mission of reconciliation and transformation.*

Fr. Elvis Gwangwava OFM Cap,  
Zimbabwe

# Stigmata



Prot. n. 3757

Rome, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024

To  
 all my brothers and sisters in the  
 International Fraternity of the  
 Secular Franciscan Order

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
 may the Lord give you his peace!

During the course of the years of the Franciscan Centenaries, this year we are celebrating the anniversary of the day, when "... true love of Christ transformed the lover into his image ... bearing with him the likeness of the Crucified" (Saint Bonaventure: The major legend XIII). Saint Francis has received the stigmata on the mountain of La Verna, meeting the crucified and glorified Christ in the image of the seraph. Saint Francis was being transformed by Christ, into the conformity of Christ, into being an image of Christ, not only in his spirit but also in his body.

It is an inspiration for us to seek answers to the great questions in our life: What is the experience of the true love of Christ in our life? What happened on the mount La Verna is not only a wonderful event which is absolutely worth to be remembered and celebrated, but such an event which also we, secular Franciscans can learn a lot from.

## Introduction

What was the situation in his life when Saint Francis went up to La Verna and received the stigmata? What was the situation in the Order? We have to notice, that these were hard times for him. The Order has become big, which was a reason of joy, but also, it was very difficult to guide and animate more or less 5000 brothers. This was somehow a moment of crisis. Big questions were raised about the future of the Order, about the directions, about the proper way of life of the brothers. The chapter decided to launch new missions, e.g. in England. It became obvious, that the coin has two sides, and fraternal life is not only full of joys, but also full of challenges. Saint Francis, not only having the burdens of a leader of this big fraternity, feeling the responsibility and facing the challenges, but also having a lot of personal problems, health issues, personal temptations, getting weaker, has decided to head to La Verna.



We can read many meditations on the events happened to Saint Francis at La Verna, and we can learn a lot about it, it is a really important and enriching moment of the life of Saint Francis, which can give us a lot regarding our Secular Franciscan vocation. I only would like to draw your attention to three things: the gift of Christ, together with Christ and unity with Christ. This is somehow a kind of spiritual journey, which may be an invitation for us to, too, to set out and experience how Christ is working through these things in our life.

## The gift of Christ

*"O Lord Jesus Christ, before I die I ask you for two graces: first, that in my lifetime I may feel, as far as possible, both in my soul and body, that pain which you, sweet Lord, endured in the hour of your most bitter Passion; second, that I may feel in my heart as far as possible that excess of love which moved you, O Son of God, to suffer so cruel a Passion for us sinners."*  
 (Little Flowers of Saint Francis)

Saint Francis, shortly before this miraculous event at La Verna asked two things, two graces from Christ: to feel the love and to feel the pain. At La Verna he received the stigmata, and we think, it gave him only one of the gifts he requested: the suffering, the pain. But could we imagine, that Christ did only the half of the job, would give only the half of the gift? Though we never could read about it, it seems pretty sure, and I am convinced, that Saint Francis was granted that grace too, that he felt the immense love of Christ.

His such deep desire had a precious response from Christ, a precious gift. He understood and we should understand, too, that these two things go always together. Christ does not let us suffer without granting the ability to love and to feel being loved. But vice versa, too: Christ teaches us that there is no great love without suffering. But these two only can be in balance if we ask both of them from Christ, and if we are ready to accept both of them from the hands of Christ.

Suffering is not a good thing by itself. Suffering by itself is not a goal for us. But the more we can accept the suffering from the hands of Christ, the more we will be able to be like him also in the terms of our love. We may be sure that Christ, when grants us the grace of suffering, grants us the joy of love, too.

The stigmata are the external sign of these two gifts: the suffering and the love, showing that they are united in one, they come from Christ together, completing each other. These gifts were a turning point in the life of Saint Francis.

Instead of comforting him, instead of spoiling him in his physical and spiritual sufferings in a way he could expect, he gets the stigmata, the wounds, which hurt - hurt a lot. However, as a miracle, these stigmata mean a comforting, the stigmata calmed him down. This moment has changed the life of Francis, and should change our life, too. It should call us to do our best to be together with Christ, to get into unity with Christ, asking and accepting everything from Him.

## Together with Christ

One can be alone without being lonely and can be lonely being surrounded by others.



We can read in the biographies of Saint Francis, that two years before his death, on the occasion of the feast of St. Michael, he went up to the mount La Verna. He wanted to be alone. Only Fr. Leo was permitted to accompany him. However, we should remember, that this is way far not the first moment in the life of Saint Francis, when he seemed to be alone, in spite of the 'illusion' of the contrary.

He was alone in the prison of Perugia. He went alone to pray in front of the San Damiano cross. He went out to keel the fast of St Michael on an island, and he was alone. But also, he went out and left the dwelling place of the brothers to be alone when praying. He even was ready to stay sleepless all the night spending in prayers when this was the only opportunity to listen to and talk to God.

He was not alone, but was lonely though being in the center of the company on the streets when being young. And he was not alone, but could feel lonely at the chapter when the brothers wanted to change his genuine ideas about the Order.

We could continue, searching his biographies. There were so many moments of being alone, sometimes being lonely, that this feeling was deeply set in his heart. Sometimes he was seeking to be alone and sometimes he found himself alone, he was lonely. However, he was always sure that in this loneliness among the people, Christ was always with him.

On the La Verna Christ did not let him being alone at all. This was the very moment, when Christ has definitely terminated his being alone. He got the best company ever, Christ himself, visibly, in the closest contact in the world. This being accompanied, comforted by Christ has led him to an absolute unity with Christ.

Christ is ready to accompany each of us, forever. Also we, secular franciscans feel sometimes alone, like anyone else. Sometimes we feel lonely. We have bad moments, periods in our life, when we don't feel anyone to be close to us. May this miracle of the La Verna be an inspiration for us, too. Christ is always ready to accompany us, he is always so close to us, that we can feel the inspiration to be united with Christ in an absolute unity. It is possible, let's believe it!

### Unity with Christ

If I want to understand someone else, the other people, I should imagine to be in his place. What did lead him to do what he did? How can I understand his motivations? I should think the same way he/she thinks, I should try to feel the same thing that he/she feels.

Francis wanted exactly the same. He wanted to learn the motivations of Christ. What has made Christ, as absolutely being a man, to give his life to others? What did make it possible for him to go to the cross? Francis wanted to understand Christ, wanted to know, what kind of love it must be to do the same. He asked the grace to experience what Christ has experienced, he wanted to totally be united with him. He did not only want to get closer to Christ, but wanted to be like Christ, and later through this unity he could be so close to others, to his brothers, to the poor, to the lepers, as Christ was. He really wanted to imitate Christ. The 'sequela Christi' has meant him even more, not only to be 'like' Christ but to 'be' Christ. This desire has driven him through his whole life, thus becoming truly 'Alter Christus'.



With the stigmas he arrived to the full unity, to the complete likeness of Christ, both in spirit and in his body. The stigmas are not the reason of this full unity but the highest point of his life which arrived to the absolute unity and likeness of Christ, both internally and in its external signs. He became 'Alter Christus', not because he received the stigmas, but the stigmas are its external signs.

### Conclusion

Saint Francis recognized that to all his problems of that time - in his private life, among his health issues, in his spiritual life, in the life of the Order - this gift of Christ is the solution, living the cross at its fullness, living in an absolute unity with Him. He recognized that the full unity means the physical unity, with the stigmas as its external signs, and also the spiritual unity with Christ whom he has met though on the cross but in his full glory.

*Francis was mightily astonished, and joy, mingled with sorrow, filled his heart. He rejoiced at the gracious aspect wherewith he saw Christ, under the guise of the Seraph, regard him, but His crucifixion pierced his soul with a sword of pitying grief. (LMJ XIII)* His heart was filled with joy and sorrow, simultaneously.

This life-changing encounter with Christ has made it possible to become gifted, to unite with Christ, and thus to be comforted.

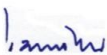
The Spirit is urging us towards the true love of Christ. The Spirit is encouraging us to go forth. The Spirit is comforting us in the difficult moments of our life. The Spirit is giving us guidance when we are searching the directions. The Spirit is transforming us. Let us be opened to the Spirit, so that like Saint Francis, we may bear the likeness of the Crucified!

I invite you all, also in the fraternities, to set some questions to ourselves again. How has Christ transformed us when we became members of this seraphic fraternity, the OFS? Do we wear the likeness of Christ? Whom do we allow to transform us: Christ or the world? What do we do with the gifts? Do we recognize, what are the real gifts? Do we know what are the gifts of God? What do we do with the suffering? Can we join it with the expression of love? Does the "true love of Christ transform" us? Do we wish to be transformed into the image of Christ? What would mean for us to bear the likeness of Christ?

May these questions lead us all to a better understanding of our vocation, and may the answers help us to keep on going on our vocational journey day by day more faithfully, more joyfully, more united with Christ. May our seraphic father, Saint Francis help us on this way!

I wish all of you a blessed feast and a joyful celebration of this life-changing encounter!

Your brother and your minister

  
Tibor Kausser  
CIOFS General Minister



## Open Discussion

**How has Christ transformed us when we became members of this seraphic fraternity, the OFS?**

In closing, Prayer to St. Francis of Assisi

**(Ben)** Saint Francis, man wounded by love,  
Crucified in body and in spirit,  
we look to you,  
decorated with the holy stigmata,  
to learn how to love the Lord Jesus  
and our brothers and sisters with your love,  
with your passion.

**(Jim)** With you, it is easier to contemplate  
and follow Christ, poor and Crucified.  
Give us, Francis,  
the freshness of your faith,  
the certainty of your hope,  
the gentleness of your charity.





**(Stan)** Intercede for us, so that it may be sweet for us to bear the burdens of life, and in trials, we may experience the tenderness of the Father and the balm of the Spirit.

May our wounds be healed by the Heart of Christ, to become, like you, witnesses of His mercy, which continues to heal and renew the life of those who seek Him with a sincere heart.

O Francis, made to resemble the Crucified One, let your stigmata be for us and for the world resplendent signs of life and resurrection, to show new ways of peace and reconciliation.

Amen.

***Pope Francis' Prayer to St. Francis  
Given at the Vatican  
April 5, 2024***

## Regional Executive Council Information

- Newsletter submissions
- 2024 Region Chapter via zoom  
November 23 (Hawaii) 24 (Guam)
- REC Sponsored Mini-Formation
  - Centenary Celebrations
    - 2025: The Canticle of Creatures
    - 2026: The Easter of Francis
- 2025 REC Formation and Elections
  - May 28, 2025 to June 1, 2025

