

Companions on the Journey: **Sisters and Associates**



"Pilgrim's Way"
Artwork by Associate Karen Kietzman

THE ASSOCIATE MANUAL

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Introduction

The Associate Manual has been designed to be a guide and resource for you , whether you are a Candidate on your journey toward becoming an Associate or whether you are an Associate or Companion seeking deeper understanding of the Associate Relationship as rooted in Franciscan charism.

In **Chapters 1 and 2** you will have the opportunity to learn more about the Sisters: present and past history. **Chapter 3** includes reviews of some of the many books written about Francis and Clare as well as timelines of their lives. As a supplement to some of the information you may have already received, **Chapters 4 and 5** provide a broader perspective on our Associate relationship. **Chapters 6 and 7** are meant to open more widely for you the richness of Franciscan/Clarean practice and spirituality. These two chapters lend themselves to discussion and prayerful reflection not only with your Companion but also with other Associates in our regional groups. The Manual concludes with various resources in **Chapter 8**.

Each Chapter includes discussion questions for prayerful discernment and reflection. If you are a Candidate, you and your Companion will use these chapters to initiate further inquiry about yourself and the Congregation. If you already are an Associate, you will find the Manual an ongoing reference for spiritual reflection. It is designed to help you discover how relevant its topics are in the spirituality of your daily life. It encourages sharing stories and hopes with each other as we live the Gospel way of life.

The sequence of the Chapters is also worthy of note. It corresponds with the sequence of the discernment process which was developed after much conversation and study by a task force of Associates and Sisters commissioned by the Governing Board of the Congregation to review in depth the Associate Relationship. Since each of you comes with a different experience and history of the Congregation, you may want to adjust the sequence and the amount of time you spend on the various Chapters. Be open to the Holy Spirit as you proceed on this journey. The Manual is set up so that parts can be added or deleted to keep it a "living" document and guide.

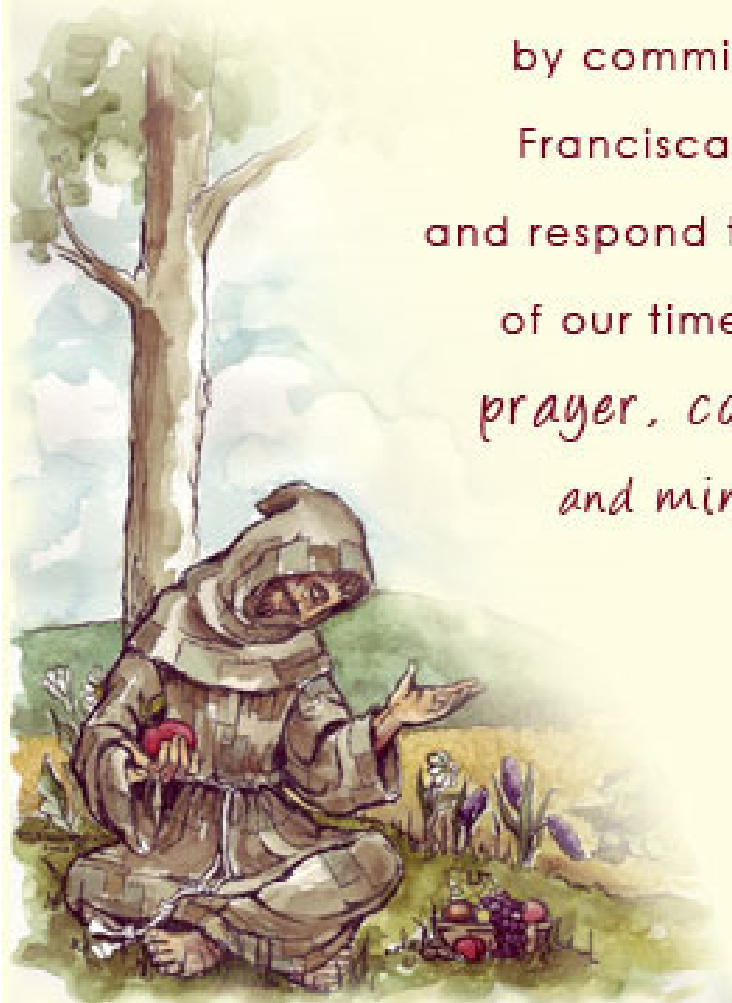
So let us begin! Come with your hopes and dreams, insights and questions, passions and compassion. Be blessed in your desire to walk with the Joliet Franciscan Sisters and Associates in the Gospel way of life of Francis and Clare.

Chapter 1: Mission Statement and Corporate Stances of the Congregation

MISSION STATEMENT

Led by the
Spirit,

we, the Joliet Franciscans,
embrace the Gospel life
by commitment to
Franciscan values
and respond to the needs
of our time through
prayer, community
and ministry.



Artwork by Sr. Kay Francis Berger, OSF

Reflecting on the Mission Statement of the Congregation



As Associates, we read and meditate on the Mission Statement of the Joliet Franciscans, to see if and how it may guide us as lay Christians. We each have been drawn to these Sisters under different circumstances and for different reasons. We have been “led by the Spirit” from within our own life situations to embrace the Gospel life in partnership with the Joliet Franciscans.

Gospel Life

Francis experienced his call to rebuild the Church literally. Always taking God at God’s word, Francis simply began to repair and eventually redesign the church of San Damiano, brick by brick. But, being led by the Spirit, he was seduced into *living* the Gospel. He did so by radically applying the Gospel to his daily life, and by examining his life and looking for guidance from the Gospels. We call this “*going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel*”.

How have I been called to embrace the Gospel life?

Which Gospel passages have inspired me? Which have challenged me?

Franciscan Values

Out of this experience of Gospel living, Franciscans, over the last 800 years, have identified what might be called their “**Franciscan core values**,” their special gifts in the life of the Church, their charism. And so, in their mission statement, the Sisters pledge to “embrace the Gospel life by commitment to Franciscan values...” Following is a brief explanation of these core values. As you meditate and pray over them, the questions that follow may help you discern their place in your own life.

Conversion

For Franciscans, conversion of heart is an ongoing process. When Francis urges us to begin a life of penance, he means we must totally and continuously undergo conversion. We make a dwelling place for God within, so that our love can grow by continuously *turning toward God and neighbor*. This is a daily challenge and often we fail. Conversion of heart is the root value and from it flows the other three: poverty, humility or honesty about who I am, and contemplation. (adapted TOR rule 6,8 and Jn 14:23) At the end of his life, Francis confessed that he had only just begun.

Do I really believe that God is not finished with me yet?

How do I deal with the changes that are necessary to grow in faith and love?

How do I accept these changes? With trust? With joy?

How open am I to the new creation that God is always holding before me?

Poverty

Trusting the Father, Christ chose for himself and his mother a poor and humble life, even though he valued created things attentively and lovingly. For Francis, this meant more than “having nothing”. It meant “having nothing but God”. From this experience an amazing freedom emerged. Poverty allows us to live peacefully in our total dependence on God. We begin to understand that all we have comes from God and that we are stewards of these gifts and of all of creation.

What does detachment from temporal goods mean for me?

What opportunities do I have to be God’s steward of creation in the use of water, land, energy, animals, and plants?

As a resident of the wealthiest country in the world, how much am I willing to go without so that the cry of the poor may be heard and answered?

Humility (Minority)

In the time of Francis and Clare, the middle class was only beginning to emerge from the feudal system. Most of the people were the “little ones,” in Italian, *minores*, the ordinary workers, the poor and the destitute. The wealthy and powerful were the *majores*. If Francis was to walk in the footsteps of Christ, he and his followers had to be *minores*.

As is described in the Rule for lay people (SFO 11,13 adapted): In the spirit of the Beatitudes, and as pilgrims and strangers on our way to the Father, let us purify our hearts from every tendency and yearning for *possession and power*. As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, so let us, with a gentle and courteous spirit, accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ. A sense of community makes us joyful and ready to place ourselves on an *equal basis* with all people, especially with the *lowly* from whom we strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

How important is keeping control for me?

In my day to day life, how do I practice “namaste?” Does the God in me greet the God in my child, spouse, co-worker, friend, neighbor?

What would it mean for me to place myself on an equal basis with my immediate community and with our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are in dire need?

Prayer and Contemplation

Francis experienced and taught simple forms of prayer. Some of the brothers could not read and books were rare and expensive. But for those in love with the Incarnate Christ, prayer was a song of praise and thanksgiving. “Let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all we *are and do.*”

Let us participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let us join in liturgical prayer, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ in our own lives.” (SFO rule 8, adapted)

Since it is only through prayer and contemplation that we can be open to conversion, poverty and humility, spend some time sharing your own experience or the place of prayer in your life.

When and where do you pray?

*How does your personal prayer nourish your communal, sacramental and liturgical prayer? And **vice versa**?*

From what you know about St. Francis and St. Clare, what are some aspects of Franciscan prayer that speak to you and inspire you?

The Needs of Our Times

Francis and Clare lived in a time of cultural upheaval, wars, injustice, and chaos that impacted not only the civil state but also the Church. The foundress of the Joliet Franciscan Sisters, Mother Alfred Moes, was led by the Spirit into a similar era of history. Each Sister responded to the signs of the times. That’s what holy people do—people who are wholly human and can recognize the signs of the times! As you grow in the Associate Relationship with other Associates and Sisters, you will learn more of the history of their various ministries and how they are nourished by prayer and community to meet the needs of the world.

What do you consider your ministry or ministries?

How do you sustain the strength to continue it? How has it changed over time?

How can association with the Sisters nourish your response to the needs of the times?

In the light of your discernment and discussion about the Associate Relationship, what aspects of this mission statement mean most to you at this point?

How much are you drawn to join with these Sisters in their mission? (Later you can compare it to your commitment statement as an Associate.)

Corporate Stances and Action

We commit ourselves to
prayer, study, dialogue and action
for nuclear disarmament. 1996



Action: Personally become more informed through
internet and current world news.

www.nti.org

www.psr.org/nuclear-weapons/
www.un.org/disarmament/education



As Joliet Franciscans,
we commit to cultivating a reverent,
interdependent relationship with Earth
and all its peoples. 2004

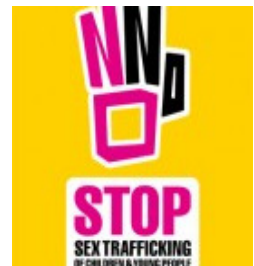
Action: Be aware of migrant workers and work
place justice issues and support needed reforms.

- Use glass containers for storage of foods
- Decrease use of paper, plastic and styrofoam
(1369 TONS of styrofoam buried each year in landfills)

We, the Sisters and Associates of the
Joliet Franciscans,
denounce the practice of human trafficking
and commit ourselves to the work
of bringing about the elimination
of this evil practice. 2006

- Action: Check into a hotel's policy on human
trafficking before making reservations.
- Borrow from JFC one of the following DVD's to
view:

Not My Life/ Lives For Sale/Look Beneath the Surface



Reflecting on the Corporate Stances of the Congregation

Over the years, in responding to the needs of the time, the Sisters have professed corporate stances on specific social justice issues. These have been identified through a process of common study, prayer, discussion and action. The Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) commission of Sisters and Associates meets regularly and offers workshops, classes, events and educational materials to keep these corporate stances relevant for the Congregation. There are also resources on these issues that you can borrow from the Congregation for your own use or to share with others.

On the Congregation's website, jolietfranciscans.org, under *History*, the Sisters list their corporate stances updating them with relevant examples for prayer and action.

Which corporate stance relates most to your sense of justice and why?

How have you supported it through action and prayer? What more can you do?

Which one would you like to learn more about?

