

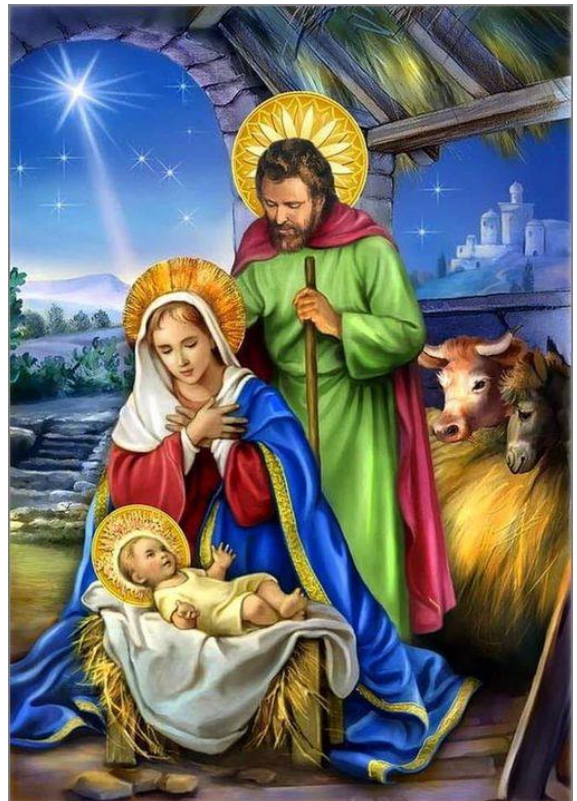


Issue no. 40 – Christmas 2023

Message from our Regional Minister



Thomas of Celano's Book I: Life of St. Francis of Assisi (1229) Chapter XXX THE MANGER HE MADE IN CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S BIRTHDAY ⁸⁴ His highest aim, foremost desire, and greatest intention was to pay heed to the holy gospel in all things and through all things, to follow the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and to retrace His footsteps completely with all vigilance and all zeal, all the desire of his soul and all the fervor of his heart. Francis used to recall with regular meditation the words of Christ and recollect His deeds with most attentive perception. Indeed, so thoroughly did the humility of the Incarnation and the charity of the Passion occupy his memory that he scarcely wanted to think of anything else. We should note then, as matter worthy of memory and something to be recalled with reverence, what he did, three years prior to his death, at the town of Greccio, on the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ. There was a certain man in that area named John who had a good reputation but an even better manner of life. Blessed Francis loved him with special affection, since, despite being a noble in the land and very honored in human society, he had trampled the nobility of the flesh under his feet and pursued instead the nobility of the spirit. As usual, blessed Francis had John summoned to him some fifteen days prior to the birthday of the Lord. "If you desire to celebrate the coming feast of the Lord together at Greccio," he said to him, "hurry before me and carefully make ready ^{Prv 24:27} the things I tell you. For I wish to enact the memory of that babe who was born in Bethlehem: to see as much as is possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of



his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, ^{Lk 2:7} and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay." Once the good and faithful man had heard Francis's words, he ran quickly ^{Jn 20:4} and prepared in that place all the things that the holy man had requested. ⁸⁵ Finally, the day of joy has drawn near, the time of exultation has come. From many different places the brethren have been called. As they could, the men and women of that land with exultant hearts prepare candles and torches to light up that night whose shining star has enlightened every day and year. Finally, the holy man of God comes and, finding all things prepared, he saw them and was glad. ^{Jn 8:56} Indeed, the manger is prepared, the hay is carried in, the ox and the ass are led to the

spot. There simplicity is given a place of honor, poverty is exalted, humility is commended, and out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem. The night is lit up like day, ^{Ps 139:12} delighting both man and beast. The people arrive, ecstatic at this new mystery of new joy. The forest amplifies the cries and the boulders echo back the joyful crowd. The brothers sing, giving God due praise, and the whole night abounds with jubilation. The holy man of God ^{Mk 1:24} stands before the manger, filled with heartfelt sighs, contrite in his piety, and overcome with wondrous joy. Over the manger the solemnities of the Mass are celebrated and the priest enjoys a new consolation. ⁸⁶ The holy man of God is dressed in the vestments of the Levites, since he was a Levite, and with full voice sings the holy gospel. Here is his voice: a powerful voice, a pleasant voice, ^{Sg 2:14} a clear voice, a musical voice, inviting all to the highest of gifts. Then he preaches to the people standing around him and pours forth sweet honey about the birth of the poor King and the poor city of Bethlehem. Moreover, burning with excessive love, he/Francis often calls Christ the "babe from Bethlehem" whenever he means to call Him Jesus. Saying the word "Bethlehem" in the manner of a bleating sheep, he fills his whole mouth with sound but even more with sweet affection. He seems to lick his lips whenever he uses the expressions "Jesus" or "babe from Bethlehem," tasting the word on his happy palate and savoring the sweetness of the word. The gifts of the Almighty are multiplied there and a virtuous man sees a wondrous vision. For the man saw a little child lying lifeless in the manger and he saw the holy man of God approach the child and waken him from a deep sleep. Nor is this vision unfitting, since in the hearts of many the child Jesus has been given over to oblivion. ^{Ps 31:13} Now he is awakened and impressed on their loving memory by His own grace through His holy servant Francis. At length, the night's solemnities draw to a close and everyone went home with joy. ⁸⁷ The hay placed in the manger there was preserved afterwards so that, through it, the Lord might restore to health the pack animals and the other animals there, as He multiplied his holy mercy. It came to pass in the surrounding area that many of the animals, suffering from various diseases, were freed from their illnesses when they ate some of this hay. What is more, women who had been suffering with long and hard labor had an easy

delivery after they placed some of this hay upon themselves. Finally, an entire group of people of both sexes obtained much-desired relief from an assortment of afflictions. At last, the site of the manger was consecrated as a temple to the Lord. In honor of the most blessed father Francis, an altar was constructed over the manger, and a church was dedicated. This was done so that where animals once ate the fodder of the hay, ^{Dn 5:21} there humans henceforth for healing of body and soul would eat the flesh of the immaculate and spotless lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us ^{Ti 2:14} with supreme and indescribable love, who lives and rules with the Father and the Holy Spirit as God, eternally glorious forever and ever. Amen. Alleluia, Alleluia



Please spend some time reflecting on the above writing by Thomas Celano. If you were in Greccio at that time of St Francis, where would you be?

May you experience joy as you reflect on God's love when the Father sent his only begotten son into this world so that you may have life in him.

Peace and all good,
Lanny

Message from our Spiritual Assistant

Love came down from heaven to create love on earth.... Christmas is the celebration of love. This year as Franciscans we are privileged to celebrate the 800 years of the 'Christmas at Greccio.' What inspired St. Francis of Assisi to reenact the birth of the Savior? It's the love of God and love for God. St. Francis was in total love for the humility, simplicity and poverty of God who took human flesh in Jesus. God chose us, He chose our imperfect world to dwell. This world is not better than the world of St. Francis, in fact it's even worse right now. Our world remains wounded more than ever, wars and natural disasters continue. Human pain and misery are at rise. So, can we still celebrate Christmas? Jesus is Emmanuel-God is with us. God came in our broken and sinful world. He came to share His love and make us love one another. He is present with us in our joys and sorrows. He is our only hope and strength in times of tragedies created by humans.

St. Francis has much to say about the joy of Incarnation. I do not have to remind you about 'perfect joy' of St. Francis. He truly lived in a true relationship with God and neighbour. He saw the love and presence of God in each animate and inanimate being, treated them with equal dignity as all have one source of origin. Lack of sincere relationship with God and neighbour will result into selfish behaviour and wish, that cause unrest in our life and society. This Christmas, I would remind you and myself to focus on the love of God who spared nothing but gave His only begotten Son to love and save us. May we be grateful for God's gift to us and share His love with each other.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2024!

Br Manoj Xalxo, OFM

Message from our Director of Formation

In the **Franciscan Daily Companion** reflection on Christmas Day this year, Fr. Jude Winkler, OFM quotes St. Francis of Assisi when he says, *You are beauty, you are gentleness*. Fr. Winkler asks us how can we describe the wonder and glory of it all? When St. Francis spoke of the Birth of the Baby Jesus in Bethlehem, he licked his lips as if these were the sweetest words he had ever said. Fr. Winkler says *We say prayers, we sing songs, but at a certain point, words fail us - and we stand in awe before the mystery of God's love*.

Prayer: Holy Infant, so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace.

May all our Secular Franciscan Brothers and sisters have a Happy and Holy Christmas Season.

Peace and joy to the world,
Catherine McNiff, ofs

Save the Dates

-VESPERS and FRANCISCAN CROWN ROSARY

On first Saturday of each month. **Next session:**

January 6th @ 7pm PT/8pm MT/9pm CT

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86486098310?pwd=R1VOZ3EvdWMraG1PTTYxb1p1WllvQT09>

Meeting ID: 864 8609 Centre 8310 Passcode: 741246

-Zoom BIBLE STUDY

The CASE for JESUS with Dr Brant Pitre

9 Tuesdays: **Nov 28-Dec 19 & Jan 9- Feb 6**

6 pm PT/ 7 pm MT/ 8 pm CT for 1 to 1.5 hrs

Zoom link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82282367951?pwd=Z3JORWVxb0o3bkxrM2RMUINabzZqQT09>

Meeting ID: 822 8236 7951 Passcode: 276824

-WINTER YOUNG ADULT RETREAT (18-40)

"Journey With the Magi" *The gift of journeying together with the WORD made flesh.*

Mt St Francis Retreat in Cochrane, AB

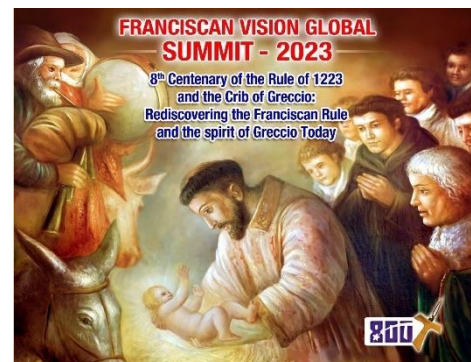
Friday, January 5 - Sunday, January 7, 2024

For more information click onto **INFO**

For questions contact: maritzachouza@gmail.com

-Next FRANCISCAN VISION GLOBAL SUMMIT

January 27, 2024 For Info see **BROCHURE**



Report on Franciscan Vision Global Summit: The December 2023 Session

The December Session: 8th Centenary of the Crib of Greccio and Rediscovering the Incarnation of Jesus.

The December session of the Franciscan Vision Global Summit 2023 provided us with a sweeping view of the impact which the Crib of Greccio has had across the globe. Each speaker from Europe, The Americas, Africa, Asia and Oceania painted a unique picture of the influence of the Crib of Greccio on cultures in their geographic region. They offered some speculation of the future it might play in the lives of the peoples.

Europe: Br. Lorenzo Turchi (OFM) spoke of the Spirit of Greccio, highlighting some aspects of the New Evangelization, in Europe. He noted that the celebration on that Christmas Eve of 1223 is the most famous episode of the life of the "Poverello, the "Poor Little man" of Assisi. As numbers of Christians continue to decline in Europe, he felt that the New Evangelization could borrow from the lessons of Greccio:

- 1) The importance of “feeling” and “touching” the event; of finding new, creative ways to fully immerse humanity in the teachings of the Gospel.
- 2) Francis used his entire body to effectively communicate with those to whom he was speaking. Evangelists must transmit the faith in new, beautiful and inviting ways; ways that will appeal to their audience.
- 3) Francis invited everyone on that night in 1223 to remember God, who came to us in poverty and humility, out of pure abiding love for us. The church today is tasked with awakening the memory of the Lord in the faithful.

Africa: Br. Valentine Eboh (OFM) presented on the experience of the African continent. He noted that at Greccio, Francis of Assisi was being a pioneer, who embarked on new ways to bring life to the faith. He changed the way that the birth of Christ was celebrated and he showed that change was not something to be feared. He introduced drama into the night that brought the realities of the birth of the Saviour into the lived experience of the faithful. The events of Greccio, provide a “blueprint for change” in, among others, the areas of mission, evangelisation and vocation.

Everything needed to bring Christ to life in Greccio came from the environment. So, when we see the rapid disappearance of natural habitat in Africa, we can imagine that there will follow negative impacts on life in Christ and the spreading the Good News on the continent. There has not been a Franciscan contribution to addressing this ecological problem but perhaps Africa can use the celebrations of Christmas at Greccio to draw attention to this crisis and to propose some solutions.

Formation-vocation is another area that has long suffered in Africa. Prospective friars have families who most likely depend on them. Accepting a vow of poverty may have far reaching effects. But another lesson from Greccio involves the “spreading of resources”. Francis brought Bethlehem to Italy, and gained the Assisi pardon for those who could not “have fought in the Crusades” or “visit Bethlehem”, the only previously approved ways to gain indulgences. Franciscans can perhaps find ways

to share spiritual resources, to bring sites of spiritual significance to Africa, an example provided being a Shrine with historic relics.

Asia: Sr. Stella Balthazar (FMM) provided some insight into the future of Greccio in Asia. St Francis envisioned this night as a ladder between heaven and earth. The celebrations at Greccio appealed to all: the children, the poor, the lost and the lonely. Everyone could participate and be a part of it. It can be an attractive element for peoples living with a caste system.

St Thomas went to India in 52 AD and Franciscans in the 13th century. Thus, there is an understanding of the mission to promote love and peace and it is something that people can relate to; as they yearn for peaceful living among castes.

People in India can also relate to the Holy Family who suffered hardship and poverty; to Mary who gave birth in an extremely difficult environment with no medical help. With issues of extreme poverty, the caste system, the low status of women and language barriers, Franciscans need to focus, going forward, on building “Human Fraternity.” There is an urgent need for Ecumenical fellowship in Asia.

The Americas: Dr. Gilberto Carvazos-Gonzalez (OFM) presented on the Americas and noted, in his opening remarks, that his talk was offered from the “Latino perspective,” as the Americas comprise a huge area of many peoples and various cultures. He noted that the Friars Minor had evangelised Mexico so the nativity was always set up under the Christmas tree in his home. Providing a little historical information, he noted that the Nativity of Francis of Assisi was markedly different to what he knows as a “Nacimiento”.

In 1223, Francis’ nativity scene involved an ox, an ass and a wooden manger with hay. Everything else was left to the imagination of the people. Bonaventure, writing some 40 years after the event, for Europeans, added that Francis had sought papal approval, and that the event was held outside a church. Bonaventure’s account, he noted, had been “sanitised” for his audience. Twenty years after Bonaventure, Salimbene di Adam wrote about Greccio and referenced the child. Then in 1291, the first carving was done for the Franciscan Pope Nicholas IV by sculptor Arnolfo di Cambio. Gradually over the years more and more figures were added.

Introduced to Spain in 1448, the nativity/creche then found its way to the Americas in the 18th century. The figures were made of clay for homes and even includes the figure of the “Devil” whose presence indicates the one whom the Child defeats. The creche portrays to the people of Latin America, the same hardships that they

suffer. They can relate to it. Jesus would have experienced at his birth, the same sights and sounds that they experience.

Dr. Gilberto noted that we need to see the hardships of today's world- the drugs, the poor treatment of the homeless and the elderly. We must reach out to them to bring them the love and joy of Christ. This is the Spirit of Greccio.

Oceania: Sr. Francesco Nirmala Gnanapragasam (FMM) began her contribution on the Crib of Greccio with an introduction to Oceania, called the "Liquid Continent" and comprised of some 10, 000 islands of fourteen independent countries. Basically, it can be considered as Australia, New Zealand and the island sub-regions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. It is the area of the world where sea levels are consistently rising faster than global averages; and where some small islands such as Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands have already become partially submerged.

It is obvious how our activities have impacted the climate and resulted in destruction. As Thomas of Celano noted, through Greccio "Francis sowed the seed of hope amid despair and death". So too, do the people of Oceania have hope for re-birth and replenishment of Mother Earth.

Francis of Assisi included the ox and the ass in his nativity. By doing so, he gave importance to all God's creatures in every ecosystem. As small islands are very vulnerable to climate change and the impacts of more intensive agricultural practices, Oceania is suffering loss of its biodiversity. As Greccio resulted in the re-birth of Christ in our Christmas remembrance, perhaps the cultural ways of knowing, doing and being in the world may offer rebirth to Oceania and some resilience to the effects of climate change.

Prepared by Marlene Welch, ofs

The Centenary

When I permanently professed as a Secular Franciscan in January, 2023, I prayed for a way to live out my vocation. God has answered my prayers a couple of ways. In the summer I volunteered to take over the Rosary Project Coordination set up for the inmates of the Edmonton Remand Centre. It is a once-a-week Rosary, both in-person at the Remand and virtually by Zoom. It is mostly administrative, but it is something I am enjoying. It is like anything else that is new, and I know there will be hiccups along the way - there already has been. But with prayer and a great team of supporters, I am confident in carrying on. Then a few weeks ago, I received an email advising I had essentially been placed on a National Task Force to celebrate the 800th Anniversary of St. Francis! At first, I was not entirely sure what it all meant as I had not yet even heard of this task force. When I discovered further information and researched it a bit more (thank goodness for Google!), I agreed to participate. Last weekend our Fraternity met for our yearly Christmas Party, and thanks to some creative folks in British Columbia, we were able to do a spoken re-enactment of the Nativity at Greccio, which St. Francis did in 1223. It was admittedly very last minute, but we had a mixture of food, prayer, dance, singing and fellowship - doesn't get much better than that, does it? The work undertaken by this Task Force is to commemorate more such events in the life of our Seraphic Father. The next event to be discussed by the Task Force is in regard to the Stigmata. I have asked our Fraternity to reflect on this over the next few weeks before our next monthly meeting in January, 2024. I would like to request that all members of Our Lady of The Angels region to take a bit of time over the holidays to pause and reflect on what the Stigmata is. What does the Stigmata mean to you? What do you think of when you do? For myself I can tell you that while I knew what it was, I have not put much thought into it. Then it occurred to me that St. Clare of Assisi did not have the Stigmata - which only served to pique my curiosity even more! For those of you who do not know me, I did my final research paper on St. Clare for my Master's of Theological Studies. So, I am quite well acquainted with her work. In any case, may I ask that you contact myself or your Minister with any thoughts or reflections you have had? You can contact me by email at: bkoneil@shaw.ca Thank you and God's Peace!

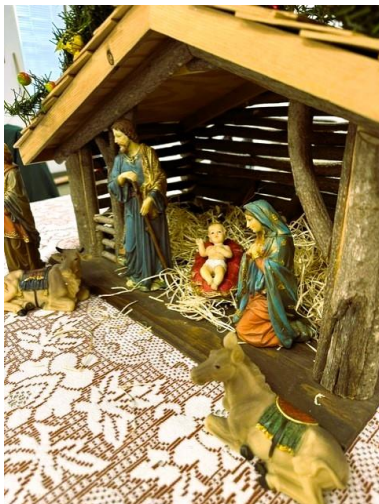
Bethanne O'Neil, ofs
St. Elizabeth of Hungary
Edmonton, Alberta



Social Corner



St Anthony of Padua Fraternity of Richmond, BC gathered to celebrate the 8th Centenary of the Crib at Greccio with some of the Friars Minor.



The *Little Flowers of St Francis Fraternity* in Kelowna gathered on November 12th to celebrate the 8th Centenary of Greccio by reading Pope Francis' Apostolic letter, *Admirabile Signum*, on "The Meaning and Importance of the Nativity Scene" while placing each figure into the scene.

The *Little Flowers* also gathered on December 10th to share a meal and recite together a beautiful liturgy called **A Christmas Remembrance** with Holy Scriptures, Christmas hymns and a reading from Thomas of Celano on the Nativity. They each left with a commemorative image of a Nativity scene and a piece of straw from the manger.





On a rainy afternoon of December 9, 2023, members of *St. Francis of Assisi Korean Fraternity* of Surrey, BC gathered together in the celebration of the Centenary of Greccio by participating in a mass celebrated by *Fr. Joachim Yoon*. Each participant had a chance to hold Baby Jesus for a few moments and reflect on God's love in the Birth of Jesus, touching the replica of San Damiano cross to reflect God's love in the Crucified Christ, and finally reflecting on God's love in the Eucharist, while chanting Taize songs during the Mass.



St Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity in Edmonton along with *Brother Aldan*, gathered with friends on December 17th to celebrate Christmas and the Greccio Centenary with a spoken re-enactment of the first crib at Greccio 800 years ago.

St Agnes of Assisi Fraternity in Coquitlam, BC met on December 16th for an Advent/Christmas celebration. Each year they gather around the creche to share and light a candle, including one for those who are unable to attend. This year each fraternity member brought a piece from their home creche to build one together at the gathering. The question to ponder this year was, "What does family mean to me?" along with reflecting on the Gospel for Week 3 of Advent, singing Christmas hymns, dancing, and sharing a meal.





Holy Spirit Fraternity of Olds, AB hosted a Creche Display by members and some parishioners to highlight the 8th Centenary of the Greccio Christmas Creche. The fraternity distributed a pamphlet "Creating Your Nativity Scene with Pope Francis" and raised \$410 on a Cookie Walk for a family in need.



St Mary's Fraternity of Calgary sponsor a youth event at St Luke's Parish with Br Dan Gurnick presenting the The Greccio Creche.

Keep going, there's more.....

7TH ANNUAL FRANCISCAN FINE ART CONTEST WINNERS

The Greccio Nativity Scene

1st PLACE

Category
Kindergarten

Iliza Upo
Holy Family School
Calgary, AB

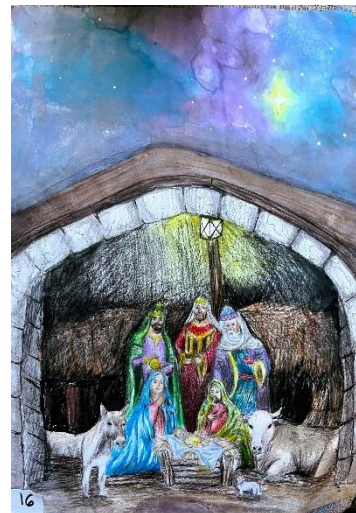


Category
Elementary

Adam Van Hatten
Home school G6
Our Lady of Peace
Parish
Innisfail, AB

Category
High School

Felicity Simone
age 15 G10
St Timothy School
Parish St Mary's Parish
Cochrane, AB



Category
Junior High

Saylor Francis
age 12 G7
Ecole Mother Teresa School
Our Lady of Assumption
Parish
Sylvan Lake, AB

HONOURS (2nd PLACE)



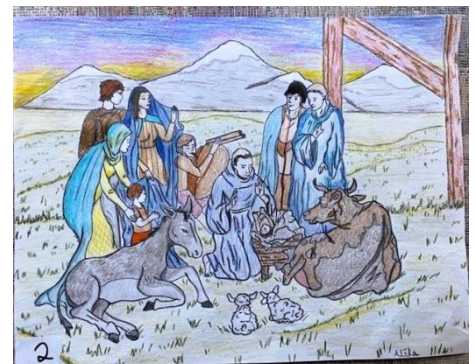
Category Elementary

Dariia Smaha age 8 G3
Our Lady of Assumption School
Assumption of the Blessed Mary
Ukrainian Church
Calgary, AB



Category Junior High

Sarah Browne age 15 G9
School Our Lady of Peace
Parish St Patrick
Calgary, AB



Category High School

Alida Else Sieger age 15 G10
School Our Lady of the Rockies
Parish St Albert the Great
Calgary, AB

ARTISTIC MERIT

Maydalina Van Camper

age 11 G6

Windsor Home School
St Matthew Parish
Rocky Mountain House, AB



Keiana Fernandes

Age 12 G7



Gabbie David
School Ecole Mother Teresa
Parish Our Lady of Assumption
Sylvan Lake, AB



Clementine Whiteley
Parish St Joseph the Worker
Victoria, BC

Video link to [The Fine Arts Contest](#)



HOPE-PEACE-JOY-LOVE

Our Lady of the Angels Messenger, Secular Franciscan Order of Western Canada Region, **Christmas 2023**
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