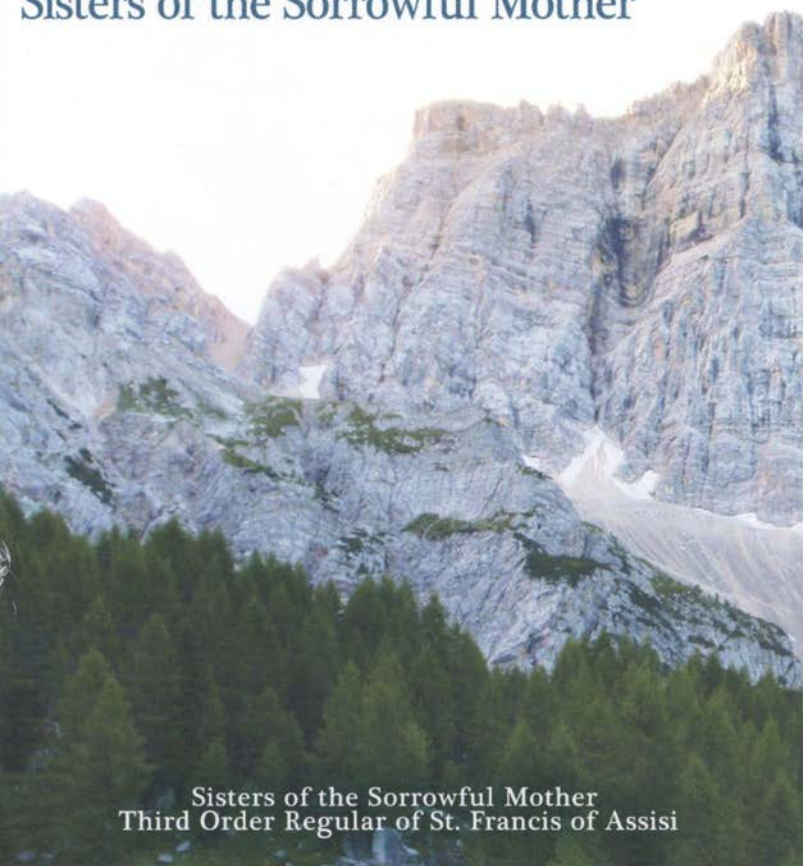


Mother Frances Streitel



Foundress of the
Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother



Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother
Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Assisi



Born Amalia
Frances Rose
Streitel in
Mellrichstadt,
Germany,
Nov. 24, 1844


Founded the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, 1883
Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Assisi

contemplative

active

Received the
title "Venerable"
by Pope
Benedict
XVI. 2010





We, Franciscan Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother,

wish to share with you and make known the gift that God gave us and the Church through Venerable Mother Frances Streitl, the foundress of our Congregation.

Often, in our meetings, our service, our apostolate, our daily lives, we are asked the following questions: what is our charism, who is our Foundress, and what did she do during her life. For this reason, we present this simple and brief pamphlet so that you can easily learn the story of Mother Frances and the special charism that the Holy Spirit gave her.

Therefore, we would like to look back over the main stages of her life in order to grasp her deep experience of God, which led her on roads that were not always immediately understandable.

The greatness of this woman is mainly shown in her faith, which constantly guided her in the pursuit of God's will and presence. She was like the bride in the Song of Songs who cannot find peace until she finds her beloved.

Let us begin to walk
in her footsteps...

Mother Frances' person and deeds can be summed up with these words:

*"May the best rest be that in which the performance of duty and accomplishment of the holy Will of God please me."*¹



A beginning like many others ...

On November 24, 1844, Adam and Franziska Hörhammer Streitl rejoiced at the birth of their first-born child, their daughter Amalia. She was born in Mellrichstadt, Germany, a picturesque town lying in the foothills of the Rhon Mountains and the Thuringian forest. According to the custom of her time, she was baptized on the day of her birth in her parents' home and named *Amalia Frances Rose*.



Her parents, who lived a life based on the strong principles of the Catholic faith, had three other children: Adam, Hermann, and Hedwig. The Streitl family manifested their sincere love of God and neighbor through their loving concern for the poor, the sick and the needy.




Together they made their home an ideal Catholic family where daily prayer, attendance at Mass, and celebration of the feasts of the Church, especially those of the Blessed Virgin Mary, were of fundamental importance.



On November 24, 1844, Adam and Franziska Hörhammer Streitl rejoiced at the birth of their first-born daughter, Amalia.



The childhood of Amalia Streitel



Although of a willful disposition and lively temperament, Amalia soon learned self-control and self-discipline through the wise guidance of her mother, who demanded obedience, punctuality, and orderliness in daily living.

At an early age, she was taught to perform household tasks and to become skillful in needlework.

She was also carefully trained in the manner of polite society suited to the rank and social position of her family, but obligations in home and education often kept her from living a life of solitude, which was her desire.





A young heart devoted to God ...

Amalia's religious formation began at an early age. When she was two, she was taught by her mother to make the sign of the Cross and say little prayers.


She was noted not merely for her intelligence, but also for her love for the poorer children around her, thus growing in a deep and true love for God. This soon brought her to an awareness of being called to religious life.

At the age of nine, she sought to understand the meaning of Christ's words, "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself."²

The reception of her First Holy Communion, on April 19, 1857, made her bond with God even stronger.

Another fundamental aspect of her human and Christian formation was her devotion to the Virgin Mary, strengthened by her family and by the presence in her hometown of several shrines dedicated to Mary as Mother of Sorrows.






Her youth: a time for saying “yes”

After completing her elementary education, Amalia was sent to Augsburg, Germany, to the Franciscan Institute known as *Maria Stern* where she obtained a diploma in French and music.

On September 24, 1857, she received the Sacrament of Confirmation, which confirmed in her an intuition of being called to religious life. The manner in which the call to religious life came to Amalia is not known. She herself tells us it came to her in a special manner when she reached the age of seventeen. Her notebook merely records: “*August 1862, call to convent.*”

Her parents strongly opposed her decision to enter religious life. They desired her to marry. This painful situation came to a climax after four years of endurance when, hiding among the rafters in the attic of her home, she refused to be introduced to a law student as a possible suitor for her hand. In this way, Amalia clearly showed her intent to answer God’s call to devote her life to Him alone.



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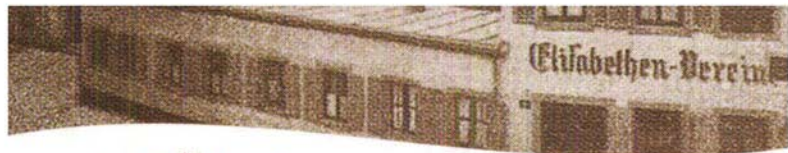
Her wish for religious life comes true...

Her parents finally accepted Amalia's decision, provided it was not a convent of strict enclosure or one engaged in the care of the sick. On September 25, 1866, Amalia finally entered religious life at the Franciscan Institute of *Maria Stern* where she was educated in her youth. Amalia immediately told the Superior of her desire to care for the sick. Instead of being granted this preference, she was asked to continue her study of French and music.

She entered the novitiate on June 3, 1867, receiving the name of Sr. Angela, and made her religious profession of vows a year later.

Although her wish for a consecrated life had come true, she was still struggling because she desired a stricter and more rigorous religious discipline. She also found herself, in the name of obedience, being asked to teach and was later appointed superior. After a period of time, Sr. Angela realized that she needed to relinquish her initial zeal and began to live an easier, less ascetical way of life. A serious illness that demanded a great sacrifice of sleeping on a mattress of seaweed for five weeks gave her insight into her interior life.





A call to live St. Francis' vision



What she really wished for was to practice poverty like St. Francis of Assisi.

This resulted in her conversion. From this very moment, she fought a fierce battle with her self-love.

What she really wished for was to practice poverty like St. Francis of Assisi. This brought Sr. Angela to wish for a strong renewal, not only for herself but also in religious life, in the Church and in society.

Therefore, she embraced every opportunity to give up all nonessentials. She devoted herself to carry out the tasks assigned to her, leading a profound prayer life and constantly being under God's loving gaze.

With this, grew the urge to live according to the original austerity of the Franciscan rule. She strongly perceived a call to 'live St. Francis' vision: material and spiritual poverty, and love of the Crucified One within the Church and the entire world.



The Carmelite convent of Himmelspforten


As a fruit of her prayer life, Sr. Angela clearly became aware that she wanted to have a deeper spiritual union with God. Prayer was by then her only strength. Through prayer, she understood that God was calling her to take new steps. Therefore, she asked to leave the Institute of *Maria Stern*, where she had lived for twenty years, and enter the Carmelite convent of *Himmelspforten* in Würzburg. This decision to leave the Institute of *Maria Stern* and enter the Carmelite convent on January 25, 1882, was made amidst an indescribable interior struggle.

Soon after her entrance into the Carmelite convent, she received the habit of a novice and the name of "Sr. Petra." At Carmel, she began a new phase of her life: the Lord granted her the grace to start walking again towards Him.


In one of her letters, she wrote: *"I had found in Carmel through prayer and sacrifice what I had sought for years. I had a novitiate. I could be obedient. Often I had occasion to divest myself of the ten years' superiorship. I became childlike again and came closer to the God of my heart."*³



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Vision of the two mountains



Sr. Petra once again entrusted her all to God; yet, she soon found herself in an inner desert where God's voice is clearer to one's heart.

At Carmel, absorbed in prayer and silence, Sr. Petra had a special interior experience that caused her to leave the Carmelite convent and be available for a new task from God. Here is what she wrote about her call to realizing a charism that would unite the active life with the contemplative:

"I was praying in the choir in the forenoon and saw something, to me hitherto strange. In spirit I beheld two mountains rise. These two mountains stood in line with each other. The mountain rising on the right was higher than the other and had some sort of gradations. On its summit, I believe I saw St. Elijah in rather indistinct form; farther down I also saw St. Teresa. The other mountain was not so high, probably because it was not so old. In the one I recognized Carmel; in the other, Alverno, on which St. Francis was standing with a cross in his hand.

Both mountains arched themselves into one...



A new call: activity and contemplation, a single way


...the higher mountain arching and inclining toward the other from about the place where St. Teresa stood...The call which I received before or after this vision, and which came to me because I would not comprehend why the Lord wished to lead me out of Carmel again, sounded like this: 'To unite the active life with the contemplative.'

Perhaps this will shed light on what I saw: Carmel may represent prayer, Alverno, activity. Both prayer and work have received new sprouts in the course of centuries, which have frequently misrepresented the sublimity of the one and the necessity of the other. In the one Order one often fails to understand the prayer of work; in the other, the work of prayer. Prayer and work must go hand in hand and like twin sisters, strive to remedy the spiritual and social misery of mankind, teaching it again what it means to pray and work."⁴


God showed Sr. Petra His will once again when Father Francis Jordan, a German priest who lived in Rome, asked her to cooperate with him in the establishment of the female branch of his new foundation whose goal was Christian education.



“Prayer and work must go hand in hand and like twin sisters, strive to remedy the spiritual and social misery of mankind.”



“By faith Abraham went out to a place, not knowing where he was to go” (Heb 11)



Just like Abraham, by faith and obedience to God's will, she left for Rome without knowing exactly what she was going to do. As the Virgin Mary said yes to the Angel, so did she, not knowing where this would lead her.

On February 16, 1883, Sr. Petra arrived in Rome. The dwelling offered by Father Jordan was truly simple, an apartment with very few utensils for the kitchen, without beds or chairs, but with the advantage of being near the basilica of St. Peter. Great was her joy because also exteriorly she could express her love for poverty and for the Church. The name she chose, Sr. Mary Frances of the Cross, was indicative of her mission.

For two years, Sr. Mary Frances and Fr. Jordan sought to cooperate with each other in the development of the new foundation, in spite of difficulties and misunderstandings that arose from being faithful to two different charisms. For this reason, separation became inevitable. The ecclesiastical authority separated the institute led by Sr. Mary Frances from the one led by Fr. Jordan (Society of the Divine Savior, also known as Salvatorians).



Founding The Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Assisi

The *Congregation of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother* was thus formed with Sr. Mary Frances as its foundress and first superior. From here on she is referred to as *Mother Frances*.

The new community scrupulously followed the Franciscan Rule with special attention to poverty and sharing with the poor. In order to provide a living, the sisters devoted themselves to the most menial of works, such as tending the sick in their homes and taking care of the sacristy at the church of Campo Santo Teutonico in the Vatican.

The sisters lived as poor people among the poor adhering to the contemplation of Christ with Mary at the foot of the Cross. The Sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours were their nourishment.

They did all they could so that the people they met could see God through their smiles, their words of hope, and their hugs.

The community was growing and this increase in membership necessitated a new means for subsistence. The sisters were, therefore, allowed to collect alms. For the first time, some sisters left for Germany, Austria, France and Poland. Others left for the United States, arriving in Kansas in 1888 to solicit alms, but they found such a tragic situation of poverty, both spiritual and material, that, upon request of the local ecclesiastical authority, they stayed to take care of the sick and the poor. They had gone to receive, but stayed to give.





The Congregation grew in its membership...

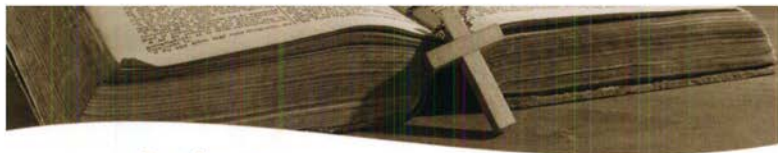


They had
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The Congregation grew in membership as did the sisters' presence in Europe and the USA. Mother Frances' presence in the various houses required her to make many inevitable journeys.

Faithful to her vocation and to the name she had chosen, Mother Mary Frances of the Cross, she accepted everything from the hands of God with great inner docility, even when she later experienced pain and the Cross when she was removed from the office of general superior because of some misunderstandings. Supported by the certainty that *everything is good because God permits it*, she lived the last years of her life in Castel Sant'Elia, province of Viterbo, Italy, serving the children at the kindergarten, taking care of the sick, and doing her best with a maternal heart for "her" sisters. After a long agony, she died in Castel Sant'Elia on March 6, 1911.

On the same day, Pope Pius X approved the Constitutions of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Assisi, thus recognizing the gift of the Spirit given to Mother Frances in founding our congregation. This alone is already a sign that her path toward sanctity is a way that can also be chosen by others. On March 27, 2010, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI authorized the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the Decree on the Heroic Virtues of the Servant of God Mother Frances of the Cross Streitl, thus declaring her Venerable in the Church.



In the Heart of Mother Frances

Mother Frances found nourishment in the writings of Franciscan and Carmelite spirituality, especially of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, and St. Teresa of Avila. She was strongly attracted to the way these three saints loved the humanity and the passion of Christ, as well as their capability to live it.

As a result of Mother Frances saying "Yes" many times, our Franciscan community, The Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, was formed - a gift of God to His Church. We are all aware that this gift of God is enriched by the contribution of each single sister and of those whom God will call to share Mother Frances' insight and charism.

The gift that the Spirit gave to Mother Frances by calling her to found a new religious family can be summed up in a few salient points springing from the contemplation of the Crucified and of Mary at the foot of the Cross.



"Lord, I desire nothing but you, but You I desire to possess entirely."



Love for Jesus' humanity and the Eucharist

Love for Jesus' humanity and the Eucharist

The Incarnation and the Eucharist form the heart of Franciscan and Carmelite spirituality. The Incarnation is the free choice of God to share in everything that makes our human condition. The Eucharist is Jesus' total self-giving for us and the realization of His Word; "I am with you always, until the end of the ages."⁵

Mother Frances, especially toward the last years of her life in Castel Sant'Elia, spent a great deal of time in prayer. It was her adoration of the Blessed Sacrament that expressed her love for Jesus' humanity and her desire to conform herself to Him.

*"Lord, I desire nothing but You, but You I desire to possess entirely."*⁶

According to Mother Frances, the Christmas crib and the Cross are to be presented again, in all their spiritual richness, to humanity of this time for they are clear signs of the unequivocal love with which God loved us and gave Himself to us.





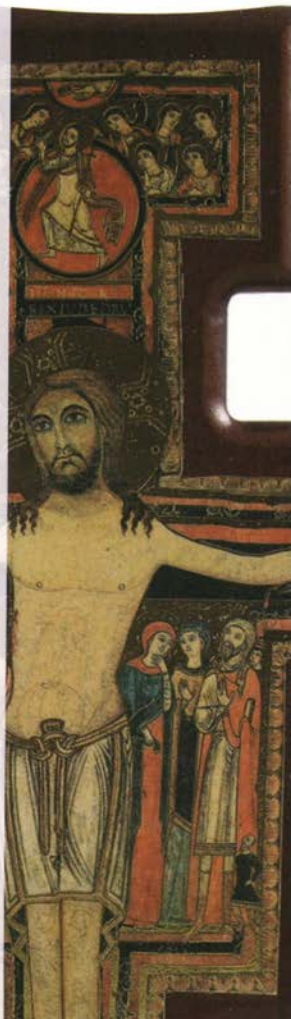
Mary at the foot of the Cross

Mary at the foot of the Cross

Mother Frances and the sisters looked up to Mary at the foot of the Cross as their guide and model in their daily lives. Mother Frances' heart was touched by Mary's readiness and docility to do God's will:

*"To take root in Mary Immaculate and to be formed in her according to the designs of God; to be introduced by her into the mystery of 'love and suffering' that I may become in truth a 'bride of the Crucified,' one who will never abandon Christ's blood-stained feet until Love Crucified shall say; Come up higher; take your place in the center of My Heart."*⁷

It is Mary, the Sorrowful Mother, who teaches us not to stop looking at our limitations and our poverty, but to be available to God without conditions or reservations.





Love and honor for the Church

Love and honor for the Church

As a Franciscan, Mother Frances passed on to us her love for the Church.

Although she knew that the Church of her time was facing a difficult situation, she was never judgmental but always desired a renewal that began from within. Mother Frances was aware that what she saw as God's will would be of benefit to the entire Church.

"My prayer today at the true crib of the Savior, the high altar of holy poverty, was as follows: Lord, bring honor to Your Church. Grant that her bridal gown appear in the brilliance of new colors, the colors of humility and poverty. Awaken for Yourself children who have the courage to follow You in despising the world and in practicing strict renunciation, who become little in order to appear great before You."⁸

It was Mary ... that the Sisters looked up to and who was their guide and model in their daily lives.




Love of humility and poverty

Love of humility and poverty

Humility is one of the dominant features of Mother Frances: in all circumstances, she sought God's will by making the search for her Beloved the keynote of her life.

Love of poverty is another central aspect in Mother Frances' life; she considered poverty the mother of all virtues because it is poverty that allows us to have a heart free for God. Mother Frances and the first sisters lived in great poverty and at the same time, they had a great love for the poor and needy.

*"Oh, may the Lord speak to you in audible signs of the joy which will be prepared for Him if a new, a poor generation arises for Him, if the original religious spirit is awakened again in souls and the world must realize that true peace does not consist in full possession of earthly goods, but in the renunciation of them."*⁹



...it is poverty that allows us to have a heart free for God.



We, Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, Today



In the footsteps of Mother Frances, we look to Mary at the foot of the Cross as a model of faith and discipleship, and we live the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi. We endeavor to practice Mother Frances' ideal in contemplating God's mystery according to which one seeks union with the Lord through constant prayer and a vigilant ministry for the Church and for those who are in material and spiritual need.

Thanks to Mother Frances and her sisters, many people have had the chance to lead a better, more human existence. Faithful to the Word of God, we also seek to conform ourselves to Jesus Christ from whom Mother Frances got the strength and grace for the mission.



Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother Mission Statement
Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Assisi

The Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother participate in the mission of Jesus to bring fuller life to others by revealing the love of God for all, especially the poor.

Right now, we have sisters in Brazil, Germany, Italy, Austria, the United States of America, Tanzania and the Caribbean Islands of Grenada, St. Lucia, Trinidad, and the Dominican Republic. We serve in education, healthcare, and evangelization, announcing that God is the Lord of the living. We are engaging ourselves to live and implement what we say in our Consecration formula:

Through a dedicated life of apostolic service, vitalized by a contemplative spirit, we care for those in need, especially the poor, and in our own poverty seek the Lord above all.





Let us Pray




Most Holy Trinity,

We come to You in thanksgiving for the life of Mother Frances Streitl who has been a model of virtue for the church and Your people. She lived her life as a witness to the Gospel through her commitment and love of Jesus Christ Crucified and Mary the Mother of Sorrows. With her example of combining active ministry and contemplative prayer she showed us how to share in Your mission of serving all people, especially the poor, in love.

We ask that You hear our prayer through the intercession of Venerable Mother Frances .. (mention your prayer request)... trusting that she will soon be named among your blessed in order to honor You. We ask this in Your name and through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Sorrows.

Amen.



Learn more about Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother:



Generalate: ssmgen.org

Austria: ssm-austria.at

Brazil: ssmbrasil.org.br

Germany: kloster-abenberg.de

Italy: ssmitalia.it

Tanzania: ssmtanzania.org

U.S./Caribbean:

sistersofthesorrowfulmother.org

Our Foundress: motherfrancesstreitel.org

Vocations: becomingasister.org

Facebook: [facebook.com/](https://facebook.com/sistersofthesorrowfulmother)

[sistersofthesorrowfulmother](https://facebook.com/sistersofthesorrowfulmother)

¹ Letters to her Parents and her sister Hedwig, Letter 19 (18), #5.

Letters of Mother Frances Stretel to Reverend Joseph Joch, Letter 28 (27), #2.

² John 12:32.

³ Letters to Father John Francis Jordan, Letter 28 (17), #6.

⁴ Letters to Father John Francis Jordan, Letter 39 (86), #8.

⁵ Matthew 28:20.

⁶ Letters to Father John Francis Jordan, Letter 62 (43), #3.

⁷ M. Frances' Personal Notebook, December 15, 1896.

⁸ Letters to Father John Francis Jordan, Letter 75 (52), #2.

⁹ Letters to Father John Francis Jordan, Letter 75 (52), #2.