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# Franciscan VISION

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The life of  
Mother Frances Streitl  
Foundress of the  
Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother

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*Mother Frances Streitl*  
Foundress of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother

Written by  
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Based on the author's book  
"Walk in Love"

*Nihil obstat:*  
Father Charles E. Yost, S.C.J., S.T.L.  
Censor librorum

September 8, 1982

*Published with ecclesiastical approval.*

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## *Introduction*

### **FRANCISCAN VISION**

Among those singularly privileged individuals who in the last and present centuries have graced the Franciscan Order as special disciples of the Little Poor Man of Assisi, there stands out, in bold relief, a gracious young woman, Amalia Frances Rose Streitel, who later became Mother Frances of the Cross, foundress of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother. Imbued with the spirit of St. Francis, she envisioned a religious life as one of apostolic activity made fruitful through contemplative prayer. From early childhood until her death, her life was centered in the Paschal Mystery, that of dying to self and rising to new life in Christ, patterned on the life of St. Francis.

# The Early Years

Amalia Streitel was born on November 24, 1844, the oldest of four children of the Streitel family, Adam, Herman, and Hedwig following. The Streitel family lived in Mellrichstadt, Bavaria, in what is now the Federal Republic of Germany, commonly referred to as West Germany. Mellrichstadt is a picturesque town, lying in the foothills of the Rhon Mountains and the Thuringian forest. Once the site of pagan sacrifices and feastings, it is now a stronghold of Christianity, evidenced by the many shrines dedicated to Our Lady as the Mother of Sorrows.

## Baptism

Amalia was baptized according to the custom of her time, on the day of her birth in her parental home, and named Amalia Frances Rose. Despite the dull, gray darkness of the day, a sudden burst of bright sunlight lit up the room during the performance of the sacred rites. All present mutely questioned the meaning of the incident, but only the officiating pastor expressed it, quoting the words of Sacred Scripture concerning St. John the Baptist, "What will this child become?" (Luke 1:66).

## **Parents**

At the time of her birth, her father, Adam Streitl, was assistant provincial judge in Mellrichstadt. Her mother, a brewer's daughter, was a pious and zealous Christian. Together they made their home an ideal Catholic family where prayer, attendance at Mass, even daily, and celebration of the feasts of the Church, especially those of the Blessed Virgin Mary, were of fundamental importance. A loving concern for the poor, the sick, and the needy manifested their sincere love of God and of neighbor.

## **Childhood and Youth**

Although of a willful disposition and lively temperament, Amalia learned self-control and self-discipline through the kind efforts and the guidance of her prudent 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. Already at this time she showed traces of a love of solitude, but for social reasons she was not permitted to indulge in it.

Her 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 in rhyme. At the age of six she began her formal education with the School Sisters of Notre Dame who taught in the local school. There she was esteemed, not merely for her scholastic achievements but also for her love for and association with the poorer children of the school. Advancing in wisdom and grace, she sought, at the age of nine, to understand the meaning of Christ's words, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself" (John 12:12).

Her first confession left her with great interior joy. She was determined to avoid every fault she had committed, and in a spirit of love and penance she put little pieces of wood into her bed in order to expiate her faults and share in the sufferings of Christ, thus trying to repay His love with her own small gift of love. The reception of her First Holy Communion on April 19, 1857, was the culmination of all her desires. Here she could truly say with St. Paul, "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Devotion to Our Blessed Lady was the counterpart of her love for the Eucharist. Her early home training and the shrines dedicated to Mary as Mother of Sorrows in her home town fostered a deep love for her.

The family soon moved to Weyhers, where her father was promoted to the position of provincial judge, and they lived there from 1857 to 1862. There Amalia received the Sacrament of Confirmation and was determined at all costs to give witness to Christ by living a truly Christian life.

## Higher Education

After completing her elementary education, Amalia was sent by her parents to Augsburg, to the educational institution known as *Maria Stern*. It was conducted by Franciscan Sisters who, in addition to the general curriculum of liberal arts, placed special emphasis on the study of languages and music. Character training and religious training were given foremost attention. In society Amalia was somewhat reserved but in school she was an excellent student. She found her joy in prayer, in the liturgy of the Church, and in the study of religion. Her vacations were spent with her parents in Weyhers and often, on returning to school, she suffered great homesickness.



# Call to Convent

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, and so it was at some time during her school days at *Maria Stern*. Her notebook merely records: "August, 1862, call to convent."

## Return to Mellrichstadt

After four years, Amalia graduated with honors and received her diploma entitling her to teach. Her father, having meanwhile become district supervisor in Mellrichstadt in 1862, returned to his former place of residence and Amalia again found herself in familiar surroundings when she returned from school. Her desire to enter the convent had steadily grown stronger, but instead of encouragement she encountered opposition. Her parents, pious and God-fearing though they were, desired her to marry and consequently endeavored to draw her into the vortex of society. She endured this frustration for four years, waiting and praying for the Lord to show His will. In the meantime she was learning good housekeeping and the secrets of culinary art. This painful situation came to a climax 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. This episode finally convinced her parents that she

had a religious vocation and they gave their consent to her entry into a convent, provided it was not one of strict enclosure nor one engaged in the care of the sick, which at that time consisted mainly in home nursing.

## **Entrance into the Convent**

Amalia therefore chose to enter the convent of the Franciscan Sisters of *Maria Stern* from whom she had received her education and whose mode of life she respected for its religious discipline, piety, and apostolic activity. Upon entering, she told the superior of her inclination to care for the sick. Instead of being granted this preference, she was asked to continue her study of French and music.

The first three months of her postulancy were months of great suffering. Homesickness plagued her, and she suffered interiorly because of the fact that she felt called to an Order with a more severe religious discipline. Sustained by prayer and the advice of her confessor, Monsignor Allioli, who counseled her to receive the habit, she attained a measure of peace.

## **Novitiate and Profession**

Amalia entered the novitiate on October 17, 1866, receiving the habit of the Franciscan Sisters of *Maria Stern* and the name "Sister Angela." But the struggle with her conscience continued, for it constantly reminded her, "You belong in a strict Order." Monsignor Allioli allowed her to practice in secret as severe a discipline as possible.

Sister Angela made her religious profession on June 8, 1868, which brought her into ever closer union with God.

## **Nördlingen — Altomünster**

Soon after her profession, being already a certified teacher, she was assigned to Nördlingen to teach in the local school. After scarcely three years of experience there, she was appointed as a local superior to a new mission in Altomünster in the Archdiocese of Munich. There she spent seven months as a zealous religious, in charge of a small convent with a girls' school for languages and needlework, in which she also gave private music lessons. Her great love for sacrifice led her to seek to develop this love in others, not all of whom appreciated her efforts.

In October, 1871, Mother Salesia Ellersdorfer, her superior general, had this to say about her when writing to Mrs. Streitel:

The acceptance of the dignity of superior has cost your daughter many a tear, but holy obedience gives her strength and courage, for she has so many good virtues which assure her God's blessing. She has, moreover, a good practical knowledge of household management.

## **Würzburg — St. Elizabeth's Home for Orphans**

Before a year had elapsed, Sister Angela was asked to take charge of St. Elizabeth's Home for Orphans in Würzburg. At first she was governed by strict principles, but after a time she became lukewarm and conformed herself to the ways of others who were somewhat lax in the interpretation of the rule and regulations. A serious illness which almost cost her life and demanded a great sacrifice of sleeping for five weeks on a mattress of seaweed gave her insight into her interior life. This resulted in her conversion, a recognition of her errors. She fought a fierce battle with her self-love, her perverse inclination and caprices. A good confession to a Capuchin priest brought light into her soul. Thereafter God led her

through a torrent of suffering to help her to a better self-knowledge and greater detachment from self. The superior general gave her permission to act freely in certain matters, but she was rebuked and even calumniated when the results were not as expected. In 1879, when it became apparent that she was to be chosen as superior of the Marian Institute in Würzburg, she suffered greatly when informed that this appointment had been reconsidered because of the interference of other persons.

## **Würzburg — Marian Institute**

After the Marian Institute had been in operation for some time, Sister Angela was finally appointed as superior in 1880 and entrusted with the task of restoring order to the financial, domestic, and even religious conditions in the house. The Institute which at that time educated and trained some sixty orphans for Christian domestic service, also conducted a kindergarten.

The two years that Sister Angela spent there were years in which she suffered much as she struggled to bear with equanimity the harsh treatment from those in higher authority, to be friendly toward others, and to suppress every bitter feeling in her heart. Prayer was again her source of strength. At this time she was drawn forcibly to love of the cross and closer to the Savior in the Holy Eucharist. God blessed her efforts and after a few months, order was restored in the Institute. Her charges admired the discipline she had restored; they loved her because of her kindness and concern for them all, even to sharing her own blanket with one of the girls who was cold during the night.

Sister Angela had come to the Institute in April, 1880. In the months of stress and suffering that followed, there grew in her a growing desire to live according to the original austerity of the Franciscan rule. Often she

perceived a voice within her telling her to restore the house of St. Francis. A Franciscan vision of poverty of spirit and love of the Crucified One was beckoning her to greater heights.

Not trusting her own perception, she consulted a pious priest at the Kappel, a place of pilgrimage in Würzburg where a shrine of the Sorrowful Mother was venerated and miraculous cures had taken place. This priest encouraged her to bring new life and spirit into the Franciscan Order.

An incident then occurred which was to change the whole course of her life. If her desire to bring new life into the Franciscan Order was truly the will of God, the way now shown her to accomplish this was surely no direct way. Faith alone was her guiding light in response to the strange incident that took place as she knelt in fervent prayer one night before the tabernacle.

What was it she was hearing? The little bell of *Himmelsporten*, the Carmelite convent about two miles from the Marian Institute. Then a voice said: "Go down there!" "How can I do this in the middle of the night?" she thought. In spirit she was suddenly transported to the choir of the Carmelite Sisters, where she joined them in their singing and praying. The voice she heard then was the voice of St. Francis telling her: "You shall learn to combine the active with the contemplative life. Enter the Carmel and remain there until another sign shall be given you!"

Could this be the way she would bring new life and spirit into the Franciscan Order? In doubt she went again to the priest at the Kappel, who told her to enter the Carmelite convent.

Providence soon gave her an opportunity to take the initial step toward entering Carmel. On August 4, 1880, she was about to go on an errand into the city when she was offered a ride with some ladies of the house going to *Himmelsporten*. At the sound of the name, all became

clear to her as she perceived a voice within her saying, "Go and ask to be received there." She rode to the Carmelite convent, presented her request to the confessor, who led her to the prioress, from whom she received the assurance that she could enter as soon as a place opened through the death of one of the Sisters.

Although a stranger previously to the Carmelite Order, Sister Angela was happy in the thought that St. Joseph, her trusted friend, had helped to arrange everything for her entrance. What God was asking of her was clear, as she wrote later to the Bishop of Augsburg: "I saw myself near the goal of many years of longing." No doubt it was the longing which she had felt in her initial training years to belong to a strict and cloistered Order in the Church.

Doubts plagued her again, however, and this time, since there was no priest near to guide her, she consulted a Franciscan who had resigned from parish work and entered religion. He was certain that all she had disclosed to him came from God, and his advice was that she speak to the superior general concerning the transfer. This she did in late February, 1881. Mother Salesia, in whom Sister Angela had always placed a childlike confidence, expressed sorrow at the news of the intended departure and regret for having caused her pain because of misinformation regarding her. Her pleas for her not to leave the Order would have caused Sister Angela to have yielded had she not been certain that God was calling her to enter Carmel. For Sister Angela, the step she was about to take caused her an indescribable struggle. Because she loved her apostolate and felt a close affinity with both the Sisters and the children, she had no desire to leave. Nevertheless, she was compelled to seek the solitude of Carmel and follow the Divine Will in whatever the future might hold for her.

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## **Sister Angela in Carmel of Himmelspforten**

When Mother Salesia gave Sister Angela permission to transfer to Carmel, it was under the condition that she return to *Maria Stern* if she did not wish to remain there. Upon receiving the permission of the diocesan bishop, Pancratius von Dinkel, to transfer, Sister Angela entered the Carmelite convent on January 25, 1882. Soon after her entrance there, she received the habit of a novice and the name "Sister Petra of Alcantara."

Entrance into the Carmelite convent finally satisfied the desires that Sister Petra had experienced since her adolescent days in regard to religious life, for she tells us: "I found in Carmel, through prayer and sacrifice, what I had sought for years." She found joy and relief in being freed from the burden of administration. Furthermore, she experienced a deep union with God, an attraction, a nearness, a perceptible sensation, a deep union with her Beloved. In the year of her novitiate, however, she experienced some trials, due to the fact that the confessor at the time did not understand the workings of God in her soul. Moreover, some of the Sisters were seemingly suspicious of her piety and labeled her as an extremist, although Prioress Anna says of her that the Sisters loved her very much and were edified at her devout conduct and zealous striving for virtue.

## Vision of the Two Mountains

The time was close for the Lord to reveal to His faithful servant the plans He had in store for her, and which He had intimated to her while she was still in the Franciscan convent. During the month of June, 1882, as she knelt in prayer before the image of the Sacred Heart, she put this question to the Lord: "Why did you call me to Carmel?" Immediately she received the answer, "In order to unite the active with the contemplative life." At once it became clear to her that God was calling her to a religious community which would strive to foster simultaneously both the active and the contemplative life. How this would be done, she did not as yet comprehend. A few days later, she tells us, while she was praying in the choir, she saw something strange. It seemed as if two mountains, one higher than the other, were rising before her eyes. On the higher one she saw Elias and St. Teresa and recognized it as Carmel; on the lower, which she recognized as Alverno, she saw St. Francis with a cross in his hand. Both mountains arched themselves into one and seemed to draw her up to the center. She was terrified, for she feared herself to be the object of diabolical illusion. She understood, nevertheless, that she was to unite the active with the contemplative life in a new foundation, Carmel signifying the contemplative and Alverno the active life.

The message she received in her mystical state was clear, but she did not know how to go about the work



entrusted to her. Since a new confessor, Father Cyprian, O.C.D., had been appointed to Carmel, Sister Petra confided the whole import of her vision to him under the seal of the confessional, for she did not want to divulge it elsewhere, fearing that she might be under diabolical illusion. The confessor, however, recognized the authenticity of her message, but being bound to secrecy, had to act with the utmost discretion. He therefore wrote a letter to Mother Salesia, Sister Petra's former superior general, asking her if she would receive Sister Petra back into her province again, but saying nothing about the vision or the reason for her return to the Order. He asked her to forward a habit of her congregation to her and to let him know through a third person, Father Beckert, pastor of St. Peter's parish in the city, what her decision would be in regard to accepting Sister Petra back into one of the houses of the *Maria Stern* Sisters.

This was the wrong course of action to be followed, since Sister Petra herself should have obtained the necessary permission from her prioress to return to her former Order, as had been stipulated by her superior general before she transferred. But evidently, in her humility she did not wish to disclose the import of her vision to her prioress; hence, no one except Father Cyprian knew the underlying reason for her intended departure. Mother Salesia was quite incensed at the manner in which this matter was handled and refused to consider Sister Petra's return unless she would receive an official request and explanation from the superiors of Carmel. In her letter to Father Beckert she mentioned only that she did not intend to assign Sister Petra (Angela) to her former position at the Marian Institute.

## **Sister Petra Leaves Carmel and Returns to Her Home**

Sister Petra could not ignore the message she had

received from the Lord. For this reason, and because of failing health, she recognized it as God's will that she leave the Carmel. On December 8, 1882, she made a formal declaration to the prioress of her intention to leave, even though she had been admitted to profession of vows. Unaware of the fact that she needed a dispensation from the vows which still bound her to *Maria Stern*, she left the convent of *Himmelsporten* in good faith, in the middle of December, 1882, and went to the home of her parents, who had been living in Bamberg the past ten years. Her homecoming must have been a very painful one, both for her parents as well as for herself. Her parents were keenly sensitive to the embarrassing situation of her return from the convent after some seventeen years and preferred that she keep to her room as much as possible; her sister Hedwig alone was sensitive to her plight. She, on her part, spent most of her time in the church of St. Gangolf, waiting for the Lord to reveal His plans.

## Call to Rome

It has been stated by a later witness that Father Cyprian suggested to Sister Petra while she was still in Carmel, the possibility of joining Father John Baptist Jordan, founder of the Catholic Teaching Society (later named Society of the Divine Savior), in the establishment of the female branch of his new foundation in Rome. He had meanwhile recommended her to Father Jordan as a possible collaborator in his work. Father Jordan agreed and delegated Father Luethen, his representative in Munich, to look into the matter and report back to him. Father Luethen forwarded the letters of Father Cyprian and Father Jordan to Amalia at her home through Miss Thecla Bayer, who had previously been appointed to head an earlier attempt to establish a female branch of the Society. This having failed, she was

now invited to come to Rome. Thecla invited Amalia to go immediately with her to Rome. However, the impression she made on the Streitel family was so unfavorable that the family dissuaded Amalia from taking such a step.

## **Barbara Demer and Her Dream**

At this time there was a girl employed in the Streitel household, Barbara Demer, who had been a postulant in a Dominican convent. One night she had a dream in which she saw a Sister in a gray habit with white cord, a black veil, and white headdress, but she had no idea who she was. The Sister beckoned to her saying, "Come with me, far from here, to a new place of work." Barbara went with her to an uncultivated field where the Sister gave her some tiny trees to plant. In the distance she saw a priest coming toward them. This dream occurred three times. Unable to interpret this strange fantasy, the Dominican community made a novena to St. Dominic, seeking enlightenment as to whether Barbara was to join some Sisters embarking on a new mission to Africa. On the ninth day, however, Barbara's foot was seized with a painful sudden swelling, so severe that the doctor said the foot would need to be amputated. Her father disagreed with this and took her to St. Anthony's Institute, where a Vincentian Sister treated the foot so successfully that in a week Barbara was again able to walk. She wished to return immediately to her convent but the prioress cautioned her to wait a short time and meanwhile help out in a family whose maid had just been taken ill; it was the Streitel family.

While attending Mass in St. Gangolf's Church in the morning, Barbara recognized the face of the Sister of her dream — Amalia Streitel. At the holy water font Amalia addressed her in a friendly manner, saying, "Young lady, you were in an Order in which a white habit is worn! Do you know, the Sacred Heart of Jesus has given you to me

for a new work. You must go with me to Rome." Barbara was speechless with surprise, but after several interviews with Amalia she decided that this must be the will of God as intimated to her by her dream. However, she encountered great opposition to this venture. Only the vicar general upheld her, saying: "We must not anticipate the providence of God. It is necessary that new congregations be founded so that the old ones may be roused up."

On February 1, 1883, Amalia went with Thecla to Munich to confer with Father Luethen. In Munich Thecla became seriously ill, and Father Luethen, being favorably impressed with Amalia, recommended her to Father Jordan in Rome as head of the new Sisterhood to be established. While caring for Thecla, Amalia informed Father Jordan of the delay, and in reply he requested her to come to Rome immediately. Thus it was that Amalia set out alone, arriving in Rome on February 16, 1883. Barbara Demer and another postulant were to follow later.

# First Community in Rome

Father Jordan had rented rooms in an apartment on the first floor of No. 151 on Via Borgo Nuovo as a convent for the new community. Amalia found them well suited to her desire of poverty and simplicity. In a letter written to him on February 18, she unfolded her ideals and concepts regarding religious life, especially of poverty and simplicity. Although Father Jordan was a man of deep spirituality and prayer, his ideal of the proposed foundation at this time was not that of a religious order bound by vows, but merely a society embracing both the members of his foundation and the laity. It was to be world-wide in scope, in order that the gospel might be preached everywhere in the world; hence, he feared that a too rigid poverty might be detrimental to his purposes. Her letter to him must have given him somewhat of a shock, as he expressed his surprise and disappointment to her quite frankly. However, even though she told him she would leave future decisions to him, he nevertheless insisted that she write down her thoughts and opinions because of her former experience in both an active and contemplative community.

Amalia, or Sister Petra as she still signed herself, proposed the original rule which St. Francis had given to St. Clare, together with some regulations from St. Teresa. Regarding prayer, she proposed "Prime" and "Compline" from the Divine Office as morning and night prayer. As to the habit, she desired it to be gray in color and bound at

the waist with a white cord. Although Father Jordan yielded to her in the choice of the gray habit for himself and the Fathers as well as for the Sisters, his own choice of black prevailed later.

## **First Postulants and Life Style**

The first postulants from Germany soon arrived, Margaret Eck and Barbara Demer. One other postulant, Sabina Schmausser, had already joined Sister Petra, so that now the little community numbered four. As Barbara related many years later, their life style was most austere, their diet consisting of bitter salad, bread, cheap fruit, with macaroni on Sundays. Much time was spent in prayer and in visiting the seven principal churches in Rome when the weather permitted.

Soon after the arrival of the new postulants, Amalia asked Father Jordan for the religious habit, a simple veil and headdress for herself and the Sisters. At the same time she asked him to take the name of Francis with the predicate "of the Cross." To her surprise and consolation she learned that a few days earlier, on March 11, he had signed himself "John Mary Francis of the Cross" when he made his religious profession on that day. Clothed in a gray habit, he was now no longer a secular but a religious priest.

## **Clothing and Profession of Amalia in the Catholic Teaching Society**

On Palm Sunday, March 18, 1883, Amalia clothed herself in the habit previously blessed by Father Jordan, put on a pair of sandals, and, as she tells us, was so transported by grace that words almost failed her as she prayed Vespers with her companions. On that same

evening, at the close of Compline, she pronounced the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience before her spiritual father, Francis Jordan of the Cross, director general of the Catholic Teaching Society. Below the vow formula she signed herself "Mother M. Frances of the Cross."

On the following Easter Sunday the three postulants also received the habit: Barbara Demer, who became Sister Scholastica; Margaret Eck, Sister Catherine; and Sabina Schmausser, Sister Agnes. At this time Mother Frances requested of Father Jordan three favors which were uppermost in her mind, namely, to observe perpetual abstinence from meat, to wear only sandals, and to recite the Divine Office. Complying with the request of Father Jordan to write a rule of life for the Sisters, Mother Frances wrote a set of norms in 1883 which later served as a basis for the constitutions of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother.

New members were arriving, among them Elizabeth Ankenbrand, who became Sister Johanna, the successor of Mother Frances as superior general, holding that office for thirty-five years. This increase in membership necessitated first of all a new means of sustenance as well as a larger dwelling. Several Sisters embarked on tours to solicit alms for the community, going first to Germany, where they visited *Himmelsporten* and heard glowing reports from the prioress of Carmel about the God-centered life of Sister Petra, now Mother Frances of the Cross. Others went to France to solicit alms.

## **New Residence — Spirit of Prayer**

The new and larger residence into which the Sisters moved was No. 18 on Vicolo del Falco, near the Franciscan Church of Santa Maria della Grazia. They appreciated this location as they did not yet have a house

chapel and it was not always possible for Father Jordan to come to the house to celebrate Holy Mass. To have a chapel in the house and at some future day to have perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in some house of the community — this was Mother Frances' ardent wish. She spent many hours in prayer, sometimes whole nights, as eye-witnesses tell us. Ordinarily she rose early, about four-thirty in the morning, praying and meditating until it was time for Mass. At one time she asked permission of Father Jordan to have a Sister with her for a holy hour between eleven and twelve o'clock during the night preceding the First Friday of each month. Ardent, indeed, was her love for the Eucharist, and no less ardent was her love for Our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph. The picture of the Holy Family held the place of honor in the little convent.

## **Beginning of Apostolate**

Since the apostolate was the foremost aim of Father Jordan, and the fusion of the active with the contemplative life was Mother Frances' specific call, it was deemed necessary to become involved in some manner of apostolic activity. Besides assisting the Fathers in their printing ministry by setting type, the Sisters were working in the service of the sick, day and night, whenever called to their homes, and in 1884 they began an apostolate for poor, abandoned girls.

Every founder and foundress of a religious congregation is called by God for a particular task for which God gives them a special grace or charism for the benefit of others. Father Jordan's charism was, without doubt, as he himself says, "the spread, defense, and quickening of the holy Catholic faith." Mother Frances, however, saw the most perfect form of religious life in the fusion of both the active and the contemplative life. This difference of opinion caused problems in the formation of the rule in



colonades leading to the entrance of St. Peter's Basilica. The house was first rented for them by Monsignor De Waal, who had been appointed their business administrator. It was later purchased and has in time become a place where the Sisters give room and board, American and German style, to pilgrims who visit the sanctuaries of Rome.

Organization was of paramount importance, and as many new members were applying for entrance, a ceremonial for reception and profession was necessary. This was drawn up by Father Jacquemin, who was eminently qualified for this task, and the ceremonial remained in use until the reforms of Vatican II.

In its early stage, the community was favored in many ways by the Cardinal Vicar. Before the close of the year 1885, Mother Frances was permitted to make her religious profession on January 6, 1886, even before the expiration of her canonical year of novitiate. She did so with eighteen Sisters whose vows, made during the time of their association with the Catholic Teaching Society, had been dissolved by Pope Leo XIII because doubts had arisen about their validity. Two weeks later, on January 20, the Cardinal Vicar reinstated Mother Frances as superior general of the community. Little more than a year later she was also permitted to make her perpetual profession of vows.

At the request of Mother Frances, the community was placed under the special protection of St. Joseph, by decree of the Cardinal Vicar, who also approved the prayer intentions for each day of the week as contained in the community prayer book. In the spring of 1885, the Sisters' habit had been changed to black by Father Jordan, but it was now restored to the original gray with a white cord, and a medal of the Sorrowful Mother became a part of the garb. Through an indult granted by Pope Leo XIII on November 13, 1886, the Sisters received the permission to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in their convent chapel. On Christmas Day the Savior took up His abode therein.

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## The Franciscan Vision

Mother Francis had realized in Carmel that she was not destined for the contemplative life only but rather for apostolic works of charity fused with deep contemplative prayer. As to the apostolate, she preferred the care of the sick, or poor and abandoned children, and the education of youth. It would be left to her to infuse into these works the special spirit of prayer and union with Christ that she so ardently desired. She wrote in her first norms: "It will be easy for us to endure the ill humor of the sick or the ignorance of the children if we live by faith and represent to ourselves Christ in them — Christ as a patient, Christ as a helpless child."

The life of the Holy Family at Nazareth was her ideal of religious life because it combined in closest union the active with the contemplative life. The day and its work were dedicated to God through prayer. In the early morning and at definite hours of the day, the Office was chanted in two choirs as the Sisters stood facing each other. Holy Mass was the summit of Mother Frances' prayer life and the supreme moment of the day. She was much concerned that everyone attend the Holy Sacrifice daily, and she stressed especially the importance of preparation for and thanksgiving after Holy Communion. In her first norms she also prescribed a day of renewal each month to enable every Sister to evaluate her religious life and attain to closer union with God. In true Franciscan manner she loved and practiced poverty and simplicity as they were practiced in the Holy Family at Nazareth, while her thoughts and desires were ever directed to God and the fulfillment of His holy will. The *spirit* of prayer permeating all activity, contemplation overflowing into action — this she envisioned and desired to infuse into the community.

## The Apostolate

Early attempts at making a foundation in Germany failed because of the stringent laws of the State during the Kulturkampf. The works of charity which the Sisters performed, such as tending the sick in their homes and caring for orphan girls in the motherhouse, brought very little remuneration because none was asked of the sick and usually they were too poor to offer anything. The thoughts of Monsignor Jacquemin and Mother Frances naturally turned again to the soliciting of alms for the community. In Germany, Austria, Luxemburg, France, and especially in Poland the Sisters were well received and many charitable contributions were given them. This manner of subsistence, however, could not remain a permanent state. Unable to secure a place in Germany for an apostolate, Mother Frances and Monsignor Jacquemin saw only one solution to the problem: to turn to the West — America!

After obtaining the authorization from the Cardinal Vicar for the purpose of soliciting alms in America, with the view also of seeking the establishment of a foundation in the New World to provide a field of apostolic labor for the realization of her aim, Mother Frances chose Sisters Joachim Hornung and Scholastica Demer as pioneers for this new and hazardous venture. They left the motherhouse on February 21, 1888, and sailed via Naples on February 26 to New York. After a stormy voyage, in which they saw a ship sink before their very eyes, they finally landed, March 27, at the Port of Hoboken, New Jersey, across the Hudson River from New York City. Father Reuland, a classmate of Monsignor Jacquemin, who was in charge of the Bureau of the St. Raphael Society in New York for the assistance of German immigrants, took the Sisters to St. Francis Hospital, conducted by the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, where they were hospitably received. However, upon hearing that they had come to America to collect

alms for the motherhouse, these Sisters gave them the discouraging information that the ecclesiastical authorities in New York would permit nothing of the kind and advised them to return to their native country immediately. The problem was this: during and after the Kulturkampf in Germany so many immigrants, among them even imposters, had come to America seeking help that they had become a real menace.

The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, therefore, in decree No. 275, ordered that no one would be allowed to collect, nor would a priest be allowed to celebrate Holy Mass unless the head superior of the Order or the bishop of the respective diocese had requested this permission from the bishop of the diocese in which they wished to ask for alms.

Bishop Michael Corrigan of New York had made it known that for a period of ten years no collections by any foreign religious, Sisters or priests, would be permitted. Not having known of the restriction (evidently Monsignor Jacquemin himself was not aware of it nor of the Baltimore decree), Sisters Scholastica and Joachim went to Philadelphia. There they providentially met Sister Sebastiana's brother, Ferdinand Hoerling, a member of the Christian Brothers, who was teaching in the boys' school adjoining their monastery. Brother Ferdinand took them to the School Sisters of Notre Dame, who generously aided them in learning the English language, a beginning of which they had made in Rome. With the Sisters they could perform their religious duties, while they lodged with Mrs. Elizabeth Heck, who cordially offered them hospitality.

In spite of the fact that they had no written authorization from their superiors in Rome, Archbishop Ryan of Philadelphia, in his kindness, allowed them to collect alms for two weeks. Mrs. Heck obtained this permission for them in written form. After the expiration of two weeks, the Sisters left for Baltimore, where the School

Sisters of Notre Dame again offered them hospitality and where they received a written statement from Mother Caroline that wherever her Sisters were located, the two Sisters from Rome would find a home just as if they belonged to the Notre Dame community. After two weeks, Sisters Scholastica and Joachim moved on to Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, and Milwaukee. In Milwaukee they were again the guests of the School Sisters of Notre Dame and there they met the spiritual director, Father Peter Matthias Abbelen, greatly esteemed by Archbishop Michael Heiss and an acquaintance of Monsignor Jacquemin. Under such favorable conditions they easily obtained permission to solicit alms for the motherhouse. Their next destination was St. Louis, Missouri, where again the School Sisters of Notre Dame were their greatest benefactors. With sentiments of deepest gratitude the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother sought throughout the succeeding years to repay this debt in whatever way they could.

## **Wichita, Kansas — St. Francis Hospital**

During their stay in St. Louis, the vicar general of the diocese, Rev. Henry Muehlsiepen, informed the two Sisters that Bishop John Joseph Hennessy of Wichita, Kansas, was in need of Sisters for his hospital and orphanage, as the Sisters of Mercy, who had staffed the institution, could no longer do so. The vicar general advised the Sisters to write to the bishop's secretary, Rev. Henry Tihen, in Wichita, who had just been in St. Louis, asking for Sisters to staff the hospital. Mother Frances and Monsignor Jacquemin were duly notified of this opportunity, and the offer was accepted. Finally, on July 27, 1889, the bishop's consent was received and forwarded to Rome by cablegram. In Rome the beginning of the apostolate in America was entrusted to St. Joseph, the

most powerful agent on whom Mother Frances could always rely.

Five young Sisters were chosen for the original staff of Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother for St. Francis Hospital, so named from its beginning in 1887. Because of the illness of Mother Frances, Monsignor Jacquemin himself determined to go to America with nine Sisters, all in their youthful zeal, to carry out the teachings of their foundress. Four of them were to open a prospective mission in Philadelphia.

The Philadelphia apostolate which had been attempted did not materialize because of many difficulties and some misunderstandings. Two Sisters from another community had recently been soliciting alms, evidently without the permission of Archbishop Ryan. Presuming that it was the same two Sisters, Scholastica and Joachim, who had collected previously, he enforced the Decree of the Council of Baltimore and even forbade Monsignor Jacquemin to celebrate mass in his archdiocese. Since all efforts to explain the matter and clear up the misunderstanding failed, the attempt at making a foundation in Philadelphia was given up and the four Sisters destined for the mission also went to St. Francis Hospital, Wichita, Kansas.

The original building of St. Francis Hospital was indeed a "house of poverty" into which the Sisters walked from the train depot. There was not one pot or dish that was whole, for lack of care by the dishwasher in handling the dishes. There were no screens on the windows, and there was little equipment even for the care of the sick. To their great joy, however, the Sisters found a little chapel dedicated to the Sorrowful Mother. Mother Frances made her first trip to America in 1890, arriving on May 23 in Wichita. She was well pleased at seeing so many young Sisters busily at work with their hearts evidently united to God in the service of the sick. Her Franciscan vision was becoming a reality!

The greatest benefactor of the Sisters and the hospital was Bishop Hennessy. Although nearly destitute himself, he managed somehow to obtain the necessaries of life for them, as well as the articles needed for divine service. To the great surprise of Mother Frances, he one day presented her with a horse and buggy! The farmers around the vicinity were generous in giving of their garden produce, even at one time giving two cows and a calf, so that the hospital could be supplied with milk. Mother Frances often visited their homes, and the Sisters went out to collect food with their new horse and buggy. In this manner they became acquainted with the Betzen family, of which five daughters later became Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother — Sisters M. Bartholomea, Aegidia, Domitilla, Gonzaga, and Anselma. In like manner, the Springobs, who were also great benefactors, gave daughters to the community — Sisters M. Cornelia and Jacoba.

## **Menomonie, Wisconsin — St. Mary's Hospital**

Yet, with all the gifts and good will of the benefactors, the income for St. Francis was meager and there was little money to pay the rent and the running expenses. It became necessary for Mother Frances to send Sisters to solicit alms for the maintenance and necessary improvements of the hospital. Sister M. Columba and a companion Sister were asked, in the summer of 1890, to travel to the Diocese of La Crosse, Wisconsin, to seek financial aid. There they met Father Paul Geyer, a priest from Marshfield, and Father Louis Kaluza from Menomonie, Wisconsin, and learned that both priests were seeking Sisters to conduct a hospital in their respective parishes. Upon their return to Wichita the Sisters informed Mother Frances of the requests of the two priests. Having ascertained details of their desired establishments, she

received the information that the old "poor house" in Menomonie could serve, for the present, as hospital and dwelling for the Sisters. Also, the Sisters destined for Marshfield could stay in Menomonie until Father Geyer would have accommodations for them. A telegram would be sent to the Sisters, advising them when they were to come.

Mother Frances formally accepted Marshfield on August 3, 1890, and Menomonie on September 21, 1890. Together with the Sisters for the new mission she set out on the journey at the end of September. Upon their arrival in Menomonie, they were guests, for a few days, of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration at the local school, where they were treated most kindly and hospitably. Anxious to begin their apostolate, they asked to be directed to their future mission of charity. Again they walked into a "house of poverty," but this was what Mother Frances had expected. There were no blankets or anything of the kind to be used as a covering, but they found some straw which they scattered on the floor for bedding. There was a stove in the room but nothing wherewith to make a fire until the next day when they gathered wood to burn. Young hands immediately went to work again and made mattresses from some materials they had brought along. The business places in Menomonie would not let the Sisters buy on credit as they did not trust their financial situation, and so it was, only after receiving some money from Wichita that the Sisters could buy the necessary equipment and articles necessary to call the place "St. Mary's Hospital." The bishop of the diocese was well pleased with the work of the Sisters; patients began to come; farmers brought produce from the country and soon there was enough food for all. The Sisters were satisfied and happy, having always before their eyes the serene and God-centered example of their foundress, who never complained about any hardship or deprivation whatever.



In the plans of Mother Frances, the mission in Menomonie was to have served as an educational center for the Sisters. In the very early days, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration who taught in the parish school were engaged as teachers to conduct classes in English with the Sisters on Saturdays. The motherhouse of these Sisters, located in La Crosse, was also envisioned as a place for further education for the Sisters. Mother Frances had already made plans for a new hospital where all things looked so favorable, but the two cities of Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire, each only about twenty miles distant, built hospitals of their own, and the projected plans of a new hospital in Menomonie had to be dropped in 1898. When the hospital at Wabasha, Minnesota, was accepted in that year, all that belonged to the Sisters was shipped there and the hospital in Menomonie was closed.

## **Marshfield, Wisconsin — St. Joseph's Hospital**

Marshfield, Wisconsin, had already been a prosperous and flourishing village of 3,435 inhabitants as far back as in 1883, with manufacturing plants, hotels, stores and business places that make a thriving village; but a huge fire on June 27, 1887, started by a spark that leaped from a locomotive into a lumber yard, destroyed two hundred fifty buildings. With grim determination the inhabitants set about rebuilding the city and by 1890 the movement for a hospital, under the leadership of Father Geyer, pastor of St. John's parish, had gained ground and was ready to materialize. After much discussion, the unanimous opinion emerged that a religious community of women, experienced in hospital work, be sought and requested to build their own hospital, since the city had suffered such losses and could not afford to build. The land, however, would be donated to them. It

was at this point that the providential meeting of Father Geyer with the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother took place on their collection tour in La Crosse.

Since the Sisters did not have the means to construct a hospital, Father Geyer assured them that he would assist in the details of taking out a loan as well as supervise the construction of the hospital. Mother Frances agreed and asked that the building be named "St. Joseph's Hospital." It was to be ready for occupancy by December 1, 1890, but since that was not possible, Father Geyer rented a house for the Sisters until the construction was finished. Mother Frances and five Sisters arrived on December 9, 1890, and the house soon took on the appearance of a small hospital, ready to receive patients. But patients were slow in coming, for in those days home nursing was preferred, for which the Sisters received twenty-five cents a day. Finally, on February 2, 1891, the newly built hospital was said to be ready for occupancy and the Sisters moved in. But what they moved into was a half-finished job, the walls being unplastered, the floor not laid, the heating plant in poor condition, and the only water available was that which was pumped by hand by the Sisters into a tank in the attic.

The big problem was where to get the money to pay for the hospital, as patients were few and poor; only four were admitted during the first year. The money that Mother Frances had received from Rome did not amount to enough to pay even the interest on the loan. Marshfield could not offer help of any kind, since it had not yet recovered from its recent catastrophe. People gave what they could in terms of food and garden produce, and this "kept the wolf from the door" for the time being. But the prayers of Mother Frances to good St. Joseph, her unflinching helper, did not go unheeded.

# The Kneipp Cure

In the nearby village of Auburndale there was stationed a young priest, Father Joseph Joch, of Bohemian descent, who had charge of its parish, St. Mary's Church and School, plus seven outlying missions. Naturally, the physical strain was beyond the strength of the young priest, and during the influenza of 1888 he suffered a nervous breakdown. He accepted the offer of the superior general, Mother Alexia of the School Sisters of St. Francis who staffed his school, to stay at their convent in Milwaukee for a period of recuperation. In 1892, the new Bishop of La Crosse, James Schwebach, advised him to go to Bavaria to try the Kneipp Cure and possibly bring his knowledge of it to the United States. Father Joch contacted Mother Alexia, who herself was troubled with rheumatism, and together with some of her Sisters she agreed to travel with him to Wörrishofen, Bavaria, to try the Kneipp Cure, study it, and upon her return to America, set up a sanitarium in Milwaukee, using this hydrotherapeutic treatment. But upon his return from Europe, Father Joch was sent by Bishop Schwebach to Marshfield as hospital chaplain and was told to help the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother in their struggle with the new hospital. Father Joch had been extraordinary confessor to the Sisters during his pastorate in Auburndale and therefore was no stranger to them. His first meeting with Mother Frances in Marshfield left an indelible impression upon him. He

devoted himself wholeheartedly to the task given him by his bishop, trying by every means to meet the financial needs of the hospital. By selling five-dollar tickets to the men working in the lumber camps in the north woods, which would serve as insurance in case of accident or illness and provide hospital care for one year, he hoped to acquire funds to pay the interest on the loan as well as on the hospital debt. But the funds did not come.

Suddenly the thought struck him, the *Kneipp Water Cure*. No sooner said than done! Try it! And he did. When he acquainted Mother Frances in Rome about his plan, she wrote to him encouragingly on New Year's Day, 1893:

... and may your plans for the Kneipp Cure in St. Joseph's materialize, succeed, and be helpful to many. I will be greatly comforted if this therapy becomes established in America and if our Sisters can lend you a helping hand with it. I will continue to pray for you and hope to see you personally in June. By that time there will be several patients who have proved the worth of the cure.

The Cure saved the situation. As soon as the word got around in the papers, people from far and near came to be healed of whatever infirmity they had. The financial condition of the hospital soon improved, so that suitable equipment could be bought and hospital improvements could be made. Efficient doctors began to come in, and even though the Kneipp Cure was later discontinued, St. Joseph's Hospital began its development into the second largest health care center in Wisconsin today.

## **Oshkosh, Wisconsin — St. Mary's Hospital**

No sooner had the news reached Oshkosh that there was a new hospital in Marshfield, staffed by German-speaking Sisters who also did home nursing, when Father Roman Scholter, pastor of St. Mary's Parish in

Oshkosh, immediately set out for Marshfield to ascertain whether or not there might be a possibility of that same privilege for his parish.

Mother Frances, although stunned by the thought of accepting another hospital in their desperate situation, listened patiently to the pleading of Father Scholter, meanwhile revolving in her mind the sheer impossibility of accepting another huge debt, and the urgent necessity of educating the Sisters for their various hospital positions instead of imposing upon them the burden of staffing another institution. She tried to explain all this to Father Scholter, but when he presented to her the great need of religious to minister to the physical and spiritual needs of the sick, especially to the many immigrants unfamiliar with the English language, his arguments won the day. After much prayer to St. Joseph, she promised to send Sisters to staff a new hospital in Oshkosh.

Father Scholter, an excellent organizer and business man, procured four lots opposite St. Mary's Church and School, on which stood an old two-story building formerly used as a store and tavern. He directed the remodeling of the building to make it suitable for occupancy and also donated \$600 of his own meager income toward defraying the cost of the project. A hot-air furnace, a water system, and bathrooms were installed, and this first small hospital which could house fifteen patients was named "St. Mary's Hospital." The Sisters later bought and paid for the furniture with money from loans and collections, amounting to \$2,980.

On Wednesday, February 25, 1891, again after much prayer to St. Joseph, Mother Frances, Sister Scholastica and Sister Alphonsa Boell arrived at St. Mary's Hospital. Sister Alphonsa, in later years, related what the conditions were when they arrived. They found an empty house with no bed, no table, no chairs, no dishes except three yellow earthenware crocks and the spoons which

they had brought with them. They sat on boxes in the little hut built on to the house to eat the lunch which they had brought along from Marshfield. For their night's rest, they spread the blankets they had brought with them on the floor. All these privations the Sisters accepted without complaint, having in their midst their foundress, who never lost her composure in the midst of the most dire poverty and deprivation. They knew that Mother Frances was experiencing what she had so ardently desired in her Franciscan vision, a life of complete poverty, combined with deep contemplative prayer and apostolic ministry, especially to the poor and needy.

## **New World Problems**

As the community grew and expanded, so also did the problems and difficulties mount. One of these problems confronting Mother Frances in the New World, which caused her much anxiety and concern, was a change in the garb, mainly the veil and headdress. In this she conformed to the desires of Bishop Hennessy. Despite his benevolence toward the community, he went beyond the limits of his jurisdiction and wanted Mother Frances and Monsignor Jacquemin to separate entirely from Rome and establish the motherhouse in Wichita, as it would have been easier, in his estimation, for the community to develop without the restrictions of Old World ties. Priests also urged the Sisters to adapt their constitutions and religious discipline to the demands and conditions of American life, reasoning that a less austere and severe rule would draw more postulants and hence be more conducive to their establishments in schools and hospitals. Alarmed at these innovations, Mother Frances strenuously objected to any departures from the principles of life as observed in Rome. She cut short all discussions with the priests and returned to Rome earlier than she had intended.

Other New World problems stemmed from financial conditions; still others, from conflicts of opinion. Monsignor Jacquemin, trained as a jurist, did not always see the reasons for certain changes of Sisters or placement of superiors, while Mother Frances, being the superior general, had the confidence of the Sisters and hence more insight into their personal problems. During this time she leaned heavily on Father Joch to use his own judgment in regard to the establishments in America, not only in fiscal matters but also in matters concerning the transfer and appointment of Sisters as superiors and administrators, since he was better acquainted with the American scene. Since he proved himself an able and trustworthy acting administrator, he was often entrusted also with the spiritual concerns of the Sisters in America. Mother Frances gave him her complete confidence in every respect.

## **Sorrowful Mother Painting**

During this time the community's official painting of the Sorrowful Mother was procured for the motherhouse in Rome, and from it large photographs were made and sent to all the missions in America. The first picture was sent to St. Joseph's Hospital in Marshfield, in March, 1894, because from its very beginning this house was considered the headquarters of the American houses and the novitiate was established there. A few years later reproductions of the picture were made as oil paintings and sent to all the filial houses.

## **Schools**

Mother Frances was also greatly interested in the education of youth, having been trained as a teacher and having spent many years in teaching and school-related administrative positions. Seeing the pioneer conditions

existing in the New World, she acceded to the desperate pleading of Father John Loevenich for Sisters to staff his schools in the new parish at Ost, Kansas, and its newly established mission at Aleppo, even though they had not had time to prepare for their task by obtaining the necessary education. The Sisters later withdrew from these schools for lack of personnel, and the schools passed into the hands of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ.

Another early attempt at rural schools was at Baker-ville, Wisconsin, near Marshfield. Although the school was discontinued for lack of facilities, in later years the Sisters taught there again.

At the time when the Sisters took charge of the hospital in Wichita, they also took charge of a small number of orphan children in the building. This was the diocesan orphanage, but after a few years, Bishop Hennessy wished to have it separated from the hospital. In 1893, he gave part of his own house for this purpose, partitioning off the front of his residence for himself and the rear for the orphans and the Sisters. About a year later, since the place did not accommodate both boys and girls, this St. John's Orphanage was discontinued.



# First Mission in Europe

During a pilgrimage from Vienna to Rome, Marie and Elise Kuppelwieser, two ladies of the nobility, hearing of the desire of the Sisters for a foundation in a German-speaking country, promised to help them win this favor from the Austrian government, which had just given the order that no new religious orders be admitted into the country. On November 21, 1892, Sister Scholastica and a companion left Rome and, arriving in Vienna, were guests of the Sisters of Sacred Heart Convent on the Rennweg. At the suggestion of the bishop, the Sisters were introduced to some of the ladies of the nobility, including Countess Coudenhove. These ladies were sympathetic but could do nothing about the situation regarding the admitting of new religious orders. Providentially, the Countess, having had an accident, sent for one of the Sisters as a nurse for her sprained ankle. As governess of the emperor's granddaughter, she was in a position to obtain the desired favor from the emperor, and this she did, to the joy of Mother Frances and all the Sisters.

On February 1, 1893, Mother Frances purchased a small house at No. 175 Simmeringer Hauptstrasse for the mission, and the Sisters of Sacred Heart Convent and other benefactors gave necessary furniture and articles for the house. Even the emperor contributed toward the establishment, enabling the Sisters to enlarge the house into a sizable convent. The Sisters did home nursing and

began training for the work to be carried on later in kindergarten and sewing schools. Mother Frances encouraged the Sisters to work in the true Franciscan spirit of poverty and prayerful service to the sick.

Upon the request of Baroness von Hasslingen, a resident of Vienna, Mother Frances also took charge of an establishment at Lussingrande on the Island of Lussin in the Adriatic Sea, for the care of children suffering from scrofula and rickets. Unfortunately, the events of World War I necessitated the termination of this mission.

For two summers the Sisters also staffed St. Mathilda Home near Vienna, a resort for women, especially teachers who needed rest and recuperation, and from 1894 to 1899, the Maria Theresa Hospital for women in Vienna, in return for board and cash compensation. Because of the great need for Sisters in America they withdrew from these establishments.

## **Rhineland, Wisconsin — St. Mary's Hospital**

A noteworthy example of the confidence which both Mother Frances and Monsignor Jacquemin placed in Father Joch was the establishment of two hospitals in northern Wisconsin, St. Mary's in Rhineland and Sacred Heart in Tomahawk. "May God enlighten you in regard to all the arrangements to be made for Rhineland and Tomahawk," Mother Frances wrote to him on July 8, 1893.

St. Mary's Hospital was established with the coming of three Sisters in June, 1893, who brought with them a trunk with all their belongings, a loaf of bread, and fifty dollars in cash. It appears that the pastor of St. Mary's Church in Rhineland, Father Nicholas July, was instrumental in getting the Sisters. Efforts, however, had been made by Monsignor Jacquemin in late 1892 to have the Sisters work under contract with the Bay Shore

Provident Company of Menominee, Michigan, but when he advised Father Joch to look into the matter in his absence, Father Joch thought it best for the Sisters to build their own hospital. Mother Frances readily acquiesced, for she wrote on May 9, 1894: "Build in Rhinelander. Get the money under favorable circumstances for the building. For the present we will not accept any new hospital in America until those we now have are safely established."

In 1895 the construction of St. Mary's Hospital was completed. The new hospital on the banks of the Pelican River served the Rhinelander community for many years before it became necessary to expand.

## **Tomahawk, Wisconsin - Sacred Heart Hospital**

The Tomahawk establishment was also left entirely to Father Joch's discretion and administration. During the time of negotiations and planning of the Rhinelander hospital in the summer of 1893, Father Charles Hoogsteel, a Belgian and pastor of St. Mary's Parish, Tomahawk, was a Kneipp patient at St. Joseph's Hospital, Marshfield. He heard of the Rhinelander plan and immediately went to Bishop Messmer, ordinary of the Diocese of Green Bay, to which the territory belonged at the time, seeking permission for a hospital and asking the bishop to recommend his project to Father Joch and the Sisters. Mother Frances and Monsignor Jacquemin both being in Rome at the time, Father Joch accepted the bishop's permission and reported this to Rome. Although they feared that the two hospitals might be in too close proximity, Mother Frances and Monsignor Jacquemin nevertheless gave permission in July, 1893, to begin the hospital in Tomahawk.

As in every initial establishment, cold, hunger, deprivation and poverty faced the Sisters, but they had

learned from their foundress her spirit of selfless dedication. This sustained them, and they bore all in patience and love for God and suffering humanity. In the spring of 1894, a new hospital was built to take the place of temporary dwellings which had proved unsuitable and inadequate. The new Sacred Heart Hospital soon flourished, along with St. Mary's in Rhineland.

## **Crisis in Wichita**

A serious problem facing Mother Frances was the financial crisis of St. Francis Hospital in Wichita. After the Kansas "boom" of 1880, in which prosperity reached a height unknown, there was a succession of crop failures and drought. After this many farmers moved to Oklahoma. Wichita had not yet recovered from the economic failure, and consequently the hospital also felt the effects of it so severely that Mother Frances sent a telegram to Father Joch, "Sell and settle Wichita." With a heavy heart, so he wrote years later, he saw the unfinished projects of the city and the desperate attempts of the people to surmount their difficulties. In the hospital he found that conditions were no better. As he stated, one physician ran the hospital and the rest of the physicians boycotted it. Shrewd business man that he was, Father Joch did not sell and settle Wichita. He saw that the city had a great future because of its location, the fertility of the land, and other factors, once the depression would have eased. Under the leadership of Sister M. Seraphine Eberth and with Dr. Andrew Fabrique as head of the medical staff, the hospital began again to flourish.

# Problems in Vienna

It need not come as a surprise that Mother Frances had problems with difficult characters. She confided to Father Joch that Sister Pia, the former superior of St. Francis Hospital in Wichita, was too severe and stern toward the bishop, causing poor public relations, and that this was one of the reasons for the malfunctioning of the hospital. But it was Sister Scholastica and her defection from the community which caused some of the greatest suffering for Mother Frances. Twice she had found it necessary to remove her from the office of superior, in Wichita and in Oshkosh, because of the trouble she had caused. Back in Rome, she became entangled in gossip about Monsignor Jacquemin, writing to the Cardinal Vicar and accusing the Monsignor of improper conduct.

In Vienna, where she was named superior of the new mission which she had been sent to establish, Sister Scholastica failed again. Because her pride was hurt when she was admonished by Mother Frances to correct certain abuses and disorders that had crept in among the Sisters, she left the convent secretly one evening with five of the Sisters who were in her favor and went to Munich. Their location was discovered by a return address on a letter which one of the Sisters had sent to her parents. The youngest of the group, being very immature, was allowed to return to the community, but the others were dispensed from their vows by the Cardinal Vicar.

Mother Frances now sorrowfully hurried to Vienna in an effort to raise the sunken religious spirit of the Sisters. Writing to Father Joch on the 29th of March, 1895, she stated:

. . . Only through much effort can a new superior find acceptance here by the authorities, who were so very much disappointed, as well as by our Sisters, who cling so fervently to their spiritual mother, in spite of the fact that I had to use such rigid discipline. Well, through it all the mother's love was apparent. Even though the reprimands were sharp, the mother's heart remained open and to it the misled but contrite souls fled . . . .

Our Order is being purified now and certainly renewed in a God-willed fashion. For this our Lord will give His blessing to you in America as well as to me in Austria. Rome is in safe keeping. This young plant is protected from external dangers, and our Reverend Father does everything possible to foster its growth.

Father Joch had wished to have Sister Johanna return from Rome to America, but Mother Frances found it imperative to keep her in Rome to take the place of the novice mistress, Sister Valeria Wiczurke, whom she had taken to Vienna to install as superior. Sister Valeria had been novice mistress in a Benedictine convent when it was suppressed by the Holy See. Upon her urgent pleading, she was accepted by Mother Frances and after her profession was appointed novice mistress in Rome. Noticing that she was instilling Benedictine principles into the novices, Mother Frances removed her from office and took her along to Vienna. Although she did not realize it at the time, the choice proved to be an unwise one, humanly speaking, and at the same time a source of great suffering for her.

Before leaving Vienna, Mother Frances established a mission in Kukus, Bohemia, but after a fire two years later the mission was given up and the Sisters returned to Vienna.

## **Denville, New Jersey — St. Francis Sanitarium**

The idea of a Kneipp Water Cure Center in Denville, New Jersey, came to Father Joch through a chance meeting with Father Bonaventure Frey, Capuchin provincial, while the former was administering the Kneipp treatment to another Capuchin, Father Francis Haas, in Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin. Father Bonaventure mentioned the fact that in Denville, New Jersey, there was a place exactly suited for the Kneipp Cure, since there was a lake on the premises and the Benedictine Fathers who owned the property would be glad to dispose of it. The original purpose had been a college, but this did not materialize and so the land was leased out to a farmer. The buildings, used for grain storage, were overrun by rats and mice.

Again, no sooner said than done! Father Joch accompanied Father Bonaventure to New Jersey to inspect the property. On their way they called on Bishop Wigger, who was more than happy to have the place put to good use. Upon inspection they found many things in poor condition, but all of this, they thought, could be remedied. Father Joch lost no time in presenting his project to Mother Frances and Monsignor Jacquemin, who were both in Rome; again they relied on his judgment and gave him permission for the enterprise.

On May 21, 1895, Father Joch left for Denville with seven Sisters to begin the new mission, later called "St. Francis Sanitarium." Workmen were hired to repair the buildings and soon they were habitable. Benedictine Abbot Hilary sent chapel equipment and a wagonload of used furniture.

The Kneipp Cure had been widely advertised in the papers and patients clamored for admittance even before the house was in any way ready to receive them. Father Joch, having learned the process and methods of the treatment in Bavaria from Father Kneipp himself, often

took the place of the doctor in examining, prescribing, and sometimes even treating male patients during the early years when there was no doctor available. People of all faiths and categories were admitted and treated most kindly, making the institution truly a charitable one. Even though Denville was predominantly a Protestant community and there was much bigotry and animosity, together with abusive language toward the Sisters in the beginning of the foundation, their unfailing charity and kindness to all soon brought about a reversal of opinion. People came again and again, being most grateful for all the services rendered them. Within three months the place was a well-run institution, and plans were made for the construction of a new building.

Mother Frances arrived in August, 1895, with twenty-two Sisters. They all marveled at the incredible task which had been accomplished in Denville in little more than three months. Mother Frances' aunt Rosa accompanied the group to America, offering her assistance, but returning the following year. Sister Seraphina's brother, John Ebert, also came on this trip and gave his services to the Sisters until his death in 1918.

Leaving Denville, Mother Frances visited the five hospitals in Wisconsin, two of which she had never seen before — Sacred Heart Hospital in Tomahawk and St. Mary's Hospital in Rhinelander. Her main concern on this visitation trip was to see that the Sisters were well instructed in the principles of religious life, had time and opportunity to perform their religious obligations, and would be provided with opportunities to improve educationally. Monsignor Jacquemin, who had come to America again in June with a group of Sisters, gave retreats to the Sisters and officiated at the rites of religious profession of temporary and final vows. Thereafter both he and Mother Frances traveled to Oshkosh and Menomonie and finally to Wichita, where they were given a warm welcome by Bishop Hennessy, who



expressed his thanks that the hospital had not been given up during its critical period. They also visited the schools in Aleppo and Ost, Kansas.

## **Problems at St. Francis Sanitarium**

On her first visit to Denville, Mother Frances was well satisfied with everything, as all was in accord with her ideals of service to the poor and sick, to all who came for bodily and spiritual healing. But when she returned toward the end of December, 1895, an incident occurred which involved Father Joch and the Kneipp Cure, and which she did not want to have repeated, as it did not seem to be in accord with her ideals of an apostolate for a religious community. When she mentioned this fact to Father Joch, he certainly must have been upset, but to avoid further problems he suggested increasing the facilities. It is certain that a decision was made in January, 1896, to expand, for on January 11, a contract was signed to erect a frame building at St. Francis Sanitarium for the sum of \$6,950. Mother Frances signed as president of the corporation, The Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother.

Monsignor Jacquemin had returned to Rome, but before his departure on January 5, both he and Mother Frances asked the Sisters to pray fervently because of a "great difficulty." Naturally the Sisters conjectured that both were facing a serious problem, the nature of which they did not know.

## **Offer of Girls' School in the State of Washington**

About this time, an offer of a girls' school in the State of Washington was made to the community by Father

Anton Joehren, a former member of the Catholic Teaching Society, and now a missionary in America's Northwest. Mother Frances asked Father Joch to go and inspect the property in order that she might be assured of its feasibility before accepting the offer. The project did not materialize, and the trip was later considered by Mother Frances to have been too costly on the part of Father Joch.

## **Death of Mother Frances' Mother**

Mother Frances returned to Marshfield and while there she received the sad news that her dear mother had departed this life on the 9th of February, 1896. She had been ill with influenza, and after receiving the Sacraments, died peacefully in the arms of her daughter Hedwig.

From Marshfield, Mother Frances went to Oshkosh, from where she corresponded with Father Joch on March 2, saying she planned to return to Denville and hoped he would return there in time "to make secure the project just begun" that is, the erection of the new building. She informed him that the Most Reverend Bishop of Newark was awaiting him.

## **Sudden Departure of Mother Frances From America**

Sister Johanna had already gone back to Rome, and when Mother Frances returned to Denville about the middle of March, Father Joch, it appears, was there. Although most loyal to the community and an invaluable acting administrator, without whom the American institutions would never have flourished or even continued to exist, Father Joch often had difficulty in

adapting to other persons' views and controlling his fiery temper. What transpired between him and Mother Frances, or what prompted her sudden departure from America is unknown. She boarded the next steamer and left for Europe, giving no reason for her action to those she left behind. Was it a less favorable attitude toward Father Joch because of certain previous occurrences involving him in connection with the Kneipp Cure? Was it the fact that, not realizing the vastness of the United States, she considered the trip to the West Coast too expensive in her estimation, causing his ire to be roused? Or was it his undue concern about the confidence she had placed in a priest in Marshfield which seemingly threatened his position in the community?

## **Arrival in Rome**

On April 2, 1896, Mother Frances arrived with Sister Pia at the Sisters' convent in Vienna. Since it was Holy Thursday, she remained there over the Sacred Triduum of Holy Week and then left for Rome with Sister Valeria on Easter Monday, April 6. Upon her arrival at the motherhouse on the 8th, what was her consternation at finding Father Joch there, waiting to see her! He had left New York on March 28, soon after her departure. Some of the older Sisters in Denville declared in later years that he had said he was going to Rome to defend his priestly honor and depose Mother Frances, while he himself stated to the contrary that he intended to help her. Considering the fact that he contracted typhoid and was ill for seven weeks immediately after reaching Rome, he would have had little opportunity to carry out any former threat.

Since it was late in the evening when Mother Frances arrived and learned of the request of Father Joch to see her, she sent word through Monsignor Jacquemin that she would see him in the morning. During the night she

spent several hours in prayer in the chapel, as it was evidently a night of terrible suffering for her. Not wishing to encounter Father Joch again after their recent meeting in Denville, and goaded on by Sister Valeria, who also did not wish to meet him because of a recent angry letter she had written to him in her schemes against him, Mother Frances left the motherhouse with Sister Valeria early in the morning while the Sisters were in the chapel. No one knew of their departure except Sister Johanna, to whom Mother Frances had come in her distraught frame of mind at three o'clock in the morning, telling her she wished to return to America to report Father Joch to the apostolic delegate. Sister Valeria also reported they were leaving but did not say where they intended to go.

After leaving the motherhouse, the two stopped at the Church of St. Anthony in the Via Merulano in Rome, where Mother Frances prayed for several hours and also unburdened herself in the confessional. Sister Valeria did the same and, as she tells us, the confessor advised her not to forsake her mother general. They then boarded the train for Padua, where they prayed at the tomb of the great St. Anthony, seeking light and help in the present trial. After three days they arrived back in Vienna.

In Rome there was bewilderment and concern when it was learned from Sister Johanna that the two had left early in the morning, leaving no indication of their destination. The two priests, Father Joch and Monsignor Jacquemin, conferred with each other and informed the Franciscan Father Bernard Doebbing, then president of the College of St. Isidore in Rome and extraordinary confessor to the Sisters. Father Doebbing then informed the Cardinal Vicar of the state of affairs. A telegram was first sent to Vienna, but Mother Frances was not there and the Sisters knew nothing about her itinerary.

# Deposition of Mother Frances From Office

Monsignor Jacquemin saw only one course to follow, namely, because of her strange behavior, to have her removed from office. On April 10, he drew up a list of complaints against Mother Frances and sent them to Cardinal Parocchi the following day. The Cardinal sent a copy of these to Father Doebbing and commissioned him to conduct a canonical visitation at the motherhouse, in order to learn the veracity of the alleged disorders and ascertain the judgment of the Sisters regarding measures to be taken. The interrogation revealed that the Sisters had always had a great love and reverence for Mother Frances, their foundress, and only during the past year had she acted somewhat strangely, being so nervous and disturbed as to continually contradict herself.

Viewing the situation objectively, anyone can readily perceive that Mother Frances was extremely overburdened and needed a complete rest. The rapid development of the community with its constant struggle for existence because of financial liabilities caused her much anxiety and necessitated much travel, making great inroads upon her health. This rapid development also necessitated many transfers of Sisters, especially when new recruits arrived from Rome, since the community was established in America only little more than eight years, and there were few English-speaking Sisters. The

urgent demands for Sisters in the hospitals and schools made it necessary for young Sisters to be placed in various positions without professional training, causing difficulties and making frequent changes necessary. Since she was dealing with characters that were sometimes less than ideal, the human condition being what it is, Mother Frances found a certain measure of discipline to be necessary, which to others seemed to be too severe at times. Coupled with this was the subtle influence of Sister Valeria, who had caused trouble by her intrigues and complaints leveled against Monsignor Jacquemin and Father Joch, and by her insinuations against the motherhouse in Rome, that it was a useless burden and that one of the American houses would serve better as a motherhouse with possibly herself in charge!

After the report given by Father Doebbing to Cardinal Parocchi about the state of affairs in the motherhouse, the latter consulted with Pope Leo XIII, and the result was a decree issued on April 14, 1896, removing Mother Frances from office and appointing Sister Johanna Ankenbrand as the new superior general.

The complaints against Mother Frances, which came to light only in 1963 in the archives of the Roman Vicariate, touched upon her strange conduct in leaving the motherhouse abruptly without notice of destination, unreasonable transfers of Sisters, dismissal of two newly professed Sisters for reasons of health, and an unwise decision involving two novices in regard to religious profession. They touched also upon a few comments Mother Frances had made concerning herself, perhaps in a state of sheer exhaustion, that she was going to Rome to be released from office and that she wished to enter the Order of the Poor Clares in Assisi.

Viewing these reasons objectively, we believe that Mother Frances could easily have cleared herself of any wrongdoing had she been given a chance to speak in her own defense. Why this haste in issuing the decree of April 14?

In regard to the complaints, however, it is evident that Monsignor Jacquemin acted in all good faith, for in his statement concerning the deposition he states, "Lest he seem to be neglectful in office, the undersigned spiritual director of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother in Rome sets forth in confidence the following: M. Frances of the Cross, superior general, appears to have acted improperly during the last years in office." Feeling under obligation to resolve the situation in some way, Monsignor Jacquemin decided that her deposition was the correct solution of the problem.

Thus was verified the name "Mother Mary Frances of the Cross." The *Franciscan Vision* had become a stark reality, patterned on the life of St. Francis crucified with Christ!

After a short stay in Vienna, Mother Frances went to Bamberg to her sister Hedwig, most probably to visit the grave of her recently departed mother. From there supposedly in response to the telegram recalling her to Rome, she arrived at the motherhouse at night, after the Sisters had retired.

Informed by the portress of all that had transpired during her absence, she went immediately to the bed of Mother Johanna, knelt down humbly, and in answer to the query of Mother Johanna why she had done this, she replied, "I know everything already; the Sister at the door told me. Let us permit the Lord to do as He likes. He does everything well."

Mother Johanna tried by every means to alleviate the suffering of Mother Frances, for she knew that she had been severely hurt. She therefore offered her a change of residence, asking her if she would like to spend some time in Vienna and thereafter with her sister Hedwig in Bamberg. Mother Frances gladly acquiesced in this, especially to escape the heat of the Italian summer. Moreover, the sudden lifting of the burden of her office left her entirely at a loss. In fact, she felt so lost

that, as Sister Stanisla tells us, she said to her within the hearing of some of the Sisters, "Come with me; I should like to start all over again." This was the one and only time she ever referred to this episode in her life, for, stunned by the blow, like the disciples of Emmaus, she did not immediately comprehend all that the Lord was saying to her on the way, that "Christ had to suffer all these things and so enter into His glory" (Luke 7:26).

In Vienna, the situation was anything but peaceful. Sister Valeria refused to accept the change of superior general and succeeded in influencing even the ecclesiastical authorities in this regard. She went so far in her subversiveness as to send a telegram to America, saying that Vienna was separating from Rome. When summoned by Mother Johanna to come to Rome, she refused and left the community on July 7, 1896. Later she again joined a Benedictine convent.

In America there were also disturbances. Many of the Sisters feared that the community would be dissolved and several contacted the bishop of their diocese, seeking counsel in the crisis of that time. Many expressed their loyalty in writing to Mother Frances, and she in turn expressed her thanks in a letter, at the same time exhorting them to remain loyal to the community and obedient to their present superiors, Mother Johanna and Monsignor Jacquemin.

The news of her appointment as superior general had caused great dismay in the heart of Sister Johanna, as she felt herself utterly incapable of filling the role of successor to Mother Frances. It was only after a retreat of three days that she was able to assume her office as superior general. She then asked the Sisters for their support and cooperation. After receiving a letter from Monsignor Jacquemin, in which he explained some of the reasons for the deposition of Mother Frances, most of the Sisters came to an understanding of the situation and readily submitted to the authority of the Church. United



in prayer as the "Community of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother," they put their hands to the plough with the firm determination of perpetuating the ideals of their beloved foundress, Mother Mary Frances of the Cross.

Monsignor Jacquemin also took up his duties with renewed zeal, endeavoring to aid the new superior general with counsel and advice. For this task he was well qualified by his eminent scholarship and erudition, especially in matters pertaining to canon law. The temporary and final approbation of the Sisters' constitutions within a relatively short period can be credited to his zealous concern and labor.

We who view the course of these events a century later, ask in the limited horizon of our understanding, Why does God exact such painful sacrifices from His well-beloved friends, who have done their utmost in executing His divine will and carrying out his designs? Why does He permit, through misunderstandings and misinterpretations, no opportunity or them to speak a word in their own defense or clarify the allegations made against them? It is the mystery of the Cross, recognized by faith, that only through the daily trials and difficulties borne for love of the Crucified and in imitation of Him that one attains to sanctity. There was no other way for the seraphic saint, Francis of Assisi. There would be no other way for Mother Frances of the Cross.

## Mother Frances in Retirement

After spending several weeks in Vienna and thereafter visiting the graves of her dear departed parents in Bamberg, Mother Frances returned to Rome on October 15, 1896. She remained there for the following nine years.

Nothing of importance is related of Mother Frances during those years of quiet retirement in the motherhouse, except for her example of humility and her most valuable counsel to the new superior general. Because of her failing health she could at first participate only in the liturgy and in community prayer; later she went again to St. Peter's Basilica to pray at her favorite places, near the Pieta', in the Blessed Sacrament chapel, and before the altar of St. Peter. In her private devotions she adhered closely to the cycle of the liturgical year. After the Stations of the Cross were erected in the chapel of the motherhouse, she prayed the Way of the Cross daily with the most profound devotion. From her letters to her sister Hedwig we learn how much strength she drew from the contemplation of the sufferings of Christ, for, as she wrote, "The cross is the key to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, in which are kept all the treasures and riches of the eternal Father."

Her one great desire had been to have perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in some house of the congregation as soon as it would be possible; so now, wanting to be with our Eucharistic Savior as much and as often as possible, she spent many hours of the day and

night before the Blessed Sacrament. Daily she offered herself before the tabernacle, as she often told her superior general, for the prosperity and growth of the community.

Mother Frances, the foundress, who had led the young community according to Franciscan ideals and spirit for thirteen years, was now among the rank and file of its members. Humanly speaking, it was not easy to submit in all things to the will of another superior general and to a local leader as well. Yet, as she had always sought to do the will of God, not her own, so now did she humbly submit to the divine will. A note in her diary of November 21, 1896, expresses this clearly:

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 His blood-stained feet until Love Crucified shall say: "Come up higher; take your place in the center of My Heart." Mary must initiate me into the mystery of our altars and adorn my soul with a bridal and eucharistic love, that I may deserve ever more to partake worthily of the Bread of angels and the Wine which brings forth virgins. I humbly pray God to instill in me deep contempt of self, together with purity and denial of self-will, as another special fruit of the retreat.

## **In Castel San Elia**

In 1905, the need of a child-care institution in the town of Castel San Elia, about thirty miles north of Rome, was one of Bishop Doebbing's main concerns. As the former extraordinary confessor of the Sisters in Rome, and now the Bishop of Nepi and Sutri, he naturally turned to the Sisters to take charge of such a mission. The place was near the Sanctuary of the Madonna of the Cliffs, in a deep, narrow valley, making it ideal for the

practice of the active apostolate combined with the contemplative life.

Mother Frances immediately offered her services and soon after the opening of the mission she went there to stay. Her health had long since improved so that she could participate in everything. When Mass was not celebrated in the Sisters' chapel, she attended the one in the parish church and then went down the steep stone steps to the Madonna of the Cliffs, where she prayed for hours. Hurrying home, she supervised the children and tended them with motherly love. To the little ones she taught the rudiments of faith: how to make the sign of the cross and how to say little prayers adapted to their age. Some of the older girls benefited from her instructions in French and German.

During the hot Italian summer, Mother Frances unselfishly offered to relieve the other Sisters of their duty of supervising the children during the afternoon rest period so that they also might enjoy a short rest, even though she may have needed it more than they. After the children were dismissed in the evening, there were tasks to be done in the kitchen, vegetables to be prepared, potatoes to be peeled, and Mother Frances was there, unaffectedly offering her service. Her whole being radiated Franciscan charity and simplicity, whether in the convent with the Sisters, with the children, or when she visited the sick and the poor, bringing them comfort and consolation and often bread and other food.

Her love for the liturgy of the church and her concern for the sacred dwelling of the Eucharistic Lord was evident in her insistence on cleanliness and decorum in the chapel. To have the necessary articles for divine service, this always received her immediate attention, even in the beginning when the community was in dire poverty. In Castel San Elia it was her joy to enhance the beauty of the chapel on feast days and to spend much of the day where she could truly say, "How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!" (Ps. 83).

Like the seraph of Assisi, Mother Frances dwelt in constant and uninterrupted union with God, whether in the sacred precincts of the chapel which she loved, or during her daily duties. She allowed herself only a few hours of sleep during the night and rose early in order to commune with God in prayer. Her whole being was sustained by love of her Crucified Lord, and the contemplation of His sufferings flowed over into the actions of her daily life.

Some time after Mother Frances had been peacefully settled in Castel San Elia, she had an unexpected visitor. Sister Scholastica, the contrite and humbled prodigal, who after eleven years of regret and domestic service, was readmitted to the community. To her great relief, Mother Frances received her with great love and kindness and she returned to Rome with a light heart. Having been readmitted in 1906 and given back her old name, "Sister Scholastica," she lived as a true religious until her death in 1937.

In gratitude to Monsignor Jacquemin for the twenty-five years of service which he had given to the community from 1885 to 1910, the Sisters in the motherhouse prepared a little celebration to commemorate the occasion. Mother Frances was also invited and in order to show her reverence and gratitude for all the good he had done for the community, she joyfully accepted the invitation. In his welcoming words, he presented Mother Frances as the foundress, for many of the younger Sisters had never seen her. This was so embarrassing to her that, in her humility, she tried to hide behind some of the Sisters. Regarding this incident, she wrote to her sister Hedwig, "Our life is alternately work and fatigue, joy and sorrow, but through it all shines the adorable will of God."

When she returned to Castel San Elia she asked to make a retreat of ten days, toward the end of November. During this retreat she asked for two special graces, namely, for a long and painful death agony in order to

enter eternity wholly purified, and for a participation in Christ's crowning with thorns. Like another Francis, who asked that he might feel in his own body the sufferings of his divine Lord, Mother Frances, in prophetic Franciscan vision, asked to suffer the pain of the crowning with thorns, and it was not denied her. Soon after this retreat, on February 2, she fainted in the chapel. She regained consciousness after being taken to her cell, but thereafter was plagued with severe headaches. Her ailing condition forced her to remain in bed for a few days, but on February 8, the anniversary of her mother's death, she attempted to attend holy Mass in the chapel. There she fainted again. The doctor's diagnosis was hemorrhage of the brain. From then on, she was confined to her bed. After a slight improvement, she lapsed again into more violent headaches, which lasted for four weeks without interruption. Her prayer, no less than that of her seraphic Father Francis, had been answered; she was indeed suffering the pain of the sacred wounds of the crowning with thorns as she had requested. Fully conscious, she grew worse steadily, and on February 27, when told of the gravity of her condition, she asked to receive the Holy Eucharist as Viaticum and the Anointing of the Sick.

## **Death of Mother Frances**

After receiving the Sacraments with the greatest devotion, she closed her eyes and remained so until March 4, speaking very little to anyone. Her thoughts during this time were expressed in earnest words: "The judgments of the Lord are inscrutably severe. What are honors and reputation? What good do they do us at the hour of death?"

Monsignor Jacquemin and the Franciscan Fathers from the parish church rendered her spiritual assistance, and Bishop Doebbing visited her, recommending to her

intercession his diocese and the whole Church. The Sunday of solemn adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, March 5, found Mother Frances still able to receive Holy Communion. She requested the prayers of all the Sisters and also asked forgiveness for all that she might have done to hurt or offend anyone. Her death agony was slow and painful, even as she had requested of the Lord. A special blessing from Pope Pius X with a plenary indulgence for the hour of death was sent to her through Monsignor Jacquemin. It gave her great comfort. On March 6, the feast of the Franciscan Saint Colette, the bell from the sick room summoned Monsignor Jacquemin and the Sisters from the chapel during the celebration of Mass to the room of the dying foundress, where all prayed aloud the *Stabat Mater*. Monsignor Jacquemin imparted the general absolution, which she received with full consciousness, and as the clock struck seven, Mother Frances of the Cross gave back her pure soul into the hands of her Creator, a victim of purest love.

## **Funeral of Mother Frances**

A few hours later, the remains of Mother Frances were laid out in the boys' hall of the institute. As soon as the people heard that she had died, many of them came to venerate the "saint." School benches had to be placed around the casket to prevent the people from cutting off pieces of clothing or carrying away anything they could take as relics. When exhorted to pray for the departed, they answered, "Mother Frances is a saint and does not need our prayers; she must pray for us."

The mayor of the city himself issued a proclamation for a Solemn Funeral Mass, with the intention of having the entire congregation participating. On this occasion Bishop Doebbing himself gave the funeral homily, stressing the fact that those who are chosen to found new religious congregations must inevitably suffer greatly

and be purified in the furnace of affliction. Having been personally involved in the deposition of Mother Frances from the office of superior general, he felt morally obliged to make amends for his action by publicly announcing this fact. He stated further that Mother Frances had climbed the heights of Calvary and stood with the Sorrowful Mother beneath the cross, so that by completely dying to herself she would be found worthy to serve the Lord. To this, all present had been witness.

It was Mother Frances' wish to be buried, not in Rome, but in the valley where so many saints had rested for centuries. Until the time of her funeral, the townspeople had not known that she was the foundress. Now when the bishop told them what a great honor it was to have a religious foundress buried in their midst, they understood and as the casket passed, they knelt down in the streets asking for her prayers and blessing. Beside the venerable Basilica of St. Elias, under the shadow of mighty cypress trees in the valley surrounded by high walls of rock, Mother Frances was laid to rest, not far from the shrine of the Madonna of the Cliffs where she had spent so many hours in prayer.

During the years she spent at Castel San Elia, Mother Frances had made an indelible impression upon all those whom she tended and served, as well as on the people who observed her kneeling for hours in the parish church and attending several Masses in succession. Even greater was their astonishment at her great humility in conducting herself as a most ordinary Sister, especially in the care of the children. To the children themselves she seemed to be an angel of goodness, a glimpse of someone supernatural, a vision from another world.



# Franciscan Vision

Mother Frances' Franciscan vision of the active apostolate combined with the contemplative life helped her guide her congregation from its humble beginnings in Rome to a system of missions which span the world. Her pious example of charity, obedience and poverty and her steadfast courage inspired her followers to surmount even the most difficult tasks. After her death the congregation continued to grow, strengthening its missions in America and Europe and adding new ones in Brazil and the West Indies. Today nearly 700 Sisters seek to follow her Franciscan vision as they spread their spiritual and medicinal healing touch throughout the world.

## Cause for Her Beatification

After the death of Mother Frances the fame of her sanctity spread more widely and many favors were attributed to her intercession. Encouraged by these signs of her powerful intercession, the community arranged that the Cause for her beatification was introduced in Rome. Approval for the initiation of the Diocesan Process was received February 22, 1937, and ten years later, the Apostolic Process was initiated with the decree of June 13, 1947, signed by Pope Pius XII. During the pontificates of Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI the Cause progressed slowly but steadily. Since

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1971 Father Antonio Cairoli, O.F.M., has been its postulator.

Prayerfully we await the day,  
when with filial love and trust,  
we shall pray with confidence  
“Blessed Frances Streitl, pray for us!”

May the legacy she left behind  
in flame love’s fiery darts,  
and the Franciscan Vision forever be  
engraved upon our hearts!”