

Knit Together

in community and prayer

Newsletter for the Province of Asia-Pacific

Third Order, Society of Saint Francis

www.tssf.org.au

Pentecost 2024

A close-knit community

Mandy Wheatley
Provincial Minister

Greetings of peace and good to all the Franciscan Third Order and others who may read this *Knit Together* newsletter. Why 'Knit Together'? Indeed, not all of us knit wool with knitting needles, although many may do!

We are, however, modelling a closely knit community, a community in which people care about each other very much. (*Britannica Dictionary*).

Many know the verse from Psalm 139.13 (ESV) 'For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.'

It is logical that we humans, because we are made in the image of a creative God, are inherently creative beings. If we are 'knit together' by a creative God, so we are called to knit one another into a caring, close-knit community. As each of us does this in our own way, I give great thanks for my work which is to make connections with all our members. Often it is a joyful task and I love this daily Community Obedience prayer which reminds us of TSSF unity:

'God, we give you thanks for the Third Order of the Society of St Francis. Grant, we pray, that being **knit together** in community and prayer, We your servants may glorify your holy name after the example of Saint Francis, and win others to your love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'



Hong Kong – a beautiful city where Third Order members are committed to making a difference wherever they are placed by God, whether it is in church, in chaplaincy, in prisons or hospitals, working on environmental issues or seeking justice for the disadvantaged. L-R: Tony Poon, Mandy Wheatley; front, May Won

Often it can be a challenge to keep our connection with one another. Regardless, the unity of God’s grand design is one of the peculiar marks of the Christian calling, which is to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Francis calls on us to create unity by joining with the Holy Spirit who is living and active in us. He says: ‘Let everyone be drawn to peace and kindness through your [own example of] peace and gentleness. For we have been called to this: to cure the wounded, to bind up the broken, and to recall the erring. Many who seem to us members of the devil will yet be disciples of Christ.’ (*The Anonymous of Perugia*, 37, 38.)

How have you touched base with your TSSF community this week?

May your Easter-tide and Pentecost season be blessed with personal outreach to many of those in our Province who need your encouragement.

Our next Newsletter will be full of information and updates from Chapter which meets by Zoom on 4th and 5th May. Please keep the Regional Ministers and Officers in your prayers.

God’s good blessings and peace to you,
Mandy tssf
Provincial Minister



Kuching, East Malaysia – where restaurants look like art galleries (where this photo was taken) and where the Third Order has been established for over 41 years, since Michael Buma Galami was professed in May 1983. Left to right; Bradley Sangan, Mandy, Phyllis Montegrai, Michael Buma Galami

Mandy’s Travels to Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia and PNG



South Korea – this fun-loving group of tertiaries are working with displaced people, providing schooling and outreach to those in their communities who need assistance. Front Hyeran Helena Yang, Bede Kwon, Sungsoon Lucy Edward Lee, Mandy, Woo- whee Elizabeth Nahm



Goroka, PNG – the youngest members of the Church of St Francis where I made some good friends.

Simple life and contemplation

Sungsoon Lucy Edward Lee tssf
Korea

Last year, I bought one new outfit. I rarely buy clothes all year, which is maybe entirely due to my 20 years of living in the habit of a religious society. So, clothes are all about keeping me warm and cool, and clean. Other than that, if you look at my lifestyle, you will find out how monotonous it is.

The purpose of this is to maintain my ultimate focus on Jesus Christ through a life of faith and prayer. Meanwhile, my surroundings are always flooded with tons of things that would distract my focus, such as the pouring in of information, invitations to social gatherings, intellectual desires for learning, tempting ornaments and working for a living.

My work is counselling and visiting as a social worker in order to match disabled people with appropriate services. This constantly requires more than 90% of my energy for me to be productive and effective. The minimum energy to stay in the presence of my Lord can easily evaporate. So, a simple life is necessary to keep me awake and to stay in the presence of my Lord, even a little.

Thankfully, during Lent I was able to lead a contemplative prayer-gathering with a few people. And I also managed to have a one-day retreat. I didn't think I could afford to add any more to my routine, but eventually I accepted the invitation to lead the prayer gathering. Why? Because I must live. I realise that contemplative prayer is as essential to my survival as air and water. I start my morning with 'My Lord! My God!' on the way to work.



Lucy Edward bottom left, at prayer gathering



Left: labyrinth at Lucy Edward's church. Above: Centrepiece at the prayer gathering

Francis and the Tasbih prayer beads

Wayne Philp tssf

My wife, Sharon, and I recently (September 2023) spent five weeks in Turkey. As part of our travels, we visited Konya, in the Anatolia region (ancient Iconia, Galatia), which is a pilgrimage destination for Muslim-Sufis focussing on the tomb of their founder of the Mevlana order, Jelaleddin Rumi.

Konya is also famous as the home of the Sufi Whirling Dervishers and for the wonderful musical instruments, chants, songs and prayer-beads on display there. It is the prayer beads I want to bring to your attention.

Francis of Assisi had a close encounter with Sufi-Islam and their prayer beads during his journey to Damietta (Egypt) during the 5th Crusade, 1217–1221. There he met Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil Naser ad-Din Abu al-Ma'ali Muhammad, 1177–1238, the Kurdish Muslim ruler and fourth Ayyubid sultan of Egypt. Heavily influenced by Sufism, al-Kamil believed that he was acting within Islamic law by listening to Br Francis and Br Illuminato about the prophet Esa (Jesus).

Al-Kamil's prominent Sufi adviser must have seen Francis in the light of Sufism and the Muslim mystic tradition. In their rough, patched up tunics Brs Francis and Illuminato must have looked like Sufis, since the very name 'Sufi' comes from the Arabic word for 'wool' – the rough material used to make their robes. Like Francis, they also wore cords rather than belts.

In the encounter between them, both Francis and the Sultan were changed. When Francis finally left to return to Italy, the Sultan showered him with many gifts and treasures. Because he had no interest in worldly wealth, Francis refused them all, except one special gift: an ivory horn used by the muezzin to call the faithful to prayer. On his return, Francis used it to call people for prayer or for preaching. Francis also shared with his community his new and deep respect for his Muslim brothers and sisters, breaking down the cycle of enmity and misunderstanding that fuelled the Crusades. Francis was especially struck by the Muslim five times daily prayer, and the practice of prostrations in worship of God; his letters urged Christians to adopt a similar practice: to make prayer a part of everyday life, in effect to remember God in everything you do, as in the [Islamic] Sufi Zekr/Dhikr [which is about 'reminding oneself' of the Glory of God].



Wayne Philp and Sharon in Turkey, September 2023

Karchmar, Irving. (2008). Darvish: St. Francis meets Sultan Malik al-Kamil. Retrieved 5th Feb. 2024 at <https://darvish.wordpress.com/2008/12/23/st-francis-meets-sultan-malik-al-kamil/>



Tasbeeh prayer beads

Pivotal to the Sufi Zekr is praying (in song) the 99 names of Allah. And, since Francis and Illuminato remained with al-Kamil and his Sufi teacher (Fakhr ad-din al-Farisi) for as many as twenty days, discussing prayer and the mystical life, it is certain that Francis would have been exposed to using Sufi prayer beads in daily praying the 99 names of Allah. When Francis left he took with him al-Kamil's gift of the ivory trumpet, which is preserved today in the crypt of the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi.

Apparently influenced by his experience with Sufi prayer, Br Francis presented the following prayer 'In Praise of God', to Brother Leo (the numbers are my addition):

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. You are holy, Lord only God. | 10. You are love. | 23. You are our protector. |
| 2. Your deeds are wonderful. | 11. You are wisdom. | 24. You are our guardian. |
| 3. You are strong. | 12. You are humility. | 25. You are our defender. |
| 4. You are great. | 13. You are endurance. | 26. You are our courage. |
| 5. You are Most High. | 14. You are rest. | 27. You are our haven. |
| 6. You are Almighty. | 15. You are peace. | 28. You are our hope. |
| 7. You, Holy Father are King of heaven and earth. | 16. You are joy and gladness. | 29. You are our faith, |
| 8. You are Three and One, Lord God. | 17. You are justice. | 30. Our great consolation. |
| 9. You are All Good. You are Good, supreme Good, Lord God, living and true. | 18. You are moderation. | 31. You are our eternal life. |
| | 19. You are all our riches. | 32. Great and wonderful Lord. |
| | 20. You are sufficient for us. | 33. Almighty God, merciful Saviour. Amen. |
| | 21. You are beauty. | |
| | 22. You are gentleness. | |

Consider the 99 Names of God as known to Islam. Although the Sufi-Muslim Tasbeeh Prayer Beads are designed to pray aloud these 99 names, ordinary Muslims routinely use these 99 beads during their prayer times to recite three sets of 33 mantra-like statements:

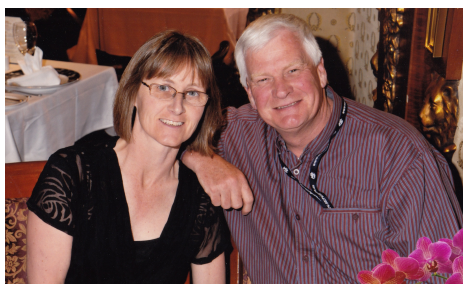
Subhan Allah: 'Glory to God'
 Al-hamdulillah: 'Thanks to God'
 Allahu Akbar: 'God is Great'.

They repeat their 3 x 33 sets of declarations five times a day. Christians can likewise use the 99 prayer beads to recite the 99 names of God above. Or, like me, they can use the 3 x 33 sets to pray (aloud, or silently, as you cycle through the beads):

33 praises to God... God is good; God is light; God is Spirit; God is Gracious; etc. etc. Or the 33 x 'In Praise of God' list Francis gave to Brother Leo (above): 33 thanks to God – thanks for today; thanks for my health; thanks for my family etc; 33 requests of God: please watch over

John; please help Betty; please heal Jill; etc. I think you'll find that you run out of beads in no time.

Please don't get me wrong, for I am not trying to promote or support the Islamic religion, or its focus on the teachings of the prophet Mohammed. Without Jesus our Christ, Islam has nothing much to offer us; by way of salvation, or by good news. But we can appreciate, just as Francis was impressed, how the Muslims pray five times a day, and how we too might adopt a practice of making prayer a cyclic part of everyday life – through the beads in our hand – reminding ourselves, in everything we do, of the Glory to God, our Thanks to God and the Greatness of God.



Wayne and Sharon

Garry Dodd tssf

Mission to Seafarers based in Newcastle

Sandra Beck

Some readers may know that I have recently moved to aged care in Newcastle. Garry Dodd is the only TSSF member geographically close to me and a friendship has emerged for which I am extremely grateful.

Garry recently told me that he is studying law because he wants to be 'that person who stands up for the rights of seafarers'. Garry is still early in his degree and will be grateful for inclusion in your prayers not just for himself but for those to whom he ministers.

He gave me an example of someone for whom he wishes he could stand up. A seafarer suffered the crushing of the second and third fingers of his right hand. On arrival in port, fourteen days after the accident, his cut, bruised and swollen fingers were also found to be broken and needed surgery to pin the bones back into place. One can only imagine the pain. The seafarer was sent back onboard to endure a 14-18 day journey to Japan and then to the Philippines, the country of origin where, Garry said, he might or might not receive treatment.

Readers may be interested to read this moving story with a deeper understanding of the role of a chaplain like Garry. I have added his name to day 28. Other chaplains may like to write about aspects of their ministry.



Garry Dodd

The Francis Stories

The Little Flowers of St Francis

Retold by Rose Christie French
(New Zealand TSSF) © 2015

With drawings by John Ngalihesi.

34pp. paperback

Third Order, The Society of St Francis,
Province of the Pacific.

Reviewed by Sandra Beck

It is with joy that I note this book is now available from our Australian publications site. I have lost track of the number of copies I have either given away or sold on, having ordered them directly from Rose, but having to charge \$15 each to cover postage. Availability in Australia has brought the price down to \$10 + \$3.00 postage and can be ordered here:

<https://tssf.org.au/order-publications-and-resources/>

The book makes a companion volume with the equally delightful *Followers of Francis*, TSSF, Province of the Pacific 2017, with drawings by Rowan French. The latter book has coloured illustrations.

Both books are adapted for tertiaries in Papua New Guinea but in my opinion are suitable for all adults and children over about five years old.

There are 21 chapters in *The Francis Stories*; each is a one to two-page slice of *The Little Flowers*. It is worth owning the book for the simple black and white drawings alone.



The final pages include St Clare's letter to St Agnes of Prague; a chronology of St Francis's life; a prayer composed by St Francis; and a second unattributed prayer.

The book has been helpful for me with novices; all my family members have received copies and I can truly say that I love both the books.

Statue of St Francis recently donated to St Mary's, South Brisbane, by the Capuchin brothers on their departure from the parish, which they had been running.

The Francis Stories

The Little Flowers of St Francis

retold by Rose Christie-French tssf
with drawings by John Ngalihesi



The Third Order Society of St Francis
Province of the Pacific
2015

An ordinary activist

Ann Ellis tssf

I was born in 1942 and grew up in England during rationing. My family lived with my grandparents. My grandmother had a large garden and we grew a lot of our own food. I helped her pick and shell peas, blackcurrants and gooseberries for pies and helped out with general garden duties.

My brother and I brought home six chicks from the Saturday market. The two that survived turned out to be cockerels! We lived near a big park with a boating lake where there were swans and ducks and in the summer the grass became white with little daisies. We made fishing nets out of Grandma's old stockings and brought home minnows in jam jars. Nature lessons were a part of school life and we were encouraged to bring in wildflowers and tadpoles.

We were blessed with four definite seasons, spring being my favourite. As we came out of winter, spring brought the glory of spring bulbs and dead trees coming into green bud. I think this childhood instilled in me a love of the natural world and little creatures. This love has grown deeper as I have grown older.

Since I retired I have joined Angligrreen, a commission of the Anglican Church, Southern Queensland, which supports the 5th Mark of Mission: *'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.'*

This led to action on climate change. I found it easy at times to fall into despair and feel deep grief because of what we are doing to ourselves and our beautiful planet. I love the way St Francis looked on everything as Kin, as brother or sister. This led me to becoming a tertiary.

My gardening is part of my action. I joined a Bushcare group and got seriously involved with our church garden, which we are revegetating with indigenous plants. We are lucky to have a great native nursery close by which offers free workshops and sells tube stock.

A couple of us set up a recycling hub for our church community which has proved useful. I write a short segment for the Pew Bulletin every week under the banner of Angligrreen. I sign petitions and write the odd letter to politicians. I subscribe to The Climate Council and to the Australian Religious Response to Climate change.

Everything I do is ordinary, very much a part of ordinary life, but it's something, and I enjoy it.



Ann Ellis with a poster which reads 'Protect Beautiful Queensland because it's home to our wonderful wildlife.'

Change of Dates for Week of Climate Justice Action

The dates for the Faiths 4 Climate Justice Week of Action, which were published in the Easter *Knit Together*, have been changed to **September 14 to 24**. Please find the explanation and more information here: arcc.org.au Click on 'Advocate' then Week of Action.

Editor: What is your story? Could you write for this page on care for creation in crisis? I suggest about 350 words plus a photo if possible (at least 1MB please). Thank you!

Due-date for next issue: 29th August (earlier if possible)

Please send contributions to: jeidown@protonmail.com

'Listening to Winter'

by Macrina Wiederkehr

Sent to *Knit Together* by Jayne Hughes

The trees have shed their colourful autumn robes.
Winter is raging through the dark, empty branches
and I am listening.
I am listening to the roar and to the quiet of winter.
I am listening to a beauty that sometimes remains unseen.

I am listening.

I am listening to the seed hidden in the earth.
I am listening to the dark swallowing up the light.
I am listening to faith rising out of doubt.
I am listening to the need to believe without seeing.

I am listening.

I am listening to the season of contemplation,
to the urgency of our world's need for reflection.
I am listening to all that waits within the earth,
to bulbs and seeds,
to deep roots dreaming.
I am listening to the sacred winter rest.

I am listening.

I am listening to long nights,
comforting darkness,
fruitful darkness,
beautiful darkness.
I am listening to the darkness of the winter season.
I am listening to the sparks of hope within the darkness.

I am listening.

I am listening to storms raging out my window,
to storms raging in my heart.
I am listening to all that makes me pull my cloak a little tighter.
I am listening to trust buried deep in the ground of my being.

I am listening.



I am listening to the kind permission of the season
to rest more often,
to reflect more deeply,
to pray without words.
I am listening to the sacrament of non-doing.

I am listening.

I am listening to my dreams and inner visions,
to the unknown wrapped in the mystery of my life,
to tears trapped in underground streams of my being,
to seeds watered daily by those tears.

I am listening.

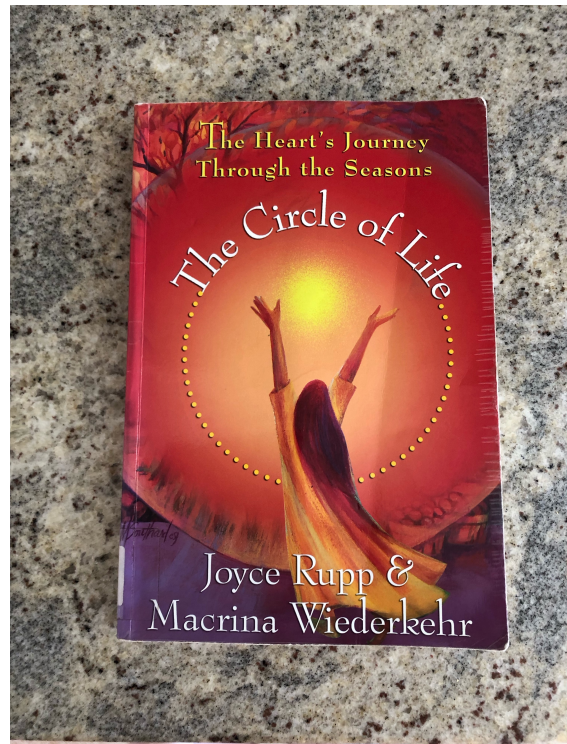
I am listening to the quiet life in winter's womb.
I am listening to winter, nurturing spring.
I am listening to brilliant winter sunsets
and lovely frosty mornings.
I am listening to snowflakes flying through the air,
to the cold winds that often blow out there,
to bare trees, so lovely in their emptiness,
to one leaf that never did let go.

I am listening.

I am listening to winter
handing over to spring.
I am listening to the poetry of winter.

I am listening.

*Taken from The Circle of Life © 2005 by
Joyce Rupp and Macrina Wiederkehr. Used by
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reserved.*



St Francis Day Sermon

John Davison

St. John's Cathedral, Hong Kong, 1984

Today the Cathedral celebrates the life of St Francis. Since I have been associated with the members of the Third Order of the Anglican Society of St Francis in the Cathedral I was asked to preach today.

It was suggested that I might talk about the vision of St Francis for today's world. I think St Francis would have thought 'a vision for today's world' a bit grandiose for him. He would have said: 'I'm only a simple man. What do I know of such things? I'm not sure what it means.'

St Francis has been a part of my life for so long that I no longer see the shape of what he means to me. It's a bit like the familiarity we have with Hong Kong when we've been here for a while. We don't see it as fresh and new as we once did. It's become such a part of our being that we need an enthusiastic tourist to remind us how exciting and beautiful it can be. So let me talk about my encounter with St Francis and see where that leads.

I was brought up in an atmosphere where saints were rather wooden people whom Roman Catholics were supposed to worship in the big church down the road. In our church we heard about people like C T Studd and the Cambridge Seven and George Mueller of Bristol. I first read of St Francis as a teenager in the works of Robert Blatchford, socialist of the Merrie England school of William Morris. I thought it strange that a socialist would be an enthusiast for the *Little Flowers of St Francis*, the classic book about St Francis written by his early followers. What did all this have in common with the St Francis Dog's Home or the St Francis Animal Rescue Shelter that I saw advertised sometimes? Obviously he meant different things to different people.

It was some years later when I left home and changed my lifestyle that I read the *Little Flowers* for myself. I had decided that the choice of the profession I had recently qualified in was a great mistake and I wanted a break from it. I wanted to live in the open air for a while so I decided to go to Victoria in Southern Australia to become a casual worker.

There was also a sense of wanting to find myself and to sort out the troublesome question of what to believe in. I had reluctantly concluded that there was some evidence that there might be a God. It was quite a disappointment that the evidence pointed that way rather than the other.

Anyway, I went to Mildura in Victoria, a couple of thousand miles away from my home in Queensland. For three weeks I worked on a farm, then began picking grapes when the season started. It was in the middle of summer and very hot. The temperature reached 48 degrees Celsius down between the rows of vines. Gradually my body became hardened to the work and I began to enjoy the freedom of it all.

Then a strange thing happened. Often as I straightened my back,



John Davison, photo by Mandy Wheatley, early in 2024. John recently celebrated 45 years of profession.

cutting knife in hand, I had the impression that someone was speaking to me. Not in words. But somewhere out of the vines and the trees and the soil and the hot sun was coming a presence that touched me deep inside. I seemed in those moments to be at one with this presence, intimately at one, as with a person who knew me through and through. But there was no one else there other than the people working with me. They were not aware that anything had happened and only I knew of the deep quiet that had come down.

But when in the midst of these experiences a sort of joy flashed up I started getting worried. Was I going mad? Was this a nervous breakdown? Where was the old objective me who knew that this sort of thing could not happen? It was one thing admitting that there might conceivably be some sort of deity around the place somewhere but to put me through all this just wasn't fair!

At this point in a local bookstore I came across a translation of *The Little Flowers of St Francis* and bought it. At the back was the Song of Brother Sun written by St Francis. All this was decidedly familiar and tallied with what I was experiencing in the fields. Yes. There was the feeling that I wanted to worship something or somebody. Good God! (Sorry, there wasn't really a good God, but nevertheless...) Good God! What was happening to me! I groaned and began to read the book.

In these artless stories of St Francis talking to the birds – making peace with the wolf of Gubbio, praying in the forest – I found an extraordinary man. Here was somebody who actually tried to obey everything that Jesus said. Tolstoy tried it but his practice of it always seemed to me to be tainted with a bourgeois self-consciousness. St Francis seemed completely natural about it. When he thought the crucifix in the ruined Church in San Damiano told him to repair his church, he thought it meant the church of San Damiano itself and he went about collecting stones to mend it.

When he read the commandments to sell all his goods and give to the poor he not only gave away his own but sold some of the stock in his father's store and ended up in jail. He had to be mad. Who in his right mind would kiss a leper the way he did? But he didn't seem mad. A lot of young men came out to join him, and young men are usually quick to recognize false religiosity. They lived a life of poverty, working in the fields and preaching to the people the love of Jesus. There seemed to be a great joy among them. I had to admit I was envious.

The more I read of St Francis and the more I had these experiences in the field and in the town, the more I realized that I was being touched and changed by the same power that had touched St Francis. Finally came the moment when it all made sense and I saw clearly that there was a God who had created me and everything else. I felt I belonged to him and I began to pray to him. But it was St Francis who had given a shape to these experiences and taught me to trust them. He had helped to lead me to God and later to Christ.

And I have never lost that sense of wonder that there is a God and that things outside of me actually exist, with their shape and texture and colour all conveying the presence and light of God. That was my first encounter with St Francis and it set the course for other encounters.



*Inside the Cathedral of
St John the Evangelist,
Hong Kong*

*Part Two of this sermon
will appear in
the next edition of
Knit Together.*