

Knit Together

in community and prayer

Newsletter for the Province of Asia-Pacific

Third Order, Society of Saint Francis

www.tssf.org.au

Francistide 2025



Common themes unite TSSF around the world

*Delegates at the Provincial
Conference in South Australia
(August 21-24). For others
present but not in this photo,
see pages 2 and 7.*

Mandy Wheatley
Provincial Minister

Dear sisters and brothers,

I am writing this short article from Auckland New Zealand, where the Provincial Ministers have been meeting to discuss and plan the work of our Third Order over the next few years.

Michael Twum-Darko, TSSF Minister General and his wife, Mary-Anne, with Peter Bargh, Provincial Minister of the Pacific and I were able to share what had been discussed at our recent Conference, General Chapter and Provincial Chapter

meetings in South Australia.

Surprisingly, there are many common themes running throughout the Third Order around the world, including listening to the concerns of the voices around us, bringing hope and peace by the lives we lead, and in every way possible, including all people, especially indigenous voices in our reflections, prayers and actions as a religious order.

We will be revising our Principles and our prayer cycle, in a way that includes St Clare's name with St Francis' and all creation. We continue to encourage novices and professed members to write a Principles-based Rule of Life as part of their formation, and to work with the First Order in our Provinces, encouraging and supporting mutual projects.

The amazing Dorothy Swayne is to be promoted as a co-founder of the Third Order at IPTOC. Here are two links to find out more about her:

Ted Witham: <https://tinyurl.com/43ejnczu>

TSSF UK: <https://tinyurl.com/y72wtwnd>



*Also at Provincial Conference
Back L-R: Mandy McCarrick,
Glenys McCarrick, Gemma
Dashwood, Selina McMahon
Front: Andrea Maslin,
Sister Cheryl CSBC*

We have a new Regional Minister for Vic-Tas, with Pirrial Clift stepping into this role, and Janet Long (NSW A) coming to help me as Assistant Provincial Minister.

*As we enter this Season of Creation, celebrating the life,
death and eternal life of St Francis,
let us go on announcing the arrival of God's new age for the Earth.
May we go boldly, living with love, reconnecting with the community of life.
May we live wisely, reducing, reusing, repairing,
recycling and regenerating.
May we live justly, realigning ourselves with all
who seek mercy and peace;
and the blessing of God, Creator, Sustainer and
Giver of life be with you always. Amen.*

Mandy tssf
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*Shanti (Bala)
Balasundaram (Sri Lanka)
with Mandy Wheatley*



Listening to Francis and Clare

Edited from a keynote address by
Brother Christopher-John SSF

I believe that Francis and Clare speak very much to us in our current day, despite their very different world and concerns. However, voices from the Middle Ages do not easily reach across the centuries. They can sound harsh or contradictory or just incomprehensible. Yet I believe that these voices are our friends and do have something to say to us. Sometimes, as with friends, it takes patience and giving them the space to let them speak to us as they will.

So – we are to attend, to listen deeply. And then to respond.

This address also includes Clare, but I will concentrate on Francis since I would need much longer to include both. However, Clare and her voice and vision are also an integral part of our life as Franciscans.

Elsewhere in our addresses we are considering the voice of the poor, the First Nations, and the voice of creation. This is exciting and it's great to see that this current of listening has spread out from our 2023 IPTOC and Joint First Order Chapters.

For a long time Francis and Clare had no voice ordinary people could easily access. Clare became fairly invisible and Francis known perhaps only through Bonaventure's *Major Life* and the *Regula Bullata* – the officially accepted Rule and perhaps a few other short texts. Their own voice in their writings was not bothered with. Perhaps just a few specialists in medieval manuscripts had access to it.

Vatican II changed that. Religious orders were told to listen to the sources. Listen to the founder. Study the origins of their order. And then also study and pay attention to the signs of the times. Just what we're doing here at this conference.

I was talking about this conference and its theme to a friend who pointed out the connection between what we're doing and Bernard Lonergan's Theology Method. Lonergan was a Canadian Jesuit and a leading thinker in the 20th century on the practical use of theology. He talked about eight tasks of theology, divided into two groups.

The first group is about retrieving the past: What happened? What did people think and say? What developed historically? What misconceptions and problems appeared?

The second part is moving into the future. How does conversion in the theologian provide a basis for reflection on faith? What view of human nature does a converted perspective reveal? What are the time-tested truths and values of one's religion? How do we organise these truths and values in a coherent perspective? How can we communicate our faith?



*Brother Christopher-John SSF
speaking at the conference*

From the 1960s Franciscans have had a wealth of source material. The writings of Francis and Clare are the primary source for their voices – the documents they wrote or dictated and which were created in their lifetime.

Then there are the lives of Francis written soon after his time. These are a secondary source for the voice of Francis. They are like ‘reported speech’. Some of the witnesses were those who could say ‘we who were with him’.

These sources were written to take forward some particular agenda or other. So each has some bias or colour. Like the four gospels, each with a particular style and written from a particular context. Some were written to present the life of Francis as an example of one who practised complete penitence, so that we too might be prompted to follow his example. Some were written to stress the values of poverty as practised by Francis. Others were written to stress the healing miracles and so on.

So these are our secondary sources. The most popular of them is the least historical and least reliable as a source for Francis. I refer to the *Little Flowers*!

And then there are, particularly since the 1920s, the huge number of books and movies telling some aspect of the life of Francis or Clare. These are each written for a purpose and in a particular context.

So where do we go to listen to Francis today? I turned to the internet and asked Brother Google for St Francis quotations. My estimate of the percentage of fake Franciscan quotations on the internet is about 80%. Or higher. Does it matter? I believe it’s important.

We are taking texts or sources and using them to shape how we see and interpret God’s presence in the world in a Franciscan way. We construct our Franciscan project on these foundations. And if the foundations are dodgy then how can we build on them? Attending to the foundations is the deep listening we need to do, and if what we are listening to is a false voice, then whatever follows might be our own agenda or interests, but it won’t necessarily be that of Francis or Clare.

It might seem fairly harmless to spread these fake quotations round. But we live in a world in which truth is suffering greatly. We have politicians whose main output is a string of lies. And a dangerously manipulative string of lies since some people would rather believe the lies than have them exposed for what they are. And these lies are endangering the common values of democracy and decency.

What can we do? How do we know the authentic voice of Francis and Clare? We learn by getting familiar with the genuine article. Then the fake sounds odd. How do we do this with Francis? By reading!

The three volume, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* published by City Press New York between 1999 and 2001 is the best source. It can be bought in single volumes. Volume 1 includes the writings of Francis. Then there is a similar, single volume for Clare. You can buy these books, although they are now quite pricey. You can read them online at various places, free of charge. For both of these websites you need to register, also free of charge:

Internet Archive: <https://tinyurl.com/bdek7ax6>

Franciscan Tradition: <https://tinyurl.com/yjb7r2sv>

See tssf.org.au for the full address and our Brother’s list of resources.



Brother Christopher-John and Jane Noller at the Stations of Creation

Hope after No

Jan Down reports on the keynote address by Bishop Chris McLeod, National Aboriginal Bishop

Is there hope after the 'no' vote to the Referendum on a Voice to Parliament? Bishop Chris McLeod gave a qualified yes in his keynote address.

Bishop Chris saw the Voice to Parliament as a fairly simple request, aiming to side-step politics. The case for Yes was for respect and recognition of First Nations people. Australia, he noted, is rare amongst colonised countries in that its founding document does not mention its indigenous people.

There were two branches to the case for No he said. The conservative No branch, supported by the lobby group Advance, expressed concerns about division, legal challenges, and the unknown. Bishop Chris saw this as a fear campaign.

The progressive No was represented by Lidia Thorpe and the 'Black Sovereign Movement', which argued that the Voice didn't go far enough, being only an advisory body. They also wanted a Treaty before the Voice.

Bishop Chris then pointed out that 72% of people in remote Aboriginal communities voted Yes.

So where are we now? Bishop Chris reported that only five of the sixteen targets for Closing the Gap are being met. The prison population is increasing. There is a rise in, but also a denial of, racism. Youth detention is going up, but locking up kids is not helping. There is a need to ask why they are committing the crimes, and get to the source of the problem.

There is overt racism, such as the neo-Nazi groups. And there are other forms of racism, such as cultural and racial superiority – 'white is right'. There is also a rise in subtle racism – dog whistling: 'there is only one flag'. There is an avoidance of talking about justice issues. And people in this camp feel emboldened by the No vote.

So is there hope after No? Bishop Chris reminded listeners that the most vocal voice in colonial times for Aboriginal people were Christians. There was a recognition of the injustice, he said, but 'We are losing that insight'.

Bishop Chris then outlined some different responses on hope from First Nations people, the first being from Chelsea Watego: 'F**k hope' she says – there is no hope for First Nations. But we are set free from lies, and we can live on our own terms.

The second response was from Bruce Pascoe, who saw 'a little bit of



Photo: Jan Down

Bishop Chris McLeod addresses the Conference

hope', but 'you can't legislate for decency. You have to teach it'.

Marcia Langton said 'Reconciliation is dead'.

But Bishop Chris himself hasn't given up hope yet. He said we need to live it, model it, and maybe this is a lesson that has come from the No vote. And he offered a Christian perspective: Romans 12.10 says 'Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour'.

Bishop Chris quoted from Nick Cave's book, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*: 'Hope is optimism with a broken heart'. In Bishop Chris's words, this is hope based on resurrection. This is the only sort of hope Aboriginal people can have.

He quoted Jurgen Moltmann:

The world is not finished but is understood as engaged in history. It is therefore the world of possibilities, the world in which we can serve the future, promised truth and righteousness and peace.

Drawing on James 2:14–17 – 'faith without works is dead' – Bishop Chris said likewise, 'hope without works is dead'.

So is there hope after No? Yes, says Bishop Chris, but not if we do not see Christian faith in action.

He ended his address by showing The Rev'd Canon Glenn Loughrey's painting of the Road to Emmaus, describing it as the winding road of hope.

Bishop Chris is the National Aboriginal Bishop of the Anglican Church of Australia, an assistant bishop in the Diocese of Adelaide, and Dean of St Peter's Cathedral. He has been in ordained ministry for 35 years and as well as serving as a parish priest, he has always ministered to Aboriginal people. Bishop Chris is of Gurindji descent; both his mother and grandmother were members of the 'Stolen Generations'.



Smoking ceremony and Welcome to Country conducted by Uncle Carlo Sanbury, Ngadjuri Elder. Mary-Anne Twum-Darko at right.

Michael Twum-Darko

An interview with the Minister General

Serving as Minister General of the worldwide Third Order of the Society of St Francis is both a profound joy and a sacred responsibility.

The joys come from witnessing the unifying power of Franciscan spirituality across cultures and continents. Seeing men and women of diverse backgrounds embrace simplicity, humility, and care for creation inspires me daily.

The role also offers the gift of fellowship, where I encounter committed Christians striving to follow Christ in the spirit of St Francis and St Clare. These moments affirm the relevance of our Franciscan witness in today's fractured world.

The challenges are equally real. Leading a global body means navigating differences in language, culture, and context, while ensuring that the unity of our Order remains strong. Coordinating initiatives across time zones, addressing financial and organisational constraints, and discerning responses to contemporary issues – climate change, inequality, and social justice – demands patience and wisdom.

Another challenge lies in balancing the pastoral needs of members with the administrative duties of leadership. Yet, these challenges are also opportunities for growth and deeper reliance on God's grace.

My life has been shaped by a dual calling: academic leadership and Christian ministry. As a professor of business informatics and founder of the Centre for Business Innovation and Incubation at Cape Peninsula University of Technology, I have dedicated over two decades to advancing education, research, and entrepreneurship in Africa. My professional work focuses on disruptive technologies, digital transformation, and building innovation ecosystems that empower youth and communities.

At the same time, my vocation as a Franciscan minister has grounded me in humility and service. I serve not only as Minister General of the Third Order but also as a priest committed to guiding people in faith. My experiences in academia and ministry complement each other – innovation shapes the future of human society, while spirituality anchors us in values that transcend the marketplace.

In both my academic and ministerial work, the Franciscan way offers a prophetic response to the challenges of our age. The call to live, love generously, and care for the poor and marginalised is timeless. I hope that the Third Order continues to grow as a global family of witnesses – committed to Christ, to justice, and to creation. It is a privilege to walk this path with so many companions in the spirit of Francis.



*Mary-Anne and Michael
Twum-Darko at the
Conference*

Hope in the unravelling

Jan Down reviews two free online courses,
the basis of her conference workshop

How bad are things looking in the world? And how well is the world responding? If you see a disconnect between the two, then the Active Hope Foundations Training course could be for you.

This is a free, on-line course designed to give people 'insights and practices that help us face our concerns about the world and respond in ways that contribute to positive change'. It does not delve into WHAT is happening. It is purely about our response.

The seven sessions can be taken at your own pace. It consists of a series of short videos with questions and exercises to try.

Chris Johnstone, co-author with Joanna Macy of the book *Active Hope*, is the presenter of the course. It is largely based on the powerful and uplifting practice of 'The Spiral of the Work that Reconnects', which has four parts: Gratitude; Honouring Our Pain for The World; Seeing with New Eyes; and Going Forth.

The Active Hope course makes a very good companion to the other one I have undertaken this year: 'Resilience and Acceptance in the Face of Collapse'.

This is another free, online course, but very different to Active Hope. It is run over nine weeks, with a weekly Zoom group session and about three hours of reading / viewing between sessions. I found the course materials very well researched and the Zoom sessions skilfully and wisely managed. I also very much enjoyed meeting participants from other countries. The course is run from the United States, which means finding one running at a time of day that works in Australia.

The material point that came through is that the underlying cause of the many interconnected global crises like climate change, environmental degradation and economic inequality, is over-consumption and the unsustainable use of resources. We are living beyond the Earth's carrying capacity.

The conclusion of the course developers is that the collapse (or unravelling) of our modern civilisation is already underway, and they see collapse as both inevitable and even *necessary* to restore nature's balance.

This was a difficult message to hear but there was a lot of support provided through the wisdom and care of the presenters, and the discussions with others. Eight of the nine weeks were devoted to how we deal with the emotional impact of such confronting information, and how we can reach acceptance and develop both inner and outer resilience.

I found the arguments convincing and the tools for resilience very helpful. I highly recommend trying this course and judging for yourself. Best taken with much prayer and a dose of Active Hope!

Active Hope: <https://tinyurl.com/3ejnmsf>

Resilience and Acceptance: <https://acceptingcollapse.com/>



*Stations of Creation, late
afternoon at Sevenhill*

*All photos in this
newsletter are
thanks to John
Noller unless
otherwise stated.*

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: 5th November 2025
Please send to:
jeidown@protonmail.com