

Knit Together

in community and prayer

Newsletter for the Province of Asia-Pacific

Third Order, Society of Saint Francis

www.tssf.org.au

Pentecost 2026

Called to trust

Mandy Wheatley
Provincial
Minister

For all Franciscans, the 4th October 2026 offers us a special moment to pause and celebrate the 800 years since the 'Easter' or 'Transitus' of St Francis of Assisi.

In Christian terminology 'transitus' is linked to the paschal mystery. 'It consecrates the passage of dying to eternal life. By offering the sacrifice of his or her personal life, the believer shares in the paschal transitus of Christ himself'¹.

How are you going to commemorate the moment when Francis embraced Sister Death?

In these uncertain and anxious times, and as in Francis' day of war and disease, may we, like him make a dwelling-place within ourselves where our God can stay with us no matter what we are facing, in our own life and death and in the chaos of the world changing around us.

Let me suggest some points to consider in the lead up to the 800th Transitus:

The call: Now is a time to remember that it all began with God's calling, which Francis heard and followed throughout his life, inspiring us today to remember how God has called each of us, giving us grateful hearts in our own personal vocation to the Third Order Franciscan life.



Giotto di Bondone – Scenes from the Life of Saint Francis: 4. Death and Ascension of St Francis (detail)

The recognition of God's work in everything in life: The secret of Francis' joy is to be found in truly seeing, listening and discerning God's work in every moment of our lives. His joy came from recognising God's hand sustaining him in poverty and pain, in uncertainty and darkness; may we see all these afflictions assisting our growth in spiritual maturity. When he felt called to live the Gospel, he had no certainties, he simply decided to trust.

When he heard the call to rebuild the Church, he did not know what to do or how, nor did he even understand the greatness of that mission, but he decided to trust; when his brothers rejected him and rejected his love of poverty, and he could not understand them or understand how God would sustain the Order, he had to trust. He always decided to trust because he had found the precious pearl for which a man is capable of giving self away completely. Let us live like Francis, recognising God's work throughout creation, honouring our history and asking the Lord for firm trust even in moments of extreme darkness.

Complete trust in God: Before he died, Francis continued to trust completely in the goodness of God, who had always accompanied him and would never let him go. He was able to trust at that moment because for 20 years he had asked the Lord to help him be a little one who completely trusted in his Father, and he practised doing so each moment of every day.

It is also the 800th anniversary of the Canticle of the Creatures and that profoundly liberating verse: 'Be praised, my Lord, for our sister, the death of the body, from which no one living is able to flee'. This verse shows us that Francis' spirit rose up in a song of gratitude to the loving Creator even as he was dying. So may it be for us. Let us live like St Francis, always longing for Heaven and madly in love with His Love.

In a world scarred by wars, violence, exclusion, exhaustion, and ecological crises, Francis reminds us that death does not have the last word. To accept death as a sister is to live reconciled with our human limits, to open ourselves to the hope of resurrection, and to learn to cherish life in all its forms – knowing that

every step toward justice, peace and mercy prepares our hearts for eternity.

Be blessed with peace and goodness as we move forward for Christ's sake in the power of His love,
Mandy Wheatley

1. See: Martinez, German (2003). *Signs of Freedom: Theology of the Christian Sacraments*. Paulist Press. p 238.



Mandy Wheatley, Hobart, 2022

Mary Frances, new novice, SA

Mary Frances, from mainland China, was made a novice at our Day of Penitence on 28th March this year. The following is a statement read out by Mary during the service.

Jeannie Minnis,
RM South Australia

Before I came to Adelaide, I thought I would fall in love with the sunshine. My son is attending high school here, so I came here.

After coming here, what I really love is the relaxed lifestyle. There is almost no reason for guys to wear a tie – not even at a funeral.

It is very different from my story. My Chinese name is Zhazhan Wu. What does it mean? It is not a flower, a princess, or even a noun. It is a verb, meaning ‘develop’.

Because my growth coincided with China’s Reform and Opening Up, I received a good education. I worked at a TV station as a host. I thought I could do anything, but for a long time, I had never read the Bible or gone to church.

When many Chinese people want to make money and pursue faster and higher development, they often sacrifice something, such as integrity. I think I was no different.

But I have a different identity: I have been a Christian since I was in university. When I was a little girl, I knew that my grandmother believed in Jesus Christ. She couldn’t read a word, but she often read the Bible. At that time, I didn’t believe in Jesus until my father suddenly committed suicide. So I began to believe in the Heavenly Father to fill the gap left by my father.

Later, I often thought about where God was when I was determined to make money and get promoted. In other words, what role did God play in my life? I think God was my bottom line. He kept my heart and did not let me become a bad person.



Mary Frances (far left) and the SA group after the Stations of the Cross service.

Things began to change after I came to Adelaide. I began praying, reading the Bible, and going to church every Sunday morning. My heart began to turn back to God. I realised that I was the lost sheep.

If you think everything has become better and life is always quiet, you are wrong. The way to the Lord is never easy.

When I began to rely on God, the things I could rely on in my life diminished, and I kept letting go of my old life.

When I thought I had at least a bed, I moved five times in one month. When I thought I had at least some money, I fell victim to a scam and lost everything.

The way to the Lord is filled with pain and sweetness. I know God is transforming me through this process – like clay in the furnace. And that kind of transformation is never comfortable. I also asked God, ‘Why me?’

That’s when I met Colin Fidock. He found a place for us to live and helped us a lot.

If you only know one Chinese person, like me, that person may represent all Chinese people. I only knew one member of the Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis so I thought Colin represented the whole Third Order.

‘If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find Him in the chalice.’ Colin did it.

I am not the beggar, but I really left my country, my family, and my job. I have nothing, just happened to have a son. I do not know God’s plan for me or where my promised land is.

Everything seemed impossible. I am sure our Father is truly alive; He really heard my prayer.

I asked for a job, and now I work as a waitress at a Chinese restaurant, and sometimes I also do some cleaning. It seemed impossible.

I asked for an opportunity to learn the Bible in a classroom, and now I have started auditing a subject at Tabor College. It seemed impossible, my English is so limited.

I hope one day God will ask me, ‘Where are you?’ and I will reply, ‘Here I am.’

I asked if I could stay in Adelaide in the future. It seemed impossible. There was almost no reason to stay here for me.

Please look at the word ‘impossible.’ It is ‘I + m + possible.’

Who is the One we believe in?

‘I AM WHO I AM.’

So ‘impossible’ becomes ‘I am possible.’

‘What is impossible with man is possible with God.’

For the rest of my life, I feel deeply honoured to be part of the Third Order, and I hope to spend my life praising God with you.



*Mary Frances and Jeannie
Minnis at the novicing*

Professions in Sri Lanka, Vanuatu



Suresh Paul professed, Sri Lanka

It was a great joy to admit Suresh Paul to the Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis. We warmly welcome Suresh to our wider family. Peace and all good.

Bala and Brother
Michael SSF (Sri Lanka)



Nick Price professed in Vanuatu

Nick Price was professed on 27th April in front of his community – the staff and students at the school he has established in a shanty town near Port Vila, Vanuatu.

Vale Sue Chapman tssf

21.2.1940 – 18.4.2026

Jan Down, with thanks to Anne

Wilson, our archivist: Sue Chapman was professed as a tertiary in Melbourne in 1988 and became a much loved and valued member of the Vic/Tas Region. Sue was the national representative for TSSF, and then SSF, on the Executive of the Franciscan Federation of Australia from 2000–

2005. As such, she brought an international perspective to our Vic / Tas group. In 2006 she convinced General Chapter to help fund the Franciscans International Bangkok office for three years.

A Service of Thanksgiving was held at St Paul's Canterbury (Melbourne) on 23 April. Her son Rob Chapman gave the eulogy. The following is an edited version:



Sue Chapman tssf

Suzanne Gray (or Sue as she became known) was born and raised in Adelaide and always maintained strong allegiances to the Festival State.

She began tertiary studies at Adelaide Uni initially in Law, but took leave after contracting Glandular Fever. She then decided to try nursing and eventually left Adelaide for work in Port Pirie with a nursing friend, where she met a young engineer called Bob Chapman who was working at the local smelter. They were married soon enough, spent several wonderful and social years in Port Pirie and made many lifelong friends there.

Bob then accepted a role on a new Hydro Electricity project in New Guinea and they flew north with two young children now in tow. Again, they relished the expat social scene in Port Moresby for several years and made more enduring friendships.

Moving then to Melbourne in the very early seventies, once again due to another job opportunity for Bob, Sue decided to resume her studies in Law, this time at Monash University. As a very young child I do have some memories of those days, including occasions when (and I'd like to think this was due to possible child care unavailability), she would head off to her lectures and leave my sister Hilary and me on the Monash lawns in the capable care of friendly hippy students who would play guitar and smoke questionable cigarettes while we attended to our colouring books.

Once she had finished her Law degree Sue began work as a solicitor in Melbourne and also quickly displayed her social conscience by volunteering weekly to provide legal aid at a local community centre. She also joined a (then) newish organisation called Amnesty International and

spent much of her spare time at meetings and writing letters to foreign governments on behalf of political prisoners.

In the late 1970s the Chapman family headed to Sydney for a few years. Sue busied herself with a job editing Legal Publications at Butterworths which she loved.

Many years later while she and I were having a casual conversation about Oxford's amazing Bodleian library, she was super proud to tell me that the last time she visited that library she had come across one of those publications bearing her name.

Her career progressed to include many different types of legal work: Law lecturer at Chislm institute and also at Melbourne Uni. She worked many years as a tutor at the Leo Cussen Institute and also a stint as a Corporate Lawyer at Petersville Sleigh.

Eventually she decided to set up her own home-based law practice primarily doing probate and conveyancing. More often than not she received new clients purely through word of mouth. She remained constantly busy and enjoyed helping her clients very much and also at this time began serving on several boards.

Her later years saw her relishing as much travel as she could. Many overseas trips were enjoyed with her great friend John Cantwell. In very recent years John was not only a loyal friend to Sue but also constantly helped both myself and Sue by diligently driving her to multiple medical appointments without any fuss.

Sue's travel adventures also saw her partaking in several study tours with the Institute of International affairs, including Myanmar where she joined a memorable in person meeting with Aung San Soo Kyi.

Possibly the most personally meaningful overseas trip Sue took however, was her very last one – to Europe in July 2023. She was extremely proud and at times understandably emotional while representing the Gray family in honouring the memory of her Uncle, Private Edwin Gray, who sadly had only lasted five days in France during World War 1. His remains had recently been discovered in a mass grave near Fromelles.

Whilst in Northern France for the interment ceremony Sue quickly became a media favourite with the Australian and French press. Her photo was taken for many publications including some with her holding the old prayer book of Edwin's mother Ada. From her hotel room in Lille she even woke up early for a 4am live interview with Australian TV in order to describe the sad journey of her uncle and many other soldiers.

Sue's Anglican faith was very important to her. As well as being an active member of many parishes, her involvements also included: participating in the Movement for the Ordination of Women, being a member of the Third Order of the Society of St Francis, attending the annual synod, and in more recent times being the enthusiastic co-convenor of the Religious Discussion Circle at her Club in the Melbourne CBD.

Her many other ongoing interests included classical music, opera, ballet, MTC Theatre, daily learning French on Duolingo and nurturing her precious rose bushes at home. She was most fortunate to have lived a long, fulfilling life.

She was a loyal friend to many, an excellent mother and she left us all feeling better for having known her.

Ezra, St Francis and Jo Knight

Jan Down

On starting to re-read the book of Ezra, I was struck by the similarity between the calling of King Cyrus of Persia to 'rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel' (1:3) and the calling of St Francis as he prayed before the San Damiano crucifix, to 'rebuild my house, which you see is in ruins'. After a false start, Francis came to realise this calling was about God's people, not stones and mortar.

In the story of Ezra God first calls a non-Israelite to the work. To me, this is a reminder that God is at work in the whole world, not just among God's people, and that God is ahead of us.

What comes next is a willing spirit: 'everyone whose spirit God had stirred got ready to go up and rebuild the house of the Lord in Jerusalem'. Again, God is the one taking the initiative. (1:5b) Ezra's own call comes later in the book (Chapter 7).

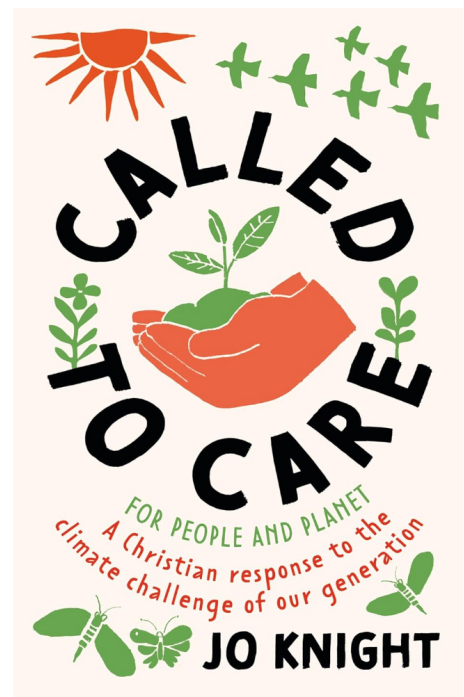
From Ezra and Francis to Jo Knight and her book, *Called to Care: for people and planet* which also has a church focus. The author is the CEO of Anglican Overseas Aid, and is therefore able to draw on her experience of meeting people in other countries who are directly impacted by climate change.

Richard Prideaux, in his excellent review of the book (*The Gippsland Anglican*, April 2026, page 15: <https://tinyurl.com/4zm87czy>), says the author 'seeks to rewild our hearts and communities and ignite our imaginations with visions of a church that reflects God's justice and love'.

Jo Knight, writing about 'holistic mission', says that 'justice, political action and structural change in our physical world belong together with spiritual, personal change and worship... holistic mission leads to spiritual renewal in our churches. In God's good design, holistic mission is actually good for the Church and good for the world.'

This book itself is a new call for the rebuilding of the Church through the re-integration of the spiritual and material as we respond to God's call to act for creation and justice. I found it a breath of fresh air – an uplifting and easy read, overflowing with the author's own love for God and the world.

A version of this article will appear simultaneously in The Gippsland Anglican under News at
<https://www.gippslandanglicans.org.au/>



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:
21st August 2026
Please send to:
jeidown@protonmail.com

Land rights, health and extractives

Across the world, Indigenous Peoples continue to face critical challenges centred on land rights violations, forced evictions, and severe health disparities compounded by climate change and conflict.

Against this backdrop, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) was held at the United Nations in New York from 20 April to 1 May 2026. The forum centred on the theme ‘Ensuring Indigenous Peoples’ health, including in the context of conflict.’

The opening statements underscored how closely intertwined Indigenous Peoples’ health is to land. This includes impacts as a result of colonisation, environmental degradation, and climate change. Addressing Indigenous Peoples gathered at the UNPFII, UN Secretary-General António Guterres acknowledged that ‘health is inseparable from your lands, waters, languages, cultures, and ecosystems’.

Indeed, throughout our programs and advocacy, Franciscans International has documented the impacts of extractive activities, conflict, and militarisation on Indigenous territories and the environment, in particular on the right to health. For example, in the Solomon Islands widespread logging and mining activities have led to air and water pollution and soil contamination. As underscored during the Forum and side events, Indigenous knowledge – including with regard to traditional medicine – and upholding the right to self-determination, are central to Indigenous health.

During the UNPFII, FI welcomed partners from West Papua, and, with them, co-organised the event ‘Human Rights in Indonesia: Indigenous Papuans and National Strategic Projects.’ Across the West Papua region, there are at least 10 such projects, adopted with the stated intent of realising a prosperous Indonesian society by developing physical and non-physical infrastructure. In practice, these schemes will result in large-scale land grabs of Indigenous customary territories and are already leading to widespread destruction of the environment. Panellists highlighted the Biak community, who are facing systematic land-grabbing campaigns, and the Merauke project, where the single largest deforestation project in the world is being carried out.

As the 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples approaches, FI will continue to advocate with its partners throughout the world for the protection of Indigenous rights and lands by ensuring that Indigenous voices are heard at the UN.



Slightly edited from FI: <https://tinyurl.com/y8tx3b29> (5/5/2026)

A Franciscan presence in Colombia

Travelling around Colombia in March this year, Cathy Mathews said she felt right at home; there was such a Franciscan presence in both Cartagena and Panama City. Cathy writes:

Franciscan friars arrived in Colombia in the early 16th century during Spanish conquests. Fray Juan de los Barrios, a prominent Franciscan, served as the first Bishop of Santa Marta and the first Archbishop of Santa Fé de Bogotá. Colombia is home to several prominent religious institutes that originated as, or follow the rule of, the Third Order. Franciscan Sisters of Mary Immaculate, the motherhouse, is in Pasto, and the sisters focus heavily on education, social service, and aiding vulnerable communities, including addressing needs with the recent migrant crises in the Caribbean.

María Bernarda Bütler (28 May 1848 – 19 May 1924), born Verena Bütler, was a Swiss religious Franciscan sister. She founded the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Sinners and served in missions in Ecuador and Colombia. Bütler worked for the care of the poor in these places until her exile from Ecuador and entrance into Colombia where she worked for the remainder of her life. The congregation moved there with her, and continued to expand during her time there.

I was most moved by the statue of her outside the Iglesia de Santa Domingo, the oldest church in Cartagena, and of the statue of St Francis in the Cathedral de Cartagena. I felt a Franciscan presence in several Colombian towns and cities and was in awe of the active work which Franciscans are still doing with marginalised communities there five centuries on.

*Sister Maria Bernada
outside the Iglesia de
Santa Domingo*



*St Francis in the
Cathedral de Cartagena*



Franciscan Aid: small initiatives make a visible difference

Andrew MacIntyre tsssf

As Franciscans, we all explicitly commit to do what we can to aid people in greater need than ourselves. We fulfil this commitment in many ways, ranging from individual initiatives to collective undertakings at home and abroad. You are probably aware of the Franciscan Aid Fund (<https://franciscanaid.org/>) but perhaps – like me (until recently) – you have only a vague awareness of its activities and potential.

Franciscan Aid is a charitable trust fund set up in Britain in 1982 under the leadership of then Minister General SSF, Brother Geoffrey. It has grown to become a substantial body and to be defined as a Third Order charitable fund working in close association with the First and Second Orders. As such, it provides an organisational focus for the international charitable giving of our Society.

The Fund supports projects focusing on community sustainability, education, ecological care and promoting self-help. In recent years it has been making grants totalling roughly £70,000 (\$130,000) annually. All Franciscan Aid projects involve a Tertiary from our Society.

One project funded last year was in our Province and more specifically in Goroka in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, where our brother, Gabriel Wauwe, led an initiative developing a chicken- and pig-rearing micro enterprise to help fund charitable giving to the most needy in the Goroka area.

Gabriel managed all the work on the ground and was supported remotely by Mandy Wheatley and me. It has been wonderful to watch his initiative come to life, to learn something of the every day lives of sisters and brothers in another part of our Province, and to see the faces of some of the people they have been able to help.

The experience also led me to think further about Franciscan Aid. I was greatly impressed by its ability to make a visible difference through a small initiative in a specific location. I was also impressed by the remarkably light administrative burden the Fund imposes – something



Raising chickens to make funds for giving to the needy in the Goroka region of PNG



Charitable giving at hospital, made possible by the fund-raising project

very rare in the world of international assistance. This has led me to get involved as a direct contributor to the Fund and to accept an invitation to become a 'Provincial Advocate' to assist the Fund's efforts to engage Franciscans around the world. At present, most of the charitable giving to the Franciscan Aid Fund comes from within Europe.

Other projects funded last year included a free daily meal to 30 children (regardless of faith and gender) in a particular slum district in Uganda; emergency support to keep the Bethlehem Hope School in Palestine open; menstrual health education for 1,000 girls in Kenya; support for wrongly imprisoned persons in Burundi to have their cases reheard; support for a Mothers Union self-help project in Tanzania; and purification of two natural springs in Uganda.

There are many, many needy causes in our world and many avenues for giving. But as you contemplate ways in which you might give, please give some thought to the Franciscan Aid Fund. Our Asia-Pacific Province has both great need and great potential within it: great need for assistance and great potential for giving. If anyone has ideas for a project that might be suitable for funding support from Franciscan Aid, please feel free to be in touch with me if you would like to discuss it.



Andrew MacIntyre

Vic/Tas Franciscans gather – in Hobart...



... and online
Both gatherings in
May this year.

