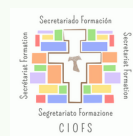


FRANCISCAN CENTENARY 2023-2026

2025: 800 YEARS OF THE CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES



SECRETARIAT FOR FORMATION
CIOFS



PRESENTATION

This is the third of four years(2023-2026), in which the Franciscan Family is celebrating five centenaries. After the anniversaries of the Later Rule (Regula Bullata) and Christmas in Greccio in 2023 and 800 years of the gift of the Stigmata in 2024, now in 2025 we are celebrating:

“THE CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES: 800 YEARS OF A PRAYER FOR ALL CREATION”

The purpose of celebrating the centenaries is to be open to God’s invitation here and now, walking together as sisters and brothers of local fraternities, as the whole Franciscan Family, and as the people of God. We desire to draw inspiration from our brother Francis as we follow Christ, so that we may become more human, more Christian, and more Franciscan.

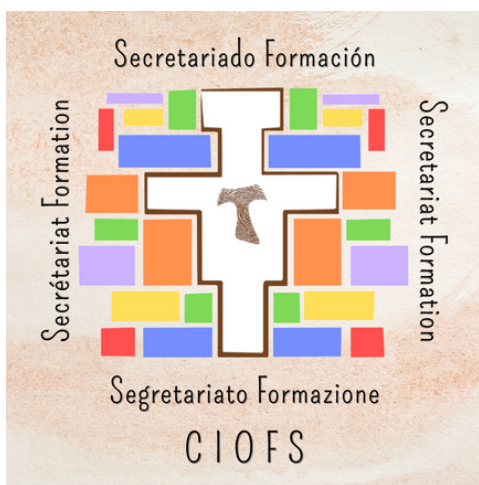
As proposed by the Conference of the Franciscan Family (CFF, 2022), the Formation Secretariat of the OFS has prepared this material for all OFS and YouFra fraternities. We reflect upon the main theme in its four dimensions: theological, anthropological, ecclesiological, and sociological – because we live in Christ, as sisters and brothers, in communion and in the world. This material is to be developed further by local fraternities, and, it would be very fitting for all activities and initiatives, at the national and/or regional level, to be coordinated by a commission representing the entire Franciscan Family” (CFF, 2022).

“The centenaries are not intended to have a positive impact only within the Franciscan Family. Imagination and creativity must be brought to bear so that the centenaries impact outwardly upon non-ecclesial social and cultural environments.” “Everyone who is attracted to the evangelical beauty of the Poverello (cf. Laudato si’ 10) [is invited] to join us in celebrating these centenaries. The centenaries offer us a valuable opportunity to invigorate the richness of our charism with a prophetic vision toward the future.” (CFF, 2022).

This year, 2025, in which we celebrate the 800th Anniversary of the Cantic of Brother Sun, we want to join Francis in an attitude of praise and commitment to all of Creation.

Therefore, we encourage each national fraternity to use the following material for additional activities during this year.

Fraternally,
Your sisters and brothers,



SECRETARIAT FOR FORMATION CIOFS

Silvia Noemi Diana, OFS
Eremenciana Chinyama, OFS
Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, OFMConv
Alonso Acevedo, OFS
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March 2025

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In this material we use the methodology See/Listen, Discern, Act and Celebrate
(Cf. Mater et Magistra, 236).

“THE CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES: 800 YEARS OF A PRAYER FOR ALL CREATION”

In 2025 we celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Canticle of Brother Sun or, as it became more commonly known, The Canticle of the Creatures, composed by St. Francis of Assisi a year before his death when he was completely blind. In Italian literature, this canticle is the oldest poetic text by a known author, being, at the same time, a prayer, a poem and a hymn of praise and joy: “It is a sudden flash that inaugurates Italian literature.” (J. Dalarun). It is also the “universal work that best reflects Franciscan spirituality and a message of love and peace that has always remained current.” (A. Mazziotti). As the General Ministers of the Franciscan Family Conference remind us, the Canticle is the expression and conclusive confession of the Poverello's life and summarizes his entire journey of conformity to Christ the beloved Son. His faith in the father hood of God becomes a song of praise that proclaims the brother hood of all creatures and their beauty.

The celebration of the Centenary of the Canticle of the Creatures as a Franciscan Family is a favorable opportunity - and an invitation - that leads us to a radical change in our relationship with creation which entails, as Pope Francis insists in his exhortations, replacing possessions with the care of our Common Home. As the Secular Franciscan Order, we also want to embrace the Celebration of this Centenary as an important and necessary occasion of life change and conversion. It will help us to rethink how we live our relationship with other creatures and with the natural resources that our sister, Mother Earth, has offered us. We are facing a great anthropological and ecological challenge that will determine our future because it is connected to the future of our sister Mother Earth. Our way of life, with the choices we make based on our vocation as Secular Franciscans, will be decisive in determining the paths that humanity needs to follow.

This is why we want to reach out to all of our brothers and sisters around the world by proposing this material as a tool for reflection, celebration and concrete action, based on our secularity and with the desire that it might be embraced, read, meditated on and transformed into concrete gestures in our daily lives and societies.



SEE / LISTEN:

The following are concrete experiences of members of the Franciscan Family: a Franciscan religious sister, an OFS brother, and a YOUFRA sister share their personal experiences working in the Integrity of Creation.

My love for the story of Saint Francis and Saint Clare of Assisi has been with me since I was a child. The parish where I had my first contact with Francis and Clare is served by Franciscan Friars Minor. Knowing that Francis was known as the patron saint of Ecology at first made me feel curious due to the love and harmony he had with God's creation. Up to that point, I knew only the basics of the Franciscan relationship with nature. As a teenager, I wanted to study veterinary medicine. While not realizing that my inspiration was from St. Francis, it entered my mind that I would need to take a course on the environment. Then, I was introduced to the Franciscan Youth fraternity (YOUFRA) at my parish, which, oddly, I did not know about, even though I was thereoften serving as an acolyte. There I delved deeper into Francis as an “excellent example of care for what is fragile” and who “paid particular attention to God’s creation and to the poorest and most abandoned.” [LS10] From then on, my desire to study and care for animals increased. However, my parents could not support me financially in a veterinary medicine course outside my city. As I was deciding on a course that was held in my city, it came to me that Francis and Clare, even in their era, showed care not only for all creatures, but also for all creation in which everything is connected and must be in perfect balance. I remembered that as the patron saint of Ecology, Francis inspired all who study and work in the field of ecology. The word BIOLOGY appeared in my mind. I understood that this was the way to learn about this balance. What I couldn't do was give up on the dream that now encompassed not only creatures but also all of creation. I studied Biological Sciences and continued speaking at YOUFRA gatherings about small gestures for creation in the service of the Regional Secretary for Human Rights, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (DHJUPIC). In 2016, I had my first contact with the Global Catholic Climate Movement, known today as the Laudato Si' Movement. At the invitation of the National Secretariat of DHJUPIC represented by Igor Bastos, I signed up for the first Laudato Si' Animators' course. This inspired my desire to be a voice for creation and to become even more engaged, taking the course again in the following years. In 2017, because of my enthusiasm as an Animator, I received a scholarship to study for a master's degree in Zoology with a specialty in Biodiversity Conservation. It was my dream to continue to learn more in order to fight more. I continued at YOUFRA and as a Laudato Si' Animator participating in events to raise awareness and collect signatures for the Laudato Si' Commitment. At that time, I continued to volunteer at events for the Global Catholic Climate Movement. The year 2019 brought me more joy. I started my PhD in Ecology and Biodiversity Conservation (completed in 2024) and, as an Animator, I became part of the Laudato Si' Movement's Team for Portuguese-speaking countries. I am now working as a Program Coordinator for Animators, Circles and Chapters of Laudato Si'. Serving in this position and inviting/motivating more people to experience the universal call to an ecological conversion based on the “translation” of scientific terminology through local examples and simple gestures made for the environment gives me strength and hope every day for a world with socio-environmental justice and equal rights for all. In this way, as St. Clare says in her letters, I want to continue without losing the starting point.

** National Secretary of Franciscan Youth in Brazil.
Program Coordinator for Portuguese Speaking
Countries - Movement Laudato Si'.*

Mayra de Oliveira Santos*, YOUFRA
Brazil

Could you share your individual and professional experience that motivated the Franciscan vision of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation?

My commitment to JPIC issues began long before I knew about the OFS and became professed. You have to go back in time to 1970 when, as a young engineer, I started working at Alfa Romeo in Milan, which at that time had 12,000 employees. Those were the years when the unions were very strong and really defended the interests of the working class. I, despite being a clerk and enjoying different working conditions, worked very hard with the unions for recognition of workers' rights and for payment of adequate wages, which cost me because, for a decade or so, I was excluded from salary raises or promotions. Parallel to professional work, my wife and I (at that time we had only one child; the other three came later) began to collaborate, giving all our free time, with a volunteer association that developed aid programs in Third World countries. Despite the fact that missionary work had been a life goal for us, we had had to shelve the idea of moving to any of those countries because of our son's deafness and the consequent commitment to support him in his growth and language learning. So, our work was carried out in the Milan office. This collaboration, therefore, involved a focus on the populations of developing countries (in Africa and Latin America), the depth of their social problems and the preparation of aid projects and volunteers who could then concretize these ideas. With this kind of lay formation and background, it was almost a given that once I made my OFS profession (which took place in 1982). I would discover a great affinity for the articles of the Rule that speak of the Form of Life and give a deeper meaning to the choices I had previously made. Towards the end of the 1980s, I discovered a Franciscan association located in Brooklyn, United States, called Franciscans International. It was still in its infancy, but its commitment to the United Nations on behalf of the poor, women, and human rights fascinated me, so I joined and followed its entire development. My membership went from being that of an external collaborator to being an OFS representative on the Board of Directors, to coordinating the writing of the dossiers of the Italian Franciscan family at the UPR (Universal Periodic Review) of Italy. Concurrently with my engagement with Franciscans International, the then OFS Minister General, Emanuela De Nunzio, appointed me to represent the OFS on the Inter-Franciscan Commission of JPIC, a role that occupied me for about 20 years. It was an opportunity to experience in depth how the values of JPIC are deeply rooted in Franciscan spirituality (Brother José Carballo, OFM, then the OFM Minister General had said that JPIC is the DNA of Franciscans). The presence on the commission of representatives from all the branches of the Franciscan family allowed me, but I think all the others also, to experience personal and communal growth. Since among the goals of this commission were the Option for the Poor and the Care of Creation, the members of the various Orders had to be sensitized on these issues. This necessarily required deep personal discernment so that the material produced (booklets, operational proposals, etc.) would reflect what had matured in our hearts and not be a pure intellectual exercise. In those years, within the Italian OFS of the Capuchin obedience (we were not yet united in regions) together with some members of the National Council and other volunteers, an OFS Missionary Center was set up with the purpose of preparing lay people to go on mission either "*Fidei donum*" or as cooperators in tasks as requested by the friars. Included in the center's formation programs was also a segment called "Education for Globality." This formation used the exact same tools as JPIC to identify issues and to study possible solutions. The criterion "Think Globally and Act Locally" was applied. Thanks to this center, we (my wife and I) were also able to go twice, for four months each time, to one of the two English-speaking provinces of Cameroon where we collaborated in the social initiatives of the OFS in that country. To summarize, I believe that this important work in all areas of JPIC and the work with the local communities was formative in both directions, we toward them and they toward us. During all this time, even in my home country at the local and regional levels, I have been engaged in carrying out this work, of course, with appropriate adaptations.

Attilio Galimberti, OFS - Italy

How was your experience coordinating the JPIC service at CIOFS? What are the challenges of this service?

The experience has been very positive when it comes to responding to emergencies. For example: Haiti Earthquake: Fundraising, on-site presence and program development; Syria Earthquake; Pakistan Floods and others that I do not mention here. However, this experience also created some frustration for me and I try to explain why. Certainly, I found and worked with people who were and are deeply committed to these areas but, unfortunately, it was also a fact that in the large majority of National Fraternities there was a lack of a JPIC structures to refer to. During the time that I was on the Presidency Council even though solicited several times National Councils only rarely responded by giving willingness to collaborate. My commitment then as councilor with responsibility for National Fraternities of Europe II area took me time away from JPIC commitment so in the end my work was reduced to the preparation of the proposal, approved at the 2017 General Chapter, of a JPIC secretariat whose members would be independent of the triennial office renewal and would report to the presidential counselor in charge of the sector.

I hope that now this structure will be replicated by the National Councils so that a stable and efficient network can be created and then we can develop training and outreach programs together by taking advantage of this very network

On the centenary of the Canticle of the Creatures, what does Saint Francis of Assisi reveal to us about caring for creation?

Laudato sie mi Signore cum tucte le tue creature
(be praised my Lord through all your creatures)

In my opinion it is very important *that cum tucte* your creatures.

Francis does not praise God FOR creatures but praises him WITH, TOGETHER with all his creatures, creature among creatures. So beyond his relationship with the Most High, he reveals to us his sense of universal brotherhood and reaffirms his sense of minority and humility, a word with which he closes the canticle. And that seems to me the very important message that he leaves us with and that should make us looking at Creation with a different eye, an environment to be cared for and cherished and not to be plundered because to plunder it would be to plunder ourselves.

After her first profession in 1992, Sr. Mary Frances first began social justice advocacy standing up for the poor by encouraging youth to say no to FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) and to continue with their education. She has been in the field for many years and her experiences range from human rights and social justice advocacy, environmental conservation, climate change, working with the affected, interfaith dialogue, and pastoral theology to conflict management. Her role as an advocate for justice and peace began at home as she is the third-born daughter with four younger brothers. She stood for fairness and equality with her siblings. Her advocacy was uncovered and nurtured when she was asked to join the Justice and Peace commission in 2003. Although she did not have any social justice training or work experience in the field of advocacy for social Justice and Peace and just a little knowledge of Catholic social teaching, her passion for human rights made her a champion for the marginalized. During her time in AOSK (Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya) she served on the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission as Advisor to the Bishops on behalf of AOSK-JPC. She has trained women peacemakers, human rights responders, and emergency responders. As the lead for human rights with teachers from 2008-2010, she has also done radio scripting for human rights education and advocacy in schools at the Kenya Institute of Education, currently known as Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development. She has facilitated forums and planned events such as International Women's Day, World Peace Day, and International Human Rights Day. She also prepared the witness for and attended the court sessions for the inquest of the late Fr. John Anthony Kaiser, an American missionary priest who was killed in Kenya in 2000. Apart from her advocacy for peace and justice, in 2015, after a terrorist attack on Garissa that killed 148 students, she visited the bishop, and they were able to bring Muslim and Christian leaders together in order to foster harmony through interfaith dialogue. Sr. Mary has settled tribal clashes in Mau Narok and has visited Victims for Peace circles. She is currently working with a Maasai community in Isinya sub county on climate resilience and drought mitigation with mechanized Agroecology and tailoring skills training to support families. She has just launched the JPICFA Laudato Si Community center, a space to educate the community on agroecology in an effort to mitigate climate change challenges. In 2006, she received a Golden Award for planting one million trees on behalf of the sisters of Kenya. Promoting Laudato Sí, she has launched and expanded a Birthday Tree Planting Campaign regionally in multiple African countries with the JPIC-FA Youth Program. Sr. Mary Frances has a long history of building peace, and as a human rights defender, being on the front lines of supporting victims of violence. She also holds a Bachelor of Social Studies among other degrees. Her experience ranges from human rights, environmental conservation, climate change, working with the affected, interfaith dialogue, pastoral theology to conflict management. She has been in this field for many years serving on the board of ERCN and also as a member of the OFM/JPIC international animation committee.

**Sister of the Little Sisters of St. Joseph and the director of the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Franciscans Africa (JPIC-FA) office in Nairobi (since 2014)*

Sister Mary Frances Wangari Sebastian*
Nairobi, Kenya

Looking at the Franciscan Sources and seeking in them enlightenment to guide our “Discernment,” we find several texts that make reference to Francis taking care of Creation in its most diverse forms. The biographers present this information, particularly in *The Legend of The Three Companions*, the writings of Thomas of Celano, and the *Legend of Perugia*, where they present us with Francis having certain “ecological” attitudes. We see Francis taking care to remove the smallest worms from the path and asking that all the honey not be taken from the bees, reserving a quantity that will sustain them during the winter. He admonished that when cutting wood, enough should be left of the trees so that they would be able to sprout again. All these, plus other small gestures, which although they were practiced in a time when the term “Ecology” did not yet exist, point to an ecological perspective. Or, better said, they point to care for Creation, our Common Home. Here are some of the quotes from the Sources:

**“When the brothers are cutting wood, he forbids them
to cut down the whole tree,
so that it might have hope of sprouting again.”**
(2Cel 165).

“When he would wash his hands in a stream, he chose a place where the water of the ablutions would not be trodden upon” *(Legend of Perugia 88).*

“Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.”
(Canticle of the Creatures 7).

**He commands the gardener to leave the edges of the garden undisturbed, so that
in their season, the green of the herbs and the beauty of the flowers
may proclaim the beautiful Father of all.**
(2Cel 165).

Therefore, Francis of Assisi can be taken today as an example and reference when we talk about ecological conversion. The Canticle of Brother Sun presents his concern for Creation while at the same time expressing the highest praise for the Creator as expressed through his creatures. The Canticle is not poetry in itself, although it is categorized as such in Italian literature. Rather it is a song, and even better a sung prayer, whose melody was composed by Francis himself.

Ten years have passed since the publication of Pope Francis's Encyclical on Care for our Common Home, *Laudato Si'*, and two years since the publication of *Laudate Deum* (Praise God) which continues this necessary and urgent reflection. In both, Pope Francis invites us to look at Saint Francis and his mystical experience, so well-expressed in the Canticle of the Creatures, which translates into praise and respect for Creation and inspires us today to assume prophetic attitudes of commitment to the Common Home.

In fact, the Pontiff's proposal for an Integral Ecology finds in the Saint of Assisi “*a beautiful and motivating model.*” *Laudato Si'* (10-12) presents the characteristics of the Poverello that have inspired his pontificate starting with his closeness to the poor, attentive listening to their cries and “*the urgent challenge of protecting our common home.*”

Pope Francis makes his appeal clear: “*The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development...*” (LS 13), which demands a “*...renewed dialogue about the way we are shaping the future of our planet.*” (LS 14).

We offer a challenge to be reflected on, personally and in fraternity:

How can this encyclical lead us to read and interpret Saint Francis's Canticle of the Creatures in new ways?



3 ACT:

Each of our actions, individual or collective, has a positive or negative impact in the world. In this section we make a series of concrete proposals for you and your fraternity, in order to promote environmental sustainability and care for the creation of God.

“purchasing is always a moral - and not simply economic - act” (Pope Bento XVI)

Individually: Re-think and adopt a different lifestyle

I. Change your lifestyle and the way you connect with the God's creation (Ecological Conversion);

II. Remember to practice the three R's: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle;

III. Promote and participate in initiatives in your local community with sustainable projects in defense of our common home.

In Fraternity:

I. Promote artistic and cultural manifestations with the brothers and sisters in order to re-create and modernize the Cantic of the Creatures, through visual arts, poetry, singing, etc;

II. Participate in organizations, movements and other institutions that work in Care for Creation like: Service in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in the Franciscan Family or the Global Catholic Climate Movement (Laudato Si' Movement);

III. Identify social and environmental problems in your local area and define where and how the fraternity can act collectively;

IV. Promote forums, meetings, and round tables on topics related to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.



4 CELEBRATE:

When we celebrate, we show gratitude to God and all involved in the goals achieved, the challenges overcome, and the time spent in solidarity with God's Creation. At that time, we invite the brothers and sisters of the fraternity to pray together this prayer of thanks and praise to God for Creation:

PSalm 19 (God's Glory in Creation)

How clearly the sky reveals God's glory!
How plainly it shows what he has done!
Each day announces it to the following day;
each night repeats it to the next.
No speech or words are used,
no sound is heard;
yet their message goes out to all the world
and is heard to the ends of the earth.
God made a home in the sky for the sun;
it comes out in the morning like a happy bridegroom,
like an athlete eager to run a race. (PSalm 19, 1-5)

Prayer: Almighty God! Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you have created the earth and have entrusted human beings to complete your work. You have filled the earth with so many beautiful things.

We praise you and thank you Lord God for the beautiful creation. Let us open ourselves to experience the presence and love of God in all created things: the sun, the moon, the stars and each beautiful planet, the flowers, the birds and the animals, the sea and its waves.

Each creature is an open book of God's love. Every creature, even the most insignificant, is part of the Community of Earth. Help us Creator Spirit so that we come to know and enjoy God our Father and Mother through the relationship we have with each other and with all creation.

Song: Sing together a version of the Canticum of the Creatures St. Francis of Assisi in a circle with hands clasped

4 CELEBRATE:

HOME PRAYER

My brother and my sister, we invite you to continue this celebration in your home for seven days. In this prayer, we would like to remember the seven days of God's Creation in Genesis.

Day 1: Look at Creation with new eyes. Choose one of the following Scripture passages: Genesis 1-2-3; Isaiah 11:1-10 or Book of Revelation 21:1-5.

Day 2: Be stewards of God's Creation. Choose one of the following Scripture passages: Genesis 9:9-17; Ecclesiastes 18:13; Exodus 23:10-11; Wisdom 9:1-14.

Day 3: Praise God with and through creation. Choose one of the following Psalm passages: Ps 19:1-6; Ps 29:3-11; Ps 8:3-8; Ps 96:11-13; Ps 148:1-10.

Day 4: We are redeemed along with all Creation. Choose one of the following of Bible passages: Mt 6:26-30; 2 P: 1-3; Rom 8:18-23; Col 1:19-20.

Day 5: Include in your personal prayer a reflection on the integrity of Creation taken from the writings of Saint Francis. Canticle of the Creatures; 2Cel 165; CantS 7; LegPer 51.

Day 6: Use a text from the Rule, the Constitutions that deals with our relationship and responsibility towards Creation. Art. 15, OFS Rule; Art. 12, GC of the OFS.

Day 7: Compose a prayer on the theme of Creation and share it with your fraternity.

