School Sisters of St. Francis

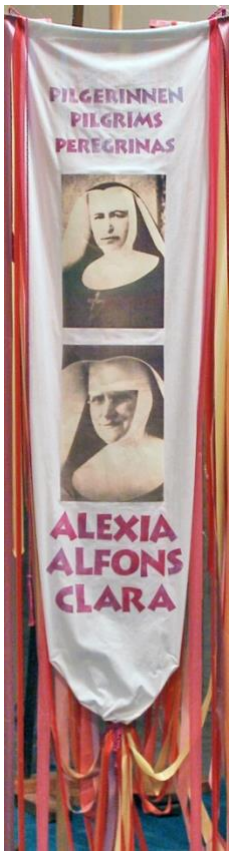
# Congregational Connections

*"As they announce peace with their lips, let them be careful to have it even more within their own hearts." (St. Francis of Assisi, Rule 30)*

April 2026

## In Gratitude for the 152 Years of the School Sisters of St. Francis

**Dear Sisters, Associates, and Women in Formation,**




On this blessed Foundresses Day, we gather with hearts full of gratitude to thank God for the gift of the School Sisters of St. Francis and for the holy vision and courage of Mother Alexia, Mother Alfons, and Sister Clara.

Guided by the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, Mother Alexia and Mother Alfons laid a strong foundation rooted in faith, humility, service, and love, especially through education and care for others. Their trust in God, willingness to serve without reserve, and commitment to forming minds and hearts continue to inspire generations.

As a congregation, we inherit a rich culture that is shaped by history, grounded in the present moment, and animated by a vision for the future. The legacy our foundresses began lives on in the mission of the School Sisters of St. Francis: to nurture faith, promote wisdom, and serve God's people with compassion and dedication. Through their prayer, teaching, and witness, countless lives have been shaped and strengthened.

In *Mission and Challenge*, Mother Alexia's life is described as a bridge from the exterior to the interior, from her outward love of neighbor to the interior realm of silence and prayer. All of her outward activities transformed her inner spirituality. We could also think of this in reverse: hers was a bridge from the inner life to the outside world, meeting the needs of the people from the wellspring of her prayer.

We are called to be prophetic witnesses, which was the theme for our reflection on the World Day of Consecrated Life. Like the prophets of Scripture, we are sent to speak God's word to a violent and fractured world.

The prophet Jeremiah was entrusted with the mission of upholding human dignity amid oppression. He proclaimed: *"Thus says the Lord: Do what is right. Rescue the victim from the hand of the oppressor. Do not wrong or oppress the resident alien… and do not shed innocent blood in this place"* (Jer 22:3).

Our focus today is to address the world through prayer and supplication, to stand for truth, and to speak up for the marginalized as our Holy Father Pope Leo XIV has modeled for us. We must allow ourselves to be disturbed by the realities of our present world. Our interior life must be awakened so that it leads us to an exterior love of our neighbor.

The risks and challenges we are called to meet today differ from those faced by our foundresses, but the strength required to face them comes from the same passion that energized Mother Alexia and Mother Alfons: "We must make the sentiments of Jesus our own" in all circumstances.

As we remember our congregation's beginnings today, we give thanks for every sister who has carried this mission forward with courage and fidelity. Often these women accomplished immeasurable good for God's people while silently giving themselves for the poor. Today, we recommit ourselves to the same spirit of service, unity, and trust in God that marked our foundation.

Dear friends in the Lord, let us pause for a moment-to behold the wonders God has accomplished. Each one of us is part of this international congregation. With grateful and joyful hearts, let us give thanks to God, together with our foundresses and the thousands of sisters who have gone before us. In 1874, they recognized that the world was a field ready for harvest and began their journey in response to the needs of their time. Today, God continues that work through our hands.

Let us renew our consecration once again and surrender ourselves to God's great mission. As we continue building upon this strong foundation with faith and hope, may God continue to bless our congregation, our ministries, all who share in our mission, and all who contribute to the advancement of that mission, today and always.

## We Remember and Pray for our Deceased Sisters

With gratitude and prayer, we remember our Sisters M. Clementa Eggert, M. Bernadette Hurni, M. Andrea Zimmermann, M. Martina Steinhart, M. Anella – Franziska Petry, and M. Diomira – Agathe Kägi of the European Region; Sisters Flora Campos and Mary Garcia of the ULAF Region; and Sisters Rosemary Reier, Bernice Gall, Joan Schumacher, Ellen Mary Schwaiger, Rita Jadin, Miriam Terese Sheehan, Madelyn Sullivan, Gwen Floryance, Leanne Herda, Marietta Hanus, Elizabeth Heese, Barbara Rowan, Nancy Ulrich, Phyllis Franzen, Barbarina Jantsch, Carolita Greiner, Grace Golata, and Rita Mae Rabitoy; and Associates Bess Andersen, Alberta Matulis, and Phyllis Ramseth of the U.S. Province, who recently completed their journey in this world and have gone to God. May they rest in eternal peace in God's presence.

Your sisters,

Rebecca Teresa Abraham Matilda Jincy



## General Assembly 2026: Enflamed by the Spirit, We Bring Peace to the World

We offer our heartfelt gratitude to the sisters of the European Region for their hospitality and gracious hosting of many events during the General Assembly that was convened from March 9-22 in Bad Herrenalb, Germany.



A special thank you goes to the Regional Leaders, Sister Erna-Maria Zimmerer and Sister Anna Maria Weinmann who planned and arranged many liturgies, receptions, dinners, and other special moments. It was a privilege to meet on the very soil that nurtured our foundresses at the foothills of the Black Forest.



This 14-day international gathering at Haus der Kirche retreat house brought together delegates from all the congregation's worldwide provinces and regions to set long-term priorities and choose new leadership.



**Electing the New Leadership Team**
On March 19, the Feast of St. Joseph, delegates elected a new International Leadership Team. This team will serve a four-year term beginning July 1 and lasting through 2030. The newly elected International Leadership Team members are:

**President—Sister Deborah Fumagalli**, from the United States Province. Received into the community in 1977, she was elected President of the congregation in 2022 and will serve a second four-year term. She previously served two terms on the U.S. Provincial Leadership Team from 2011-2019.

**First Vice President—Sister Jincy Vilayappilly**, from St. Francis Province (North India). She was received into the community in 1994. She has served the congregation as vice president since her election in 2022. She previously served as a formator, teacher, and served a term on her provincial leadership team.

**Second Vice President—Sister Matilde Maravi**, from the Latin American Region ULAF (Latin American Union of Franciscans). She was received into the community in 1998. She has served the congregation as vice president since her election in 2022, and previously served as a teacher at St. Clare School in Paita, Peru.

**Third Vice President—Sister Ann Celine Alapattukunnel**, from Assisi Province (South India). She was received into the community in 1982. She previously served her province on its leadership team and is currently preaching and counseling.

The team will work to carry out the new Congregational Direction as we go forward to bring peace into the world.

**Setting the Congregational Direction**
A primary focus was the prayerful discernment and establishment of the Congregational Direction for the next four years. This included reviewing and responding to drafts to guide future missions and ministries globally.





**The approved Congregational Direction 2026-2030 is:**
"As Franciscan women of peace, we ground ourselves in a deep interior life and cultivate both compassionate, life-giving communities and a vibrant mission spirit. We commit ourselves to be instruments of God's peace, respecting Creation and the dignity of all people, following the Gospel call to nonviolence in the face of oppression. As sisters, we support each other's ongoing development and create plans to address needs across provinces and regions. Our application of technology and collaboration with others are means to strengthen our mission. Called by our foundresses to see the needs of the times as the will of God, we follow wherever the Spirit leads."

Here is how the Assembly participants envision the Congregational Direction being lived out:

*Congregational Direction in Action*

1. We commit ourselves to deepening our core identity and growing into our true selves as consecrated women.

2. We work to strengthen relationships within our communities to foster understanding across differences and build mutual support.

3. We foster the leadership skills of our sisters through initial and ongoing formation and explore new forms of leadership that take into account the changes within our congregation and strengthen our unity.

4. We plan together as generalate, provinces, and regions to take actions for the common good internally and in the world.

5. We learn new technologies and use them responsibly to support our mission work.
6. We develop platforms and spaces to communicate our presence and broadcast messages of peace as a legacy of our Franciscan heritage.

7. We engage in collaboration with others who share our concerns and goals to increase our impact and build a global community of care.

8. We commit ourselves to active nonviolence, opening our hearts to listen to and understand others, taking actions to stand against injustice, and building peace locally and globally.

9. We show compassionate care for ourselves, other people, all beings, and Mother Earth.

**Busy Weeks of Dialogue and Discernment**
Delegates spent the gathering's opening days sharing reports about our worldwide provinces and regions. The International Leadership Team and Treasurer also shared reports, and a video update from the Office of Mission Advancement was presented.



Sisters in attendance enjoyed opportunities for Mass, prayer services, reflection, table discussion, and casual conversation with their sisters from around the world. There was much rejoicing when sisters from our Assisi Province, flying from India, arrived at the retreat center following days of travel delays caused by the war in the Middle East. Sisters also celebrated the birthday of Sister Tresa Abraham Kizhakeparambil, who will complete her service on the International Leadership Team in June. Sister Tresa Abraham has served two four-year terms as Vice President.



Delegates ended their first week together by reviewing proposals and hearing committee reports. After a weekend break, the delegates began the work of direction setting and discernment to elect the leadership team members. On March 17, after another day of discussion, dialogue, and decision-making, delegates enjoyed an evening of gratitude and celebration by honoring the International Leadership Team as their term of service draws to a close. The evening included skits, a slideshow, songs, gift-giving, and much laughter!





For views of the sisters' activities, please visit the special General Assembly page on our congregation's website that includes many photos taken by Sister Rose Hacker and a short video throughout the assembly. We thank Sister Rose for providing the congregation with a behind-the-scenes view of all the assembly activities.