SERAPHIC NEWS

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The Friars of Saint Francis Newsletter

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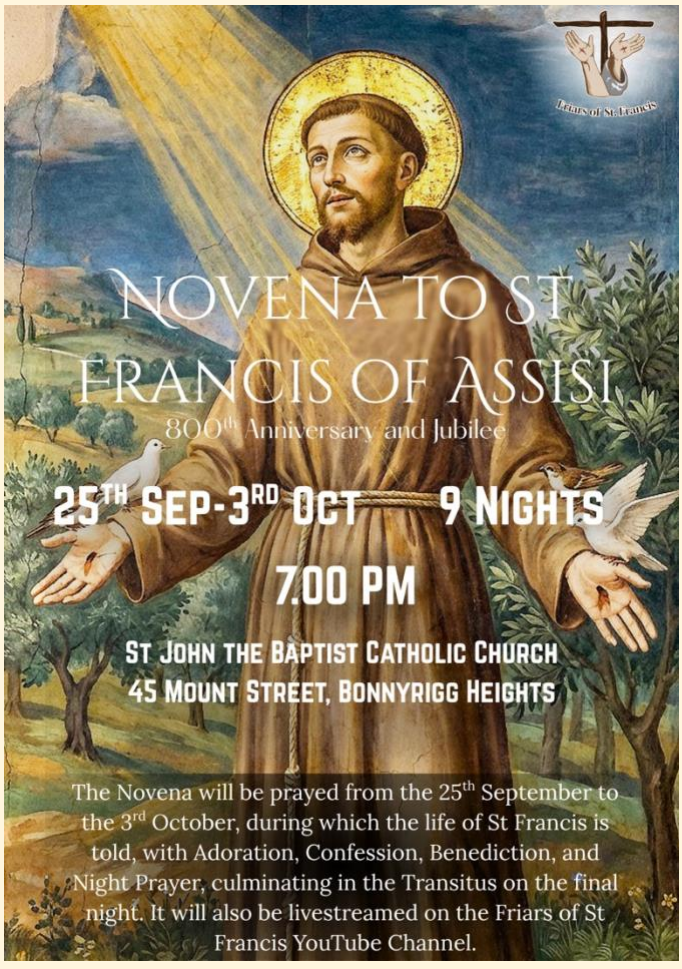
The Jubilee Year of St Francis & Relocating Friars

According to Saint Francis the friars are pilgrims and strangers in this world. Sure enough, we faced that reality on moving diocese. Many of St Bernadette's parishioners in Dundas Valley had been imploring Heaven to keep Fr Christopher and the friars where they were. Little did they realize that a number of the faithful in Bonnyrigg happened to be praying for an extra priest. And they got six; well, three priests and three brothers. Fr Christopher and the Community had been in the Parramatta Diocese since 1998, with twenty-two very happy years spent at Dundas Valley. St Bernadette's farewelled us after our final Sunday Mass there (24 May). We are so grateful for their love and support. Thank you also to the many wonderful volunteers who helped with the moving and packing.

St John the Baptist Catholic Church at Bonnyrigg-Edensor Park welcomed our community when Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP installed Fr Christopher as Parish Priest in the midst of an overflowing congregation. In his homily, the Dominican bishop told the people that their new priests and brothers had made a pilgrimage to Assisi earlier that year, for this year is the eighth centenary of the death of St Francis. His sacred remains had been exhumed for public veneration for the first time since his burial, for a period of one month only. There was a plenary indulgence to be gained in that pilgrimage. Now, the Archbishop announced, there is a plenary indulgence attached to St John the Baptist's Parish, for it has become a Franciscan Church. This applies to the special Jubilee Year of St Francis in 2026. The indulgence comes with the usual requirements: confession,



communion, prayers for the pope and interior detachment from sin.

Refectory of the Sacro Convento, Assisi

The parishioners of Bonnyrigg have been planning to build a new church for many years. As the current building only holds 600 seated – on chairs, there are not yet any pews – Archbishop Anthony announced that the friars have the task of building a brand-new church and declared, with a glint in his eye, that it would be modelled on the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi! We are grateful to God for the welcome we received from the faithful as we began a new life in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

Fr Christopher introduced some necessary changes fairly quickly in the new parish, to the delight of many faithful parishioners, and to the disquiet of a small number. With the encouragement of the Archbishop and Vicar General, we now have beautiful timber altar-rails demarcating the sanctuary of the church.

Meanwhile we are squeezed temporarily into a rental property in nearby Cecil Hills, a ten-minute walk from the church. This was the most suitable house we could find, and within only a week of moving to Bonnyrigg. Unfortunately, we cannot dwell at the church itself, as there is not enough space in the presbytery for six friars. The archbishop has asked us to build a friary, as well as a new church that will hold the growing Catholic population. There is therefore much work ahead for the Community.

Fr Christopher's time is largely taken up in pastoral care and renewing the parish, as well as in training two novices, Br. Nicholas and Br. Leo, and Br Anthony, who is also in formation (in temporary vows). All three of the brothers study at the Catholic Institute of Sydney and Notre Dame. Fr Ruben and Fr Benedict assist Fr Christopher in the parish and in the formation of the brothers. We also celebrate Holy Mass and the sacraments elsewhere on request when possible. As a religious community our apostolate reaches beyond the parish. This includes chaplaincy work, teaching, hospitality, and ministering to the poor. Wherever we find ourselves from day to day, we seek to bear witness to the Gospel in the joyful spirit of St Francis.

Australia is in dire need of the visible witness of dedicated religious life. It is rare to see male religious out and about in religious garb these days. Consequently, wearing the habit in public certainly draws attention. Strangers have on occasion stopped a brother and asked him whether he was expert in martial arts. Some think it's a costume. On the other hand, many people certainly recognize the habit and express their delight. The habit is a reminder to us that we wear the

cross of Christ as our garment. It is also a sign of poverty and simplicity. We don't need to take much thought in the mornings about what to wear that day. Here at St John the Baptist's the children also take great delight in the brothers who join them during lunch break to kick the ball around. 'Do you have to sleep in that?' is a question sometimes posed by the little ones.

Now that Friars of St Francis are growing in number and young men seek to discern their vocation with the community, we need to consider future accommodation and the formation of the young members. While the parish is our main apostolate now, it could never be the only work Franciscans carry out. A number of people have pointed out that the time is ripe for establishing a 'mother house,' where young brothers can be formed into finally professed friars and some as priests, and even floated the idea of a place for retreat. These are our hopes and we place them in the hands of God.

Vocation Story:

Br Anthony of the Sacred Heart, FSF

If you'd told me 10 years ago that I was going to become a Friar of St Francis, I probably wouldn't have believed you. I had never expected a call to a religious vocation. However, after 5 years of living the life of a friar, I can confidently say that God knew what He was doing, even if I didn't!

Growing up, we all have dreams and aspirations for ourselves. Mine were along the lines of getting married to a beautiful wife, having a nice sports car and a job as an astronaut or an actor. Alongside these, I also had a deep sense of the existence and reality of God as a loving and personal Being, someone I could confide in and someone I loved. Being Lebanese, I grew up in the Maronite rite and was also an altar server for a while, so I was close to the altar and close to Christ from my youth. The problem was that I never had a deeply rooted faith in my heart. I grew up praying the rosary and going to Sunday mass, even loving God and thanking Him, but it was all a surface level love and it didn't feel like my faith was mine; it was more an embodiment of the faith my parents wanted me to have.

My calling to religious life began after I entered university. I was studying media at Macquarie University and had been dating a girl for close to 2 ½ years when I first heard of vocations, the idea that God personally called individuals to a state in life. At this point I had joined the university Catholic Society and was going to adoration, doing retreats, praying more in my own time, and had come to make the faith my own. One day I got angry after hearing the story of a priest swindling a family of their money, and I said to God, "If you want me to be a priest, tell me and I will show the world that priests can be beautiful!" The very next day, we celebrated the feast of the Annunciation, and I took this as a sign that as Our Lady gave her yes to God, so I was called to say yes to God in becoming His.

After reaching out to my local priests, the Friars of St Francis, I was offered a period of discernment with them and quickly realised that I was called to live the religious life with the Franciscans. I didn't

know what religious life was or who St Francis was, and as I continued to grow in my understanding of both, so I grew more in love with both. Pope St. John Paul II says of the consecrated life that it "is a special path to holiness," and I am blessed by God to discover this daily in my life as a friar. Because the consecrated life is a radical imitation of the obedience, poverty and chastity found in the life of Christ, we can more easily come closer to Christ in holiness, provided we give our own efforts. I strive daily to die like Christ on my cross in obedience to the Father. I live without property like Christ, humbling myself in making God my provider, and I live in chastity so that I may be wed to Christ who wed Himself to His Church.

Did you know?

The tomb and mortal remains of St Francis were only discovered in 1818, after 52 nights of secret excavations through solid rock beneath the lower Basilica of St Francis. His bones were found four meters under the main altar, contained in what had been a limestone drinking trough for animals. Iron grating further protected the body from relic robbers. In 1978 Pope Paul VI authorised the relics to be placed into a plexiglass urn, in which oxygen was replaced by nitrogen for further preservation. In March this year, the sacred relics were publicly displayed in the Lower Basilica. Over 400,000 pilgrims venerated the sacred relics of St Francis during that one-month period. They have subsequently been returned to the tomb in the Basilica's crypt beneath the altar.

FREQUENT FRIAR MILES

This program offers you our daily prayers for your offerings, and even treasure in Heaven. As Franciscans we depend on alms for the education of our young friars, and we hope to acquire land for the use of our growing community. We are very grateful to all our benefactors and friends. Donations may be made with the QR code or by clicking on the link: https://www.friarsofstfrancis.org/donate/

Friars of St Francis website: https://www.friarsofstfrancis.org/

Live-streamed Masses: Friars of St Francis - YouTube