



Jaargang 53 - 364

Oriëntatie FIC

For Inspiration and Communication

2026 - 3 - September



Grateful for...

our Founders Msgr. Louis Ratten and Bro. Bernardus Hoecken,
and for Mary, St. Vincent de Paul and St. Francis of Assisi

Grateful to...

Bernardus, Louis Rutten, Mary, Vincent de Paul, Francis

Dozens, if not hundreds, of congregations and religious orders count a saint among their founders—a source of great gratitude for them. We, as the FIC, do not share that particular fortune. Yet, we may consider ourselves fortunate to have **two** founders—and men, at that, who dared to grow together.

Bernardus Hoecken was the first brother and our first Superior General, but after only six years, he had to step aside for Servatius Voss, and three years later for Alexius van den Broek. Did Louis Rutten have a hand in this? It certainly seems so. Bernardus was reassigned to Hasselt to teach the first grade of primary school.

Bernardus and Louis had very different characters and outlooks. Bro. Bruno, Superior General from 1970 to 1982, wrote of our founders: “We may be deeply grateful for these two founders.” “We honour both their names.”

They struggled in their relationship, yet ultimately, they grew ever closer to one another.

Bruno: “Bernardus and Rutten. The relationship between these two figures is as compelling as a novel. I believe that, in time, they came to understand each other exceptionally well; that they gained this insight only through considerable pain; that both had enough shortcomings to occasionally irritate the other intensely; yet that both loved the congregation immensely and were great enough never to let go of one another.”

There is yet another reason to be grateful for the founders we have.

Louis Rutten was, from the outset, a remarkable man who devised and implemented various plans to help people in need. Yet from 1871 onwards, he was a frail figure “suffering intensely from spiritual anguish, listlessness, and melancholy.” In the final twenty years of his life, he had to come to terms with his limitations, and it is precisely in this regard that Louis serves as an example to each of us.

For us, the FIC Brothers, our founders are essentially saints—people who made the most of their lives and who hold up ideals for us; they are pilgrims who have gone before us.

In this issue, alongside our founders, we look at three saints who hold a special place in our hearts:

- Mary. She represents the feminine face of God—something we increasingly need.
- Vincent, the ‘second patron’ of our congregation. We are grateful to him for the enduring inspiration that has sprung from his life. Today, there are nearly a million ‘Vincentians’— people dedicated to helping those in need.
- Francis, the man who died 800 years ago. His bond with nature serves as an inspiring example for us, one for which we are deeply grateful.



*grateful
for each other*





Our Founders

From the Constitutions of the FIC

Our congregation was founded in 1840 by Ludovicus Rutten. This young priest felt called to dedicate his entire life and all his resources to the service of the Christian upbringing and formation of young people.

His initial focus was on the poor and neglected youth of his hometown, Maastricht, where social conditions at the time were dire.

In 1840, Bernardus Hoecken became the first superior of our congregation's first community. For many years, he worked alongside Rutten to lead the growing community. He strongly insisted that the brothers should never lose sight of the poor.

Our founders were compassionate men, filled with the spirit of Jesus. Living in the spirit of our founders means that we — in our own time and circumstances — strive to follow their example and preserve their legacy.

For us, preserving the legacy of our founders means:

- Paying close attention to spiritual and religious needs, as well as to the transmission of faith in ways that are contemporary and culturally integrated; viewing upbringing, formation, and education as our primary apostolic tradition,
- Consistently showing a special preference for the poor and the vulnerable,
- Remaining open to positive developments,
- Valuing fraternal community life highly; we call one another 'brother' and seek to embody this in our everyday lives,
- Holding a special devotion to Mary. We wish to keep alive not only the memory of our founders; we also feel a bond with all our deceased fellow brothers.

Grateful for their inspiring example, we also honour their legacy.

We honour their names

The founders of the FIC congregation were people of deep compassion. They felt called and sent to make the message of the Gospel — a message of love — visible in our world. What they sought — along with the founders of other religious orders — was a way of life that made closeness and mercy a tangible reality. Following in the footsteps of these men and women, inspired individuals throughout the centuries have kept alive the insight that a good and loving life is not a distant ideal. It is within that tradition that we all wish to stand.

***We honour both their names. They laid the foundation stone.
We brothers keep on building In faith and grateful memory.***

Human life means being on a journey. Towards what goal?
How do we find the path of life? It resembles a voyage
across the often dark and stormy sea of history,
during which we look to the stars that show us the way.
The true stars of our lives are people who knew how to live well.
They are lights of hope.

***We honour Vincent's name: You brought a richness to the poor
We brothers keep on striving For right and just humanity***

For many, Jesus Christ is the Light itself, the Sun
that has risen over all the darkness of history.
But to find Him, we also need lights closer at hand —
People who share light from His Light and thus offer guidance on our journey.

***We honour Jesus' name: You brought the message of good news
We brothers keep on spreading The richness of your Kingdom here***

For millions of people across the globe, Mary is the star of hope.
As FIC Brothers, we joyfully bear the name: Brothers of the Immaculate Conception
of the Blessed Virgin Mary ('Fratres Immaculatae Conceptionis').

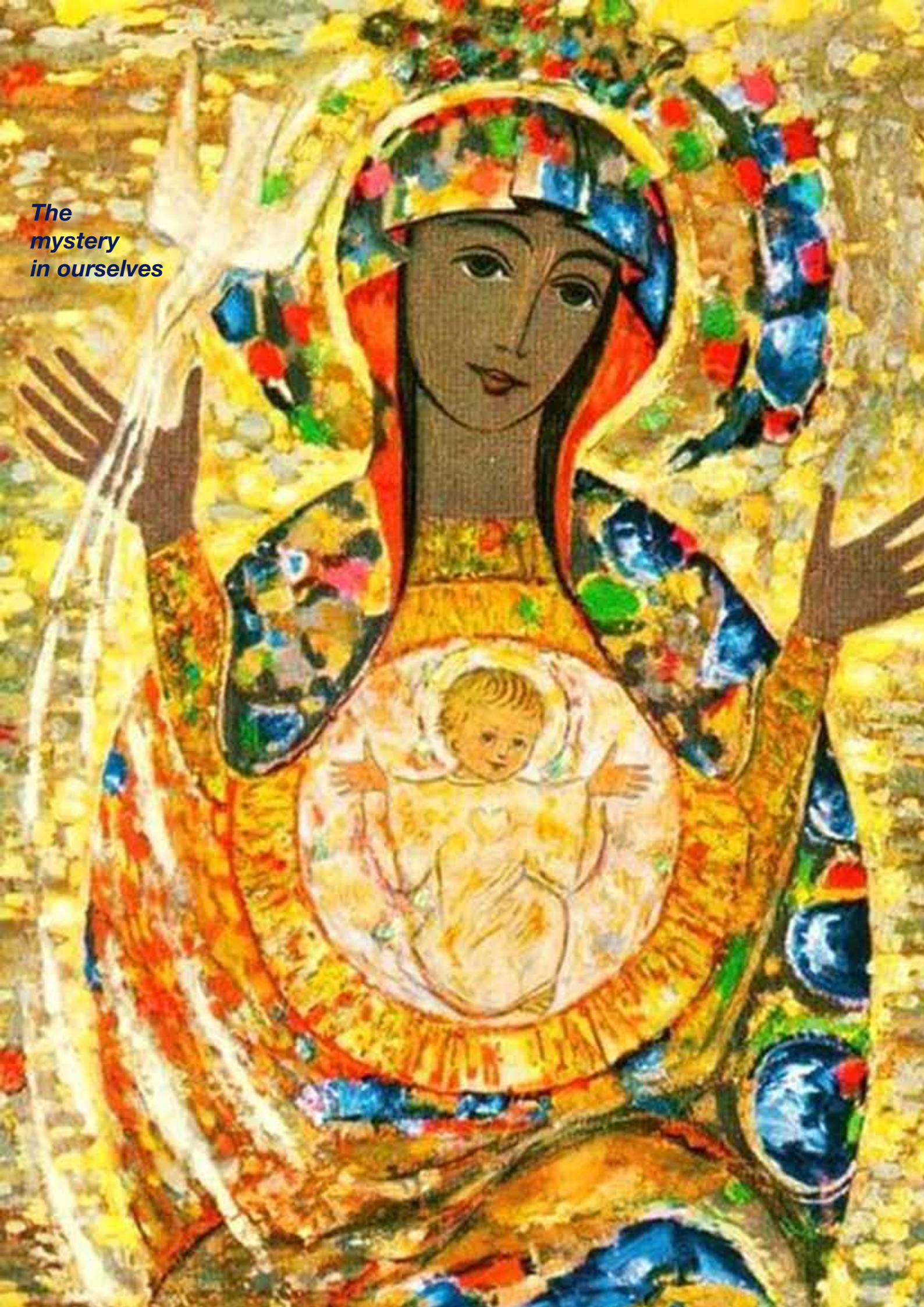
***We honour Mary's name: You Mother, pure, immaculate
We brothers keep on praying For help and loving look at us***

In this special year, we also add a verse to our (extended)
congregational hymn about the saint who has been a source of inspiration
to many for eight centuries.

***We honour Francis' name: He taught us of Creator's love
We Brothers keep on caring For all that God has given us.***



*The
mystery
in ourselves*



Journeying together - With Mary as our example

Frans School

For the anniversary celebration on 15 August 2026, Bro. Frans School wrote a reflection with the jubilarians and Mary in mind.

The theme of this celebration is 'Journeying Together'. The first reading—from our Constitutions— speaks of us as "imperfect beings". "Again and again we try to see and appreciate the good things in our fellow-brothers, despite their human frailties, despite the hurts and disappointments we inflict on each other." These experiences can help us grow in deeper humanity and bring us closer together, because, despite everything, we are able to experience the inherent worth of one another. Thus, we journey together as imperfect yet valuable human beings. The Gospel reading from Luke (1:39–56) speaks of the bond between two pregnant women, Mary and Elizabeth, who meet and journey together for a time, experiencing the profound, active Mystery within their lives— a Mystery that bears fruit when one opens oneself to it in faith and trust.

The Image of Mary

The Church has accorded Mary, as Mother of the Lord, a significant place. She is the Immaculate Conception, the Immaculate Virgin, the Mother of the Church, the Mother of Good Counsel, and bears all the other titles by which we invoke her in the Litany of Loreto. Mary cannot be praised enough, and many feast days in the liturgical year are dedicated to her. All of this serves a purpose, and the multifaceted nature of Mary holds great meaning for many believers. Today, however, I wish to place greater emphasis on the biblical Mary—presenting a more modest and human, yet powerful, image of a Woman who walked her own path.

From shock and confusion to faith, receptivity, and service; simple and 'humble in spirit.' Upon the Angel's visit, Mary was startled by his words

and became confused—a reaction entirely understandable and human. She was to conceive and bear a son, the Son of the Most High. Yet she asked: "How will this happen? I have never had relations with a man." The Angel replied: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." Mary said: "I wish to serve the Lord: let it happen to me as you have said." Thus, Mary moves from shock and confusion to faith, receptivity, and service. She surrenders herself to the deepest Mystery of her life and entrusts herself to the Almighty God. She is simple and 'humble in spirit.'

Concern, lack of understanding, Confidently awaiting an answer

After Mary gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem, the angel brought the good news to the shepherds: "A Saviour has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord." Mary treasured all these words in her heart and kept reflecting on them. When Jesus stayed behind in the Temple, Mary and Joseph were worried, and when they found him again, they were distraught. "Child, what have you done to us? We searched for you with anxious hearts." Jesus replied: "I needed to be in my Father's house." Yet Mary and Joseph did not understand what he was saying to them. In Mary, we see concern, uncertainty, and a lack of understanding—but also the trust that an answer will come.

Solicitude, empathy for others, deep faith

When the wine was running low at the wedding in Cana, Mary sought Jesus' help: "They have no more wine." Jesus replied: "What do you want of me? My time has not yet come." His mother then said to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you, no matter what." Mary empathizes with the bridal couple; she is caring and trusts in her son. Here we see Mary's solicitude: she disregards his refusal and places her trust in her son.

Lack of understanding, doubt, disbelief, anxiety

As Jesus travelled through Galilee and Judea proclaiming the Good News and healing people of their ailments, he was beset by the scribes, and the crowds pressed in on him as well. "His relatives set out to take charge of him—by force, if necessary—for they believed he had lost his mind." "Meanwhile, his mother and brothers ar-

rived. They sent someone inside to fetch him, while they themselves waited outside.” “Your mother and your brothers are outside, looking for you.” Jesus: “Who are my mother and my brothers?”

Mary no longer understands her son: what is he doing, and where is it all leading? Has he lost his way? She is deeply concerned and anxious, and wants to protect him. In Mary, we see a very human reaction: a lack of understanding, doubt, disbelief, and anxiety.

Faithful, close, quiet, attentive, in the background, not focused on herself but pointing to her Son.

Let us look at ‘Mary beneath the Cross’. Here, I draw upon a reflection by Br. Johan Muijtjens: At the foot of the Cross, one of Jesus’ most intimate words is spoken: “Behold your mother.” In that moment, Christ entrusts his mother not only to the beloved disciple but to the entire community of believers. Thus, Mary becomes the mother of all who live in Christ. That motherhood is not a matter of power or authority, but of closeness. Mary is present just as she always was: quiet yet attentive; in the background yet essential; not focused on herself, but pointing to her Son.

Praying, waiting, trusting; believing together, hoping and persevering

After Jesus’ Ascension, the apostles returned to Jerusalem. “They devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with the women and with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

Br. Johan Muijtjens reflects: We see Mary once again in the Upper Room: not knowing what lays ahead, yet praying in the midst of the disciples, waiting and trusting in the help of Jesus’ Spirit. She does not stand above the community, but at its heart. That is what truly makes her a mother: someone who believes, hopes, and perseveres together with us.

Full of grace

In the preceding text, I attempted to sketch a broad picture of the Jewish woman Mary—of her person and her characteristic qualities. She was able to fulfil the life mission entrusted to her only because she was graced, and because this grace had been promised to her: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.” Like Mary, we too are graced. We, brothers, live our lives with both

our strengths and our weaknesses. Thanks to the grace we receive, we overcome difficulties, sometimes rise above ourselves, maintain confidence in the future, and persevere in doing good when things threaten to go wrong. Like Mary, we place our trust in God, who makes our life possible. And deep down, we know that we do not ‘create’ the best moments of our lives ourselves, but rather that they are bestowed upon us. Often, we only realize this when looking back.



The lives of our jubilarians

Cris, you have embodied many of Mary's qualities. Throughout your life, you have dedicated yourself to serving the brotherhood in various locations: De Beyart and Tongerseweg in Maastricht, and Oude Mollenhutseweg in Nijmegen. You began as a shoemaker at De Beyart, working alongside Augustino and Theocritus. Later, you worked in the De Beyart print shop; you trained as a layout artist and technical illustrator, mastering reprography and small-format offset printing. Subsequently, you joined the staff of the De Beyart Central Library. For years, you held ultimate responsibility for the repro department in the De Beyart basement, faithfully assisting residents and people from Maastricht with all kinds of copying tasks. You did not always receive the appreciation you deserved from those in charge, and you often struggled to understand the decisions that were made. Yet, despite this, you remained open and available to others, steadfast in your life as a brother.

You have lived at De Beyart for a very long time and are a true 'Beyardier'. You have witnessed all the changes—changes you were not particularly fond of, as you value the familiar and the traditional. You have various hobbies and create beautiful picture books. You enjoy working on jigsaw puzzles and love a challenge. You take an interest in history and like to customize your furniture to suit your own preferences. Although you grumble about them now and then, you are truly grateful for the care provided by Yolanda and Carin. You enjoy going shopping with Yolanda—preferably at the thrift store.

Cris, may you enjoy the years that lie ahead. Mary will stand by you and protect you.



Gait, throughout your life, we have seen traits of Mary in you: a spirit of service, compassion for others (especially those living on the margins), faithfulness to people and to your life as a brother, patience, care and concern, openness and approachability, and a faith that things would turn out well.

You served as a cook in the Netherlands and Spain. You worked for Spanish guest workers in the Netherlands, managed a household, and served as a caregiver for the sick in Miranda del Ebro and Vitoria in Spain. In 1980, you moved to Chile. There, you engaged in social work in Talca and neighbourhood pastoral care in Buín. You dedicated yourself wholeheartedly to the people of Manuel Plaza, running a kitchen for children and workshops for women. In 1987, you became the episcopal delegate for neighbourhood pastoral care in Talca, and in 1995, you began supporting people struggling with drug and alcohol addiction—a very intense period that demanded a great deal of you. You returned to the Netherlands in 1999. For a year and a half, you were a member of the new 'In den Rooden Leeuw' community.

Afterward, you were an active member of the Ludovicus, Xaverius, and Bernardus communities. You ran countless errands and helped manage the Beyart shop. You were a truly sociable brother—not only to your fellow brothers in the Bernardus community but also to the residents of De Beyart. For years, you took charge of the Sunday drinks and snacks. Now, you often feel tired, and life weighs heavily upon you. At nearly 89 years of age, you feel that your life is drawing to its close. Gait, thank you for who you are and for your brotherhood. Looking back, you have been a blessed brother. Mary will remain close to you.



Wim, looking back, you too display various traits of Mary: a spirit of service, loyalty to fellow brothers and to others, compassion and empathy, patience (though not too much of it!), dedication, faith in the future, and perseverance.

Every brother is aware of your commitment to the congregation; you certainly did not hide your light under a bushel. We know you as a creative teacher at the St. Aloysius School; as a contributor to and writer for 'Met Brandend Hart' and 'De kleine Apostel'; as an author of educational curricula; and as a tireless staff member and guide at the Education Service Centre (COS). Your training in journalism bore fruit: for many years, you co-edited the magazine 'Berichten van de Broeders van Maastricht' with Ben Duives and conducted countless interviews. You also worked for the magazine 'Oriëntatie FIC'.

You were also a capable administrator—first as a member (and later as Vicar) of the Dutch Provincial Council, then as a member of the De Beyart Board, and subsequently as General Director of De Beyart. In September 1996, you moved to the Erasmusdomein, becoming a non-resident member of the Capucijnengang community. You served as Board Secretary for the 'In den Rooden Leeuw' Foundation and were also a board member of the 'Dienst Wittevrouweveld' Foundation.

You engaged in pastoral work at the 'De Zeven Bronnen' nursing home and acted as a creative leader in many liturgical celebrations. Within the congregation, you made substantial contributions to numerous chapters and conferences. And how many obituaries for our deceased fellow brothers have you written and delivered! Amidst all your other activities, people could turn to you for a supportive conversation, and you helped those in need—including financially. All in all, it was a rich

and often very busy life. Yet, you never neglected your spiritual life; you always devoted ample time to prayer, spiritual reading, and meditation, and you nurtured your spiritual depth.

Wim, you are now severely disabled and dependent on the care of others—a stark contrast to the many years you took such good care of yourself and took pride in your independence. May Mary help you find patience and continue to enjoy the small things in life.

Frans, you, too, embody the characteristics of Mary: an open and receptive attitude, empathy and a heart that is easily moved, closeness, care and attentiveness, a willingness to listen, faith, and faithfulness.

You have a long career behind you, though you would not call it that. For you, what matters far more is giving shape to your identity as a brother among people—both young and old. To you, being a brother means being close to others, standing alongside them, meeting them in their humanity, and sharing what you carry within yourself: your attention, your ability to listen, your creativity, and your enthusiasm for so many things. It also means being open to receiving what others have to offer. We know you as a creative educator and principal of the St. Canisius School in The Hague—a school serving children from our multicultural society, including those who require extra attention. You were the one who took the initiative to create the 'Garden of Faiths', with a specific focus on the world's major religions. You championed the restoration of the garden pavilion at the Westeinde site after it had been destroyed by fire; this place of peace and encounter was rebuilt and is now more beautiful than ever.

In you, one clearly sees both the desire and the ability to share something meaningful with others. For instance, you established the Nativity Scene Museum and, together with fellow brothers and associates, organized tours during the Christmas season, sharing the story of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

As a key driving force, you helped build the City Monastery in The Hague—a place of encounter and inspiration. You launched numerous initiatives to transform the Westeinde location into a vibrant and welcoming space. The City Monastery became a place of hospitality where many guests could find respite and renewal, and where those involved in street pastoral care also found a haven of peace.

You know The Hague well and do not shy away from the public eye: you appear on regional tele-



Grateful for...

vision programs and participate in neighbourhood initiatives. For many years, you have dedicated your time and creativity to the magazine 'Oriëntatie FIC', a publication focused on inspiration and communication. You are active in the 'Bezinning aan Huis' (Reflection at Home) working group and express your creativity through your supportive role in international FIC Oases. You now give shape to your commitment to others from your 'little city monastery' in The Hague, in close connection with our associates in the city and your many friends.

Frans, thank you for 65 years of life as a brother. Mary will be pleased with you and will protect you like a mother.

Remaining close to each other on the journey together

Dear brothers, we are grateful for the journey our jubilarians—Cris, Gait, Wim, and Frans—have travelled. A journey undertaken together with their fellow brothers and with the people to whom they dedicated themselves and showed themselves to be true brothers—through ups and downs, in joy and sorrow. A journey in union with Jesus, our Brother, following the example of Mary, our Mother.

Now that we here in the Netherlands have all grown old and form but a small flock, we ask the Lord to



continue walking with us. May we remain close to one another, hold fast to each other, and continue to help one another through small gestures of care and service.

And may Mary, our Mother and Patroness, assist us in this and open our hearts to one another. Let us not forget that we all—just like Mary—have been graced.

Holy Mary, pray for us.





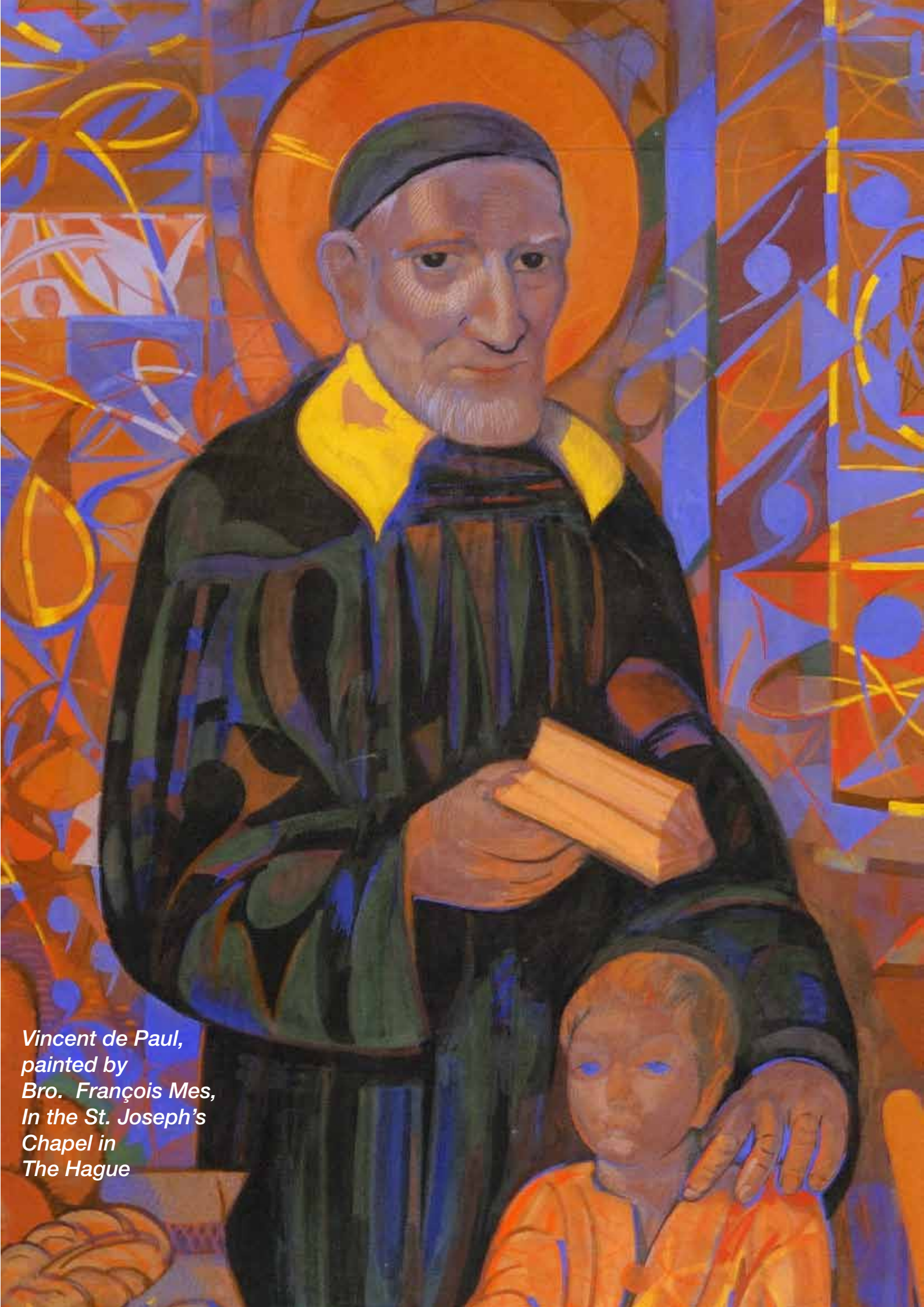
Holy Mary, pray for us

*From the Constitutions of the Brothers FIC:
Mary, of all people, is joined with Jesus in the most intimate way.
She is his mother and is called the mother of all the faithful.
We contemplate her life and address her in our personal
and communal prayer.*

*People across the world seek closeness and intimacy with Mary.
She is the feminine face of God, looking upon us with love
and attentiveness. Mary is easily approachable: You light a candle for her
and surrender yourself to her encouragement and support.*

*Holy Mary, protector of our congregation
and of all people worldwide,
pray for us.
Be our advocate in times of joy and sorrow.*

*From: 'Seven times seven times Mary',
Oriëntatie FIC 39-290*



*Vincent de Paul,
painted by
Bro. François Mes,
In the St. Joseph's
Chapel in
The Hague*

Vincent de Paul on love

To love is to will the good for everyone, to desire that each person recognizes their own worth, to hold them in high regard and appreciate them, to seek their well-being—as far as it depends on us—and to wish that no harm befalls the person we love.

Love is mercy: we must strive to let our hearts be moved, to make them sensitive to the suffering and misery of others, and to ask God to grant us a spirit of mercy. We are in dire need of mercy, for we are called to bear witness to it everywhere and to endure all things for its sake.

Witnessing the misery of another touches us, moves us, and softens us. This compassion is rooted in love: love makes it impossible to see someone suffer without suffering along with them.

Love opens one person's heart to another, allowing them to sense what the other is experiencing. Love is an orientation towards the other. Through mercy, love opens the heart of one to the other, and the heart of the other to the one.

Love is a calling

It is not merely a matter of love for God, but also of love for one's fellow human beings—out of love for God. This is something so sublime that it transcends human understanding. We need divine light to fathom the height, depth, breadth, and glory of this love. We must surrender ourselves completely to God to let this truth truly sink in, so that our every action and attitude is shaped by it.

God has chosen us as instruments of His boundless fatherly love. He desires for this love to spread throughout the world and reach everywhere.

Let us strive to understand this magnificent reality ever more deeply. It will remain an inexhaustible source of meaning for our lives. If we could see it clearly, it would radically transform our entire existence.



Renewed Focus on Vincent de Paul in The Hague

Frans Wils

From the very beginning of our congregation, there has been close cooperation with various St. Vincent de Paul Societies. The brothers came to live and work in The Hague starting in 1861, at the invitation of the Society.

This year, the 180th anniversary of The Hague's St. Vincent de Paul Society provided an opportunity to celebrate and reflect on the Society's many positive developments in recent years. To mark the occasion, a special mural was created on a wall bordering the playground shared by the 'Stadsklooster/Vincentiushof' (City Monastery/Vincentius Court) and the Carolus School.

The mural was unveiled by City Councillor Kavish Partiman and several children from the Carolus School. These children had the opportunity to collaborate with artist Jochem Aller on the design of the image. The central figure is the saint, Vincent de Paul, depicted just as he appears in the Joseph Chapel. The chapel's windows also inspired the colourful halo surrounding the saint. Other details include:

- bread being broken and shared
- books representing education
- toys (the toy shop is a successful initiative of the Society)
- people being held up and supported
- a quill pen writing history
- the dove of peace
- the Alpha and the Omega.

The educational leaflet we prepared for the children describes Vincent de Paul as follows:
I am Vincent de Paul.

I am a French saint who lived a long time ago: 1581–1660.

A saint is someone who led an extraordinary life

and who can serve as an example to others. At first, I wanted to make a lot of money, but later I discovered that helping others is more rewarding.

Together with wealthy people, we did a great deal for the poor.

We didn't just provide food;

we also taught them how to take good care of themselves.

Many people still follow my example.

Vincent de Paul

*To raise the dead to life again,
to give support to the living,
to lift the poor from their misery:
God willed what must be done.*

*He chose Vincent de Paul,
who knew not what had come to him.
His life was not the easiest,
yet it set him ablaze in heart and soul.*

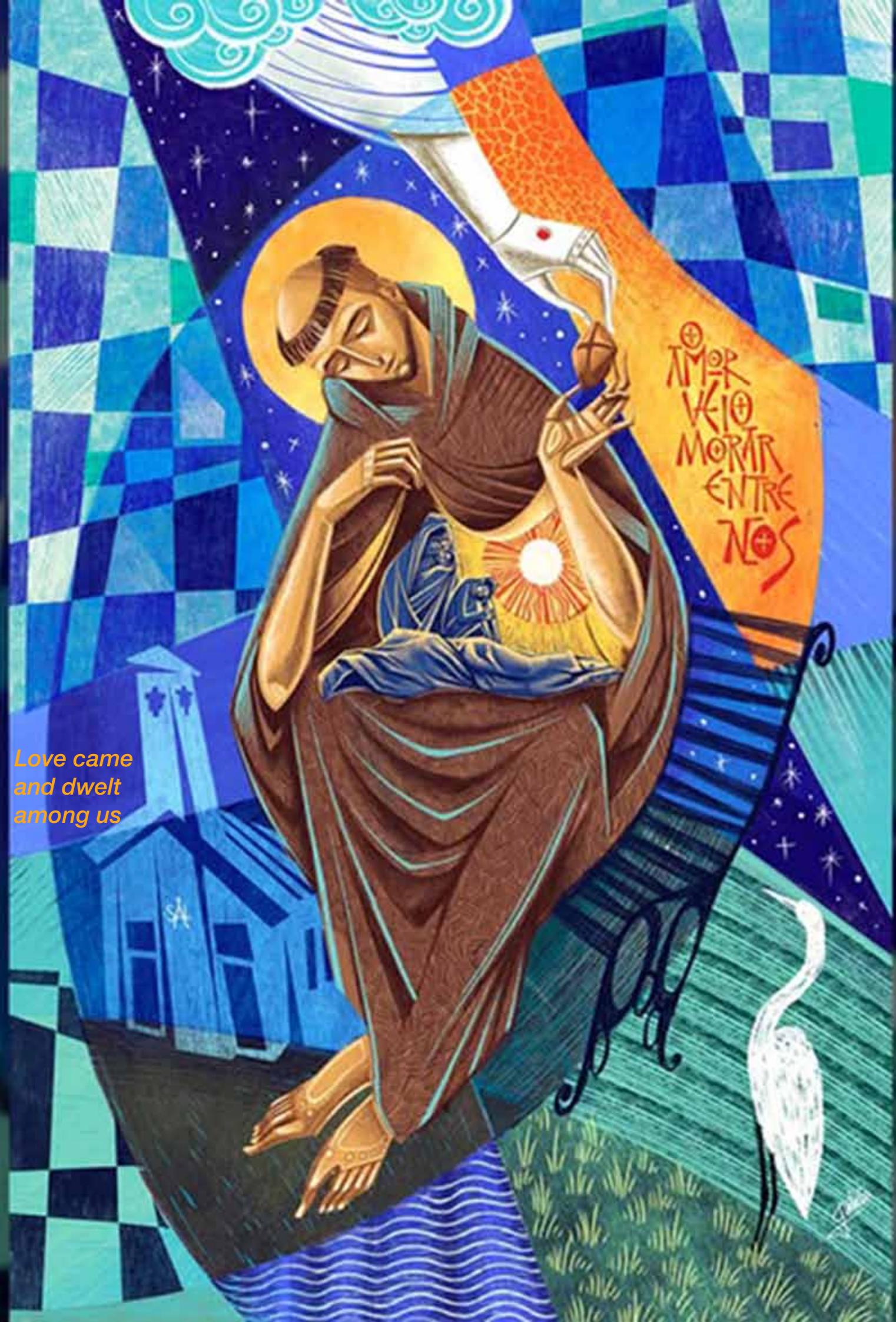
*I still recall from my time at school
how he escaped from slavery,
and how poverty clings to one's home.
That poverty still dwells within me...*

*Not that hunger will plague me —
as if it were truly a matter of physical hunger;
it is, above all, the emptiness that gnaws inside
when one stands before one's Creator.*

Ferrie Kompier



*Love came
and dwelt
among us*



Francis of Assisi...

A familiar figure—even today—
someone warmly regarded, who moves you time and again with his authenticity.
How is that possible...?

It is actually quite remarkable.
For his way of life stands in stark contrast to what most people are accustomed to
or would desire! This was true in his day, and remains so in our own.

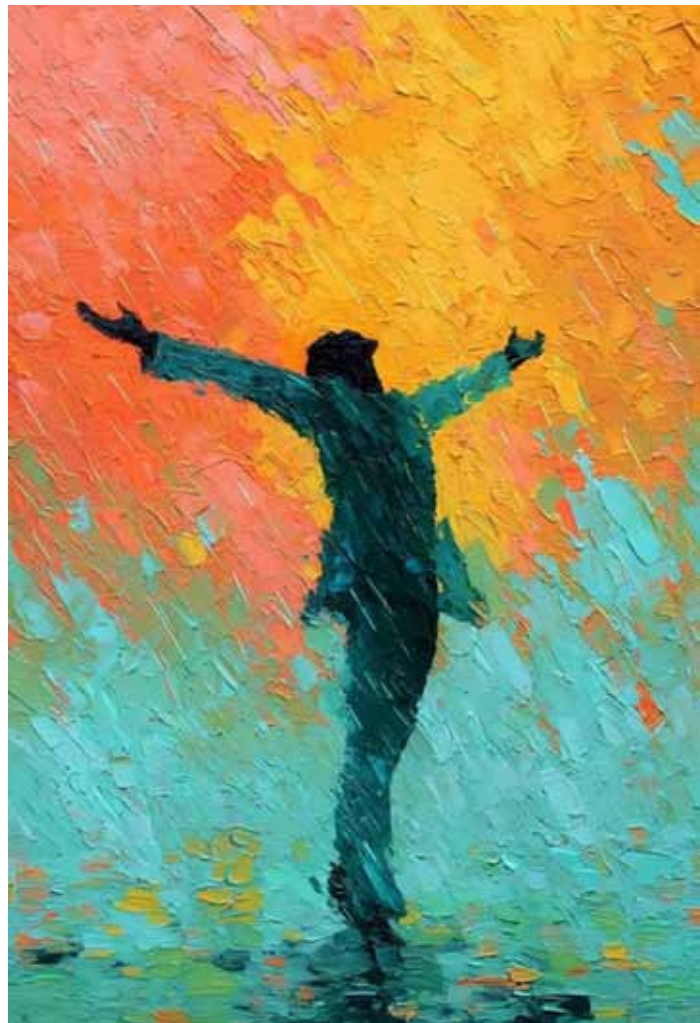
Francis chose the path of the lowly, of the insignificant;
preferring poverty to wealth, lowliness to status;
and in doing so, he became a brother to all people.

Not driven by a social agenda or a societal ideal,
but by a deep compassion ignited by God Himself.

Deeply touched and drawn by the humility of God—
as he encountered it in the life and suffering of Jesus—
Francis did not choose an easy life.
Yet, he found profound peace within it.

We wish this for you, along with the invitation to follow his example.

(Excerpted from the Franciscan magazine "Francesco")



Brief Litany of St. Francis

1.
You wondrous man, pray for us if you can:
that we may honour the poor
and conspire with power no more

2.
You wondrous man, pray for us if you can:
that we recognize the wolf inside
and with compassion bring him quiet

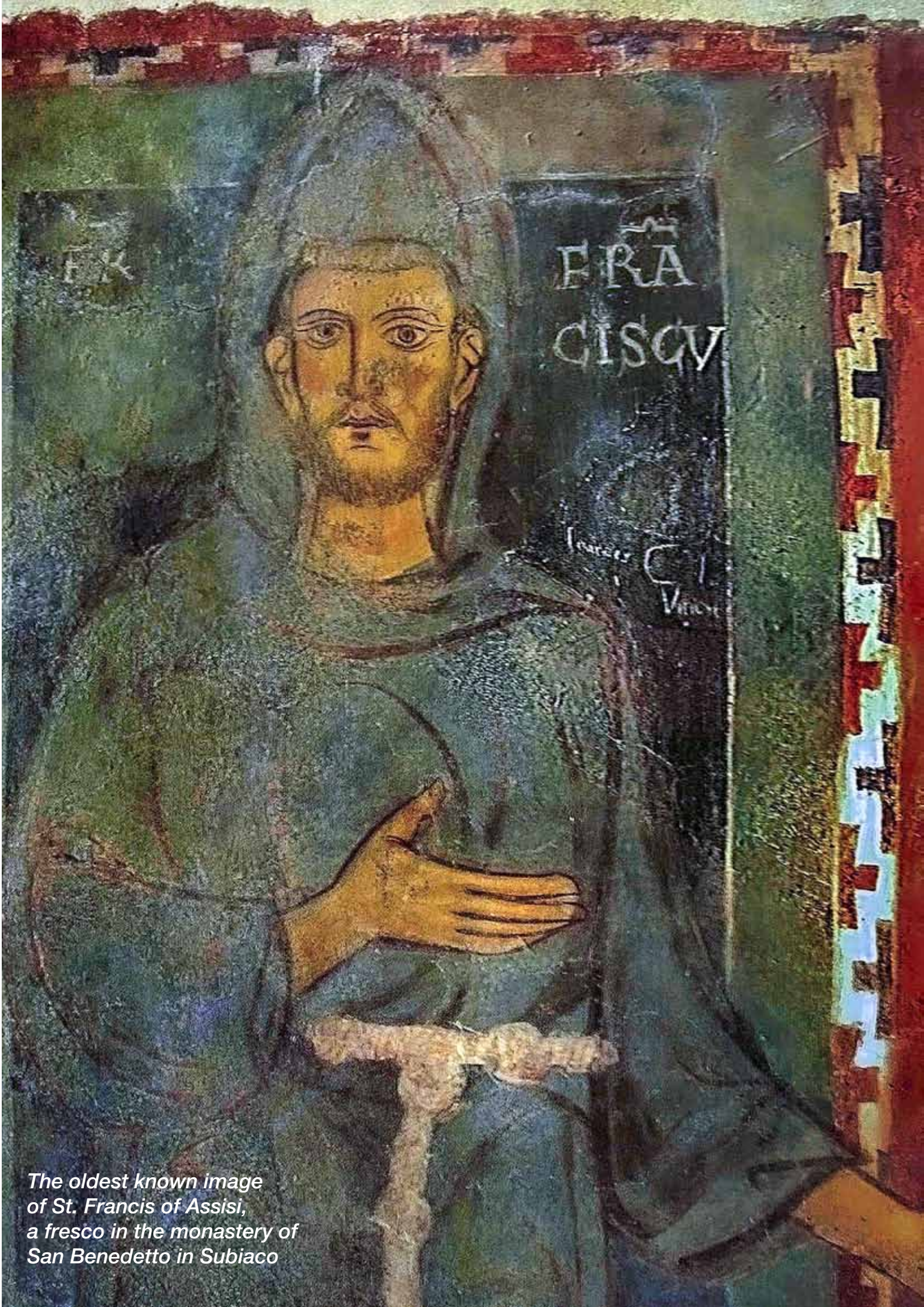
3.
You wondrous man, pray for us if you can:
that in peace we may greet
all whom along the way we meet

4.
You wondrous man, pray for us if you can:
that we keep the fire alight
and praise the sun even in the night

5.
You wondrous man, pray for us if you can:
that even as we die, we sing
of our receiving such good things

Hein Stufkens





The oldest known image of St. Francis of Assisi, a fresco in the monastery of San Benedetto in Subiaco

Nature Wisdom

Johan Muijtjens

Johan has been maintaining a nature blog for some time now. We would like to draw your attention to this blog. This year, we will include a 'clipping' in every issue, hoping that you will also find time to read the entire blog.



Living water

The theme of this Month of Creation is 'Living Water'. Living water — clean, safe, and plentiful water — is truly vital, literally a matter of life and death for everyone. Our bodies are permeated with water, as is all of life. I am coming to realize this more and more deeply.

A personal experience:

For some years now, it has been possible to reach the northern part of the African country of Ghana by plane. You can now view the landscape — which one previously could only traverse at eye level — from a considerable height. This was a new experience for me recently, af-

ter having travelled there overland from time to time since the 1980s. Looking down now, I was struck with alarm.

Northern Ghana

This area borders the Sahel, the broad southern strip of the Sahara. We know this from school. But now the reality hit me with full force: the desert is advancing relentlessly! What was still a beautiful green landscape in the 1980s — with scrub and large, magnificent trees under which children played — has transformed in just a few decades into a savanna landscape featuring only the occasional tree, scattered scrub, and vast stretches of bare ground.

Savanna

A green and flourishing region has turned into an ochre-coloured landscape! Not over the course of centuries, but in just a few decades. Yes, I was struck with alarm when I saw that. People in the area told me that, within a single lifetime, they have gone from having two wet seasons to just one rainy period, and that even that single fertile season is now beginning to shorten. More and more people are struggling to grow enough food to support their families — or even just to keep their heads above water. One also sees increasing poverty on the streets.

Shops look more neglected, there is more litter along the roads, and maintenance is steadily declining. What also struck me was a certain sense of resignation among young people at a secondary school — feeling I did not detect back in



the 1980s, when nature still radiated such vitality. The physical environment clearly impacts how people feel and the energy they possess.

Gradual change

A particular challenge with climate change is its gradual nature. When the coronavirus outbreak occurred, it was an immediate 'all hands on deck' situation. But this change happens bit by bit: a little less rain each year, a little more dust, slightly lower yields. It is just shy of the threshold that would trigger an alarm. And there is the lingering hope: perhaps things will be (somewhat) better next year. But that improvement never comes.

What pains me is that so many people — such as those here in Northern Ghana — have few, if any, resources to cope with these changes or to develop alternatives. They lack the means, and sometimes the knowledge, to develop and implement new methods of agriculture, livestock farming, horticulture, forestry, fertilization, and irrigation. Supportive social and economic infrastructure is often lacking as well.

We here in prosperous Western Europe - at least most of us — have access to protective technologies, various amenities, better social safety nets, and generally better baseline health. These advantages allow us to cope with rising temperatures, erratic weather patterns, increasing air and water pollution, and other hardships. Yet, even in our so-called affluent society, a growing number of people are suffering — and even dying — from the consequences of these climatic changes, whether through respiratory ailments, heatstroke, or infections, not to mention the associated psychological and material deprivation.

Added motivation

These experiences in Ghana have motivated me even more to contribute as much as I can to the health of — at the very least — 'our' environment. After all — harsh as it may sound — it is primarily the lifestyle, the unhealthiness, and the excesses of our Western world that are now making themselves felt across the globe, with increasingly painful consequences.

I want to commit myself to this cause, not with a sense of despair that "it makes no difference

anyway", nor with anger toward others for not doing enough. Instead, I act with a strong conviction that every contribution truly matters — and that working together with others, whether in small circles or on a larger scale, naturally yields far greater results.

We are called upon to be courageous and creative: to remain open to the opportunities presented to us and to actively seek them out.

We should ask ourselves: How do I treat this precious water? Can I offer a quiet "thank you" when I drink a glass of water? Am I mindful not to use more water than necessary when washing myself or doing the dishes? Or — if you also consider energy — do you, for instance, avoid boiling more water than you actually need for tea, coffee, or other purposes?

Using water consciously, sparingly, and carefully — not because you 'have to', but out of respect and gratitude — and perhaps also out of consideration to the people who ensure that we still have plenty of good quality water? That strikes me as an excellent way to experience this Season of Creation — the Season of Living Water — fruitfully as well!





*Open to,
and looking actively for,
possibilities*

Working for Africa



I am Hans Visser, a member of the Kontaktgroep Maastricht (KGM), a former FIC member, and a loyal reader of 'Oriëntatie FIC'.

I have been married to Will since 1968. In 1970, I had the opportunity to become headmaster of a school in Berg en Terblijt, a small village between Maastricht and Valkenburg. I was keen to live in Maastricht — having had a wonderful time there at the Martinus School and the St. Jozef School — but things didn't go well for Will when we met friends there, as everyone would speak to her in the local dialect. We then opted for a school in Den Bosch — the 'Zoete Lieve Vrouwenschool' (Our Lady School), a wonderful name for a school in Den Bosch — and had a house built in Vlijmen. We had a son and a daughter, Jeroen and Evelien.

In 1980, I became the principal of a new primary school in Tilburg. The school grew rapidly; after six years, we had 37 teachers and nearly 1,000 pupils. Yet, we had no caretaker and no administrative staff. Because the school grew by 150 to 200 pupils each year — and funding depended on the previous year's enrolment — was still teaching classes myself. On April 18, 1986 — the day of the Chernobyl disaster — it all suddenly became too much for me, and in no time, I was in the hospital. After a period of rehabilitation, I was allowed to return to full-time work during the 1987 Carnival season. On Good Friday, I went to the hospital for a check-up during my lunch break. At the nurse's request, the cardiologist came to assess the situation and sent me straight back to the hospital. A few days later, he told me that I was no longer allowed to go to school.

Supply and Demand International

After another period of intensive rehabilitation, we discovered that Frans van Pinxteren—a CMM Brother from Tilburg—was setting up an

organization called 'Vraag en Aanbod Internationaal' (VAI, Supply and Demand International) to support missionaries in Africa. By then, I was on a disability pension, so I began helping Brother Frans van Pinxteren as a volunteer. We organized fundraising drives at schools, churches, and 'Third World markets', and established workshops across the Netherlands where long-term unemployed individuals — while retaining their benefits and working under the supervision of skilled professionals — refurbished the collected goods. Before long, we had 40 workshops operating throughout the country.

After two or three years, Frans suddenly said, "Why don't you go and see how things are going in Africa, and what becomes of our shipments?" And so, in 1992, we spent six weeks in Rwanda. We also visited Goma in the Congo and Bujumbura in Burundi. In the years that followed, we travelled to various French-speaking African countries on behalf of VAI projects to launch new initiatives and inspect shipments.

Ivory Coast

In the late 1990s, Will and I travelled to the Ivory Coast—among other places—on behalf of 'Supply and Demand International'. We visited several mission stations there.

We also took the opportunity to travel to Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast. That is where the Ivorians built the world's largest church — a replica of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The Basilica of Our Lady of Peace (Notre-Dame de la Paix), featuring 7,000 seats and standing room for 11,000 people, was designed to be the largest church in the world.



The Notre Dame de la Paix in Yamoussoukro

The Pope stipulated that the church could not be larger than St. Peter's in Rome — meaning a dome height of 157 meters rather than 158 — and a hospital had to be built next to it; otherwise, the Pope would not consecrate the church. The President of Ivory Coast, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, agreed. With a fortune of eleven billion, he could easily cover the 300-million construction cost using just the interest.

The dome was indeed built to a height of 157 meters, but a 17-meter-high golden cross was placed on top. As for the promised hospital, only the foundation stone remains — the one Pope John Paul II laid during the basilica's consecration. Impressive hotels and conference centres were also built, right in the middle of the jungle, requiring the felling of thousands of trees. Today, it is an un-African city of over 300,000 inhabitants, featuring wide roads and tall lampposts — which, incidentally, no longer work.

With the Brothers in Accra and Wa, Ghana

We had also made appointments in Ghana and wanted to take the opportunity to visit the brothers there. The brothers were involved with the organization 'Supply and Demand International'. Driving by car from one African country to another is quite an experience. We had been advised to bring two Africans along to help us cross the border; they took care of filling out and stamping all the necessary paperwork. It was quite a hassle, as the car had to be cleared for export and then imported again; passports and visas were carefully scrutinized, checked, and double-checked. Naturally, our yellow medical passports were examined too, and we had to answer a barrage of questions. Once everything was finally in order after several hours, we were sent to a counter where a customs officer was fast asleep. He was apparently taking a late and extended siesta. Waiting, waiting, and more waiting.

Grateful for...

Finally, the small window slid open, and the man asked where we were headed. I said, "We're going to visit the Brothers in Accra: Bert Ketelaars and Jos van Dinther." The man perked up, and a broad smile spread across his face. "I went to school with the Brothers," he said. "Oh, so that's why you have such a good job now and turned out to be such a fine customs officer," I replied. "Well... you only have a 14-day visa; I'll quickly change that to two months for you." He stamped everything with large seals, wished us a pleasant journey, and told us not to forget to give the Brothers his regards. At long last, we were able to continue our journey. As we drove past the little office, he stuck his head out of the window and waved goodbye.

We went on to explore Accra with Jos van Dinther and admired his CAS project. VAI had shipped a large quantity of materials in containers to Tema—Ghana's major port city. After a few days, we drove on to Wa. We received a warm welcome there as well and met up with Bro. Arnold Smal. We have wonderful memories of our visit to the Brothers and saw the mountains of work they have accomplished. We are happy that, through VAI, we were able to provide valuable assistance.

Will and I also carried out other projects in Burkina Faso — not for VAI, but for our own foundation, Zod Neere. These included the construction of a large vocational school (the CPAEC in Ouagadougou), a cashew plantation in Léo (in southern Burkina Faso), and four water wells, including ones in Samba and Léo.





*The one for the other,
the other for the one*

Being grateful
for all the opportunities you have
and the talents you have been given
to make something good of your life
and to inspire others.

Grateful that you can enjoy each day,
even when things don't always go your way.
Yet there are moments every day
that lift you above your difficulties
and make you grateful to be alive.





Grateful

News from the Provinces

Chile

On 15 August 2026, Bro. Gé van Vugt marked 65 years as a brother. This was celebrated extensively in Chile, including with a prayer service themed: 'At the end of the journey comes the question: did you live, did you love?'



Ghana

In Ghana, Bro. Emmanuel Naamwinle made his first vows on September 3, while Bros. Callistus Yengdem and Prosper Ganye made their perpetual profession.



Grateful for...

Indonesia

In Indonesia, Bro. Greg Suhadi obtained his doctorate in management.



The Netherlands

On 7 August, the Dutch Province and the General Council welcomed our new Superior General, Bro. Prof. Clement Nangpiire, to Maastricht. He immediately set to work, holding consultations with his fellow brothers on the General Council.



On 6 September, Associate Member Claudia Theinert—formerly a member of the now-disbanded Prins Bisschopssingel community—was formally welcomed into the new Olympiapad community. Claudia said: “It was a truly lovely and warm welcome. That warmth

Grateful for...

touched me deeply; it felt right and good. There are still some practical details to sort out, but I am very happy and grateful to be connected to a community again. Since the closure of the PBS community, I had felt quite alone...”



On 15 August 2026, the jubilees of four brothers were celebrated at De Beyart. Bro. Crispianus Mooren marked 75 years of profession on that day, Bro. Gait Welling 70 years, and Bros. Wim Swüste and Frans Wils 65 years. The jubilarians were warmly celebrated and honoured during the festivities.





Colophon

Oriëntatie FIC is the magazine of the FIC Congregation in the Netherlands.

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The image on page 12 from 'Seven times seven times Mary' is by Bro. François Mes. The translated poem by Hein Stufkens (p. 20) is included here with the author's permission. Johan Muijtjens's blog posts can be found at <https://natuurwijsheid.blogspot.com/>