

Franciscan Mission Associates Mt. Vernon, NY 10551 Missions in Guatemala - Honduras - El Salvador, Central America

Stewardship – Taking care of what we have been given

2025 marks the 800th anniversary of St. Francis' *Canticle of the Creatures*. In this beautiful prayer, Francis praises the Lord for various parts of creation. Sun, moon, stars, water, fire, and earth are all gifts that God has given to humanity for our use.

Stewardship has many facets. Francis praises God for "those who give pardon for your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation." Our relationships are also part of what we have been given to care for. He then praises God for Sister Bodily Death. We are reminded that part of stewardship is to take care of our bodies while we live in them.

Finally, Francis says that we must serve God with great humility. God is the landlord of creation, and He has gifted it to us to care for. During our temporary time on Earth, we are called to steward all creation this is the responsibility of these great gifts.

Lent: Sacrifice and Stewardship in the Spirit of St. Joseph

Lent arrives swiftly each year, inviting us to journey from the dormancy of winter to the renewed life of spring, symbolizing the passage from death to resurrection. It is a season to reflect on Jesus' great sacrifice and to look to St. Joseph, Jesus' earthly father and Mary's husband, as an inspiring model of sacrifice, humility, and stewardship.

During Lent, as we contemplate the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we are called to make small sacrifices, often by giving up something meaningful. In doing so, we join our efforts to Jesus' sacrifice, gaining grace for ourselves and others. St. Joseph, though silent in the Gospels, exemplifies this spirit of self-sacrifice. He dedicated his life to protecting and providing for Mary and Jesus, setting aside his own desires to fulfill God's will. His daily acts of stewardship remind us that humble, unseen sacrifices are deeply valued by God

Lenten sacrifices also serve as а reminder that everything we have is a gift from God. Our skills, resources, and every blessing in life come from Him, who calls us to be good stewards. St. Joseph's life illustrates this perfectlyhe used his hands and strength to serve and protect, fully aware that his talents and blessings were meant for a purpose beyond himself.

Whether we choose to abstain from something or add more time for prayer, good works, or charitable giving, Lent invites us to live as good stewards of the gifts we have received. Inspired by St. Joseph, we can approach this season with a spirit of quiet dedication and service, honoring God through our actions and sacrifices.

This Lent, let us strive to reflect St. Joseph's faithfulness and humility. May our sacrifices, large or small, be an expression of gratitude and stewardship, as we remember that "all is gift."

Donate Online to Help More People in Need

Each day, families in the poorest and most dangerous nations see hope and light because of your donations. When you choose to offer financial support through our secure website, you enable us to provide more help, faster.

Simply visit www.FMA-support.org/ffc or scan the code below to read more about our work and learn how a small

sacrifice from you can make life-changing differences for so many.

We respond personally to every message and donation.









Gold Transparency 2024





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FMA Focus is a member of the Catholic Media Association, Candid, the Nonprofit Alliance, the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Great Nonprofits and Charity Navigator.

Please address all correspondence to Father Robert, OFM, at P.O. Box 598, Mount Vernon, N.Y. 10551. Please send changes of address six weeks in advance; if possible include your mailing label, and give both old and new address.

FREEDOM NEEDS STEWARDSHIP, TOO

Probably the greatest, and the most on what we can do and that no law can difficult, gift that humans have been given is the gift of Free Will. Along with intellect, memory, and imagination, it is a faculty of our soul. We can choose at each moment what we will do, say, and believe. Good choices bring us closer to God and help us to grow in virtue. Poor choices lead us to sin and pull us away from God and from one another.

In free societies, this gift is a staple of a country's operation. It is recognized that the rights to freedom enjoyed by people come from God and cannot be taken away by any government. This is fundamental to a complete understanding of freedom. To be free is at the heart of humanity.

Like all gifts of creation, freedom requires stewardship, too. It must be both used properly and guarded. If not used properly, freedom may become license, where we believe that there are no limits restrict us. If it is not guarded, freedom may slowly slip away and be replaced by authoritarianism. Either extreme is dangerous to us as God's creatures.

True freedom is not simply the absence of restriction. Freedom, as God's gift, is meant to allow us the choice to follow His will. To love anyone, but particularly to love God, must be a free choice. If we desire to love Him, then we must follow the path that He has set out for us. Without freedom, love is not possible. Our freedom to love, and therefore to act with virtue, is an image of God's free choice to love each and every human He has created.

As citizens in a free society, we have not only the right to be free, but also the responsibility to protect and guard one's own freedom and the freedom of others. This is a most precious gift.

Feed the Poor with St. Anthony's Bread

There is a centuries-old practice of making an offering in honor of St. Anthony to feed the poor. These offerings are made either in petition for a favor sought or in thanksgiving for a favor received and are known as St. Anthony's Bread.

You can learn more about this practice and help us feed the poor with St. Anthony's Bread in these ways:

Online by scanning this QR code or visiting our website at www.FMA-support.org/ffc

Email us at admin@franciscanmissionassoc.org

Write to us at Franciscan Mission Associates, PO Box 598, Dept. 2255, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598



We respond personally to every message and donation.

"Come, Be My Light" – the Stewardship of Mother Teresa

When we contemplate stewardship, we must think about taking care of those in greatest need. Few Saints exemplify this better than St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa).

She was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu on August 26, 1910, in Skopje, Albania. Her devout family was aided by the vibrant Jesuit parish of the Sacred Heart. Agnes made her First Holy Communion at age five and her Confirmation at age six. Her father died when she was eight, leaving her family in financial straits.

At 18, she left Albania for Ireland to join the Sisters of Loreto. There, she received the name Sister Mary Teresa. In December of 1929, she

departed for her first trip to India. After professing first vows in 1931, she was assigned to St. Mary's School for girls, where she spent the next 18 years. She showed a capacity for hard work and a natural talent for organization.

In 1946 while on a train ride to Darjeeling, Sister Teresa received a vision of Jesus that revealed the desire of His heart for "victims of love" who would "radiate His love on souls." He begged her, "Come, be My light. I cannot go alone." Jesus was calling Teresa to work with the poorest of the poor.

After two years of prayer and discernment, she received permission to begin. On August 17, 1948, she dressed for the first time in her white sari with blue border and headed into



the streets of Calcutta. She would begin each day with communion and then walk among "the unwanted, the unloved, the uncared for" to find Jesus. After some months, her former students joined her, one by one.

On October 7, 1950, the officially established Pope the Congregation of the Missionaries of Charity. In less than fifteen years, houses to care for the poorest of the poor were opened all over India, and in 1965 Pope Paul VI asked Mother Teresa to open a house in Venezuela. Over the next thirty years, houses would be opened on every continent, and even in almost every Communist country. By the time of her

death in 1997, her sisters numbered nearly 4,000 with 610 foundations in 123 countries. She was canonized as St. Teresa of Calcutta on September 4, 2016.

During nearly 50 years of caring for the poor, Mother Teresa suffered from profound spiritual darkness. Her interior life was marked by a deep sense of separation from God—she even felt rejected by Him—along with an ever-increasing longing for His love. Through this darkness, she mystically participated in the thirst of Jesus for the poor, and thus enjoyed more profound union with Him. She remained a faithful servant of Jesus and steward of his Gospel until her death.

What About Me? Caring for Ourselves

There is an old saying, "You cannot give what you do not have." Whether in the material, physical, or spiritual senses, it is important to keep ourselves in good health.

Material goods are a blessing from God; they make it easier for us to live a life unburdened by the worry of "having enough." These goods need to be used well, first and foremost for our families and loved ones, and then for other causes. After taking care of our family, we must think about charity. St. Paul says to give only what you can, not more and not less. Giving from the heart is what is important, not the size of the gift.

Physical stewardship is important, too. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and must be respected. We should not be frivolous with our health. Maintaining a routine of nutritious meals and regular exercise, if we are able, will help us keep healthy. Avoiding bad habits and overindulgence is important, too, as these things can do serious damage to the body.

Of equal if not greater importance is the soul. Yet, it is this stewardship that so many forget about. Spiritual strength keeps us humble and holy, and it gives us the ability to help others who are struggling. Daily prayer, reading the Scriptures, attending Mass on Sunday, and regular confession are the backbone of a healthy spiritual life. We make time for so many things in our lives—we must also make time for the most important relationship of all.

There is a difference between being selfish and exercising self-care. If we only think of ourselves and what is good for us, we are selfish. If I take a little time to care for myself—materially, physically, and spiritually—I can then serve as Jesus did and be a steward of others.

We only have one life to live; through good stewardship, we can make it count.



STEWARDSHIP OF THE SOUL

"Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of Mine, you did it for Me." (Matthew 25:40)

taking good care of our bodies is an important part of the stewardship that God calls us to. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and we should do all we can to avoid harming them. Good nutrition, exercise, and avoiding bad habits are among the ways to do so.

But we are much more than our bodies. God has infused into each one of us a rational soul that contains our intellect, our will, and our memory. We think, we choose, and we remember by means of our soul. Through our soul, we can have a spiritual connection with God, for God is Spirit, as are our souls.

Maintaining good spiritual health is critical to the responsibility of stewardship. When our earthly life is over, our souls will pass on from this world to the next. It is based on the state of our souls that we will either enjoy eternal reward or endure eternal punishment. This need not be frightening if we practice good care of our spiritual selves.

There are several ways in which we

As we've said elsewhere in this issue, remain in good relationship with God. First and foremost is prayer. Communication is necessary to maintain any relationship. Talking to God and listening for His voice will keep us on the right path.

> Next in the stewardship of one's soul is the Sacraments. These special signs of God's love are offered to us as sources of grace. They draw us into the very life of God. We can receive Eucharist and Reconciliation often, and going to Mass and confession regularly keeps our souls healthy.

> Good works are also important because they enable us to see Christ in one another—even in those with whom we disagree. In Matthew's Gospel (Chapter 25), Jesus tells us that helping others is equivalent to helping Him. We may be able to help physically, or if not, then through prayer. Whatever we can do, it is beneficial not only to the other, but to ourselves.

> Next time you hear the phrase, "Take good care of yourself," remember to apply that sentiment to both body and soul.



Website and Social Media

Learn more about the Franciscan Mission Associates by visiting us online: https://franciscanmissionassoc.org/ Or follow us on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/franciscanmissionassoc/

Director's Letter

Fr. Robert, OFM FRANCISCAN FRIARS/P.O. BOX 598 MOUNT VERNON, NY 10551-0598 TEL: 914 664-5604



Dear Friends,

In this Jubilee Year of 2025, which Pope Francis has dedicated to "Pilgrims of Hope," we also celebrate the 800th anniversary of Saint Francis' *Canticle of the Creatures*, a poetic prayer that praises God the creator of everything and expresses respect for creation. Francis recognized the presence of God in all of creation, and he attempted to make his life and the lives of his followers one continuous song of praise to God for all the many gifts He has given us.

When we praise God, a large part of what we praise is His Creation. He has given us the world and all its wonders to use, but also to take care of. We call this **stewardship**, and that is the theme of this edition of *FMA Focus*.

Caring for what God has given us is essential to following His message.

Taking care of the Earth certainly falls under the umbrella of stewardship. But there is so much more to it. Caring for one another, caring for our own souls so that we might spend an eternity with God, and caring for our physical health are all parts of what it means to be good stewards.

We are preparing to celebrate the great liturgical season of Lent. Typically during this time, Christians make sacrifices by "giving up" or "doing extra" to grow in relationship to God and to do penance for their failings. As we think about things we might sacrifice, perhaps we can keep our eyes on all aspects of stewardship. This Lent may be used as an opportunity, in our words and our actions, to praise God for all He has provided us.

May God bless you.

FR. Robert, of

Fr. Robert, OFM

Stewardship of Others – Fr. Jack's Story

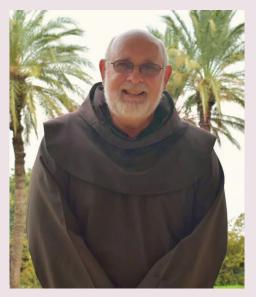
On September 7, 2024, the friars of the Immaculate Conception Province and the community of Agape of El Salvador suffered a great loss. God called Fr. Jack, OFM to Himself at the age of 76. Fr. Jack had suffered for a great deal of time with illness, but it never dampened his spirit.

One of the ways that we become stewards of God's gifts is by taking care of one another. That certainly applied to Fr. Jack, who served in Central America, closer to home, and in the US Navy.

As a young man fresh out of Serra Catholic High School in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, Jack felt a calling to the Franciscan life. He entered the formation program in Troy, NY, at the age of eighteen, in 1966. He moved on to the novitiate in 1967, professed first vows the following year, and made his solemn profession in 1974. Jack studied theology at the *Instituto Teologica Salesiano* in Guatemala City, Guatemala, and was ordained a priest on November 13, 1975.

For the next seven years, he had several assignments in the missions of Central America. He returned to the United States in 1982 to minister in parishes staffed by our friars, including in Pittsburgh, Brooklyn, Troy, and Meriden. He served as pastor at St. Pamphilus Church in Pittsburgh and St. Rose of Lima in Meriden, Connecticut.

Parish work was not all that Fr. Jack did. He also served several tours of duty as a chaplain in the US Navy and



Navy Reserve, attaining the rank of Commander. His last assignment took him back to Central America, where he was the Assistant Director and later the Director of Agape, our mission in El Salvador.

Whether he was performing pastoral duties caring for the physical needs of children and the elderly, counseling a young sailor, or doing the administrative work of a pastor, Fr. Jack always had others on his mind and in his heart.

May God bring him eternal peace.



When God Is the Steward by Brother Kevin, OFM





Brother Kevin's story began in the capital of Guatemala, where he was born in 1991, the second child of Jacinto and Ana Maria, with an older sister named Vivian Roxana.

Their household was not religious, and at a young age, his parents separated. His family was broken and poor, his mother working almost constantly just to make ends meet. His maternal grandparents provided a roof over their heads, but they were not in good health. With his mother gone so much, Kevin learned to be independent from an early age. The family's poverty led to a great deal of humiliation, as other children mocked their lack of resources. Still, Kevin's tenacity and desire for a better life earned him scholarships so that he could complete his studies.

The only Catholic in the household was Kevin's maternal grandmother, and thanks to her, he was baptized at the age of seven and went on to receive First Holy Communion and Confirmation. But he had no real interest in Church and his view of God was of a Father who had abandoned him, like his own father. This caused anger, fear, resentment, and the feeling that he had no one to support him.

Kevin's life contained not only a lack of economic stability, but also of emotional stability. To compensate, he went from one meaningless relationship to another, never truly being faithful to one woman. But God had plans for Kevin, and he fell deeply for a girl who was involved in the Franciscan Youth Group. If he wanted to get to know her, he would have to attend.

As happens so often, the Lord used Kevin's time in the group to draw Kevin into a deeper relationship with Him. By the time the girl who had captured his attention left to study, Kevin no longer wanted to be part of the group only for her. Even though some people there were suspicious of his past, he was growing into a Franciscan way of life. He was soon chosen as the coordinator of the group, and eventually felt the call to religious life as a friar. Because of his lack of material blessings, Kevin adapted easily to that part of Franciscan life. However, his family was confused, since they had never been religious. They did not reject his choice, though, and instead used the opportunity to learn about God and the Church.

At the age of 31, Kevin professed first vows in the Immaculate Conception Province

of the Franciscans. He recognizes that God has been the steward of his life all along, and that every experience he has had led him to where he is. His journey with the Franciscans will continue, and he is a reminder to us that, despite what we may think, God is the one who is ultimately guiding our path.



Vocations

The young men in our formation program continue to discern God's call to follow the way of St. Francis. They are eager to dedicate themselves to God and the good of His people.

Many other men and women who are discerning the call to religious life need only the special courage to hear God's call and to answer Him.

Your prayers and donations help them in their process of listening to God's call, the important first step in ensuring that there are devoted priests, brothers, and sisters to do Christ's work in today's world and tomorrow's.

To encourage and support Vocations, you can:

Donate online at: www.FMA-support.org/ffc Call us: 914-664-5604 Write to us at: admin@franciscanmissionassoc.org or Franciscan Mission Associates PO Box 598, Dept. 2253 Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598



We respond personally to every message and donation.



Let us protect with love all that God has given us!

Pope Francis

Pastors can lead the way in motivating the faithful to wise stewardshipof their citizenship responsibilities.Edwin Meese

For everything is from You, and we only give You what we have received from You.

1 Chronicles 29:14-16

Stewardship of our air and water is a responsibility that should be free of the bias of politics. Luther Strange

As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that greater peace is in your hearts.

St. Francis of Assisi

Effective stewardship of the public finances has to be at the heart of everything we do. Liz Kendall

For if eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what he does not have.

2 Corinthians 8:12

Good stewardship of the environment and our natural resources is necessary. Cindy Hyde-Smith

Life is not given to us to be jealously guarded for ourselves, but is given to us so that we may give it in turn. Pope Francis

Our Readers Gladly Write...

Dear Father Robert, FOCUS is very valuable as a reading tool to spread the Good News. I share your publication with others, and I believe that others share theirs also. G.K., Bronx, NY

Dear Father Robert, I found the articles in the September *FOCUS* to be very helpful and informative. They have helped me to look at my life and see where I need to grow stronger in my love for God and for others. Thank you for this gift. *D.G., Columbia, MD*

Father Robert,

I am always so happy to receive mail from you. The prayer cards and booklets help not only me, but those I love. They help me to pray more fervently and to keep my mind focused on what I am praying for. Thank you. *D.K., Austin, TX*

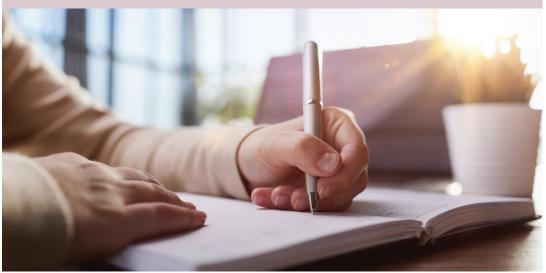
Dear Father,

I am so grateful for the prayer material to St. Anthony and St. Jude. Over the past few months, I have needed their help a great deal because of some issues that I and my family were going through. Both saints came through for us, and I am thankful to have had those prayers available for us to use. God bless you and the work of the friars.

C.S., Ames, IA

Dear Fr. Robert,

I so enjoy the articles in your FOCUS magazine. This edition has helped me to become stronger in my faith and confident that God will help me to overcome all difficulties. Thank you for continuing to give me this encouragement. I look forward to the next issue. S.M., Daytona Beach, FL



You Can Continue To Be a Steward

Franciscan Mission Associates (FMA) is grateful for every donation we receive, large or small. It is not the size of the gift that matters, it is the heart with which it is given. We marvel at the generosity of all our donors. There is no way we could continue our mission without you.

As we focus this month on stewardship, we also reflect on an important fact: you can continue being a good steward even after God calls you home. Legacy Giving is a magnificent way to continue to make a difference. It ensures that your charity and care for those who are most in need will continue long after your earthly journey ends.

A gift made to FMA in your memory will continue to feed children, house the

homeless, teach skills to young people, and care for the elderly. It also allows us to continue to help our men in formation and our older friars. Jesus says if we give, we will receive back thirty, sixty, or onehundred fold. With even a small legacy gift, you can help so many people.



Join the FMA Legacy Society

When you make a legacy gift to FMA, you will join other donors whose legacy gifts help sustain our ministries and missions and transform lives.

To learn more about the Legacy Society and the difference your legacy gift can make for people in need, please contact us:

Franciscan Mission Associates PO Box 598, Dept. 2252 Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598 914-664-5604 leavealegacy@franciscanmissionassoc.org

"Legacy Giving allows the Franciscan Friars to carry forward the mission of St. Francis, touching lives with compassion and faith. Your generosity ensures that our work in education, healthcare, and spiritual care continues to grow. Together, we create lasting change for future generations in need."

- Fr. Robert, OFM

There Is Wonder in All Created Things

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom You give us light. (St. Francis of Assisi, from Canticle of the Creatures)

Have you ever stood back and marveled at a sunset? Or a sunrise? Have you appreciated the beauty of a bed of flowers? Or the smell of pine trees? Have you laughed at a funny thing that your pet has done? The psalms say, "the Lord delights in His creatures." He gives them to us to delight in, as well.

In the Book of Genesis, God tells our first parents to "fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and all the living things on the earth." What a gift-and what a responsibility! All of creation is given to us for our use; and it is also given to us to care for. As creation reflects the beauty of God, humanity must work to maintain its beauty. We must be stewards of what God has given.

Taking care of the Earth first means that we must be aware of things that can harm it. Modern technology has brought us many conveniences; however, we must be careful that these advances do not damage the environment. We are called to use the earth, not to abuse it.

Among the things that we must be aware of are the water, the air, and the land. Pollution hurts not only our natural resources, but ourselves as well. Dirty air and water and misuse of the land can damage human health as well as all creatures. Stewardship calls us to care for the earth, and in doing so, to care for ourselves.

In recent years, humans have discovered ways to care more earnestly for the environment. Cleaner-burning fuels, new methods of waste disposal, and other such innovations are helping us to preserve the beauty and the usefulness of creation. While creation is no doubt ours to enjoy and to use, it is our responsibility to be good stewards of it so that future generations may have the same opportunities that we have to live long and healthy lives in a world that is as beautiful as God created it.

Remembrance on Your Birthday

Father Robert includes a special remembrance for all Franciscan Mission Associates and their benefactors on their birthday if he knows when it is. To be remembered in his Mass on your birthday, please let us know.

Email us: admin@franciscanmissionassoc.org, call us: 914-664-5604 or mail us this completed form:

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My birthday is (Month, Day, Year)	
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My address is _____

City_

_____ State _____ Zip ___

Send to: Franciscan Mission Associates PO Box 598, Dept. 2254, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598



St. Francis of Assisi 800th Jubilee Pilgrimage April 14-23, 2026 Departing from New York-JFK

Honor the 800th anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi's passing by joining us for a specially curated pilgrimage across Italy in 2026.

The Journey

Through this special journey, we will connect with God's creation and the call to stewardship that defined St. Francis' life. We will trace his life through the **Umbrian countryside** to **Assisi** and other sites central to his mission:

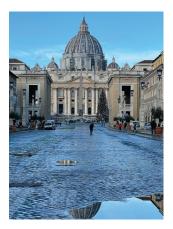
- Greccio, where St. Francis established the first Nativity scene;
- the tranquil **Carceri caves**, where he found solitude among the forests of Umbria;
- La Verna, where he received the stigmata;
- historic churches to celebrate Mass, including the **Basilica of St. Francis**, which holds the tomb of the saint; and
- a final stop in **Rome** with a chance to attend Pope Francis' weekly audience at St. Peter's Square and Mass at San Francesco a Ripa.

This pilgrimage is a unique invitation to connect with St. Francis and reflect on our shared responsibility for the earth and its preservation for future generations.

Reserve Your Place

A special discount is available for those who book before March 3, 2025. The price of USD \$5,999 covers all ten days of essential travel and accommodation.

For more information and to reserve your place, call 914.664.5604 or visit franciscanmissionassoc.org/800jubilee.



Special Novena Schedule Lent – Easter 2025

All year-round Franciscan Mission Associates conducts a regular schedule of spiritual and devotional exercises in which all benefactors are invited to take part. During the coming months the Special Novena schedule is:

March 5–April 13	Lenten Masses (40)
April 8–16	
April 15–June 10	
April 20–28	In Thanksgiving for the Risen Christ
May 1–9 and May 10–18	Feast of St. Peregrine (May 1)
May7–15 and May 16–24	Feast of St. Dymphna (May 15)
May 29–June 6 and June 7–15	Holy Spirit Novena
June 5–13 and June 13–21	Feast of St. Anthony (June 13)
June 19–27	Feast of Sacred Heart

Holy Mass is offered each day for all Franciscan Mission Associates benefactors and for the special intentions they request. Kindly forward your petitions for the Novenas scheduled to:

Fr. Robert, OFM at Franciscan Mission Associates P.O. Box 598, Dept. 2251, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598

FIND NEW RESOURCES AT www.FranciscanMissionAssoc.org



We've refreshed our look and our website. Visit us online for:

- Information about the impact of your support
- Spiritual resources including a Calendar of Masses and Novenas
- Ongoing updates about our missions and brothers
- **Religious gifts** available in a new online shop