

FMA FOCUS

FEB 2026 | VOL 59 NO 2

Franciscan Mission Associates
Mt. Vernon, NY 10551

Missions in Guatemala - Honduras - El Salvador, Central America

Virtue: Surrender

This year marks the 800th anniversary of the death of our dear Saint Francis. For each of us, death is an inevitable reality. In the Canticle of the Creatures, Saint Francis praises God for “our Sister, bodily death, from whom no human can escape.”

Francis’ life was, relatively speaking, rather short. He died in 1226, at the age of 44. But what he accomplished in that short period of time is absolutely amazing. How was he able to do it?

As a young man, Francis desired glory—he wanted to be a knight and a warrior. He wanted to leave a legacy of bravery and to be remembered as a conqueror of others. He even served in a war



between Assisi and the neighboring town of Perugia. In it, Francis was wounded and captured, spending a year or so in captivity.

When he returned to Assisi, his desire for fame was still strong—until the Lord touched him. God showed Francis that earthly fame is unimportant and heavenly fame carries on forever. As Francis

Weekly Reflections

Every Sunday, we offer a spiritual reflection to help frame your week. To see these, follow us on Facebook or bookmark our Weekly Reflections web page.



pondered God's message, the answer came to him only slowly: the answer was surrender. Francis realized that he needed to surrender his own will, his desires, his loves, and even his tribulations, to the God who had called him. Only then would he be able to fulfill God's Will.

In this edition of *FMA Focus*, and in

our Weekly Reflections throughout the year, we will fill in some of the details of Francis' experiences. As you read them, think about what God might be asking you to surrender to Him. Only when we let go of ourselves are we truly free. Francis came to find that out, and so can we. ■

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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:

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"Through Legacy Giving, you help the Franciscan Friars advance the mission of St. Francis. You make it possible to feed the hungry, care for the sick, and spread the Good News. Because of you, lives are changed and hope takes root for generations to come."

-Fr. Patrick, OFM



FMA Focus, the official newsletter of Franciscan Mission Associates, is published in February and September.

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 Patrick, 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.



Surrender Is Not Capitulation

In recent years, the politics of countries throughout the world seem to be increasingly polarized. We give labels to people, brand them as “left” or “right,” and often forget that behind those labels there are real people, made in the image of God. For those of us who are not involved in government, it can be easy to sneer at politicians who can’t seem to act in unity and get things done. We may despair that the principles we elected them for seem to take a back seat to stubbornness or arrogance as they “dig in” to a specific position.

If we examine ourselves carefully, however, we might not be so quick to judge others. We can often be just as stubborn and unbending about things as those whom we criticize. Each of us has our own views on issues, whether political, religious, or social. Some issues affect a whole country, state, or local community; some may affect just our own family. Often, our views are tightly held and may be in direct contradiction with the beliefs of others who are close to us. Sometimes, this leads to breaking off relationships with others, even family.

Though their positions on issues may not match ours, it is against God’s Will

to name-call or to treat a person as less than human because they seem different from us. But “surrender” does not mean giving up on our own convictions.

It is important in situations of discord to ask that very popular question, What would Jesus do? First, He would listen. Our opinions are borne of our experiences and we must give credence to each person’s lived reality. Next, Jesus would then explain His position. Jesus never forced His opinions on anyone. Whether the other person came over to His view or not, He would treat them with dignity and respect. He preserved each person’s dignity by surrendering the fact that He was God and therefore knew He was right.

We humans do not have the same assurance that everything we believe is correct. To surrender our judgment of another person does not mean that we capitulate our principles or values. In fact, it has the very opposite effect. Treating others with dignity and respect leaves the door open for continued dialogue that will help us understand each other more deeply and hopefully come to the truth. ■

Keep in touch daily

Nearly every day, we post new spiritual resources and updates to our Facebook page. We invite you to follow us there:



St. Francis' First Surrender— Material Goods

It surprises many to know that St. Francis was born to a wealthy family of textile merchants, and in his early life he was quite indulgent and arrogant. He liked the “good life” and, according to his biographer Thomas of Celano, spent his time in “curiosity, practical jokes and foolish talk, songs, and soft and flowing garments.” Francis did not hoard money; rather, he freely spent what he had on himself and his friends. Many of them followed him because of this. While he was kind, he squandered much of what his family had.

The beginning of Francis’ conversion occurred during his recuperation from an illness he suffered after he had been held as a prisoner of war for a year. His healing took a great deal of time, and during this period he began to mull things over. His thoughts strayed to topics of spirituality that he had not spent time pondering before.

An indirect path to spirituality

As his spiritual side grew, the things that used to delight Francis no longer did. In fact, they repulsed him. Still, his conversion was neither full nor immediate. He tried to avoid God’s grasp, turning again to worldly matters. He vowed to do good deeds as a knight would—seeking glory.



Francis agreed to go to the town of Apulia with a nobleman from Assisi. One night, he had a vision of his house filled not with the cloth his family sold, but with military weapons. At first, he took this as confirmation of his plan to do great things. Later, however, he came to interpret those weapons as the spiritual goods he would need to do God’s Will.

Francis turned to prayer, often in caves and deserted places. As he grew in holiness, he did not reveal his transformation to anyone. Even to his closest friend, he spoke only

symbolically of a great treasure—a pearl of great price he said he had discovered.

Finally convinced that this was a Divine call, Francis began to preach publicly in his hometown of Assisi. When asked, he stated that he would take a “wife of great wisdom.” This “wife” would turn out to be poverty.

Committing to poverty

Francis took cloth from his father’s business and went to Foligno, where he sold everything he had, including his horse. He wanted to help the poor but was so eager to get rid of the money that he tried to give it to a poor priest who refused it, but ultimately allowed Francis to stay with him.

Francis’ father was furious. He chased

after his son, who hid for a month in a cave. When Francis came out, his father beat and imprisoned him. His mother eventually freed him, but this made his father more furious than ever. He chased Francis down and, unable to dissuade him from his new life, demanded the money from the cloth. The priest had left it on the windowsill where Francis had thrown it, and it was returned to Francis’ father.

In a complete surrender, Francis stripped naked and returned even the clothes he was wearing to his father. The bishop knew then that Francis was sincere and placed his own mantle on him. Francis’ surrender of material goods and his dedication to poverty had begun. ■

Lifelong Surrender— News From IC Province

Four brothers have taken vows and are ordained deacons

The road to becoming a Franciscan Friar is long and considered. Once a man is accepted as a candidate, he spends many years in formation before taking the lifelong commitment of final vows. One must first become a postulant, then a novice, then a temporary professed brother. With each step, one must exercise an element of surrender as each man gives a little more of his life to God and to the community. At any point along the way, the man or the Franciscan community may discern



that this is not the vocation he is being called to.

For those who persevere in the Franciscan vocation, the day comes when they profess final vows. This

solemn ceremony binds each man to the Franciscan way of life for as long as they live. It is a great moment of surrender as one pledges to live in poverty, chastity, and obedience for the rest of their life.

On Monday, September 29, 2025—the Feast of the Archangels—four brothers of the Immaculate Conception Province made this ultimate surrender. Brothers Daniel, Luis Antonio, Oscar, and Kevin Gabriel professed their Solemn Vows before God, the Church and the community. They were received by Fr. Patrick, OFM, our Provincial Minister, in the presence of family, friends, and other Franciscans.

Six days later, on October 5, 2025, these four men were then ordained deacons in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. During the ordination Mass, a Franciscan Cardinal, His Eminence Mauro Cardinal Gambetti, OFM Conv, placed his hands on the head of each man, forever changing them.

You see, as Catholics, we believe that when a man is ordained, an indelible character is placed on his soul, marking him forever as a minister of the Gospel. The diaconate is the first degree of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, to be followed by the priesthood.



Each of these men has been assigned to serve in a parish within our Province during their period of diaconal ministry. They will assist at the altar, proclaim the Gospel, preach homilies, baptize, witness marriages, and serve the poor and needy. They will live and experience pastoral ministry among real communities. This is a time not only of service, but of deepening their vocation. Each day, they are called to surrender themselves increasingly to the will of God and the service of His people.

You, dear friends of Franciscan Mission Associates (FMA), have walked this journey with Brothers Daniel, Luis Antonio, Oscar, and Kevin Gabriel. Your prayers, encouragement, and financial support have made this moment possible for each of them. You are part of their story, and of the greater mission of the Franciscan Province of the Immaculate Conception. God bless you for your generosity. ■

Support Franciscan Students

St. Anthony's Burse is a fund that supports the training and formation of new Franciscan Friars. Support our brothers as they pursue their vocations.



Director's Letter

Fr. Patrick, OFM

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Dear Friends,

As I reflect on what has happened in the past year, I am truly reminded of the virtue of surrender. When we begin our life's vocation, be it married life, religious life, priesthood, or single life, we generally have a plan as to how we would like it to develop. But, as is often said, "man plans, and God laughs."

When I began my life as a Franciscan Friar, I planned to do the work that our province does: parish ministry, a time in the missions, and taking care of those in need. I never dreamed that a great part of my religious life would be spent in administration. But this was the plan God had for me, and I have needed to practice surrender to achieve it.

Surrender to God may be the most challenging virtue to practice, since we humans always want to be in control. Admitting that we aren't in control is difficult. However, when we turn things over to the Great Planner and do our best to follow His plan, true joy does come our way.

As we prepare to enter Lent, I encourage each of you to pray for the gift of surrender. Whatever sacrifices and penances you perform during this graced time, let them be a prayer that the Lord may grant the gift of surrender. God's plan may be quite a detour from our own expectations, but given that He is all-knowing, His plan will surely be more rewarding than what our own limited experience can imagine.

May God bless you and your family this Lenten season,

Fr. Patrick, OFM

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We Can All Be Part of Selvin's Dream: Mission Update From Fr. Joaquin, OFM



Selvin is a twelve-year-old boy who lives at Valley of the Angels orphanage, our mission school in Guatemala. As the oldest of three children, Selvin came to Valley because there is no one to look after him and his siblings at home. His father abandoned the family when Selvin was five years old, so his mother has to work a lot to support the family.

"At Valley, there are opportunities here," Selvin says.

Fr. Joaquin, OFM, says that from Selvin's first day at Valley, "He has shown good spirit, intelligence, and perseverance. He likes playing soccer and baseball and he is talented at drawing. He also loves the saints, especially St. Jude Thaddeus."

When Selvin imagines his future, he dreams of buying his family a nice house and lifting them out of poverty. "Valley has been a true home for me, where I'm cared for and nourished," he says. "It's a refuge where I feel safe. When I grow up and can, I'd like to give back what they've given me."

Forever family

Fr. Joaquin explains that soon, Selvin must

leave Valley because the school's programs for boys end with Grade 6. "Still, we find ways to support young men like Selvin to pursue their dreams," Fr. Joaquin says. "They remain part of the Valley of the Angels family, and we continue to offer them friendship, guidance, and spiritual support."

Educating boys out of poverty

With the help of generous donors, we also strive to provide some of these boys with the financial support needed to complete their technical educations at other institutions, such as San José Technical School. To do this, they need learning materials, food, and housing during their time in the school, which is in the city.

"We can all be part of Selvin's dream," says Fr. Joaquin. Just a few dollars a day helps us ensure that promising young people in our Central America missions have a fighting chance to escape poverty, pursue productive careers, and raise up their families and communities—all under the loving and watchful eyes of God. ■



St. Francis' Second Surrender—Self-Will

St. Francis' renunciation of worldly goods was a major milestone in his life. Poverty would become his hallmark, and indeed the hallmark of the whole Franciscan Order. Freed from worldly concerns, Francis could concentrate more fully on developing his spiritual life. He took to heart the words of Jesus to "deny oneself, take up your cross and follow Me." This meant conquering his self-will, a difficult but necessary thing for any Christian to do.

Letting go of fear and judgment

One way that Francis conquered his self-will can be seen in his treatment of lepers. Before his conversion, he used to hold his nose when he came upon a leper—even when he came near their house. But, after the Lord visited him, when Francis came upon a leper, he approached and kissed him. From that point on, he spent a great deal of time helping lepers and even washed their sores.

Even during his early, worldly life, Francis was compassionate to others in need. One time, however, he uncharacteristically reprimanded a poor man for begging for alms. He soon regretted it and determined always to give a poor person help if he could.

Initially after his surrender of material goods, Francis wore the habit of a hermit—a walking stick, sandals, and a leather belt. After hearing in the Gospel Jesus' command to "take nothing with you for the journey," he abandoned the walking stick, shoes, and belt and clothed himself in a simple tunic with a cord for a belt.

Rebuilding the Church

Early in his new life, Francis asked the Lord what he should do and the Lord answered, "Rebuild My Church." In obedience to God's Will, Francis took this literally and begged for money and materials to rebuild three churches in the Assisi area that were in terrible disrepair. Later, he came to understand that God wasn't speaking of physical buildings, but of the Church herself, which had been deeply affected by worldliness and corruption.

Eventually, other men saw the humility and surrender that Francis exhibited and were drawn to join him in his work. Six brothers joined him originally, and Francis cared for them, diligently instructed them, and called them his "little flock."

Francis always regretted the sins he had committed in his early life. One day while in prayer, he experienced a sweetness and joy that led him to know that the debt for his sin had been paid. He needed to surrender even his sinfulness to God to be ready for his mission.

Francis sent the brothers out in pairs to preach, but after a short time they came back together. More men joined them in their work, and Francis soon wrote a rule of life for them. This rule required the surrender of self-will on the part of each of the brothers, just as they had witnessed in Francis. ■

Diaconate in New York

By Br. Daniel, OFM



It is a great joy to greet you, dear friends and benefactors of FMA! I am happy to share with you that a month ago I was ordained a deacon in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. It was a moment of grace and a manifestation of God's faithfulness toward me—a very profound moment in which the words of Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, who ordained us, were truly comforting and spiritually uplifting.

By God's grace, I have been assigned to Saint Anthony of Padua Parish in NYC, where I am currently serving as a deacon. This experience has allowed me to live out the diaconate in the various dimensions in which deacons in our Catholic Church serve:

- **Service in the Liturgy:** Each day I assist at the Masses we celebrate as a parish, proclaiming the Gospel and carrying out the parts of the Mass entrusted to deacons—inviting the assembly to offer the sign of peace and giving the dismissal.
- **Service of the Word:** One of the ministries I am carrying out is preaching at Masses, where direct

contact with the Gospel strengthens my own faith, and I hope it may likewise be a source of strength for the community I am serving.

- **Service of Charity:** In this area, I have had the opportunity to join the "Joy Initiative," an apostolate of our parish that helps those in need and the homeless with food, hygiene products, and other essentials. Going out into the streets to meet our brothers and sisters in need has been truly encouraging for my faith and vocation.

Dear benefactors, your support during my formation in Rome was truly invaluable, and I always pray for each one of you. I also ask that you keep me in your prayers during this time.

Blessings.





Words to Live By

Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you.

1 Peter 5:7

I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day.

Abraham Lincoln

Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

James 4:7

In another sense, it is not trying that is ever going to bring us home. All this trying leads up to the vital moment at which you turn to God and say, "You must do this. I can't."

C.S. Lewis

Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will act.

Psalms 37:5

One does not surrender a life in an instant. That which is lifelong can only be surrendered in a lifetime.

Elisabeth Elliot

Be still and know that I am God.

Psalms 46:10

We are at our most powerful the moment we no longer need to be powerful!

Eric Michael Leventhal

My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:9

The greatness of a man's power is the measure of his surrender.

William Booth

Our Readers Gladly Write...

Dear Fr. Robert,
First of all, thank you for the “thank you” phone call a few days ago. Enclosed now are two more donations for St. Anthony’s bread in appreciation for favors received. I am keeping St. Anthony working overtime. Many thanks.
J.S., Port Ewen, NY

Dear Father,
Our son had a knee replacement a few years ago. He got a sepsis infection in his knee and we rushed him to the hospital 90 miles away. They had to take out a metal appliance. While we were waiting, a priest came into the room to bless him. He stayed with us for a time, and when he left, he gave us a prayer guide, “Dedicating the week to St. Anthony of Padua.” We prayed it over our son, and I believe that St. Anthony answered our prayers. It took many weeks for the antibiotic infusions to work so that he could have the knee replaced. I have used this booklet daily since then and it is quite worn. May I ask you to send me a replacement? Thank you.
P.K., South Dakota

Dear Fr. Robert,
I write to congratulate you on 30

years as Director of FMA. You have maintained a steady course for the entire organization and everyone in it. I can tell from your writing that you are a good leader, and Fr. Patrick will have big shoes to fill, but thanks to you, they are comfortable shoes to step into. I often wonder what the lives of those you serve would be like without you and the Franciscan Mission Associates. Your work has, no doubt, yielded great fruit. May God bless you all ways, all days.

M.M., Shrewsbury, MA

Dear Fr. Patrick,
It was nice to hear from you by mail recently. You are in my prayers, along with Fr. Robert and all the Brothers and Priests. Fr. Robert has become a beloved good friend through our correspondence over the last several years, and I hope that I will be able to say the same for you. Welcome to FMA. I hope that your experience is a wonderful one. The world appreciates all the good work that the Franciscan Order does throughout the world. God has truly blessed you with so much good. I wish you a Happy Thanksgiving, a blessed Christmas, and a joyous New Year.
G.K., Fort Wayne, IN



Work and Pray

There is an old saying among the spiritual: “Work as if everything depends on you and pray as if everything depends on God.” To live this way helps us to put the virtue of surrender into action.

Planning is an important part of human life. We cannot simply wander through life without giving any thought to what the future holds. Young people must choose schools and careers. Couples must consider where to live and when to have children. Older people may focus on how to deal with retirement and their later life. Planning these things guides us in figuring out the steps we must take to achieve our goals.

As humans attempting to be faithful to God, we know that our plans are often interrupted or may even fall apart due to circumstances beyond our control. This brings the second part of the saying into focus, and why it is important for us to have an ongoing dialogue with God. A life of prayer provides the solution to the twists and turns that come our way. If we are speaking with and listening to God on a regular basis, it will be much easier to hear His voice directing us. When we try to force our own will on Him, we cannot hear Him.

Persistence in prayer is important as well.

The answers may not come immediately—we must remember that God doesn’t work on our timeline. The plan that He has for us may be revealed slowly. We must remember that His plan will always, in the end, make sense, even if we are unable to see it now. Through prayer, we can come to trust in His plan and surrender to carrying out that plan. It may be difficult to do, and it is impossible to do on our own, but when we surrender our will, we find that the help we need to face life’s challenges is always there. This pattern is clear when we look at the lives of the saints and of holy people we personally know.

Even someone who is not used to having a personal relationship with God or with Jesus—someone without a strong prayer life—can begin. There is no better time to form or strengthen a relationship with our Lord than the present. Speak to God as your Father. Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern what He wants, and for the courage and perseverance to do it. When you hear His voice directing you, trust that you can follow what He is asking.

This is the virtue of surrender. We may fail sometimes, but the more we practice, the easier it becomes. Even the saints had to work at it. ■

Birthday remembrance

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How Do I Surrender?



In this issue, we have explored that surrender is an integral part of being a disciple of Jesus. We have also seen the surrender of St. Francis and of some of the friars of the Immaculate Conception Province, who are striving to give themselves in service to the Church. But how does one go about surrendering? Is there a special formula to be used? Perfect words to be said? Some magic potion we can take to have the experience of surrender?

The question of how to surrender has been around as long as there have been people. Whenever someone recognizes that there is a power greater than themselves Who has a plan for them, they try to surrender themselves to that plan. Yet for as long as people have attempted to do this, they have discovered that it is not easy!

The first step to surrender is discerning exactly what the Lord is asking of us. This is possible only through prayer. Without a personal relationship with our God, enhanced by our communication, we cannot know what the plan for our life is. If we listen carefully to the Lord, the right path will be revealed to our hearts and souls. What is asked of us may be difficult, such as changing location or job, standing up for a moral principle that may cause division, or even accepting physical suffering—but surrender requires that we trust God's plan once we have discerned it.

We can picture trust as being like a child standing on the edge of the pool with a parent encouraging them to jump into their arms. The child feels a great deal of fear, but when they finally jump and are caught, they feel great joy. Trusting God is not easy. As humans, we sometimes have trouble trusting people we can see, let alone trusting a God whom we can't see. Spiritual trust may take time. Often, we try to "convince" God to change the plan so that it fits what feels safe to us. Even Jesus did this in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He pleaded with the Father that there be another way for humanity to be saved than by His crucifixion.

This leads us to the last step: resignation. Resignation may have a negative connotation—when we resign ourselves to things, we often do so grudgingly. "If I have to, I will," is how we sometimes feel. In the spiritual sense, however, resignation means deciding to do what God asks because we accept that His plan is better than our own. After Jesus asked for an alternate way to fulfill His mission, He said, "but not My will, but Yours be done."

These two steps are essential if we are to practice the virtue of surrender in our lives. They are not easy, but with God's help, they are possible. ■

Everyday Guidance

On our website, we offer practical guidance for living by the teachings of Jesus Christ and the guidance of the saints and other holy persons in our daily lives:



St. Francis' Third Surrender— His Final Years

As the Franciscan Order grew, so did Francis' holiness. It would be impossible to list all his experiences here, but a few can be mentioned.

Francis went to Rome with the Rule he had written for his brothers, and it was approved by Pope Innocent III. The cornerstones of the Franciscan rule were poverty and simplicity, and the friars lived in humble circumstances.

Francis was given great supernatural abilities, including visions of the future, an insight into souls, and a style of preaching that converted many.

Along with St. Clare, who followed him, they established the "Poor Ladies," an order of nuns which would become the Poor Clares, who live a life of prayer and still exist today.

He traveled to Damietta, Egypt, was captured and beaten, but ultimately was received kindly by the Sultan of the Saracens. Though he did not convert the Sultan, the ruler listened to what Francis said and did not kill him. This deserves notice, since Francis went there longing for martyrdom, and the crusades were raging at the time.

In the last years of his life, Francis experienced great trials, especially when he became nearly blind. He gladly offered all his sufferings—physical, emotional and spiritual—to the Lord in surrender.

In 1224, while staying at La Verna, Francis had a vision of a man who looked like a six-winged angel on a cross. Francis wondered what the vision meant, then signs of the nail marks of Christ appeared on his hands and feet, and an oblong scar which bled appeared on his side, as if he had been pierced by a lance. Francis endured the pain of these wounds for two years.

On the night of October 3, 1226, at the age of forty-four, Francis passed from this life to the next. Francis saw death as the ultimate surrender—he gave over his spirit as Jesus did on the cross. Franciscans around the world still celebrate this night as the Transitus, the passing of our Holy Father into eternal life.

In life and in death, Francis surrendered everything to God. May we have the strength and faith to do the same. ■



Feed the Poor

St. Anthony's Bread is a devotion to St. Anthony dating back to the 13th century. It is a source of many favors and graces and is of great aid to the poor and needy.

Contribute to St. Anthony's Bread today.



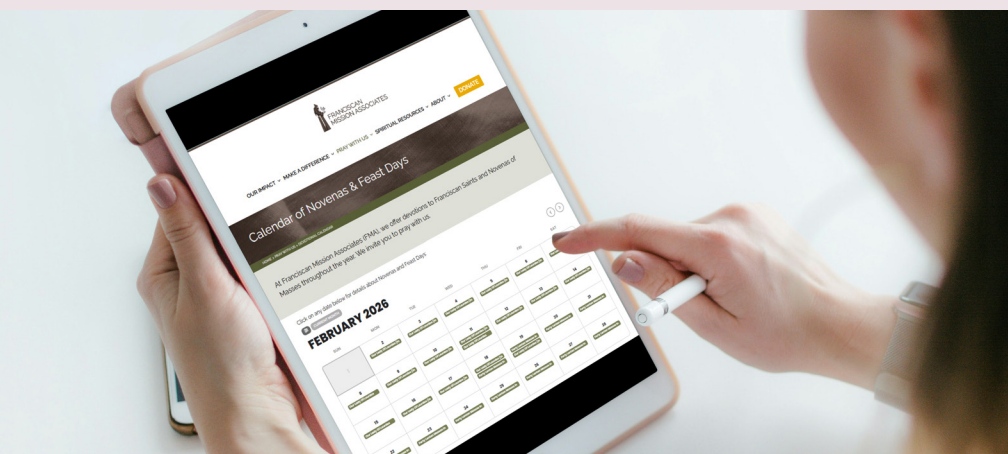
Special Novena Schedule— Lent/Easter/Spring 2026

All year round, Franciscan Mission Associates conduct 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:

February 2 to February 19	Our Lady of Lourdes
February 18 to March 29	Lenten Masses (40)
March 24 to April 1	Feast of Easter
April 5 to April 13	In Thanksgiving for the Risen Christ
April 14 to June 9	9 Tuesdays to St. Anthony
May 1 to May 18	Feast of St. Peregrine (May 1)
May 7 to May 24	Feast of St. Dymphna (May 15)
May 24 to June 1	Holy Spirit Novena
June 4 to June 12	Feast of Sacred Heart (June 12)
June 5 to June 21	Feast of St. Anthony (June 13)

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:

Father Patrick, OFM, Franciscan Mission Associates
P.O. Box 598, Dept. F26, Mount Vernon, NY 10551-0598



Pray With Us

We offer devotions to Franciscan Saints and Novenas of Masses throughout the year. You can view the devotional calendar and pray with us:

