

FMA FOCUS



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Franciscan Mission Associates

Mt. Vernon, NY 10551

Missions in Guatemala - Honduras - El Salvador, Central America

Longsuffering

Christianity is often at odds with the values and beliefs of the world. Because of sin, the world has fallen and so has our human nature. As a result, all people have sinned throughout human history, except for the Blessed Mother.

One consequence of our fallen nature is that we are often drawn toward what is comfortable and pleasing to us. We naturally resist suffering. Even small inconveniences can frustrate us greatly.

Suffering takes many forms, from daily annoyances to serious illness. While some troubles pass quickly, others may bring months or even years of physical pain and hardship.

Suffering can also be emotional or spiritual. Depression, grief, or spiritual dryness may cause deep and lasting anguish. Yet St. Paul tells us in the Letter to the Galatians that longsuffering, also called patient

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Love that endures: From this world to the next

Christians have always believed that our bonds with one another do not end at death. The Church Militant on earth, the Church Suffering in Purgatory, and the Church Triumphant in heaven remain united in what we call the Communion of Saints. This unity is not merely a doctrine we profess. It is something we practice, especially through prayer and sacrifice for those who have died.

The Second Book of Maccabees teaches that it is good and holy to offer sacrifices for the dead to aid in the cleansing of their sins. The Church has carried this tradition forward for centuries. We offer personal penances, acts of charity, and Masses for the souls of the faithful departed, trusting that God, in His mercy, directs the grace of these offerings to those who need it most. When our own time comes, we too will depend on

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Longsuffering *cont'd*

endurance, is a fruit of the Spirit. We are not called to enjoy suffering, but we are called to endure it faithfully and to unite it with the sufferings of Jesus.

In doing so, we participate in His saving work and, as St. Paul writes, “make up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.” What is missing in Christ’s

sacrifice? Our participation. When we offer our sufferings to God, He can use them to bring grace to us, to those we love, and to the whole world.

In this issue of *FMA Focus*, we reflect on the virtue of longsuffering, a virtue St. Francis practiced faithfully in imitation of Jesus. ■

Love that endures: From this world to the next *cont'd*

the prayers of those we leave behind. The patient endurance we practice now in praying for others teaches those we love to do the same for us.

Jesus reminded His disciples that this kind of patient, sacrificial love would always be needed. When a woman anointed Him with costly oil, and Judas protested that the money should have been given to the poor, Jesus replied that the poor would always be with them. As long as we live in a fallen world, the sick, the elderly, the hungry, and others in need will be present among us. We will always have an obligation to care for them. That is why we are deeply grateful for our benefactors who recognize these needs and respond with generous hearts.

For some, that generosity extends even beyond their own lifetime. A legacy gift through a Trust or a Will is a profound act of enduring love: an investment in the relief of suffering whose fruits the giver may never see on this side of heaven. It is stewardship in its deepest sense, offering back to God what He has entrusted to us for the good of others.

We await the day when Christ will return, and all who have followed Him will be united in glory. On that day, all suffering will cease. Until then, may we remain a people who recognize the needs of others, living and deceased, and willingly unite our sacrifices with those of Christ for the sake of the world He came to save. ■

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Please send changes of address six weeks in advance; if possible, include your mailing label and give both old and new address.



Director's letter

Fr. Patrick, OFM

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Dear Friends,

During this year, we have been celebrating the 800th anniversary of the death of our beloved St. Francis of Assisi. Pope Leo XIV has even declared this to be the "Year of St. Francis." For more than eight centuries, religious and lay people alike have sought to imitate the great virtues Francis demonstrated throughout his life.

In this issue of FMA Focus, we reflect on one of the more difficult virtues, long-suffering. Throughout his life, Francis was given many opportunities to endure suffering. His injury in battle, his imprisonment by his own father after his conversion, and the suffering he endured from the stigmata during the final years of his life are only a few examples. Each of these moments is explored in this issue. Though Francis was selfish and carefree in his early years, he gradually came to understand that suffering is often an essential part of growing in holiness. He endured these trials joyfully because he knew they united him more closely to Jesus.

Suffering can be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Illness, especially chronic and life-threatening illness, can bring tremendous pain. Mental and emotional struggles such as depression and anxiety may also weigh heavily upon us. Spiritual suffering can be equally difficult when we feel distant from God or believe our prayers are going unanswered.

We are not called to enjoy suffering. That would be contrary to human nature. But we are called to remember how Our Lord suffered for us. When we endure our sufferings and offer them to the Father in union with Jesus, the result is REDEMPTION, not only for ourselves but for others as well. Each time we practice the virtue of longsuffering, we participate in the saving mission of Christ.

Yours in St. Francis,

Fr. Patrick, OFM

The first suffering of Francis – War, capture and conversion

Saints are not born saints. Although some attain holiness at a young age, like the new millennial saint Carlo Acutis, many others, including St. Francis, endured great suffering before achieving sanctity.

Born about 1181 or 1182, Francis was named Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone by his mother. His father, Pietro, was away in France at the time. When he returned, he began calling his son Francesco, possibly in honor of his financial success there.

Francis' family was wealthy. His father was a successful cloth merchant, and in his youth, Francis lived a carefree life. He was amiable, generous, and well-liked, but he was not especially religious. Though baptized as a baby, he paid little attention to his faith. Instead, he dreamed of greatness, especially through military glory.

In 1202, Francis joined others from Assisi in a war against the neighboring city of Perugia. He was captured and spent nearly a year as a prisoner before being released. During this time, he suffered illness, isolation, and depression. In 1203, he was released and returned to Assisi to recuperate.

Now the hand of the Lord began to act. Once he was able to walk, Francis ventured outside, only to discover that the beauty of creation, which had once delighted him, no longer affected him the same way. The young nobleman who had loved fine things and worldly pleasures began to change.



In spiritual life, this stage is called purgative. God can use suffering and solitude to purge someone's soul of the earthly goods and pleasures that they have grown accustomed to.

Francis' conversion was not immediate. Over the following year, he experienced suffering not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well, struggling to let go of

his former way of life. In modern terms, some of what he endured might resemble what we now call PTSD. Though he repented of his sins, he feared falling back into them.

He often retreated to a cave with a trusted friend. The friend would remain outside while Francis entered alone to "speak to his Father in secret," later sharing with his companion what had taken place there.

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Mother Teresa: A darkness that led to light

The twentieth century witnessed tremendous suffering. Two world wars, the Holocaust, the Killing Fields, and the Rwandan genocide are only a few of the tragedies that claimed millions of lives during those hundred years.

Yet amid so much darkness, great good was done as well. Religious communities, charitable organizations, and countless individuals dedicated themselves to caring for those who suffered. One such person was St. Teresa of Calcutta.

Born in 1910 in Skopje to an Albanian family, she joined the Sisters of Loreto at the age of eighteen in 1928. In January 1929, she was sent to Calcutta, where she later taught at St. Mary's School for girls after professing her first vows. She made her final vows in 1937 and continued working at the school, eventually becoming principal in 1944. She became known for her prayerfulness, generosity, and organizational skills.

On September 10, 1946, Mother Teresa began receiving visions and locutions from the Lord, calling her to serve the poor and forgotten. After two years of discernment, she left the Loreto convent in 1948, wearing the simple white sari

with a blue border that would become her trademark. In 1950, she founded the Missionaries of Charity. The story of the community's growth and worldwide mission is fascinating and continues to inspire people throughout the world.

Mother Teresa became known as a holy and dedicated religious woman who tirelessly served the poor and inspired many women to follow her path. In 1979, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her humanitarian work.



Yet shortly after beginning her work in Calcutta, Mother Teresa entered into a profound spiritual suffering. Despite the joyful “mask” or “cloak” she presented publicly, she experienced what she would describe as “dryness,” a painful absence of God’s

presence within her soul. This darkness made her question her faith and wonder whether her good work was merely a deception.

With the guidance of trusted spiritual advisors, Mother Teresa gradually came to understand this suffering as a share in the passion of Christ. She embraced the darkness as a painful yet profound union with Him. This spiritual trial would last

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The first suffering of Francis – War, capture and conversion *cont'd*

In 1205, Francis decided to join another military expedition to Apulia, still believing himself called to greatness as a knight. During the journey, however, he experienced a spiritual vision that caused him to turn back to Assisi. This moment would ultimately lead him to renounce wealth and embrace a life of poverty.

His friends noticed the change in him and assumed he was preparing for

marriage. Francis told them, “I will take a bride more noble and more beautiful than you have ever seen, and she will surpass the rest in beauty and excel all others in wisdom.”

The suffering Francis endured had begun to purge him, body and soul, from attachment to the things of this world. ■



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Mother Teresa *cont'd*

for nearly fifty years, lasting until she died in 1997, and remained known only to her spiritual advisors until after she died.

To many people, such suffering might seem like a reason to despair or lose faith. Yet throughout Christian history, spiritual darkness has often been experienced by those seeking deeper spiritual intimacy. Just as Jesus, in His humanity, experienced abandonment during His passion, God sometimes

permits those closest to Him to share in that mystery, not as punishment, but as a path toward deeper trust and love.

Each of us may experience periods of darkness in our own spiritual lives. We should not see them as signs that God has abandoned us, but as opportunities to grow in our trust in His goodness and love. Like Mother Teresa, those who persevere faithfully through suffering will one day know the fullness of eternal happiness. ■

The second suffering of Francis – renunciation and imprisonment

After his conversion, Francis' life changed dramatically. Believing the time had come to begin the work God was calling him to, he mounted his horse, took scarlet cloth to sell, and travelled to the nearby town of Foligno. There he sold the cloth as usual, but afterward left his horse behind and began the journey home on foot. Along the way, he reflected on what he should do with the money.

He was inspired to offer it to a local priest in Assisi. The priest allowed Francis to stay with him but refused to accept the money out of fear of Francis' father. Francis simply left it on a windowsill.

As he moved about Assisi, many who had known him before his conversion believed he had lost his senses. Some mocked him openly and even threw mud at him in the streets. When his father learned what had happened, he dragged Francis home, locked him in a cellar, and tried through threats and beatings to force him to abandon this new way of life. Francis would not yield.

While Pietro was away on business, Francis' mother set him free. Francis endured all that had happened with remarkable peace and became even more determined to serve God in poverty. His father later recovered the money Francis had left behind and demanded that his son

renounce any claim to his inheritance.

The matter was finally brought before the bishop. There, to the amazement of all present, Francis removed everything

he possessed, even his clothing, and returned it to his father. Humiliated, Pietro turned away, while the bishop, recognizing Francis' sincerity, covered him with his own cloak.

Francis then began what he understood to be God's call:

rebuild churches. Begging for money and materials, he repaired three churches near Assisi: San Damiano, San Pietro, and the Portiuncula. In time, however, Francis came to understand that God was calling him not merely to rebuild physical churches, but to help renew the Church itself.

During this period, Francis spent long hours in prayer and solitude. Before long, others were drawn to the simplicity and holiness of his life and desired to follow him.

The Franciscan Order spread rapidly, but it was born through suffering, rejection, and sacrifice. Yet the older Francis grew, the more joyfully he accepted whatever sufferings God permitted. This is the way of the saints, and it remains an example for us today. ■



A long journey to the altar

When we speak about the virtue of longsuffering, we most often think of hardship, illness, poverty, or loss. Sometimes, however, longsuffering leads not to sorrow but to the joyful fulfillment of a long-awaited goal. That was the case for five of our friars who were ordained to the priesthood on Saturday, May 2, 2026.

The newly ordained priests are Fr. Leonardo Rafael Morles Gonzalez, OFM, Fr. Daniel Ramirez Luna, OFM, Fr. Luis Antonio Hernandez Reinosa, OFM, Fr. Oscar Danilo Valle Perez, OFM, and Fr. Kevin Gabriel Gonzalez Vega, OFM. They were ordained by His Excellency Angelo Falzon, Bishop of Comayagua, Honduras, in the presence of their families and members of the Immaculate Conception Province. As with every ordination, it was a day filled with tremendous joy.



Why do we equate ordination with an end to longsuffering? Because such joy comes only after many years of sacrifice and preparation. These men left their families, moved far from home, surrendered much of their independence, learned obedience to their superiors, and faced the doubts and feelings of unworthiness that often accompany a vocation to the priesthood. While these sacrifices may not fit the usual understanding of suffering, they are real acts of self-denial undertaken to faithfully follow God's call.

Frs. Leonardo, Daniel, Luis, Oscar and Kevin began their journeys many years ago when they entered the Immaculate Conception Province as postulants. This initial stage is a time of discernment during which both the candidates and the Province come to know one another more deeply.





They moved on to the novitiate, where they studied the Franciscan Rule and way of life while beginning to understand more fully the life and ministry of a friar.

After professing temporary vows, they spent years in both study and ministry in various places throughout the world. This period helps build a balance between the theological knowledge required of a priest and the missionary spirit needed to follow in the footsteps of St. Francis.

Several months ago, these five men reached another important milestone when they were ordained deacons. They were then assigned to places where they could exercise their diaconal ministry,

administer the sacraments, teach, and serve those in need.

Then, on May 2, their long period of preparation came to an end when they were ordained priests of Jesus Christ. They now begin a new chapter of ministry, offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, hearing confessions, and doing other priestly work while still tending to the people in practical ways.

Religious formation is a different kind of long suffering than we often imagine. Yet, it is precisely through this patient endurance and faithful preparation that these men have now received the fruits of the vocation to which God called them. ■

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.



A new chapter of service and sacrifice

The life of a priest can be one of tremendous joy, but it is also a life of sacrifice, especially for a missionary. A friar never knows where he might be sent or when. He must rely upon the Will of God and the guidance of his superiors to direct his ministry, and sometimes those changes come quickly. The circumstances in which missionaries live may also vary greatly from one assignment to another. One place may be financially secure, while another may require living with very modest means.

For the five men recently ordained to the priesthood, life now enters a new stage of service. Though this may not be the suffering most people immediately think of, the demands placed upon missionaries are very real.

As they begin their priestly ministry, each of these friars will be assigned where the Province believes they are most needed. Some will serve in the United States, where they will adapt to parish life while continuing to strengthen their English-language skills. Others will remain in Central America. Learning to preach, celebrate the Sacraments, and minister effectively in a language or culture different from one's own can be a significant challenge in itself.

Not everyone is called to missionary life. Most people enjoy a vocation as a husband, wife, mother, father, or even a single person who spreads the Gospel at work and within the family. All these callings include their own forms of sacrifice and longsuffering.

As Christians, we are called to unite our hardships with the suffering of Christ. When we do so, God uses those sacrifices not only for our spiritual growth, but also for the good of others, including many whom we may never meet. In this way, each of us contributes to the salvation of the world.

We celebrate with great joy the ordination of our five brothers to the priesthood. They now begin a new phase in missionary life that will surely include both joy and sacrifice.

The ordination also reminds us that every member of the Church has a role in the mission of the Gospel. Whether through missionary work, service in a local parish, raising a family, or supporting the missions financially, each person has received gifts from God to be shared with others. Together, may we continue the mission entrusted to us. ■





Words to live by

“God had one Son on earth without sin, but never one without suffering.”

– ST. AUGUSTINE

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”

– HELEN KELLER

“Suffering is a great favor. Remember that everything soon comes to an end...and take courage.”

– ST. TERESA OF AVILA

“Love is not all that is required in a relationship. It needs understanding, openness, kindness, patience, longsuffering.”

– IYANLA VANZANT

“Love Jesus, love Him very much, but to do this, be ready to sacrifice more.”

– ST. PIO OF PIETRELCINA (PADRE PIO)

“Pain and suffering are always inevitable for a large intelligence and a deep heart. The really great men must, I think, have great sadness on earth.”

– FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

“The greater the suffering, the purer the love.”

– ST. FAUSTINA KOWALSKA

“Joy is love exalted; peace is love in response; longsuffering is love enduring.”

– DWIGHT MOODY

“If the Lord permitted you to have some trial, bear it willingly and with gratitude.”

– SAINT LOUIS, KING OF FRANCE

“A longsuffering person will endure where others give up. He always thinks about how God has been longsuffering toward him, and he counts God’s longsuffering as salvation. Longsuffering endures where no one else can endure, and it always hopes for a happy result at the end.”

– JOHN OSCAR SMITH

Our readers gladly write

Dear Fr. Patrick,

I am adding an (extra) one time donation in honor of Fr. Robert's 30 years of service to the Immaculate Conception Province. God bless him!

F.G., Montgomery, AL

Dear Friars,

I want to say thank you for the Father's Day mailing. I think too often men (fathers) are overlooked. It seems "Mother's Day" has become singularly most important.

Your mailing caused me to remember the men that have made and are making a difference in my life. I have listed many on the cards you provided. Some are deceased and some are living. I have likely overlooked even more.

Again, thank you for your mailings.

K.H., Kokomo, IN

Dear Fr. Patrick,

My grandson Jaken and I have been praying to hug at Easter. We were able to. (A.M. sent a picture). Please continue to pray that God's Will be always done and for me to continue to see Jaken, hug him, and see the day when he calls me grandma.

A.M., Robert, LA

Dear FMA,

I recently asked for prayers for my son's job search. He received a promotional offer from his current employer that will place him in a position that fits his gifts and aspirations. Much appreciation for your intercession and for Our Father's quick response. Peace and blessings.

E.C.



A pilgrimage in the footsteps of St. Francis

To honor the 800th anniversary of St. Francis' death, FMA sponsored a pilgrimage to Italy in April 2026. The two centers of the journey were Assisi and Rome, along with several important sites connected to the life of St. Francis.

After arriving in Rome, the pilgrims traveled to Assisi and visited the Chiesa Nuova, believed to be the site of the home where St. Francis grew up. The following day included visits to the Church of San Damiano, where Francis heard the call to "rebuild my church," and San Rufino Cathedral, where he was baptized.

The next morning brought the pilgrims to the Hermitage of the Carceri, where Francis and his brothers often withdrew for solitude and prayer. From there, they traveled to the Basilica of St. Clare to see the original San Damiano Cross that spoke to Francis during his conversion.

Another day centered on the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels, which houses the Portiuncula, the "little portion" so beloved by St. Francis. It was there that Francis spent many hours in prayer, received St. Clare into religious life, and eventually died.

The pilgrimage also included visits to Greccio, where Francis created the first Christmas creche, and Fonte Colombo, where he received treatment for his eye disease. It was there, after forty days of

fasting, that Francis dictated the original Franciscan Rule.

The journey then continued to La Verna, where Francis received the stigmata on September 17, 1224. Pilgrims participated in the afternoon procession commemorating this extraordinary event.

Before leaving Assisi, the group toured the Basilica of St. Francis and viewed Giotto's frescoes depicting

scenes from the saint's life. Despite damage caused by earthquakes over the centuries, the frescoes remain remarkable testimonies to Francis' enduring legacy.

The final portion of the pilgrimage took place in Rome. Pilgrims visited the Basilica of St. John Lateran, where Francis received approval of his Rule from Pope Innocent III. Although Pope Leo XIV was traveling in Africa during the pilgrimage, the group celebrated Mass in the Lithuanian Chapel of St. Peter's Basilica. A walking tour of Rome and a farewell dinner concluded the journey.

The pilgrimage offered a deeper encounter with the sacrifices and sufferings of St. Francis. From the home where he was confined by his father, to the place where he renounced his inheritance, to the site where he received the wounds of Christ, pilgrims reflected on how Francis' longsuffering has borne fruit even 800 years later. Many returned home deeply moved and spiritually renewed. ■

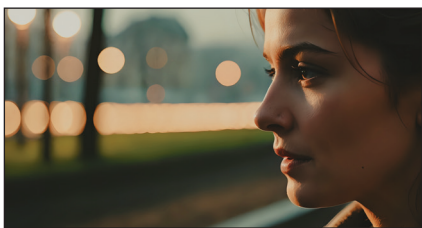


Practical Guidance: Remembering that God is God

The virtue of long suffering can be difficult to understand, especially when we try to find practical ways to live it out in daily life. No one enjoys suffering. It was not part of God's original plan. However, when sin entered the world, the harmony God created was disrupted. Since that time, suffering has remained part of the human experience.

How, then, do we endure suffering and strive to practice virtue in the midst of our trials? There are several truths we can remember that may help us. The following points are not exhaustive, but they may offer guidance and encouragement.

This life and this world are only a preparation for the world to come. In that new creation, there will be no suffering, sadness, illness, or evil. Whatever we experience in this life is temporary.



While not all suffering is the result of personal sin, sin itself does bring suffering into the world. Avoiding sin and sincerely repenting for our sins can help relieve it.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that those who believe in Him might have eternal life." (John 3:16). God desires every person to be with Him forever, so much so that the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, took on a

human nature and suffered unspeakably on the cross to atone for our sins.

With God's grace, we are capable of enduring trials and offering them in union with the sufferings of Jesus. When we do this, God can bring spiritual benefit not only to ourselves, but also to those we love and even to people we may never meet. We may also offer prayers and sacrifices for the faithful departed.

Even when we cannot understand it, God has a plan for the world and for every human life. Everything that happens, including suffering, fits into that plan somehow. If we maintain an earthly view, this may seem impossible to understand. But if we keep our eyes fixed on the world to come, we will see that God's plan is being carried out in everything we experience.

We may sometimes think that life would be easier if God governed the world according to our wishes. Yet our understanding is limited and cannot account for history, circumstances, and the interplay of human activity, including how we suffer.

Perhaps the most practical thing we can remember is a saying often attributed to St. Augustine: "God is God and I am not God." Although His original plan did not include human suffering, His plan after human sin allows for suffering and will use it in His overall plan. We don't have to enjoy suffering. We are called to trust that it has meaning and purpose within God's greater plan. ■

The third suffering of Francis – Illness, hardship, and the stigmata

During the first decade of the Franciscan Order, the number of friars grew from the small number with whom Francis began to more than five thousand. What had once been mocked as foolishness spread rapidly throughout Europe. Today, eight hundred years later, there are more than 35,000 Franciscan friars worldwide.

Francis lived a life of remarkable austerity. He denied himself comforts, slept little, fasted often, and divided his time between prayerful solitude and tireless service to others. Over time, this demanding way of life took a serious toll on his body. Francis lived only about twenty years after his conversion, and during that time, his health steadily declined. Yet his physical suffering never weakened his desire for holiness or service.

Even when he became too weak to walk long distances, Francis continued traveling from town to town on a small donkey so he could minister to others. The brothers often encouraged him to rest, but he resisted slowing down. He also suffered from a painful eye disease that remained untreated for quite some time before Brother Elias, one of his closest companions, persuaded him to accept medical care. In the last stages of his life, Francis was nearly blind.

His greatest physical suffering, however, began in 1224 while he was praying at the hermitage of La Verna. There, he had a vision of a six-winged seraph nailed to a cross. The vision filled Francis with both wonder and fear, as he struggled to



understand its meaning. As he reflected upon it, the wounds of Christ began to appear on his hands, feet, and side.

For the final two years of his life, Francis endured the pain of stigmata. He revealed them to very few people, not desiring the publicity this would cause.

Francis died on October 4, 1226, after a life marked by physical, emotional and spiritual suffering. Yet through all these trials, he remained faithful and joyful in serving the Lord. His example reminds us that whatever sufferings God permits in our lives, we can offer the affliction to the Father in union with Jesus. In doing so, suffering can become a source of grace not only for us but also for others. ■

Special Novena Schedule – Fall/Advent-Christmas 2026

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:

September 21 – 29	Feast of the Archangels
September 26 – October 4	Feast of St. Francis
September 29 – October 15	Feast of the Holy Rosary
October 11 – 28	St. Jude Novena
October 27 – December 22	Novena to St. Anthony on the nine Tuesdays before Christmas
November 2 – November 30	Novena for the Faithful Departed
December 1 – December 31	Infant Savior (31 Masses)
December 8 – December 16	Feast of the Immaculate Conception
December 16 – December 24	Feast of Christmas (in Padua)
December 24 – January 1	Feast of Christmas (in Assisi)
December 25 – January 2	Christ Child Novena (in Bethlehem)
January 1 – 19	Holy Family Novena

Holy Mass is offered each day for all Franciscan Mission Associates benefactors and for their special intentions. Kindly forward your petitions for the scheduled Novenas to Fr. Patrick, OFM at:

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