

Reflecting on the Words of St Clare of Assisi

May the holy angels of God, our blessed Father Francis and all ... saints ...
confirm for you this most holy blessing in heaven and on earth

(The final words of Clare).

ST CLARE OF ASSISI WAS ONLY 18 YEARS OLD WHEN SHE FOUNDED THE POOR LADIES OF SAN DAMIANO. A NUMBER OF RULES WERE WRITTEN FOR THE ORDER: FROM FRANCIS, FROM CARDINAL HUGOLINO IN 1217 AND FROM POPE INNOCENT IV IN 1247. CLARE FINALLY WROTE HER OWN RULE IN 1253, WHICH WAS APPROVED ON AUGUST 9TH, TWO DAYS BEFORE HER DEATH ON AUGUST 11TH 1253. CLARE WAS THE FIRST WOMAN TO WRITE A RULE FOR WOMEN.

These extracts are from the Rule of 1253. This material can be used in reflection sessions when focus on the words of Clare would help participants examine some of the core elements of a Franciscan way of living. You could use these quotes in group discussion asking: how do the principles of Clare's rule apply to the contemporary world? How might the rules underpin a Franciscan way of operating in communities? The following extracts are taken from the Rule written by Clare and ratified on her death bed in 1253.

Collaborative decision-making

If ... anyone should come to us desiring to accept this life, the abbess is bound to seek the consent of all the sisters (ch. 2).

Simplicity and poverty

If she is suitable ... she should go and sell all that she has and take care to distribute the proceeds to the poor (ch. 2).

Careful speech and avoidance of gossiping

Let them be careful not to introduce other talk unless it pertains to the confession and the salvation of souls (ch. 3).

Mentoring

... for these and the other novices, the abbess shall carefully provide a mistress ... who shall form them diligently ... (ch. 3).

Leadership by example

Let her (the leader) also strive to preside over the others more by virtues and holy behaviour than by her office... (ch. 3).

Leading with kindness

... moved by example, the sisters may obey her more out of love than out of fear (ch. 3).

Care for the vulnerable

Let her console the afflicted. Let her also be the last refuge for those who are troubled ... (ch.4).

Inclusivity and discernment

... let all who hold offices in the monastery be chosen by common agreement of all the sisters (ch.4).

Work for the Common good

... work that pertains to a virtuous life and the common good (ch.7).

Mutual love

Let them be always eager ... to preserve among themselves the unity of mutual love (ch.10).

Slow to anger

(not) become angry or disturbed on account of another's sin, for anger and disturbance prevent charity in oneself and in others (ch.9).

