

# For Reflection & Discussion

The story of the life of Francis of Assisi is the foundation stone of formation and mission work in Franciscan ministries. The story can be used in many ways with staff, leadership teams and the wider community.

**AS WELL AS DISCUSSING THE QUESTIONS WHICH FOLLOW, YOU COULD CONSIDER USING THE STORY OF FRANCIS AS THE BASIS FOR A MINISTRY MURAL, FOR A DIGITAL REPRESENTATION OF THE MINISTRY FOUNDATIONS OR IN DRAMA AND MUSICAL ACTIVITIES. YOU COULD ALSO INVITE FRANCISCANS TO SHARE WHAT INSPIRED THEM ABOUT THE STORY OF FRANCIS.**

- What part of Francis' story has the most impact on you?
- How can the life of Francis inspire new generations of people working in Franciscan ministries?
- Francis faced many challenges and struggles in his life and work. What can he teach us about dealing with setbacks and difficulties?
- Francis gave his energy, passion and health to help the most vulnerable in his society? Who might Francis be helping if he was walking in your community today?
- Francis' story highlights the importance of prayer and reflection in listening to God's call to mission. He spent time in silence; he listened to the voices of the poor and marginalised; he loved the forest and wild places; he walked contemplatively between villages. How can your ministry ensure that prayer, reflection and discernment are the heart of everything that you do?
- Francis' life inspired others and his legacy is the foundation of Franciscan enterprises across the world. What made his work and his vision appealing to others? Who are our contemporary Francis' challenging social and political paradigms and practising radical mercy and compassion?



# For Reflection

## Sacred places in the Life of St Francis

### ASSISI

The birthplace of Francis. A place of family and friends. A place so familiar yet so remote from his new vision and calling to go out and preach the Gospel.

### PORTIUNCULA

Arguably the most sacred place in the Franciscan world. It was a home, a safe place, a meeting place. The Church of St Mary of the Angels maintains the Franciscan spirit of communion and confraternity. It was here that Francis died in 1226.

### GRECCIO

Place of the first Christmas crib. Here Francis was moved to bring the story of the first Christmas alive for the people of the area. It was a remote mountain top where Francis slept in rocky caves, close to the earth, and staring up at the expanse of the night sky.

### RIVOTORTO

Outside of the city walls, where the despised and forgotten were banished. Here Francis lived when he left Assisi 1209-1211. Here he encountered the lepers and this meeting changed his life. Here he wrote the first rule of the fledgling Franciscan order.

### DAMIETTA

Francis made many attempts to reach Damietta where the worst aspects of the 5th Crusade were being lived out. His visit was brief but profound in its impact on the Franciscan worldview. Here Francis encountered a different face of God. A different way of prayer. A different spirituality.



### SAN DAMIANO

Here when he was desperate for direction the crucifix spoke and God called Francis to 'rebuild the Church'. Here Francis installed Clare and her sisters. Here Francis wrote his final prayer of praise to God - the Canticle of Creatures.

### MT ALVERNIA

A gift from Count Orlando. This place was a place of prayer and retreat from the world. The sanctuary gave Francis space to seek connection with God. Here Francis received the stigmata in 1225. The mountain top holds the spirit of the Franciscan tradition.

### CARCERI

On the slopes of Mount Subasio, this place offered quiet and solitude to Francis. Here he would withdraw to pray and to spend time in nature. Here he was close to God. Surrounded by trees, birdsong and rocky outcrops, the Carceri was a temple of grace.

### ROME

The centre of power in the Catholic Church. Here Francis came with his followers to have his first Rule approved. Here he met Pope Innocent III. Here he swapped clothes with a beggar to experience true poverty.

### BASILICA OF ST JOHN LATERAN

As the Pope's Cathedral, as the Bishop of Rome, this Church plays a significant role in Franciscan history. It was here that Francis and the first friars travelled in 1209 to seek the approval of Pope Innocent III for their Rule or way of life.

### Reflection Questions:

What are the common features of the places in Francis' life?

Where do you feel close to God?

What places have been significant in your life and faith journey?

If you could visit one Franciscan place - where would you like to go?



# For Reflection

## People in the Life of St Francis

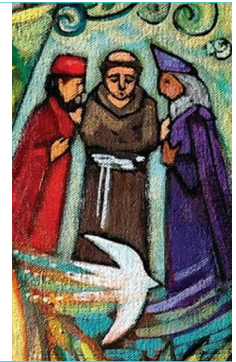


### SULTAN MALIK AL KAMIL

Francis travelled to Damietta in Egypt in 1219 at the height of the 5th Crusade. He wanted to stop the violence on one hand and convert the Muslims on the other. His meeting with the Sultan showed that two men of faith could find common ground. Al-Kamil was impressed with Francis, and Francis realised that Muslims also honoured God.

### BISHOP GUIDO

Mentor and friend of Francis, Bishop Guido of Assisi stood with Francis when he confronted his father Peter Bernardone and handed back his clothes. He advised Francis to seek solitude and later assisted Clare to escape her family and join the Franciscan enterprise.



### MOTHER - PICA DI BOURLÉMONT

Her love for her son never wavered. She nursed him through long sickness, protected him from his father's wrath and undoubtedly prayed for his safety and happiness. Because of her love Francis often used mothers as his model of care and compassion.

### FATHER - PIETRO DI BERNARDONE

A wealthy cloth merchant Pietro gave Francis a carefree childhood and supported his early ambition to be a knight. Later perplexed by Francis' behaviour he tried punishment, imprisonment and public humiliation. There is no record that Francis had any further dealings with his father after he sought protection from the Church.

### CLARE OF ASSISI

Clare, the co-founder of the Franciscan orders was a spiritual friend in the Irish tradition of the Anam Cara. Clare encouraged and supported Francis and he gave spiritual and practical assistance to Clare.

### EARLY FRIENDS

The energy, support and camaraderie of his friends grounded Francis. They stood with him when people scoffed and rejected the new movement: Peter Catanii, Giles, Philip, Sylvester, Leo, Rufino, Angelo and Moricus.

### BERNARD OF QUINTAVALLE

Francis' first follower. He shared the vision and believed in the Gospel way. With Francis in 1208 he opened the scriptures and together they found the path they would follow. He is buried close to Francis in the Basilica in Assisi.

### COUNT ORLANDO CHIUSI

In 1213 he gifted the land at Mount Alvernia in Tuscany to Francis who used it as a place of prayer and retreat. It is here in 1224 that Francis received the Stigmata.

### JOHN OF VELITA

He was a local knight from Greccio and follower of Francis in the Third Order. Francis trusted him to set up the nativity scene at Greccio on Christmas Eve in 1223.

### LADY JACOBA DE SETTESOLI

A friend of Francis in Rome. Lady Jacoba longed to follow the Franciscan way. A widow with children, she was encouraged to live a perfect life everyday and to find charity everywhere. She sought to assist Francis wherever she could, including on his deathbed where she brought a shroud and candles.

### THE PRIEST AT SAN DAMIANO

When Francis began to pray in churches around Assisi, he heard God's call to 'rebuild my Church' in the ruined chapel at San Damiano. The local priest after refusing the money Francis offered him allowed him to stay and taught Francis about prayer.

### POPE INNOCENT III

When Francis came to Rome in 1209 to seek Papal approval for his religious movement Pope Innocent III was sceptical. Later Pope Innocent had a dream of a man holding up the Basilica of St John Lateran. He came to believe that this man was Francis and he gave his approval for the Franciscan enterprise.

## Reflection Questions:

Many people walk life's journey with us. Who has encouraged you?  
What people have been important in your life? Who has gifted you with presence and support?  
Who are your spiritual friends (Anam Cara)?

# The Life of St Francis in Art

## A Reflective Worksheet



### A STATEMENT FROM THE ARTISTS LUIGI AND KATE AGNELLI:

This drawing is dedicated to the life of Francis of Assisi. It is designed as a triptych, divided into three parts. The story begins in the bottom right-hand corner and proceeds in an anti-clockwise direction, loosely following events as they occurred. The right side

narrates the early life of Francis and the foundation of the Order, whilst the left side recounts key events of his later life and death. The central section is dedicated to three life-changing events in the life of Francis, beginning in the centre with his greeting of the leper with a kiss, followed, above, by the speaking crucifix in San Damiano and below by the

moment when he receives the stigmata at La Verna. Verses from the Canticum of the Creatures, perhaps the best known and loved of Francis's poems, are reproduced and illustrated throughout the artwork.

© Illustrated images by Luigi and Kate Agnelli. WEB: [www.landk.it](http://www.landk.it)

### Ideas for using the sketch in Discussion & Reflection:

- Ask participants to examine the drawing and identify the key moments of Francis' life. Then challenge them to name twenty moments and share the significance of each moment with their group.
- Invite participants to list key places in the sketch and discuss their role in Francis' story.
- Invite participants to find the symbols embedded in the sketch and to discuss their significance in the Franciscan tradition.
- Give each participant a section of the sketch and, jigsaw style, ask them to reassemble the whole sketch. Each participant can explain where their event fits into the story of Francis and the Franciscan movement.
- Use the sketches for a Visio Divina where participants take the sketch and sit with each section, noting which images and symbols draw their attention (notes on Visio Divina and contemplative prayer walks are provided in the appendices).



# The Life of St Francis in Art

## A Reflective Worksheet – Visiting the Sultan in Damietta



### A STATEMENT FROM THE ARTISTS LUIGI AND KATE AGNELLI:

Set in the Crusades - a period of historic conflict between east and west, this story speaks with urgency to our present world.

The narrative centres on a meeting 800 years ago between the Christian Francis of Assisi and the Muslim Sultan Al-Malik Al-Kamil, two men who against all odds, met in the midst of war and found mutual respect and

common ground. It is a story of hope that shines brightly today as an icon of respect and dialogue between Muslim and Christian faiths.

© Illustrated images by Luigi and Kate Agnelli. WEB: [www.landk.it](http://www.landk.it)

### Ideas for using the sketch in Discussion & Reflection:

- Invite groups to discuss how this event speaks with urgency to the present world?
- Challenge participants to examine the drawing and identify key aspects of Francis' meeting with Sultan Al-Malik Al-Kamil.
- Ask participants, in groups, to explain the symbols embedded in the sketch and their meaning.
- Ask groups to consider what this sketch reveals about warfare in Francis' time.
- Use the sketches for a Visio Divina where participants take the sketch and sit with each section, noting which images and symbols draw their attention (notes on Visio Divina and contemplative prayer walks are provided in the appendices).