Living Gospel Values in the Spirit of St. Francis of Assisi

Community of the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal
Bronx, New York

The Community of the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal was founded in 1988 as a parallel community to the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal which began in 1987. The women’s community was founded under the auspices of the friars and they consider one of them—Fr. Andrew Apostoli, C.F.R., their founder. The sisters community was formally established as an association of the faithful in 1990 by the late John Cardinal O’Connor.

The Sisters of the Renewal strive to live the Gospel in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi in the Capuchin tradition. They live a common life characterized by charity, prayer and poverty. Their work focuses on serving the spiritual and material needs of the very poor in their neighborhoods and includes an extensive evangelization apostolate.

The contemplative dimension of their life is lived out through the daily Sacrifice of the Mass, a daily Eucharistic Holy Hour, the Divine Office five times a day in common, frequent Confession, and daily Rosary. Fridays are set aside as a quiet day of prayer with Eucharistic Adoration. Each member takes a monthly day of solitude for deeper prayer and renewal.

The sisters hold a particular devotion to Our Lady, especially under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, since she exemplifies three things they hold special in their community. She is the “Queen of the Americas”; one apostolic goal of the C.F.R. community is to work for the renewal of the Catholic Church in America. She is the “Protectress of the Unborn”; the community is very pro-life, working to safeguard life from conception to natural death. She is also the “Star of Evangelization”; the sisters ask for her intercession in all their evangelization efforts. They also faithfully support the Holy Father and the Church’s Magisterium.

Communal life of the sisters is filled with a family spirit. From prayers to meals to their daily work everything is shared in common and done together. They take turns cooking, cleaning, and doing manual chores. Recreation consists in joyfully sharing stories and enjoying one another’s company at meals.

The sisters’ apostolate includes material and spiritual outreach to the poor in their neighborhoods. Each convent has a pantry to provide for the needs of the poor, whether it’s a cup of coffee, a sandwich, clothing, a rosary, etc. Members frequently visit homes, hospitals, and the elderly in nursing facilities. The community
has a soup kitchen, food hand-outs, as well as programs for the youth of their neighborhoods and the sisters hope one day to have a women’s homeless shelter. Evangelization takes the form of missions, school visits, youth retreats (especially Youth 2000, national and international), Bible prayer groups, and pro-life ministry. Though much of their work is done from their convents, members frequently travel, responding to requests for sharing the faith with many, especially through personal witness and music ministry.

The sisters live a very simple life, depending on Divine Providence for all their needs and the needs of the poor they serve. Presently, they have three convents in New York and one convent in Leeds, England.

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In the Spirit of the Founder . . .

Working to Promote God’s Kingdom

In 1987 when eight Capuchin friars received permission to begin a reform known as the Community of Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, only the Lord Himself knew that soon the beginnings of the Community of Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal would also be underway.

Fr. Andrew Apostoli, C.F.R. (one of the eight founding members of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal—far right) was guiding a vocational discernment group of lay women in the New York area. A small group of these women found themselves drawn to a similar vision of life to that which the Franciscan Friars had just begun.

These women were attracted to the radical life that Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity embraced, yet they felt that such a charism wasn’t exactly their call. Feeling drawn to St. Francis of Assisi and seeing the beginnings of the friars’ reform unfold before them, they began to wonder whether Father Andrew might help begin a community of sisters which would be similar to the friars’ community.

Meanwhile, unknown to the women, Father Andrew was envisioning this same possibility. On Palm Sunday weekend in 1987, as the discernment group was on retreat with Father Andrew, there was a joyful realization that they all shared this same hope. From that day on, steps were taken to receive proper permissions from the Archdiocese of New York. Cardinal O’Connor kindly gave permission to begin a house of discernment in the South Bronx. On the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, July 16, 1988, six women officially entered as candidates for this possible new community. In 1990, the Community of the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal was established as an Association of the Faithful.

Sr. Lucille Cutrone, C.F.R., who was one of the original founding members, professed her final vows on August 22, 1995, and is presently the Community Servant. The sisters are very grateful for Father Andrew’s original inspiration, fatherly care, and continued guidance. They are also very much indebted to the entire community of friars, especially to Fr. Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R., and the original founders, who generously shared their way of life with the sisters and have shown great brotherly support in so many ways throughout the years. The friars continue to serve the sisters by offering Holy Mass, hearing confessions, and giving spiritual direction. At the same time, in various apostolic works, the friars and sisters work together to promote God’s Kingdom.