

A Book for St Francis

SUMMER 2022 UPDATE

"We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way"

- St Francis of Assisi



*Most High and Glorious God,
Enlighten the darkness of my heart.
Give me true faith,
certain hope, perfect charity,
sense and knowledge, O Lord,
That I may carry out your holy and
true command.*



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Reflecting now on our last few years together, we have certainly faced many struggles: sickness, separation, anxiety and uncertainty – but we hold fast to the truth that there is always a reason to hope in Christ Jesus. In our community, one of the greatest difficulties has been the death of our founder, Fr Roberto Donato, whom we know many of you knew and loved. Fr Roberto was himself a man who suffered, for many years with lupus and then in the end with a brain tumor. But we recognize in him an example of the joy found in suffering when it is united to the Cross of Christ. Fr Roberto's deep life of prayer and continual refuge in Christ was surely what allowed him to endure this particularly heavy trial without losing hope. This is the call for all of us: to stand firmly on the rock that is Christ, in this and all the seasons of our lives. Fr Roberto himself taught us this: "If I could make one all-embracing recommendation that everyone can remember and keep in their heart, I would say this *'Be always in communion with the Lord Jesus; Always, whatever you do, wherever you go, and whoever you walk with!'*"

To you, our friends, benefactors and spiritual warriors who have supported and embraced us in this time, we express immense gratitude. From the time our community began in 2005 until now, our lives have been enriched and upheld by your presence; and in turn, we hope to renew our commitment of walking with you in the ways the Lord asks, and to serving you as His grace allows. This year, I, Fr Pio, have been blessed again with the trust of my brothers and sisters, who have elected me as Moderator for the next four years. And so, let us take heart as we begin this new chapter together. Let us pray for the repose of the soul of our brother, father and friend, Fr Roberto, and let us be attentive to the Lord, who is always bringing about new and good fruits through the Holy Spirit. – *Fr Pio*

Below is an update on some of the ways our community has been seeking to serve in the Lord's vineyard in the past two years.

Studies: Our brothers and sisters have continued working hard on their various educational paths. In Rome, Br Grant studied Italian and completed a diploma in Franciscan Spirituality, while Fr Christopher finished his Licentiate, writing his thesis on the Book of Ruth. Both brothers have now returned to Halifax and Fr Christopher is working on his doctorate in Biblical Studies. This year, Fr Francesco completed courses through the Gregorian University online, on the topics of Ecumenical Dialogue and Grace. Sr Angela is close to finishing her Bachelor in Philosophy and Classics at Dalhousie. We have two Dalhousie graduates of late: Sr Ilaria completed her Masters in Musicology at Dalhousie in 2020 and Sr Gemma graduated from Dalhousie with her Bachelor of Psychology in 2021. She is now finishing her Masters in Counselling from Acadia. We are proud of the hard work of all of our students!

Pastoral Ministry: Especially during the pandemic, continued ministry through the parish has been an essential aspect of our ministry to the local Church. Last year, Fr Pio was entrusted with the parish of St Francis and St Clare of Assisi, as Fr Francesco finished his time as pastor. In the same parish, Fr Nathanael serves as assistant pastor, and Br Grant has also been assigned as Deacon. Sr Rita is in her fifteenth year of pastoral ministry at St Theresa's and dedicates her service to Sacristan work, marriage preparation and funeral pastoral care. She works in RCIA with our associate Myra, who also serves as Sacristan at St Catherine's Church. Fr Paul has served for the past 3 years as assistant pastor of Holy Apostles parish. He will now take a course in CPE and begin his ministry as a hospital chaplain. Fr Peter has been assistant pastor of Divine Mercy parish in Dartmouth since 2018 and continues to serve there now. It was a joy, when restrictions allowed, for the whole community to return to our Saturday morning and Sunday evening Masses at St Catherine's. These continue to be a moment of community prayer, spiritual strengthening and connecting with our wider Franciscan "family".

Prayer & Community: In this time especially, we've experienced the centrality and importance of a deep prayer life. In our community and in the whole Church, we depend on the constant prayers of those in our contemplative convent, San Damiano. Sr Patricia offers her prayer each day in sacrifice for souls. We rely too on

the daily prayers to which many of our Associates dedicate themselves, personally, in Mass and Adoration, and in ministry. We are grateful for the prayer and service of the active sisters also in San Damiano: Sr Teresa, Sr Lucia and Sr Rose. This year on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25th, Sr Rose entered Novitiate. We also rejoiced with Sr Angela on the Feast of St Clare in 2019, as she professed her perpetual vows, and the following October, with Elaine Wentzell, making her perpetual promises as an Associate with the community.

Outreach: Through the FOH Furniture Bank, Fr Nathanael and Fr Peter continue working to provide for the housing needs of the poor. Our Associate Marian brings her joy each week to the Daily Bread Outreach. Sr Elizabeth and Sr Lucia have both been involved in ministry to the elderly in nursing homes, visiting, praying with them, and providing companionship. Fr Paul continues in his ministry of comfort and Sacramental care to the elderly and those in hospital.

Formation: Providing deep faith formation is a particular passion of our community. Fr Pio, Fr Christopher, Sr Teresa and Fr Francesco have been involved in providing parish missions and retreats within and outside of the Archdiocese. Fr Peter and Fr Nathanael both act as Spiritual Advisor to the two Secular Franciscan fraternities in the HRM. Sr Bernadette, Sr Gemma and Sr Angela are all involved in providing formation and support to Catholic young women's groups, and Fr Christopher has also developed a men's group. It has also been a great joy in the past few years to develop and deepen relationships with the youth and families in our parishes. We've seen some of our Masses become vibrant moments of communion with the whole Church: young and old, religious and lay. In the hope of building up the Domestic Church, Br Grant has been involved with several families, connecting and providing resources and Franciscan spirituality, Sr Angela teaches catechism at St Catherine's, and Sr Lucia continues serving as the Director of Religious Education at St Theresa's.

Palliative Ministry: We also owe a debt of gratitude to those who tenderly cared for and served Fr Roberto in his illness and final days on this earth. Fr Francesco and Fr Peter both travelled to Rome to be at his side. Father was also cared for faithfully by close friends and family members, as well as supported in prayer by many.

To be added to our list for regular updates and community news, e-mail us at communicationfoh@gmail.com