

## AN EXPLANATION TO ACCOMPANY THE ILLUSTRATED “LIFELINE” OF FRANCIS OF ASSISI

### Awakening

- Born in 1182 to upper middle class parents and baptized “John”.
- As a young man - leader of his peers, venturesome, valiant, genial, gentle, joyful, generous, chivalrous, daring and original - he sings songs of the troubadours.
- Early desire to be a soldier - a knight!
- Becomes a soldier and then a prisoner of war in Perugia for a year.
- His spirits remain high during prison but he returns home in ill health.
- Restless, yearning and anxious; he struggles and becomes melancholy. Friends and parties are not quite the same as before.
- Becomes aware of poverty – especially as he turns away a beggar in his father’s shop – he feels much remorse for this.
- He sets out once again on the field of battle and has a dream of a castle that is adorned with shields of honor. He hears a voice asking, “Who can do more for you, the lord or the vassal?” Francis asks what he should do, and he was told to go home. His dream lost, he again loses vitality and grows sad.
- Finds himself drawn to a leper –overcoming his dread he kisses this leper. Victory over self! What was once bitter is now sweet!
- Finds his thoughts turning to the poor Christ, and begins to see clearly the poverty that is around him.
- His friends wonder if he is in love because he seems so distracted. He realizes that his bride is Lady Poverty. He is excited for there could be no bride that would demand more sacrifice.
- Seeking strength he makes a pilgrimage to Rome. At St. Peter’s in Rome he is horrified at the small offerings that people left there. He remembers the beggar in his father’s shop, begging “for the love of God”.
- He trades clothes with a beggar outside St. Peter’s in Rome.
- He returns to Assisi, prays and waits for guidance. He is about 23-24 years old.

## **Enlightenment**

- A voice speaks to him from the crucifix which hangs in the little church of San Damiano – “Francis, go and rebuild my church which you see has fallen into ruin.”
- Taking this literally he began repairs on this church. He takes some of his father’s possessions, and sells them to get money for this project.
- His father hunts him down. Francis hides in a cave – praying and seeking God’s will. After some time he emerges, now he knows what he needs to do.
- In the town square he renounces his inheritance and states that he will now only call God his father. Francis strips and the bishop covers him with his mantle.
- Francis cares for the lepers, does manual labor, gives away what he earns and begs for food for himself.
- He restores three churches –San Damiano, San Pietro and the Portiuncula.
- He puts on a “tunic” and a cord; a beggar’s outfit; not a religious habit. He begins to preach the Kingdom of God.

## **Brotherhood**

- Impressed by Francis’ lifestyle, Bernard, the first follower joins Francis.
- It is revealed to him that the words of the Gospel will be Francis’ rule.
- Soon others join – Sylvester, Peter Carrani, Angelo, Leo, Pacifico, Masseo, Juniper, Giles and Brother John the Simple.
- They journey to Rome to seek approval of their rule of life.
- The Pope has a dream in which he sees Francis holding up the Church which was falling into ruin. He verbally approves Francis’ rule.
- The brothers take the name “friars minor” and return to Assisi. Their first friary is “Rivo Torto” – cramped and poor.
- Beginnings of the Secular Franciscan Order as laypersons join – the first according to tradition is Luchesio along with his wife, Buona Donna.
- Clare follows Francis – dramatic exit from her former life.
- After attending the Fourth Lateran Council Francis adopts the TAU.
- Clare and her sisters are established at the monastery of San Damiano.

## **Ministry and Mission**

- Francis longs to spread the Gospel and hopes for martyrdom.
- Sets out and seeks an audience with the Sultan Malekel-Kamel of Egypt.
- The first “Third Order” fraternity is canonically established by Cardinal Hugolin and Francis in 1221 in Florence. (Third Order Rule of 1221).
- Francis writes the final rule for the Order of the Lesser Brothers.
- Celebration of Christmas at Greccio – crib scene – Mass at Midnight – the Christ of Christmas and the Christ of the Mass are the same.
- Retreat on Mount LaVerna where he receives the Stigmata
- During illness and pain his “Canticle of Creatures” is completed.
- Final visit with Clare and the sisters.
- Death at the Portiuncula on the evening of Oct. 3, 1226. Placed naked on the ground, his soul ascends to God.
- Francis is canonized a saint by Pope Gregory IX on July 16, 1228.
- Clare lives 27 years after Francis. She does much to preserve the ideals that Francis put forth for the Order.
- Clare passes on to eternal life in 1253 and is canonized in 1255.
- All three branches of the Franciscan family continue to this day.