



established 2005

FRANCISCAN SCHOOLS AUSTRALIA

enriching Franciscan spirituality within schools



charism support



resources



connection



From the FSA Living Stones Framework the theme for 2022 is EMBRACE

In our Franciscan tradition **EMBRACE** invites us to accompany those who are the 'poor, little ones' of the world. Go on ...open the door of your heart to listen to the voice of Jesus.



**from the desk of our FSA Executive Coordinator
Fr Stephen Bliss OFM**



Welcome to 2022 and our first newsletter for the FSA Year of **EMBRACE**.

In our Franciscan tradition the concept of embrace is deeply rooted in the Gospel. For example, St. Francis and his companions start living the First Beatitude of Jesus in earnest, and their life together starts looking like the Kingdom of God on earth, thus fulfilling Jesus' words, "How blessed are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs" (Mt 5:3). Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven **is** theirs, and it is also ours, here and now. We are invited to open the door of our heart to listen to the voice of Jesus this year. In **EMBRACING** a culture of encounter, we will create united and reconciled communities within a united and reconciled world.

The Pope of Fratelli Tutti, recently affirms this concept. In Mosul he said "Fraternity is more durable than fratricide". He reminds us that on that bridge, called **humanity**, we must all take steps in order to **EMBRACE** one another. And we must do so above all in order to **embrace** those who are furthest away, those who at first, we might find repulsive, because however distant they may be from us, they are still our brothers and sisters.

I pray that your community will set out each day to **EMBRACE** the God of all and that our Franciscan spirituality is a continuing inspiration. *Fr Stephen*

REFLECTION

- Consider how your school community will **EMBRACE** this **LIVING STONE** from the FSA framework? • What can you do right now to **EMBRACE** all of creation?

ACT

Distribute the FSA Living Stones Framework to all staff as a mouse pad.

PRAY

Lord, teach us to move beyond ourselves, and to set out in search of **EMBRACE**. Teach us to go out and see, teach us to listen, not to entertain prejudices, or draw hasty conclusions. Teach us to go where no one else will go, to take the time needed to understand, to pay attention to the essentials, not to be distracted by the superfluous, to distinguish deceptive appearances from the truth. Grant us the grace to recognize your dwelling places in our world and the honesty needed to tell others what we have seen. AMEN

Fr Stephen Bliss ofm, is pleased to announce our new part-time **Animator of Mission and Identity for Franciscan Schools Australia**
Alison Stone

"I am delighted to minister with Alison in this new position of Animator, so that we can support and encourage Franciscan Spirituality within Schools in Australia. Franciscan Spirituality speaks to us more than ever at this time - our young people need models of people simply living the Gospel life. St. Francis and St. Clare encourage us to see and experience God's love and peace".

Known to many in the Franciscan family, **Alison** is a veteran educator, experienced spiritual formation and senior leader with a Franciscan heart.

FSA thanks the Franciscan Friars of the Holy Spirit Province for their generous funding of this position and the support by the MFIC Sisters, Australia. In gratitude we acknowledge their provision, vision and accompaniment.



Inspired by Murray Bodo's book *Tales of St. Francis,*

St Anthony Messenger Press, 1988

ST. FRANCIS MEETS A LEPER (pg 26)

In the soft mists over the valley of Spoleto, Francis meets a leper. Sliding off his horse and walking unsteadily towards the woman, Francis says aloud "..., I see Jesus offering me the beautiful feminine hand." (pg 27)

Francis only knows this woman in a brief embrace. Only when his love grew strong enough to embrace what he found difficult would Francis see the light of the broken person in his arms.



Today, I realise that God's face will continue to allude us until, like Saint Francis, we embrace God in every creature. Fr Murray reminds us that "A joy-filled life comes from taking what is bitter in life and embracing it for the love of Jesus Christ, who in turn transforms it into sweetness of soul." In that difficult embrace between Francis and the leper, we learn that God's face is both masculine and feminine, and God's face is not always beautiful at first embrace. When we read how St. Francis embraced a leper and realised he had held God in his arms; we begin to remember repulsive, difficult times in our own lives that turned out somehow divine. As communities who embrace the Franciscan tradition we have to return again and again to the poor, the despised and rejected. Those things, people who and daily events that challenge us, and at first we despise. We live our calling when we embrace and accompany the *poor little ones* as Saint Francis did. **Alison Stone**

FRANCISCAN MARKERS

These tales of St. Francis will help you to explore the Living Stone **EMBRACE**.

- Francis and the Leper,
- The Wolf of Gubbio;
- St. Francis and the Sultan;
- Of St. Francis' First Companion – Bernard of Quintavalle;
- The Miserable Leper's Tale
- The Damietta Prostitute
- The Miracle of Greccio



**No need to always recite a prayer ...
the Poor Clare Sisters suggest communities**

EMBRACE THE GAZE

Clare, in her writings, suggests a visual reading – Gaze on the image of the Crucified Christ, this leads to meditation or consideration of Christ, then to contemplation and an imitation of Christ.
(your school can purchase altar breads from The Poor Clare Community, Campbelltown [HERE](#))

Find out about The Poor Clare Community, Richmond [HERE](#)



"Glory to God in the highest, and peace to all of goodwill."

And so, it came to pass in 1223, the year Francis was spending Christmas with his brothers in the hermitage on the mountain of Greccio.

Today the miracle of Greccio continues as school communities globally **EMBRACE** those who have less than many.

In December 2021 it came to pass that a staff member at Padua College, Brisbane contacted FSA members and a bike and two helmets were left at the Ipswich Parish for two very excited young ladies from Sudan.

Our Executive Coordinator Fr Stephen was delighted to witness this gesture of **embrace**.



Elsa meets
Sr Cecilia mfc

MEET ELSA

We know that all God's creatures are part of the Franciscan story... think wolf, fish, birds and rabbits!

FSA invites schools to **EMBRACE Smart Pups** as part of your fundraising and justice program in 2022. **Smart Pups** is a not-for-profit charity organisation based on the Sunshine Coast, QLD. They specialise in providing trained service dogs (hearing and guide) to assist children with special needs.

Sr Catherine's new pup, ELSA will be trained for visits to retirement communities.



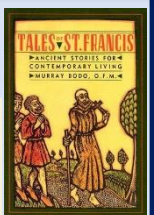
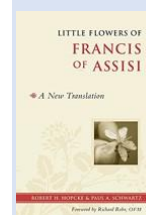
One of FSA National Executive members Sr Catherine mfc and her new pup, Elsa.

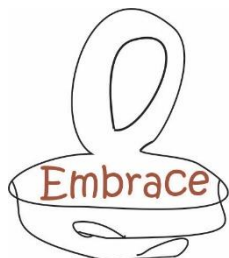
RESOURCES TO INSPIRE THE LIVING STONE OF EMBRACE



Animator of Mission and Identity for Franciscan Schools Australia, Alison is eager to assist schools with resources, formation and PD experiences. She will connect you with other schools and Franciscan religious. Please contact her:

| astone@franciscans.org.au
| M: 0427909302





THE FRANCISCAN SPIRIT OF EMBRACE

St. Francis used to say that he and the brothers had a contract with the world. If the brothers were faithful to **Gospel poverty**, the people of God would care for their needs.


(see the tale of St Dominic and the Chapter of Mats)

*Not everyone can live as poorly as St. Francis and the early friars did, but we can all live **Gospel poverty** which entails loving those who are not easily loved. In loving what we find difficult to **embrace**, we are transformed, our thinking is turned around, and we find God present in our community.*

So, how do we do this daily in a busy school environment?

FSA encourages all member schools to enact these **actions of embrace**:



- Keep eyes on your loving God. Lead meetings and start ALL classes – not just RE - with a simple prayer or reflection. It can be two lines long 😊
 - Turn on your camera when on screen – we want to SEE you!
 - Check in with everyone before you begin a meeting – Use the traffic light  analogy...“How are you travelling? On a green road, waiting/ stalled on amber or on a red (*rough*) road?”
 - Invite others to sit at ‘your table’ – don’t leave anyone on the outer, especially visitors and relief staff.
 - Actively seek out service opportunities in your local community.
- Embrace the ethos of sharing – so share resources, experiences and yourself with others, especially those staff members you find ‘bitter’.
 - Notice melancholy and respond warmly.
- Understand we don’t let students go because they are disrespectful and difficult – this is when we embrace the bitterness.
 - Create a Franciscan inspired signature block. Add **Pax et bonum** or **peace and all good** or **pax e bene** or simply **peace**.
 - Acknowledge the local indigenous people – whose country do you work on?
 - Go sit in nature and walk quietly upon the earth.
 - Enthusiastically schedule silence and stillness during your day.

These actions are a good start. But ...



We would love to hear from you, so email FSA and let us know how your community enacts the spirit of embrace. We’ll publish photos and stories.

LORD, TEACH ME POVERTY OF SPIRIT, WHICH DEPENDS ON YOU TO DO WHAT I CANNOT DO. TO BE POOR MEANS TO DEPEND ON YOU FOR EVERYTHING. TO BE POOR MEANS THAT I AM RICH ONLY IN WHAT YOU DO IN ME AND FOR ME. GRANT ME PEACE. AMEN.

M. Bodo Tales of St. Francis pg 67

Come learn from the women who lived it best!

Join online for a series of masterclasses on **12 female mystics**.



Each month (COSTS \$27- @ MONTH) , you'll be invited to learn from a different wise woman: from the classics, like **Teresa** of Avila, **Hildegard** of Bingen, and **Julian** of Norwich– to the lesser-known moderns, like Dorothy Day, Etty Hillesum, and Evelyn Underhill.



[Click here to learn more!](#)

EARTHBEAT

EarthBeat's Burning Questions series explores concepts related to faith and climate change.

*Why is Francis of Assisi the patron saint of ecology?
What is the season of creation?*

Click [HERE](#) to find out

If you have a burning question that FSA can answer and publish in our next ENewsletter contact FSA Animator of Mission and Identity – **Alison Stone**.
astone@franciscans.org.au



On the Calendar for 2022

- Website upgrade & launch
- eNewsletters - Wk 3 and Wk 8 each term
- Reconnect with all member schools
- Establish Sequential Formation Program
- National Executive visits to State hubs
- Primary approach – capacity building
- Specific conference for intensive training of key State representative
- Groundwork for **2023 Travelling Scholar** – Fr Dan Horan OFM who returns July – Aug 2023
- 2023 Pilgrimage to Assisi for staff of schools.



MEMBERSHIP FEES

All schools will receive a 2022 membership invoice by email during February. Your prompt attention ensures FSA can power our mission to connect, resource & support.

- \$250- for communities 3 - 101 students
- \$350- for communities 101 – 500 students
- \$550- for communities over 501 students.

RESOURCES: [Francis, the comic strip](#) +

[The Francis Chronicles](#) the ministry of the world's parish priest.



Francis



NCRonline.org/cartoons



The FSA website is a priority in 2022. Thank you for being patient as we work on behalf of all member schools.

