

How different religious communities embrace their charisms

Religious communities are gifted with charisms that called their founders to serve God in different ways. Some teach, preach or serve the poor. Some have a life of prayer that beckons others to hear the voice of God and seek his graces.

The five friars at the Holy Dormition Byzantine Franciscan Friary in Sybertsville, Pennsylvania, follow the example of St. Francis to live the Gospel through preaching, prayer, poverty, fraternity and serving the poor and marginalized.

Their chapel is open during daylight for prayer, Divine Liturgies and Friday confessions. Their retreats and days of recollection are part of the Franciscan charism of preaching the Gospel.



Father Wolbert

Father Jerome Wolbert is guardian of the house and has a parish assignment.

“We live our charism in the presence of our friars in having the chapel open, and the ministry of keeping the place as a quiet refuge where people can encounter God in the peace of the land and in the sacramental presence of Our Lord,” he

said.

The friary is the only Byzantine Franciscan community in the United States. They're part of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Province in Franklin, Wisconsin, which has nearly 90 Roman and Byzantine priests and brothers.

"I work at a food pantry a couple of times a month, and Father Jim Carroll, who also has a parish, helps collect food and gets it to the people who need it," Father Wolbert said. "A lot of people in our area are struggling to get by."

Brother Augustine Paulik, 80, is not as physically active as he once was, but he rises at 5 a.m. to be at chapel for 7 a.m. prayers. He's a good listener for visitors who need someone to talk to, and that's living the Gospel.

The friars embrace brotherhood in the spirit of St. Francis.

"We live without anything of our own," Father Wolbert said. "We come together for praying and for meals, and we support each other prayerfully and fraternally. So if I'm struggling with something, I don't have to deal with it on my own. I have my brothers to deal with it, too."

Dedication to the Rosary

The Dominican Nuns of the Perpetual Rosary in Summit, New Jersey, fully participate in the mission of the Dominican Friars of the Order of Preachers.

"We have a life of prayer, a life of penance and are witness to the reality of God and the primacy of God while living this life," said Sister Mary Catharine of Jesus Perry. "We make only one vow of obedience, and in that vow is this whole way of life that encompasses chastity, service and prayer."

The 18 nuns, ages 24 to 89, sing the full Divine Office seven times a day, attend daily Mass and have two hours of private

prayer. Praying the Rosary during adoration is part of their charism.

Sister Mary Catharine, 51, takes care of their habits and manages the gift shop that sells their handmade soap, hand creams and candles. She felt called to God since she was a child but wanted to teach. After one college semester, she realized that what she truly wanted was to simply praise God.

“The monastery is really like a center point in the area,” she said. “The chapel is open all day, and people come for prayer and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. We have people from all over the world asking us to pray for their intentions.”

A volunteer recently told her how much the monastery meant, that its presence “offered a place where we can come and be with the Lord.”

The spontaneous comment touched Sister Mary Catharine. “That’s what a monastery is supposed to do, to point to something more, to our final end and what we are here for,” she said.

An evolving mission

St. Catherine Kasper, founder of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit to discern how they were to respond to the needs of the poor in 19th-century Germany. She instructed the sisters to listen prayerfully, live simply and joyfully in loving service, and to be women of faith and vision who respond to the evolving needs of the Church.

When a handful of her sisters arrived in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1868, they served in a parish, school and orphanage and nursed the sick. Their work was primarily in schools and hospitals when Sister Joetta Huelsmann, provincial of the community in Donaldson, Indiana, entered 51 years ago. There are now 65 sisters in the U.S. States Province, and 48 are at the motherhouse.

“What we do now is broader,” Sister Joetta said. “We have the Sojourner Truth House where we work with women and children and have a day care center. We help the women to write resumes, learn how to dress for job interviews, and we help them find jobs and a place to live.”

There’s a retreat center on campus, MoonTree Studios for the arts, nursing home and independent living, housing for special needs and the elderly, preventive health services, food programs and services for immigrants. Babies with compromised health are cared for at a home in East Chicago.

Students at their Ancilla College gain agricultural experience at the Ancilla Beef and Grain Farm.

“We look at a person’s gifts and where we can use those gifts,” Sister Joetta said about their growing ministries and assignments.

The sisters pray together morning and evening, attend daily Mass if possible, have a personal prayer life and are encouraged to make at least a five-day retreat annually.

“We need that nourishment to renew our relationship with God,” she said.

Hospitality and stability

More than a thousand people make retreats every year at St. Emma Monastery in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Thousands more attend their summer flea market, quarterly book sales, Christmas Shoppe and Christmas Open House. People shop six days a week at their Treasure Shoppe and gift and book store, and it’s unknown how many visit the two chapels and the shrines to St. Walburga, Our Lady of Fatima, St. Pio, Jesus at the Last Supper, outdoor Stations of the Cross, or the Rosary path that winds through a corner of the monastery’s 115 acres. They also run a bed and breakfast.

Hospitality is a Benedictine charism. Following the Rule of St. Benedict, the six nuns, one postulant and their volunteers welcome all guests as Christ.



Mother Mary
Anne

“It’s so humbling to hear back about how people are touched or even changed when they come here,” said Mother Mary Anne Noll, the prioress for 27 years. “They experience that God really does provide an oasis in the world. He really does touch their hearts.”

The charism of *ora et labora*, Latin for prayer and work, is another Benedictine tradition.

“It’s the love of God and love of neighbor that’s infused in everything we do,” she said. “We use the tools of the monastery as sacred vessels, and sacred vessels are spaces to be filled with a gift of self. Yesterday we had a water leak in the retreat house, and cleaning that up was a gift that we had that we gave to God.”

The nuns’ prayer life centers on daily Mass and Liturgy of the Hours seven times a day, and fulfilling prayer requests from people who visit, call and send letters or emails from nearly every state.

“I am so privileged when people pull the curtain back on their hearts and really share what’s inside them, the struggles

they've been through, and the graces," Mother Mary Anne said. "We are the nursing home out in the battlefield of life. People are beat up from so many different sides. They come here and God blesses them."

Benedictines additionally profess a vow of stability.

"This is not just my address for 57 years," she said. "Think of stability as blooming where you're planted."

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