A message from  
S. Marilisa…

In the book of the Prophet Micah (6:8), we read: “This is what God asks of you: to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with God.” These simple words of scripture contain profound depth and meaning for us as we enter the season of Lent. They call us to reflect more deeply on the meaning of Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection, the Paschal Mystery that is the central focus of our faith.

Where is there a need for justice today? Who among us cannot recognize the oppression of nations, races, families, children, and neighbors who are suffering abuse at the hands of those who seek only to exploit them, to strip them of dignity, to use and abuse them without conscience? What has happened to our human race when immigrants who are seeking survival, a piece of bread, a refuge from tyranny to find only the coldness of apathy and denial? How can we walk humbly with God when our hearts have become hard, our prayers empty, our fasting a deception before so much global hunger and poverty?

On Ash Wednesday, we are eager to receive the sign of the Cross, the sign of our salvation. Listening to the words that call us to do penance and believe in the Gospel, we are encouraged to pray, fast, give alms, be merciful, forgive, and love unconditionally. Even when we are not loved in return, we are still called to live as children of Light in a world that appears to be overcome by darkness. These words give us the answers we seek in these difficult times. Both mercy and compassion are the weapons that will overcome the tragic effects of sin that has wounded us so deeply. In this cleansing season of Lent, let us become renewed by our hope in the Resurrection of the Lord who has conquered sin and darkness. Let us await eagerly for the Easter Vigil, to be blessed with the holy water of Easter, to see the Paschal candle pierce the darkness of the night, and to believe that God’s plan for humanity is still unfolding in our time.

May you be richly blessed in this holy season.

Sr. Marilisa Helena da Silva, OSF  
Congregational Minister  
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Celebrating 25 Years of the presence and ministry of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters in Santo Domingo, DR

Responding to our Lord’s call, and with a strong desire of expanding our international mission, the sisters and a lay associate initiated the Fraternity of Bernardine Franciscan Sisters in Santo Domingo. There was a group of sisters formed by Sister Andreen Rusin from the US Province, Sister Veraci da Silva Crispa from the Brazilian Province, and Jennifer Glass, a lay associate from the US Province. The group of missionaries arrived in Santo Domingo on the 8th of September of 1993 with their twelve suitcases. Father Gregorio de Alegría, a Vincentian priest, met the sisters at the airport and five seminarians helped the sisters with their luggage. When they arrived at the house (the Vicentians empty novitiate in Vila Mella), they met “Prietica”, the wonderful woman who helped the sisters and was like a sister and mother to all. The conditions of the water, lights and streets were their first challenges.

In January of 1994 Sister Lusete Morelli, from the Brazilian province, arrived to join the missionary group. The community of Los Tres Brazos was selected as their mission. The sisters were received with much affection, happiness and joy. All the sisters left Villa Mella to take care of the community at Santo Tomás in Los Tres Brazos. “Tres Brazos – Three Arms – so named because of a river which divides the area into three large settlements of houses and an innumerable population.

Students in Santo Domingo wearing the new school uniforms provided by Alvernia University fundraiser, and the generous donation of Rev. Ronald Bowman, Chaplain for the university and the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters in Reading, PA.

Tomás, at this time, was one of the nine chapels of St. Louise de Marillac parish. The group consisted of, for the most part, sick people who had no access to medical assistance or medicine. Another great worry of the sisters was providing birth and baptismal certificates. The people lived in a chaotic situation. God was talking to the sisters in each face of these suffering and abandoned people.

Sister Veraci da Silva Crispa and her care for the sick

Sister Yosari Mercedes Adames Rosa with students in the Dominican Republic

The sisters felt that St. Francis of Assisi and Mother Veronica were echoing to them “Peace and All Good” when the people welcomed them.
Celebrating 80 Years of the presence and ministry of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters in Brazil

With few material resources but endless energy, enthusiasm, and trust in Divine Providence, the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters have carried their mission beyond the borders of the United States, going first to Brazil in 1937, when five Bernardines were sent to Rio Grande do Sul in southern Brazil. Over the years many young Brazilian women joined the Sisters and today, over 85 Brazilian Sisters work in five states, including the Amazon region. There the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters are committed to education, healthcare, social services, as well as, pastoral and spiritual ministries.

The faithful missionary journey of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters in Brazil is one of simple, yet dauntless courage and Trust in Divine Providence. Despite the many difficulties faced, they have overcome challenges, improved countless lives, and strengthened numerous communities in mission. Thousands of people have experienced the merciful presence of Christ because of the Sisters’ zealous missionary spirit.

Today with deep trust in Divine Providence, they continue to respond to the needs of the poor, whether near or far, partnering with Associates and Volunteers in Mission.

As they celebrate their 125th anniversary, they thank God for His tremendous goodness and hope that, in some way, they have also left a positive impact upon the lives of many. †
Our Mission

IN THE NAME OF JESUS,
we reach out in compassionate love
recognizing the dignity and
giftedness
of each person.
We welcome all as brother
and sister.
faithful to the Church and to
our Charism,
We seek justice, peace and
reconciliation,
especially as we work with
and in behalf of the poor.
Trusting in Divine Providence
we journey in faith and joy,
sister and servant to all.

USA—BRAZIL—AFRICA
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
Our History

The Bernardine Franciscan Sisters have answered God’s call for more than one hundred years. Following in the footsteps of Francis and Clare of Assisi, Bernardine of Siena, Angelina of Montegiove and Mother Veronica Grzedowska of Poland, we continue our mission — to embrace the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our story is one of blessings and Divine Providence intertwined with a rich history founded in active lay ministry in the 15th century, transformed by cloister life for over 400 hundred years, and brought to a new life in the United States in the latter part of the 19th century.

In a new millennium, we stand at historic crossroads, witnessing to humankind’s awesome achievements and God’s marvelous works. We know that there isn’t a clear way mapped out for the future. Like our foundress, who took her first footsteps of hopes and dreams on the soil of the United States, we too, walk into the future trusting in Divine Providence and knowing God’s eternal goodness will sustain our efforts. We respond to new challenges and dare to make a difference as we journey with our brothers and sisters — following the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The heritage of Francis, Clare, Bernardine, Angeline, and Mother Veronica inspire us to venture forward into the future as women who are focused on the mission of Jesus. We need each other’s insights, cooperation, enthusiasm, and willingness to go the extra mile. Time and time again, our extraordinary history was blessed with women — women who saw with the eyes of faith; women who listened with the ears of hope; women who became the voices of the voiceless; and women who walked in the footsteps of our Franciscan brothers and sisters. They model to us how to continue the act of creation in the ongoing evolution of our congregation.

Elza, a lay missionary, and Sr. Eliene