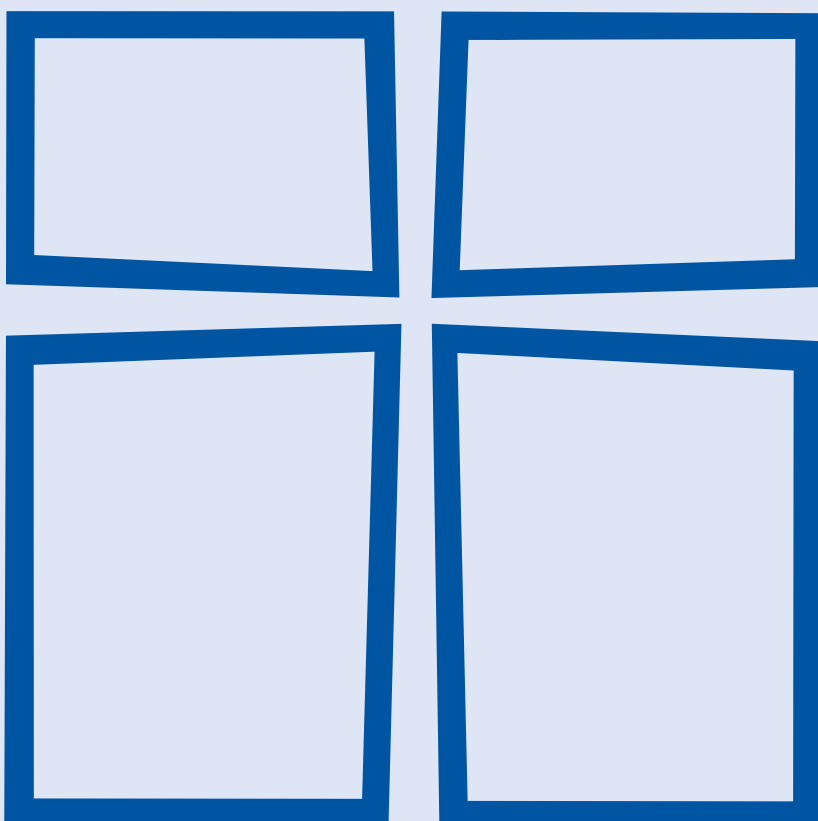


Theodosia

1/2026



History of the Institute

I Must Have This Hill

Sacred Places

The Church of the Sacred
Heart of Jesus in Đakovo

Blessing - Opening

Zdenka Schelingová
Pilgrimage House



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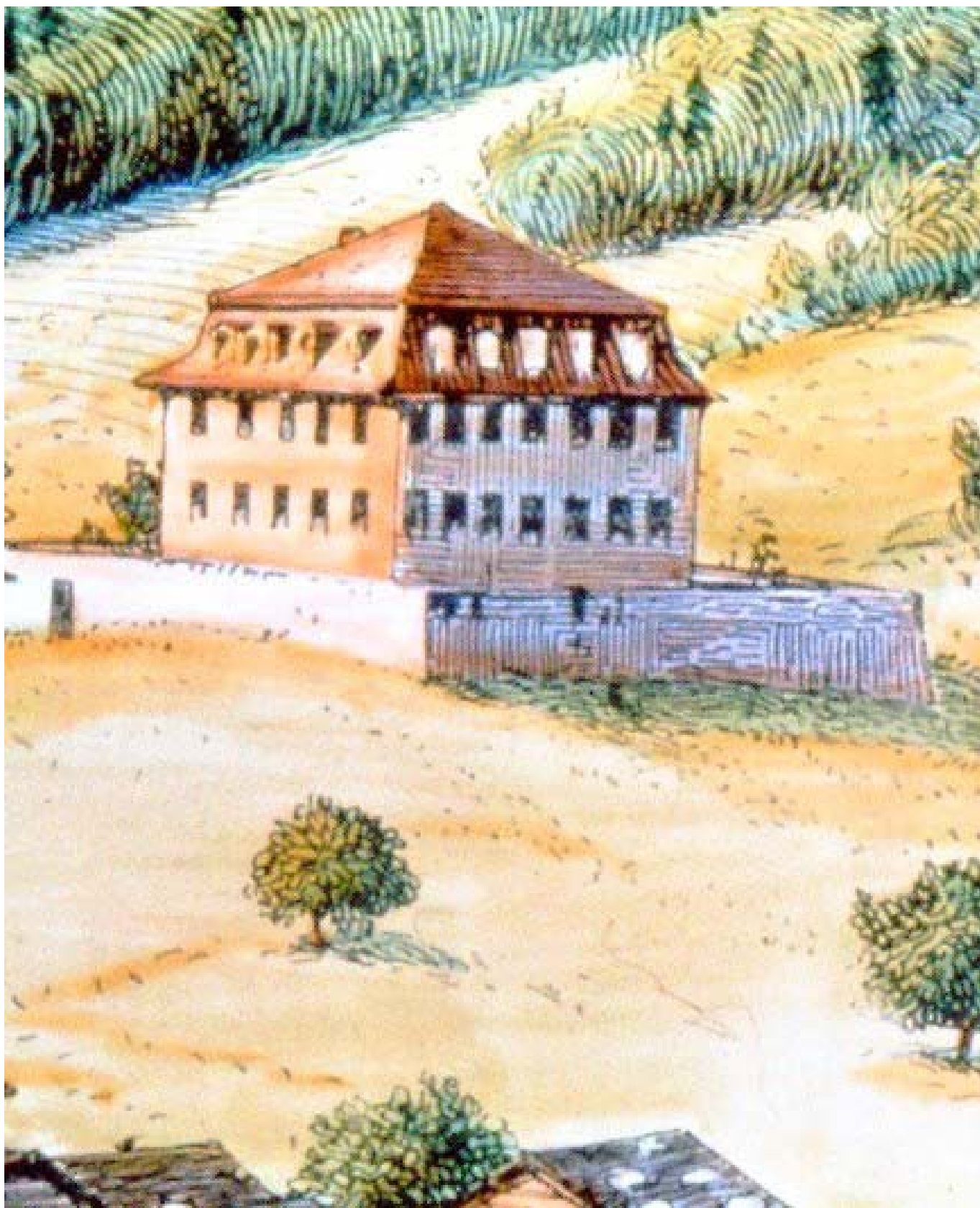
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"Niggsche Hof", Drawing by Sr. M. Agniete Steponaityte

(1906–1995)

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Editorial

Theodosia has been given a new look. However, it remains true to its mission. Mother M. Theresia herself prefaced the first issue in 1886 with these words: “It has no other purpose than to bring the sisters news from time to time of what is being created and what good is being done within the bosom of the Congregation ...”. We know from experience that much more new and good happens in everyday life than what we can read in Theodosia. But the articles create a bond between us, allowing us to marvel, give thanks and pray for one another. The network applies here too.

Let us leaf through this issue a little. Who could have imagined 170 years ago that the Niggsche Hof would become the motherhouse of a worldwide community? On March 5, 1856, a few courageous sisters, almost destitute, began to set up and expand the house. We can only agree with the chronicler of the time: „Human effort was one thing, God’s blessing was another.”

We are also introduced to a holy place, namely the convent church of Đakovo in the Province of Croatia. A place full of stories of God and people. Blessed Sr. Zdenka Schelingová has been given a pilgrims’ house in Podunajské Biskupice, in the Province of Slovakia. We may assume that it will become a place of attraction for many people.

As Holy Cross Sisters, we will no doubt follow with interest the article on an art exhibition entitled: “Signs of the Cross” – “Signs of Life”. The artist herself shares her reflections on this with us.

Sisters from various European provinces set out together last year as pilgrims on the Ulrika way from Unterstadion to Hegne. A special experience of “praying with one’s feet”. The Community Tree of Life also met in Hegne in September. It sees itself as a living branch of our community.

In Theodosia, there is also space for a sister’s very personal reflections on her profession and her vocation as a teacher.

We know from experience how important playing, singing and painting are. Let us be inspired by “homemade games in old age”.

Spring has a lot to offer: with the awakening of nature, it can also be a sign of the “nevertheless” in our lives. Examples come from a spring poem and from the Bible.

As usual, the “Information from the General Leadership” follow at the end.

As a reminder, a notice from 2024,1: „As a result of the significantly changed situation in our communities, Theodosia will only be published three times a year from 2024 onwards.”

With heartfelt thanks for the varied contributions and best wishes to all readers.

Sr. Christiane Jungo

I must have this hill

The arrival of the first sisters in Ingenbohl 170 years ago

Christiane Jungo, based on Dr P. Veit Gadiant and Sr M. Clarissa Rutishauser

For a neglected house to be transformed into a convent, indeed even a motherhouse, it took foresight, courage, helpers and, above all, trust in God. All of this was characteristic of Fr. Theodosius Florentini. Let us look back 170 years.

THE “NIGGSCHHE HOF”

In the first few days of March 1856, a group of sisters climbed the hill above Ingenbohl-Brunnen with only a few belongings. Their destination was the “Niggsche Hof” – at that time a dilapidated estate. The house had been built in 1761 and had changed hands several times over the course of history. At the beginning of the 19th century, Marzell Nigg from Gersau had purchased it. It was to him that the commonly used name “Niggsche Hof” was attributed. It was to become the motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy.

Why was the motherhouse to be moved away from Chur? Although the radical government of Chur appreciated the sisters’ work in the new hospital and other institutions, it feared that a convent might be established in the town. That was not to be allowed. By decree, it ruled that all sisters and novices who were not strictly necessary for the running of the hospital must leave Chur.

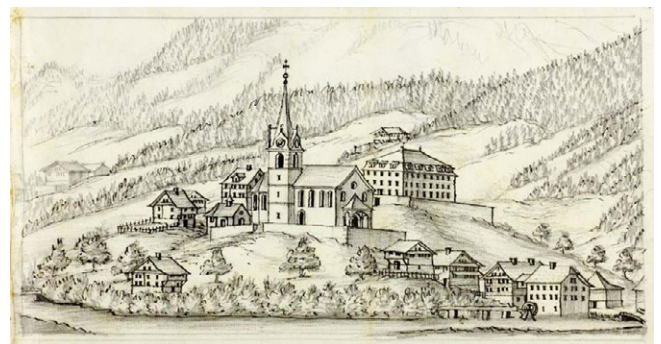
We learn from the Schwyz Council proceedings that Fr. Theodosius was not the first to consider this hill suitable for a monastic settlement; in 1830, the Trappists were granted

permission to settle at the “Niggsche Hof”. Apparently, this never came to pass.

The chronicle of Ingenbohl recounts that, whilst inspecting the hill, Fr. Theodosius declared: “I must have this hill; it is as if Providence had destined it for my plan”.

What is certain is that the then parish priest of Ingenbohl, Melchior Tschümperlin, advised the searching Fr. Theodosius to establish the motherhouse for his congregation here. He not only gave sound advice, but proved himself a friend and helper during the motherhouse’s early difficult times, helping on more than one occasion to alleviate the sisters’ poverty.

What was known at the time as the “Niggsche Hof” comprised a relatively spacious, formerly well-kept but now somewhat dilapidated



‘Niggsche Hof’, pen-and-ink drawing around 1800

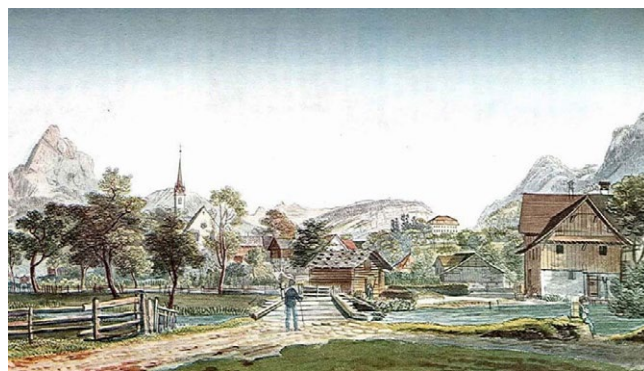
residential building, outbuildings including barns and stables, plus a garden, fields and meadows. Apparently, Fr. Theodosius did not focus so much on the condition of the property, but already envisioned in his mind what he would make of the house and farm.

The purchase contract is dated september 3, 1855.

How was Fr. Theodosius able to make such a purchase? He had, after all, to confess to the Landammann Xaver Aufdermauer of the Hotel Adler in Brunnen, whom he had taken into his confidence, that his entire cash holdings consisted of a five-franc coin. So the hotelier advanced the purchase price. This was set at 26,000 guilders or 45,714.24 francs. The instalments were spread over the years 1855 to 1858. Among the terms and conditions was the following: “The seller is obliged to provide the buyer with a good cow as part of this purchase.” Thus, at least some provision had been made for the future household.

Human effort was one thing, God’s blessing was another

Let us hear from the chronicler of the motherhouse, Sr. Marzella Mürb, as she recounts the arrival of the first sisters at the “Niggsche Hof”. “With the onset of spring in 1856, new life sprang from the ruins. On march 5, Sr. Lidwina Müller, a proven pioneer, arrived in Ingenbohl from Chur with a few assistants. Her travelling companion was holy poverty, which was also palpable and visible everywhere in Ingenbohl. Sr. Lidwina was well acquainted with her from Planaterra and the Holy Cross Hospital and was not at all accustomed to being daunted by difficulties. In the best of health and of rare strength, filled with vigour and a zest for work, she set to work with fresh enthusiasm on the great task; the others followed her example ...”.



Parish church and ‘Niggsche Hof’, around 1820, watercolor by David Schmid, Schwyz State Archives

Fr. Theodosius immediately arranged, for the first few weeks, that retreats should be held here for the sisters in the surrounding area. That was easier said than done. “In the absence of bed frames, straw was piled on the floor; sheets and blankets completed the sleeping arrangements ...”. It was more difficult to procure other necessary items. “Sr. Lidwina borrowed cooking utensils from the parish house kitchen; from the Fassbind family in Brunnen she obtained rice and dried fruit on credit. The brave cook gathered the necessary fuel in the vicinity of the house, where wood and brushwood lay scattered about.”

The first retreat hall also presented a picture of extreme poverty. A door laid on its side, draped with a thin curtain, resting on four unplanned pieces of wood, served as the altar table. “When Fr. Theodosius, who was leading the retreat, noticed that there was no cross, he declared that he would not give any further talks unless a crucifix was brought into the room.” Eventually, a crucifix was found and two candles were borrowed from the parish church.

Over the course of the weeks and months, things became somewhat more homely. Craftsmen were called in, fields were levelled and gardens laid out, and when a group of

sisters arrived again in the autumn, the whitewashed, welcoming house greeted them from the hilltop. The chronicler would later write: “Human effort was one thing, God’s blessing was another.”

MOTHERHOUSE OF THE SISTERS OF MERCY

Meanwhile, Fr. Theodosius had been working to establish the legal basis for the new motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy for schooling and nursing. As early as the beginning of May 1856, he had been granted verbal approval by the Bishop of Chur. On May 23, he requested written confirmation. In doing so, he emphasised that he would shortly be submitting the revised Rule, together with further provisions, for approval as well. In addition, he asked that the Bishop might renew his appointment as Superior of the Institute.

The Bishop’s reply is dated June 3, 1856

Bishop Kaspar von Carl confirmed: “1. The so-called ‘Niggsche Hof’ in Ingenbohl (hereinafter referred to as Ingenbohl) shall henceforth, and until further notice, serve as a motherhouse and training centre for the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross for the Diocese and Administration of Chur, and shall be recognised as such. 2. The Sisters shall observe the Constitutions of the Institute of the Teaching Sisters of the Third Order of St Francis of Assisi, previously approved by us, under the title: Sisters of the Holy Cross. 3. We reserve the right to make such amendments to these Constitutions as we deem necessary; furthermore, in all matters not covered by the Rule, the Superiors of the Institute shall follow our instructions and shall not decide on anything of importance without our approval.”

Mother M. Theresia oversaw matters alternately in Chur and Ingenbohl. In 1857, the young community in Chur numbered 72 sisters, 50 novices and 30 candidates, all of whom were also led by her. During her absence, Sr. M. Ida Hardegger, a teacher in Schwyz and later assistant to the Congregation, managed the financial affairs at the motherhouse. Internal management was entrusted to Sr. Alexandrina Krotz, who later became Provincial Superior in Bohemia. On October 13, 1857, Mother M. Theresia, whilst still in Chur, was legally elected Superior General of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross. It was not until the spring of 1858 that she finally moved into the new motherhouse on the hill in Ingenbohl with the novices and candidates.

Cell division

Fr. Theodosius would have liked to see Ingenbohl serve as the motherhouse for both the teaching sisters and the Sisters of Mercy. However, differences of opinion between him and Mother Bernarda prevented this plan from coming to fruition. Their visions regarding the direction of the community and responsibility for it were too far apart. Furthermore, Menzingen, with the motherhouse of the Teaching Sisters, belonged to the Diocese of Basel, whilst Chur/Ingenbohl, with the motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy, belonged to the Diocese of Chur. As no agreement could be reached despite considerable efforts, the two bishops, Karl Arnold of Basel and Kaspar von Carl of Chur, declared the two communities to be two independent, separate institutes at the end of August 1856.

Mother M. Theresia had kept a low profile during this tense period and suffered as a result of these developments. In an excerpt from a letter dated July 30 1856 to Mother Bernarda, we sense something of this pain:



Parish church and 'Niggsche Hof', watercolor around 1850

“... Dear Mother, I wish you could see into my heart, how deeply attached I am to the Institute and how I have always loved you and still do ...”.

Instead of “separation”, 170 years on we can say: it was a “cell division”, for both congregations flourished, albeit with pain, but under God’s blessing and thanks to the devotion of courageous women. Each community realised, in its own way, the wish of Fr. Theodosius: “I wanted to establish these congregations in such a way that they would fit in everywhere, could find a home anywhere, and would seek to penetrate all walks of life.”

Today, after years of outward growth, both communities are experiencing a phase of downsizing and an inward-looking apostolate. And above all: they rejoice in their shared roots and feel a sisterly bond with one another.

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Holy Places

The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Đakovo

Sr. Matea Čelik, Đakovo, Province of Croatia

Every convent church is full of stories. Stories of God and of people who have prayed, celebrated, sought guidance and given thanks here in good times and bad. In this holy place, everyone is, as it were, enveloped in a “cloud of prayer” that has spread throughout this space over generations.

A SPIRITUAL CENTRE

In Đakovo, in the heart of Slavonia, there is not only a geographical but also a spiritual centre: the provincial house of the Croatian Province of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross. And like a living organism, it has its own heart – the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus – which is pulsing with the rhythm of prayer, faith and love. A love that springs from the pierced heart of Jesus and pours out upon the sisters and all those who, through them, experience the closeness of God.

PLACE OF FIRST LOVE

The church is not only physically situated at the heart of the convent (for it literally divides the convent into an eastern and a western part), but it is also the spiritual heart, the centre of the sisters' lives in our province. In addition to daily commu-

nal prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist, during which the sisters receive the Word of God and the Bread of Life, this church has also had a decisive influence on the life of almost every sister in our province. Since its construction (1908), almost every sister began her religious journey here, when she first heard her religious name and was admitted to the novitiate. Almost every sister became a bride of Christ in this church by responding to his call to love, devotion, fidelity and com-



Exterior

munion, by reciting the formula of vows. Thus, this Sacred Heart Church is a place of first love. A place where every sister is called to renew this love, to reaffirm it and to commit herself to it – through the renewal of vows, the perpetual vows and, finally, through the 50th anniversary of her profession.

AN INTERIOR THAT LEADS TO CONTEMPLATION

The church was built in the late Baroque style and is cruciform in shape. It is 37 metres long, 11 metres wide and 17 metres high, and has four wooden altars – the high altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, two side altars (the altar of Our Lady and of St Joseph) and the altar of St Anthony at the entrance to the church. The church is adorned with numerous stained-glass windows, including those depicting Our Lady of Lourdes, Saint Teresa of Ávila, the Nativity of Jesus, the Resurrection of Christ, the Apparition of Jesus to Margaret Mary Alacoque, the Visitation of Mary, Saint Francis at the Cross, and others. In addition to the windows, a beautiful Way of the Cross enriches the church. The interior of the church is simple, bright and pleasant; above all, it cre-

ates an atmosphere of peace, inviting contemplation and directing heart and soul towards what is essential.

I recall the testimony of a nun who, in great inner distress, came before the image of Our Lady. Kneeling, she raised her gaze to Mary, and it seemed to her as though Mary had put everything aside, placed her hands in her lap, and listened with maternal attention to the nun's cry for help.

ON THE WAY TO THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

A more recent addition is the mosaic depicting our three Blessed ones and their relics, along with the cross that connects earth and heaven. It was installed in January 2023. The artist behind the mosaic, Brother Zdenko Vidović (SJ), says:

“The entire composition can be reduced to a few fundamental motifs: the cross, the heavenly Jerusalem (heaven), Mary, and the depiction of Blessed Mother M. Theresia Scherer, the founder; Blessed Sr. Ulrika Nisch; Blessed Sr. Zdenka Schelingová; and Mother M. Amadeja Pavlović, whose beatification process has been initiated. Through her ‘yes’,

Mary made it possible for the Second Person of the Holy Trinity to take on human nature and bring about our salvation. Through his death on the cross, Jesus opened the gates of heaven for us. And through our ‘yes’ to God's will and the promptings of the Holy Spirit, following the example of Mary and the blessed, we can make our lives a masterpiece.”

We see that, alongside the Blessed, Mother M. Amadeja Pavlović,



Interior

Provincial Superior of the Croatian Province during the difficult period of communism (1943–1955), has also found her place in the mosaic. With her wisdom, prudence, faith and courage, she left a deep impression on the spiritual heritage, history and life of the Croatian Province.

OPEN TO ALL

Although the church is part of the convent, it is open to anyone who wishes to pray with the sisters, join in the Mass or pray here privately during the day. The altar of St Anthony at the entrance to the church is particularly popular – so much so that many believe him to be the church’s patron saint. On the feast day of St Anthony, believers from near and far make a pilgrimage to the church throughout the day. Every 16th of the month is a day of pilgrimage in honour of Blessed Mother M. Theresia, bringing together worshippers from Dakovo and the surrounding area as well as believers from other parts of the diocese.

The church hosts not only religious ceremonies but also celebrations organised by groups associated with the monastery. Here, members of the Franciscan Third Order (OFS) take their vows; members of the Franciscan Youth renew their promises; and occasionally, parents and children from our nursery school gather, as do children, parents and friends of people with disabilities.

The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Dakovo is not merely an architectural mas-



High altar

terpiece or a historic building – it is a living testimony to faith, that endures. Under its vaults echo the prayers of generations of sisters, the cries for help from the faithful, and the joy of shared celebrations. It is a place where God’s longing and that of humanity, God’s call and the human response, come together. And as the sisters and the faithful continue their journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem, this church remains a constant reminder and a sign of hope – that the love flowing from the heart of God is the only power that transforms human souls and the world.

Zdenka Schelingová Pilgrimage House – Blessing and opening

Sr. Jaroslava Kotul'áková, Trnava, Province of Slovakia

Even in difficult times, dreams can come true if enough people believe in them. And when the right people get to work and patrons come forward, a former novitiate house is transformed into a pilgrim house in honour of Sr. Zdenka Schelingová. It now stands under God's blessing and is an open place of encounter, retreat and seeking God.

THE PURPOSE OF THE HOUSE

Moved by the Spirit of God, we have courageously undertaken the renovation of Block B in Podunajské Biskupice to create the Zdenka Schelingová Pilgrimage House. In this house, as pilgrims of hope, we wish to journey alongside people who wish to get to know Blessed Zdenka better. We also wish to welcome those who, through her intercession, draw from the treasure of God's grace and who wish to rest in the tranquillity of this house as they journey through life.

GRAND OPENING AND BLESSING

January 10, 2026 was a great gift for our Province Slovakia. The Zdenka Schelingová Pilgrimage House in Podunajské Biskupice was solemnly blessed and opened by Bishop Pavol Šajgalík, OFM Cap, Bishop of the Ordinariate of OS and OZ SR. The celebration began with a festive Holy Mass in the Church of the Exaltation of the Cross, attended by many priests, sisters from European provinces (Switzerland, Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic), local sisters and other guests of honour. We were particularly delighted by the presence

of General Councillor Sr. Rahela Lacković. She represented the General Leadership at this celebration. She is also the contact person for our Province Slovakia.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COURAGE AND COOPERATION

In his homily, the Bishop highlighted the sisters' courage in bringing such a project to fruition in these difficult times. He



In the church before Holy Mass



Bishop Mons. Pavol Šajgalik, OFMCap, and concelebrants

reminded us that we are all pilgrims on a journey and that, along this path, we need places where we can reflect on our lives in silence, draw new strength, and return to our daily duties with renewed hope.

He expressed his gratitude to all who had contributed to the realisation of this project: the architect Pavol Ďurko, who was unable to live to see its completion; the construction company TOMCRAFT and its team; and the benefactors, in particular the sisters of the Central Europe Province.



Reliquary and offerings

THE PROJECT IN CONNECTION WITH THE SPIRITUAL LEGACY OF BLESSED ZDENKA

At the end of Holy Mass, the Provincial Superior, Sr. Mária Terézia Dobrovičová, expressed her gratitude to God and to all those who had contributed to the realisation of this project. As a token of gratitude, she presented the main representatives with a stone image of Blessed Zdenka, symbolising the connection between the physical construction of the



Blessing of the Pilgrim House

house and the spiritual heritage of the Congregation and Blessed Zdenka.

The Holy Mass was followed by the blessing and solemn opening of the pilgrim house. The invited guests and sisters were able to chat in a joyful atmosphere over a shared agape meal and then tour the entire house.

THE HOUSE OVER WHICH BLESSED ZDENKA WATCHES

During the blessing of the house, Bishop Šajgalík compared the pilgrim house to a great relic. Sr. Zdenka spent the years of her formation here – her postulancy and novitiate. He expressed his conviction that she would watch over this house with care. Through her intercession, she would help and accompany all who enter it.

We are very grateful for this work, for God's great protection during the renovation and for His goodness. We believe that all pilgrims and visitors who visit the Zdenka Schelingová Pilgrimage House in Podunajské Biskupice will experience this goodness of God.



Grand opening

Sign of the Cross – Sign of Life

An art exhibition by Sr. Margret Scheurecker, Linz, Province of Central Europe

In the following text, Sr. Margret introduces herself. We learn not only about her work and an exhibition during Lent 2025, but she also gives us a sense of her self-understanding as a Holy Cross Sister and an artist, of her charism and her mission.



Sr. Margret

BIOGRAPHY

Sr. Margret was born in 1955 in Taufkirchen an der Pram (Upper Austria). She studied art education (visual arts and craft education). From the time of her profession in 1980

until 2017, she taught at the School Centre of Holy Cross Sisters in Linz.

Since 1995, she has been creating her own works, preferably using clay, soapstone and wood. She has been exhibiting her work regularly for 20 years. She is currently exploring the expressive power of colour: painting on wood, on hand-woven linen, and collages with colour photographs. Sr. Margret leads a creative group both at the Rudigier retirement home in Linz and in the order's own care unit for elderly sisters and those suffering from dementia.

COMMISSION AS AN ARTIST

During Lent 2025, I was invited to exhibit a wide variety of works on the theme that is

central to me, “Signs of the Cross – Signs of Life”, at the St. Benedict Education Centre in Seitenstetten (Lower Austria). For 20 years, I have organised an exhibition almost every year, even though putting my work on display is something I find difficult. I am constantly preoccupied by the question of whether artistic creation has a place within our mission as Holy Cross Sisters. But when I then discover, through contact with people, that my works open up a spiritual space of wonder, of conversation, of longing for an encounter with God, then I must say again and again with all my heart: Yes, I may, I must show myself through my works! That is my mission, my very personal way of responding today to the needs and hardships of people on a spiritual quest!

AN INSIGHT INTO THE TECHNIQUE

For my “Sign of the Cross – Sign of Life” series, I used hand-woven linen from the rural region of the Mühlviertel. In the past, young women who wished to become nuns would bring this linen to the convent as part of their “dowry”. For decades, it lay unnoticed in a chest. Anyone who understands the labour involved in processing flax by hand and

weaving linen knows just how precious this material was – and still is to me.

This linen, woven from thin and thicker threads, bears my painting: red-pulsing, blue-breathing, light-filled symbols of divine life. For my works are meant to be symbols and hints, not representational images. I take very seriously the commandment that man should not form a concrete image of God (Ex 20:4). God, the Creator of all being, is a mystery. I sense him as the Great Life, reflected in the whole of multicoloured and manifold existence (Gen 1:26). Jesus, the Christ, is a mystery: do not try to capture him in an image! *Noli me tangere!* (John 20:17)

The hand-woven linen inspired me to reflect on life: life is like weaving. The stretched threads of the so-called warp are given to you, predetermined; threads of fate to which you – perhaps at times – feel chained. But you can decide on the quality and colour of the thread for the so-called weft. You choose the weave, your personal order, your individual pattern. From these crossed, interwoven threads of warp and weft, your life emerges: your unique life, moving freely back and forth, woven, lived.

BIBLE PASSAGES ON THE THEME OF “LINEN”

Before I began the painting, I looked for Bible passages that speak of linen and textiles. This created a special connection for me with the material that awaited me.

Lk. 2:7: “They wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

Lk. 10:25–37: “When he saw him, he had compassion, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them.”

Matthew 9:18–26: “Then a woman who had been suffering from a haemorrhage for twelve years came up behind him and touched the hem of his garment. For she said to herself, ‘If I only touch his garment, I will be healed.’”

Lk. 15:11–32: “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quickly, bring the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.’”

Jn. 13:4: “He rose from the table, took off his outer garment, and wrapped a linen cloth around himself; then he began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the linen cloth.”

Mt. 27:35 and John 19:23: “And the soldiers divided his garments among themselves.”

Lk. 23:53: “And he took him down from the cross, wrapped him in a linen cloth and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb.”

John 19:40: “They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in linen cloths, together with the fragrant ointments, as is the Jewish custom for burial.”

Lk. 24:12: “But Peter ran to the tomb, bent down, and saw only the linen cloths lying there.”

Rev. 7:13–14: “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and where have they come from? – They are those who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Ps. 139:14: “You yourself formed my inner being; you wove me in my mother’s womb. I thank you that I am so wonderfully and marvellously made.”

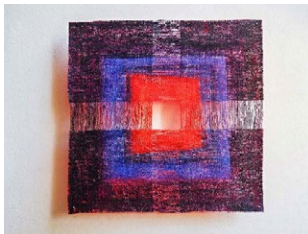
Is 38:12: “Like a weaver, you have woven out my life; you cut me off like a finished piece of cloth.”

It moved me to see that Jesus' life, from beginning to end, is closely linked to the reality of linen.

Design

Before I began painting on the hand-woven linen, I removed warp and weft threads from the fabric, creating a cross-shaped pattern with an empty centre which appears lighter or darker depending on the angle of the light.

As I subsequently stiffened the linen with paste, it was possible to attach the finished work to the wall using four pins. However, the distance from the wall is approximately four centimetres; thus, the "Sign of the cross – Sign of life" appears to float in front of the wall, conveying a certain lightness. At the same time, however, a dynamic interplay of light and shadow emerges – a symbolic reference to our lives.



**Dark Sound
night-time word
God's name
God's essence
I am here**



**Veronica's veil – a ray of
light from the encounter**



**the divine countenance of
the earth
the earthly face of God**



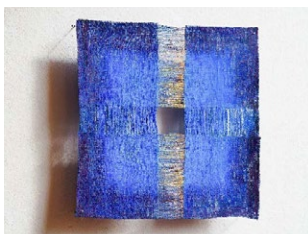
**From the depths I call to
you, Lord**



**Four-part harmony
harmony
quaternity
Four of the 99 Names of
God**



**The passing of light –
God's silent presence**



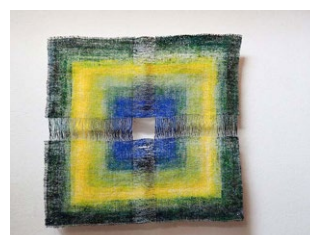
**I do not wish to know you,
God
I sense sometimes,
perhaps not always
in the blue of the
dandelion, flax blossom,
bellflower**



**I am the window to the
world**



**don't hold me tight
don't bind me in the
picture
sense me in the breath of
colour
in the breath of the world**



**God saw that it was good:
heaven, earth, plants,
light**

European Pilgrimage Week

In the footsteps of Blessed Sr. Ulrika

Sr. Dorothea Maria Oehler, Hegne, Province of Baden-Württemberg

Getting to know Sr. Ulrika better, meeting other people, walking together, praying, singing, marvelling at nature and experiencing surprises time and again – all this was part of the pilgrimage along the Ulrika Way from Unterstadion to Hegne from May 24 to 31, 2025.

TOGETHER ON THE ULRIKA WAY

To mark the 130th anniversary of the Baden-Württemberg Province and with a view to fostering concrete links between the Western European provinces, we had the opportunity to meet a diverse, multilingual group of Holy Cross Sisters from the provinces of Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia, the Czech Repub-

lic, Central Europe and Switzerland at Hegne Convent.

After 14 sisters had arrived on Saturday, we set off as pilgrims of hope. Among them were P. Helmut Miltner, Sr. Dorothea Maria Oehler and other sisters from Hegne. From Sunday onwards, we spent four days walking the Ulrika Way from Unterstadion to Mittelbiberach, and from Birnau to Hegne. At the Ulrika



Church in Unterstadion, we were warmly welcomed at the Ulrika traditional room by the Ulrika Friends' Association, as we were at our accommodation and destinations in Mittelbiberach and Steinhausen, and especially in Hegne.

Setting out – Trust – Pausing – Arriving: a theme for each day! We also learnt that pilgrimage is possible whatever the weather. One sister said after the first day: "It's just like a retreat!" A younger sister commented: "It was like an international juniorate gathering." Those are wonderful compliments.

The path through the green meadows, the orchards and the woods allowed us to "pray with our feet". We were able to experience a sense of vastness, great depth, meaningful encounters and a fruitful exchange across borders, combined with many surprises.

The churches along the way served as places of refuge and invited us to pray. The daily Eucharistic celebrations with P. Helmut Miltner were valuable and precious.

"Love knows no measure" – this was the motto of Sr. Ulrika that guided us on our journey. We experienced abundance and plenitude, just as Psalm 23 says: "He fills my cup to the brim!"

On Thursday, the Feast of the Ascension, the visiting sisters joined in meals at various convents within the Hegne Monastery. This led to a lively and valuable exchange! The following day, everyone was delighted by the flower island, Mainau.

Looking back, I can say: we were united in prayer and are very grateful for this experience. The Good Shepherd was with us and guided us!

“Community Tree of Life” – september meeting

Gabriele Weh-Saile, member of Lebensbaum, Hegne Convent

The members of the ‘Community Tree of Life’ in Hegne strive to live out the spirituality of the Sisters of the Cross in their daily lives. At their meeting last autumn, they celebrated the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, welcomed new members and established new structures.

FROM THE SEPTEMBER MEETING

The september 2025 meeting of the Lebensbaum Community was marked by a sense of vitality and new beginnings.

A central theme was the **Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross**, which connects the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross and the ‘Community Tree of Life’ in a special way. Every year around september 14, the entire community gathers for a large meeting in

Hegne. This year, the spiritual significance of the feast was explored through a variety of creative expressions: using natural materials, clay work, dance and a painting workshop.

A highlight was the solemn admission of three new members. Following an induction period, they were welcomed during a festive service. They placed their admission within the context of the Easter story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus – a powerful symbol



Group photo



New Leadership

of their shared journey of faith, of lived community and of God’s closeness. Another important moment of the weekend was the farewell to the previous leadership team. In future, responsibility will no longer be borne by a single team, but distributed across several working groups. The thanks of the community to the previous leadership was heartfelt and overwhelming. As a symbol of the new beginning, a steering wheel was handed over to the new working groups. Sr. Susanne Bader, the Provincial Superior, pronounced a blessing on this new path. With strengthened cohesion and a forward-looking structure, the ‘Community Tree of Life’ is now setting out on a new phase of its work.



Symbol for the Journey

My dream of becoming a teacher

Sr. M. Beáta Skubeňová, Nursery School, Kopanka, Slovak Province

A profession, or as we like to say today, a job, generally refers to daily work to earn a living. But when we speak of a vocation, it implies that an activity is carried out with passion and joy, that a higher purpose and mission are seen behind it.

My vocation

Ever since I was a child, I have had a dream of teaching and nurturing children. Today I have been blessed with this opportunity, and I often thank God for it. I am delighted that, in my work as a teacher, I can live out my “spiritual motherhood”. And also that, through this, I can play a part in direct evangelisation within the Church. I have thus been granted the grace to pass on the faith and the message of God’s and our love to others.

It is said that children are full of energy. Indeed, they have their own spark, sometimes even an abundance of energy, which needs to be put to good use and channelled properly.

In this respect, I feel a duty to impart values to them through words, but above all through my very being. For this reason too, my field of work is the place of my constant conversion of heart and my growth in the school of Jesus. It is the space where my wounds and shortcomings come to the surface and draw my attention to the need for my own healing and conversion. I can say that the difficulties in my work as a teacher are often precisely my weaknesses. The children help me to recognise the truth about myself more clearly. When I am honest with myself, I can sense who I really am. With their simplicity, immediacy and honesty, they teach me to be truly

authentic. We all carry our own “baggage” of experiences, traits, and ideas. It is a challenge to be fully present with mind and heart and to engage with the children holistically. Despite the tiredness and difficulties I often feel as a teacher, my love for this work still outweighs everything else. I love the moments when the children show me their love in its purest form, with such sincerity. I also love the moments when I notice a positive change in their lives. Just one example: a little boy joined an already well-established group of children as a newcomer. We talked about the values of love. In the first few months, there was a conflict between him and another child. In a subsequent conversation, I suggested, among other things, that they should try to forgive one another. The boy mentioned above clenched his fists. He clearly didn’t want to. Six months later, the same boy surprised me with the remark: “My friend and I had a row over a toy, but we’ve forgiven each other.”

When children learn about values, they themselves become ambassadors of those values. Indeed: together with P. Theodosius, I say: “What a blessing it is to raise the little ones for heaven!”

Self-designed games in old age

St. Mary's Care Unit in Linz

Sr. Margret Scheurecker, Linz, Province of Central Europe

It is well known that group games promote mental, physical and emotional health. And all the more so when the games are designed by the players themselves. Laughing together, a sense of achievement and social interaction enhance the quality of life in old age. Sr. Margret takes us on a short visit to the care ward in Linz.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

In our Constitutions I read: "Sick and elderly sisters are a blessing to our community. We show them grateful love and attention and stand by them in their helplessness, fear and loneliness ..." (Following Christ in Community, Art. 56).

Several times a week I visit our elderly sisters in the care ward. In doing so, I experience first-hand that those people whom we support actually give us strength (as Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, an Austrian writer, put it). Elderly people teach me patience and attentiveness, and they challenge my creativity.

Once a week, I meet with some of the sisters to draw, paint and play with them. It's even more fun with games we've designed ourselves. So far, we've created several games: a **quartet game** drawn by the sisters, the

board game "Butterfly Excursion" and the **communicative dice game "My Circle of Life"**, which I'd like to describe in more detail. I was inspired by Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "I live my life in ever-widening circles".

A double spiral is drawn on the cardboard game board and divided into different sections. The spiral leading from the inside out is painted in shades of red, yellow and orange; the other, leading from the outside in towards the centre, is in shades of blue and



Quartet

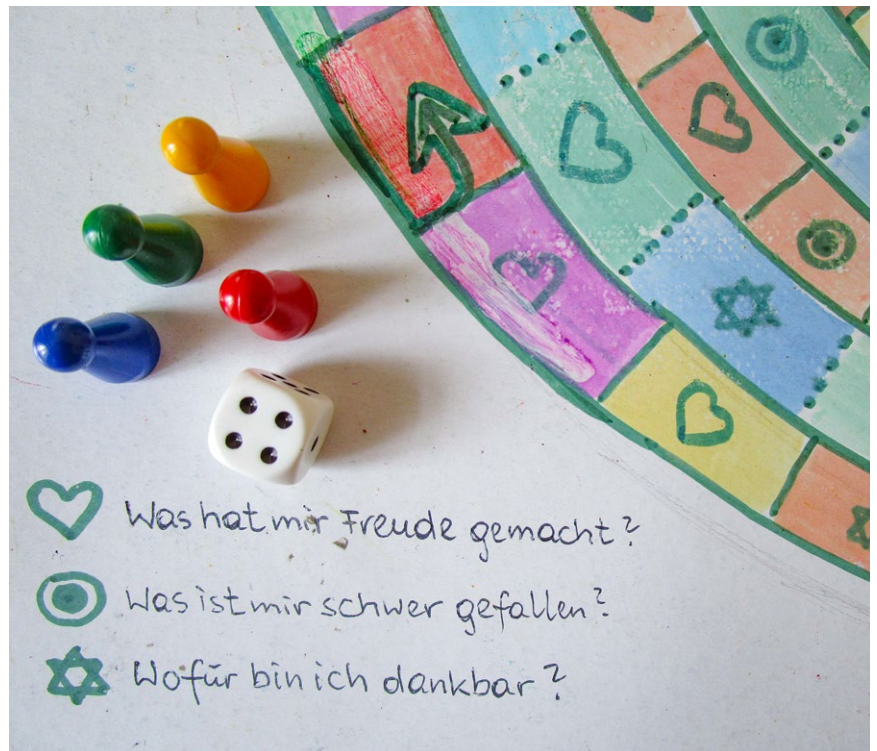
green. The individual sections contain symbols:

The **heart** is linked to the question: What has brought me joy in my life? What brings me joy now?

A dark **dot** with a light ring refers to the darker sides of life: What have I found difficult? What do I find difficult now?

The **star** asks us: What am I grateful for?

The start and end of life's journey lie at the centre of the spiral in the shape of a cross-flower. It tells us: I come from God and I am going to God.



With both seriousness and humour, we played this dice game, “My Circle of Life”, us-



Dice game “Journey of Life”

ing the colourful game pieces. “It really gets the conversation going,” said one sister. “This way we learn something about each other; that’s lovely!”

“That was a real highlight,” said another sister, full of joy.

I, too, was pleasantly surprised by how enthusiastically the sisters joined in. And so I am very motivated to develop further new ideas with and for our sisters. Attending to the needs of the elderly sisters with dementia is, after all, part of our mission: for the needs of the moment – of the here and now – reveal God’s will to us and thus guide us on the path of care (freely adapted from Fr. Theodosius).

The Blossoming Almond Branch

Sr. Christiane Jungo, Ingenbohl, Province of Switzerland

The coming of spring delights us not only with new life and fresh colours. It can also be a sign of hope and confidence, pointing beyond itself. Shalom Ben-Chorin and the prophet Jeremiah experienced this with the “blooming almond branch”.

“Friends, is not the fact that the almond branch is blossoming and sprouting once more a sign that love endures?”

Our blossoming fruit trees remind me of this verse by Shalom Ben-Chorin. Was a romantic at work here? No. A man of the Bible! One who knew that God speaks to people in many different ways. Shalom Ben-Chorin was born in Munich in 1913. At that time, his name was Friedrich Rosenthal and he was a German-Jewish religious philosopher and writer. In the 1930s, he was arrested several times by the Nazis. In 1935, he fled to Jerusalem and translated his name into Hebrew. Friedrich, a name containing the word for peace, became Shalom. And instead of Rosenthal, he called himself Ben Chorin = Son of Freedom. So the name means: Peace, Son of Freedom.

Ben-Chorin recounted that he had written this poem during a very difficult time – in March 1942. He was sitting in his working room in Jerusalem, and looked out of the window. Inside, he felt paralysed by what was happening to his people. Suddenly, his gaze fell upon an almond tree in his neighbour’s garden. Whilst everything else was still bare, this tree began to blossom, a delicate white-pink. Ben-Chorin sensed: This is a sign! He wrote a spring poem, a poem of hope against

death. It became an expression of his faith in God, who desires life. Later, he liked to recount how the quiet message of the almond tree had often comforted him when he was despondent and hopeless – not only during the war.

The whole poem

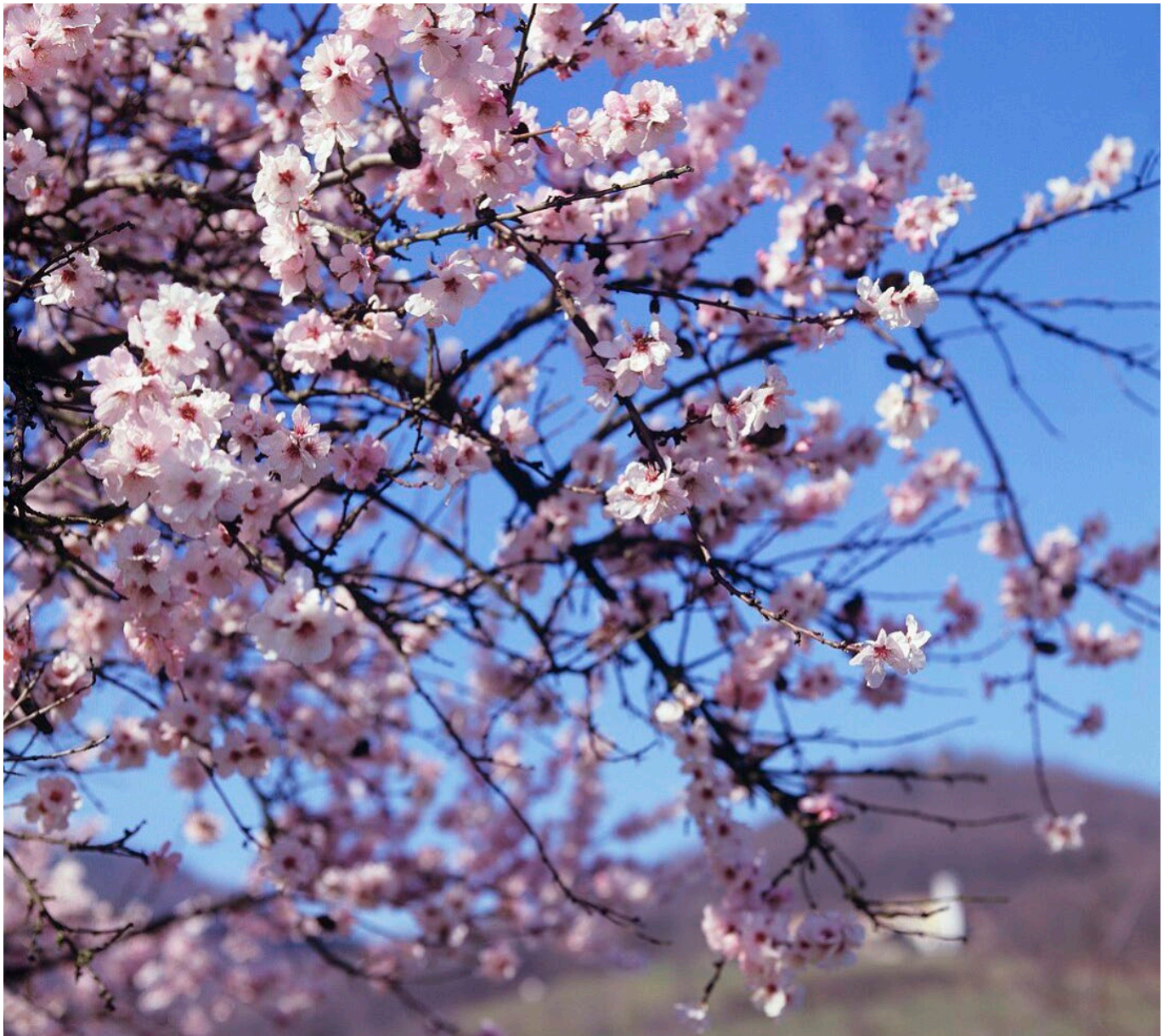
*Friends, that the almond branch is
blooming and sprouting again,
is that not a sign that love remains?*

*That life has not passed away, however
much blood cries out,
do not regard this lightly in these gloomy
times.*

*War tramples thousands, a world passes
away.
Yet the victory of life’s blossoms gently
sways in the wind.*

*Friends, may the almond branch sway-
ing in blossom
let it remain a sign to us of how life tri-
umphs.*

*The word “God” does not appear in the poem.
Yet there is no doubt that the almond branch
is to be seen as a sign of hope that God is
faithful. The implied message is not to let*



Blooming almond tree (Photo: living4media)

oneself be discouraged, but to focus on that which can give us a sign of life. It is the hope of small signs, the hope of “nevertheless”, of “in spite of everything”.

Another Jew wrote after the war (1946), “**Saying Yes to Life in Spite of Everything**”, Viktor Frankl. His logotherapy is meaning-oriented – forward-looking. People are helped when they see a purpose ahead of them that makes life worth living – perhaps just for today. But tomorrow too, for that one day.

A BIBLICAL IMAGE

“Friends, that the almond branch is blooming and sprouting again, is that not a sign that love remains?” Shalom Ben-Chorin penned these beautiful lines, yet he did not invent the symbol of the blossoming almond branch. It is rooted in Jewish tradition. Specifically in the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah 1:11–12: *“The word of the Lord came to me: ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’ I replied, ‘I see an almond branch.’ Then the Lord said to me, ‘You have*

seen correctly; for I am watching over my word and carrying it out.”

Before God calls the young man into service, he gives him a sign of hope: whenever he sees a blossoming almond branch, he is to remember it and know that he can rely on God’s word and his support. An almond branch, because the prophet’s homeland is known for its almond trees. God encourages the fearful Jeremiah not only with words, but with something that is dear and familiar to him. From now on, the blossoming branch stands not merely for the return of life in the cycle of the seasons. It points beyond the superficial and becomes a sign of life, a sign that God will not forsake him. Such is the psychology of God.

To every person, he gives as a sign that which is a personal message for them. Perhaps one day a sign was given to us too. Something

dawned on us, something touched us deeply and still touches us when we see it or think of it. Against failure, suffering and hardship, God repeatedly sets small signs of life: a mustard seed, a shoot from the root of Jesse, a child in a manger, bread and fish, or indeed a blossoming almond branch. Every spring is a sign that something new is growing, even if it is almost impossible to imagine. No winter lasts forever. Cold and hardship do not have the last word.

Let us not forget to look to the “almond branch”, to beauty, to the power of nature, to the signs of God! Let us look forward to Easter, to the risen Jesus, the embodiment of our hope.

It doesn’t always have to be a “blooming almond branch”. But they exist for us too: the signs of **“nevertheless”**, of **“in spite of everything”**.

Information from the General Administration

GENERAL VISITATION 2026

Province of Italy

From May 16 to 29 2026, the General Visitation will take place in the Province of Italy, conducted by Sr. Marie-Marthe Schönenberger and Sr. Gabriele Schachinger. The entire General Leadership will be in Besozzo at the end of the Visitation to take part in the closing sessions.

May God's Spirit accompany all those involved in the meetings, discussions and consultations during the visitation.

Visit to Uganda

From July 4 to August 7, 2026, Sr. Pratima Minj will visit the Vicariate of Uganda and conduct workshops on community building.

CONGRESS OF PROVINCIAL SUPERIORS 2026

From August 26 to September 5, 2026, the Provincial Superiors' Congress will take place in Hegne, Province of Baden-Württemberg.

Periodical of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross

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