

History of the Franciscan Sisters of Siessen

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	We write history Franciscan Sisters of Siessen 1854-2025
01	2025, in the Holy Year, proclaimed by Pope Francis (2013 – 2025) as “Year of Hope”, we take a look at the history of our Congregation. We recognise in it phases of energetic new beginnings and fresh starts, but also times of crisis, hardship and distress. In it, we discover traces of hope for our time. Pope Francis encourages us: "Hope does not deceive." ¹
02	St Francis was a beacon of hope in his time – and he still is today. Moved by the Word of God, he decided for a life according to the Gospel, in which he was joined by many brothers beyond the borders of Italy already then. St Clare and her sisters, the "Poor Ladies", were also inspired by him, as were numerous lay people who formed the Secular Third Order.
03	Out of this branch, the Religious Communities of the so-called Third Order Regular formed. In Germany, the Dillingen Sisters adopted this rule as early as 1289 and thus became the oldest Franciscan Congregation of the Third Order Regular. As a daughter foundation of Dillingen, the Oggelsbeuren foundation adopted its statutes and the rule of the Third Order Regular and thus became part of the great Franciscan movement.
	1854 – 1860 A dream comes true
04	In the middle of the 19th century, after a deep cut in Religious Life caused by secularisation, the need to found Catholic girls' schools was recognised in Upper Swabia. This also happened near Ehingen in Württemberg, from where girls and young women, due to the lack of higher education on site, attended the school run by the Franciscan Sisters of Dillingen in Bavaria. Many of them also joined this Congregation as candidates at the time.
05	But something new was about to happen: In view of this situation, the young women, their parents and the spiritual school inspector Joseph Kuonz from Dieterskirch had the idea of founding a girls' school with a boarding school in the former Franciscan Convent in Oggelsbeuren, where only one sister still lived, with the help of the Franciscan Sisters of Dillingen.
06	School inspector Kuonz turned to Mother Theresia Haselmayr from Dillingen and asked for sisters for the realisation of this plan. Mother Theresia was open to this request and gave him the following orientation in a letter on 8 April 1853: “...the main purpose of the foundation would have to be teaching and education” “All the foundations of our Order shall be characterized by poverty and simplicity of life, in the spirit of our seraphic Father Francis. The members must turn to God alone and trust in his ever-present providence. If they start like this and remain faithful to this spirit, they will never suffer want.” “The community at Oggelsbeuren would have to become independent ...”. Bishop of Rottenburg Josef Lipp (1848 – 1869) approved the planned foundation on 15 November 1853.
07	The Convent in Oggelsbeuren was renovated for the future Convent and school. With the arrival of the so-called “Conventual Sisters” M. Seraphina Model, M. Clementia Mühleisen and the Lay Sister M. Agatha Weiß from Dillingen, convent life started anew in Oggelsbeuren on 2 March 1854.

¹ from Bull of Indiction „Spes non confundit“ 2024

	The distinction between the Conventual Sisters addressed as "Lady", who were teachers and wore a black veil, and the Lay Sisters addressed as "Sister", who devoted themselves to domestic and craft activities and wore a white veil, came from the statutes that had applied to all women's Convents in Bavaria since 1829. These statutes remained valid in our Congregation until the introduction of the new Constitution in 1908.
08	M. Seraphina Model was the first Superior of the newly founded Congregation. School inspector Kuonz became the bishop's first representative and, as such, was called Superior. At a time when women's rights were still very limited, this position was legally necessary and also very important in many negotiations concerning schools. The Congregation had Superiors until 2020, but from Superior Hermann Dörflinger (1980–1996) onwards, their role increasingly changed to that of pastoral care.
09	In the founding year 1854, when the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin and Mother of God Mary was proclaimed, the Congregation consecrated itself to the Mother of God under this title. This is why all the Sisters still bear the name of Mary in their Religious name today.
10	On 6 June 1854, the clothing of the first three novices took place: Sr M. Antonia Frankenhauser, Sr M. Franziska Seraphika Model and Sr M. Klara Höß. After the long period of suppression of Religious Life, this clothing was a great sign of hope for the Catholic Church in the region.
11	Sr M. Antonia Frankenhauser was elected Superior of the young Congregation in 1857, immediately after her First Profession. Like her great role model, Mother M. Theresia Haselmayr of Dillingen, she set about building up the school and Convent with courage and trust in God. The education of women was Mother M. Antonia's passion and already in the early years the new school had an excellent reputation. Many young women came to attend the school and quite a few of them decided to join the Order, so that by the time the school moved to Siessen in 1860, 30 women had been clothed. The rapid growth of the Congregation allowed to establish branches early on.
12	By the end of 1855, Father Faustin Mennel from Erolzheim contacted them. He had erected a building in Bonlanden and was looking for Sisters to found a Convent and a school. The Diocese of Rottenburg emphasized that it should be a branch Convent of the Franciscan Congregation and the Superiors at Oggelsbeuren assumed this, too. However, it soon showed that Father Mennel wanted an independent foundation. But it took the diocese until 1900 to separate the two Congregations officially.
13	At the beginning of 1857, Vicar Fuchs from Heiligenbronn contacted the Sisters of Oggelsbeuren as he wanted to found an orphanage for girls in Heiligenbronn near Schramberg. In the preliminary discussions about the foundation, it became clear that this could also not be a branch Convent of Oggelsbeuren, but a new Congregation. In the same year, Sr M. Seraphina Model and a novice were sent to temporarily care for and teach the orphans present and to introduce young women to the Congregation that was to be founded. From there, Sr M. Seraphina did not return to Oggelsbeuren, but to Dillingen.
	1860 – From Oggelsbeuren to Siessen
14	Congregation and school grew so that the old Convent soon became too small and the Sisters looked for a new location with larger premises. With the acquisition of the former Dominican Convent in Siessen, the Sisters and their pupils were able to move into a considerably larger building on 24 May 1860, where one Dominican sister still lived. The legacy of the Congregation in Siessen includes a Romanesque cross, through which the Lord accompanied the Dominican sisters throughout the centuries and gave them comfort and support. He gave them the promise that monastic life would not cease in this place.

	In the strength of this promise, they faithfully continued on their path until it was fulfilled with the arrival of the Franciscan Sisters. To this day, the Romanesque cross is honoured as a sign of hope and confidence in the Congregation.
	1860 – 1932 Years of construction
15	The rapid growth of the Congregation and the joyful reception of the Sisters by the Catholic population were a great encouragement for the young Congregation. From the very beginning, the Sisters tried to respond to the needs and challenges of the times. From Schwalldorf near Rottenburg to Beuren near Wangen, eight Convents where Sisters worked in public schools, creches and parishes were established in predominantly rural areas during Mother M. Antonia's lifetime. Further Convent foundations followed. From the very beginning, an important field of activity in the Motherhouse was the parament workshop, where a large number of Sisters produced with great skill liturgical textiles for the parishes and the diocese.
16	Mother M. Antonia Frankenhauser, who had led the young Congregation through the storms of the beginning, died on 10 July 1866 at the age of only 36. Her successor in office was Mother M. Bonaventura Glöggler (1866 – 1908). She had entered as a candidate while still in Dillingen. She guided the fortunes of the Congregation for 42 years and had a significant and lasting influence on the shape of its mission.
17	Politically, a harsh wind blew against the Sisters. In the once Protestant Württemberg, the school activities of the Catholic Sisters were viewed with suspicion. In 1871, the various German states united under the leadership of Prussia, which was also Protestant, to form the federal "German Reich". Already in the previous year, the First Vatican Council (1869 – 1870) had proclaimed the dogma of papal infallibility, which was controversial within the Catholic Church and caused indignation outside. During this time, efforts to limit the growing influence of the "backward" Catholic Church intensified. Every Convent foundation required governmental authorisation. Sisters were repeatedly dismissed from the public school service. The most painful cut, however, was the imposed limit on the number of Sisters.
18	Mother M. Bonaventura persistently tried to fight against the governmental restrictions and to utilise every available scope for the internal and external development of the Congregation. Governmental restrictions were gradually relaxed, but only completely lifted after the end of the First World War.
19	During Mother M. Bonaventura's term of office, the founding mission of education and formation was realised and courageously developed by establishing various types of schools for girls and women in different locations. In the Diocese of Rottenburg, the following schools were founded or taken over: Aulendorf, Mergentheim, Saulgau, Friedrichshafen, Tettnang, Gmünd, Ellwangen and Rottenburg. Most of them initially were schools of home economics or sewing schools, later advanced training schools and, in some cases, higher daughters' schools or daughters' institutes, adapted to local requirements. Outside of Siessen, boarding schools were also opened in Mergentheim, Gmünd, Rottenburg and Friedrichshafen.
20	The departure to Stuttgart, the Protestant capital of Württemberg, where Catholic initiatives were viewed with great scepticism, was particularly challenging. From 1872 on, two Sisters worked in the Catholic primary school there. In 1886, St Agnes School was founded as a secondary girls' school, and in 1887, Sisters were employed in the Marienheim, a home for working girls and women. In 1925, St. Josef was founded in the east of Stuttgart as a creche and sewing school and developed over the years into a nursery and children's home, day care centre and after-school care centre.

21	In Ellwangen, in addition to the St Gertrudis school founded in 1895, the Sisters took over another field of activity from 1908 in the Marienpflege children's rescue centre, today a children's and youth village.
22	The year 1908 brought significant changes for the Congregation. New Statutes were drawn up and handed over to the Sisters in April 1908. The most important change was the abolition of the distinction between "Ladies" and "Sisters". From then on, all Professed Sisters wore a black veil and were called "Sisters".
23	In June of that year, Mother M. Bonaventura Glöggler resigned from her position as Superior General after 42 years. On 16 July, Mother M. Franziska Nagel (1908 – 1924), the former Superior of St Ludwig in Gmünd (today Schwäbisch Gmünd), was elected as her successor. She was a clever woman, full of energy and with a mystical gift.
24	At this time, the education and development of women was not only a burning concern of the women's Orders that were founded for this purpose. More and more women with higher education were also exerting influence on society, fought for women's rights and for their equal access to education and corresponding social status.
25	The political situation in Europe became increasingly volatile and the economic situation ever more uncertain. The growing tensions erupted in the First World War (1914 – 1918), which brought millions of deaths and terrible misery to Europe.
26	During the First World War, the Sisters in the Motherhouse started the 24-hour Eucharistic adoration for the sake of peace in the world from 2 February 1915. Out of concern for the Sisters' health, in 1926 the diocesan curia passed on to them the papal directive to limit eucharistic adoration to times during the day and to hold night adoration only before each Sacred Heart Friday and before the Sacred Heart feast.
27	The end of the First World War also meant the end of the monarchy. After the initial turmoil, the Weimar Republic emerged as Germany's first democratic republic. The victorious powers had imposed high reparation payments on Germany, which represented a major economic burden for the country. During this time, Sisters were once again dismissed from public school service due to austerity measures and the creation of jobs for those returning from war. This was a very difficult economic phase for the Congregation. Sometimes the Sisters did not know how to feed the boarding school pupils and themselves.
28	Mother M. Franziska Nagel died in 1924. Her former assistant, Mother M. Gertrudis Bosch (1924 – 1936), was elected as her successor.
29	As the school field of work became increasingly uncertain in terms of employment opportunities and the communities increasingly demanded nurses, the Congregation opened up to nursing and care for elderly people. In addition to home nursing care in rural branches, Sisters from Siessen worked as nurses and teachers in the sanatorium for children with lung diseases in Wangen in the Allgäu from 1928 on. Later, retirement homes were also opened in several places.
1932 – 1945 Crossing borders and overcoming resistance	
30	In the 1920s, the Church was gripped by a great enthusiasm for missionary work. Already in 1924, Pope Pius XI (1922 – 1939) called on the Religious Orders to support the young churches in Latin America, Africa and Asia. In 1929, St Thérèse of Lisieux was named patroness of the world mission.
31	Enthusiasm for the mission also grew among the Sisters of Siessen, especially as they kept receiving requests for it. At the same time, political reprisals against the Order's own schools increased. This combination of missionary zeal and external hardship led Mother M. Gertrudis, a missionary enthusiast, to consider new opportunities for work overseas. She established contacts with other Superior Generals who already had Sisters in the missions. But how should she make a decision in these turbulent, oppressive and uncertain times? Although

	it soon became clear that South Africa should be the destination, Mother M. Gertrudis hesitated when five different enquiries suddenly arrived from South Africa. Sr M. Kallista Eckenweiler ² , who was dying, heard about this and encouraged her to send Sisters to South Africa after all, because despite many difficulties, setting out with trust in God would bring rich blessings to the Congregation.
32	On invitation of German Bishop Herman Joseph Meysing of the Kimberley Vicariate, the Sisters finally dared to set off. Sr M. Sidonia Haaga, Sr M. Ludovika Maier, Sr M. Matthia Steck, Sr M. Sindulfa Wetzel, Sr M. Caritina Erne and Sr M. Bernadette Ziegler departed on the long journey to South Africa in 1932.
33	Mother M. Gertrudis hoped for another new beginning in another country. When she received a request from Brazil via the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing to send Sisters to Agudos, a newly emerging town in the centre of the state of São Paulo, she saw this as a call from God. In 1936, the Sisters M. Ida Ensle, M. Konrada Nagel, M. Goswina Walter and M. Henrica Lang set off for Brazil.
34	Mother M. Gertrudis Bosch's term of office ended in 1936. Mother M. Augustina Steinhauser (1936 – 1948) was elected as her successor. As Superior of St Joseph's Home in Stuttgart, she had already had painful experiences with the National Socialists and was thus suitably prepared for the severe hardships that were to come upon the Congregation in these times.
35	<i>Germany</i> As a result of the global economic crisis, the situation of people in Germany increasingly worsened and many believed the promises of the National Socialists. In 1933, they won the Reichstag elections and disaster took its course. The National Socialists pursued an aggressive anti-Church policy. Once again, Sisters were dismissed from public school service. In 1938, all private schools, including the religious schools, were finally closed.
36	Due to the increasing terror of the National Socialists and the Second World War, the country experienced a devastating time of internal and external destruction. Nevertheless, there were still signs of hope, especially in the form of those women finding their way into our Congregation. One of them was Sr M. Innocentia Hummel (1909 – 1946), who joined our Congregation in 1931 after successfully completing her art studies. With her works and above all with her permission to produce figurines from her drawings, she helped the workers of the Goebel company to keep their jobs during the years of recession and contributed significantly to the Sisters' living.
37	From the end of 1940 to 1945, the motherhouse was confiscated by the National Socialists and served as a temporary camp for up to 2,000 people. Only around 40 of the 260 Sisters and candidates at the time were able to stay in Siessen, including Sr M. Innocentia. Others were temporarily accommodated with their families or in Convents or priests' houses.
38	The Sisters in the Convents had little contact with the Motherhouse and were sometimes treated with hostility and threatened. The Sisters who were expelled from the schools were deployed in various areas, including the Ordinariate and Caritas. Despite all hardships and distress, they also developed resilience, agility, new skills and perseverance during this time.
39	The time before and during the Second World War was very different, but no less difficult, for the Sisters who set off to distant countries as pioneers of the mission. The long, arduous journey by ship, the arrival in a country whose people and language were still foreign to them and the realisation that they would never be able to return home must have been very

² 1846-1932 First Profession in 1871, Teacher, Quote from the obituary: "Mother Superior, please do not abandon this! It is a great work and will bring rich blessings to the Congregation. You surely will encounter many difficulties - but place your complete trust in the Lord – it is His holy will."

	challenging and difficult for the Sisters. Strengthening their hope were their experiences with various local people who supported them in the difficult beginnings.
40	<i>South Africa</i> In South Africa, the Sisters were supported by the Holy Cross Sisters of Aliwal NorthSol and the Oblates of the Immaculate Conception (OMI). The Oblates were entrusted with the areas in today's dioceses of Kimberley and Bloemfontein to bring the Gospel to the people there and to build up ecclesiastical structures. They provided almost all the priests and the bishop. Sr M. Ludovika Maier was appointed first Superior of our missionaries (1935 – 1949).
41	The first places of activity were Mafeking (now Mafikeng) and Taungs (now Taung), Devondale, Dewetsdorp, Tweespruit in South Africa, as well as Lobatsi and Ramoutswa in Botswana. There, the Sisters lived in small missionary stations and worked closely together with the Oblates. They helped the priests and worked in creches, schools and with the sick. From 1938, the Sisters were in the so-called priests' house in Bloemfontein, which later became the Bishop's House. They had a similar assignment with the bishop in Kimberley, where they worked in household and sacristy as well as then in the secretariat. In all these places, the Sisters offered hospitality to travelling priests and Sisters.
42	For the further development of the Region, the Sisters lacked a place where they could gather and feel “at home”. This was one of the reasons why Mother M. Gertrudis Bosch came to South Africa after her term of office 1936. Supported by her, the farm Goedgenoeg near Bloemfontein was bought in 1937. At the end of 1938, Mother M. Gertrudis returned to Germany, but just a few months later she set off for South Africa once again. Even though the name of the farm meant “good enough”, the land did not yield enough to feed the Sisters. Therefore, the farm was resold. In 1943, the Sisters bought the ‘Fort Savage Farm’ in Marseilles. This place, today's Assisi Mission, became the Regional and later the Provincial House of the South African Sisters.
43	The Second World War also had its effects on South Africa. Those Fathers without South African citizenship were interned for a time and the Sisters as well lived in great insecurity. As German citizens, they were expelled from the Convents in Botswana during the war.
44	<i>Brazil</i> In Brazil, the Sisters arrived in Agudos in the diocese of Botucatu/SP full of confidence and hope in 1936. They were warmly welcomed by the inhabitants of the town and by Fr João Batista de Aquino, the parish priest and director of the Nossa Senhora do Sagrado Coração Institute, which was immediately handed over to the Sisters' care. The school had 150 pupils, including 44 boarders. It was the only co-educative religious institution in the entire region and also the only regular school dedicated to the training of primary school teachers.
45	To the delight of the Sisters, the Franciscans (Friars Minor) also came to Agudos in the following years. This event was of great significance, for the Sisters now had brothers on the same spiritual path, and Franciscan pastoral care became possible for them and the boarding school students.
46	The Sisters had to overcome numerous obstacles in the early years. In great poverty and with a heavy workload, they dedicated themselves to the boarding school and the hospital. Just three years after the arrival of the first Sisters, when the group already numbered 14, contact with the Motherhouse was almost completely severed due to the outbreak of the Second World War.
47	In 1942, the energetic and esteemed first Superior Mother M. Ida Ensle (1936 – 1942) died. This was a further blow for the Sisters. Her successor was Mother M. Klara Gehring (1942 – 1954).

	1945 – 1960 Reconstruction years – courageous steps in difficult times
48	On 8 May 1945, the Second World War ended with Germany's capitulation. Countless people had died and most European cities had been destroyed by bombing raids. Germany was divided into four zones, which were controlled and administered by the occupying powers of France, England, the USA and the Soviet Union. Now that the war was over, reconstruction could begin. However, it would be a long time before it was possible to send mail and travel again. This also made contact with the Sisters in South Africa and Brazil very difficult.
49	Mother M. Augustina Steinhauser's term of office ended in 1948. She had led the Congregation with courage and vigour through perhaps the most difficult years in its history. Mother M. Cassiana Erler (1948 – 1960) was elected as her successor. She had to carry out the difficult reconstruction of the Congregation after the Second World War and look after the growing Regions in South Africa and Brazil.
50	<i>South Africa</i> In the 1948 elections, the National Party became the winner, which further intensified the already existing Apartheid. This inhumane ideology shaped the country for decades and meant humiliating discrimination for the black majority population. In this difficult environment, the Sisters tried to live and preach the Gospel.
51	In Douglas, at the confluence of the Vaal and Orange Rivers, the Sisters worked in a small hospital from 1948 to 1988. It was destroyed by a severe flood in 1988.
52	In 1949, Mother M. Ludovika Maier accompanied Mother M. Gertrudis Bosch, who had remained in South Africa since 1939 due to the turmoil of war, to Siessen. Both were able to report on the developments in the South African mission. As Mother M. Ludovika's term of office had expired, Mother M. Franziska Nagel (1949 – 1961), a niece of the deceased former Superior General of the same name, was appointed as her successor.
53	In 1951, the Vatican established the ecclesiastical hierarchy in South Africa with dioceses, archdioceses and ecclesiastical provinces. Bishop Meysing became the first archbishop of Bloemfontein.
54	On 19 October 1952, the Congregation became even more deeply rooted in South Africa when the first four local novices were clothed. They were Sr Mary Joseph Mosito, Sr Maria Goretti Makhube, Sr M. Francis Ntsekhe and Sr M. Clare Dince.
55	Together with the Oblates, the Sisters built up Assisi Mission. One Oblate priest was responsible for the pastoral care of the Sisters and for the pastoral care of the parish. Oblate brothers also assisted the Sisters. They ran the farm, erected buildings, cleared water sources and lent a hand where there was need. The Sisters cared for the sick and taught children, initially in the open air, until a primary school was finally built on the Assisi Mission site in 1950. From 1952 to 1995, the Sisters also ran a small maternity clinic for black women, as these had no access to state-run clinics. In 1960, the Sisters founded the St Joseph's creche in Bloemfontein.
56	<i>Brazil</i> The Sisters' life testimony also attracted young women in Brazil. In 1947, the Regional Superior at the time, Mother M. Klara Gehring, had the opportunity to travel to the Motherhouse to discuss pressing issues, especially in relation to religious formation. On 18 August, after a long journey, she arrived back in Agudos, and the first four Brazilian candidates were accepted into the postulancy already on 22 August. Their clothing took place on 22 February 1948. They were Sr Maria José Agostinho, Sr M. Aparecida Casagrandi, Sr M. Geralda Galindo and Sr M. Vicenta Neves.

57	In 1949, the Sisters founded the first Convent outside of Agudos and established the Dona Maria Leonor Creche in Garça. In the 1950s, the Sisters responded to the call of the Church with a great outreach to distant and unknown places. They founded various educational institutions and schools, e.g. in Garça/SP, Chopinzinho/PR, Paranaíba/MS. In Bauru/SP they opened a creche. Mother M. Franziska Romana Leist was Regional Superior from 1954 to 1961.
58	<i>Germany</i> The war left destruction and deep rifts in society in its wake. Through the persecution and systematic murder of Jews and various minorities, as well as the arrest and execution of countless opponents of the regime, the German people had incurred a great debt of guilt. Millions of people were displaced from the German eastern territories and other south-east European countries or had to flee from the advancing Soviet army. They all needed accommodation and work opportunities in bombed-out Germany. The reconstruction of Germany in the 1950s was so astonishingly fast that there was even talk of the "German economic miracle".
59	The four German occupation zones developed differently. When there was a rupture between the victorious powers in 1947, there were signs of a division of Germany. In 1948, the foundations for a democratic state were laid in the three western zones and the D-Mark was introduced in a currency reform. The Federal Republic of Germany was founded when the Basic Law came into force on 23 May 1949. On 7 October 1949, the "German Democratic Republic" was proclaimed in the Russian occupation zone. This sealed the division of Germany, which lasted 40 years. The border between East and West Germany was strictly guarded and many paid with their lives for trying to leave the GDR. The "Berlin Wall", built in August 1961, separated the two parts of Berlin and became a symbol of the divided Germany.
60	The years after the war were also a busy and exhausting time of reconstruction for the Congregation. At the end of 1945, the Sisters got the Motherhouse back, albeit in a desolate state. The buildings of the schools and Convents in the cities were damaged and, in some cases, completely destroyed. The first schools were able to resume work in 1946. With the reconstruction of the country, the demand for Catholic schools also increased. Now the lack of Sisters who could teach became painfully apparent.
61	The teacher training centre in Siessen was not allowed to open anymore. Other training possibilities had to be found for the candidates.
62	The internal reconstruction of the Congregation was also a major challenge. In one way or another, all the Sisters had made harrowing experiences with the State and its ideology. Some of them were traumatised. Others had developed a new independence as a result of the oppressive circumstances and found it difficult to return to the previous conventual forms. Many of the rituals were perceived as empty and no longer contemporary. The Sisters demanded a further development of the rituals. But the time for this had not yet come, as the external reconstruction required all their strength.
	1960 – 1978 The Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar period
63	In December 1961, Pope John XXIII (1958 – 1963) dared to make a new start and convened the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965), which Pope Paul VI (1963–1978) brought to a close. John XXIII wanted to open the windows of the Church wide into the world and set in motion an 'aggiornamento' (updating) of the Church's doctrine and practice. This advance filled the Church with great hope, as long-awaited renewals became possible. The dynamics of change affected all areas of the Church. This also brought with it tensions and struggles for direction.

64	The Superior General Mother M. Angela Sauter (1960 – 1972) followed the Church's opening movement very attentively and encouraged committed engagement with the topics of the Council. She sent Sisters to further training and renewal courses and invited a wide variety of speakers. She implemented gradually the impulses and suggestions of the Second Vatican Council. By this, she supported Sisters who passed these impulses on to the Congregation and thus ensured the formation of future leaders among the Sisters.
65	The Council had called on Religious Congregations to return to their roots in order to embark on a path of renewal. ³ Within the Franciscan family, more and more source texts were translated and deepened, which also revitalised Franciscan spirituality in our Congregation.
66	The General Chapter of 1966 removed many outdated regulations from the Order of Life. This resulted in the first "transitional Constitution".
67	In Brazil and South Africa, the native Sisters increasingly took on responsibility at the various levels of leadership. On the occasion of the General Chapter in 1966, beside the Regional Superior Sr M. Alfonsa Emberter (1961 – 1969) and Sr M. Dietburga Häfele as delegate, Sr M. Zélia Cardoso was the first Brazilian Sister to be present in the Motherhouse. From then on, at least one Brazilian and, from 1972, one South African Sister was always involved in the General Chapter, either as a delegate or as a guest.
68	The post-conciliar renewal process of the Congregation was continued by the Superior General Sr M. Radegundis Wespel (1972 – 1984). Thanks to her background as a theologian, she guided the Congregation with a steady hand through the turbulent post-conciliar times.
69	During her term of office, a legal dispute arose regarding the question of whether the Congregation held the rights of use to the art of Sr M. Innocentia Hummel. Sr. M. Radegundis succeeded in securing these rights for Sr. M. Innocentia's conventual creative period, thereby ensuring that the financial resources generated from her conventual works would be used in accordance with the artist's wishes. This benefited the entire Congregation and many social projects.
70	Due to the very different social and ecclesiastical circumstances in the three countries, the renewal process after the Second Vatican Council in the Congregation proceeded differently.
71	<i>Brazil</i> The last German Regional Superior was Mother M. Alfonsa Emberger. In 1967, Brazilian Sisters joined the Regional Council for the first time. In January 1969, the first Regional Chapter in Brazil took place under the leadership of the General Superior Mother M. Angela Sauter. All Sisters could submit proposals. The new Regional Superior was elected by secret ballot. Mother M. Imaculada Kumasaka (1969 – 1982) was the first Regional Superior to descend from Brazil.
72	The military dictatorship in Brazil (1964 – 1985) deeply wounded the country. The regime suspended democratic freedoms, introduced press censorship and persecuted members of the opposition, many of whom were imprisoned, tortured or killed. The Catholic Church played an ambivalent role in the resistance against the dictatorship as some of the clergy supported the coup and the military regime. However, numerous bishops, priests, religious and lay people actively resisted the oppression, risking their lives in the process. They fought for the observance of human rights, respect for the rights of small farmers, agricultural labourers and indigenous peoples and offered protection to persecuted people. The emerging basic ecclesiastical communities and other popular movements for social justice laid the groundwork for the development of liberation theology. Through the Brazilian Bishops'

³ PC 2 (Perfectae Caritatis, Degree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, Oct. 28, 1965)

	Conference, the Church gained a strong influence in the resistance against the inhumane military regime.
73	Liberation theology in Brazil also led to ground-breaking changes within the Church regarding its mission. Particularly the Conferences of the Latin American bishops in Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979) committed themselves to an option for the poor on the basis of liberation theology. The Religious Communities in the country were also encouraged to concretise this option.
74	The Sisters of the Brazilian Region took up this ecclesiastical impulse and founded numerous smaller Convents among the poor. The following are particularly notable: Santa Quitéria in Curitiba/PR, Getulina/SP, where the Sisters worked in pastoral care and in the hospital; Honório Serpa/PR, with a mission for the landless; Vila Pampulha on the outskirts of Agudos/SP; Vila União/MG and Alexandrita/MG. Over the years, these Convents were closed again – partly due to a lack of Sisters, partly because of taking on other tasks as a new response to the signs of the times.
75	<i>South Africa</i> Due to Apartheid, South Africa experienced a very difficult social and political period full of violence and injustice. Apartheid was a system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination that prevailed in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. It demanded the separation of people based on race, with white minority government implementing policies that favoured white people and marginalized the black majority. This included restrictions on where people could live, work, and go to school as well as limitations on political and civil rights.
76	The South African Province also was affected by Apartheid. It jeopardized the missionary efforts of the German Sisters, compromising the aim for which they had come to South Africa. Unfortunately the system favoured them as white people. When they accepted black vocations into the Region, they registered them as farm workers as Assisi Mission was classified as a white area where black people were only allowed to live as employees of the white people. The two white Sisters who joined in South Africa were sent to Germany for novitiate as they could not be formed with the black South Africans. On their return to South Africa, both left the Congregation. Since then, no more white South Africans have joined the Region. During this very difficult time, Sr M. Ludovika Maier (1961 – 1968) again held the office of Regional Superior.
77	Apartheid brought separation between white and black Sisters. They had to live in separate houses, with the blacks occupying old farm houses while the whites were among themselves in the Provincial house. The African Sisters came to the farm and to the Provincial House not as Sisters but as workers. The type of meals and clothing differed. In the country, people who spoke out against Apartheid like Nelson Mandela were killed or imprisoned. The Sisters of the Region also lived in fear of being expelled if they spoke out against the system. Tensions grew and erupted into a revolt in 1976 when the African Sisters refused to accept this inequality any longer. Many left the Congregation while others were expelled.
78	Despite difficult times, the mission of the South African Sisters was fruitful, especially in serving the disadvantaged population. During the term of office of Mother M. Reinlinde Küble (1968 – 1978), the management of the female branch of the Catholic secondary school in Mariasdal near Tweespruit was taken over. The Sisters taught here as teachers between 1970 and 1997 and made it possible for black girls to receive a higher education. During this time, they also formed candidates and Sisters of the Region.

79	At the request of the Bishop of Kimberley, Erwin Hecht, the Sisters founded a Convent in Batlharos on the edge of the Kalahari Desert in 1977 and worked in pastoral care and with the poor. Today, the Sisters work there in a retirement home for particularly needy people.
80	In response to this “revolt”, Sr M. Radegundis Wespel, the then Superior General, mandated the Regional Superior Sr M. Cassia Benz (1978 – 1987), to intervene, to work on the integration of both Black and White Sisters and to correct the unjust practices in the Region. As a result, the Region flourished with new vocations.
81	Germany In Germany, the phase following the Second Vatican Council was characterised by a great deal of unrest and major upheavals in Church and society. Economically and socially, Germany experienced a great upturn during the reconstruction phase and people gained confidence and new self-confidence. It was still difficult to deal with the crimes of National Socialism, but the first attempts were made to come to terms with them. In this context, the dangers of obedience and authority were recognised more clearly and addressed more intensively.
82	Church life regained vigour through the awakening after the Second Vatican Council. Many parishes and associations attempted with great hope to live out “the new spirit” of the Council. Many children and young people were reached and supported through youth work in the parishes.
83	In the Congregation, there were outwardly visible signs of the implementation of the Council. One of them was the change of the Congregation’s name. According to the Constitution of 1908 it was called the "Congregation of the School Sisters of the 3rd Order of St Francis in Siessen". In the transitional Constitution of 1966, it was called the "Congregation of the Sisters of the 3rd Order" and, in 1969, it was renamed the "Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of Siessen". The changing names also reflected the new orientation of the Congregation, no longer placing the works at the centre of the common life, but Christ. Other outward signs of renewal were the change and simplification of the Religious habit in several steps (from 1960 on) and the redesign of the Convent chapel in the Motherhouse by Sr M. Sigmunda May (1937 – 2017) in 1967.
84	Steps taken to implement the Second Vatican Council internally were: • promoting personal and spiritual maturation, • improving the Sisters' communication skills, • deepening the Franciscan sources with the possibility of travelling to Assisi, • intensifying the personal relationship with God, • practicing living with the Word of God and • strengthening adoration – not only in the Motherhouse, but also in the other Convents.
85	The mission of the Congregation continually adapted to changes in society. In 1972, the Siessen teacher’s seminary was integrated into the Institute for Social Professions in Ravensburg, where the Congregation took on a shareholder role. Sisters who had taught at the teacher’s seminary could continue teaching at the institute, while others could do their formation there. In this context, a Convent was established in Ravensburg at the time.
86	In 1976, the Franciscan family and the Church commemorated the 750th anniversary of the death of St Francis. To mark this occasion, the first Franciscan Festival was held in Siessen, which, due its popularity, was celebrated as Franciscan Youth Festival every year until 2017 on the last Sunday in September.
	1978 – 2000 Years of change and upheaval
87	The election of John Paul II (1978 – 2005) marked the beginning of a new phase for the Catholic Church. He was a charismatic figure who knew how to inspire people, especially the

	youth. Based on a jubilee pilgrimage of young people in the Holy Year of Redemption in 1984, he initiated the World Youth Day. He took a confrontational stance towards the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, thereby contributing to the collapse of these systems. He also took a hard line against liberation theology, as well as against moral theologians who advocated for a more relaxed approach to sexual morality. He promoted the newly emerging spiritual movements and saw them as a driving force for the new evangelisation.
88	Our Congregation, too, dealt with new spiritual movements and other, longer-established charisms with great openness and in a variety of ways in order to ultimately rediscover and deepen our own Franciscan charism. The Congregation benefited a lot from encountering other charisms, but when their influence became too strong, conflicts arose.
89	In an intensive worldwide process, the Rule of the Franciscan Third Order Communities was revised. The Superior General Sr M. Radegundis Wespel participated in this process and brought the joy and enthusiasm it generated into the Congregation.
90	In 1980, the Jesuit Fr. Josef Sudbrack, together with a group of Sisters, had elaborated an Order of Life for that time in a lengthy process. However, this draft did not reach the General Chapter, as the basis for the new Order of Life was to be the recently drafted Franciscan Rule of the Third Order, which Pope John Paul II had approved on 8 December 1982. At the General Chapter in 1984, the new Order of Life, which had been written in the meantime by Sr M. Radegundis, was adopted. After years of transitional constitution and interim phases, the Congregation finally had a common basis again.
91	Sr M. Judith Jung had been a driving force for the renewal of the Congregation since the Council. At the 1984 "Katholikentag", she was touched by a Word that she understood as a motto for her election as Superior General shortly thereafter: "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of hem for evermore." (Ez 37:26)
92	As Superior General (1984 – 1996), she ensured the implementation of the new Order of Life. She also accompanied the difficult process of leading the works into the future or handing them over in all Regions. The question of the identity of Religious Life when works are discontinued was a central theme of her term of office. During this phase, she encountered the Focolare Movement and the Family of Hope, in which Sr M. Judith saw important signs of hope for the future of the Congregation.
93	Based on the Franciscan tertiary Chiara Lubich, the Focolare Movement started in 1943 with the aim of living love and unity, inspired by the Gospel, and thus becoming bridge builders in this world. Looking at "Jesus Forsaken" became the source of giving everything for love and unity. Today, the Focolare movement is spread worldwide and also has members from various Christian churches and other religions.
94	In 1983, a new movement emerged in Brazil, which later called itself the "Family of Hope". A young German Franciscan, Frei Hans Stapel, was a priest in the city of Guaratinguetá and had begun to live the Gospel in a very concrete way with young people. Moved by this, Nelson Giovanelli Rosendo dos Santos began befriending young people who were using drugs on a street corner. Eventually, one of these wanted to get off drugs and asked Nelson to help him. Together with Frei Hans, they lived the Gospel in a concrete way every day. Soon others joined them, and the first Fazenda da Esperança was established, with many more to follow.
95	During a visit to the Focolare Centre near São Paulo, Sr M. Judith met Frei Hans and accepted his invitation to visit the Fazenda in Pedrinhas. The encounter with the recuperants there left a deep impression on her. In 1985, Sr M. Annunciata Unterreiner, the Superior General of the Franciscan Sisters of Au am Inn, and Sr M. Judith were both in Brazil at the same time and spent spiritual days together with Frei Hans in Pedrinhas. While reflecting on the reading about God's covenant with Abraham, the idea of a covenant between the three spiritual communities arose, which all those present experienced as spirit-led.

96	Encountering these spiritualities sparked varying degrees of enthusiasm in our Congregation. Many Sisters saw in it the deeply Franciscan concern to live the Gospel. Especially in the encounter with the Fazenda, this life seemed so simple and concrete that it appealed to the longing of many hearts.
97	This covenant gave rise to several joint projects, mainly in Brazil, but also beyond. From 1995 to 1997, there was an international study Convent in Rome with Sr Rita Maria Matokonyane from the South African Province, Sr M. Iracema Willan from the Brazilian Province, Sr M. Magdalena Morgenstern and Sr M. Kathrin Prenzel from the German part of our Congregation, as well as Sr Cleusa de Fátima Leme do Prado from the Brazilian Province of the Franciscan Sisters of Au am Inn. At first, the group lived in Villa Achilia, a house of the Focolare Movement, where Religious sisters were trained in Focolare spirituality. Later, the Sisters moved close to the Antonianum University, where they studied Franciscan spirituality.
98	In the course of time, the initial enthusiasm for the ideas of the Focolare Movement and the Family of Hope turned into a feeling among more and more Sisters that they were being overwhelmed by a different spirituality. This led to serious conflicts, especially in the German part of the Congregation.
99	At the General Chapter of 1996, at the end of Sr Judith's second term of office, the main lines of these years came together. The General Chapter made far-reaching decisions. The Regions of South Africa and Brazil were turned into Provinces. The sale of the schools in Brazil was approved, as was the relocation of the Provincial House from Agudos to Guaratinguetá. In Germany, the schools were transferred to a non-profit limited liability company.
100	In 1996, the inter-Franciscan group "Contemplative Way" was founded in Siessen. The aim of this group was to elaborate and practise the contemplative dimension of Franciscan spirituality and finally to develop a Franciscan school of prayer and a Franciscan model for spiritual retreats. In 2003, the first of eight Franciscan prayer schools was organised, in which also many Sisters took part. Two retreats were held in Brazil to introduce and practise the Franciscan School of Prayer. The studies and work of the Contemplative Way came out in various publications. The Franciscan School of Prayer is available in German, English and Portuguese.
101	The Superior General Sr M. Simone Zoller (1996 – 2008) implemented the Provincialisation of Brazil and South Africa after the General Chapter in 1996. The strong emphasis on Focolare spirituality and the spirituality of Fazenda da Esperança had caused conflictual dynamics in all Provinces. Sr M. Simone mastered the task to understand the received impulses and inspirations more deeply out of the Franciscan charism and to anchor the covenant in the baptismal calling of every Sister.
102	In a joint mission, Brazilian and South African Sisters cared for the Portuguese-speaking refugees from Angola living in Pomfret in the Kalahari Desert in South Africa from 1998 to 2002. These were former soldiers who had fought alongside South Africa in Namibia and Angola, and their families. Sr M. Electa Wild worked as a teacher in the school and Sr M. Regina Ferreira de Melo as well as Sr M. Teresinha Rozante were involved in pastoral work in the parish and in various social services.
103	<i>South Africa</i> The founding of the Convent in the then newly emerging town of Botshabelo with many unemployed people in 1983 was a courageous setting out towards the poor. The Sisters are still active there today in a creche and in pastoral work.
104	In 1985, the Oblates established the Regina Pacis Retreat Centre for the Archdiocese of Bloemfontein in Assisi Mission, which today belongs to the Sisters.

105	The election of Sr M. Gertrude Ramokotjo (1987 – 1993) as the first South African Regional Superior marked the beginning of a new era for the Region, at a time when the country itself was also emerging more and more from the shadows of the past.
106	The major political turning point for South Africa came in 1990 with the release of Nelson Mandela. The abolition of the Apartheid laws and the first democratic elections in 1994, in which Nelson Mandela was elected president, ended the Apartheid system. His election was associated with great hopes and the country experienced a departure into more freedom and self-determination for the black population. In the "rainbow nation", all ethnic, cultural and religious groups were to be able to live with equal rights.
107	The Catholic Church, to which only around 7% of the population belonged, also changed. The European Oblate missionaries grew older, returned to their countries or died. Gradually they were replaced by African Oblates. Over the decades, the order withdrew more and more and diocesan priests took over responsibility in the parishes and dioceses. This changed the previously natural cooperation between priests and Sisters.
108	When the South African Region, as decided at the General Chapter in 1996, became a Province in 1997, the then Regional Superior Sr M. Elizabeth Pebane (1993 – 2002) became the first Provincial Superior.
109	<i>Brazil</i> As a result of developments in the Church, tensions increased over the years between the Sisters who wanted to continue to run the institutions and those who wanted to work in pastoral care and be with the poor.
110	During this period of transition, the Regional Leadership was also looking for new ways of pastoral care for vocations and formation, as time and again young women started Religious Life full of hope, but were unable to cope with the challenges of growing into it and left the Congregation. This led to an age gap between the generations in the Region, the consequences of which continue to have an impact until now. In the Regional Chapter in 1975, it was discussed how to form the future Sisters according to the current circumstances in Church and society. In 1979, the postulancy and novitiate were transferred to Curitiba/PR. In the small Convent there, the young formees took on more responsibility for daily life, they participated in inter-congregational formation courses and engaged in pastoral work with poor families. This way, a new model of Initial Formation was created in the Brazilian Region. The reorganisation had significant advantages but also brought along challenges and conflicts.
111	The Regional Superior Sr M. Zélia Cardoso (1982 – 1988) participated in the General Chapter of 1984 in Siessen, where the new Order of Life was approved, and it was one of her tasks to implement it. During her term of office, two Convents were founded among the poor, one in Vila União – Iturama/MG in 1982 and one in Parque Pampulha on the outskirts of Agudos in 1985.
112	In 1988, an extraordinary Regional Chapter was held after five Sisters had left or been dismissed at the beginning of the year. This marked the culmination of the dispute over the direction of the order of the previous years. At this Chapter, a new Regional Leadership was elected with Sr M. Josefina Alves as Regional Superior (1988 – 1993).
113	After an intensive process of searching and discernment, the Brazilian Region had the courage to try something new in the early 1990s. Two Sisters from Germany, Sr M. Theresina Fehrenbacher and Sr Marilen Arteaga, were sent to share life with the young women of Fazenda da Esperança. The experiences of the two Sisters, which were full of challenges but also fascinating, touched the hearts of many Brazilian Sisters. As they listened, some felt the desire to share this experience with the young women, in search of a deeper life in God and a more concrete realisation of the Gospel.

114	During this time, the future of the schools was also a concern for the Regional Leadership. As fewer and fewer Sisters were working as teachers, the question arose as to whether the Region should continue to run the schools.
115	During the General Chapter in 1996, when the elevation to Province was confirmed, an unexpected offer came from an interested businessman to acquire the schools - a fact that was seen as divine providence. Shortly afterwards, the Sisters sold the schools, and it was necessary not only to change the tasks, but also to look for another place for spiritual renewal and new forms of mission.
116	Sad to say goodbye to a valuable past, but also grateful for a history that had been written with love and dedication, the Sisters left Agudos in 1997. This journey left deep marks and formed leaders who to this day keep alive the values and inspirations that the Sisters passed on. In this transition process, Sr M. Eliane Cassetari (1993 – 2002), then Provincial Superior, obedient and firm in her faith, played a decisive role in carrying out the radical change and reorganisation of the Province.
117	On 11 August 1997, the feast day of Saint Clare, the new Province was officially named "Santa Clara Province" in the "Imaculada Conceição" chapel, which was still under construction, and was founded in one of the poorest districts of Guaratinguetá/SP. It was like a veritable exodus: Convents were closed while new mission fields opened up. From the gate of the newly created Provincial Seat, with a view of the shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, the Sisters were constantly given the strength of hope and the certainty of Mary's protection.
118	There was some resistance to the development of this new project of returning to Franciscan roots, but at the same time a new missionary fervour was kindled by the opportunities that were opening up. Thus began the exchange between the Provinces: German and South African Sisters came to gain experience at the Fazenda da Esperança, while Brazilian Sisters were sent to international and inter-congregational projects.
119	Another major change in the Province resulted from a fundamental question: how and for what do we want to form the Sisters in Initial Formation? On this new path, it became clear that formation for consecrated life should come from listening and direct contact with the simplest and poorest people. In the first few years, the formation phases were inter-congregational and structured as follows: The candidates lived together with the young women of the Fazenda da Esperança for a certain period of time and thus gained experienced the Gospel in a concrete way, the fraternal life, mutual correction and the sharing of life. The Postulate took over the care of people with HIV/AIDS in the Casa de Apoio Sol Nascente in Lagoinha/SP. The apostolic Novitiate took on the character of being on the move: accompanied by their formator, the novices were sent on missionary experiences to unknown places at the invitation of bishops or priests, in order to be a sign of hope in the midst of pain and suffering. From 1998, various novitiate groups were in Coroatá/MA for practical training.
120	In 1999, the Convent Santa Maria da Porciúncula was founded in Petrópolis/RJ to create a Franciscan presence in the Terra Santa day care centre.
121	<i>Germany</i> After there were only a few new entries in the German part of the Congregation in the 1970s, many young women joined in the 1980s. Nevertheless, the number of Sisters in Germany decreased from 756 to 382 between 1960 and 2000. Many of the traditional small Convents, usually with one nursery school teacher, one nurse and one needlework teacher, were closed in the 1980s due to a lack of Sisters.
122	Instead of merely integrating the young forces into the existing, the Congregation had the courage and the foresight to initiate an inner path of renewal and significant changes in its

	mission. Superior General Sr M. Judith Jung, who was responsible for religious education and initiated the open youth work in Siessen before her term of office, stands for this foresight.
123	The "Forsthaus" on the edge of the Convent grounds that was acquired by the Congregation in 1980 made it possible to establish new pastoral and spiritual youth work in Siessen. This includes the "temporary Convent" for young women Following the closure of the school and boarding school in Siessen in 1990 and the subsequent renovation of the motherhouse the open youth work was further expanded with meeting days, youth retreats, Convent days for school classes and other events for children and young people. The heartfelt wish of some Sisters to offer a feast of St. Francis also for children and families led to the Feast of St Francis for Children and Families annually celebrated on 1 May since 1992.
124	The German church enabled young people to study theology and take up a church profession. This gave the pastoral ministry a new lease of life. There were numerous theologians and pastoral workers among the Sisters who joined the Congregation in the 1980s. They brought with them a wealth of theological expertise, which had a very fruitful impact within the Congregation on exploring the own spirituality, on current ecclesiastical and social issues, and on the further development of religious formation. Within the Church and its hierarchical structures, this increase in competence in the areas of pastoral care, spiritual guidance, retreat work and teaching gave the Sisterhood a new standing as women of the Church.
125	A second focus, which was promoted with foresight by the Congregation, developed in the area of psychological, medical and psychotherapeutic qualifications, which contributed to the formation as a deeper understanding of the human dimension of spiritual growth and changed the understanding of leadership. The increase in therapeutic competence also opened up new mission opportunities, both in the individual accompaniment of people seeking healing and in larger spiritual-therapeutic projects in Siessen.
126	After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the process of German reunification, the Congregation founded Convents in Eastern Germany on the Hülfsberg (1993 – 1998), in Königsbrück (1997 – 1999), in Dresden (2011 – 2015) and in Cottbus (2013 – 2020). Twice, Sisters of our Congregation set off for Albania, but each mission lasted only a short time.
127	The increase in pastoral professions made it possible to lead convents into the future by changing their tasks, such as the Convent of St Maria in Isny by taking up pastoral work in the rural area since 1990.
128	The desire to revitalise Franciscan spirituality was reflected in the missions of the then newly founded Convents. In 1986, a house was acquired in Assisi, Italy, and a Convent was founded to give young people in particular access to Francis and Clare, e.g. through guided tours and shared life.
129	By founding the Carceri Convent in 1991, the Congregation gave new expression to the importance of prayer and contemplation in the Franciscan charism. In a daily rhythm characterised by silence and prayer, Sisters have since lived this side of the Franciscan vocation and they also share it with guests seeking silence.
130	In 1991, at the request of the Archdiocese of Freiburg the Portiuncula Convent was founded to take over the adoration service in the cathedral. This mission was then reinforced by the introduction of a daily midday contemplation for the numerous tourists in the cathedral. With the foundation of the Freiburg Convent, there were also many opportunities to get in touch with young people and to accompany them.
131	On the initiative of Pastor Georg Schlütter, a Convent started in Berlin-Kreuzberg in 1995 as an open house for the poor; one Sister worked in the creche. A few months later, the two German Sisters were joined by two Brazilian Sisters from our Congregation and from the Congregation of Au am Inn. They were involved in all the preliminary discussions and

	preparatory work for the first Fazenda da Esperança on German ground, which began in Riewend in 1998 and then in Gut Neuhoof. Our Sisters worked there for many years.
132	The educational and pastoral mission of the Congregation was also realised in Künzelsau-Taläcker from 1995, where a district was created in which mainly newly arrived ethnic German repatriates from Russia were settled. The Convent supported these people in their integration process by working in the creche, pastoral offerings and teaching them the German language.
133	In the process of further developing the schools, the “Sießener Schulen gGmbH” was founded in 1996 by resolution of the General Chapter, and the Franciscan Sisters of Siessen remain its shareholders to this day. Sr M. Simone accompanied the development of the Siessen schools with the aim of keeping Franciscan spirituality alive in the school communities as well, even though the schools were no longer under the direct sponsorship of the Congregation and fewer Sisters were working there. In 2004, the “Siessener Schulen gGmbH” merged with the “Salvatorkolleg gGmbH” in Bad Wurzach to form the “Ordensschulen-Trägerverbund gGmbH.”
134	The St. Josef Children's Centre in Stuttgart was converted into a gGmbH in 1997. Between 1995 and 2000, the Congregation transferred the retirement homes to other institutions – St Antonius, Friedrichshafen, to the “Liebenau Foundation” and St Ludwig, Schwäbisch Gmünd, to the “House Lindenhof Foundation”. Villa Augusta in Stuttgart was closed as a retirement home for structural reasons and the building was sold. Due to the decline in the number of Sisters, large Convents in institutions run by other sponsorships also had to be downsized and eventually closed during this time, such as the Marienheim in Stuttgart (1887 – 1988) and the children's sanatorium in Wangen (1928 – 2021). The number of Sisters working at the Marienpflege children's and youth village in Ellwangen (since 1908) also declined significantly.
135	The foundation of a Convent on the Bussen pilgrimage mountain was primarily a diocesan concern, which was responded to by our Congregation in 1996. In 2013, the Convent was closed for personnel reasons, but reopened in 2019 due to a new request. In 2002, at the request of the Bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, a Convent was founded in Höchstberg to look after the pilgrimage site there and to take over the leadership of the parish. This Convent existed until 2016.
The development after the turn of the millennium	
136	The Church put its hopes for a new evangelization in the event of the celebration of the 2000th birthday of Jesus Christ. Just one year later, on 11 September 2001, the terrible terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in the USA shook the world. The images of the collapsing Twin Towers were engraved on the collective memory of the people. This shook confidence in a better world and fear of the threat of terrorism gripped the nations.
137	Another sign of the times were the ever-increasing flows of refugees around the globe. This strengthened nationalist separatist movements in many countries, leading to radicalisation at various levels.
138	Climate change and its consequences became more and more visible and worried many people. In this explosive context, the theme of ‘justice, peace and integrity of creation’, which had been a concern of the Congregation for many years, took on new relevance and significance with the publication of Pope Francis's encyclical ‘Laudato Si’”, which attracted worldwide attention in 2015.
139	The process of growing together and the structural change continued in the Congregation. The new Provinces of South Africa and Brazil were strengthened in their identity and developed. The Superior General Sr. M. Anna Franziska Kindermann (2008 – 2020) intensified the support for the Provinces. From 2012 onwards, she was particularly committed to helping the South African Province through a crisis phase.

140	The 2014 General Chapter decided to continue the structural process started in 1996. The most important objectives for the planned structural change were defined by this General Chapter as follows: • to promote sisterhood throughout the Congregation, • to strengthen the identity of the individual parts within the international Congregation, • to facilitate the internationality of the General Leadership and • to give the Provinces of South Africa and Brazil a pension scheme and more financial independence by dividing up the assets of the Congregation. These goals were realised in a three-part extraordinary General Chapter (2017 – 2019), which included revising the Constitution, facilitating the implementation of an international leadership of the Congregation and establishing the German Province.
141	This process was accompanied by international meetings that promoted closer ties. In 2015 and 2016, meetings of the so-called 'Congregation Council' were held in Siessen. This consultative body accompanied the development of the structural changes and the Constitution and consisted of the General Leadership, the Mission Procurator and three representatives each from the Provincial Leaderships of South Africa and Brazil. In 2016, there was also a joint journey to Assisi for the Sisters from Germany, South Africa and Brazil who were preparing for Final Profession this year. In 2017, the formators from the three countries met for the first time in Brazil. Further meetings followed in the various countries.
142	The new Constitution and the Statutes came into force on 1 January 2020 and the German part of the Congregation became a Province. The new German Province was led by the previous General Leadership until the election of the first German Provincial Leadership in October 2020.
143	In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic affected the entire world for two years, claiming many victims and causing great uncertainty in society and politics. It also interfered with the plans of the Congregation. After much deliberation, the General Leadership decided, with the approval of the Capitulars, to hold the General Chapter of 2020, including elections, online in August. Bishop Dr Gebhard Fürst granted the necessary dispensation for this step. Despite the pandemic, it was possible for the Capitulars in all countries to gather in one place. In addition, there were international groups that also met online and carried out essential parts of the Chapter's work. The General Chapter of 2020 elected Sr M. Karin Berger as the 12th Superior General of the Congregation. The subsequent Provincial Chapters could all take place in presence.
144	With the election of the Provincial Leaderships, the composition of the first Congregational Leadership in the new structure was clear. The members of the General Leadership are Sr M. Karin Berger, Sr M. Tanja Lohr and Sr M. Emanuela Tieze, as well as the Provincial Superiors Sr M. Emmanuela Khwepe (South Africa), Sr Rosa Maria Severino (Brazil) and Sr Marie-Sophie Schindeldecker (Germany).
145	Based on the positive experience with the General Chapter, many events for the entire Congregation were subsequently held online. This promoted the growing together of the Provinces and encouraged all to learn English, which had been decided upon as the language of the Congregation.
146	The implementation of the Constitution and of the new structure, as well as the elaboration of the text on spirituality for the new Order of Life were subsequently the central tasks of the General Leadership. This text was developed in a synodal process with the participation of all the Sisters of the Congregation. The historical overview of the origins and development of the Congregation was also drawn up, reflecting a new, shared understanding of our history.
147	A particular highlight was the "New Generations' Encounter", an international meeting of young Sisters and formators in South Africa at the turn of the year 2024/2025. For the

	younger generations of the Congregation, it promoted the process to get to know each other better and laid a further foundation for internationalisation and the development of intercultural encounters at eye level throughout the Congregation.
148	The extraordinary General Chapter of 2025 symbolised the process the Congregation went through in these years. A lot of work was done in international groups in a synodal style. All the working groups of the Chapter and the facilitators were international and the text on spirituality was not drafted only in German and later translated but finalised simultaneously in all three languages.
149	The revision of the Order of Life, which began at the extraordinary General Chapter of 2017 – 2019, was finalised with the adoption of the text on spirituality and the historical overview at the extraordinary General Chapter of 2025. Each Province had already drawn up its own Provincial Directory before the extraordinary General Chapter 2025 and had it approved by the respective Provincial Chapter.
150	<i>Brazil</i> In 2000, the Franciscan Sisters of Au am Inn withdrew from the covenant. The Province of Santa Clara, however, retained the covenant with the Fazenda da Esperança.
151	A Convent was founded in Coroatá/MA in 2001. The Sisters worked at the Fazenda da Esperança.
152	During the term of office of Sr M. Iracema Willan as Provincial Superior (2002 – 2008), the Convent in Bahia, in Oliveira dos Brejinhos, was founded, as was Coutinho União in the Prelature of São Félix do Araguaia/MT. During this time, the growing together of the Provinces was promoted above all through exchanges, the sending of Brazilians to Germany and of Germans to Brazil for a longer stay.
153	In 2008, Sr M. Eliane Cassetari (2008 – 2014) once again took over the leadership of the Province. In 2011, she founded a Convent in Belo Jardim/PE, which was mainly dedicated to youth ministry and care for the poor and existed until 2022.
154	Over the years, the Sisters have encouraged the people of God on their journey and supported them through pastoral services, catechesis, the education of children and young people, the training of lay people in responsibility and through social projects. Although some of the Convents were closed due to a lack of Sisters who could take on the mission, the impact of these new ways on evangelisation was significant and bore good fruit.
155	In 2012, the mortal remains of the Sisters, who were previously buried in the Agudos cemetery, were transferred to the memorial in the garden of the Provincial House in Guaratinguetá. This gesture finalized the transformation of the Province: The past joined with the present to form a hopeful path to the future.
156	In 2014, Sr Rosa Maria Severino was elected Provincial Superior. During her term, the ageing of the Province became increasingly evident. Creating a good living environment for everyone, renovating the Convent buildings in accordance with the reality of the residents' age, and continuing to be missionaries was no easy task. During this period, small but significant initiatives emerged, such as the Student Project, the Project "Taking care of Life", the partnership with the SEFRAS Project, and participation in popular missions, visible signs of hope for the poorest. In Guaratinguetá, the revitalization of the garden and the renovation of rooms and the Immaculate Conception Chapel consolidated the space as a place for retreats, group meetings, and wedding celebrations. These activities take place regularly and, in addition to being a means of evangelization, represent a source of income for the Convent. Since the pandemic, the Sisters have found new ways to overcome distances through online

	meetings for formation, important information from the Province and Congregation, sharing of life, as well as moments of common prayer on the main feast days of the Province.
157	Since 2017, the Candidacy has been taking place in the smaller Convents in response to the needs of the Province, taking into account the Franciscan sources and the calls of a "Church setting of". The Novitiate House was moved to Coroatá/MA, continuing this journey of formation in line with the current challenges and demands. The Sisters are currently involved in pastoral work, catechesis, social initiatives and nursing care.
158	The Brazilian Province is connected to the Diocese of Óbidos in the Amazon region via the Franciscan bishop Dom Bernardo Bahlmann. When the project to build a hospital ship to provide medical care for the Amazonian population was launched there in 2019, a German Sister set off for there. As she couldn't obtain a work permit as a doctor, she returned to Germany at the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.
159	In Garça, the Sisters moved to a small Convent on the outskirts of the city in 2023. There they live a missionary presence in a poor neighbourhood and form a prayer cell. They continue to be involved in the Dona Maria Leonor children's and youth centre.
160	Over time, the understanding of the partnership with the Fazenda da Esperança matured and the forms of cooperation changed. The Sisters remain in direct contact with the people on the Fazendas, but are also increasingly dedicated to training Fazenda managers, particularly by teaching Franciscan spirituality. The Initial Formation also continues to benefit from contact with the Fazenda, albeit in a different form.
161	Although the Brazilian Province has few members, it remains faithful to its mission, proclaiming the Gospel through its life in communion with those most in need. From the small Convents where most live, and through the silence of prayer, the missionary zeal of Father Francis radiates forth.
162	<i>South Africa</i> The transformation process from the Apartheid regime to a democratic state was characterised for the young "rainbow nation" in South Africa by high hopes and expectations, but also by demanding challenges, crises and far-reaching changes. Although the state improved the situation for the poor in the fields of education, healthcare and housing, the struggle to overcome social and economic inequality in the country has remained a persistent problem to this day, especially as political efforts to tackle poverty have been undermined by growing corruption. Some activities that had previously been carried out by the Sisters were now taken over by the state. Thus, new tasks and missionary fields had to be developed in Assisi Mission.
163	There were also hopeful set offs in the Convents outside of Assisi Mission after the turn of the millennium. Two important Convents for the poor were founded during the term of office of Sr Rita-Maria Matokonyane (2002 – 2008). The St Francis Convent was founded near Bloemfontein to set up an archdiocesan project for HIV patients. From 2003 to 2023, Sr M. Electa Wild ran with great dedication the Lesedi Centre of Hope, an outpatient social care centre for HIV patients, in Bloemfontein, and from 2011 to 2023 also a hospice and nursing home. In 2006, Sisters set off to a very poor area, the township of Kothsong, near Bothaville in the diocese of Kroonstad, where they first worked in pastoral care and then also in a newly built creche
164	Archbishop Buti Tlhagale was looking for Sisters for pastoral work in Orange Farm, a township of around 800,000 inhabitants near Johannesburg with high unemployment, extreme poverty and high immigration from neighbouring countries. The South African Province, now already under the leadership of Sr M. Ottilia Khoele (2008 – 2012), asked the General Chapter in 2008 for two German Sisters to live together with South African Sisters in this place and bear witness to the coexistence of black and white. The General Chapter agreed to this request. So,

	in January 2009, Sr M. Anna Franziska Kindermann first sent Sr M. Debora Endres and shortly afterwards Sr M. Mechthilde Faist to South Africa. The Convent was founded in Ennerdale. However, it soon became apparent that the situation in this place was life-threatening for white people. Therefore, Sr M. Mechthilde was not placed there at all and Sr M. Debora was later transferred to the Provincial House.
165	Religious life and Religious Formation went through a serious crisis during this time. As part of a reform process, the formators received solid training for their task. In addition, the Initial Formation was realised in the Motherhouse from 2012 to 2014.
166	All professed Sisters of the Province could take advantage of various programmes as part of the Ongoing Formation. There were leadership training courses and the Province placed a new emphasis on empowering the young generation of Sisters through studies or professional training and further education. During this time of inner awakening, Sr M. Elizabeth Pebane (2012 – 2014) and Sr M. Colette Sele (2014 – 2020) led the Province. As part of the internal reform process, the Provincial House and the San Damiano Formation House were renovated.
167	In addition to the spiritual renewal, the mission of the Provincial House was revitalised. The Province launched various initiatives to develop the village belonging to Assisi Mission. The project included the renovation or new construction of several houses, an innovative gardening project (Foundations for Farming) and the construction of a bakery to provide better food for the Sisters and the villagers.
168	In 2021, the Sisters opened the Bophelo Child and Youth Care Centre and the above-mentioned bakery. Sr M. Emmanuela Khwepe, who had set up the centre, had already been Provincial Superior since 2020. In 2023, the Sisters founded the Rebabaletswe Partial Care Centre (day care centre) in Assisi Mission. These projects also created jobs for the residents of the nearby village.
169	<i>Germany</i> For many people, the "adaptation of the Church to the needs and conditions of our times", heralded by the Second Vatican Council, fell short of expectations, as structures and doctrinal content hadn't changed at all or only insufficiently. This led to a serious loss of acceptance of faith and the Church in society. The sexual abuse within the Church, the disregard for the victims and the trivialising treatment of the perpetrators shocked and outraged many people and led to a rapid loss of the church's credibility as a moral authority. Many people left the Catholic Church. Through a Synodal Process ("Synodaler Weg", 2019 – 2023) involving bishops and laypeople, the German Church attempted to address the causes of sexual abuse in the Church and initiate the necessary changes to prevent such incidents in the future. This Process was viewed with great scepticism by the Universal Church but was taken up as a topic in the World Synod (2023 – 2025) under Pope Francis.
170	The reality of Religious Life in Germany changed as a result of the progressive ageing of the Congregations, whose dwindling number of members led to the handing over of tasks and the withdrawal from previous fields of activity. The resulting loss of ecclesiastical and social significance could not be stopped by new ways of spiritual and pastoral work. Nevertheless, it must not underestimate their effectiveness as seeds for new life.
171	Despite these painful developments, what gives us hope and encouragement are the diverse pastoral and social tasks and projects that Sisters are carrying out in various places to give people signs of hope, e.g. the city Convent in Bad Mergentheim and language lessons for migrants. The mission of the Motherhouse was also refined and intensified by giving adult pastoral care a new focus with retreats, spiritual training days and spiritual counselling. At the same time, youth work was expanded as "pastoral care for children, youth and families".

	In 2004, the Garden of St Francis was opened with the stations of the Cantic of the Creatures. The conversion of the gatehouse into a Convent café, an exhibition space and a Convent shop, which was completed in 2016, created further low-threshold opportunities for contact.
172	From 2010 to 2025, there was a Convent in Gothenburg in Sweden to strengthen the dwindling presence of Religious People in this country through Franciscan pastoral work in the diaspora.
173	During the great wave of refugees, the Sisters took in Syrian and Iraqi refugees at the Motherhouse from 2015 onwards, in order to meet the need of the time. In 2022, they also provided accommodation for refugees when the war in Ukraine began.
174	In 2017, an accompaniment of individual Sisters by a woman began, which more and more sisters joined. The spiritual and personal deepening they hoped for led to an experience of spiritual abuse for some Sisters. The disputes in this matter led to tensions that lasted well beyond the conversion into a Province.
175	On 1 January 2020, the German part of the Congregation, including the two Convents in Sweden and Italy, became the German Province with its own Provincial Leadership. Sr Marie-Sophie Schindeldecker was elected as the first German Provincial Superior in October 2020. One of her first tasks was to develop a new identity as German Province together with the Sisters and, together with the General Leadership, shape the cooperation between the two leadership levels on the premises of the Motherhouse.
176	A pastoral care project, planned together with the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, at the university and in the new residential neighbourhood being built in Stuttgart-Birkach did not provide the Sisters with the necessary framework for fruitful work, which is why the Convent founded in 2021 was closed in 2023. The most recent Convent foundations in Wilnsdorf (2021) and Dortmund (2025) in the Archdiocese of Paderborn have a pastoral and social focus.
177	Due to the decreasing number of Sisters and the different areas of responsibility, Sisters now often work alone at a place of activity or even sometimes live alone. Thus, even in the Convents, the Sisters are often no longer united by a common mission, but by communal life, prayer and testimony of faith.
178	All Provinces are in a process of constant development and change. Convents are opened and also closed to be able to respond to the signs of the times in a rapidly changing world and Church.
	Closing words
179	This overview of the history of the Congregation is based on facts and figures. Yet, how these are viewed at any given time and in what social, political and ecclesiastical context is always a matter of interpretation. The view of this will change as we move along. What remains is the conviction that God is at work in the history of the Congregation and of each individual Sister, and that He is writing and will write history through them. In this hope, the Congregation is courageously moving forward into the future: to the praise and glory of God.