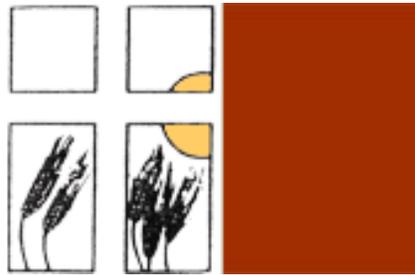


FRANCISCAN FAMILY APOSTOLATE



The Poor and the Franciscan Family Apostolate

SMALL THINGS

DONE IN GREAT LOVE AND PEACE

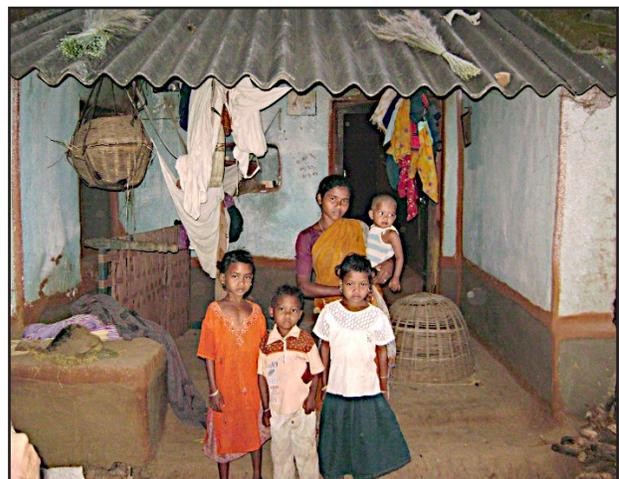
by Alan J. Ouimet O.F.S.

The Franciscan Family Apostolate has been around a long time — 43 years. Founded in 1971 and designed to assist American Secular Franciscans in their outreach to care for the poor and oppressed, it has helped thousands of families. Recently, the Apostolate has commenced assisting HIV/AIDS widows and their children in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Our families here are tribal families that have been ostracized because of their disease. In a word, they have been abandoned due to fear of contagion. To best show the progress of the Franciscan Family Apostolate, I am setting forth a letter I received from Sister Carmel Paul, our partner and director of our project there. She wrote as follows:

What Franciscan Family Apostolate means for the mission of South East Region of Andhra Pradesh is difficult to verbalize. As I just recall how the miracles of love transferred the life of Arika Gangamma who resides at Gopalapuram. She belongs to Savara Tribal tribe and lost her husband all of a sudden with four kids last aged 4 months. All I experienced in my first visits was that she was an incapable illiterate woman who never moved from her mountain where she resides. Now I understand that she became a women leader of her village; she manages her finances ; she sends her children to school. She is aware of many of her rights and how and where to go about and get her needs met. She raises animals and manages field work in association with the villagers.

How and when this transformation took place I really do not know. It was decided by the Franciscan Family Apostolate in collaboration with the Canossian sisters to assist a family for three years and help the family to reach

the goal of self- reliance. The Apostolate provided her with \$ 75 per quarter for three years and an asset to work with to earn a better livelihood. We were asked to guide and motivate the family, above all to follow them with their speed to capture their heart to free them from the clutches of ignorance and superstitions which are their guiding forces. Being animists they believe in the supernatural powers and in the spirits of the dead. Persevering under the love of the Canossian sisters, and mingled with the generous heart of her sponsor from the Apostolate, Gangamma found meaning in life and illumined her mind that if she cooperate with the scheme she too can become someone in the society. Her daughter, Vasantha and her brother Santhosh were first enrolled in the Montfort Brothers Tribal welfare residential school. Santhosh, who is a victim of sickle cell anemia, had to leave his education there after a year, being often in need of hospitalization. Both of Gangamma's sons are victims of sickle cell anemia which is hereditary but her girls are



healthy and ambitious. Now three of Gangamma's children are going to the village school and her 2nd daughter is doing her studies in Montfort residential school.

Because of the generous heart of her sponsor, in collaborations with the partial assistance from Tribal housing government scheme, Gangamma succeeded to build a decent house of her own. A portion of her house she floored in beautiful tiles; she made a small little garden on the roof of her concrete house. It is to be wondered, among the many houses sanctioned to build, only her house is completed. I visited the family in an unexpected moment and found house is kept clean and tidy.

Following a family with a specific vision to free themselves from the clutches of poverty and leading them to self-

reliance, unknowingly, we gave them the ambition to grow and stand on their feet. Now all Gangamma's children are going to school. She learned to write her name and set her goals and knows how to manage her family. It is a wonder!

All things are becoming possible because of the joint effort of the Franciscan Family Apostolate holding hands and collaborating with the Canossian sisters assisted with generous hearts of Secular Franciscan sponsors. It is vividly clear that money alone cannot change a poor person but without money we can never assist a family to reach the goal of such transformation. Gangamma was sponsored until last year. Why some sponsors come forth from so far away is a marvel.

In every age O Lord, You have been our refuge.

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Many families are in need of assistance. Caring for the poor costs less than the purchase of a daily cup of coffee, \$25.00 per month. Please consider sponsoring a family. We have many, many waiting for assistance. For further information please visit our website, www.openhearts.org or contact Alan Ouimet, OFS at 203-915-2837 or email ffaindia@att.net.

Franciscan Family Apostolate Mission Statement

The Franciscan Family Apostolate was founded as response of the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO) to the plight of the poor in the Third World. Following its founder, Saint Francis of Assisi, the poor Christ is found in the faces and lives of the poor and oppressed of the world. The Franciscan Family Apostolate's mission is to encourage a witness to the Gospel life preached by Jesus – the care and concern for the stranger in need regardless of race, color, religion or country of origin.

In 1987 the Franciscan Family Apostolate became an independent 501(c)3 charity upon receipt of its tax exempt status from the IRS with the following stated goals:

- To alleviate poverty, provide financial support and assistance to needy individuals and families in the Third World through outreach programs and related activities;
- To develop and implement similar outreach programs in the United States;
- Lastly, to develop and implement educational programs in Third World countries and in the United States to provide occupational training.