



## Founding and Mercy

Celebrating the Anniversary of the Founding of our Congregation:  
Birthed by the Mercy of God

Mercy reveals herself in the confluence of persons and events that brought about the founding moments of our congregation in Philadelphia. From 1851 to 1855, the lives of Maria Anna Bachmann, her four children, her mother, her sister Barbara, Anna Dorn, Fr. John Hespelein, Pope Pius IX, and Bishop John Neumann would intersect, entwine, and overlap in ways they never dreamed—all culminating in that one moment in time when the three women knelt before Bishop Neumann on April 9, 1855, and accepted the Franciscan habit.

*“God’s mercy is the power of God that sustains, protects, promotes, builds up, and creates life anew.” (Mercy ~ Cardinal Walter Kasper)*

Mercy is certainly the name of the breath of the Spirit that hovered over Maria Anna, a recent widow; Barbara, her sister who always desired to be a religious; and Anna, a Secular Franciscan, as they began to live a religious life with a Franciscan Rule. Simultaneously the Spirit inspired Bishop Neumann to go to Rome for the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception and an “ad limina” visit to Pope Pius IX. This same Spirit who stirred Pius IX to tell Bishop Neumann to create his own community and make them Franciscan also inspired Fr. John Hespelein to write to Bishop Neumann while he was in Rome, telling him about the three women living a Franciscan life.

This month we celebrate the anniversary of the founding of our congregation—a founding birthed by the mercy of God. What response can we make to this overwhelming grace? How can we better live out our Franciscan charism—a gift of God’s mercy—in our world today? Where is the Spirit leading us at this point in time? Who might be intersecting, entwining, and overlapping with us to create something new?