In the Lord’s name! Amen.

Of the various gifts which we have received and continue to receive daily from our benefactor, the Father of mercies (2 Corinthians 1:3), the one for which we must be most thankful to Christ’s glorious Father is our vocation. And the more perfect and greater that gift is, so much the greater should be our thanks to Him.

And that’s why the apostle writes: “Consider your calling” (1 Corinthians 1:26).

The Son of God has become for us the path (John 14:6) which our most blessed Father Francis, His true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example (1 Timothy 4:12).

Therefore, beloved Sisters, we must consider the immense gifts which God has bestowed on us, and especially those gifts that He has seen fit to effect in us through His beloved servant, our blessed Father Francis—not only after our conversion but also while we were still living our miserable and vain secular lives.

For almost immediately after his conversion, while he still had neither brothers nor companions, this holy man, in the process of building the Church of San Damiano—in which he, totally filled with divine consolation, was compelled to abandon the world completely—in the great joy and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit made a prophecy about us which the Lord later fulfilled.

This shows us God’s abundant kindness toward us, who, because of His mercy and love, saw fit to announce our vocation and election (2 Peter 1:18) through His saint.

And the prophecy of our most blessed Father Francis was not only about us, but also about other women who were to come in the future professing this same holy vocation to which we have been called by the Lord.

Therefore, we must keep the commandments of God and of our Father with great care and mental and bodily effort, so that, with the Lord’s help, we may return His talent to Him many times over (cf. Matthew 25:15-23).

For the Lord Himself has set us as a model to imitate and mirror not only for others, but also for our own sisters whom the Lord has called to our way of life, so that they in turn might be a mirror and model to those living a secular way of life.

And since the Lord has called us to such great things that those women who are to be models for imitation for others may see such models in us, we are truly bound to bless and praise the Lord and gain more strength from Him to do good.

Therefore, if we have maintained the aforesaid way of life, we shall leave others a noble example and (in the shortest time) obtain the prize of eternal happiness (2 Maccabees 6:28, 31).
After the most high heavenly Father saw fit in His mercy and grace to enlighten my heart to do penance (paenitentiam facere) following the example and teaching of our most blessed Father Francis, shortly after his own conversion, I, together with the few sisters whom the Lord had provided me with soon after my conversion, promised him voluntary obedience (oboedientiam voluntarie sibi promisi), just as the Lord had given us the Light of His grace through Francis’s holy life and teaching.

When Blessed Francis noticed that, although we were physically weak and frail, we shunned no deprivation, poverty, hard work, distress, or being held in low esteem and contempt by the world—nay, rather, we delighted in all these greatly as he tested us frequently using the saints and his brothers as a benchmark—he rejoiced greatly in the Lord. And moved by compassion for us, he promised to have always, both through himself and through his Order, the same loving care and special concern for us as for his own brothers.

And thus through God’s will and the will of our most blessed Father Francis, we set up residence at the Church of San Damiano, where, in a short time, the Lord increased our number by His mercy and grace so that what He had predicted through His saint might be fulfilled. [32] For before this, we had stayed in another place, even though only for a little while.

After that Francis wrote a rule (forma vivendi) for us, emphasizing as primary that we should remain forever in holy poverty.

Nor was it enough for him to encourage us by many exhortations and examples to love and observe most holy poverty while he was living, but he also left us many writings so that we should in no respect depart from poverty even after his death—just like the Son of God never had a desire to abandon this holy poverty while He lived in the world.

Nor did our most blessed Father Francis himself, following in His footsteps (1 Peter 2:21), as long as he was alive, in any way abandon this holy poverty which he had chosen to follow for himself and his brothers, both in word and in deed.

Now I, Clare, the maid-servant of Christ and of the Poor Sisters of the Monastery of San Damiano, unworthy that I am, and being only a seedling (plantula) of the holy Father, joined with my sisters in thinking about the extent of our vows commanded by so great a father. [38-39] Considering also the frailty in other sisters which we feared in ourselves after the death of our holy Father Francis, who was our pillar and, after God, our single consolation and support (1 Timothy 3:15), we bound ourselves voluntarily, over and over again, to our Lady, most holy Poverty, so that, after my death, the Sisters present and to come would not abandon their commitment to her in any way.

And, just as I have always been careful and diligent to observe and to have the other sisters observe holy poverty which we have promised the Lord and our blessed Father Francis, so, too, let the others who will succeed me in office be bound forever to observe it and have it observed by the other sisters, with God’s help.

And as a further precaution, I took care to have our vow of most holy poverty, which we promised the Lord and our blessed Father [Francis], solidified with privileges by the Lord Pope Innocent [III], during whose pontificate we started, and by his successors—so that we would never in any way depart from it.
Thus, with knees bent and bowing down both externally and internally, I commend all my sisters, both those present and those to come, to our holy Mother the Church of Rome, to the supreme Pontiff, and especially to the Lord Cardinal who has been appointed [Protector] for the Order of Friars Minor and for us—

in order that, for the sake of the love of that God Who was poor as He lay in the crib (Luke 2:12), poor during his lifetime, and poor as He remained naked on the cross, the Protector may always impress upon his little flock (Luke 12:32)—which Lord [God] our Father has begotten in his holy Church—the poverty and humility of God’s beloved Son and His glorious Virgin Mother, by both the word and the example of our blessed Father Francis; and that he might make sure that the holy poverty which we have promised God and our most blessed Father St. Francis is observed, and that he may always encourage and maintain this poverty for those sisters.

Now the Lord gave us our most blessed Father Francis as our founder, planter, and helpmate in Christ’s service and in dealing with the obligations we have taken in the face of the Lord and our blessed Father Francis. [49] Moreover, for as long as he was alive, he continued, both in word and in deed, to cherish and take care of us, his seedlings. [50-51] Following this legacy, then, I commend and commit my sisters, both those that are here now and those that will follow, to the successor of our blessed Father Francis and to the entire Order, so that they may help us to progress continually in our service to God and above all in our observance of most holy poverty.

And even if these sisters should, after my death, ever leave this place and go to some other place, they are still bound (wherever they end up) to observe that vow of poverty which we have promised to God and to our most blessed Father Francis.

And let both the sister in charge and the other sisters take care to make sure that they never acquire or accept any more land around that place than they need to set up a garden for growing vegetables.

And if it should become necessary, for reasons of propriety and privacy for the monastery, to acquire more land beyond the boundaries of the garden on any side, make sure that the sisters don’t buy or receive any more land than is absolutely required, and that they never, for any reason, cultivate that land or plant on it: it must remain untilled and undeveloped.

I warn and inspire all of my sisters in Christ, both those here present and those to come in the future, to strive always to imitate the way of holy simplicity, humility, and poverty, as well as [maintain] the nobility of our holy way of life, as we were taught by Christ and by our most blessed Father Francis from the beginning of our conversion.

For it is through these things—not through our own merits but by the mercy and grace alone of our benefactor—that the Father of mercies himself (2 Corinthians 1:3) have spread the fragrance (2 Corinthians 2:15) of a good name in the eyes of everyone, both near and far.

Loving one another out of your love of Christ, let your inner love display itself outwardly in your deeds, creating such a compelling example that the sisters may continue to grow in love of God and for one another.

I also beg that sister who will be in charge of the other sisters to strive to rise above others rather in her virtues and holy life than in her office, so that, encouraged
by her example, the sisters may obey her not so much because they have to but solely out of love.

[63-64] Let her also anticipate and care for the needs of her sisters, just as a good mother cares for her daughters; and especially, let her make an effort to provide for them according to their individual needs from the things that the Lord chooses to provide.

[65-66] Let her also be so accommodating and so approachable that they may reveal to her their needs with trust and have recourse to her at any hour with confidence, both on their own account and on account of their sisters, at their convenience.

[67] But the sisters who are under her should remember that they have surrendered their own wills for the sake of the Lord.

[68-70] Therefore I would have them obey their mother as they have promised the Lord of their own free will, so that, seeing the love, humility, and unity that they display toward one another, their mother might bear more lightly every burden that her office imposes on her, and that what is troublesome and bitter might be turned into sweetness for her because of their holy way of life.

[71-73] And because the pathway is narrow and the gate is tight through which one passes and enters into life, and there are few who walk on that path and enter through it (Matthew 7:14), and [because] even if some of them walk on it for a while, there are few who keep it up, and blessed are those who are allowed to walk on the path and follow it to the end (Psalms 118:1; Matthew 10:22)—

[74-75] therefore, as we entered the pathway to the Lord, let’s make sure that we don’t go off in the wrong direction through our own fault and ignorance, and that we do not offend so great a Lord and His Virgin Mother, and our Father, blessed Francis, and the Church Triumphant and, in fact, the Church Militant.

[76] For it is written: Cursed are those who turn away from Your commandments (Psalms 119:21).

[77-78] For this reason I bow my knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:14), with the support of the merits of the glorious, holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and of our most blessed Father Francis and all the Saints, that the Lord Himself Who has given us a good beginning, might give us the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6), and even the will to persevere to the end. Amen.

[79] And so that the rule might be better observed, I leave these writings to you, my dearest and most beloved Sisters, those here now and those to come, as a sign of the Lord’s blessing, and of our most blessed Father Francis, and of my own blessing, who am your mother and servant.