



Andiamo! Walk to Assisi: A Journey of Wellness, Balance and Relationship In the Spirit of Saint Francis' Canticle of the Creatures

Benvenuto (welcome) to a Franciscan Wellness Challenge!

*Holy Father Francis, show us the way to wellness through your profound wisdom and words.
St. Francis, may you be our divine guide in our quest to be well mentally, physically and spiritually.*

This wellness challenge is designed to take you on a journey of healthy habits with physical, mental and spiritual benefits. It is inspired by a Franciscan spiritual approach to healthy living.

"We all want to be healthy, but we don't always go about it spiritually, which will be the only way to be truly healthy". Deacon Tom Bello, OFS who at the time was National Minister of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States said this as I shared my Wellness Program idea with him. Deacon Tom heartily endorsed this concept of wellness through spirituality.

Let me introduce myself: My name is Cathy Roszart, OFS. A cradle catholic, the oldest of 7 children, I was born and raised in the South of France. Back in the early sixties, my family enjoyed a healthy and active lifestyle including a wholesome Mediterranean diet of fresh food and lots of outdoors activities. Coming to the United States as a foreign exchange student in High School was a major cultural shock on many levels.

Being a professed member of the Secular Franciscan Order, mine is a journey of ongoing conversion, improvement, learning and growth. Secular Franciscans are also called to build community, fraternity – as we are called to help one another on our earthly journey. I want to share with you a Wellness program that I helped create. A wellness program specially designed for Franciscans or anyone with a Franciscan heart.

Taking care of our body and soul is an awesome responsibility. We are well aware that we should be physically active, eat balanced meals, drink 8 cups of water daily, sleep 7-9 hours every night, and avoid stress. I am not here today to go over all the benefits of a healthy lifestyle such as physical fitness, good nutrition, and sleep hygiene or stress management.

This is my personal wellness "credo":

- First and foremost, I believe in God, as He is my strength and my inspiration.
- I also believe in family and friends and all the good people God puts in my life. I believe in community and connectiveness.



- I believe in being physically active, not "doing exercise" but in living an active life.
- I believe in eating, in balanced nutrition, not in a specific or restrictive diet.
- I believe in living in a healthy environment and making my world a cleaner place.
- I believe in approaching health in a holistic way.
- Lastly, I believe in having a purpose in life and a reason to get up in the morning.

During my last semester at Illinois State University, I performed an internship at the Center for Healthy Lifestyles at the OSF (Order of St. Francis) St. Joseph Medical Center in Bloomington, IL. In collaboration with another intern, I was asked to help create an employee wellness program. The only specification was, that it should be a virtual walk to Assisi, Italy. It was certainly a great opportunity for me to share with others my passion for wellness through a program in which I could incorporate part of my identity as a Franciscan.

Although the concept of a "virtual" walk when it comes to a wellness challenge is gaining some popularity lately, I may have to explain. The opposite of the word "virtual" could be "actual", like actually, physically walking to Assisi. As much as most of us would like to go to Assisi, Italy it may not be possible for many reasons. But more than a trip to Italy, this journey needs to be for now, more like a pilgrimage. In his book Titled "*The Sun and Moon over Assisi*", Gerry Straub, describes a pilgrim like this: "A pilgrim is a displaced person whose normal routines and relationships have been suspended". He adds "A pilgrimage is not about tourism or postcards; it is about change". Certainly, you will agree with me that in order to adopt a healthy lifestyle most of us will need to consider our "normal" routines and make changes. We can all think of at least one bad habit that we need to change to be healthier. Frankly, don't we know all too well what we need to do to be healthy? In essence, we only need to figure out a practical way to do it. This wellness challenge offers a simple method for a salutary lifestyle, with a spiritual perspective on health.

After a few days of brainstorming ideas, I got the inspiration to use St. Francis "Canticle of the Creatures" as a focal point for this wellness program. Each verse of the Canticle, highlights a feeling of simple unity with all creation and the wonderful relationship in perfect harmony with all the creatures of the earth.

Most wellness challenges invariably intimidate the sedentary and overweight individual with target goals beyond easy reach. Wellness challenges are likely to appeal to the person who is already fit and healthy. But rest easy, *Andiamo! Walk to Assisi* wellness challenge is within reach for anyone regardless of physical fitness and age.

Andiamo! Walk to Assisi is not another idea for a starvation diet or strenuous exercise routine. Instead, it is a practical as well as a spiritual approach to wellness. This wellness program offers realistic, achievable goals by simply encouraging a person to adopt a healthy



lifestyle. Additionally, the Virtual Walk to Assisi is a pilgrimage of sort toward the goal to reach a healthy way of life. St. Francis' *Canticle of the Creatures*, aims to inspire and challenge anyone to embrace, through key motivation, a simple and easy way to reach optimal health.

Participants in this wellness challenge will receive weekly instructions for seven weeks with fun, simple activities. The challenge is about walking. Not virtual as the name suggests, but actual walking. The word virtual refers only to the destination: Assisi, Italy. Participants will also enjoy wellness tips through inspirational guidance from the *Canticle of the Creatures*.

Are you thinking right now of a group of people (like family, friends, co-workers, your local parish, your fraternity, your neighborhood or any other group) that you could invite to share this wellness challenge with you?

Wondering how far or how long you should walk every day?

A healthy individual should aim to walk approximately 150 minutes a week. To maintain good physical fitness an adult should attempt to walk 30 minutes at least 5 days during the week which will easily reach that goal. If you walk at a brisk walking pace, for 30 minutes we will cover between 1.5 and 2 miles. If you add to that a fairly active day of housekeeping, shopping, gardening...etc. you will certainly get those 5 miles a day for good physical activity. Regarding the distance for this challenge, you need to Google the distance between your location and Assisi, Italy. Let's take for example Central Arizona to Assisi and let's agree that it is roughly 6125 miles. If you are taking on this wellness challenge on your own, and 5 miles is your daily goal, for every mile you walk you can record 125 virtual miles. If you can get a team together you just need to adjust those numbers. For example, gather 25 members of your family or friends and each one will pledge to walk 5 miles a day, every day of the week and you have 875 miles travelled every week. Each participant will track and record how many miles they travel on a mileage log. At the end of each week, they share their total with the team.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	TOTAL:
Week 1								
Week 2								
Week 3								
Week 4								
Week 5								
Week 6								
Week 7								
MILES PLEDGED TO WALK EACH WEEK: ...							Total Miles Walked:	

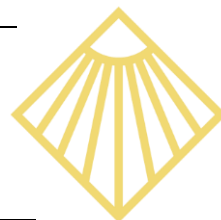
Let's pray together the introduction of Francis' *Canticle of the creatures*.

*"Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing,
To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name."*



Week 1: Brother Sun

*" Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One. "*



Think about how your mood is affected by the weather, mostly how a sunny day may influence the way your day unfolds. Spending time outdoors in the sunshine increases levels of serotonin (Serotonin is our body's natural "happy" hormone).

Week 1 challenge:

As you load up on the "happy" hormone by spending time outdoors, aim to also spread the "sunshine" or happy mood to others around you.

- In order to do that, make a point each day this week to do something nice for someone (family member, co-worker, or even a stranger) and reflect on how the person responds to your good deed.
- And remember, we travel ... miles of our mile journey this week.

Italian words: O Sole mio, that's how Italians say "oh my sunshine".

Week 2: Sister Moon and the stars

*"Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful."*



We all know the importance of sleep. Sleep benefits your heart, your mind, your overall performance. It affects your weight, your mood and stress. Not enough sleep and you will experience physical and mental set-backs!

"Blessed is the person who is too busy to worry in the daytime and too sleepy to worry at night." (Leo Aikman) Blessed indeed is that person!

It is quite possible that you will notice how much better you are sleeping since you started on this wellness challenge. When you stick with a daily routine of physical activity such as walking, you will soon improve your sleep pattern.

Week 2 challenge:

Get at least 7 hours of restful and regenerating sleep every night this week. And of course, our goal is still to walk ... miles to reach Assisi.

Italian words: Buona notte e signi d'oro (Good night and sweet dreams)



Week 3: Brother Wind and Air

*"Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures."*



The way we breathe affects our whole body. Deep breathing is one of the best ways to relieve stress. When we breathe deeply it sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax.

"Breath is Spirit. The act of breathing is living." (Author unknown)

Week 3 challenge:

Make time every day this week to do a breathing exercise for 5 minutes (for example, once mid-morning and again mid-afternoon) and again the goal for this week is to walk miles.

Example of breathing exercise: Find a quiet place, assume a comfortable position, quiet your inner noises, breathe in deep, remember that God loves you and you are in God's presence, enjoy moment in peace and relaxation.

Italian words: Dolce far niente (the pleasure of idleness)

Week 4: Sister Water

*"Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste."*



We are told that drinking at least eight cups of water throughout the day keeps us well hydrated. You also may know that when we drink a sufficient amount of water, we increase fat burning, benefit from healthier skin and enjoy more energy, better digestion, fewer cravings. Furthermore, when we drink enough water, we get rid of toxins in our body. Keeping a glass or bottle of water within reach might be a good reminder to drink often.

Week 4 challenge:

Drink 8 cups of water every day this week.

If carbonated beverages are your drink of choice, your challenge can be to eliminate one soft drink a day, every day for the next 7 days.

Remember when you increase your physical activity you need to drink more fluids.

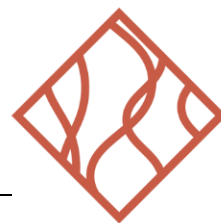
Keep that in mind this week as we walk another ... miles towards Assisi!

Italian words: Nel vino c'è la verità, nell'acqua c'è la salute *sanitas*
(There is truth in wine, there is health in water)



Week 5: Brother Fire

*"Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong."*



Cooking at home and eating with your family and friends is most beneficial for wellness for many reasons:

- You consume a lot less calories
- You know exactly what you're eating
- You save money
- Last but certainly not least, you spend quality time with your loved ones.

Eat anything you want, just cook it yourself!" says the author, Michael Pollan. Also remember "The most indispensable ingredient of good home cooking is the LOVE for those you are cooking for!"

Week 5 challenge:

- ✓ Pick one day this week, when all the members of your household, or a group of friends, cook and eat a meal together.
- ✓ Walk ... more miles this week!

Italian words: As they say in Italy: "Buon appetito"

Week 6: Sister Mother Earth

"Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs."



Fruits & vegetables are a natural source of fiber. We all know that! Fiber helps regulate digestive system, keep you fuller longer and manage weight.

Don't forget herbs and spices. They greatly benefit your health. Some may help slow down the growth of cancer. Others like cinnamon has been shown to lower blood sugar and cholesterol levels. Using spices helps you not only to be healthy but also makes your food taste better.

Week 6 Challenge:

- ✓ Add one fruit and one vegetable to each meal
 - ✓ Make your plate as colorful as possible!
- Andiamo!* Let's walk another ... miles this week!

Italian words:

Italians call all that grows from the earth **Bontà della terra** (goodness of the earth)

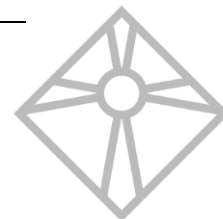


Week 7: Peace

*"Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.*

Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You,

Most High, shall they be crowned."



There are many ways to bring peace into your heart and into your life:

- Forgive others. Letting go of grudges will free you from unnecessary stress.
- Resolve to create peace in your environment and be comfortable with the people around you. Communicate.
- Surround yourself with positive energy, and with positive people.

Week 7 Challenge:

- ✓ Take time this week to reflect on the past 6 weeks. Realize how much you have accomplished.
- ✓ Ask yourself two questions:
 - How did my participation in the wellness challenge improve my health over the past weeks?
 - What can I do to maintain these good habits in the future?
- ✓ On this last week of our challenge, we walk the remaining ... miles on our ... mile-journey!

Italian words: You may have heard this popular Franciscan greeting before:

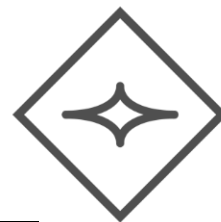
"Peace and all good" which translate to **Pace e Bene** in Italian

This is the end of our wellness challenge... but there is one more verse to the Canticum. Francis composed this last verse of the Canticum on his deathbed. Most of us would rather not think or mention death. However, it is a part of our life and we need to embrace it.

*"Praised be You my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.*

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

*Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm."*



Let me share with you one of the dearest wishes I have for myself and also for everyone I love. I wish that we may die healthy. Let me explain!



We can all agree that we are all going to die someday. I don't know about you but, if I have a choice, I would much prefer to die in my own bed surrounded by my family and most importantly, not be in pain. So many people die with much suffering, after lengthy stays in hospitals or nursing homes. I would much rather die healthy, wouldn't you? I want to do my part to die healthy. I understand that it is not entirely my choice in the matter. But if I can do anything to make the end of my life, not a sort of "calvary" I want to make sure I do all that I can to die healthy. Not only for myself but the people in my family and my friends who would have to endure financial and emotional hardships if I need lengthy and expensive medical treatment. Many illnesses today in the United States are related to our diet, our lack of exercise and our lifestyles. What if the healthy habits included in this wellness challenge could help guarantee a better chance to prevent illnesses and many conditions that plague so many people these days? Are you willing to give this wellness program a chance? Are you willing to encourage others around you to take on this challenge and adopt a healthy lifestyle? Let's make it a fun journey by sharing the challenge with family, friends and co-workers.

"Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility. Amen"

I will leave you with the following prayer, an excerpt of a letter Saint Clare wrote to Saint Agnes of Prague.

*"What you hold, may you always hold,
 What you do, may you always do and never abandon.
 But with swift pace, light step, unswerving feet,
 So that even your steps stir up no dust,
 May you go forward securely, joyfully, and swiftly,
 On the path of prudent happiness,
 Not believing anything that would dissuade you from this resolution
 Or that would place a stumbling block for you on the way,
 So that you may offer your vows to the Most High
 In the pursuit of that perfection
 To which the Spirit of the Lord has called you." Amen*

May God grant you the courage and perseverance day by day, step by step
 to humbly walk your earthly journey.
 May you always be aware of God's blessings in your life
 and may your heart overflow with peace.
 May God give you strength of mind and body
 As you keep traveling onward
 moving steadily, yet at your own pace
 on your way to complete wellness. Amen

Andiamo! Buena gente (Good people).

This wellness challenge is the author's creative inspiration and intended solely for the use of a non-profit group. Please contact Cathy Roszhart, OFS at croszhart@gmail.com for authorization to use or publish.