

The TAVOLA of Mother M. Clara Pfaender

Tavola is an Italian word meaning table. In the art world it is applied to a painting that lays out the story of a person. The person is usually in the center and the facets of the story of her or his life are depicted in small paintings that surround the central figure. Originally, many of the Tavola were painted on a large piece of wood, like a table. One could say that it "served the life of the person" as food for the soul of the beholder who sat at the table.

In the Franciscan Tradition we are familiar with a Tavola of St. Francis and one of St. Clare. Our Tavola depiction of Mother Clara is painted in a central circle. She is passing on light to the congregation. Facets of her life surround this circle in a form of the Icon Cross of San Damiano that called Francis of Assisi to begin his new way of life. The San Damiano Icon shape also represents our Franciscan Heritage. The cross offers others the life of Clara, as it offers the life of Christ. It feeds the soul of whoever gazes upon this Tavola.

Our Tavola center of Mother Clara is done in the icon-style where what is most important is emphasized. Thus Mother Clara offers the beholder the gift of light.



Wheaton Franciscan Sisters
Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary

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The Tavola of Mother M. Clara Pfaender was "seeded" from a Covenant Member retreat given in September 2006 based on the Tavola of St. Clare of Assisi. A simple question was raised at the end of the retreat, "Wouldn't it be nice to have a Tavola of our own foundress?" There was an enthusiastic "yes."

This "yes" led to an invitation to the whole province for anyone interested in being a part of this creative adventure. From an initial group of 16, a committed circle of nine came together faithfully for more than nine months...praying, contemplating, naming, choosing, seeking advice, and laboring in love to make our Circle Intention a reality:

Our INTENTION is to create a Tavola of Mother Clara that tells her story in such a way as to access multiple levels of meaning in her and us.

We found a Franciscan artist, S. Maryam Gossling, FSPA, to assist us as "midwife" in bringing all our efforts into a visible art piece.

We hope that this Tavola will bring all of us and others who come to know Mother Clara to a deep love and appreciation for the woman who founded our Congregation of Franciscan Sisters, Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary 150 years ago. We are forever grateful to those who financially made this project come true.

**Members of the Tavola Circle
Wheaton Franciscans
St. Clare Province of the Franciscan Sisters,
Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary**

S. Diane Przyborowski
S. Ellen Heitman
Jean Ford
S. Gabriele Uhlein
S. Georgene L. Wilson
CM Jeanne Guilfoyle
S. Mary Ellen McAleese
S. Melanie Paradis
S. Toby Marie Bonny

The Tavola was written (painted) by S. Maryam Gossling, FSPA

October 2010

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Foundress of the Franciscan Sisters,
Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary

Created for the 150th Jubilee of the Congregation

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1) **Spirit and Center: The Source of Mother Clara's life and inspiration was Divine Presence symbolized by the Holy Spirit.** The divine life flowed through her and emanates to us all as gift, a "light into the darkness."

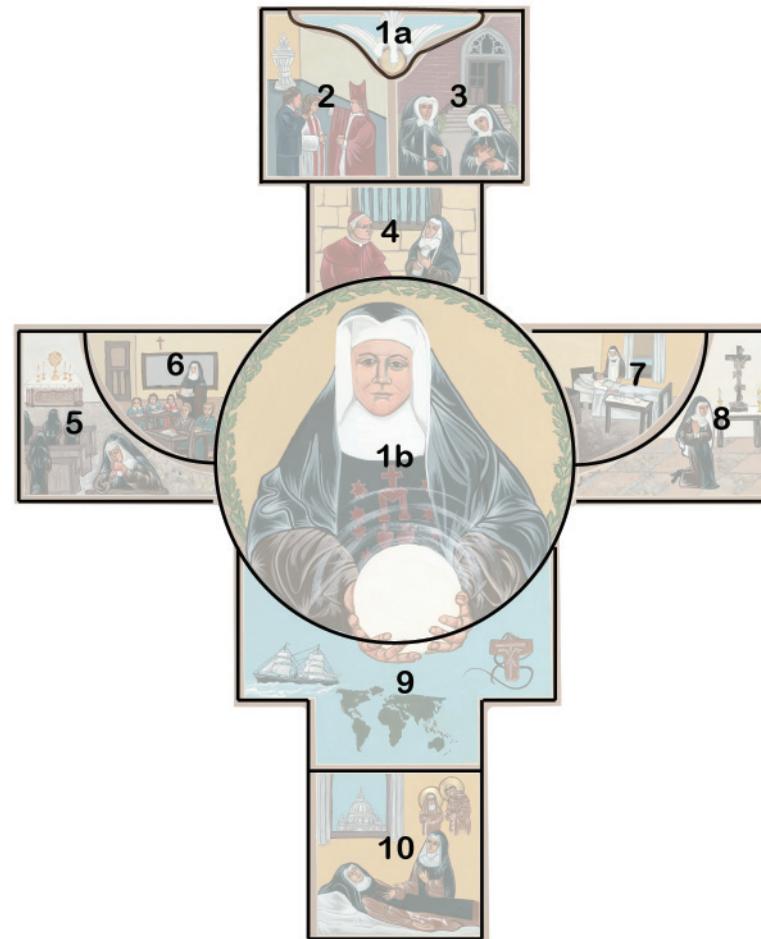
2) **Anna Theresia Pfaender was born on December 6, 1827.** Three days later she was baptized into her mother's Catholic faith. Her mother died when Theresia was 4 years old. As a twelve-year-old she prepared for her confirmation. Her father insisted Theresia take classes in his Lutheran faith and then choose her faith for herself. Theresia wholeheartedly committed herself to the Catholic faith.

3) **Theresia was given the name Clara after she entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Christian Charity in Paderborn, Germany, at the age of 22.** Sr. Clara discovered joy in teaching and working with children and found herself well-suited to prayer and community life. Throughout these years, Sr. Clara experienced internal restlessness and a burning desire to live more intensely a contemplative and active life. She discerned with her trusted confidants, Mother Pauline von Mallinekrodt and Bishop Conrad Martin, and departed the Congregation with Mother Pauline's blessing. Sr. Clara prepared to begin her own congregation.

4) **Bishop Martin gave Sr. Clara permission to begin her own congregation in Olpe, Germany, with two of her friends.** The bishop trusted Sr. Clara to write the Founding Constitution for the new congregation following in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi. On October 30, 1860, Bishop Martin approved this Constitution for the Sisters of St. Francis, Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. It clearly outlined the congregation's emphasis on love and service, prayer for the persecuted Church, and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The congregation was moved to Salzkotten, Germany, in 1863 where the German Province remains today. When the Kulturkampf (a culture war against the Catholic Church) was enacted in Prussia in the 1870s, Bishop Martin was imprisoned because of his strong opposition to these restrictions. He entrusted Mother Clara with extraordinary powers, normally reserved for the bishop, to ensure the growth and life of the congregation.

5-8) **The contemplative and active life is the heart of the community.** Mother Clara explicitly wrote, "No manner of loving service shall be excluded from their loving concern." Communal and individual

About the Tavola of Mother M. Clara Pfaender



prayer enlightened this service. This flexibility and balance helped the congregation to thrive. Mother Clara received great satisfaction from her work with children as a teacher and in her work with orphans. Both of these ministries were woven into the mission of her congregation.

The congregation included nursing as part of their mission, tending the wounded in Prussia's wars. The Sisters' reputation for providing exceptional and compassionate care to those in their charge spread rapidly. Mother Clara answered the call to send her Sisters to the United States to open hospitals for German immigrants in the new world.

Mother Clara needed to rely on the plenary powers given her by Bishop Martin as she made difficult decisions to provide for new members, to help her overworked Sisters, and to serve those in need. Her use of these plenary powers on several occasions resulted in censorship by her Sisters and the religious authorities. Her love for God and her firm faith in God's will helped her survive the betrayal by her Sisters, the loss of her good name, and the surrender of her life's work with eventual exile from her beloved congregation.

9) **The congregation had expanded to France, the Netherlands, and the United States by the middle of the 1870s.** The fifth group of Sisters to leave Germany for America boarded the *Deutschland* for the journey. On December 6, 1875, the ship went aground during a severe winter storm off the coast of England. The five Sisters drowned in the tragedy. Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote his masterpiece poem, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, and dedicated it to the memory of these Sisters.

The Franciscan Sisters, Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary are present in Germany, the Netherlands, France, the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Romania, Malawi and East Timor. The cross intersected by the arms of Christ and St. Francis is the congregation's international symbol.

10) **Mother Clara died in poverty and exile in Rome on October 5, 1882, with one loyal companion by her side, Sister Evangelista.** Mother Clara received the last sacraments of the church from a Jesuit priest. She then spoke the words, "Come, St. Francis," and died. Surely St. Francis and St. Clare escorted her on this final journey to eternal life.