Throughout the year, from time to time, we gather and share some "Franciscan Family" stories. Now it's time for the annual re-telling of the story of the Portiuncula. You know, that quaint little shrine on the west side of campus - the one with the unusual name? (**Time for the Italian lesson: Everyone, say it together…Por-zi-oooon-cooo-la. Once again…quickly now…Portiuncula!** See, that wasn't too bad.) I'll let you in on a secret; the Sylvania Franciscans often refer to it as "The Port."

So why are we sharing the story? Well, **Wednesday, August 2** is the day when Franciscans throughout the world celebrate the feast of **St. Mary of the Angels, the Portiuncula**.

In 1206 in the small town of Assisi, a young man named Francis was trying to understand exactly what God had planned for his life. While praying one day in the church of San Damiano (that's a story for another day), Francis heard the voice of God asking him to, "Rebuild my house." He took the message quite literally and began to repair some of the little village churches that had been neglected. One of those churches that he eventually rebuilt was a shrine dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus - the church of **St. Mary of the Angels**, also known as the Portiuncula (*the little portion*).

Francis soon came to learn that God was calling him to a much larger mission…that of "rebuilding" the people of God…and his life journey took numerous, unexpected twists and turns. However because of his love for Mary the mother of Jesus, the chapel remained dear to the heart of Francis and his companions. Although he refused to own any property, Francis knew that he needed a place to call "home". **It was here at the Portiuncula that Francis called his brothers together to renew their bond of community and to tell one another of the marvels that God was working in them and through them. This was – in fact – their *little portion* in the world.**

The Benedictine monks, who owned the chapel, agreed to grant the friars the sole use of the chapel in perpetuity. Each year as a token of their agreement, the friars sent the Benedictines a basket of fish as "rent". The monks, in return, sent the friars a barrel of oil. This yearly exchange of gifts continues to this day in Assisi.

In 1216 (just over 800 years ago), Francis made a bold request. Through a combination of prayer and conversation with the pope, the **Pardon of Assisi** was established.* When Francis announced this special privilege to the people, he proclaimed: *My brothers and sisters, I wish to send you all to heaven!*   Francis reminded the people that God's love and mercy was extended to **all** – regardless of social or economic standing.

As Francis neared the end of his life, he asked to be brought back to the Portiuncula. It was in this place that he had first learned of God's ways, and it was in this place that he wished to

give his soul back to his Creator. Francis had found such peace throughout his life that he could welcome even death as a dear sister.

Our own Sylvania Franciscan Portiuncula was modeled after this chapel in Assisi. Built in 1936 (YES, it's over 80 years old!), it was constructed by our founder, Mother Mary Adelaide, in gratitude to God after the Sisters had survived a serious financial crisis which almost resulted in the loss of *our* home here in Sylvania. It remains a sacred space set aside for quiet reflection. Here you are invited to come away from the noise and confusion of your day and reflect on the marvels that God has accomplished in your life.

The Portiuncula chapel is opened daily (7:00 am – 5:00 pm) for private prayer and reflection.

I invite you to make your own personal pilgrimage to the "Port" on Wednesday, August 2 to celebrate the feast.
And join us for evening prayer outside the Portiuncula at 5:00 pm.

For a picture of the original chapel in Assisi (which is actually a rather small chapel now housed inside of an extremely large basilica) click on:
http://www.porziuncola.org/santuario/porziuncola.php?l=en

Pax et bonum – Pace e bene – Peace and all good!