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interchange
Sisters of Saint Francis



New Beginnings

interchange

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Dear Family and Friends,

New Beginnings! What a delightful gift that comes to us every season when you live in a geographic area that celebrates the change of seasons. When I lived in Bogotá, Colombia (literally, one of the most beautiful countries on our planet, Mother Earth), I enjoyed the richness of its beautiful diversity, but I missed the changes of seasons. What is the *joy* that I am experiencing *now, in this moment of new beginnings?*

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that we need to be open to see and receive the beauty, the gift, and the challenge that new beginnings bring to us. *“SEE... I AM doing new things... do you not SEE it?”*



In this issue:

- Sister Christine raises questions that challenge our perception of new beginnings:
 - Do they lose their luster, or do they last?
 - Do they take part of the past into its future?
 - What are the gifts/challenges a new beginning can offer?
- Kathy Woytych offers a simple example of how our ability to be humble and accept a mistake or error can open the door to an incredible experience of a new friendship.
- Sister Ramona conveys an unusual story of a contemporary experience of the shared charisms of St. Francis and St. Clare and “what God is doing with us!”
- Rosemary Grebin Palms reminds us that new beginnings often lead us down an enduring path of how diversity is part of living our Franciscan spirit in a myriad of ways.
- Sisters Mary Kay and Phyllis challenge us to see God’s presence in the “lepers” of our time, and remind us that we have a serious, urgent responsibility to ask ourselves what is God saying to us, and what is *our responsibility?*

Sister Mary Brigh reminded us that, “As we go into the future, we must not lose the good things of the past.” And Sister Generose further commented that, “We must not be content only to see things as they are. We must have the vision, the faith, and hope to see what things *can and must become.*”

New Beginnings! Hopefully, as we allow our aging process to gently move us into the future, we never become “OLD.” We delight in Mary Oliver’s invitation to each of us: “What is it that you want to do with your *one wild and precious life?*”



Sister Tierney Trueman
President / Congregational Minister

Spring: A Time for New Beginnings



Image by bertothul courtesy of Pixabay

I was born in the spring. It was always my delight to welcome the season with its arrival filled with many signs: the robins returning, bird choruses, and green sightings of all kinds. It was a great treasure to imagine the various greens winding their way through the dark earth emerging from that experience and being energized by the pull to the light of day. Some of us would label it as a true new beginning.

Those of us who live where we are able to enjoy the four seasons may have a shared report of this emerging growth. At times, I think we take this wonder for granted because, although it is always unique in its appearance, it manifests itself differently each year. We expect it, and at times, this new beginning may even go unnoticed.

New beginnings have a life of their own. We plan for them for weeks, and maybe even years. We may have looked for a new house, a new school, or a new class to take for the preparation of a new career. Sometimes we make so many plans and become bogged down, so even the newness loses something, and the excitement for the change in the future is lost in the process.

This brings me back to the focus of what I have found as new beginnings in my life. I remember my initial days in preparation for my first teaching assignment. I had 42 seventh graders! One of my students called me “Rookie.” (Did it show that much?) My new beginning was inevitable, because I was being prepared for teaching, and here I was. It was a tough year managing all I had to know; but I guess you have to start somewhere. I stayed a teacher for many years, but one year, on that last day of school, I was not sure teaching would remain in my future.

Another moving experience of a new beginning was the realization that came when both of my parents had died. I woke up one morning, shortly after that, and realized that I was an orphan! I could not reach out to call or have a conversation with either of my parents, but had to trust in what they taught me about living and doing. It took me a while to live into this new beginning.

Some new beginnings have delight in their very experience. After teaching, I worked as a counselor



Image by stanbalik courtesy of Pixabay

in ministry in Chicago, and there were days when insights received during a session filled me with wonderment, and the client was given a new insight into their lives. Claiming this new beginning became a vote of confidence for my new ministry.

I am sure, if each of us took the time, we could come up with specific events that brought us to new beginnings in our lives. Take a few moments to reflect. What have been the new beginnings in your life?

New beginnings happen all the time. I don't want to forget to mention the ones that happen every day when the sun comes up or a gentle rain falls on the parched earth. Each day our lives are filled with new beginnings. Maybe we are just not aware. Count yours up on a given day!

The insights I have gained in pondering these two words include:

- New beginnings can be planned, but many more come to us without our pursuit.

- Do new beginnings lose their luster in a few days or weeks? Or do they last and become the starting point of a wonderful future?
- Does a new beginning take part of the past into its future?
- What are the gifts a new beginning can offer?
- What challenges go with a new beginning?

New beginnings need to happen in our world. People everywhere need to bring love, care, and support to help us step into a future and a new beginning. Actually, the new beginning is only the first step. The next step is when we go deep inside and reflect. That is the hard part.

May you always continue to enjoy and reflect on your new beginnings!

The Beginning of a New Friendship



Image by Steve Buissonne courtesy of Pixabay

Have you ever had an embarrassing moment that blossomed into something wonderful? I did. One Sunday morning, a few months ago, I took communion to a gentleman. I parked, got out of my car, locking it automatically, and was instantly aware that I had just locked both my keys and my cell phone inside the car. I could see both and could not get to them. Chagrined, I thought “now he is stuck with me until I can get AAA to unlock my car.” I entered his home saying, “well, I have just done something really stupid.” I told him what happened. He smiled good-naturedly and logged onto AAA on his cell phone.

And then we settled in to a lovely conversation until AAA arrived. We did not know much about one another until that time. I learned that Bob been a priest and then left the priesthood to work with the poor. He became a social worker and, as I found

out from others later, he was a much respected and wonderfully empathic therapist. He had also married a woman who was a therapist, and they often did couples therapy together. A friend who had experienced working with both of them, spoke of their skill and compassion.

Over the past four months, our friendship has grown. During this time, he started to decline more and was sleeping later. I told his close friend, Tom, that I wouldn’t bother Bob with a call to ask if he wanted me to bring communion. But if Tom found that Bob wanted me to come, I would be ready to do so. As it so happened, I got a text Sunday after liturgy saying that, indeed, Bob would like me to bring communion.

I kept thinking of a line from a Mary Oliver poem, “All my life I was a bride married to amazement.” While



Image by ipopba courtesy of iStockphoto

I have books of Mary Oliver's poetry, I could not remember the poem it was in. I went home, googled the phrase and discovered it was from her poem, "When Death Comes." I grabbed the needed book and went to his home. Editing out the beginning and ending lines, I used the poem as the reading/prayer for our communion service. I closed the poem with Mary Oliver's reflection, "All my life I was a bride married to amazement. I was the bridegroom taking the world into my arms." I looked at Bob and said, "Bob, you have been the bridegroom taking the world into your arms." It was a heartfelt observation.

Then together, we prayed our Sunday Assembly's version of the Our Father:

*"Holy One, our only home.
blessed be your name.
May your day dawn, your will be done,
here as in heaven.
Feed us today,
and forgive us as we forgive each other.
Do not forsake us at the test,
but deliver us from evil.
For the glory, the power and the mercy are yours,
now and forever.
Amen."*

Engaging the Mystery in New Beginnings



Standing: Poor Clare Sisters Catherine Chung, Beth Lynn, Jo Casey, Rochester Franciscan Sister Ramona Miller (abbess), and Poor Clare Sister Caroline Berres

Seated: Poor Clare Sisters Fran Getchell and Margaret Mewhorter

*See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up;
do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the
wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*

- (Is 43:19)

Isaiah encourages the Israelites in chapter forty-three reminding them that God has called them by name, “you are mine.” God says “Fear not, I am with you.” These prophetic words are the experience of the Poor Clares who moved into Assisi Heights on February 7, 2018. Their move from their monastery in Bloomington, Minnesota, provides a tangible reminder that new beginnings are part and parcel of our spiritual journey.

My introduction to these Poor Clares came through retreats I made at their monastery. When I began ministry as a staff member of the Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs, there was an expectation that I serve as the feminine voice on the team, highlighting the role of Saint Clare as cofounder of the Franciscan movement. This created a desire to become better acquainted with the Poor Clare lifestyle and, to do so, I made a retreat at their Monastery in Bloomington, Minnesota.

Touched by the peacefulness of life in the monastery and familiarity with the history of Clare’s life in Assisi, Italy, I felt a calling to join the Poor Clares. I was wisely advised that my true calling was to remain a Rochester Franciscan. I considered my teaching of Saint Clare as an extension of the monastery; a kind of extern Sister!

In the first year the Poor Clares lived at Assisi Heights, Sister Helen Weier was elected abbess for a three-year term. That same year, I was elected Congregational Minister of the Rochester Franciscans for a four-year term. Before her term ended, Sister Helen became ill and moved into the Health Care Center. The Poor Clares felt that none of them were able to assume the role of abbess, so they sought advice for the procedure to have an appointed superior, a commissary. A commissary is a person appointed to act as the canonical superior of another institute. The Poor Clares prefer the term canonical administrator.

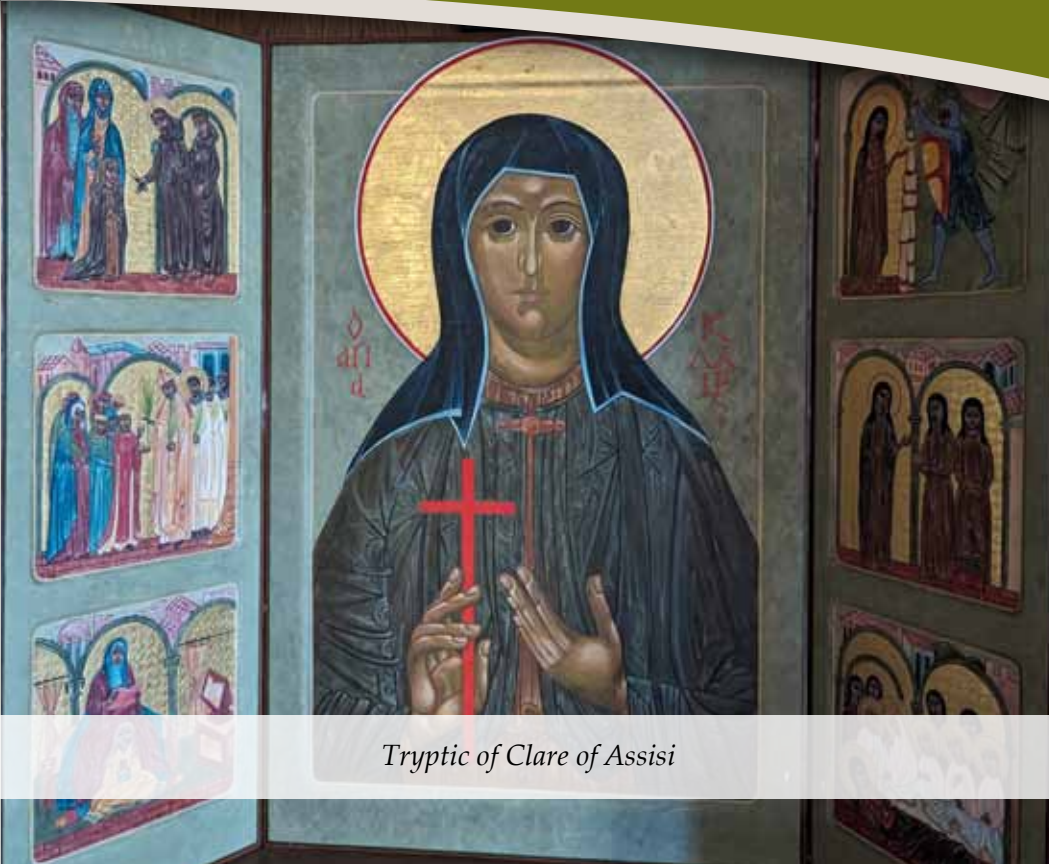
After consultation with a canon lawyer and their Poor Clare Federation, they decided to petition the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome to appoint

Praying with Clare of Assisi



Ramona Miller
and Ingrid Peterson

Book Cover
for the
Journey



Tryptic of Clare of Assisi

a canonical administrator. My appreciation and knowledge of their life, as well as the arrangement for their life at Assisi Heights, disposed me to agree to be nominated for this role. I received the appointment in May 2021.

The mystery of new beginnings requires claiming God's word: *See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?* This new communal dimension of life without an abbess, and a part-time canonical administrator, brings forth new responsibilities in each of us. I am just beginning to grasp the full dimension of the potential for "new" in me and the "new" that is unfolding in the relationship of the Poor Clares and the Rochester Franciscans.

Four Poor Clares have died since their move to Rochester and that loss is keenly felt similarly by Rochester Franciscans who have celebrated 71 Sisters to Sister Death since July 1, 2018. The greatest heritage Saints Francis and Clare leave for us is a deeply rooted desire for God, a fervent commitment to prayer, and a life that witnesses God's love. Each day provides a new day for looking for what God is doing with us!

Clare gives witness that freeing oneself from acquisitiveness, living simply, and being an empty vessel for God to fill will lead to true peace. She demonstrates that material possessions cannot satisfy our spiritual hunger; despite life's demands, we find meaning in life by exchanging the temporal things for those of eternity. This means putting everything else, as Clare did, after God.^[1]

[1] Ramona Miller OSF and Ingrid Peterson OSF, *Praying with Clare of Assisi* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1994):29.

Cojourning: The Beginning and Its New Beginning – Its Growing Edge



Sister Francha



Rosemary Grebin Palms with her family



Visiting New York City

I take cojourning personally.

Back in 1970, I was known as Sister Francha, and I was getting ready to separate from my beloved Rochester Franciscan Sisters. I wanted to somehow stay connected, even as I felt called in a new direction; a new beginning in my growth as a human being. I heard talk of a possible new form of religious practice that some people called “lay affiliation” – non-vowed persons attaching themselves in various ways to specific religious congregations – and I thought: why not me? Why not offer a way for former religious Sisters and Brothers to stay loosely attached to their orders and possibly partake in their charisms and spiritual practices as lay persons?

My specific idea was that as the affiliates pursue their own lives and careers, they can offer their prayers but also other services to the vowed Sisters and Brothers, as each is able – friendship, moral support, professional advice, even financial contributions. I wrote a brief essay about this idea specifically for my Franciscan Sisters, and one of them proposed a lay affiliation experiment at the Congregation’s Chapter assembly the month after I left the convent. A seed was planted.

Howard Thurman, a theologian who proved very influential in the American civil rights movement, wrote about the importance of hope in the face of tremendous obstacles. “The fruit ripens on the tree,” he wrote, “the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the Earth against a time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit. Such is the growing edge!”

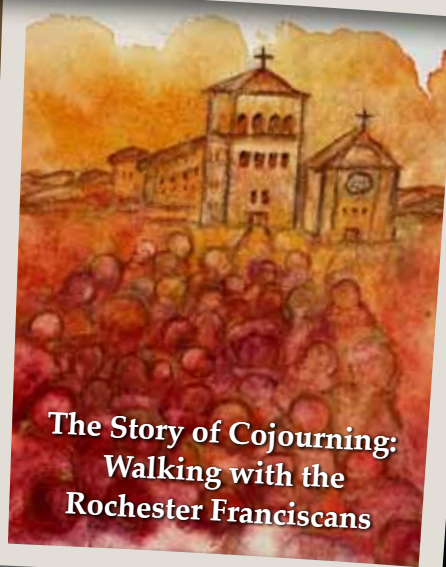
The seed of the concept of cojourning took a while to germinate. But the soil was being prepared and watered and nurtured. Many Sisters had a hand in that nurturing. Fourteen years later, that seed burst forth and started to grow when the Sisters proposed, and unanimously accepted, their generously improved version of affiliation. They named it, poetically, cojourning. Sister Marlys Jax designed a marvelous logo, which was refined by Sister Clairvaux McFarland, depicting the two threads of vowed life and cojourning life, knotted together but also traveling separately in parallel lines in the same direction.

The year was 1984.

The original kernel idea of cojourning was now vastly improved to include any persons who wished to grow in the Franciscan gospel values. They could be men or women, Catholic or not, from any part of the



*Cojourners and Sisters
co-signing the covenant*



*The Story of Cojourning:
Walking with the
Rochester Franciscans*



*Former vocation staff when
cojourning was introduced:
Standing: Sisters Loretta Klinkhammer and Judi Angst
Seated: Sisters Wanda Mettes and Darlene Coffman*



world. Two pioneer Cojourners joined, Steve Ohly and Jane Campion, and slowly, and then quickly, several would-be Franciscans joined this growing edge.

Meanwhile, I was busy with my own chosen new beginning and my own growing edge: I got a teaching job, married, finished my graduate degree, and raised a family. I wasn't paying close attention to what my Franciscan friends were up to – until I visited Assisi, Italy, in 1996, and again felt drawn to the Franciscan charism. I soon found my way back to my beloved Franciscan Sisters and to yet another new beginning for me, as a newly minted Cojourner.

I will celebrate 25 years of my own cojourning this coming summer – 25 years of spiritual riches and new friends on this journey among both the Sisters and the other Cojourners.

But I was a latecomer. The cojourning program itself will be celebrating FORTY YEARS. The Cojourners, with the support of the Sisters, are planning a big celebration at Assisi Heights. We are calling the occasion "Franciscan Cojourning -- FORTY YEARS AND ON TO TOMORROW." The dates are June 28-30, 2024. During this gathering, we will have liturgies and speakers, distribute a new book on our history of cojourning (authored by Cojourner Marianne Hockema), and share in all kinds of fun and games. We will talk about what our future might look like on this growing edge. "All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born," wrote Thurman. It will be a new beginning.

New Beginnings: In Their Lives and in Our Hearts



1

What is God asking of me? What is my response to these suffering people?

In early February 2024, we, Sisters Mary Kay Mahowald and Phyllis Sellner, had a unique and blessed pilgrimage to many migrant shelters, both in the U.S. and in Mexican border towns. To say it was deeply emotional would be an understatement.

According to the Catholic principles of Migration in a pastoral letter ***Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope***, issued in 2016, by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops:

“Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families. Sovereign nations do have the right to control their borders and wealthier nations have a strong obligation to accommodate migration flows. Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection without incarceration. Regardless of legal status, migrants’ human dignity and human rights should be respected.”¹

It was with these principles that we chose to enter a pilgrimage sponsored by the Franciscan University of San Diego. Our days were filled with prayer, compassion, listening, helping fill sustenance bags

for the needy, and sharing life with the migrants we encountered.

Our first stop was a migrant shelter at Our Lady of Grace parish in San Diego, California, where more than 20 men from Venezuela were housed in a large tent. The parish itself was mostly made up of immigrants, and these parishioners generously provided breakfast and evening meals for the men. During the day, the men were expected to seek day jobs to earn money to enable their families to join them in the U.S. We learned that one man left his job with the Venezuelan Supreme Court due to political punishments. Another man was a fireman for many years and his family was politically being punished and tormented.

Our next stop was the Tijuana Immaculate Conception shelter, which was staffed by elderly Sisters who had worked there for many years. We interacted with migrants from Russia, Afghanistan, Central and South America. They told of their harrowing experiences with drug cartels and the threats to their families. A young Chechen gentleman fled from Russia after threats of murder because his lifestyle was not accepted. A young couple with their children



fled from Afghanistan after the thriving computer company, which the father founded, was burned down. His family was threatened with annihilation because he had worked with the American soldiers during their occupation. He also related the Taliban's harsh treatment of women and fear for his own wife and daughters.

We then visited the *Instituto Assunta* shelter for women and children run by the Scalabrinian Sisters. Women can stay there for up to a month, must find employment during the daylight hours, and make plans to leave for more permanent housing. The staff also run a makeshift one-room school to occupy the children during much of the day. In every shelter we visited, it was amazing how well behaved the children were. When given treats, each immediately shared with the other kids. There was no selfishness among them and their sharing and honoring one another appeared automatic.

The next day, we traveled through mountain snow to Jacumba Hot Springs, where Sam Schultz and his wife, Gabriela, operate a shack with supplies for migrant travelers. Every day, Sam cooks up a huge pot of lentil soup to offer a hot sustenance meal to the migrant

travelers. We also stopped at what appeared to be an abandoned camp in the desert; where remnants of tattered tents, wet sleeping bags, and other items were left behind. It was a gruesome site. Cold, wet, blustery winds, and snowstorms affect that mountainous region near San Diego. As has been televised many times, there is a break in the "wall" behind the mountain and "coyotes" get paid to drive desperate migrants to this location where they can then freely walk into the U.S. Their primary goal is to be picked up by the Border Patrol so they can be taken into custody to file for asylum. Recent travelers through that area have been mothers with babies and young children seeking refuge from terrors in their lives.

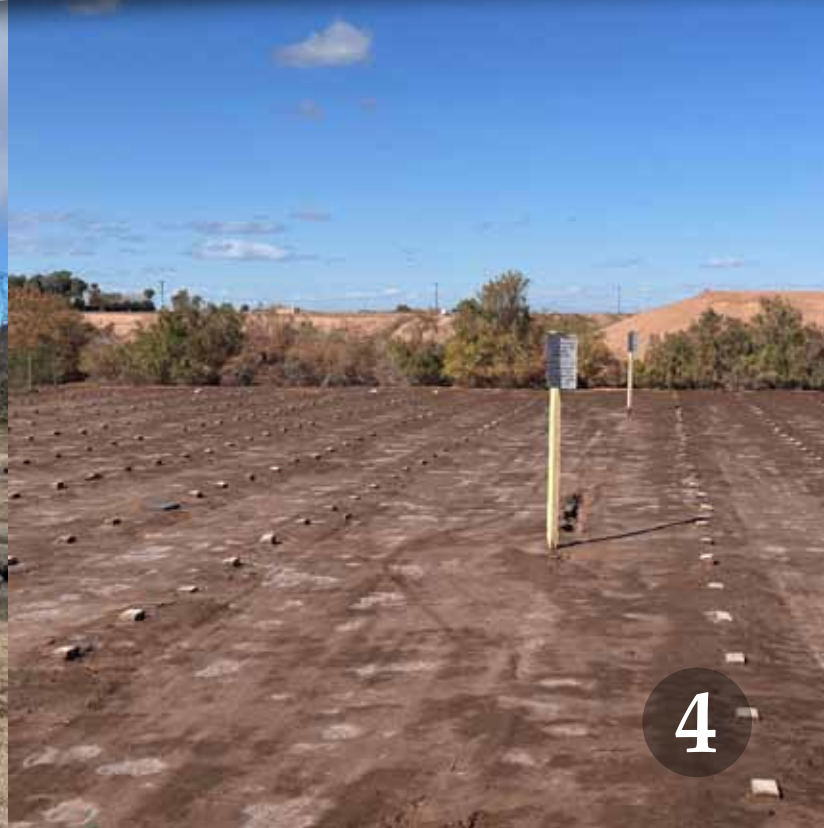
Traveling through the desert and along the border wall, we arrived in Holtville, California, where a cemetery is located. As we prayed and walked through the cemetery, it appeared to just be a "regular" cemetery with tombstones, flowers and green grass. Toward the rear of the cemetery was a 6-foot green wall cutting off observation of the hundreds of graves beyond – graves marked only with a brick. No names, no information about who is buried there. Just a dusty barren plot of land. We learned these are the migrants who died along the way by drowning, heat

New Beginnings: In Their Lives and in Our Hearts... *continued*



exhaustion, or abusive measures. Families were not permitted to mourn their loved ones. **Even in death they were kept behind a wall – not to be seen – not to be known. No names, no dates of death, nothing but a brick on top of a dirt mound.**

From there we went to the border area where migrants were processed, and then are requested to make a call to a relative located in the U.S. to get directions and transportation. This was a room filled with people clinging onto the little hope they have to be resettled, clinging onto tiny backpacks containing identification papers and little else. We gave them snack bars and energy bars, as most had not eaten for some time. With Pastor Baldwin, a Baptist minister, we met a large family from Peru whose family members' lives had been threatened, tortured, and sexually abused. It was obvious this was a well-educated family, and they were destined to travel to New York where relatives had invited them. Pastor Baldwin is a generous compassionate man whom Border Patrols call when they have a family that needs shelter. His church offers shelter, transportation, and goodwill. Pastor Baldwin has been a godsend to this ministry, for many years, in both Calexico, California, and Mexicali, Mexico. Meeting such generous, compassionate



persons buoyed up our hope and trust in humankind. Truly, God is working through them.

Every day, hundreds of laborers from Mexico come to the U.S. to perform physical duties. There are enormous fields of vegetables which need garden care and harvesting, and landowners employ these men and women at a very cheap rate. They are driven to fields in buses that have porta-potties hanging on the back. At the end of each day, they are driven back to the border. However, to remain unseen, the buses drop off the workers several blocks away from the crossover gate. These laborers endure harsh treatment from their employers and harsh weather conditions under a relentless hot sun. A reliable witness disclosed that, in order for many women to receive their paycheck, they must have sex with the foreman.

We could go on with stories about our experiences with these lovely people of God. One little 11-year-old boy in the shelter remained very sad and unresponsive to any contact. His face showed absolutely no emotion. We learned his family had been tortured for not going along with the drug lords. For warning and punishment, in front of the family, the father's head was cut off with a machete and the head rolled onto the floor in front of this 11-year old boy.



This week of pilgrimage was tearful, heavy, sad, and prayerful. One cannot imagine the pain these people go through. They are fleeing violence and torture which we cannot imagine or stop. When we visited a shelter, they appreciated our kindness to them. Each time someone visits shelters, it is a diversion from their sad lives. We offer them hope, love, and a change from their lives of subsistence.

Jesus said, “Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do to me.”

We continue to ask the questions, “What is God saying to us?” “What is our responsibility?” “How are we welcoming the stranger?” “Are we Christian enough to follow the words of Jesus?”

¹ US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC, 2016

Photo credit from this Immersion experience: Sister Anne Carrabino. Photo captions follow:

1. Photo of our group at Tijuana. The sign reads “the country begins here” – *Aqui Empieza La Patria*.
2. A Stained Glass window depicting the Holy Family at the Scalabrini Shelter for women and children, gives the mothers hope on their journey.
3. Site of abandoned tents where families had lived seeking sheltering from the cold.
4. A cemetery at Holtville, California, where many unidentified men, women and children are buried with NO identifying markers. They are known only to God and to those who grieve them.
5. Walking along a wall that divides two countries and separates many lives.
6. We prayed honoring the memories of those who lost their lives on this journey.

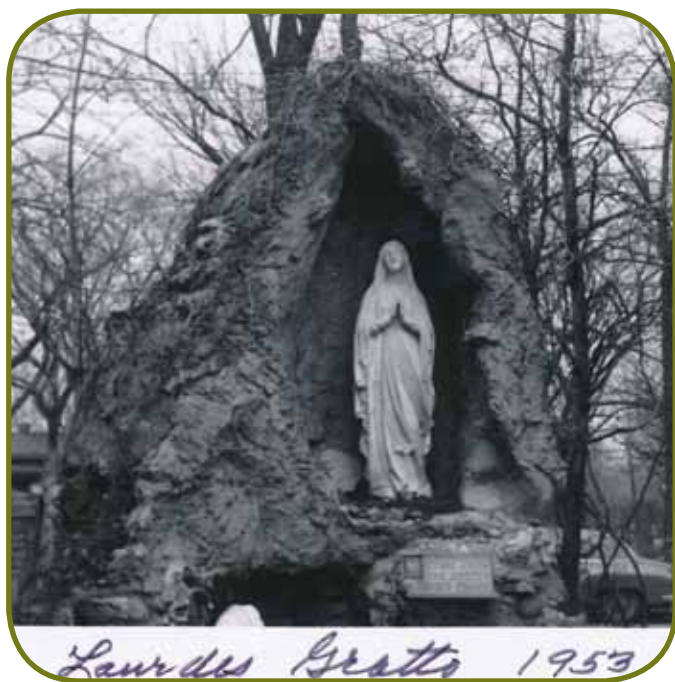
From the Archives: New Beginnings for Treasured Statues

Since the early days of this Congregation, statues have been part of the spirituality and environment around the places where Sisters lived. From the Center Street Motherhouse, to Assisi Heights, and to the many places where Sisters lived and ministered, the statues of Saint Francis, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and others, have been inspirational reminders of our Catholic faith.

Some of the statues at the Motherhouse have had “new beginnings,” as they were originally elsewhere and then relocated to the Assisi Heights’ site.

Let’s consider some of the outdoor statuary of Assisi Heights.

Our Lady of Lourdes – The patroness of the Rochester Franciscans is Our Lady of Lourdes. This image of Mary appeared to Saint Bernadette in 1858 – just seven years after Mother Alfred Moes and Sister Barbara Moes (her sister) emigrated to the United States. One of the statues of Our Lady of Lourdes was originally located in the grotto of the old Motherhouse in downtown Rochester.



When Assisi Heights opened in 1955, the statue was moved to its new location – the natural stone grotto located part way up the drive to the new Motherhouse. During the time of formation (Postulants and Novices), as well as during the annual retreat, it was the custom for Sisters to process to and from the Grotto singing Marian hymns and praying the Franciscan crown (7 decade rosary).



Our Lady of Lourdes #2 – Another statue of this Marian image came to Assisi Heights because of the Congregation’s time in Saint James, Minnesota. The Sisters ran the Saint James Hospital and Home for the Aged for almost forty years (1922-1962), as well as worked in the school and parish. After the Home for the Aged closed, the statue of Our Lady with St. Bernadette was brought to Assisi Heights. It is now located near the Sisters’ entrance on the west side of Assisi Heights.

Saint Francis – This statue was originally located at the original Motherhouse on Center Street in Rochester. The statue (but not the pedestal, because it had deteriorated) was moved to the Inner Court of the new Motherhouse. It is now one of the most visible statues on the grounds, able to be viewed from four sides of the building. We are blessed to have the skill of our talented grounds crew, who annually beautify the space around the statue.

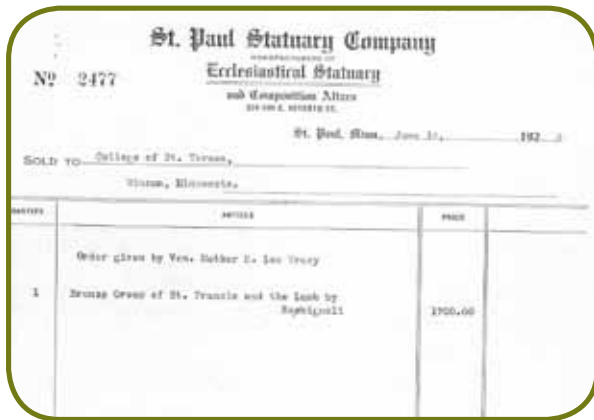


Saint Joseph – Like Saint Anthony, this statue of Saint Joseph was originally in the Main Chapel at the old Motherhouse, and was then included in the landscaping for the Outer Court. Also, like the statue of Saint Anthony, Saint Joseph is holding a lily (a symbol of purity), and the child Jesus. While we know little about his life, we must assume that he had an influence on his wife and son.

Saint Anthony of Padua – While he is best known to most people as the finder of lost objects, Saint Anthony is well known in the Franciscan world as a teacher and preacher. He is usually depicted holding the child Jesus, or a lily, or a book, or all three. Our statue of Saint Anthony is holding the child Jesus as well as a lily. This statue, originally in the Chapel at the Center Street Motherhouse, is now located in the Outer Court of Assisi Heights.



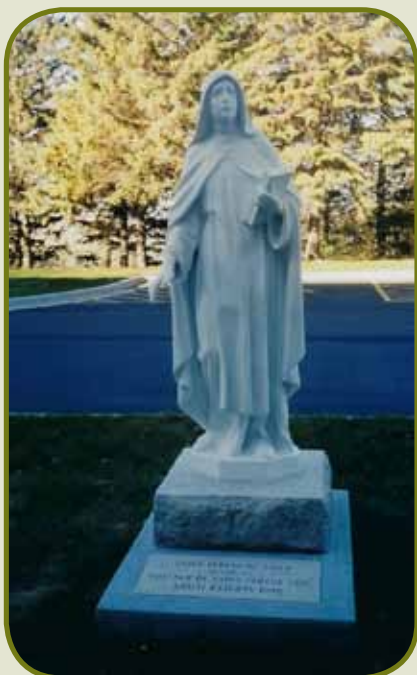
Saint Francis and the Lamb was another statue with a new beginning. The original of the statue is located in the garden of the Church of Saint Mary of the Angels in Assisi, Italy. In the mid 1920s, Mother Leo wanted something tangible at the College of Saint Teresa in Winona, Minnesota, to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the death of St. Francis (1226). Mother Leo and Sister Aloysius asked the widow of the sculptor, V. Rosignoli, for permission to make a copy of the statue. The 1928 invoice on the next page, shows a purchase price of \$1700. After the College closed, the statue was moved from its Alverna Hall courtyard location to the front circle drive at Assisi Heights.



Our Lady of Beauraing – This statue was a gift from Mr. and Mrs. George Herder, a couple from Waseca, Minnesota, who had a devotion to Our Lady; specifically, the apparition which appeared in Mrs. Herder’s homeland, an area in Belgium. Their son had been cured of a serious illness and they wanted to honor Mary, and so they created 50 statues and widely distributed them. The statue is installed on the east side of Assisi Heights, across the parking lot from the building. While the statue was not as memorable as a place of group prayer as the Our Lady of Lourdes statue in the grotto, it does hold a place in the hearts of the Sisters. Because it is located close to the building, some Sisters can see it from their windows.

Saint Teresa of Avila is another beloved figure in the history of the Rochester Franciscans. The Congregational college in Winona was named after Saint Teresa, who was the first of only four women to be named “Doctor of the Church.”

Her statue was installed at the College of Saint Teresa in 1920, originally between old Assisi Hall and the main academic building, and then moved to the front of Alverna Hall. After the college closed in 1989, the statue was moved to Assisi Heights in 1990, and is now located near the Sisters’ entrance on the west side of the building.



These figures of concrete and stone help us to remember and honor significant figures in our Christian and Franciscan heritage.

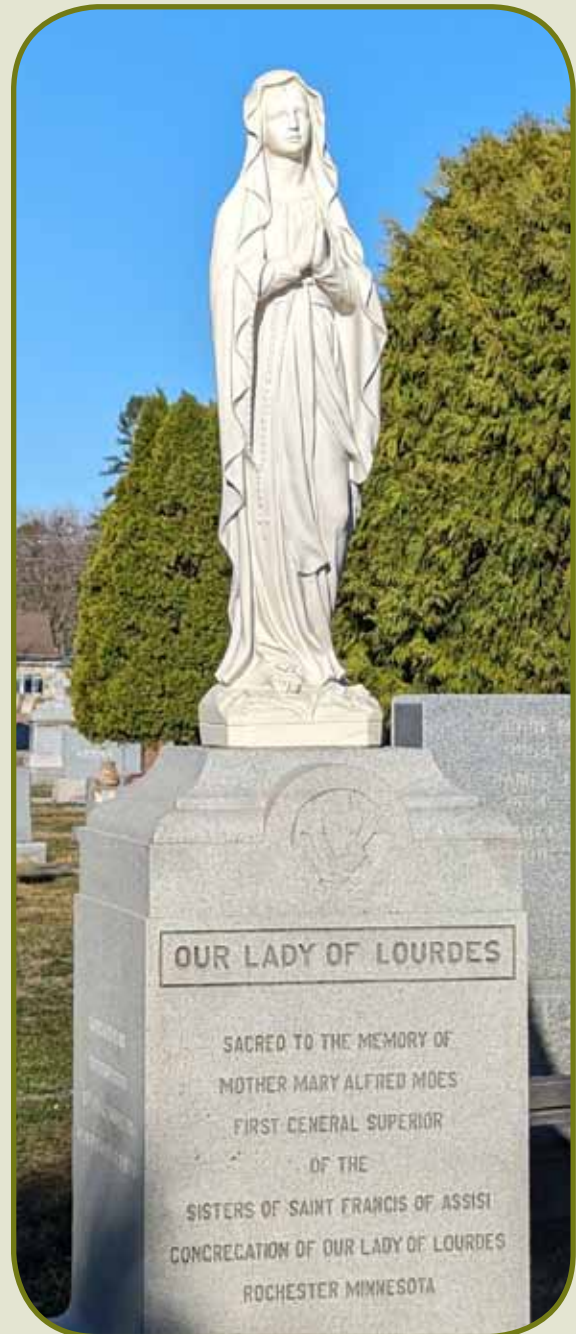
Additional Statues

There are two other outdoor statues near and dear to the hearts of Rochester Franciscans, although they are not located on the Motherhouse grounds. One is a statue of Mother Alfred Moes, standing alongside Dr. W. W. Mayo in the Feith Statuary Park (shown below), located in the shadow of Mayo Clinic's Gonda Building in downtown Rochester.



Another is the statue of Blessed Virgin Mary, located on the grave of Mother Alfred in Calvary Cemetery in Rochester, Minnesota (shown right).

While many of these outdoor statues have found a special place in their new home at Assisi Heights, they have always held a special 'place' in the hearts of the Sisters of Saint Francis.



Sister Patricia Beck (July 17, 1931 - February 19, 2024)



Sister Pat Beck was born in Dayton, Ohio, and was raised with two siblings, Jack and Tom. Since both of Sister Pat's parents were only children, after her brothers died, the family became very small, with no cousins, aunts or uncles. She dreamed of being a nurse someday, but began as a file clerk and then worked up to being a bookkeeper after graduation. Sister Pat developed many friendships and many of her friends were Catholic. She had been baptized at twelve, but there was no serious practice of any religion. One Christmas Eve, she attended a Midnight Mass, during which Sister Pat felt a special presence she could not explain. This experience remained with her all during her life. The feeling guided her to take more steps to learn about the Catholic faith, and after instruction, she became Catholic, and was baptized at the age of 23. She eventually learned about the Rochester Franciscans, and entered our Community at age 25. As St. Francis dedicated his life to serving others, Sister Pat followed in his footsteps. In her life of commitment, she lived simply and alongside others whom she served, recognizing that we are all part of the human family. The Community expressed a need for teachers, and she did not hesitate to respond. The College of St. Teresa prepared Sister Pat for teaching, and additional education at Winona State University in a Master's program, equipped her for the role of principal. She served as a teacher and principal in Catholic schools in Chicago, Illinois, and in Easton, Rochester and Caledonia, Minnesota. Having lived with Sister Francine Balster in Easton and Caledonia, it seemed natural that the two team up in response to an invitation to minister to the elderly in Austin, Minnesota, where both spent twenty years of ministry before retiring to Assisi Heights. The two endeared themselves not only to parishioners, but to many in Austin. Sister Pat truly became a fountain of overflowing joy and love.

Sister Francine Balster (July 27, 1925 - February 15, 2024)



Dorothy Evelyn Balster was born June 27, 1925 in Wilmont, Minnesota, the first of six children. With two aunts who were Rochester Franciscans, Sister Aaron and Sister Clara Lenz, there was undoubtedly an influence on Sister Francine's response to the call to become a Sister. Both of her aunts were teachers and greatly inspirational to her. She also believed that the faith of her family strengthened her own vocation commitment. After her initial religious formation, Sister Francine availed herself of many courses, workshops and degrees to aid her ministry, and served as a teacher, administrator, librarian and teacher's aide for 47 years in Minnesota and Ohio. Loved and treasured by children, teens and adults, Sister Francine touched deeply more lives than she could ever have imagined. Her teaching success was attested to by a note from a former student who said, "I wonder what I would have been like had you not intervened in my life. I've turned out to be a successful, compassionate person...One person did make a difference." In God's providence she was missioned with Sister Pat Beck, 40 years ago, leading to an eventual relationship as close as sisters. In fact, since Sister Pat's own family members had passed away before she entered religious life, Sister Pat became an honorary member of Sister Francine's family, a role cherished by all. Known as a team, Sisters Francine and Pat were invited by Father Paul Nelson, in 1994, to move out of the classroom to develop and direct a tri-Parish "Ministry of Care Program" for elderly residents of Austin. In addition to home visits and other outreach, they hosted monthly gatherings for Mass, a meal and entertainment; not only nourishing faith but bringing much joy and laughter. Since their 2018 retirement to Assisi Heights, the friends were able to live next door to each other. The memories of Sister Francine's loving, generous and calm demeanor are etched on our hearts.

Sister Joy Barth

(August 16, 1930 - February 8, 2024)



Mary Alice Barth was a farmer's daughter, born in Spring Valley, Minnesota, the oldest of three girls. She said she learned so much from her parents who, at an early age, instilled in her an appreciation for *water, soil, air* and *fire*. Perhaps these four elements are the best way to summarize the wonderful life of this small Franciscan Sister who was so fittingly given the name "Joy" when she received the habit in 1951. **Air:** The atmosphere of her life was love. Her very presence carried a sense of life-giving. Her relationship with nature was also true of her relationship with people – a deep sense of respect. **Earth** (soil): Gardening, working in the soil, began early in her life at home and as a 4-H member. As one of the Assisi Heights gardeners, she never lost the joy of seeing new life emerge and grow until harvest. When asked what she wanted to be remembered for, she said "love of nature, especially water, trees and birds." Reflecting on the Scripture passage, "In my Father's house there are many mansions", she prayed that "there may be a spot in mine with an apple orchard and bluebirds." **Fire:** Joy had a passion

and enthusiasm for everything she did. For 34 years, that fire was used as a grade school teacher, mostly in grades 4-6. She was an excellent teacher who it was said "could put things out simply." This took her to many missions: Austin, Winona, Wilmont, Saint Margaret Mary in Minneapolis, St. James, Fairmont, Silver Spring in Maryland, Bloomington, Glencoe and Owatonna – where she brought joy and community spirit to the Sisters with whom she lived. She brought that same fire for 17 years to the Assisi Community Center, and the interactions with the many diverse groups who had programs at Assisi Heights. Her ability to organize and 'take action' were gifts she used in many areas of Justice and Peace – including Franciscans International, water conservation, and corporate responsibility. **Water:** Perhaps Water is the part of creation that we most associate with Joy. She is responsible for changing many hearts in her untiring work in conserving water. In 2014, she received the Environmental Achievement Award from Olmsted County Conservation and Rochester Public Utilities. Joy was appreciated being earth, air, fire, and water in our midst and calling us to a greater respect for God's creation.

Sister Louise Romero

(September 2, 1928 - December 29, 2023)



Louise was the first in a family of three girls, born in beautiful La Jara, Colorado, along the Rio Grande Valley. At her baptism, she was given the name "Louise," which means one who is destined to stand her ground with courage. Louise was joined by sisters Margaret and Mary Jane. All three of the girls attended the public school in La Jara. "We had an excellent staff," said the future educator! Sister Louise joined our Community in 1947. Her sister, Margaret, became a nurse and mother of six children who often visited Sister Louise over the years. Her sister Mary Jane became a Benedictine Sister and a dear, loving friend to Louise all of her life. We learned that Sister Louise was a loved teacher and principal at school in Silver Springs (and a librarian) in Bethesda, Maryland; Chicago, Illinois; Springfield, Glencoe, Iona, Sleepy Eye, and Austin, Minnesota; Watertown, South Dakota; and Santa Ana, California. A total of 59 years was spent in ministry. In 2008, Louise chose to retire to Assisi Heights. She accepted the position of house treasurer and delighted in her pastoral care to Sister Sean Clinch. After her sister,

Mary Jane, died last year, Louise announced that she, too, was ready "to go to God." However, her journey will continue as she becomes part of the "Mayo Study." We celebrate her forever gift of grace and wisdom as our Sister.

Sister Mary Ann Snyder

(September 10, 1930 - December 18, 2023)



Mary Ann Snyder was born in Portsmouth, Ohio, at our Congregation's Mercy Hospital. She had two sisters, Jane and Barbara, and a brother, Jack. She was taught by the Rochester Franciscan Sisters in both grade school and high school. She entered the Congregation in 1948, and received the name Sister Angelitta. After making her profession of vows, she began 46 years as a teacher in Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio and Maryland. Her first 9 years of teaching were spent in Chicago, and she remembered the challenge of adapting to her next mission in the small town of Adams, Minnesota; though she also had pleasant memories of the community life there. When Sisters were able to choose their ministry, a letter in the National Catholic Reporter from Fr. George Clements, the black pastor of Holy Angels Parish in Chicago, prompted Sister Mary Ann, as well as other Sisters, to apply. And so, the mission at Holy Angels School began, where Sister Mary Ann taught first grade for 25 years. One of her happiest memories from that time was walking with the children down to Lake Michigan. After retiring from classroom teaching, Sister Mary Ann moved to Columbus, Ohio, where she could be closer to her family. She was engaged in social work for the Joint Organization for Inner-City Needs (J.O.I.N.) for 20 years. Part of her work included tutoring adult non-readers, from various countries, to achieve the ability to read in English. She was inspired by her coworkers, and no doubt, her coworkers were just as inspired by her! From there, Sister Mary Ann's next stop was retiring to Assisi Heights. Though soft-spoken, Sister Mary Ann was always an advocate for social justice, and consistently on the side of the poor and those suffering injustice. She kept abreast of current events in the world, and loved having a good conversation about what actions could be taken to make this a more just world.

Sister Una O'Meara

(September 4, 1929 - December 7, 2023)



The world was blessed with a kind and gentle person when Agnes Mary O'Meara (Sister Una) was born in St. Charles, Minnesota, into a loving and hardworking farm family. Her parents, welcomed four children into their lives: a boy, Francis, who died as a baby, and three daughters – Agnes, Helen and Marian. Family values and relationships were the bedrock of Sister Una's upbringing. She learned what hard work was as she participated in the chores on the farm; milking cows by hand and assisting with the harvest of corn, hay and wheat. These values carried over into her professional life as a teacher. After she graduated from St. Charles High School, she attended Winona State for two years. After teaching for one year, she entered the Sisters of Saint Francis in Rochester, in 1951, and was given the name Sister Una. She received her bachelor's degree from the College of St. Teresa. During the years she was teaching, she also studied at the Catholic University in Washington, D.C., where in 1967, she completed studies with a Masters in Elementary Education. She taught for 27 years in Minnesota, Illinois, Maryland and Ohio, where she became a principal. Upon leaving the education ministry, Sister Una moved to Tau Center in Winona, where she became an assistant and later also a receptionist, welcoming persons who came for gatherings and retreats. Moving to Assisi Heights, she again served as a receptionist and driver of the shuttle for the Sisters. Her draw to pastoral and spiritual relationship also moved her to pursue Pastoral Studies. She served as a hospital chaplain, from 1985-1987, in Gary, Indiana, followed by Pastoral Care Director for the Sisters of Holy Cross, Saint Mary's Convent in Notre Dame, Indiana, and then hospital chaplain in Baraboo, Wisconsin, until she retired to Assisi Heights in 1999. In community living, Sister Una shared her gifts; not only with her Rochester Franciscan Community, but with other communities with whom she lived, students she taught, and her family members, as she shared her gentle, kind, and loving way of living the Franciscan life.



Image by Brooke Rice-Stivers

I had a friend who, when she retired, kept saying “This is what I was born for.” She was overjoyed with retirement. But somehow, it didn’t feel quite the same way for me. Last year, when I reached 80, and I was finding it harder to keep up with all the computer changes in medical records, and remembering the names of all the new medications, I decided the time had come. I should retire.

Having grown up feeling that one of the most important values in life was to be a hard worker, I now felt a real sense of loss and restlessness. I think that one of the reasons I had kept working was that it gave me a regular schedule and I knew where I was supposed to be and what I was supposed to do most of the time. I had felt that what I did was important and I got a lot of thanks and support. Now, I was free of the schedules. I had the time and there were all kinds of things I could volunteer for. I didn’t know how to choose. I didn’t want to just run from one thing to another. I did try several things that just didn’t seem right for me.

Besides, when I worked, I was making a nice salary. When I wanted something, I could usually buy it. I could be generous with my kids and with those who were in need. And I was, so my savings were not huge.

My life had changed and I had to find myself all over

again. Most people didn’t care who I had been or what I had done. As I said, I was restless, and even reading didn’t satisfy me for long periods of time, although I had always longed for more time to read and pray. I had been blessed, and felt like I should be using the gifts I had been given. However, even short times spent reading Richard Rohr’s *Falling Upward*, Joan Chittister’s *The Gift of Grace*, and Ronald Rolheiser’s *The Holy Longing*, assured me that God didn’t really care what I did, but who I was.

Good friends modeled for me the importance of relationships and contemplative prayer. These had always been important to me, but they took on a new place in my life. I had never had the time to take long walks in nature and to feel the awe of a beautiful huge oak tree grown from an acorn; or the beautiful flowers sprung from buds, fertilized by bees; or a rainbow created by sun on raindrops. Who could imagine such things! I knew all this, but I could now experience them. It was not easy, and I’m not there yet, but I’m learning.

I do volunteer with the food pantry and Hospice. There are several friends that I help care for, but I have some large spaces of time and I am learning to appreciate the gift that time is. It is good to be alive. Maybe my friend, who had thought that she was “born for retirement,” really was on to something!

Thankful for Our Donors

With the support of our benefactors, Sisters are able to continue their ministries of service, prayer and influence. We continue to share our message through Facebook and our website, as well as through our traditional media such as the *Interchange*. We are truly blessed by each one of you!

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Contact Information

Please feel free to email or call the Office of Mission Advancement at 507.529.3536 with any questions.

Brooke Rice-Stivers, Coordinator | brooke.stivers@rochesterfranciscan.org

We are grateful for gifts given in honor of a Sister or loved one who has been a vital part of your life.

We remember those who have gone before us, and you, our generous benefactors, through the daily prayers of our Sisters.

Gifts received October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023.



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Annual Report

Committing ourselves to be a compassionate presence for peace in our world, while striving for justice and reverence for all creation, is possible because of our generous benefactors.

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