



Assisi Heights

Volunteer Handbook

Cover Photo Credit: Sister Marlene Pinzka

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Section One

Welcome from the Sisters of St. Francis

It is a great pleasure to welcome each and every one of you who has chosen to become a member of our exciting volunteer program here at Assisi Heights, sharing your many gifts, time, and energy to enrich the lives of our Sisters! They continually ask us to support their on-going growth in how they live their communal and spiritual lives, always becoming who God has called them to be. You bring a wide variety of experiences and education, expanding their daily life experiences in myriad ways. And they are grateful!

As a volunteer, you become a member of our Assisi Heights Franciscan Family, along with our Sisters, Cojourners and staff, sharing in our mission “to be a compassionate presence for peace in our world, striving for justice and reverence for all creation.” In the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, we are invited to remember that we are all brothers and sisters to one another, and to all of God’s creatures! Know that your lives will be enriched as your share life with the Sisters, in whatever volunteer services you so generously offer. Enjoy your service, know of our gratitude, take care and be good to yourselves!



Sister Tierney Trueman, OSF
Congregational Minister, 2022-2026

History of the Rochester Franciscan Sisters

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The official Cooperate Title of the Franciscan Sisters of Rochester is “The Sisters of St. Francis of the Third Order Regular, the Congregation of Our Lady of Lourdes of Rochester Minnesota.” The community, founded in 1877 by Mother Alfred Moes, had twenty-five original members. Soon other women joined them.

The Sisters opened schools in Owatonna and Rochester, and in 1889 founded St. Marys Hospital. A nursing school, run by Sisters, was begun at the hospital in 1894. While some Sisters became nurses, instructors, and administrators at the hospital, others continued in the profession of teaching. The Franciscan Sisters of Rochester, pioneers in secondary education for young women, also founded the Winona Seminary, which in 1907 became the College of St. Teresa.

Over the last century, the Sisters have served in the fields of education, nursing, administration, pastoral ministry, chaplaincy, social work, human services, peace and justice, retreat leadership and others.

Although the majority of the Sisters throughout the Congregation are now retired, most are involved in various outreach efforts as well as peace and justice advocacy. The Rochester Franciscans today number approximately 107 Sisters, with 67 living at Assisi Heights. Many Sisters live independently at Assisi Heights. Two of the floors are considered “Healthcare” floors since they have nursing staff available every day of the week. Some Sisters in those areas need minimal assistance while others have greater needs. Many of our volunteers are involved in activities with Sisters from the Healthcare floors.

At the present time, other Rochester Franciscans can be found living in different parts of Minnesota, California, Colorado, Missouri, New Mexico and in Bogotá, Colombia.



History of Assisi Heights



In 1949, the site now known as Assisi Heights was selected as the Congregational home for the Sisters of St. Francis, Rochester, Minnesota. Indigenous Dakota Natives more than likely occupied the land first. The original 138 acres was purchased from a combination of properties of Dr. Louis B. Wilson, MD, and the Klein homestead and Quarry. It was located in northwest Rochester, 50 feet outside the city limits on what the DNR classified as the edge of the Oak Savannah. The acreage included seven acres of woods in primitive and natural state. The Wilsons named it Walnut Hill due to large number of walnut, linden and oak trees. Included in the property transaction was an orchard of 1375 of various apple trees, operated by Dr. Wilson, the University of Minnesota and Mayo Properties Association.

The new convent building of Italian Romanesque architectural design was started in June of 1952, the 75th anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone of the first motherhouse in downtown Rochester. Located on one of the highest hills in Olmsted County, Assisi Heights bears striking resemblance to the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi in Italy. The Sisters moved from their original convent in downtown Rochester to their new home in 1955. Currently, the property is 119 acres with 75 acres in Conservation Easement and 600 solar panels for capturing the energy of the sun.

Today, Assisi Heights is home not only to Rochester Franciscans, but also a Poor Clare Community. The Poor Clares, a cloistered order of women, are part of the larger “Franciscan Family” throughout the world. When the small group in Bloomington, Minnesota, decided that it was time to close their Monastery, the Rochester Franciscans were happy to welcome them on February 7, 2018. The Poor Clare Sisters live a cloistered lifestyle, occupying a floor on the south wing at Assisi Heights.



History of Assisi Heights Volunteer Program

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Members of the lay community have been providing volunteer services to the Sisters of St. Francis at Assisi Heights for over fifty years. It was in 1972 that Sister Bernadette Servaty (shown below, left) moved from Winona to Rochester and initiated the volunteer program. She invited a group of women to meet with her and brainstorm ideas. Recruiting began through local church bulletins and “word of mouth.” It didn’t take long before there were 20 women involved in “Friendly Visiting” and planning social events and parties with the Sisters. Two lay women - Evelyn Cashman from St. John’s Catholic Church, and Lee Smith from St. Pius - served as the chairperson and vice chairperson of the group. Under the direction of the various Sisters, the volunteer program flourished and expanded and included both women and men. In 1993, Margaret Helminska served as the first lay Volunteer Coordinator for Assisi Heights.

Over the years, the program has grown and changed according to the needs of the Sisters and the creativity of volunteers. As more and more Sisters deal with aging issues and health concerns, volunteers play an even more important role at Assisi Heights.

We welcome and are grateful for all of the women, men, youth and children who come to Assisi Heights to offer their time, care and talents to the Sisters of St. Francis.

Photos courtesy of Assisi Heights Archives



Section Two

Assisi Heights Mission Statement

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Mission Statement

The mission of the
Assisi Heights Sisters and staff
is to provide a spiritual home
and sanctuary of hospitality
and compassion
for each other, for Rochester Franciscans,
for the broader community,
and for all who come to serve
and be served.

Philosophy of Volunteer Program

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We recognize that each person is blessed with a variety of gifts and talents, and gratefully acknowledge the generosity of those persons who wish to freely share their gifts, talents, time and energy, in volunteer service to the Sisters of St. Francis. We seek to place volunteers in positions in which they best can give of their gifts and talents, but hold at all times the safety and well-being of the Sisters as our primary goal.

Guidelines for Interacting with Sisters

While volunteers serve in a variety of ways, the majority of the Assisi Heights volunteers have direct interaction with the Sisters. Some volunteers will be involved in regular activities on our Healthcare floors, while other volunteers may help transport Sisters in wheelchairs to the chapel, to the main dining room, or to events in our Spirituality Center. Volunteers may meet Sisters in the hallway while giving a tour of Assisi Heights, or while browsing in our bookstore. Therefore, we offer these general guidelines for interacting with Sisters in whichever capacity you serve.

- Approach Sisters from the front.
- Introduce yourself.
- Call the Sister by her title “Sister” and her first name, or simply “Sister” or by the name that she has requested that you use for her.
- Initiate conversations with a greeting and a pleasant smile.
- Speak clearly and maintain good eye contact.
- Be at the same level as the Sister you are talking to whenever possible.
- Be aware and sensitive to any disabilities or impairments Sisters might have.
- Be patient. Always treat Sisters with respect. Allow Sisters time to respond and to move slowly.
- Keep conversations pleasant, uplifting, and appropriate.
- If visiting in a Sister’s room, the door must remain open. Find a chair to use if you wish to sit.

Sisters’ Rights

Assisi Heights is the home of the Sisters and they have certain rights.

- Sisters have a right to feel safe and to be treated with dignity, respect, care and compassion.
- Sisters have a right to their own privacy, and thus, always knock on a Sister’s door and request permission to enter. Identify yourself as a volunteer.
- Sisters have a right to expect that personal information they share with you will be honored and held in confidence.
- Sisters have the right to their property, and thus, any gift offered by a Sister of her property or money should be politely refused.
- Sisters have the right to choose which activities they wish to participate, and to refuse participation in an activity.
- Sisters have the right to freedom from physical, verbal, sexual, financial or any other forms of abuse.

Any suspected violation of Sisters’ Rights should be reported immediately to the Volunteer Coordinator.

General Volunteer Guidelines



- Please sign-in when you enter the building at the volunteer desk (located in the front lobby, southeast corner, near the switchboard) and sign out as you leave. Include your name, the time, and the number of your volunteer hours that day.
- Remember to wear your identification badge which is kept at the volunteer desk.
- Work only in the assigned area. If you would like to have a change in your assignment, please talk to the Volunteer Coordinator.
- Please notify the Assisi Heights reception desk (507-282-7441) if, for any reason, you will not be available for your assigned responsibility, or follow more specific instructions if you have received them.
- If you are ill, PLEASE DO NOT COME. Wait until you are well.
- Ask for assistance with any question you have, if you have difficulty or are unable to complete a task, or are unsure of a situation.
- If you note an emergency, advise someone in charge of the area as soon as possible.
- Respect the confidentiality of what you learn about and/or from the Sisters.



Section Three

Policies and Information

Volunteer Application and Orientation Process

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Prospective volunteers must complete a screening process which consists of a written application, personal references, and an interview with the Volunteer Coordinator.

All new volunteers will receive a general orientation and tour of Assisi Heights. There are confidentiality statements and waivers that must be signed by volunteers.

The Volunteer Coordinator will work with the applicant to determine the area in which the volunteer can best be of service and then refer the volunteer to the appropriate person who oversees that particular area.

Once a decision has been made as to where the new volunteer will serve, there may be further training by the Coordinator who oversees that specific area of service (Healthcare Center, Life Enrichment Department, Spirituality Center, Pastoral Care, Liturgical Ministry, Assisi Heights Tours or Garden Work, etc.) All volunteers will have a supervisor of their chosen area of service who can provide ongoing assistance and support.

Our regular volunteers may be offered various enrichment opportunities or further training to enhance the service that they provide and to give necessary required updates.

Regular volunteers may be required to have a background check, depending on the specific area of their service.



Dress Code



Since volunteers are involved in various services opportunities, everyone is asked to dress appropriately for the task. Those working in the garden will need to dress differently than those giving tours or assisting at Mass or leading an activity with Sisters.

Volunteer Badge



Volunteers will each be given a badge on their first day of service and must wear their badge at all times when volunteering at Assisi Heights. There may be certain exceptions such as for those helping with outside work.

Parking



Volunteers may park their cars in front of the building or the overflow lot to the right of the drive as you come up the hill. Please do not use the spaces marked “reserved” nor in the circle outside the main chapel.

Personal Belongings



There is a coat rack located to the right as you walk into the main Assisi Heights door. We ask that you do not bring any valuables into Assisi Heights.

Recording Volunteer Hours



All volunteers are asked to record their volunteer hours. There is a section for documenting time in the Volunteer “Sign in/out” booklet in the front lobby of Assisi Heights. If you are providing volunteer service from off the Assisi Heights campus, a tracking form will be provided for you.

Card and Gift Shop



A Card and Gift Shop is located at Assisi Heights, near the dining room. It is managed by the Sisters and generally opens Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday from 12:15pm – 1:15pm. You can find Assisi Heights honey, books, handcrafted items, cards and artwork created by our Sisters and Cojourners, as well as DVDs about the Rochester Franciscans. Feel free to browse and make purchases.

Meals



If your volunteer time extends over one of the meal times or if a Sister invites you to share a meal with her as her guest, you may eat in our dining room free of charge.

No Smoking Policy



The Sisters of St. Francis have designated Assisi Heights building and property to be “smoke-free” and thus, smoking is not allowed anywhere on the property.



Mutual Respect, Harassment and Abusive Behavior



In keeping with the Mission Statement of the Assisi Heights Sisters and Staff to provide “a spiritual home and sanctuary of hospitality and compassion...” we strive to create an environment of mutual respect, care and consideration for all Sisters, Staff and Volunteers. Disrespect, harassment, bullying and abusive behavior will not be tolerated. Any volunteer that experiences or witnesses this behavior is asked to report it immediately to the Volunteer Coordinator.

Confidentiality



As volunteers interact with Sisters and staff, you may learn personal information about someone’s life, their family, their health status, etc. It is critical that this information be kept confidential. Volunteers are asked to sign a Confidentiality Form and will also be offered training regarding what is considered confidential information. If there is any question at any time, it may be directed to the Volunteer Coordinator.

Photo Release Form



The Sisters of St. Francis promote their mission, values and programs through their website, Facebook page, and various newsletters. You will be invited to sign a photo release form if any pictures are taken of you with Sisters that might be used in any way to help promote the mission, values and programs of the Sisters. It is in no way obligatory for you to sign the form. If you sign the form and your photo is used, you may request a digital copy for yourself.



Cell Phones, Photos and Social Media



We recognize that it is important to carry a cell phone with you for many reasons, but ask that you do not make personal calls during your volunteer time, except for emergency reasons.

While volunteers are asked “not” to take any pictures with their cell phones or cameras, there may be times that the Volunteer Coordinator or a designated staff member takes pictures of special events and gives you a digital copy of the picture to remember the occasion.

Volunteers are not to post any pictures with the Sisters on social media. However, there may be times that the Volunteer Coordinator sends pictures to the Director of Communications at Assisi Heights for posting on the Assisi Heights Facebook page.

Gifts



For the protection of the volunteers and Sisters alike, volunteers are asked not to accept gifts from individual Sisters or to give gifts to individual Sisters. Exceptions can be made on the discretion of the Volunteer Coordinator or Life Enrichment Manager.

If a volunteer wants to give a gift to all of the Sisters on a corridor or all the Sisters at Assisi Heights (such as a special treat for a holiday), that should be discussed and approved by the Life Enrichment Manager.



Pet Visits

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Although the Sisters living at Assisi Heights are not allowed to keep any pets, many of them gain great comfort and delight in visits from pets. Volunteers who have certified therapy dogs are welcome to work out a plan with the Life Enrichment Coordinator for regular visits.



Section Four

Safety Issues

Wheelchair Safety

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1. Healthcare staff will assist Sisters in getting into wheelchairs and apply necessary belts. If the belt needs to be adjusted or removed, ask nursing staff for assistance.
2. Before moving a Sister in a wheelchair, be sure her feet are securely on the footrests, and her arms and hands are not extending over the sides of the armrests. It is safest if the Sister's hands are on her lap, with her elbows kept close to her body.
3. Ensure that all blankets and other objects are safely tucked in with nothing sticking out beyond the arm rests.
4. Tell the Sister before you move her so she is prepared.
5. When pushing a wheelchair, go slowly at all times, especially when entering doorways and elevators and avoid quick turns.
6. Lock the wheelchair on both sides when the Sister will be sitting in one place.
7. Enter elevators by pulling the wheelchair backwards onto the elevator.
8. Exit elevators by backing out whenever possible. This means turning the wheelchair around on the elevator. It is best if the large wheels to the rear of the chair go through the door first, whether entering or exiting the elevator.
9. When going down an incline, pull the wheelchair backwards down the incline. When going up an incline, push the wheelchair up, e.g., with the Sister facing the incline.
10. Never remove a Sister from a wheelchair. Call a nursing care staff member for help if a Sister wants to get out of her wheelchair.

Wheeled Walkers with Seats on Them

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Volunteers should never push the Sister while she is seated on one of these walkers.

Please Under No Circumstances Ever...

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- Take a Sister off the Healthcare floors without signing them out at the nursing station.
- Remove a Sister from her environment unless permission has been obtained and you have been instructed or given permission from staff to do so.
- Assist a Sister to the bathroom.
- Remove a Sister from a wheelchair or bed.
- Assist in feeding a Sister.
- Help a fallen Sister back up, but get staff to help immediately.
- Answer a call light.
- Enter a room where a Sister is in isolation. (If a Sister is in isolation from a communicable disease, an isolation card will be placed on the door so you will know she is in isolation.)

Contact Nurse Manager When...

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When any safety concerns arise with the Sisters from the Healthcare floors or with Sisters in other parts of Assisi Heights, contact a Nurse Manager immediately. Volunteers are given a list of emergency numbers to call during their initial orientation and are asked to keep it with them during their volunteer service. If volunteers misplace that list, a new list can be obtained from the Volunteer Coordinator.

Infectious Disease Protection



Special care in all aspects of personal hygiene is needed because of the fragility and vulnerability of the elderly Sisters regarding infectious diseases.

Below are a few tips to remember whenever you volunteer:

- **If you are sick, please stay home until you are well.**
- If your volunteer activity includes cooking, baking, preparing snacks, feeding, or carrying meals trays, it is imperative that you wash your hands well before handling the food.
- If you feel a cough or sneeze coming on, bend your arm and use your elbow or another part of your arm that is covered with fabric. If you have no sleeves, then please use a tissue and discard the tissue in the trash can immediately afterwards. Wash your hands right away with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Keeping hands clean is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of many contagious diseases.

1. Wet hands.
2. Apply soap.
3. Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
4. Scrub your hands for at least twenty seconds (You can hum the "Happy Birthday" song twice from beginning to end).
5. Rinse your hands well under clean running water.
6. Dry hands with paper towel.

When soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Containers of hand sanitizer can be found throughout the building.

- Apply the product to the palm of one hand and rub it all over the surfaces of your hands until your hands are dry.

If questions or concerns come up during your volunteer service, please be sure to ask one of the nurses or the Volunteer Coordinator.

Flu Season

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Volunteers who serve on one of the Healthcare floors at Assisi Heights are highly encouraged to get their annual flu shot.

COVID - 19

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Assisi Heights follows guidelines from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) regarding safeguards for the protection of Sisters, staff, families, volunteers and other visitors.

Volunteers are required to provide documentation that they have received their initial COVID vaccination. Boosters are not required.

There may be times when masks are required on our Healthcare floors, especially during flu and cold season.

Volunteers will be kept abreast of changes as we move forward with the infectious disease prevention.



Section Five

Weather Emergency Procedures and Fire Safety

Assisi Heights is a concrete structure and will provide considerable protection for most severe weather. It is very important that volunteers be prepared for emergencies and know the procedures at Assisi Heights.

The Mayo System will automatically announce over the Assisi Heights Public Address (PA) System on a 24/7 basis, the information for severe weather, including winter storm watches and warnings, severe thunderstorm warnings, and tornado watches and warnings. Stay in safe areas until the “all clear” is announced.

Tornado Safety

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A tornado watch means that weather conditions are favorable for tornados to develop while a tornado warning means that a tornado has been sighted or indicated on the weather radar.

Should a warning be issued, seek shelter away from windows and outside walls. Listen closely for any instructions that may be given with the warning through the paging system.

There are designated areas throughout the building. Depending on where you are in the building if you hear the sirens sounding, please seek shelter in a designated area listed below:

Ground Floor - Center Hallway by Tekakwitha (“Tek”) Lounge
First Floor - Hallway behind serving lines in the Dining Room
Healthcare Center - Follow instructions from Healthcare staff
4th Floor - 4th Francis West and North Hallway

Fire Safety



Alarms will sound if smoke or fire is present or if an alarm box has been activated. If you hear the fire alarm, stay calm and do not run. Listen for instructions from the Emergency Management Team. Do not use the elevators (unless instructed to do so by the Emergency Management Team).

Strobes will flash and the alarms will sound on the floor where the fire is located. For example, if the fire is located on 2nd Clare, the alarm will sound on the entire 2nd floor.

If smoke or fire is present, you will be told how to evacuate and may be asked to assist Sisters. If no smoke or fire is present, stay in the hallway, as a group, until notified of an all clear or given further instructions via the intercom.

Remember, stay alert and calm and listen for instructions.



Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled as to console;

To be understood as to understand;

To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

- Amen.





Sisters of Saint Francis
Rochester, Minnesota

www.rochesterfranciscan.org

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