Fall 2017

interchange

Sisters of Saint Francis

A Compassionate Presence

Exploring values common to you and today's Rochester Franciscans

Focus: A Compassionate Presence

interchange

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From the National Catholic Development Conference

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Letter from the President

Sister Marilyn Geiger

Dear Friends and Family,

We, the Sisters of Saint Francis, continue to live out our Mission statement, "to be a compassionate presence for peace in the world, striving for justice and reverence for all creation." There is no end to the opportunities that present themselves, on a daily basis, where the Sisters are to serve as a compassionate presence. Our challenge is to be mindful of what is happening at the moment which calls for our compassion. In this issue of *Interchange*, we share stories of Sisters (and Cojourners), serving in their own unique way to be a compassionate presence in the world. As bearers of hope, we believe that compassion is woven into our strands of DNA; it is a force that binds us together as Franciscans.

Recently, when reading the October 2017 Bulletin of the Catholic Record Society in the Diocese of Columbus, I learned Mother Alfred Moes responded compassionately to a Bishop's request for Sisters to teach in newly established schools in southern Ohio in the late 19th century. Not only did she send Sisters, but she soon purchased the property under the title of the Academy of Our Lady of Lourdes, which guaranteed that our Franciscan Community would continue to be a compassionate presence – a presence that lasted for 81 years, from 1883 to 1964! That is just another facet of information we have learned from other Communities established by this remarkable woman, our foundress, Mother Alfred.

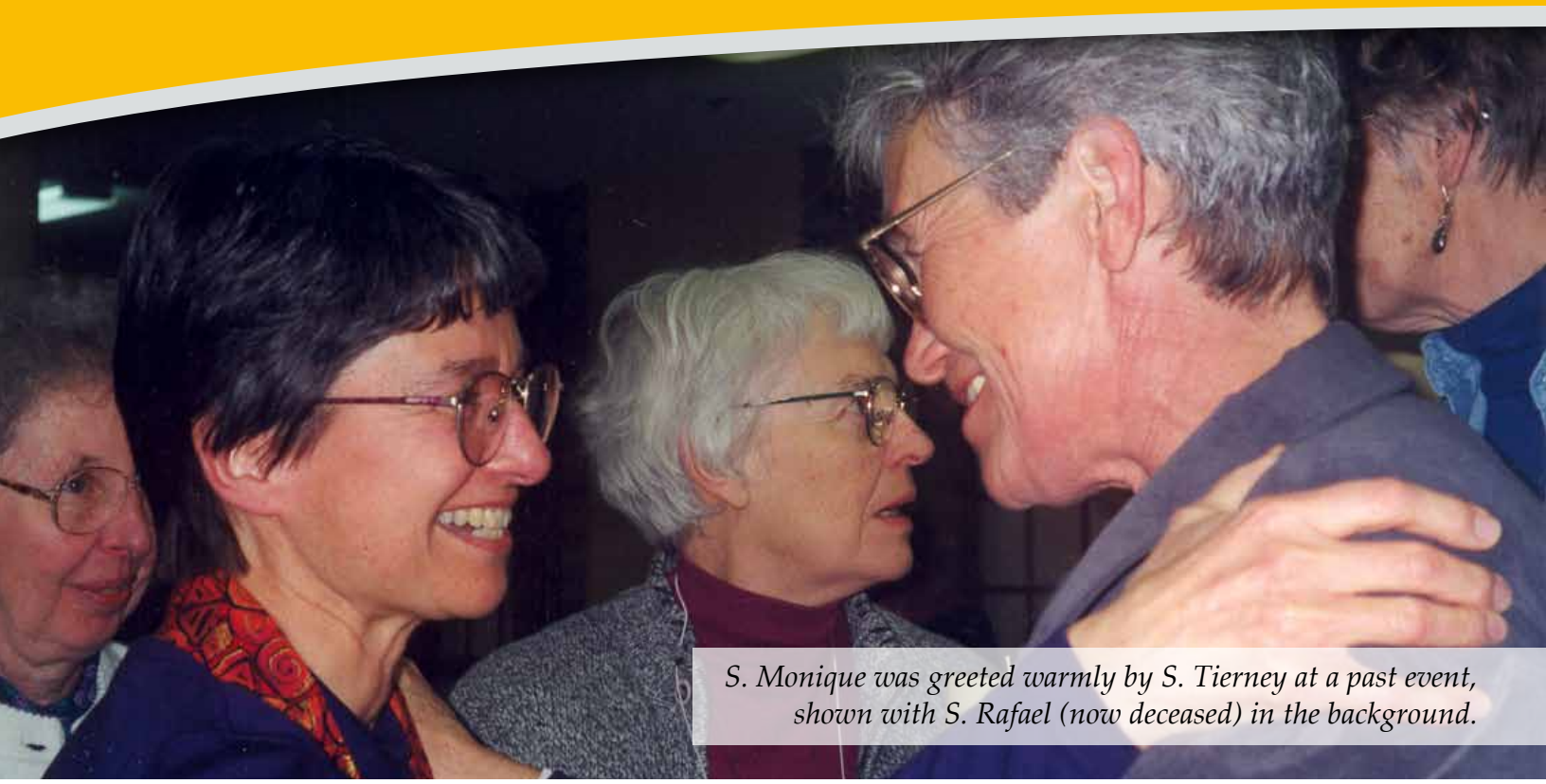
As we continue to celebrate the 140th Anniversary of the founding of our Congregation, we marvel at the gifts of this courageous woman, while also re-examining gifts and talents of many of the Rochester Franciscan Sisters and Cojourners over the years. The walls and hallways at Assisi Heights have been graced with samples of their poetry, music and artistic talents. To celebrate our Foundress Day, we will bring closure to the year's festivities at Mass on Sunday, December 17, 2017. We look forward to what life will bring between now and 2027, when we celebrate 150 years!

As "Bearers of Hope" we invite you join us on this journey by continually striving to become a compassionate presence for peace in our world.

Sr Marilyn Geiger, OSF

Sister Marilyn Geiger
Congregational Minister

Sister Monique Schwirtz a Compassionate Presence



S. Monique was greeted warmly by S. Tierney at a past event, shown with S. Rafael (now deceased) in the background.

My question to Monique was: "How have you experienced yourself as a compassionate presence at various times in your ministries throughout your life?"

As I sat with Monique, ready to listen to her experience of being a compassionate presence in her ministry, she began by saying she needed to state her theology around compassionate presence. Monique believes that compassion is not a basic instinct within us, but one that needs to be learned through reflection, prayer and discipline. She went on to say that, "unless I have compassion for myself it may be difficult to have or show compassion for others. We learn to understand ourselves through processing the dysfunction in our family system, the poor choices we've made and the struggles in relationships. All of these really become gifts if we give ourselves time to reflect and pray, for it is then that we come to a greater understanding of ourselves and others."

"Forgiveness is the only way to free ourselves from the entrapment of the past." - Richard Rohr

Looking at scripture we see in Luke 6:36, "Be compassionate, as your Father is compassionate." Putting this in the context of living the Gospel is our call as Franciscans. This can only happen by practicing forgiveness, which begins with oneself and extends to others by listening to their stories.

During her career, Sister Monique served as a teacher and principal, a social worker, Co-Director of Residential Life at Assisi Heights, in Congregational Leadership and then as a spiritual director at Holy Spirit Retreat Center. As she reflected on her various ministries, she realized that all involved a high level of listening with compassion to the needs and desires of others.

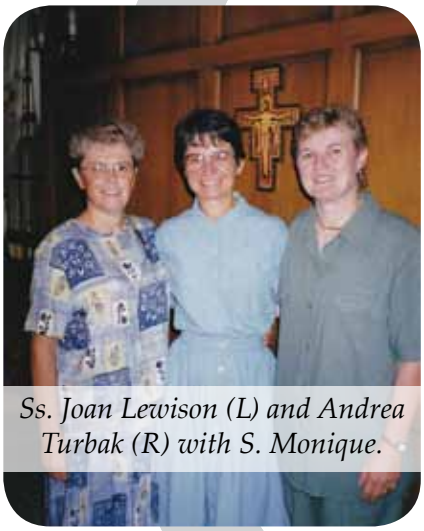
Monique has always been very interested in and involved with peace and justice issues. During her time in Congregational leadership she was connected to the peace and justice office, supporting those in the front lines of its work. Having compassion for living in other countries experiencing turmoil, she joined in a vigil and a march at the School of the Americas (SOA), run by the U.S. Department of Defense, to protest the training of mainly Latin American military officers who have gone on to commit human rights abuses in their respective countries.

Most recently, during months of recovery from major surgery, the ministry of compassion for "self" has become important to her. This has led to a deeper experience of the diversity within our community and an appreciation of each Sister for who she is and the gift she brings.

According to Sister Monique, this phrase 'sums' it all up:

DIVERSITY + COMPASSION = COMMUNITY.

Roadside clean-up volunteers – S. Monique and Cojourner Kay Solyst.



Ss. Joan Lewison (L) and Andrea Turbak (R) with S. Monique.

Staff at Holy Spirit Retreat Center in 2016. Standing: Sisters JoAnn Haney, Char Hesby and Jennifer Corbett. Seated: Sisters Monique Schwirtz and Carmen Sonnek.

Blessing the cornerstone at Assisi Heights on the 50th Anniversary of the building.

Planting a tree in honor of peace and justice work in 2006.

The Compassionate Work of Sisters Kenric and Jesse

Knowing the life led by Sisters Kenric and Jesse in New Ulm, and their compassionate involvement in the community, I asked them to explain this in greater detail for all of you. What follows is their own words.

Sister Kenric Ruppert:

After years of being involved in education, in parish schools, religious education and in working with developmentally challenged adults, I now focus my attention on being a compassionate presence to the elderly and those that are shut-ins (unable to leave their homes).

I visit persons in the hospital and at five nursing home facilities. Of those, two are facilities for individuals with Alzheimer's disease. I take communion to them and spend time praying and just being with them.

In the course of living in this community for many years, both Jesse and I have been present to many persons in their last days on earth. We have been there for the family members as well. Those times have been powerful reminders of how God is with us and interacts in their lives and in ours.

Sister Jesse Capparelli:

I have lived in this community for over 30 years. I have served as a social worker, working with families and children. Most recently, I worked as a site manager for the "Meals on Wheels" program. Working with the volunteer drivers, I shared the importance of being engaged with people in ways other than just delivering a meal. People need and appreciate a smile, a cheerful greeting, eye contact and letting them know someone cares. The program allows persons to be independent and live in their homes, but there is that added reassurance to family members knowing that someone visits their loved one each day. For that, they are grateful.

Since retiring in May, I have now become one of the "Meals on Wheels" volunteers! This is a program which I believe in and love. I know the diners look forward to receiving a hot meal, but I also know that, even more, they look forward to contact with another person… and we are all richer for it.

S. Kenric prays with a 97-year-old blind woman.

by Sister Tierney Trueman

S. Jesse delivers a meal and a laugh.

Companions on the Journey of Life

Many Sisters volunteer their time to accompany Sisters to their doctor appointments. Known as 'Clinic Companions,' these volunteers serve not only as an escort to physically accompany the Sisters to their appointments, but many also listen and reiterate what was said by the doctor during those visits. Yet, their presence can mean so much more.

L to R: Sisters Merici, Rosemary, Valerie, Ancel, Mary and Yvonne.

What does it mean to be a Clinic Companion? Here are words of wisdom from some of the current Clinic Companions:

"Providing loving care and service as a Clinic Companion might be likened to following in the footprints of Jesus. Compassionate love, gentleness, patience, kindness and a listening heart are gifts given and received by all. A great deal of trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit begins and concludes each assignment of Clinic Companions as we follow in the footprints of Jesus."

- Sister Yvonne Elskamp

"It is an honor, privilege, and a rewarding ministry to be a Clinic Companion. It is a way of being a compassionate presence to Sisters who are sick, in pain, worried or scared. It makes the trip to a doctor a bit easier and sometimes fun or funny. It is also a special time to get to know Sisters who have dedicated their lives to God and our community. In many ways, it is a sacred time. Being a companion is one way I am able to express compassionate presence."

- Sister Rosemary Cordell

"For me compassionate presence is a two-way street in who I am and what I do each day. A compassionate presence is being available, listening and commenting discreetly when appropriate. Sometimes the compassionate presence works mutually. I am the one in need of calming while the other is quietly going through health issues for that particular visit. Then we are there with and for each other."

- Sister Ancel Fischer

"Since I arrived at Assisi Heights six years ago, I have been a companion for Sisters attending the clinic for medical and surgical problems. Sometimes Sisters received information they were not prepared for and needed help to process and understand the information they heard. With a strong need for compassion, I would listen to them and offer them an opportunity to ask questions so I could help them clarify what is involved and be ready to better understand their health problem."

- Sister Merici Maher

"I believe accompanying our Sisters is what it means to be a sister to and for them. For some, just the effort to get in and out of the car takes every ounce of energy they have for the entire day. They come home very exhausted – and very grateful.

Sometimes decisions need to be made, and I can ask questions in a different way or wonder with the Sisters about how to respond – or remind them they can take time to think about their response. I often feel as though I am an extra set of eyes and ears for the Sisters that I am accompanying. They may repeat the same thing over and over again and I just answer as if it were the first time it was said. For the most part, the Sisters I accompany are most appreciative for my being with them. That is the reward of companioning!"

- Sister Mary Carroll

Since my colleagues have given wonderful summaries, I would like to consider showing the flip side, and call it: "The gifts received as a Clinic Companion."

It is a wonderful opportunity to visit one-to-one with our Sisters. Many are older and I do not really know them. Some reminisce of times past and love to tell what they remember from their childhood or their professional years. I gain insight into another time and what is important to them. In experiencing the vulnerability and fragility of the Sisters, I can appreciate my own vulnerability and fragility as well and accept it.

I have learned to handle surprises and stay calm and be a steady presence when a medical emergency arises. I am now able to seek the proper help needed when such an incident occurs and it will benefit me in the future.

It takes patience when you sit for a long time in a waiting room and realize how your sisters must feel about being in a wheelchair or in the ER for hours. I develop empathy for them and it is a good practice of patience for me!

It gifts me with courage, as some of their strength rubs off on me when they face a terminal illness diagnosis. Many of them are so accepting of whatever God may be asking of them. I see their openness and trust in God and willingness to face what lies ahead. This helps me to understand and appreciate that I also face an uncertain future as well.

It moves me to try to "age with grace and dignity" as they do, and it keeps me humble before my God and before them. I am grateful for the health I have now and see it as a chance to be that compassionate presence for them.

I have become the beneficiary of many prayers as each person I take seems to say on our return, "Thank you and you will be remembered in my prayer."

I appreciate all those former Clinic Companions that have spent hours with our Sisters in the past. For each of them I am grateful and ask God's blessing.

In Memoriam

Sister Clairvaux McFarland (May 21, 1931 - September 3, 2017)

Sister Clairvaux entered the Sisters of Saint Francis in 1949. She received a bachelor's degree in elementary education from the College of St. Teresa, Winona, Minnesota in 1963, and a master's degree in art education from Winona State University in 1967. For nineteen years, Sister Clairvaux was an intermediate teacher in parish schools in Austin, Waseca and Delano, Minnesota, as well as in Portsmouth, Ohio. From 1971 to 1981, she served as an art professor at the College of St. Teresa in Winona, Minnesota. From 1981 to 1989, Sister Clairvaux was a graphic designer at Saint Marys Hospital and in the Communications Office at Assisi Heights. In 1990, she engaged in two years of experiential learning in iconography, after which she wrote several icons for schools, parishes and colleges. Her major icons include the life-size San Damiano Cross at Assisi Heights and Gustavus Adolphus Chapel in St. Peter, Minnesota; the icon of St. Clare at Assisi Heights; icons of the Trinity and Our Lady of Tenderness at Mayo Clinic Hospital, Saint Marys Campus; and the icon of Our Lady of Kobonal for Kobonal, Haiti. Sister Clairvaux left us a wonderful heritage by enriching us with the spirituality of icons and by writing of so many.

Sister Helen Chatterton (July 27, 1927 - April 27, 2017)

Sister Helen, formerly known as Sister Gordon, entered the Sisters of Saint Francis from St. Peter Parish in North St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1954. She received a bachelor's degree in business administration from the College of St. Teresa in Winona, Minnesota, and a master's degree in guidance and counseling from St. Thomas University in St. Paul, Minnesota. Sister Helen served for four years as a secondary education teacher at Lourdes High School in Rochester, before taking the position of Director of Marian Hall at Saint Marys Hospital for 13 years. In 1973, she moved to Washington, D.C., and worked as an accountant for Movement for a Better World. Later, her office skills took her to Prince of Peace Church in Taylors, South Carolina, and served as secretary, bookkeeper and office manager for eight years. She then moved to Columbia, South Carolina, where she held the position of Pastoral Assistant from 1986 to 2009. In 2009, Sister Helen moved back to Assisi Heights where she had been serving in the Administration Support Office. She lived her life with a positive attitude, kindness, compassion and fidelity to the end.

Sister Joyce Rowland (October 31, 1922 - July 19, 2017)

Sister Joyce entered the Sisters of Saint Francis in 1942, from Annunciation Parish, Minneapolis, Minnesota. In 1949, she received a bachelor's degree in English from the College of St. Teresa in Winona, Minnesota. She then earned a master's degree in English curriculum and instruction from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis in 1953, followed by a Ph. D. in philosophy from St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri, in 1962. Sister Joyce taught at several parish schools in Austin and Rochester, Minnesota. From 1953 to 1956, Sister Joyce served as Postulant Mistress for the Franciscan Sisters in Rochester. On completion of her doctorate, she served as Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the College of St. Teresa (CST) in Winona until 1967, and also served as Assistant Academic Dean from 1965-1967. After completing a Ford Fellowship in 1967, she served as Associate Professor, Academic Dean and Vice-President at CST until 1969, and then served as President of the College from 1969 to 1980. Sister Joyce initiated and supported many creative educational approaches during her tenure as President. She served on a Presidential Commission on Women in Higher Education and on the Title IX Committee that helped to draft legislation that opened a path for female participation in athletics. Following her years at the College, Sister Joyce taught elementary students in Las Animas, Colorado; served the poor and lepers in Managua, Nicaragua; taught leprosy patients at the public health hospital in Carville, Louisiana; and provided parish outreach ministry to the sick, homebound and terminally ill members of a parish in Green Valley, Arizona. She also served as a volunteer at Clements and Lamberton, Minnesota. She retired to Assisi Heights in 2008, graciously sharing her wisdom and smiles.

Sister Margaret Manahan (December 23, 1922 - June 5, 2017)

Sister Margaret, formerly known as Sister Mary Dara, entered the Sisters of Saint Francis, in 1943, from Cathedral Parish in St. Paul, Minnesota. In 1961, she received a bachelor's degree in elementary education from the College of St. Teresa in Winona; followed by a master's degree in religious education/teaching from St. Mary's College in Winona, in 1973; and a master's degree in education/pastoral counseling from St. Thomas University in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1974. Sister Margaret taught elementary students for eleven years in Austin and Winona, Minnesota, and Chicago, Illinois. Following that, she taught religious education in several parishes in Minnesota, as well as serving as a religious education director/coordinator in Albert Lea, and Edina, Minnesota. Later, she served as a pastoral associate for five years at St. Olaf Parish in Minneapolis. She also served as director of SEMSCO in Rochester from 1981 to 1984; organizer for the Vietnamese Mutual Assistance Association in Columbus, Ohio, from 1984 to 1987; campus minister in Columbus, Ohio; and then at Tau Center in Winona from 1991 to 1994. She volunteered at several social service agencies while in Victor, Montana, returning to Rochester in 1996. She was active at Assisi Heights and joined the Young at Heart Singers in 2001, giving her last performance in December 2016. Sister Margaret was known for living out her lifetime saying: "Be contented and happy, and give happiness to others."

Sister Paula Leopold (September 10, 1915 - January 31, 2017)

Sister Paula entered the Sisters of Saint Francis in 1934 from Sacred Heart Parish, Heron Lake, Minnesota. In 1940, she graduated from Saint Marys School of Nursing, Rochester. For 38 years, Sister Paula served as an R.N. in Rochester and St. James, Minnesota; Portsmouth, Ohio; Denver, Colorado; Jenkins and Louisville, Kentucky; and at Assisi Heights. She also served in child care in Thornton, Colorado, and as a companion and nurse in Augusta, Georgia, and Clearwater, Florida. She retired to Assisi Heights in 1984, where she served as sacristan, liturgical minister, driver, house and child sitter and a volunteer with Saint Marys Hospital Auxiliary. Wherever Sister Paula served, her gregarious personality made new friends.

Sister Philothea Kadrlik (April 23, 1917 - July 2, 2017)

Sister Philothea entered the Sisters of Saint Francis in 1945 from St. Wenceslaus Parish in Milladore, Minnesota. For nearly twenty years, she served as housekeeper for the Franciscan Sisters in several parishes throughout southern Minnesota: Austin, Winona, Fairmont, Sleepy Eye and Rochester. She also served in Wausau, Wisconsin; Chicago, Illinois; and Portsmouth, Ohio. From 1957 to 1962, she was on the housekeeping staff at Saint Marys Hospital in Rochester. She then served as a seamstress at the College of St. Teresa in Winona, until 1969, and later as an office and library clerk at Saint Marys Hospital until 1980. She served as an Auxiliary Volunteer at Saint Marys until retiring to Assisi Heights in 2009. Sister Philothea's smile and piercing blue eyes revealed serenity and joy. She always looked up and said, "Thank you for coming."

Sister Regina Monnig (December 3, 1932 - July 22, 2017)

Sister Regina, formerly known as Sister Gretta, entered the Sisters of Saint Francis from Saint Mary Parish in Pine Grove, Ohio in 1951. She received a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the College of St. Teresa in Winona in 1957; a Master of Science in Nursing Administration from the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., in 1965; and a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Minnesota in 1975. Sister Regina served at Saint Marys Hospital as a nurse from 1953 to 1963, and again from 1965 to 1968 as a supervisor/faculty member of Saint Marys School of Nursing. From 1969 to 1971, she was an instructor in the nursing program at the College of Saint Teresa. She served as professor in the School of Nursing at the University of Minnesota, later returing to the College of Saint Teresa as Chair and associate professor in the Department of Nursing. From 1978 to 1998, Sister Regina served as Academic Dean and Professor of Nursing in several university nursing programs in Kansas, Kentucky, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky and North Dakota. Sister Regina was an Air Force Reserve Nurse from 1972 to 1992. She retired in 1998, returning to Assisi Heights in 2009. Sister Regina lived the message of Mother Teresa "to love without getting tired."

Compassion and Maisie, the Therapy Dog

Maisie with Sister Lorraine Landkammer

by Kim Jaworski, Life Enrichment Assistant

Compassion can be the awareness of another's struggle and our willingness to stand with them and walk with them through their difficulty. Sometimes it is bearing witness to their struggle and supporting them as best we can as they move forward. Maisie came to be a therapy dog through a bit of grace and compassion herself. And now she shares her compassionate soul with the Sisters at Assisi Heights and those at Seasons Hospice.

Maisie is an English Springer mix who was rescued from a disreputable breeder by the English Springer Rescue America group and found her way into the home of Jean & Bill Rynda. Jean had done some volunteer work a number of years ago with the Golden Valley Humane Society, bringing puppies and kittens to group homes. She could see what a difference the animal visits made to people and the connections they made. She hoped to do therapy dog work someday. The timing was finally right, 30 years later, when they adopted Maisie. Initially, Maisie was shy and frightened as a result of her difficult first year of life. Maisie's breeder was being shut down and the animals were now just an encumbrance. Rescue saved Maisie's life, but there was healing to do. Jean enrolled Maisie in the therapy animal program and found that this timid girl really liked to take the classes and just blossomed. With love and compassion in her new home, Maisie learned to trust and love in return. She was a natural with the animal therapy program and really loves to visit with people.

Now, Maisie has been visiting the Sisters at Assisi Heights for the past year. She comes with Jean twice a month for about 2 hours during each visit. There is compassion in her eyes as she approaches each person and invites them to touch her. Maisie loves all of the Sisters and appreciates their affection, attention, ear and tummy rubs, and some treats! She also enjoys meeting other people in the entrance lobby and hallways during her visits. Jean and Bill feel so fortunate to have found such a special dog and to have the dream of doing therapy animal work become a reality. It is wonderful to see the effect Maisie has on people!

Rochester: City of Compassion

There is a story behind every beginning! For more than five years, Cathy Ashton has had her eye on an out-of-the-possible dream on making Rochester a "Compassionate City." Cathy fell in love with Karen Armstrong's book, Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life as a result of leading a 12-month book discussion at Assisi Heights Spirituality Center. And so, Cathy, who had a laser-focused persistence on designating Rochester as a city for compassion, waited. And waited. She sought companions that had the same passion and found it in the spirit and values of persons at Assisi Heights. Eventually, a collaboration began with ten like-minded folks, including Sisters, Cojourners, the Mayor and persons with a variety of cultural and faith backgrounds and from various professions.

The historical underpinnings of this form of compassion began much earlier, in 2001, in response to the events of 9/11. An interfaith group met weekly to support and learn from each other teachings and traditions under the Abrahamic religions in Assisi Community Center. In 2006, Sisters and Cojourners organized a pilgrimage of sorts, visiting the sanctuaries under the Tent of Abraham in downtown Rochester. They examined the themes of compassion, forgiveness and mercy by the host denomination, which culminated with the sharing of foods common to that tradition. This then transformed into the Journey of Peace event, which is now in its eighth year.

The most compelling phenomenon is how the Charter for Compassion aligns with the Rochester Franciscan Mission Statement of serving as a compassionate presence. The Charter for Compassion has been affirmed by over 70 diverse communities in the United States and has been initiated in hundreds more in nearly 50 countries since 2009. Though many have already signed, Rochester's efforts have a startling freshness. Every single document presented to the City Council, including the logo, has been created following contemplative thought.

The overall focus of "Compassionate Rochester MN" is the stewardship of the universal values of kindness, love and compassion. Our focus areas are:

- Honoring and supporting compassionate thought and action already existing in our community.
- Growing a culture of compassion as a binding force in our community.
- Creating opportunities for meaningful multigenerational participation in compassionate actions.

The Charter for Compassion transcends all religious, ideological and cultural differences and seeks to enliven the Golden Rule, encouraging each of us to treat all others as we wish to be treated. Compassion is to enter into the suffering of others, while working tirelessly to alleviate the suffering on our horizon. We seek to honor the sanctity of every human being by treating everyone, without exception, with absolute justice, equality and respect. In our chaotic and polarized world, compassion needs to be rooted in our soul, and defined by our words and everyday action.

The Charter states: "We therefore call upon all men and women:

- to restore compassion to the center of morality and religion.
- to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence or disdain is illegitimate.
- to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures.
- to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity.
- to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings - even those regarded as enemies."

by Sister Marlys Jax

We urgently need to make compassion a clean, luminous and dynamic force in our world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to creation of a just economy and peaceful global community. - *excerpts from the Charter for Compassion.*

How is this effort being introduced in Rochester? This past summer, Catholic Charities launched the "Locks of Compassion," a fundraiser on Rochester's Peace Plaza selling padlocks to raise money for their refugee and immigrant program. On September 18, 2017, Mayor Ardell Brede, along with the City Council, signed the Charter for Compassion Resolution to become an official "City of Compassion." Those who gathered for the signing are shown below. It seeks to reflect compassion in its policies, procedures and programming including the "Planning 2 Succeed: Rochester Comprehensive Plan on 2040." October 2, 2017, the committee showed the movie Walk with Me, the journey into mindfulness, featuring Thich Nhat Hanh. Then on October 22, 2017, the "Journey of Peace VIII: Weaving Compassion" was held at Assisi Heights to carry the torch forward in support of personal and communal participation. Many other partners are joining the movement to bring compassion to action. With all the chaos and tensions in our world, mindfulness and compassion are healthy countermeasures.

Grief Ministry: Serving as a Compassionate Presence

In 1952, as I sat in fourth grade class in an army barracks at the Ft. Hood, Texas, elementary campus, my teacher told me to gather my books and leave for the day. Mother, Daddy and five-year-old Phyllis were waiting for me in the car. From the back seat, Mother turned to me and spoke with quivering lips, "Frances, Grandma died."

Daddy's mother, Orny Mae, was gone. We didn't even get to hug, kiss and say goodbye. Life as I knew it, fell into tiny pieces that day. I remember Grandma's funeral, where I sat between Mother and Great-Grandma, sobbing tears into my handkerchief. I wondered how Great-Grandma Dennis felt about losing her daughter. Did she hurt like I hurt? She sat next to me, looking straight ahead at the Baptist preacher.

My next memory is standing in a dark corner between the refrigerator and the wall, feeling angry. We were gathered at Great-Aunt Thelma's house. The tables and counters were covered with home cooked farm food people had brought. The women, preparing the food service, laughed and seemed to enjoy themselves – in my nine-year-old-interpretation. I felt so mad at them for not feeling like me. I felt invisible, all by myself.

For over forty years, I felt this sad little girl crying inside me. No one had encouraged me to talk or asked me why I was so sad. No one knew that grief is a process, that must be nurtured as healing evolves. Perhaps this experience empowered my answering God's invitation to ministry. Learning grief moves in its own time and space, encouraged me to minister with myself and with others; for I learned that if I am to touch others in Christ's Love, I must let myself be touched by His continuous healing grace.

Grief ministry has taught me deeper empathetic presence. Quiet listening gives the person space to reflect or speak, getting in touch with feelings of the loss, she or he is experiencing. Ministry taught me long ago that inner Christ-Silence opens my spiritual ears to other. There is no need to think of what to say. If needed, words will come. It is learning to empty and open my heart-mind to the Holy Spirit. It is recognizing Christ-Presence inside and all around. It is listening through Christ's ears.

Living in Hong Kong, I ministered with a Chinese woman, whose brother had died. We sat on the floor in my counseling room looking at a Medicine Wheel of rocks on the wood floor, reflecting on life's seasons. We shared much silence. Before leaving, she said, "I am a practicing Buddhist, yet, I feel the strong presence of Christ here." I had done nothing more than be in the moment. The living Christ radiated Love and Healing.

Grief ministry in St. Patrick's Catholic Community, where my husband, Urb, and I belong, is actively facilitated throughout the year. Men and women in the group gather from the parish, as well as from the greater community. Some continue year-round, for that is the time they need. As each group gathers in circle around the open scripture, crucifix and candle, sharing becomes prayer that flows through the circle, soothes and comforts the hurting spirits of each of us gathered there. They know there is no set time for grieving, and that they need others to hear and tell their stories of love and loss.

Looking back on my loneliness as a nine-year-old child, I have experienced mercy, forgiveness and healing for the loss of Grandma's stories, hugs and laughter. I still miss her. I still talk to her and see her making the yummy sourdough biscuits each morning. When I knead, bake and smell sourdough bread, I think of her.

When I was coordinator of Pastoral Care at Assisi Heights, we always were experiencing loss and ministering with one another. Members of that pastoral care team, Sisters Caroline, Fidelis and Cabrini, are now praying for us in Heaven. They, and all the Sisters I've known since 1970, have led me to befriending my process, and allowing myself to feel the loss, for as long as I need.

Christ Ministry flows through me and returns multiplied. Thank you, Rochester Franciscans and Cojourners, for sharing my journey.

Cojourner Fran Weidner

Experiencing Compassion Within the Spectrum of Life

Listening to Cojourners, Judy Dawley and Mary Doucette, share their life experiences of providing listening ears and compassionate presence to persons at either end of the spectrum of life – children and elderly—was a gift, the gift of awesome respect for their compassion that brings healing. Judy's ministry as a child therapist provides her the outlet for her passion of healing traumatized children. She has the compassion to sit in silence for many hour-long sessions before trust develops for a child to respond and open up about the hurt in their lives. Mary Doucette described her ministry with older adults providing a compassionate presence. She discovered that many are depressed with grief of many kinds, and have not been able to talk about it. Accumulated losses over years weighs heavily and is the root of depression. Empathic listening develops the trust that empowers older adults to speak and release the sadness that they have previously been unable to do.

While doing intake with a troubled elder, Mary would hear the person say they "had never told it (their sad story) before." Releasing the pain held in secret comes from the compassionate presence of the attentive listener. Mary developed a Peer Counselor program that today is known as Peer Support group within Elder Network. These peer counselors discover that by their visits and listening, they enable the troubled elder to have courage. One counselor reported, "She knows in her heart what to do but needs the support to do this." Also, these peer support persons realize they cannot change disease, but are there to listen, listen, listen…

Judy acknowledges her special gift of not being afraid to join with the pain and partner with a suffering person. One child, who had been severely abused and placed in foster care, was acting out with agitated anger. Brought in for therapy sessions, the child would cower down in a beanbag, pull a hoodie over himself, and sit in silence. For six months, Judy would sit with the child, coloring, and making small talk before there was some recognition he trusted her. The healing relationship developed that allowed this child to be well enough to be adopted by loving parents who continued to nurture the child with parental love. Out of the hours of compassionate presence evolved a happy young adult doing well in school and life.

Mary and Judy both selflessly offer their compassionate presence to hurting persons. When asked how they renew their inner reservoir of compassion, Judy immediately responded with "prayer, and being in nature, the out-of-doors." She has a therapy dog, Ariel, named after the angel Ariel who is a guardian of children. Also, Judy enjoys her horses. The dog and the horses are companions for therapy with some children. Mary responded that prayer of gratitude each evening renews her heart. When she considers all the good she has experienced in a given day, she is filled with gratitude. She came to the awareness that with atrial fibrillation, she cannot hold fear and gratitude at the same time. Praying with gratitude nurtures compassion.

The similarity of compassion for persons at both ends of the spectrum of life was evident in the sharing of stories of life experiences shared by Judy and Mary. Judy said, "We can't fix/change what's happened in the child's life. We can, however, help them heal and that starts with helping the child to face the reality of their circumstance, accept the fact that they did not cause the traumatic event, and then provide the emotional and physical safety for them to resolve the myriad of issues related to their trauma. We empower children to use effective life skills to move on to be happy and healthy." Both women have great capacity to accept persons in the disposition they are in when they meet. This affirmation and acceptance of the present moment forms a foundation for compassionate healing. Chronological age does not determine the quality of compassion manifested by these Franciscan women.

by Sister Ramona Miller

Cojourners Mary Doucette (L) and Judy Dawley (R).

The Meaning of Compassion

Pope Francis visited Colombia on September 6-10, 2017, a country that is timidly building its way out of war, finding ways to reconcile by forgiving "what is unforgivable" and "naming what is unnamable." In his visit, Pope Francis met with the victims of war "his most awaited moment" since his arrival: "I come here with respect and with a clear awareness that, like Moses, I am standing on sacred ground (cf. Ex 3:5). A land watered by the blood of thousands of innocent victims and by the heart-breaking sorrow of their families and friends. Wounds that are hard to heal and that hurt us all, because every act of violence committed against a human being is a wound in humanity's flesh; every violent death diminishes us as people."

Pope Francis summons us to persevere in the struggle to promote a "culture of encounter." This requires us to place at the center of all political, social and economic activity the human person, who enjoys the highest dignity, and respect for the common good.

As we as a Congregation prepare for Chapter and are asking ourselves what our mission is personally and communally Pope Francis' words enlighten our reflection: "I ask you, please, to listen to the poor, to those who suffer. Look them in the eye and let yourselves be continually questioned by their faces racked with pain and by their pleading hands. From them we learn true lessons about life, humanity and dignity. For they, who cry out from their shackles, really understand the words of the one who died on the cross, as expressed by the words of your Colombian national anthem."

As I ponder these words, I cannot but think of Sister Margaret Kiefer who has incarnated these words with her life. From El Salvador in times of war, to Haiti, Peru, and Colombia, the poor, the vulnerable, the downtrodden have been her love. One of the most significant ministries of Marg, while living in Bogotá, was her accompaniment of the families in the poor barrios of El Codito. She found those home-bound by illness and visited them, advocating for them by finding health services and professional experts to help them. But moreover she would "go to their encounter," meet them, share with them, bringing them hope and love. She made many friends who carried her up and down the hill, who would invite her in for a meal, who would cry on her shoulder. There she found Luis Hernando (he was 16 years old at the time and is now 33) and his mother. "He had suffered a gunshot wound to his spine by a stray bullet, (one not meant for him), and became paralyzed for life." Luis Hernando and his mother lived on the side of the road in a very precarious situation. Luis's mother, an elderly peasant, could not have a job since she needed to care for her son. And after being in bed for so many years, Luis would get depressed, sick, tired. Marg visited them weekly and befriended them, bringing joy and support into this family. With Marg's help finding and paying for a private teacher, Luis Hernando finished his High School requirements and graduated last year!

Pope Francis… Sister Marg Kiefer… two persons who have truly taught me in very concrete ways the meaning of compassion. I close with a comparison of two of their writings.

WHO IS THERE

Who is there to receive the tears of the mothers
Whose sons have been taken to jail accused
Of participating in the violence wherein fell
A young man of the barrio 'Estrellita'?
Who is there to visit the family
Of the fallen boy; to help
The Father wipe sorrow, confusion
And distress off his face;
To lead four young brothers to
lay down vengeance and to
Walk, pray, beseech the good
And forgiving God to grace them
With the beating of Her heart
In their hearts leading them
To forgive.

- Sister Margaret Kiefer

by Sister M. Carolina Pardo

PRAYER BEFORE THE CRUCIFIX OF BOJAYA

O black Christ of Bojayá,
who reminds us of your passion and death;
together with your arms and feet
they have torn away your children who sought refuge in you.

O black Christ of Bojayá, who looks tenderly upon us and in whose face is serenity;
your heart beats so that we may be received in your love.

O black Christ of Bojayá,
Grant us to commit ourselves to restoring your body.
May we be your feet that go forth to encounter
our brothers and sisters in need;
your arms to embrace those who have lost their dignity;
your hands to bless and console those who weep alone.
Make us witnesses
to your love and infinite mercy.

- Pope Francis

Reprinted from: https://zenit.org/articles/meeting-for-national-reconciliation-in-villavicencio-colombia/

Fond memories of Sister Marg Kiefer serving citizens of the Barrios in Bogotá

50 Year Jubilarians

Standing, left to right: Sisters Barbara Goergen, Andrea Turbak, and Linda Wieser

Always be lovers of God and the souls of your sisters and brothers.

-Clare of Assisi

Mother Alfred Legacy Society

As I reflect on the compassionate presence that is embodied within the Sisters of Saint Francis, I find myself filled with gratitude for this community of wise, holy and joyful women. In doing so, I'd like to extend an invitation to join the Mother Alfred Legacy Society.

Mother Alfred Moes

Named after the Foundress of the Sisters of Saint Francis, the newly formed Mother Alfred Legacy Society honors those individuals and families who value the mission of the Sisters of Saint Francis and their continuance into the future by remembering the Sisters in their wills or estate plans.

Gifts to the Mother Alfred Legacy Society are acts of hope for the future. Your legacy gift is a most important type of gift for the Sisters of Saint Francis. Through God's grace and your generosity, the Sisters of Saint Francis will be equipped to be a compassionate presence in our world for years to come.

Why a legacy gift? Estate planning is important for everyone.

Legacy gifts offer the following benefits:

Simplicity. Just a few sentences in your will or trust are all that is needed.

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Have you already named the Sisters of Saint Francis in your will or estate? We would love to honor and thank you. Members of the Mother Alfred Legacy Society will be remembered through a monthly Mass intention, invited to special events, and recognized in the Interchange magazine and on our website. Please contact the Office of Development to learn more about becoming a member of the Mother Alfred Legacy Society.

If you are considering a legacy gift to the Sisters, we can help. Contact the Sisters of Saint Francis Office of Development for gift planning information and resources.

You, the family and friends of the Sisters, make possible their impact on our world.

Thank you.

Make a Gift Today

The Mission of the Sisters of Saint Francis of Rochester, Minnesota is to be a compassionate presence for peace in our world, striving for justice and reverence for all creation. Our ministries include praying for the needs of our world in the silence of the chapel and daily in our homes; ministering in hospitals and hospices; eliminating social injustice; providing support to immigrants and working to end human trafficking; volunteering at Dorothy Day Centers and social agencies in our local communities; ministering to those with addictions and those imprisoned; providing education in schools and serving as spiritual guides.

Your generosity allows us to continue these ministries as well as maintaining our home, Assisi Heights, which provides care for our retired Sisters. In addition, we welcome hundreds of people each year, who come to Lourdes Chapel for prayer, liturgy and reflection, or to Assisi Heights Spirituality Center for educational programs or retreats.

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Christmas on the Hill

AN UMBRIAN CELEBRATION

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Feel the joyous noel!

Saturday, December 2, 2017 at 6:30 p.m.

Party in the Parlors…Festive surroundings and Christmas carol sing-along.
Pray in the Chapel…Celebrate Holden Evening Prayer, a Christmas on the Hill favorite. The story of the Nativity will come to life.
Enjoy heavenly treats…Italian appetizer buffet and gourmet dessert bar, with sparkling wines and waters.

$50 per person, reservations required.
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