A Contemplative Approach

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Sisters of Saint Francis

Focus: A Contemplative Approach

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editor
Kathy Gatliff

layout/design
Ben Sebesta

cover photo
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telephone: (507) 282-7441
fax: (507) 282-7762
info@rochesterfranciscan.org
www.rochesterfranciscan.org

1001 14th Street Northwest
Rochester, MN 55901

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Letter from the President

Sister Ramona Miller

Dear Friends and Companions,

A summer evening stroll gazing up at the full moon lifts my mind above the entangled review of the day's activities, toward the expansiveness of the universe. While considering the limitless sky, my body seems lighter and my heart has more joy. Life is good! Such an experience attunes us to contemplation. Richard Rohr says *"Contemplation allows us to experience the reality of our participation in God's nature for ourselves."* As a young religious, I labored under the false notion that contemplation was for those religious who lived cloistered lives dedicated to prayer, like the Poor Clares who are now in residence at Assisi Heights. But I have come to know that living with a quiet heart, attuned to God's Presence, is the meaning of contemplative living. The true reality for a happy life is living contemplatively, paying attention to the smallest messages of goodness that are around us.

All prayer opens us to experiencing God right where we are, in whatever context our life's calling places us. This contemplative approach to living honors our five senses, acknowledging the goodness of God. God's revelation comes to us through what we see, hear, taste, smell and touch. St. Bonaventure taught that, when we are in harmony with our created condition, the universe serves as "a ladder by which we can reach out to God."

In this issue of *Interchange*, we explore the dimension of contemplative living as it shapes the ways we relate to our property, our decision-making, and our social justice concerns and more. Preserving the natural beauty of 72 acres of land at Assisi Heights in a Conservation Easement respects the need we have for sacred space that awakens our senses to the Source of all Goodness.

St. Paul prayed, "May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened." As the eyes of our hearts are enlightened, our contemplative approach becomes more habitual in our decision-making. We listen more attentively to others' contributions in conversation, we ponder and reflect more before reacting to new suggestions, and we feel the grace of God's life with us and within us. Deepened reverence for creation spills over into actions to advocate for the reversal of global warming and other societal concerns.

A contemplative approach to life engages us in the ongoing process of rebuilding the house of God.

Sister Ramona Miller

Sister Ramona Miller, OSF
Congregational Minister

Contemplative Decision-Making

L to R: Sister Charlotte Hesby, Cojourner Barb Agerter, Sister Karen Collette, Sister Marisa McDonald and Sister Jan Reisdorf

"Without a doubt, living from within is not a luxury, rather it is our vocation." [1]
- Maria Elena Martinez, OSF

The form of our communal decision-making has changed over the years. Because we are a religious community, communal decisions have always been made in the context of prayer; but the process has evolved in recent years to be more consciously contemplative in nature. Two primary sources of this change are a more sophisticated understanding of how groups interact and the growing interest in a contemplative approach to life. With contemplative dialogue in the decision-making process, a more wholistic and Spirit-led outcome may emerge.

"Contemplative" in this context means bringing prayerful silence, attentive listening, and open-heartedness to the entire process, so that our engagement with an issue comes from deep within, not simply from our ideas about it. It presumes a willingness to allow not only our *ideas*, but *ourselves* to be changed by the dialogue. This is a major presumption, but at the heart of a religious community is the desire for the Spirit to transform us both individually and collectively.

As our Community gathers for deliberations, we invite ourselves into this open space of contemplative dialogue. After a brief prayer asking for the guidance of the Spirit, we sit together in silence, allowing the stillness to permeate us. Silence is an essential element in contemplative dialogue. It sets the stage for attentive listening and calls us to a participation that is permeated by the Spirit. We may pause at different moments of the process to once again enter the silence. This is especially necessary when we have hit a point of impasse. The silence reminds us of the Spirit's presence and enjoins us to stay with the process when we might want to escape by walking away, shutting down or simply giving in. None of these choices honors the importance of the decision, nor brings the Community forward along its desired path of transformation into God and service to the world.

Within a contemplative dialogue, all participants have an opportunity to speak; no one dominates and no one remains silent. The process may include multiple rounds of conversation and silence so that the group gradually spirals deeper into the issue; each

Image courtesy of Pixabay.com

participant ever more aware of the attitudes, fears, hopes, questions and insights active at this moment. Each round of conversation requires increased receptivity and deeper letting go.

> *"With practice, we learn to encounter one another's thinking from the interior level of contemplative listening where we have the capacity to hold multiple perspectives and welcome differences without reactive judgments."* [2]
>
> *- Liz Sweeney, CSJ*

Before we reach a conclusion, we may well remain in a place of impasse, not because of disagreement, but because all is still too unclear. We may need to allow the issue to remain unsettled for a time. This leads us into the difficult place of choosing to trust that the Spirit is continuing to work in us. Meanwhile, we wait, allowing the darkness of the in-between spaces to be fertile with unseen, unfelt movements. This waiting, too, is integral to the contemplative process.

When the waiting appears complete, we move ahead. Now is the time for decision-making. We gather the best wisdom from all the members, note the direction we seem to be leaning, and make a tentative decision. Once that decision is reached, it is tested. We imagine it operating and then ask: How does this feel? Does it build up the Community and the world or does it tear it down? Does it resonate with our hopes or feed our fears? Is it consistent with our mission, our understanding of ourselves? If our answers to these questions show our decision likely to move the Community forward in grace, into deeper communion with God and the world, we will move ahead with the decision.

All through the process, we trust that the Spirit is guiding and will continue to guide the actions that follow from the deliberations. Each step unfolds into the next, each requiring trust that we are and will be led by the Spirit.

[1] *"Living from the Great Deep Is Our Vocation," p. 15, The Occasional Papers, a publication of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Summer 2015*

[2] *"Moving Into Deeper Communion: Communal Discernment Through Contemplative Dialogue," pg. 5, The Occasional Papers, a publication of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Summer 2015*

Contemplating the Future: Establishing a Conservation Easement

The property known as Assisi Heights was formed from two acquisitions that the Sisters of Saint Francis made in 1949: the plot of approximately 51 acres owned by the Mayo Properties Association known as the Dr. L.B. Wilson Walnut Hill Farm, and adjoining property of approximately 88 acres of land known as the Klein farm. Over the years, small parcels had been sold to Samaritan Bethany Nursing Home, which is now owned by Minnesota Adult & Teen Challenge, and Hiawatha Homes.

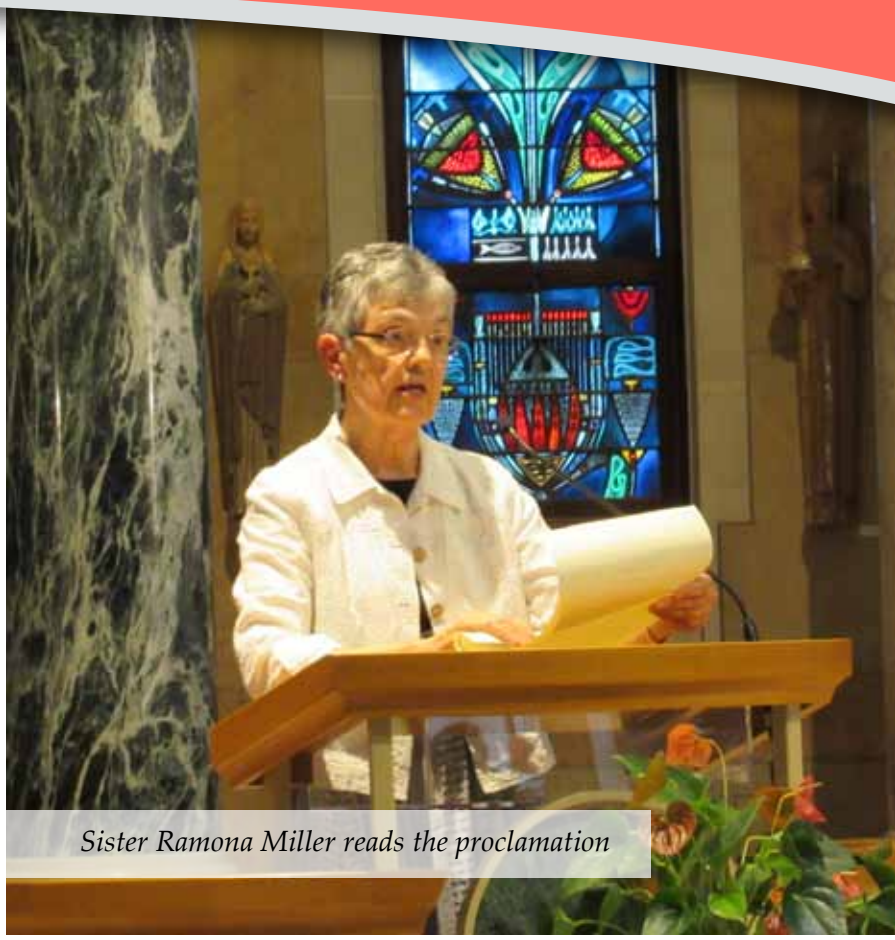
The Sisters of Saint Francis have always maintained the natural condition of the hillside slopes and desired that the Green Space be maintained and preserved as an example of Franciscan care for nature. In 2017, a proposal from a committee of Sisters was presented to the Congregational Chapter Meeting (decision-making body) requesting that a Task Force be established to consider placing the whole or a portion of the Assisi Heights property in a Conservation Easement.

Reasons for pursuing an easement included that the Sisters: 1) would participate in the worldwide effort toward sustainability of the planet; 2) would deepen their awareness of and contribution to the physical, mental, and spiritual health of all by safeguarding fresh air, natural beauty, ecological interaction with animals, plants, trees, and a place of beauty for the city of Rochester and all who come here from around the world; and 3) promote Franciscan spirituality following Saint Francis' teaching to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.

A Conservation Easement is a legal document that places restrictions on land use, protecting it for future generations whether the property is sold or passed on to heirs. Such a document potentially reduces the sale value of the property. Before preparing for the filing of the conservation easement, it is necessary to have

a surveyor prepare an accurate description of the boundary lines of the property. One amusing thing we discovered was that the original property lines included some land underneath the roadway known as Assisi Heights Drive, so an accurate legal description of the property needed to prepared and filed in the Olmsted County Property Records Office.

Lawyers familiar with real estate transactions were engaged to prepare the document outlining the portion of our property we desired to place in the conservation easement. The exact lines for approximately 72.14 acres were identified and included the Motherhouse (the main building with its chapel) the grounds to the south and west that provide an unobstructed view of the Motherhouse, and the Wilson House, which was the former home of Dr. and Mrs. Louis Wilson. Learning that the animals are not considered real property and yet desiring to protect their habitat, the Conservation Easement reads



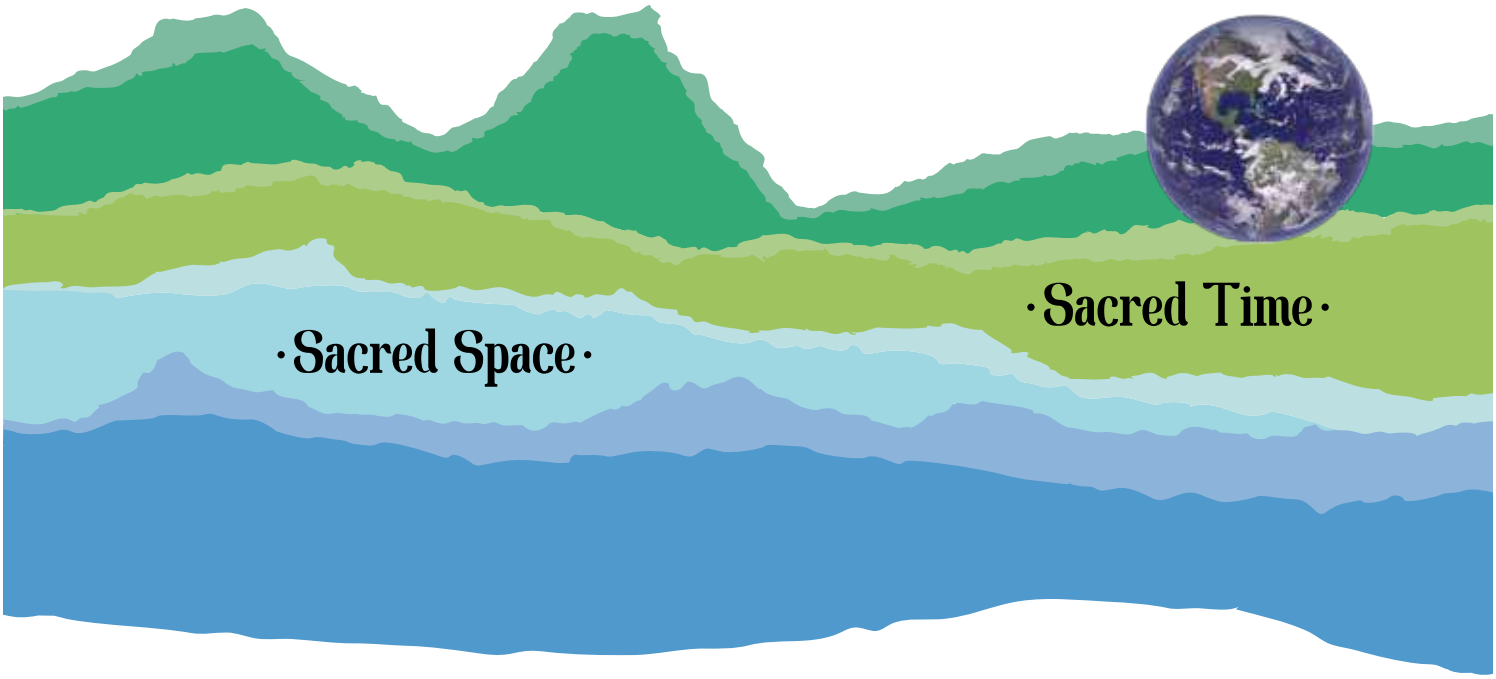
Sister Ramona Miller reads the proclamation

Yellow lines intersecting the blue boundaries indicate the conservation easement.

"the Green Space be maintained and preserved as an example of the Franciscan care for nature and a home for animals and birds."

A proclamation of the Conservation Easement occurred on July 18 during a Prayer Service in Lourdes Chapel at the beginning of the Summer Gathering of Sisters and Cojourners. The announcement concluded with the declaration that "this property will serve as a lasting reminder of the many significant charitable and cultural contributions made by the members of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Francis, and that this Green Space shall be maintained as a natural resource, a place of quietude, and suitable habitat for a wide variety of plants, animals and birds, in perpetuity."

An Invitation to Journey Through Our Gathering



The warmest week in July found the Rochester Franciscan Sisters and Cojourners gathered at Assisi Heights. The days were designed to celebrate "Sacred Space, Sacred Time." We were fortunate to have Sister Mary Elizabeth Imler, OSF, as our guest presenter. She provided us with the gift of viewing our world from the minutest form of life into the far reaches of the cosmos. Our Sacred Space is within the realities of our existence, with a view into the future. Our Sacred Time together gave us a new view of the importance of not only **our** global impact, but also the critical nature of **our** actions on behalf of all creation. Sister Mary Elizabeth invited us to a time of reflection on several questions, inviting us to enter more fully into our Franciscan calling:

- *When did you first fall in love and respect for our sister, Mother Earth, and all creation? How does it continue to impel your desires and shape your living?*
- *How does the direction of our foundress, Mother Alfred Moes, offer an example of gospel conversion in living, loving, knowing how to follow in the footprints of Jesus?*
- *Having read the encyclical of Pope Francis, Laudato Si', what is the message for us, knowing that we are present in these times?*

An extended period of quiet time was offered for reflection on those questions and others that related to identify one's own Sacred Space… the space that is carried within us… that space where one finds the presence of God's voice in the contemplative dance of life. Where does the voice of God come to you?

The time moved quickly and the Spirit's presence was palpable throughout the Heights. Since it was blistering hot outside, with high temperatures and humidity, those in attendance had to seek places where air conditioning was present -- survival was the goal! Later in the afternoon, small randomly-assigned groups of Sisters and Cojourners gathered to share the *sacred time* of their reflection. The richness of the sharing was expressed. This will continue during the year ahead through the newly formed sharing circles. We will provide these small groups with thought-provoking articles, questions and challenges for

Scenes from our journey through Sacred Space, Sacred Time

Sister Jennifer Corbett leads us in prayer.

Standing: Sisters Wanda Mettes & Ruth Snyder
Seated: Cojourners Marty Cormack & Rosemary Van Houten

Cojourners Cathy Tisel Nelson, Ellen Stelling, and potential candidate Kathy Woytych.

Sister Joan Brown, Kathy Bohn Keene, Sister Cecily Schroepfer, Ginny Swenson, and Cojourner Eileen Lundy gather in remembrance of former Sister, Pat Sablatura.

Sister Marlene Pinzka co-presents on ways to use investments to make a positive change in our world.

our spiritual enrichment, led by our congregational leadership.

This journey through our gathering is an invitation for you to join us, looking more intentionally at how we mutually have a global impact. Together, we must take time to reflect and ponder the questions stated above. What one action will ***you*** consider? As you come to know more of the impact of the products you purchase, think of how you will dispose of the items you do not need, that have come into your home. When will you contact individuals or groups who work with the concerns you have in order to make change?

Carry the words and intention of St. Francis as a challenge, knowing he "did what was his to do" in his day. He asks us to identify and move forward with "what is ours to do" today.

Consider focusing on your commitment to setting aside some *Sacred Time* to engage in your *Sacred Space*. How does the meaning of Sabbath, whatever your tradition, become part of a day, or a full day, absent work activity to enjoy a time that is creative and refreshing? Upon your return from that time with God, you will be able to say, "and that was good."

Reflections on the Burning Cathedral

Cathedral de Notre Dame before the fire

Image courtesy of Pixabay.com

The morning I heard that the Cathedral of Notre Dame had burned, many thoughts rushed through me. When I saw pictures of the steeple toppling, many feelings overcame me, including sadness for this holy sanctuary that holds the footsteps and prayers of so many pilgrims and Parisians.

I remembered the last time I was in Notre Dame. I sat in this magnificent church, in 2015, with pilgrims from all over the world who were attending the 2015 U.N. Climate Change Conference of Parties. Beauty, art, music and prayers surrounded me during an interfaith prayer. We prayed for our Earth, we prayed for world leaders to take bold stands to address climate justice.

That convergence of 195 nations at the United Nations Paris climate meeting resulted in a too-long-awaited climate agreement to move humanity to take action to reduce carbon emissions and to limit a global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

As people gathered around the world in tears over the destruction of Notre Dame, they rallied within 48 hours, collecting pledges and donations totaling close to a billion dollars. The president of France pledged to repair the Cathedral within five years.

Some of the Navajo and Pueblo indigenous people that I work with in New Mexico speak of the Earth as their church, their cathedral. What should we think about the 2018 sobering report unveiled by the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, stating that we have about 10 years to stop irreversible climate change?

Our Earth is burning. Our sacred "Sister Mother Earth who sustains and governs us" (St. Francis of Assisi) is on fire. We see the sacred spires of trees in the Amazon falling to fire, the baptismal fonts of rivers and lakes languishing in drought and pollution, the daily Eucharistic altars of family tables in Honduras,

by Sister Joan Brown

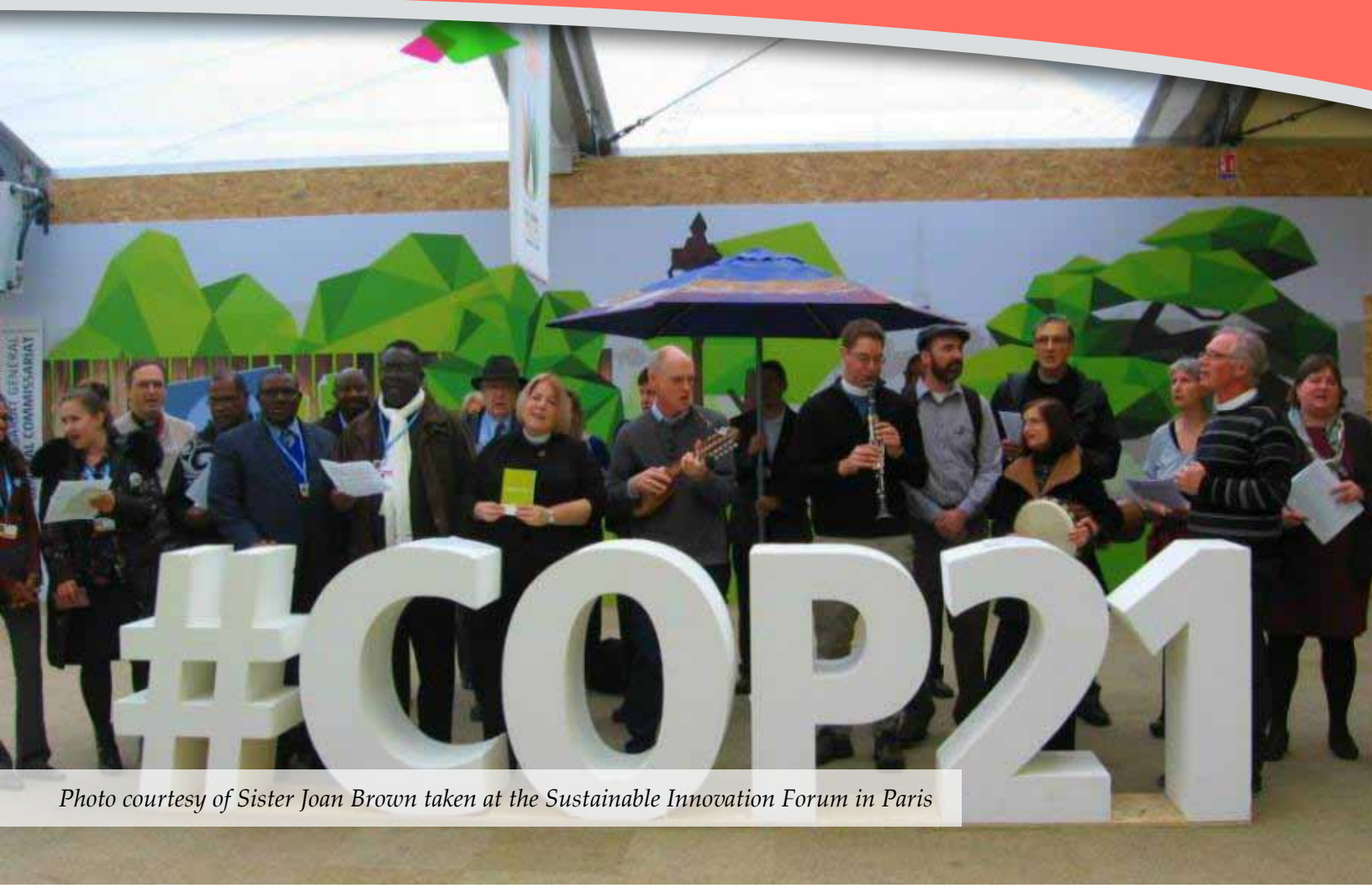


Photo courtesy of Sister Joan Brown taken at the Sustainable Innovation Forum in Paris

El Salvador and Guatemala empty of food for children, and we stand before the death beds of species becoming extinct as we act as hospice-midwives. But all seems very quiet compared to the millions of sorrowful onlookers mourning Notre Dame. Where are the mourners for the Earth? Where are the billions of dollars for efforts like the Green Climate Fund to address adaptation to and mitigation of climate change?

St. Francis of Assisi heard God speak during one of his moments of conversion. "Go and rebuild my church which is falling in ruins." He immediately began the physical rebuilding of the stone structure of San Damiano. In the ashes of Notre Dame, good-hearted people pledge to rebuild the cathedral. Early in the reconstruction of San Damiano, St. Francis realized that he had misunderstood God. His work was to rebuild the soul of the church that groaned under the strain of abuse and sin. Although there is no doubt that Notre Dame will be structurally rebuilt, are we being offered another message to stop the burning of our Earth?

Young people all over the world are calling for radical action to address global warming, so that they might have a livable future. Choirs singing within the cathedral are being replaced by children singing on the streets, their voices echoing around the world. In New Mexico, some concerned children created a club several years ago, "The Global Warming Express." Last week, they changed their name to "The Global Warming Emergency" or WE for short. Fire alarms are reverberating through our churches, synagogues, mosques and halls of political power. There is an emergency, and only WE can put out the fire and repair our cathedral, our beautiful Earth, that is moving toward ruin.

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We are All Called to be Mystics

by Marion Kaple, Cojourner

Mysticism is a word that has a variety of meanings and interpretations, across many religious and cultural traditions, and has come down through centuries of time to our own generation. In the Christian tradition, mysticism has been generally defined as an experiential awareness of or conscious communion with God. It is a word that has been misunderstood, seems esoteric, scary and certainly not one we would embrace as applying to ourselves.

And yet, Karl Rahner, SJ, a theologian many of us remember from the Vatican II era and onward, famously wrote: "In the days to come, we will all be mystics, or we will be nothing at all." [1] There was a time when I did not understand this quote. But over the years, as my own inner life evolved, I have come to know what he meant and will try to unpack it in what follows.

Richard Rohr, in his extensive writings, has developed the theme that our spiritual life is similar to our physical life, in that we move from an infancy stage, where we are completely dependent, through our formative years to our full maturity. This spiritual development is reflected in our prayer life. In spiritual infancy, our prayers are childlike. "Now I lay me down to sleep" is one we all learned. In our formative years, we progressed to memorized and formulary prayers, to private and reflective prayers, and to an understanding and love of the rich liturgical and sacramental rituals of our faith. In our spiritual maturity, we have come to know and love God at a devotional and intellectual level; however, even this may seem not enough and we yearn to know God at a deeper level. We experience an underlying thread of spiritual restlessness and longing for something more, a deeper level of "knowing" God. As the psalmist says: "As the deer yearns for running water, so my soul longs for you O God..." Ps. 42.

Karl Rahner speaks to this as well, "as a mysticism of everyday life, (which) is a recognition... that everyday life contains... the eternal and silent mystery, which we call God and (God's) secret grace... it is the undertow, the vector or implicit call to holiness found in every person's deepest interior." [2] Further, Rahner says that these everyday experiences open our hearts to a more profound, deeper path, found in apophatic prayer, that is in "prayer without words," in deep, interior silence that opens us to an invitation to the intentional experience of the presence of God within ourselves and all of creation.

In recent years, contemplative prayer has been reintroduced to the greater Christian community outside the monastery walls.

This prayer form does not replace our rich tradition of discursive prayer, liturgical prayer, and private prayer. But it does deeply enrich our spiritual lives through opening our intuitive faculties and patterning our life in new ways that can change us. A practitioner of prayer without words begins to recognize "something new" in one's life—a love of interior silence, an expansive understanding of our connectedness with God and all creation, a reduction in either/or thinking and a new capacity for both/and thinking. In a word, as James Finley says, we are "beginning the journey of moving through the narrow gate of our soul into the God-given nature of ourselves" [3] and "God is awakening us to our God-given Godly nature in God," and together with God, "we are awakening to the urgency of love... to live in God living in us." We are being transformed as our Divine nature becomes more fully manifest.

[1] Rahner, Karl. "Christian Living Formerly and Today," *Theological Investigations VII* (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1971) p. 15

[2] Mary Steinmetz, *"Thoughts on the Experience of God in the Theology of Karl Rahner: Gifts and Implications,"* Lumen et Vita, (Vol. 2, 2012), p. 5.

[3] Rohr, Richard. *Following the Mystics Through the Gate, Seeing God in All Things - DVD.* Featuring Richard Rohr, James Finley, and Cynthia Bourgeault. (Albuquerque, NM: Center for Action and Contemplation, 2003) Disc 3 of 4.

Assisi Heights: Powerful House of Prayer *by Sister Christine Stanoch*

Photo courtesy of Cojourner Pat Mahoney

We, the Sisters of Saint Francis, have welcomed thousands of people to join us in various celebrations, attend programs in the Spirituality Center, and enjoy a walk on the grounds at Assisi Heights. At night, it is truly a beautiful sight to see the lights of the city from atop this hill. It reminds us that those lights represent many people… those vibrant with life welcoming others to our community, those carrying burdens, those suffering from illness, and others still facing difficult decisions.

Now take a look at the majestic bell tower of Lourdes Chapel at Assisi Heights. It has become a beacon of light, viewed far and wide, in and around the city of Rochester. As the old saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand *words*." But in this case, it might be appropriate to revise the saying to, "a picture is worth a thousand *prayers*."

The lights of the tower serve as a beacon against the darkness. Through the prayers of the Sisters, this light represents hope and love for our world. It is our desire that this light will remind all of the *power of prayer*, which we wish to share with all who seek peace.

If you wish to ask the Sisters for a special prayer, please select the "Prayer Request" button on our home page at www.rochesterfranciscan.org, or call and leave a message on the prayer line at 507-529-3539.

We wish you peace!

A Contemplative Approach to Healing Society's Ills

Sister Jennifer Corbett admires gladiolas at Assisi Heights

When asked to write a contemplative piece exploring how to address justice and peace issues in today's world, my observations can be summed up in in four separate reflections.

Part One

"Be modest about what you are doing, be modest in your expectations of what your acts of witness will accomplish, be modest about who you are. Do your best but get used to failure. It's God who made the world and God who saves it, not you. But be confident that whatever you do to safeguard life is not wasted."

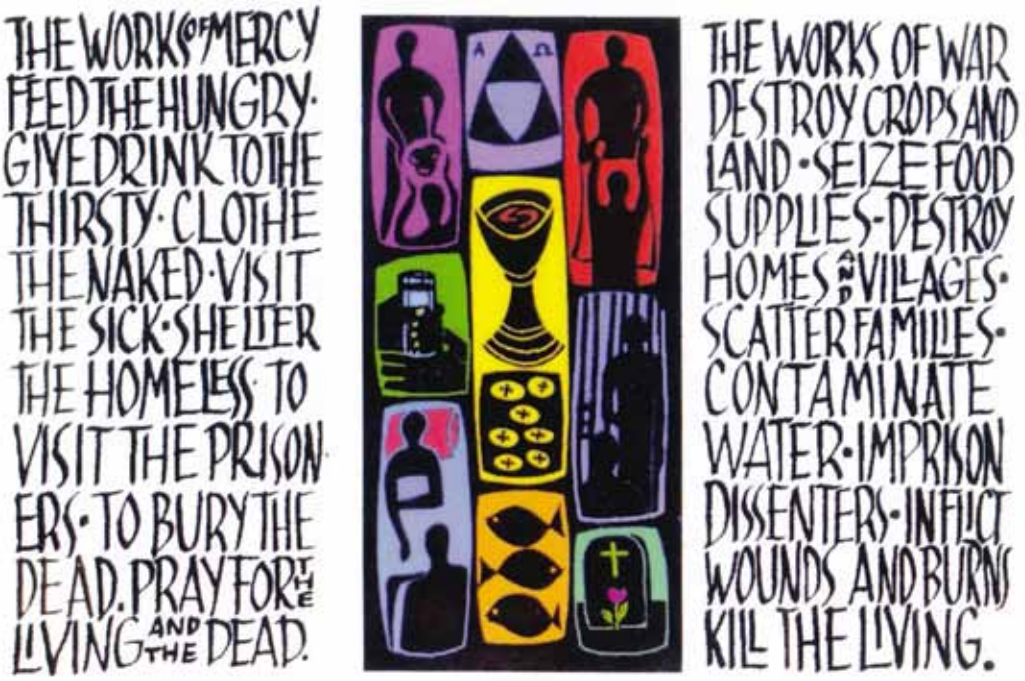
At Play in the Lions' Den: A Biography and Memoir of Daniel Berrigan, p.310

Part Two

May 14, 2019 — I am walking out of Saint Marys Hospital, to my car parked in "Reserved Parking" for Assisi Heights' cars. Head down, I am recalling visits with our Sisters. Then, I notice 4 boxes along the sidewalk filled with plastic bottles of all different sizes. I stop and ask the gentle man who is unloading buckets of gladiolas, "What do all these plastic bottles have in common?" "They are vases," he replies. I am in the company of John Meyer from Elgin, Minnesota. "We bring our gladiolas to the hospital to give away to the patients and visitors. We stand at the Information Desk and offer them. We used to farm, but now we do this. We come several times during the growing season." In the back of his SUV are at least 6 more buckets of splendid, proud gladiolas.

Having breathed the air of capitalism for so long, I immediately wondered what all this cost him: what happened to potential profit? "I have hybridized many gladiolas and about 40 are registered. I name them after my grandchildren, children and… My wife and granddaughter should be coming soon to get more." Barbara Meyer and her granddaughter arrive with an empty wheelchair and place four more buckets to take inside. Barbara gives me their "business" card, and states, "We give the cards and an angel clip with the flowers." On the bottom of the card is a quote from Matthew:

> *"And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies (flowers) of the field, how they grow. They do not labor nor do they spin, but I say to you that not even*



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Solomon in all his glory was clothed as one of these."
Matt. 6:28-29

Part Three

I am now the Promoter of Justice and Peace for our community of Cojourners and Sisters. This is a new responsibility for me. By temperament, I have high expectations. I could make this very complicated and miss the mark of the work: daily conversion and building of the reign of God. On social media, there is so much information to read, petitions to sign, webinars to attend , requests from other groups and religious communities to join… What I have decided to do is bring my daily, opening of Morning Prayer to this important work. "O God, give me pause before I open my mouth that I may love, hear, and speak your Holy Word this day."

"Open the book of Jeremiah and you do not find a person looking for inner peace… rather mountains and valleys. That kind of richness I find very appealing, whereas the spirituality that looks for a flat emotional landscape brought on by the endless search for inner peace and equanimity, I find disturbing, a quest that goes nowhere."

At Play in the Lions' Den, p. 289

Part Four

The Works of Mercy

As children, many Catholics memorized the "Works of Mercy." Fittingly, the card shown above, from the *Catholic Worker* newspaper, places "The Works of War" also alongside this image. Practicing the Works of Mercy will counteract the cruelty and self-sufficiency of which each of us are capable. Opportunities for Good and Evil are in front of us - at our own personal borders. Let us choose the Good.

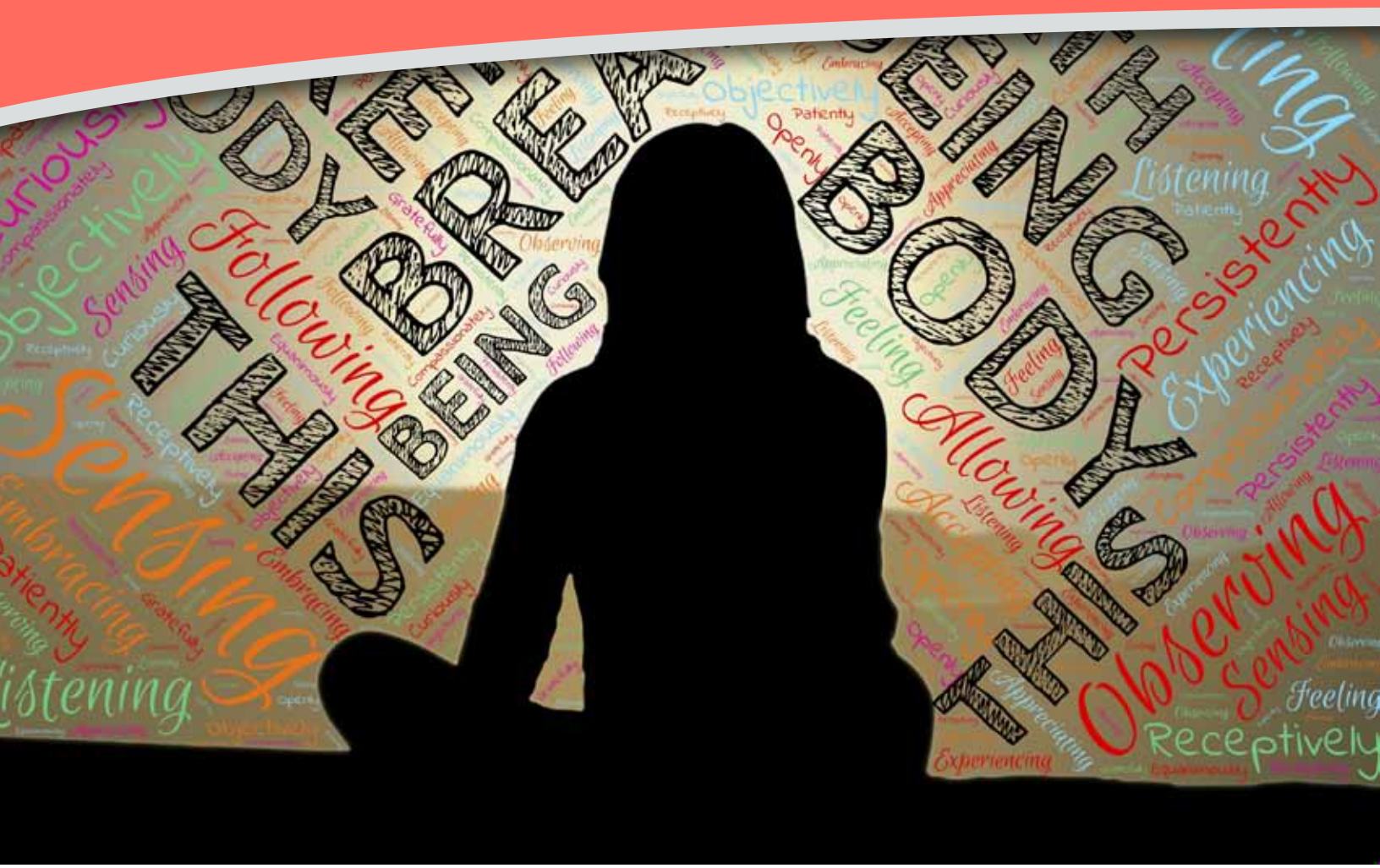
"Be confident that whatever you do to safeguard life is not wasted."

Part Five:

For you to offer your contemplative thoughts…

Forest, Jim. At Play in the Lions' Den: A Biography and Memoir of Daniel Berrigan. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017.

Centering Prayer – The Experience of Being Engulfed in a Divine State



Images courtesy of Pixabay.com

Question: *Where on earth do I go to experience this Divine State?*
Answer: *… where breath meets a quiet rhythm,*
… where the spirit meets soul,
… where the mind meets silence,
… where the heart meets the Creator!

You won't need a credit card and you won't have to wait for the automated response, "You have been approved." You already are! One such opportunity lies in Centering Prayer. You only have to submit yourself to the present moment and to God. Centering Prayer is resting in the presence of God.

Centering Prayer came into practice as a new form of contemplative prayer through the collaboration of Fathers Thomas Keating, Basil Pennington and William Menninger under the inspiration of their fellow Trappist, Father Thomas Merton, and their mutual reflections on the 14th century classic, *"The Cloud of Unknowing." The Cloud* makes clear the ineffability of the encounter with God, which is always the work of the Spirit, not ours. Our work is to let go of all attempts to find God through our thoughts and intellectual understanding. Instead, we choose a single-focused dart of desire for God, while we wait in the darkness of unknowing.

The developers of Centering Prayer utilized *The Cloud's* preference for wordless, affective presence as the basis of their prayer-form. They chose to skip past the process of sacred reading and reflection which had been the classical form of preparation for the silence of contemplation. By substituting the repeated word or phrase as the entry point to silence, they simplified the entire process and made it more accessible to anyone.

The practice of Centering Prayer is a sort of "boot camp" or initiation to meditation and/or contemplation. Centering Prayer is one of many approaches. It is the place where peace and quiet meet. Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence. In order to hear the language of God, we must learn to be still and to rest in God. The allure of this relationship comes into being in quiet. The intent is to be totally available to the divine source within.

The steps to the practice are simple:

1) Choose a sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action in you.
2) Sit comfortably with eyes closed and silently introduce your sacred word as symbol of your consent to the God within (1-2 syllable words are best).
3) When thoughts or distractions enter your mind, let them go and return to your word. Thoughts are natural and abundant (e.g., call the kids, do the laundry). The hope is to let go and, as with a windshield wiper, wipe it away and return to your word.
4) The setting is hushed. Breath is in sync. Be ready!
5) At the end of the 15-20 minutes of sitting, close with a slow recitation of your favorite prayer.

The prayer usually begins with the sound of a singing Tibetan bowl and a curtain of quiet. It ends with a clasp of the heart. In between, one's spirit descends to the depths of contemplation, for silence is the vehicle that takes us to the center of our being. May you surrender to the unknown unfolding of God in the covenant of love.

The relationship will unfold where silence bends.

"There is a higher kind of listening
Which is not an attentiveness to a particular wavelength,
A receptivity to a certain kind of message,
But a general emptiness that waits to realize the message of God
Within our own particular void.
Because I know that I can never expect or anticipate
The word that will transform my darkness into light,
I do not even anticipate a special kind of transformation.
I do not demand light instead of darkness.
I wait on the Word of God in silence
And when I am 'answered',
It is not so much by a word that bursts into my silence,
It is by silence itself suddenly,
Inexplicably, revealing itself to me as a word of great power,
full of the voice of God."

- *The Climate of Monastic Prayer* by Thomas Merton

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In Memoriam

Sister Baptiste Fish (January 25, 1928 - May 30, 2019)

It was while attending the College of St. Teresa (CST) in Winona, that Shirley Elaine Fish developed a deep admiration and love for the Franciscan Sisters. Sister Baptiste's active ministry years cross a large landscape of positions and places. She ministered as a teacher; an assistant to our Community Secretary, Sister Mary Keating; accounting manager; assistant to Congregational Treasurer, Sister Adele O'Neil; and as supervisor of accounting staff for several nursing homes. As her parents aged, Sister Baptiste spent more and more time helping them. After her mother's death in 1987, she moved in with her father, eventually leaving her "day job" to care for him full-time. These were "the most blessed years of my life," she said. "And I'm forever grateful to our Community for making it possible."

Sister Casilda Chavez (February 25, 1922 - June 17, 2019)

How did Margaret Mary Chavez, from the southern boundary of Colorado, come to belong to the Rochester Franciscans? When she was speaking with her pastor, he explained that there were various kinds of Sisters—Franciscans, Benedictines or Sisters of Mercy. She was flustered and said the first kind that he mentioned, Franciscans. So he took out the Catholic Directory and randomly chose the name and address of the Sisters of St. Francis in Rochester for her to write to Mother Aquinas. She applied, was accepted. For almost forty years in elementary schools, her small stature, sparkling eyes, warm smile and command of her well organized classroom, were assets and blessings for the children she taught. The excellence of her teaching was known by the principal who received calls from parents of her students who asked that their next son or daughter entering school be placed in Sister Casilda's classroom.

Sister Helen Rohlik (January 12, 1931 - April 4, 2019)

Helen entered our Rochester Franciscan community from her home parish in Seaforth, Minnesota, in 1951, and, as Sister Phylis, soon began the teaching she loved. Six happy years teaching in Owatonna were followed by junior high experiences in Austin and Rollingstone and high school teaching in Wilmont, Minnesota. After she was sent to teach at St. Mary's School in Winona, she began to study Classics at the College of Saint Teresa. She obtained her Masters Degree in Latin at the University of Notre Dame in 1967. From there, she went to Norfolk, Nebraska, then back to Rochester, where she taught Latin and English at Lourdes High School. She also taught at the elementary schools in Rochester. She was gifted in working with elderly persons and also with children; eventually taking courses in childcare and becoming a valued caregiver for several families – a service she carried on for several years. Sister Helen moved to Assisi Heights in 1983. She described her volunteer work as a guide for visitors at Mayo Clinic as "amazing and exciting!"

Sister Lorna Helter (December 8, 1916 - May 4, 2019)

There is not another like her! Sister Lorna Helter was a well-seasoned grand lady. All through her career she could be counted on to "close the deal" whether it be in education or sales. Born Mary Elizabeth in 1916, she enjoyed a century plus two years of living. She stacked up sixty-seven years of ministry; thirty-five years teaching and thirty-two years of "managing the store." Later, she received a Fine Arts degree from Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana. She returned to a ministry in education, but this time she realized her gifts were better suited for those older than 6 or 7 years of age. She worked with junior and senior high students in Rochester and Winona. Following her 10-year career as the art instructor, she migrated to a new field as a sales advisor at St. Joseph Cathedral's Book and Gift Shop. Calligraphy was Sister Lorna's specialty. She served as sales associate and artist-in-residence, showcasing many of her own creations: banners, lettered certificates, quilts, crocheted kitchen hand towels, and baptismal smocks. Her friend, Mary Murphy, called her a "woman far ahead of the times." We agree!

Sister Michon Welsh (May 25, 1931 - May 23, 2019)

This talented woman celebrated her 60 years as a Franciscan Sister in various ministries. Michon was a: teacher, principal, liturgist, administrator, musician, environment designer, artist, Pastoral Minister and educator, and Coordinator of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of New Ulm. Working closely with priests, musicians, lay liturgical ministers and volunteers, she brought the liturgies to a level of dynamic worship, appreciated and celebrated in each liturgical season. Michon once stated, "Liturgy has been my ministry for thirty-three years. I know, without a doubt, that I have contributed to the larger mission of Jesus and our community through liturgy... the common prayer of the Church. Through liturgy, we are formed in the mission of Jesus through message, community and service."

How lovely for those found in Your Most Holy Will.
The second death can do them no harm.
Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks,
And serve him with great humility.
(From *Canticle of Creation*)

Contemplating How Music Soothes the Soul

by Sisters Briana McCarthy and Lalonde Ryan

Sisters Lalonde Ryan, Lois Knipp, Martha Mathew and Anne Walch.

Sister Lalonde Ryan leads the Congregation in song.

Every culture has forms of music. Music has the power to transcend words, stories, and even poetry. Like the proverb states, "Whoever sings; prays twice." No wonder we sing our hearts out at our liturgies!

The Rochester Franciscan Community has been gifted with many talented musical artists, including: Sisters Ancille and Genevieve (Violin), Sisters Ethelreda and Cecily (Piano), Sister Lalonde (Voice), and Sister Alice Ann (Composer), and other companions, including Cojourner Cathy Tisel Nelson (Composer, Pianist) who have enhanced our gatherings.

It is well-known that music has a profound effect on both the emotions and the body. One can often concentrate better and feel more alert with fast music, while slower tempos have dramatic effects by lowering our heart rates; breathing becomes less labored, and the racing mind slows down. Harp music, instrumental music with incorporated sounds of nature, and romantic tunes, tend to create moods of relaxation and peacefulness.

There are numerous medical studies showing how music helps reduce stress, anxiety and can even lift depressive moods and states. A study in Italy revealed that listening to Celtic, classical and Indian music for thirty minutes can lower blood pressure, improve memory, and expand attention to details. Other studies have produced "the Mozart Effect," which helps to enhance learning and calms infants in the womb. Then there is Baroque music which has 60 beats per minute. It activates both the right and the left side of the brain, resulting in higher levels of consciousness. "Be Still and Know that I am God," is a favorite mantra. Chanted mantras have become soulful to many. Softly and slowly repeating this mantra, can quickly center the alignment of mind, heart, and Spirit.

Music, a gift of the Spirit, hums in our hearts, draws us to seek harmony, and deeply connects us together as brothers and sisters. Music, the universal language, offers to link the human family beyond our current narratives and conflicts.

From the Archives

by Sister Marisa McDonald

Spotlight on a Franciscan musician who was a master of the universal language of music through the strings of her violin.

Prior to joining the Rochester Franciscans, Sister Ancille Brown spent several successful years as a concert violinist, and was well lauded by music critics.

A discovery in the Congregational Archives this year prompted a remembering of this talented woman. In March 2019, a large photo of the 1920 Chicago Civic Music Student Orchestra was unearthed. On the photo was a note that Mildred Brown (later known as Sister Ancille) was the assistant concert mistress.

During the 2019-2020 season, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is celebrating their 100th anniversary, and so the Orchestra was contacted to see if they would be interested in the photo. They were and the picture (above right) was sent to them. In a thank you note, the Director of the Archives stated that Mildred Brown had been a member of the Civic Orchestra during its first season in 1919-20, and was one of fourteen women on the roster. She was invited to return in 1922-23, this time as concertmaster – the first woman to hold that position in the ensemble.

In May 2019, the Chicago Symphony created an entry for their social media platforms about Mildred Brown/ Sister Ancille, detailing some of her appearances as a concert performer.

And, you may ask, how did this musical talent from Chicago end up with the Rochester Franciscans? I don't know if she was acquainted with the Community before but, in 1923, she came to Winona for a concert, and to teach violin in summer school. That fall, she wrote to Mother Leo of her wish to become a Sister of Saint Francis. She entered in early January 1924, and spent her career as a teacher – at Lourdes High School, the School of Musical Arts in Rochester, and at the College of Saint Teresa.

Golden Jubilarians 50
fifty years

Standing Left to Right: Sisters Kathleen Welscher and Charlotte Hesby
Seated Left to Right: Sisters Mary Anne Ryan and Mary Kay Mahowald

Diamond Jubilarians 75
seventy-five years

Sister Ramona Kruse

From the Office of Mission Advancement *by June Howard, Director*

"For what are the servants of God but his minstrels, whose work it is to lift up people's hearts and move them to spiritual gladness."

-St. Francis of Assisi

Mother Alfred Moes

Thank you for supporting the mission of the Sisters of Saint Francis. Through your kindness, the lives of others are enriched. You are a blessing to so many; to all those who are touched by the ministries of the Sisters as well as the Sisters themselves.

You take your responsibility to heart and it's because of your commitment to the mission that this is all possible. Your faithful generosity allows the Sisters to continue their ministries in our communities, across the United States and beyond our borders. It honors the Sisters who are now retired, that they may live out their years in the comfort and peace of their home. And it's because of your gratitude for this holy environment, where one feels close to God, that hundreds may come each year to Lourdes Chapel for prayer, liturgy and reflection, and to Assisi Heights Spirituality Center for educational programs and retreats.

This past summer a donor sent us the following message:

"I was recently treated for cancer at the Mayo Clinic. I am currently in remission, and am so grateful to Mayo, and the Sisters of St. Francis for the role they played in founding and supporting the care at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. God's hand has played a major role in my healing so far. I prayed in the courtyard outside the Mayo building (where the statues of Mother Alfred and Dr. Mayo are) before my scans, seeking the blessings and expressing gratitude towards the Sisters of St. Francis and the Brothers Mayo for the work of God, and the Mayo doctors in my healing."

The indomitable spirit of Mother Alfred lives on in her congregation of Sisters. The Rochester Franciscans see God revealed in all creation, and they act on the challenges of peace, poverty, and care of our earth. They seek to promote justice, to advocate for the disenfranchised, and to work for peace in the way of Saint Francis. They engage compassionately in the heart of the world and remember each and every one of you in their daily prayers.

Good and gracious God, we ask you to hold our Congregation gently in the palm of Your hand. You have given us Mother Alfred Moes as an example of what one woman could do when led by Your Spirit. May she be a light for our future, as we live out our mission, the plan you have for us. Give us her wisdom so that we may commit our way to You and trust that You will pour out your Spirit upon us.

Amen.

Love, Joy and Peace be with you,

Sisters of Saint Francis
Academy of Our Lady of Lourdes

Communications Department
1001 14th Street NW, Suite 100
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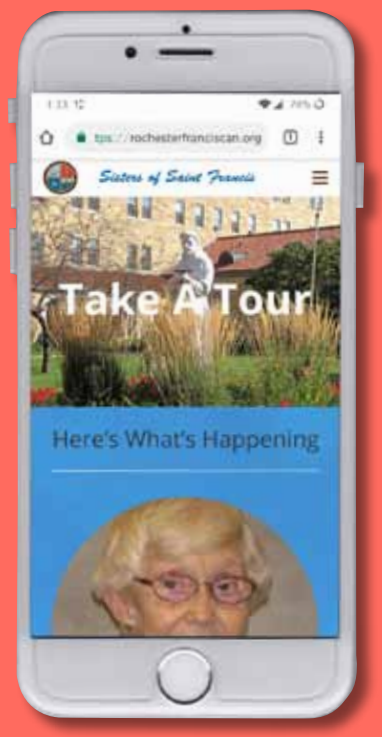

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