Gratitude

Fall 2020

interchange

Sisters of Saint Francis

Focus: Gratitude

interchange

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Letter from the President

Sister Ramona Miller

Dear Friends and Family,

The weeks of social distancing to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 are continuing beyond what we imagined when we began sheltering in place in April and closed Assisi Heights to the public. Accustomed to great socialization opportunities with our Liturgies and shared meals in our large dining room, this restricted time feels awkward to our Franciscan way of life. How do we lift our spirits? With prayers and expressions of gratitude. That's right! Giving God thanks and praise is not directly related to what we might be emotionally experiencing but rather acknowledges the goodness of God's gifts to us: our life, our faith, those who care about us, and the generativity of nature.

The story of Job comes to mind during these times; a man who suffered many calamities and, at first, felt that it would have been better for him not to have lived. Job's friends argued that certainly Job must have done something bad that caused God to punish him. (This thought rises frequently when persons are suffering; that the suffering is punishment for former behavior.) Not so. When God speaks to Job, he reminds Job that God is the God of the universe. Reading chapters 38 and 39 in the book of Job increases awe in us of the breadth of beauty in all of creation. We humbly join Job in a faithful reply that we know that God can do all things, and that no purpose of God can be hindered.

How to pray with renewed hope and confidence in God during hard times? Perhaps using a model of a prayer of Saint Francis would be a choice for us. Francis prayed daily before each of the Liturgy of the Hours a type of litany. For each aspect of faith and appreciation of nature, he would respond "let us praise and glorify God forever." Saying our own spontaneous litany provides a way for us to express all for which we are grateful. We might start by saying, "for the goodness of essential workers providing food for us, let us praise and glorify God forever." Such a litany of gratitude shifts our mind from what we want to complain about to that for which we are to be grateful.

There is beauty all around us; do we see it? The Sisters of Saint Francis continue to experience a renewed sense of beauty of creation during the change of seasons. May we all find our hearts overflowing with gratitude as we daily express our spontaneous litanies of awareness for those aspects of life for which we say "let us praise and glorify God forever."

Sister Ramona Miller

Sister Ramona Miller, OSF
Congregational Minister

A Journey in Thanksgiving…

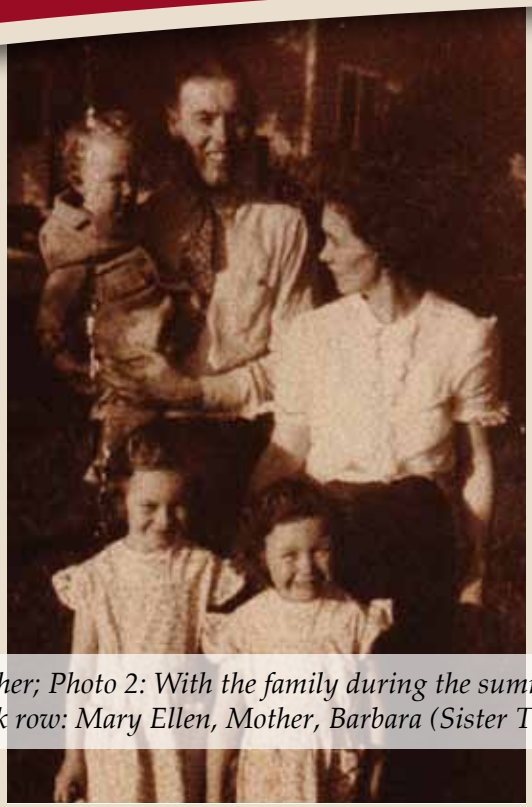


Photo 1: Sister Tierney's father; Photo 2: With the family during the summer before he died and Mother expecting youngest; Photo 3: Back row: Mary Ellen, Mother, Barbara (Sister Tierney), Front row: Kathy and John

"I would radiate your love as long as I live, becoming a blessing to others in gratitude to you."
(Psalm 63, Nan Merrill Psalter)

What were the first words that you learned to speak as a baby? Do you remember them? Most of us probably learned to speak the words, "Mom" and "Dad." In my family, the words that probably followed those initial words for me and my three siblings were "thank you." (I have often commented that if we forget everything our parents taught us, we will not forget to say "thank you.") For us, it became very clear from an early age, that expressing gratitude was simply a way of being, a way of life. Usually the words were accompanied by a fresh loaf of bread, a plate of cookies, or some other physical expression of gratitude. The foundation for this way of being was the faith in God that was born and bred in us from our earliest days. We were a family who learned and practiced being grateful to God, the Giver of all gifts. Daily family prayer, frequent celebration of the Eucharist, regular participation in church activities were ways that we learned to continuously give gratitude to God for the many blessings that we received. (Even when great personal family suffering – the premature death of my Dad – became a part of our lives, we were always challenged to find some good within the suffering, and a reason to be grateful.)

Elementary school introduced me to the Rochester Franciscans, and during those precious years, the importance of being grateful was wonderfully reinforced, and I began to make the connection that being joyful was somehow a part of being grateful! My mother certainly exuded a sense of being joyful, and now I was enjoying a similar experience with my Franciscan Sister teachers. The attraction to all things Franciscan was planted within me.

My years as a Rochester Franciscan has offered me many experiences and opportunities to remind me of the importance of being grateful, and only deepened within me appreciation for the myriad ways that God's overwhelming love called me to profound gratitude. Scriptural passages came to life for me as I humbly reflected on this amazing love that God has for me. From Jeremiah: "From of old I have dearly loved you, and still I maintain my unfailing care for you. I will rebuild you, and you will be rebuilt." (Jer. 31-3-4) From Isaiah: "I will make a covenant with you; it will be forever; to love you faithfully."

(Isa. 55:3) I reflected often on Meister Eckhart's comment, "If the only prayer you ever pray is a prayer of thanksgiving, it is enough." Francis challenged his brothers and sisters to "Let them always give thanks to Him from whom we receive all good." (Rule 31). And my longtime favorite part of our Franciscan Rule is Chapter 20, "Let the sisters and brothers be gentle, peaceful, and unassuming... it should be obvious that they are joyful, good-humored, and happy in the Lord as they ought to be."

Then, in early 2020, COVID arrived, bringing abrupt changes and challenges to the lives of everyone living on Mother Earth. Overnight I was sent home to begin an absolutely new chapter of my life, that is to say, working from home. Two months later, I began a 4-month period of furlough from the work I was enjoying, helping to keep alive our Franciscan history/heritage/values in Mayo Clinic. During those initial months of working from home/furlough, I grappled with the question "are we being invited into a new/different way of *being*?"

• Couples out walking together – often, hand in hand, conversing, laughing, enjoying life in the freshness of the outdoors, unlimited time;

• Families celebrating time together – parents playing with their children – often, rather long periods of the day; parents, kids in strollers, four-legged creatures finding new paths around the neighborhood;

• Fluid time – no need to rush, no tasks to do before leaving for work; enjoying the *gift* of being able to live without time restraints; allowing oneself to experience life in the environment of timelessness – to move out of the environment of instant/immediate need;

• The opportunity to *linger*... to allow a morning sunrise or an evening sunset to envelop one's whole being with Nature's rainbow of color splashed across the horizon; to drink in beauty that is all around: spring's lushness – trees, bushes, flowers of myriad colors and shapes – the intensity of a deep purple orchid, the bright happy faces of summer's day lilies, flowering tomato plants – the promise of a tasty harvest; bright bursts of petunias, geraniums, peonies shouting their greetings from innumerable flower pots and baskets that decorate the neighborhood.

• To be stopped and delighted with an invitation to watch a turkey courting exhibit – three males strutting with full tail feathers on display for one lonely female playing the coquette;

• *Real* conversations with others, valuing the opportunity that technology offers beyond the world of instant text messages, creating a "culture of encounter" and appreciating the often missed gifts that enrich lives far beyond simple messaging;

Image by skeeze courtesy of Pixabay.com

A Journey in Thanksgiving... *continued*

• To experience both the challenge and the gift of waiting and to be grateful for this refreshing pause within the often frenetic pace that so characterizes much of our lives. What a gift! So many daily delights for which to be grateful!

The delight I was enjoying changed rather abruptly when I was invited to experience another way of being, namely, to companion our Sisters to the ER and clinic appointments, to be the guest during their hospitalizations, to hear their stories of suffering and pain, and to be a messenger taking food/fuel cards to unemployed families, trying desperately to survive, as they experienced a dire need just for the basics of life. A heavy curtain of darkness and pain became a pall that enveloped me. How can one possibly be grateful for anything, when you are so challenged to feel profound empathy for the many ways that COVID-19 has brought acute suffering to so many persons? Think of our Sisters who have lived for so many months in an absolute quarantine that, at times, has felt like a prison; those who have personally suffered the disease of the COVID-19 virus; those who have lost a loved one from the disease; those who daily move out into work that potentially exposes them to COVID; those who live in great need and fear for long months of unemployment, without income and without meaningful work to fill long days and hours. An overwhelming sense of loss seems to obliterate any possible sense of gain for which one would want to express gratitude.

Mayo Clinic Archives

Yet, during those months of furlough I was privileged to celebrate daily Eucharist at the Saint Marys Hospital Chapel – one of the very few places where Eucharist was offered in the diocese. I found myself bringing the vicarious suffering that I was experiencing in my encounters with others to Eucharist each day. For the first time in my life, I began to have an appreciation for the Eucharist that I had never experienced at any other time. Jesus' invitation, "do this in memory of me" brought me to a depth of understanding that I had never felt! To become what we eat – the Body/Blood of Jesus – called to become bread that is *broken* and *shared, my life given to others; wine that is poured out for others to heal sin and division!*

And the prayer of thanksgiving that follows, *"I thank you for holding* ***me*** *worthy to stand in your presence and minister to you"* - has radically changed my life and deepened my awareness of what it means to be sister – to the Lord himself, and implicitly, to everyone else, who is my brother, my sister. As I continued to encounter these suffering brothers/sisters, I found myself reflecting on the words from *Les Miserables*, "to love another person is to see the face of God." And hearing the echo, "I thank you for holding me worthy to stand in your presence and minister to you."

Frederick Buchner reminds us that, "The place God calls you to be is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." COVID has given me the gift of recognizing/remembering what is part of my deep gladness – so many aspects of life that bring me great joy. And it has challenged me to recognize in a profound way that the source of that deep gladness is my life in God, from which I receive all that I need to continue to never tire of searching for where I am called to respond to the world's deep hunger.

For all that has been, THANKS, LORD, THANKS.
To all that will be, THANKS, LORD, THANKS.

- Dag Hammarskjold

Gratitude for Safety and Care During COVID-19

by Sister Mary Eliot Crowley

Not only do the Sisters miss interacting with the staff at Assisi Heights, but the employees miss interacting with the Sisters!

Gratitude is an attitude, a choice, an opportunity to show appreciation to another person for a job well done or their helpful presence in one's life. Gratitude is expressed in every language and script, often accompanied with flowers, candy or a card with these two little words, THANK YOU! It may be to recognize a mission accomplished or the person's actions. Gratitude is not expressed lightly but from the heart.

During this time of COVID-19, the Sisters of Saint Francis have been under the care of our vigilant staff, and one another, to avoid the spread of this disease. It has been wonderful to hear Sisters express their gratitude, and their desire to see the staff who have provided for them. Staff do not always know that they are being mentioned as the individual who made that delicious dessert or who fluffed the sheets just right; who planted the flowers at this or that particular place; or who picked apples to be enjoyed in a crisp or pie later in the season. But the Sisters want the staff to know that they are grateful.

As I conversed with resident Sisters, their gratitude was expressed in the following ways:

> *"The Sisters on my corridor are so positive, calm and helpful and like to laugh. This time has given us time to "attend" to our Sisters in new ways."*

> *"The Pandemic Committee has been a life saver. We don't always like what they tell us, because it seems like another restriction, but it is for our protection. They keep us well informed. The best gift was giving us freedom to walk outside anywhere on the property. A breath of freedom and beauty."*

Gratitude for Safety... *continued*

Polishing and cleaning help this summer

Erica polishes brass!

One Sister shared her gift of poetic verse to express experiences during this time of shelter-in-place:

Gratitude during COVID

Haiku by Sister Patricia Jean Schlosser

Lush, greened summer paths,
twin fawns, baby turkeys, bees,
face of earth renewed.

The Sisters are grateful for the health care staff, who provide assistance with daily needs, such as: dispensing medications; assisting with light housekeeping chores; helping those with mobility issues go from place to place; and encouraging Sisters to go outside on beautiful days.

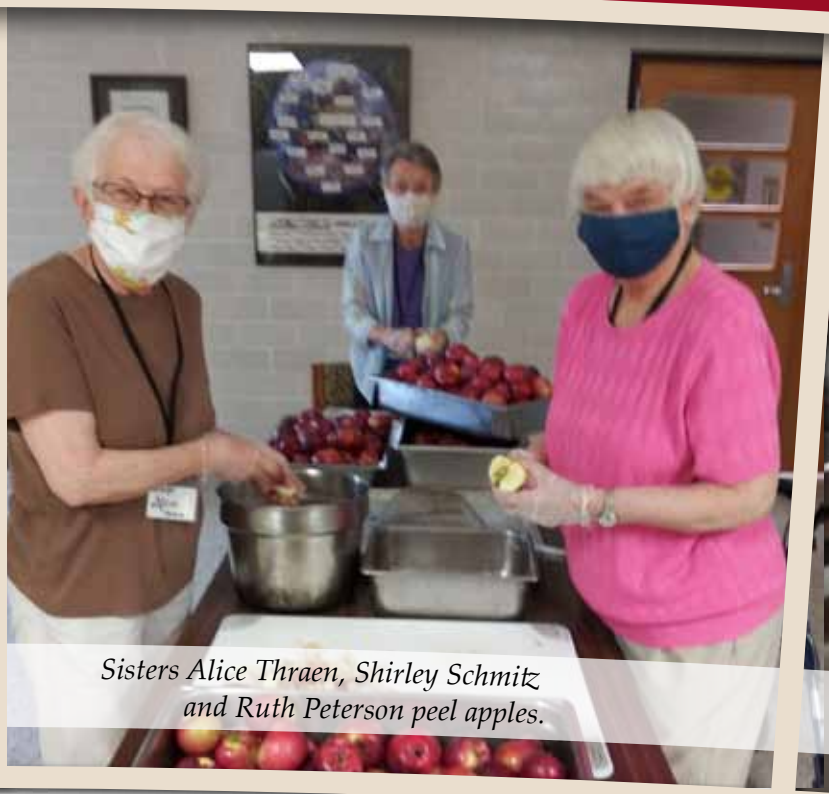
Many Sisters imagine that the preparation and serving of their daily meals must be a real dance down in the kitchen and the dish room! The meals have been very good, and servings are more than a great plenty. Some Sisters relayed that they may have to move a lot more if this goes on much longer. Is there such a thing as a diet meal?!

Communication of information and the great mail service, both inside the house and to the outside, is appreciated even more during this time. Notes of special prayers requested or needed 'just appear' on the bulletin boards. All of this involves so many people behind the scenes.

The prayers prepared and sent out for special feasts and remembrances of our deceased Sisters have been so well done. Some Sisters really enjoy meeting on their corridors, or via Zoom, when Sisters across the Congregation enter into prayer at one designated time.

And while on the topic, through the ability to utilize technology, and improving skills with the help of our IT professionals, Sisters have been able to pray weekly and observe Sunday Liturgy with the parishes where they once served in ministry.

Yes, the list goes on! Sisters offer their gratitude to



Sisters Alice Thraen, Shirley Schmitz and Ruth Peterson peel apples.

Sister Alice Thraen sorts the apples picked by the staff.

the special cleaners who made the place shine like never before (or at least for a long while!) – having been blessed with staff and volunteers helping in new ways this summer, working in areas not inhabited by residents. They have been scrubbing, oiling, polishing and dusting in places both high and low. The maintenance staff have kept the Sisters warm in the cooler months and cool in the warmer months! And during this shelter-in-place time, staff managed to keep the Sisters entertained with movies, popcorn, and spiritual enrichment videos.

In the meantime, the bills got paid, people were employed, and issues were resolved. Little or big problems were handled, and the Sisters needs were met. Sisters were driven to the Mayo Clinic and other appointments, often accompanied by a companion. And the list goes on.

The words "thank you" seem like such small words, and yet they express the hearts of our Sisters filled with gratitude for these and many more months of safety, as we move further along the timeline of the pandemic. Most importantly, this is a time of immense ***GRATITUDE***.

Haiku / Tanka Poem

by Sister Ramona Kruse

In this virus time
Many capable hands are
Needed to complete
Innumerable special
Tasks with qualified partners

We have them on Clare
Capable, experienced
Generous, pleasant

A laugh, a question
A filled prescription plus an
Amiable, kind, patient
And always willing to help!

They are our special
"See to it" people on Clare
Gratitude Prevails!

Time OUT!

Image by cindydangerjones courtesy of Pixabay.com

What does an umpire say when a player slides successfully into home plate? Safe!

That is what it feels like (so far) at Assisi Heights in the seventh inning of COVID-19 in 2020. Yes, it is time for the seventh inning stretch! This virus sticks like Velcro! It reminds me of the 7th year of a 7-year cycle in the Jewish tradition, which comes around again in 2021-2022 to take time out! (P.S. The virus came a bit early.) Farmers leave ground fallow on the 7th year to restore its fertility and to re-evaluate the surplus. Likewise, Sabbath day, the 7th day of the week, is for rest!

So what have we learned in this *time out* for resting? We have a double-header game in session: virus and racism. We have touched many distress points of life, and recognized our worldwide interconnections. Sports announcers say we are coming away exhausted, worried; having normalized inequity, and experienced the greed for toilet tissue, yeast, and canning jar lids.

Can we retrieve anything good from the virus by looking in the rear-view mirror? As in music, the notes carry the tune, but rests announce the spacing and are equally as important. They cause us to stop, rest, catch our breath, recall, and give pause to absorb the previous cadence, and then to thrust us to the next movement. Consider the musical score of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" with a virus. How has the absence of this tune restructured your post COVID-19 rest time? The virus caused me to stop, pause, look, and find other music. It meant readjusting my thinking, not stopping at my local haunts, and reevaluating the needs and wants on my wish list. I have attended ZOOM school, practiced the piano, honed in on latent artistic talents, hand stitched dozens of dishtowels, tried new recipes without guests but with 'curve appeal', canned vegetables and fruits, and watched umpteen documentaries. Most of all, the *time out* has reawakened boundless gratitude for those things taken for granted.

Brené Brown says, "What separates privilege from entitlement is gratitude." I pause to consider if

by Sister Marlys Jax

my privileges have become entitlements. I have so many gifts that are freely given and I have not done anything to earn it– like breath. We only know what a gift breath is, when we have trouble breathing or when smoke or ragweed is in the air. Consider your heartbeat. You can calculate the years it has worked night and day without a *time out!* That thumping is free, not earned. Outside my window, nature has painted an overwhelmingly beautiful scene! I have not paid a penny for it. Can we list that for which we are grateful? Here is my partial list: black soil, snowflakes (in season), an extended warm hand, a bugling Sandhill Crane, a home, an Opera in the Outfield, the scent of basil, ballet, hugs, fresh water, burrowing earthworms, and chiming church bells.

Gratitude calls us to restore fertility in our physical and spiritual life, and reevaluate what may be a surplus. How? Physically by breathing fresh air, exercising, eating healthy, and for me, reducing the surplus stuff in my closet and top shelves. Sunday has become a Do-Nothing Day! In the spiritual realm, I have located extra *time out* for quietness, mindfulness, reading, compassionate listening, patience, and above all, gratefulness and writing Thank You notes.

Willie Nelson testified, "When I started counting my blessings and being grateful, my life turned around." Gratitude suggests we turn around. We need to consider the subtle opportunities that are set before us every moment. Opportunity knocks only once, use it or miss it, because the next opportunity bumps up to first place. David Steindl-Rast[1] was a noted presenter at our Pastoral Weekend in 1971, as a guest of Sister Gretchen Berg. Today at 94, he says, "The root of joy is gratefulness. It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that make us joyful."

That sums it up beautifully. May this be a time to experience all for which you are grateful.

[1] Visit David Steindl-Rast's website: https://gratefulness.org/reflections

Life… in a leaf

by Frank McIlmail, Cojourner

Image by Couleur courtesy of Pixabay.com

The lush green leaf was on a tree populated by many lush green leaves in a wooded Minnesota area. I sat underneath the tree to eat lunch. I saw the leaf as I looked up and began to reflect on that leaf. Six months previously, in the dead of winter, that leaf would not have been visible as it was awaiting a rebirth in the spring. Now it was July, and in a few months the winds would blow the leaf helter-skelter and, hopefully, it would land on some lawn where it would be raked up and tossed into some compost pile to continue its life enriching the soil and living on in a different manner.

As I reflected on this leaf, I realized that it was symbolic of my life. My birth, the spring and summer of my years have gone all too quickly… and in the fall of my existence, the leaf helps me reflect on the remainder of my life. Upon my death, like the leaf, I will return to ashes, those ashes strewn somewhere on this earth and, hopefully, the memories I leave behind will motivate someone to do good for others. And, thus, like the leaf enriching the earth, so will I.

It was a pandemic moment that brought me to that tree and to that leaf and for that moment, I am truly grateful.

Image by Kranich17 courtesy of Pixabay.com

On Gratitude

by Mary Huettl, Cojourner

Is there any word that brings one to her knees more than "gratitude?" What an awesome God we have, who created the mountains, the oceans, the trees and fruit, the flowers, the sun and moon, rainbows, and people…! Just consider the amazing way the human body works, the way plants seed, and flower, and produce more plants. And God created the animals who lick our faces and cuddle with us. And what an awesome God who created love, friendship, caring, and compassion.

I just returned from a month with my daughter and her family. My almost thirteen-year-old granddaughter (who questions everything) is doing a lot of asking about things such as: "Is there really a God? Did God create the world? Why do people die?" We found a site on YouTube entitled "6 Proofs for God's Existence | Proof for God"[1] which she and I watched together. I think it answered a lot of questions for her.

For me, I don't need a video. As I look out my window right now, there is an eagle circling overhead, sometimes the deer come into my yard. A God-like image for me is their silent presence, so gentle and beautiful. While looking at a bouquet of flowers I bought at the market yesterday, with the variety of blooms, textures and colors, I think, "What kind of God created such beauty?"

And even in these troubling times, I am grateful that I have a family that I love, with siblings, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. I have a home to live in that is now paid for, a car, though old, still runs, friends that support and nourish me. I have plenty of food to eat, an education that has given me gainful employment and a way to survive in retirement. I am grateful to have good health, still able to function well in my almost 78 years of life. I have not gotten COVID, even though I spent three months of 2020 in North Carolina and have flown safely back to Minnesota.

But high on my list of things for which to be grateful is my relationship with the Rochester Franciscans. I would never be the person I am today had I not experienced those 4 ½ years when I was a member of the Community. And now, after almost 33 years as a Cojourner, the spiritual growth and the relationships just continue to grow and grow.

Yes, I feel such gratitude, for all that has been, for all that is, and for all that will be. We believe, God… help our unbelief!

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iuGn9jSPmQ

Earth, Air, Fire and Water

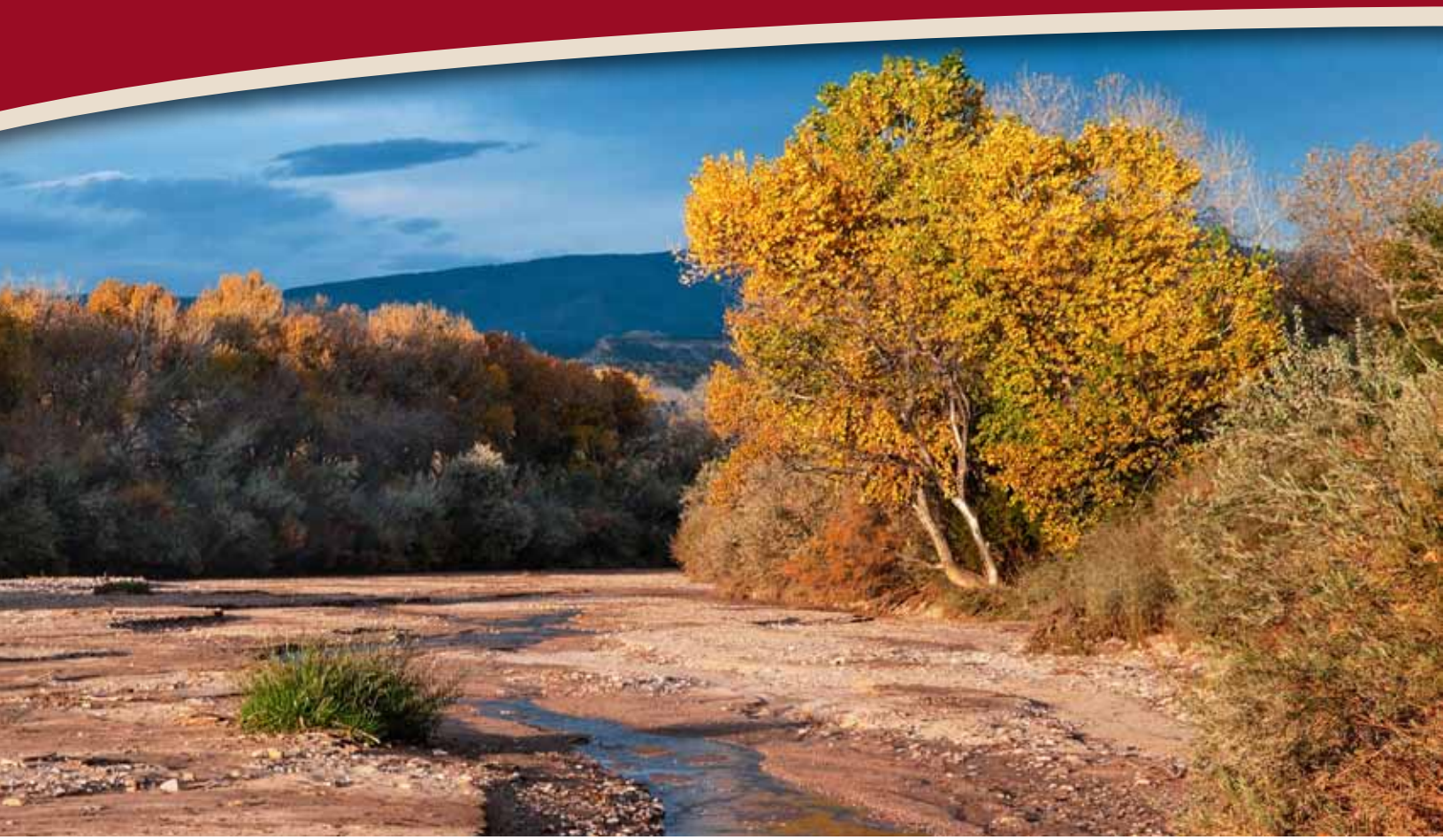


Photo by Ron Baker

As I write this, today is the Autumn Solstice. Blessed rain has cleared the dust from the benches on our deck and has given trees, other plants and the thirsty earth a much-needed drink. After the usual drought of summer, our September rains are a liquid blessing.

Water, blessed water. And air, earth, fire. All blessings, said our Native American guide as he led us in a prayer to the four corners of the earth, and to air, earth, fire, and water. An old Celtic blessing echoes most of the Native American prayer:

> *Deep peace of the running wave to you.*
> *Deep peace of the flowing air to you.*
> *Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.*
> *Deep peace of the shining stars to you.*
> *Deep peace of the infinite peace to you.*
> *Deep peace of the gentle night to you.*

But fires are raging in California. The hurtling water and wild winds of hurricanes have left trees uprooted, homes destroyed, and many people have lost everything. Mudslides have covered homes in other parts of the world, sometimes before people could evacuate. Earth, air, fire, water. These are blessings, but also at times, both destructive and frightening. Oh, my dear Celtic ancestors, how can we pray about deep peace from these now?

But we can pray and, perhaps through this experience of mine, I will show you how.

In 1981, my husband Ed and I lived in a small house with a long yard that terraced down to a little creek, no wider than the spread of my arms. But one day, Memorial Day, it began to rain. And it rained and rained and rained into the pitch black night.

We could see nothing in the yard until a flash of lightning showed that the creek had become a raging river, had left its banks, and was climbing up the yard. We grabbed what we could and began to stack things on a ledge in the kitchen. But it was a flash flood, with the emphasis on flash, and the waters began to bubble in under the sliding glass doors to the patio.

They rose fast. I ran to the laundry room only to see a pick-up truck wedged between our house, and the one next door. The water was swirling around the house and rising fast. On the other side of the house, we saw our utility shed had left its moorings and was jammed into the side of the house next door. The waters kept rising. It was a one-story house, so we went to the highest spot, a step-up, in the hall near our front door. And then, suddenly, with the waters up to my neck, they crested, stood still, and just as they had risen quickly, they began to recede, but not as quickly. The waters outside were at my waist level and still swirling around the house. A man came to our door and shouted, "Come out. We can help you to higher ground." So, he and Ed held me between them and we made our way to higher ground, my feet giving out from under me in the power of the swirling water.

I was not praying my dear Celtic prayer. But I did stand in awe of the power of water.

So we have these blessings—earth, air, fire, water—that give us energy and life in its many forms. But they can overpower us. They can take our lives. And as we have misused them over the years, as we, the people, have ignored the climate changes we have contributed to, we are seeing, knowing, and feeling the raging power of burning forests with dangerous smoking air, the hurricanes with raging wind and flooding waters. So, now what is our prayer? Being so grateful for these four blessings, what happens to our gratitude when they rage against us?

Photo by Ed Lundy

We take the step that precedes gratitude, and that is forgiveness. We ask forgiveness of the earth, the air, fire, and water. And the form of our plea for forgiveness is to deal appropriately, energetically, and effectively with climate change in whatever ways we can.

After our flood in 1981, we saw our house covered in filthy mud. All our books and clothes lay in sodden heaps of mud. Pages of Ed's dissertation research lay here and there on the floor, some having floated down the river. It was a mess. But friends came and began to help. Soon we had someone wiping off Ed's research, carefully, page by page. Another friend gathering the destroyed books to dispose of them. A friend from a nearby parish bringing a check to help pay for damages. Red Cross arrived with sandwiches and lemonade. A family member came from California to direct the cleaning and rebuilding of parts of the house. They showed us how to be resilient, like forests that rise after a fire to grow new and stronger trees. The goodness and generosity of our friends helped us rebuild and restore our home. All this, a beautiful thing to see, planted hope deep in our hearts and left us filled with gratitude.

Mop in hand, I stood for a moment, my feet heavy with caked mud, and looked at the friends working to help us clean up. I was so filled with gratitude for such goodness that I could only stand there, joyful in the midst of the mud. I looked up at a framed painting on the wall above a doorway. It was of a white owl-like bird, painted by an Inuit artist in Alaska. I think of it as the Inuit Holy Spirit. And the words from a poem "God's Grandeur" by Gerard Manley Hopkins came to my mind. These words describe for me the twin blessings of hope and gratitude:

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

In Memoriam

Sister Ingrid Peterson (July 2, 1935 – June 28, 2020)

Sister Ingrid, born Janet Peterson in Grantsburg, Wisconsin, began life on her family farm with parents, Mary (Grant) and Elmer Peterson and her brothers, Larry and Jerry. She often expressed: "My family has been most important part of my life; they made me who I am." As a young student at the College of Saint Teresa, she met Franciscan Sisters. For the next 65 years, her Franciscan Community was an ongoing thread of support, encouragement, and challenge for her. After years of teaching, followed by graduate work at the University of Michigan and Iowa State University, Sister Ingrid returned to the College of Saint Teresa as a faculty member in the English Department. She was deeply loved by her students and never failed to challenge and yet support them. The closing of the College of Saint Teresa was a heartbreaking event for Sister Ingrid, but a bright light emerged as she was propelled into life as a scholar of St. Clare of Assisi, and of other early Franciscan women. Sister Ingrid's scholarly accomplishments are numerous: her 1993 book, *Clare of Assisi, A Biographical Study*; authoring or co-authoring articles and book chapters; editing academic articles and publications; serving on the staff of the Franciscan Sabbatical Program at Tau Center; summer professorships, mentoring other researchers; coordinating and presenting several sessions at the prestigious Kalamazoo Medieval Congress; and organizing "Clarefest 1993" which gathered hundreds of members of the Franciscan family. Her expertise and willingness to share her knowledge led to two significant honors: she was the first woman to receive the Franciscan Institute Medal from St. Bonaventure (NY) University and the publishing of a *Festschrift - Her Bright Merits* - a collection of essays in her honor.

Sister Marice Hughes (August 17, 1927 – August 21, 2020)

Sister Marice's family valued strong relationships with one another, a deep faith in God, love of learning, and caring for others. These values helped define Margaret Mary Hughes as her life and eventual ministry unfolded. She completed her education in Waseca, Minnesota, where the Sisters of Saint Francis taught her in grade school through high school. Upon graduation, Sister Marice attended the College of Saint Teresa in Winona, Minnesota. When she graduated, her first mission was at Saint Priscilla's School in Chicago, Illinois, teaching sixth and seventh graders and enjoying the many opportunities of discovery this new venture had in store for her. She taught in several other parish schools both in the high school level as well as grade school in Minnesota and Ohio. After she left teaching, she moved to Naperville, Illinois, where she cared for her elderly mother and volunteered at Saints Peter and Paul School. After the death of her mother, Sister Marice returned to Assisi Heights. She offered her services by assigning prayer partners to Sisters in active ministry with Sisters who lived at Assisi Heights, and eventually she connected Cojourners with prayer partners as well. Sister Marice loved to travel and a highlight of her life was a pilgrimage to Assisi. She walked in the footsteps of Saints Francis and Clare, and her life continued in that pattern of walking as they did, in the footsteps of Jesus in the gospel.

Sister Monique Schwirtz (May 24, 1938 – May 7, 2020)

Quietly intent in all she did. Faithful. Lover of cats. Determined. Tenderhearted. Proud of her Croatian and Luxembourger heritages. Attentive to those in need. Thrifty. Precise. Petite in body but strong in spirit, Sister Monique began life in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, as Ellen Elise Schwirtz, the first of four children born to John and Victoria Radosevich Schwirtz. Following high school, she attended the College of St. Teresa for two years. She said those two years were wonderfully nurturing for her, both academically and emotionally. It was during the College's Holy Week Retreat, in her sophomore year, that Ellen came to know her call to religious life. She entered the Sisters of Saint Francis the August before her junior year. Whether she was teaching in the classroom, observing as principal, working with the vulnerable through the Minnesota Valley Action Council, acting as Director of Daily Life and Service at Assisi Heights, in Congregational Leadership or at Holy Spirit Retreat Center, there was in her a tenderness, strength and sensitivity to the needs of others that shone through.

Sister Valerie Kilian (June 6, 1941 – July 11, 2020)

Born Charleen Kilian, she was the only child of immigrant parents who met on the boat en route to the United States. Our Rochester Franciscan Sisters were her teachers, and from grade school on she wanted to be a teaching Sister. After becoming a Sister, she earned her Elementary Education degree from the College of Saint Teresa in Winona, Minnesota. Valerie was a primary teacher for 15 years in southern Minnesota and South Dakota. She also served at Assisi Heights and at Tau Center in Winona. She is remembered for her first person presentations of women in the Bible in complete costume. Valerie enjoyed travel throughout her life. As a child, she relished visiting her relatives in Germany and in the US. She was an integral part of her close convent class that planned, raised finances and traveled together across the U.S., and to Assisi and parts of Europe. Sister Valerie is remembered for her hospitality, and for being a gracious companion to many Sisters for their Mayo Clinic appointments, which brought joy to her life. She loved trying new things and was known for her considerateness, truthfulness, honesty and creativity. Always practical in her approach to life, Sister Valerie left this message for her classmates: "Just send me your loving prayers and if God needs me in heaven now -- so be it!"

Gratitude

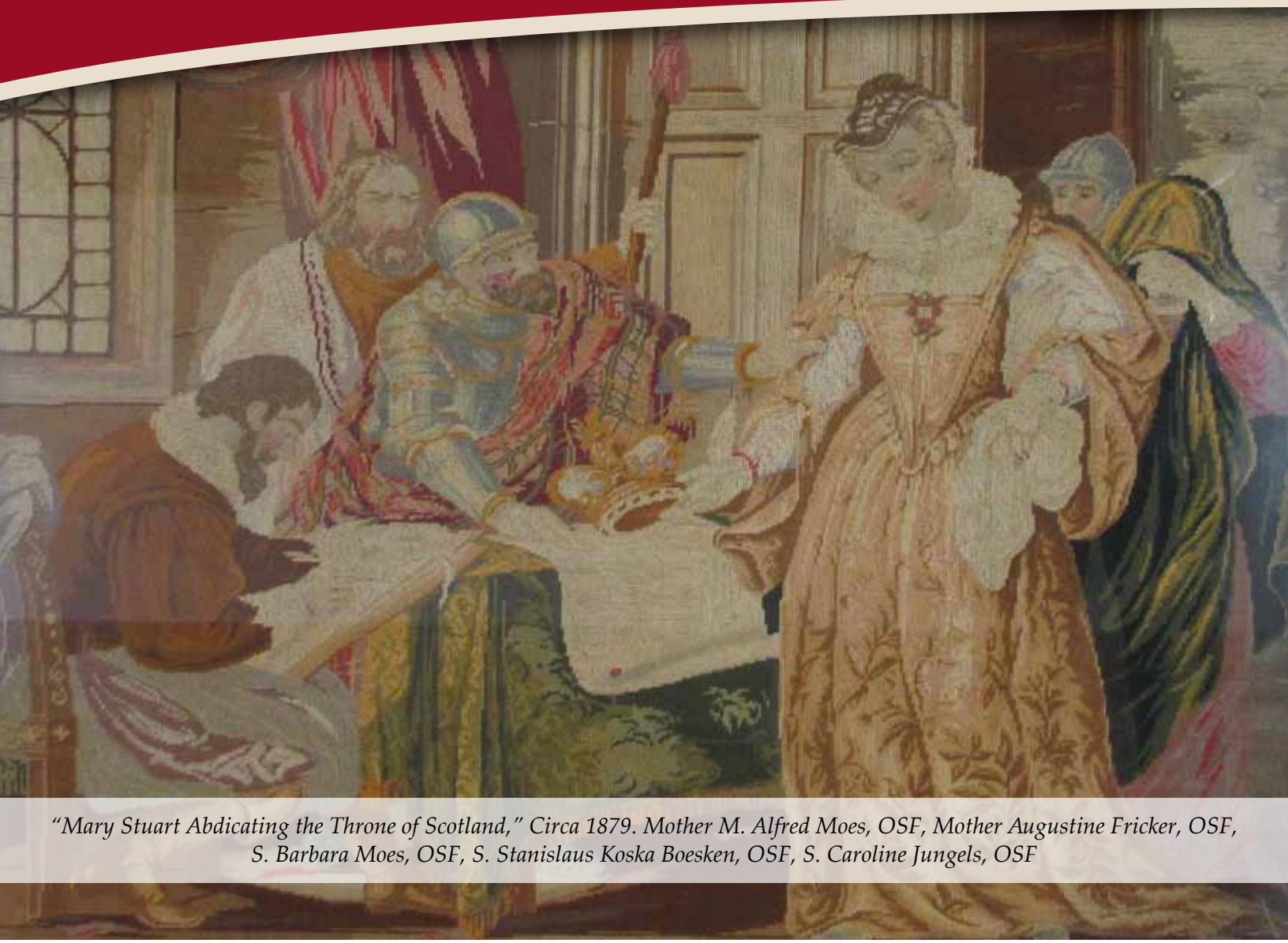
by Sister Briana McCarthy

Gratitude has a way of activating our senses:
The Heart warms sending gentle fingers to touch,
The eyes see from a glow of love,
The ears hear sounds more like music in the air,
Taste buds delight in rich dark chocolate cake,
As smelling it lifts a "yum" prayer of gratitude.

Gratitude has a cousin in Thanksgiving.
Together they exchange words like:
Thanks enjoys giving
Giving ubiquitously service to others
Being grateful enriches the soul
Being fully grateful, fully thankful sets one free to BE.

Gratitude and its cousin Thanksgiving,
Rooted deeply in Trinity goodness and love,
Outpour abundant energies,
Spreading and opening,
Our human senses and alertness
To Divine/Human living here on Earth.

From the Archives



"Mary Stuart Abdicating the Throne of Scotland," Circa 1879. Mother M. Alfred Moes, OSF, Mother Augustine Fricker, OSF, S. Barbara Moes, OSF, S. Stanislaus Koska Boesken, OSF, S. Caroline Jungels, OSF

I have deep gratitude for the rich diversity of artistic talents that have been part of our heritage, going back over 140 years to the founding days of the community, and to this present day.

In the early years of the Rochester Franciscan Community, while the Sisters were building and staffing schools and hospitals, they often engaged in handwork and music lessons to earn money to fund their institutions and projects, and no doubt provided a respite from their considerable labors. In a hallway at Assisi Heights, there is a large framed needlework piece completed by Mother Alfred and several of the first Sisters (see image above). In Sister Carlan Kraman's biography of Mother Alfred Moes[1], she notes that the early education of the Moes sisters would stand them in good stead: "Their skill in 'all kinds of fancy work' as well as painting would not only be passed on later to pupils in their charge, but would also enable the struggling religious communities to earn extra and much needed money."

Throughout the succeeding years, creative arts have continued to be a vital component of our congregational fabric. Sister Boniface Galles (1857-1946) taught art for many years and produced some beautiful pieces, some of which remain at Assisi Heights – including a "burnt wood" bench which she designed and carved.

Then came the year 2020. And creative works again have a significant place. In the early days of the pandemic, one of the activities of several Rochester

Franciscans was to pull out the sewing machines and start producing piles of masks – not only for the Sisters and staff at Assisi Heights, but also to donate to others. The Sisters have found more time to spend on their lifelong hobbies and to relearn handiwork skills of long ago. Our Cojourners have had more time to do projects with children and grandchildren. As one Cojourner commented, "having the time and using it well are very important."

An interesting commentary about the "Place of the Creative Arts in the CoVid era" appeared in an Ugandan newspaper, *The Daily Monitor*, on August 11, 2020: [2]

> "Throughout our existence, the arts have always been close to us. Whether through songs, dances, drum rhythms, drama, folktales, rock-painting, poetry, and other forms of artistic expression, the creative arts have always been an outlet for communities to express imagination, joy, fear, and humility and embody tragedies… Creative processes immerse us into a world that offers the body, mind and soul a moment to think, connect, care, and grow… The creative arts provide a blueprint that communities can use to explore the meanings and purposes of collective resilience, therapeutic innovations and communal support."

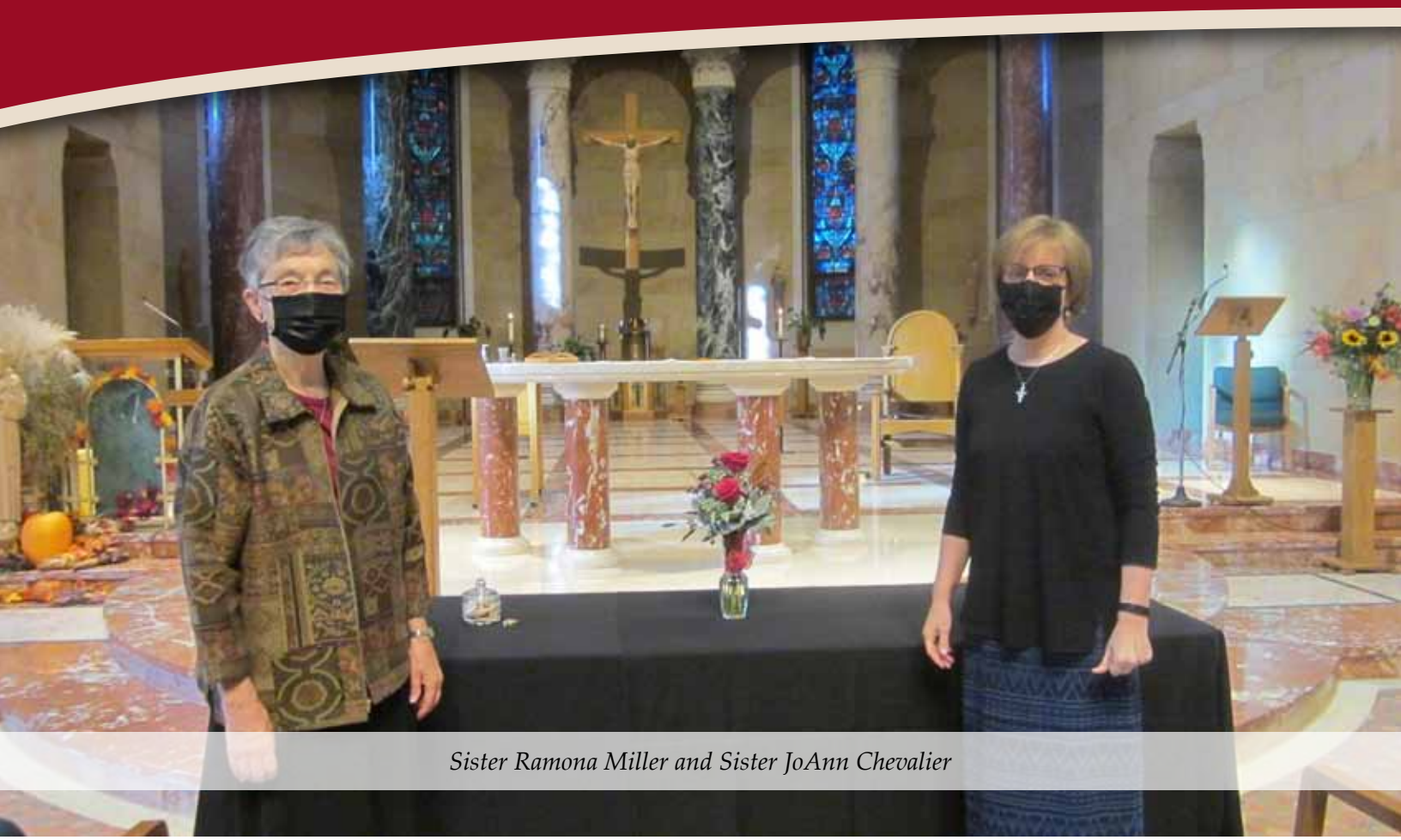
Who knows what works of art will appear as a result of this unusual time? And how creative activities have helped, not just to pass the hours, but to be a focus of creating joy in others and sparking the imagination and spiritual healing.

[1] *Odyssey in faith: the story of Mother Alfred Moes, Foundress of two Franciscan Congregations and Saint Marys Hospital,* Rochester, Minnesota, Kraman OSF, Sister Carlan. Sisters of Saint Francis, 1990, page 19.

[2] https://www.monitor.co.ug/OpEd/Commentary/-creative-arts-Covid-era-support-systems-educate-sensitise/689364-5607302-jcsaik/index.html

In the earliest days of the pandemic, Sisters Clara Marie Schotzko, LaDonna Maier, Kathleen Welscher and Pat Keefe begin sewing masks for healthcare workers.

Gratitude for Becoming a Rochester Franciscan Sister



Sister Ramona Miller and Sister JoAnn Chevalier

Professing Final Vows

By Sister JoAnn Chevalier

October 4, 2020, was a significant day for me! Based on an invitation and graces from God, an inner call and divine awakening moved me into an amazing journey. On the Feast of Saint Francis, I professed final religious vows to God and the Rule and Life of the Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis. Being a Franciscan life-vowed member brings me great joy and deep peace.

During these past years of temporary religious vows, I have been absorbed in my vocational call, living toward fullness of life through prayer, spiritual experiences, ministry, and ongoing discernment to life as a Franciscan vowed religious. These years have provided a unique opportunity for me to deeply examine how God is working in my life. Graces were given to grow in prayer, experience more time in silence and contemplation, and intentionally respond to where God is calling me.

My commitment to vowed religious life has deepened as I engaged in a discernment process, which includes how and where I am called to utilize and share my gifts, how to live out my covenant and wholehearted intimacy with God, and how my Franciscan Sisters and others experience my presence and mission in daily life.

In ministry, as a Chaplain/Spiritual Caregiver, my mission is to be a compassionate presence and to nurture healing while promoting the well-being of the whole person, by providing companionship and drawing persons

into an intimate relationship with God, one another, and all creation. Presence implies the giving of self to another, where the person is seen as mystery rather than challenge.

The Trinity provides a theological framework for my ministry of spiritual care-giving. The Trinitarian framework is based on community, love, and relationship. The Trinity invites a sense of communion, fellowship, presence, and union with one another. The Holy One, in the form of Creator God, Jesus the Christ, and Holy Spirit, is in constant pursuit of being united in love with all of humanity and creation. The Trinity reminds me that I am made to be relational, that I am responsible for interconnectedness and interdependence with those I encounter. Communion and relationship are at the heart of the Trinity, providing the model for being accepted, forgiven, loved, valued, and welcomed. My response is an intentional action that provides a calm presence during times of stress, comfort in moments of loss, accompaniment in times of need. My ministry spans across all encounters, allowing me to share in ordinary and extraordinary events in people's lives, in all its joys and messiness, and delicately support others in a sacred connectedness.

I cannot predict the future of religious life, nor my evolution in this way of life. I try my best to move forward in faith and trust that I am exactly where God has called me, and that the creative Spirit's involvement will continue to lead me on this journey. My vocation, an evolutionary experience, consists of unceasing change, new calls to adaptation, and invitations to engage with life's challenges and opportunities.

As we journey together, riding this mystery, I am grateful for your ongoing prayers and supportive companionship. Let the celebration begin, whether gathered together or with hearts dancing in connection with the Spirit!

Sisters Jean Keniry, Joyce Stemper, Avis Schons, Patricia George, Elaine Frank and Clara Marie Schotzko

Entering the Novitiate

by Sister Pat George

In Ireland, we have a saying "your feet will carry you to where your heart is." This is true about my journey to Rochester and my calling to become a vowed, religious Sister of Saint Francis. The Spirit's whisper of being called to a vowed religious life has always been a companion of mine since birth. There has always been a place in my soul that knew it would not rest until I had said YES to the journey of religious life. It has taken all this time to become ready to enter into the fullness of who God has called me to be.

I was born in Ireland and adopted at almost three years old to a couple in Chicago, Illinois. While attending college at DePaul University, I met my husband, Jeff. I moved to California and we were blessed with two children; Brian and Kaitlyn and three grandchildren; Emma, Sophie and Bentley. Jeff passed away in 2012 after 38 years of marriage. Professionally, I had three major careers/ministries prior to retiring. In addition, I have been a passionate activist for social justice issues, a spiritual director, a restorative justice advocate, an adjunct graduate level professor at California State University, Sacramento, a hospice worker, a clinical therapist, a lay minister, a parish/school pastoral board member, and a Eucharistic minister and lector.

On August 10, on the Transitus of St. Clare, I was received into the Novitiate of the Sisters of Saint Francis. I remain eager to serve God and respond to the call to live the vowed life and mission as a Rochester Franciscan. May the Holy Spirit lead me to live the Gospel through prayer, community and service in the tradition of Mother Alfred, Francis, and Clare.

I ask for your prayers and support going forward and I will keep you in my prayers as well. May our spiritual Brother Francis and Sister Clare guide each of us on our paths; always and in all ways. Blessings!

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

"May the Lord bless and protect you.
May the Lord be with you always and may you
always be with Him."

- from the Blessing of Saint Clare

The Sisters of Saint Francis are continually grateful for the many sacrifices people have made to support their ministries. YOU enable them to sustain their work, their mission, and their home. Please know that you and your family are remembered each day in the Sisters prayers.
You are truly a blessing to all.

May you, who serve others, be a light of hope of all creation radiating the love of God!

And together, we will remember…

We believe that all the ties of Friendship and Affection which knit us as one throughout our lives do not unravel with death. So, although circumstances prevent us from gathering together this year, for the November Remembrance service and dinner, please know that in honor of All Saints and All Souls, we promise we will remember your deceased loved ones in our prayer throughout the month of November.

If you would like the Sisters to specifically remember a loved one in prayer, please give us their name by completing the Prayer Needs section in the attached envelope and return it to the Sisters of Saint Francis. We will place the names of your loved ones in a special memorial display in our chapel throughout the month of November.

May God give you peace and all good,

June Howard and Kim Jaworski

As we find our methods of communication being done more and more online these days, our office is working hard to acquire current email addresses. If you have changed your email or don't think we have it, please email Kim at mission.assistant@rochesterfranciscan.org and we will update our records. Thank you!

Sisters of Saint Francis
Academy of Our Lady of Lourdes

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