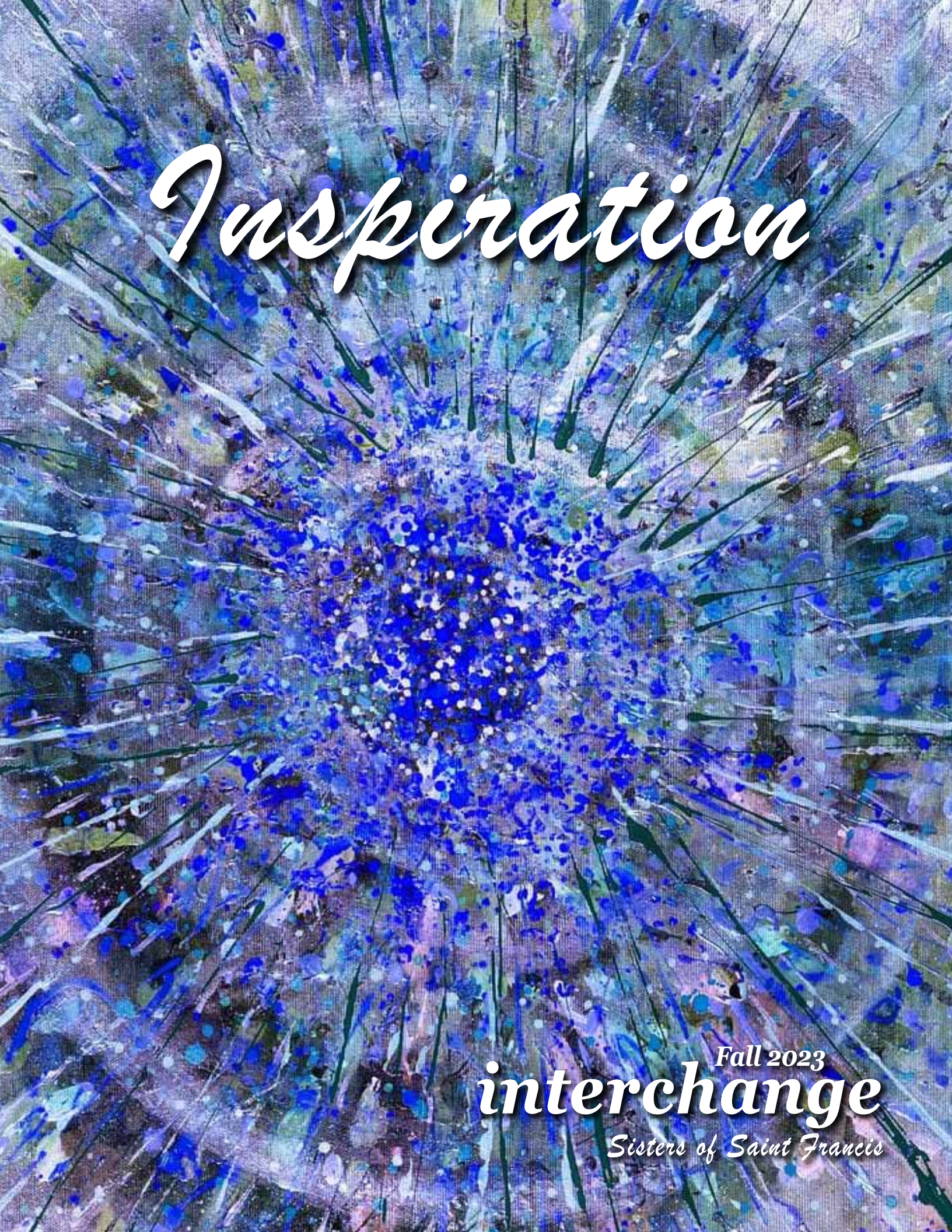
Inspiration
Fall 2023
interchange
Sisters of Saint Francis

Focus: Inspiration

interchange

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1 **Letter from the President**
by Sister Tierney Trueman

2 **Inspired by Rochester Franciscans**
by Mary E. Huettl, Cojourner

4 **In the Eyes of the Beholder**
by Dee Thatcher, Cojourner

6 **What Inspires Me**
by Kathy Woytych, Cojourner

7 **Cojourner Covenant**

8 **Leaving Footprints on Our Hearts**
by Sister Christine Stanoch

10 **In Memoriam**

18 **Recalling Stories of Inspiration**
by Sister Cashel Weiler

20 **The Center is Everywhere**
by Eileen Lundy, Cojourner

23 **How Trafficking Awareness Programs Inspired a Novel**
by Lois Kennis

24 **Inspired by the Sound of Music**
by Sister Dawn M. Nothwehr

26 **Books That Have Surprisingly Inspired Me**
by Sister Char Hesby

28 **From the Archives: Inspired by History**
by Sister Marisa McDonald

30 **Through the Eyes of a Child**
by Sharie Furst

32 **Be an Inspiration to a Child!**
From the Office of Mission Advancement

Letter from the President

Sister Tierney Trueman

Dear Friends and Family,

When Kathy Gatliff, Director of Communications and PR, invited writers to submit articles of inspiration for the current issue of ***interchange***, I wonder if she had any particular expectations about what "inspiring" content might look like! To read this issue is to invite yourself to sit down and enjoy an amazing, enriching banquet, like that described in Isaiah 25:6: "On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will prepare a banquet of rich fare for all the peoples, a banquet of wines well-matured and richest fare..."

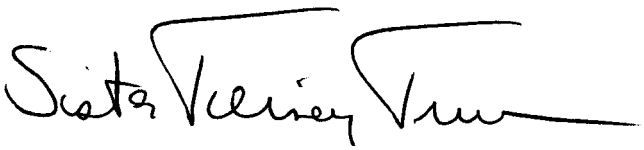
This issue's nurturing "richest fare" includes cherished personal stories of Sisters and Cojourners – memories of events long remembered and treasured. Stories of encounters with others that marked their lives – family members and total strangers struggling with illness, loss, and pain.

Stories from the simple, innocent view of a child. Stories that deepen our own faith belief. Stories that invite us to "widen the space of our tent" and become enriched by dialogue with other religious traditions.

This amazing banquet promises food to the reader that will sustain our beliefs that indeed, "we are all one – all part of one great wonder;" that the most inspiring moments in our lives happen when we realize the importance of being in relationship with others; that it is not about "what we do in life, rather it's about how we touch other peoples' lives."

So, pour a glass of well-matured wine, sit down in a comfortable chair, put your feet up, and lean back to read your new copy of ***interchange***, and open yourself "to see with new eyes what had always been there."

Most of all, take care and be good to yourself.



Sister Tierney Trueman
President / Congregational Minister

Inspired by Rochester Franciscans

Top: Sisters Therese Jilk, Pat Beck and Nancy Kinsley

Bottom: Sisters Iria Miller, Elizabeth Gillis and JoAnn Haney

When I saw that the topic for this issue of Interchange was "inspiration," I immediately thought of the interviews I had done with Sisters and Cojourners for their internal newsletters. One doesn't need to look any further than those for inspiration. I regret that I cannot cite all of the amazing things I learned, because all were certainly inspirational, but I will mention just a few.

One of the first Sisters I interviewed was Sister Therese Jilk. On the back of the greeting cards she makes is written "by our form of life, we Rochester Franciscans, ourselves wounded, give our lives proclaiming God's goodness." I have one of the crucifixes she made hanging in my home with the corpus of broken glass which proclaims "see yourself in the body of Christ."

Each one I interviewed humbly proclaimed that their life wasn't that remarkable. The Sister that comes to mind immediately is Sister Pat Beck. At age 23, against her family's wishes, she sought to become Catholic. Sister Pat had to wait two years before she was allowed to enter the convent. She lost all of her family within five years, and the Rochester Franciscan Community became her family.

Another Sister, Nancy Kinsley, helped care for three of her siblings who had Muscular Dystrophy before she joined the Franciscans, which she says taught her compassion. In her retirement, she still volunteers regularly as a tutor at the school where she previously taught, and helps others within her apartment building.

Some Sisters and Cojourners are, or have been, doctors and nurses, psychologists, social workers, health care workers, and others work in hospice. Some are artists, composers, authors, teachers, professors, librarians. Others are chaplains and some work in parishes and prayer ministry. Some volunteer and work in corrections, in soup kitchens and food distribution centers. Others work against human trafficking, for just immigration policies, for affordable housing for all, and for climate justice and racial justice.

by Mary E. Huettl, Cojourner

Top: Sisters Jesse Capparelli, Marlys Jax and Lalonde Ryan

Bottom: Cojourner Dee Thatcher, Sister Glennie Jeanne Pogue, Cojourner Joanne Kellen and Cojourner Joan Cordes

The Rochester Franciscans have ministered throughout the world and worked with many different peoples and cultures. I have been amazed at how many of the Sisters have worked in Bogotá, Colombia. They worked with the indigenous in the U.S., Peru, Cambodia, and many other places. As Sister Iria Miller once told me, "God knows how to keep nudging you until you end up where you belong." Sister Liz Gillis says that the scripture came alive for her when she saw women weeping for their children in San Carlos.

And what an inspiration it has been just to listen to what the Sisters and Cojourners have to say! Sister JoAnn Haney says of her life, "All has been good! I have learned that you really have to take it one day at a time and count the blessings in that." Sister Jesse Capparelli remarks how beautifully the Sisters are aging, demonstrating real faith and caring for one another. "I stand on the shoulders of such giants." To quote Sister Marlys Jax, "we are not for ourselves, we are for others." She is echoed by Sister Lalonde Ryan, who says, "It's spending time with people." Cojourner Dee Thatcher said, "It's not what you do in life or what career you have, it's about how you touch other people's lives." Sister Glennie Jeanne Pogue's motto is to "do as much as I can, for as many as I can, for as long as I can." So many of the Cojourners express such gratitude and echo what Joanne Kellen had to say: "I have so much respect for the Rochester Franciscans' care of the earth, their ministry to vulnerable people and care for the less fortunate. I feel the Sisters are ahead of the rest of the world and are a model of care for all of us." Cojourner Joan Cordes shares her thoughts about Cojourning, stating that "it is comforting to know that there are over 100 other men and women who profess the legacy, not only of Francis and Clare, but all of all of the Sisters in the Rochester Franciscan Community." Their inspiration will live on...

In the Eyes of the Beholder

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INSPIRE has many different meanings according to Webster and Google. What I think of the most when I hear the word inspire is to affect with a specified thought, feeling or action. We can inspire or be inspired by. We can inspire fear as much as we can inspire kindness or love. And maybe we can even inspire someone enough to change a behavior, even our own, hopefully for the better.

I believe that whether one is inspired by me is in the eyes of the beholder. I hope that I can inspire others in a positive way but I truly do not know how my words or actions will impact others.

What I am most inspired by are those that see a need, maybe an injustice, and decide they have to do something to change it. Ordinary folks, children and adults both have done some amazing things to help the homeless in their communities, and others help with clean up after disasters. I am inspired by those that will stand up for what they believe in or help the underdog, even when there are risks to themselves.

On a more personal level, the event of my life that most inspired me was the premature birth and six days later, the death of my son Ryan in July, 1977.

At the time, I had little involvement with any church and questioned whether I had any faith at all. If God is so loving, how could my child be taken from me? And there were the comments from well-meaning friends and family saying that I was young and could always have another. My thought was, "What is wrong with these people? Do they not understand that you do not replace a child like you would a dead battery?" And there were those who said that this was God's will and all would work out. "How was it supposed to work out?" I asked over and over.

I went through the days and months wondering if I would ever be able to smile again, laugh, find joy or meaning in life. I could hardly make decisions that were more difficult than what color T-shirt to put on each day. Thankfully, I had Darren, my other son, who was not quite two years old needing my love and attention. What I couldn't find energy to do for myself, I could for him, as I believed he deserved a functioning Mom and that became my focus.

What inspired me most about Ryan's short life on earth, was that we truly should not take anything in life for granted. The change from this inspiration was that house cleaning didn't seem so important anymore

Image courtesy of Pixabay

and dust in the house wouldn't end the world. What I could do was savor the time with Darren and my family with trips to the zoo, walks in the woods, reading together, fishing with his Grandma… just being and doing things together. I decided I would not waste precious time with Darren while I had it, or with anyone else in my life that mattered either.

As I had mentioned earlier, organized church and faith played little role in my life during that time. However, looking back now I realize I did have a faith, I just didn't think it counted, since I went to church so seldom. I had always thought of the Earth as one big Cathedral, so I spent more of my free time in the woods, walking, and meditating on my own. Over the years, I did find peace and had come to realize that I could find joy in life again even with the death of my child, Ryan. There is not a day of the year I do not think about him and how he inspired me to live and love more fully.

Many years after Ryan's death, I had my first connection with Assisi Heights through Sister Linda Wieser. My life has never been the same since. While I had found peace with Ryan's death, I also realized that I was still holding some grief. Because of my medical complications and hospitalization at the time of his death, I was unable to attend my own son's funeral. Even though 20 years had now passed, Sister Linda suggested we do a service at Oakwood Cemetery so I could experience this ritual that had eluded me all these years. It brought enormous peace to my heart. And so it was, through Sister Linda and becoming more involved with many other Sisters and Cojourners, that spiritual inspiration would seem a good way of describing the transformation I was feeling. I was finding a deeper level of peace and realization that it is an ongoing process.

I was put to the test in 2018, when diagnosed with cancer (chondrosarcoma), and had to have surgery to remove the three ribs that were cancerous. At my one-year checkup, I told my doctor that I had actually had one of the highest quality years of my life since the surgery. I truly had the feeling I was living life to the fullest, even in the midst of a potentially life-threatening illness. I do savor family and friends more than anything. And, taking nothing for granted, it is inspiring to find that the ordinary events of life can indeed make life feel pretty extraordinary, and one worth living.

What Inspires Me

by Kathy Woytych, Cojourner

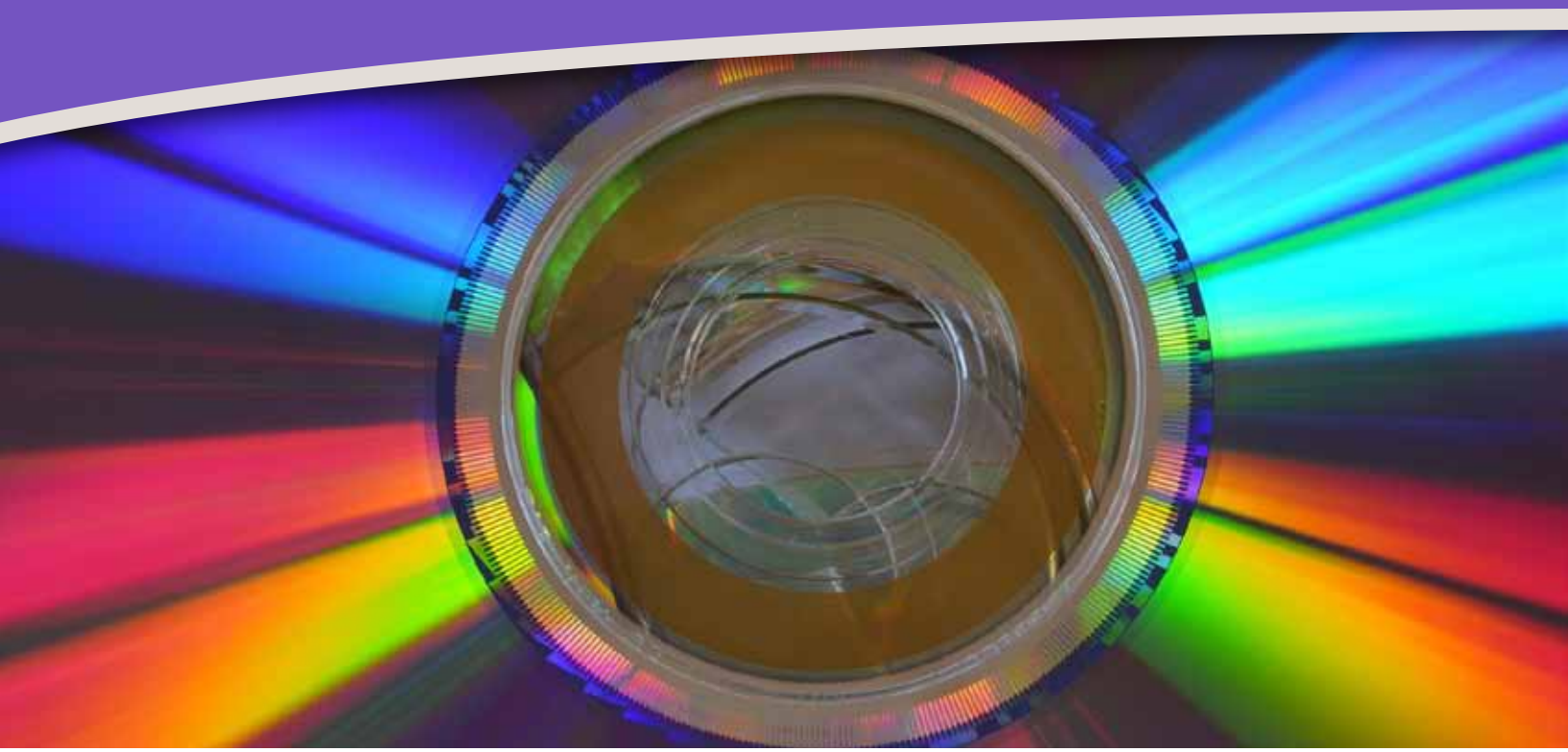


Image courtesy of Pixabay

Our lives are like a prism, in which each person's gifts and beauty shimmers as part of the whole. The oft-repeated rituals at the death of a Sister – the sharing of memories, funeral liturgies, and the "YES Sheets" – have become a foundational spiritual practice of memento mori. We remember those who have passed on and confront the reality that we, too, shall one day die. Nested within this familiar ritual is the juxtaposition of two recent funerals that left me pondering the unique beauty and gifts of my dear friend, Mary Ellen Trueman, and of Sister Kay Wagner.

I was struck by the very succinct way Mary Ellen summed up her life for her obituary: "Mary Ellen had a life-long love for her Roman Catholic Church, volunteering her time and talent. A voracious reader, an inveterate correspondent, a desire to make life better for those less fortunate, and a deep love for all of nature, were also characteristic of her." So very true. The description was simple, as was her lifestyle. Her loving attention to all she encountered played out in her chats with the employees of Hy-Vee when she shopped for groceries, her commitment to and constant assurance of prayers for others, her continued correspondence, even as the pain of rheumatoid arthritis made that more difficult. She inspired students by her care for them evinced in her attendance at their sports events and her affirmative notes included with newspaper clippings of their achievements. They noted her generosity, that she did good things with the little money she had. She always had a smile and sparkle in her eyes. I once called her attention to the fact that the red mark on her cheek was in the shape of a heart and a wonderful symbol of who she was. That pleased her as she had not noticed the shape before.

I did not know Sister Kay very well. However, the joy and delight in life that emanated from her was obvious. Her prayer integrated in the sharing of memories and her funeral was profoundly moving. Kay was deeply rooted in her contemplation of Holy Presence within her. She knew she was cherished by God, her family, her friends, and her colleagues. Joy bubbled forth and it was contagious. To be with Kay was to be caught up in her joy. She was creative and drawn to the depths of Jungian analysis in her own inner work and her accompaniment of others. With those she shared a deep spiritual bond, she would invite them to close their conversation with a chant, "My delight is in my God."

The many faceted prism of the lives of those who've gone before us – lives lived generously with joy and good humor inspire all of us to keep our hearts open and our love reaching out. Truly, in memory and in life, the Word is made flesh and lives among us.

On Friday, October 6, we welcomed seven new Cojourners, who signed a covenant with the Rochester Franciscan Sisters.

Don Baldus

Katie Hyder

Terre McJoynt

Steve Ohly

Carol Robson

Teri Sanneman

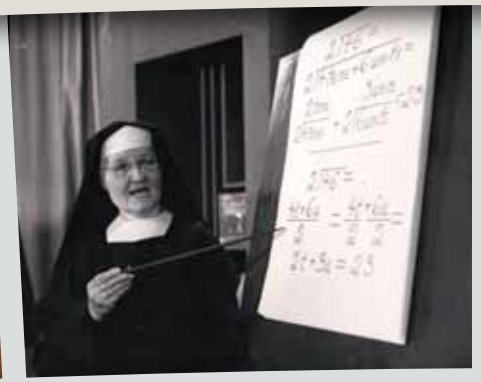
Deedee Van Dyke

What is Cojourning? Cojourning describes a relationship in which individuals and the Sisters of Saint Francis desire to journey together, or "co-journey," sharing their lives, prayer, mission and ministry in the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi and the foundress, Mother Alfred Moes. Cojourner is the name given to a lay associate with the Sisters of Saint Francis of Rochester, Minnesota.

Leaving Footprints on Our Hearts

Sister Constantius

Sister Michon



Sister Leontius

"Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some people move our souls to dance. They awaken us to a new understanding with the passing whisper of their wisdom. Some people come into our lives for a while and leave footprints on our hearts and we are never, ever the same."

- Flavia

Reflecting on who inspires me gave me time to remember, be grateful and to acknowledge the gifts of kindness and support throughout the many stages of my life and the wisdom that has touched me. I discovered that the list of names I created were far more than I could include in this article. I would like to address the Sisters in my Congregation, who may or may not know that they have shared their wisdom and have left footprints on my heart.

Sister Constantius Kuechenmeister, was a Sister of Saint Francis who I first met in the grade school I attended in Chicago, Illinois. She used to read to my seventh and eighth grade classes so that our regular teachers could have a break. Sister Constantius introduced us to Father Peter Damien who worked with lepers in Molokai, and later became a saint. Most special was that she planted the seed for me to want to follow in the footprints of St. Francis. Her dynamic storytelling captured my imagination and her life expressed what she read. Sister Constantius became a St. Francis figure for me.

Sister Michon Welch was the leader of the high school choir at St. Juliana Parish, in Chicago, Illinois. We had so much fun with the Sisters and loved singing. Her vibrant personality taught me that being a Sister could be joyful. Sister Michon always showed interest in what was going on in my life and stood by me in my decision-making process. She was always there with a listening and discerning heart and helped me to recognize the movement of God in my life.

At the College of St. Teresa in Winona, Minnesota, Sister Leontius Schulte was a great teacher in preparing students to become teachers. She loved to teach math and she inspired us all to love and to want to be good teachers. I did use her teaching philosophy and dedicated myself to help students to love learning. Sister Leontius also taught me how to love life. Sister Leontius aged gracefully and she practiced what she preached. Joy just flowed out from her smiling face and loving attitude.

Sister Annella Rhode was in charge of Housekeeping at Assisi Heights. She welcomed all of us young women who left home after high school and put up with the immaturity that came with our youth. She even laughed at our escapades. But she also taught us how to be a faithful Sister by her example. Whatever the task, big or small, we learned how to use it as an

by Sister Christine Stanoch

Sister Annella *Sister Monique* *Sister Margaret Clare* *Sister Valerie*

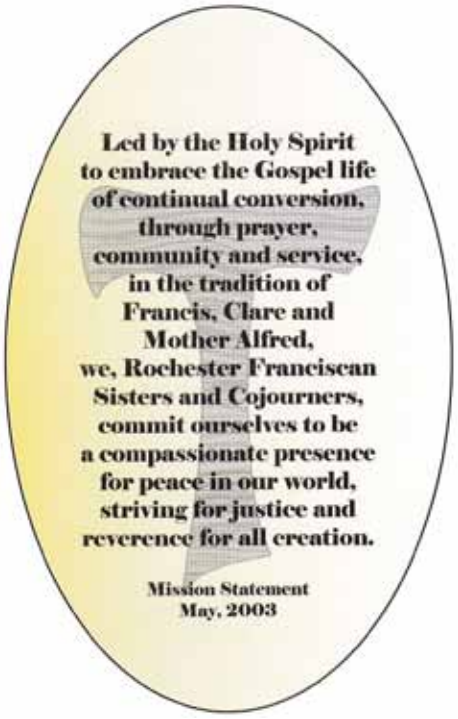
opportunity to make others' lives easier. She came to work and prayer with a fidelity that truly inspired me.

Sister Monique Schwirtz was the quiet giant in my life. I lived with her on mission. I would describe her as the wind beneath my wings. Sister Monique had high standards that she expected of herself. She taught me to strive to be my best. Sister Monique would always support my dreams and listen to my heart when I needed her wisdom.

Sister Margaret Clare Style was my eighth-grade spelling teacher. She traded with my homeroom teacher and came to our class to teach us spelling. I reclaimed Sister Margaret Clare in my trips from Chicago for committees and task forces we served on in the Community. We would have "catch-up talks" at night and laugh. She was a great storyteller. Sister Margaret Clare helped me laugh at myself and my mistakes, and encouraged me not take them too seriously, or I would get myself in trouble. Her wisdom was a treasure.

Sister Valerie Usher was my dear soulmate. We began our inner journey to become soulmates when we made final vows, helping each other to be faithful. Our paths did not have the grace of a day-to-day experience, but she was always openhearted to listen to my burdens, concerns, joys, and insights. In the last months of her life she gave me the greatest gift, which was to spend time together identifying the building blocks which formed our spiritual lives. We worked on readings, songs, and thoughts she wanted to gift us with as a Community, especially as we sat with her. Sister Valerie said these words I will never forget. I said to her that we have so much in common as we shared meaningful readings, etc. She said, "Why do you think I chose you to help me with this?" Being grateful for our meetings would not even touch what those words meant.

The list continues to grow. And the gift of making one is the opportunity to remember the impact each Sister has had in my life. For all the Sisters who have inspired me, named in this article or not, I say THANK YOU. You have left have footprints on my heart and I will never be the same.



In Memoriam

Sister Agnes Malone (July 1, 1928 – June 13, 2023)

In August 1946, at the age of 18, Regina Marie Malone was admitted to the Sisters of Saint Francis Convent in Rochester, Minnesota, where her aunt, Sister Giovanni Malone, was already a Rochester Franciscan. After making First Vows, she was assigned to teach first grade in Chicago, Illinois; Ironton, Ohio; and Austin, Minnesota. She then returned to the College of Saint Teresa (CST) in Winona, Minnesota, to work on her degree, as well as serve as the assistant postulant mistress. Following her time at CST, she became a high school English and Speech teacher, and a Speech coach, for two years before moving on to graduate studies in 1960. There were a few years where she returned to the classroom before becoming Vocation Director, Formation Team member, and Research Director at Assisi Heights. She joined Sister Margaret Mary Modde in research, serving as document editor among the many other duties that were given to her. She traveled throughout the world supporting Sister Margaret Mary as she helped other Congregations maneuver in the world of Church and Canon Law. Sister Margaret Mary couldn't have accomplished all she did without the help of Sister Agnes! (Although Sister Agnes, in her humble way, would deny her part in the endeavors.) She enjoyed music and the arts. She kept track of what was happening in news around the world. She read and kept copious notes in the tiniest script, and in organized detail, about the books she read. She was well-liked, fun-loving, and had a good sense of humor. She was open to anything that would broaden her horizons.

Sister Barbara Haag (December 26, 1930 – June 28, 2023)

Sister Barbara was a proud Wasecan, who entered the Rochester Franciscans in 1948. Sister Barbara graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from the College of Saint. Teresa and began her nursing career at Saint Marys Hospital, where she served as a nursing supervisor for 14 years. The Sisters who lived and worked with her remember her as very kind and supportive of staff, and that she was well-liked and respected. She left Saint Marys Hospital to further her education. Upon getting her Master of Science in Nursing degree, she returned to Saint Marys to serve as director of the LPN program for two years. Following that, she served as Assistant Professor of Nursing and Director of Graduate Programs in Nursing in many other institutions in various states for 20 years. During that time, she also provided a wonderful example of being a poor Franciscan by earning her Ph.D. while working full-time. She was a humble person who never put herself first. In 1993, Sister Barb received her Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry and began her next career choice serving as Pastoral Minister for several Catholic Churches, some of which were in priest-less parishes in Wisconsin. Sister Barb loved nature and walking outside. Many evenings she could be found sitting near the Wilson House contemplating the quiet of nature and the beauty surrounding her. She was delighted on one of her walks when a baby deer let her pet it. Her relationship with her "little" sister, Helen, was strengthened when they were able to live together at various times, and while at Assisi Heights, they prayed together daily.

Sister Helen Haag (June 24, 1932 – August 12, 2023)

Helen Haag was the youngest of five children born and raised in Waseca, Minnesota. After graduating from Sacred Heart School in Waseca, she entered the Rochester Franciscan Sisters, in 1951, where her sister, Barbara, was also a member. Sister Helen's 50-year long history in teaching started with 7th grade in Owatonna. Her mission slip also added Choir and Organist. Sister Helen's other early teaching assignments were to Adrian and Currie, Minnesota, where she continued to lead choirs, serve as organist, and began to give piano lessons after school and on Saturday. Her gift of music lifted the hearts and spirits of so many wherever she went. She responded to the call to go west with Sisters Lucrecia, Saul (Rosemary Cordell), and Edwin, to start a school in Las Animas, Colorado. Sister Helen loved the work and the culture there. After ten years, she came back to Minnesota for a few years, but Colorado called again, and she went to Holly, Colorado, where she taught junior and senior high school students and was joined by Sister Kathleen Welscher. After serving eleven years there, the two of them moved to Sterling, Colorado, where Sister Helen continued to teach and be involved in the community for another fourteen years. She was a creative teacher, organizing family retreats for Advent and Lent, with activities for parents and children to do together. Her teaching skills reached beyond the classroom to include offering GED classes for adults. When her sister, Sister Barbara, was chosen for leadership, the two sisters lived together in Rochester for three years and then went together to Minnesota Lake, where they served in parish ministry. Helen returned to Assisi Heights in 2011, and continued to inspire us by living the Gospel and following the rule of St. Francis. She is remembered for her kind and loving spirit.

Sister Kay Wagner (January 3, 1942 – May 28, 2023)

Kay Frances Wagner was born in Watertown, South Dakota and loved the Franciscan Sisters who taught her and thus, when she decided to join the convent, of course she came to Rochester, Minnesota. Being one of the middle children in a large family, Kay must have learned early on how to relate well to people of all ages and personalities, as that was one of her gifts throughout her lifetime. Sister Kay had a natural charisma that drew people of all backgrounds and life experiences to her. There are certain themes that were woven through Kay's life: an absolute love of life and desire to celebrate whenever possible; a grateful heart and joyful spirit; a gift of song and love of music; a passion for travel and adventure; and a desire to be rooted in the "inner life"–to know God more deeply—and to help others know God's love. Being Franciscan was central in Sister Kay's life. Whether in the role of teacher, social worker or pastoral counselor, Kay was quite innovative in her ministry: developing an "open classroom" in Sleepy Eye, Minnesota; a "parish counseling program" in Chicago, Illinois; a "pastoral counseling center" in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and a "soul journey" ministry in La Quinta, California. Sister Kay resonated with Carl Jung and used many Jungian practices in her own personal life and in her ministry, such as: dreamwork, myths, symbols, music, movement, meditation, art and sand tray therapy. An invitation by priest-friend Jim Wolf to join the team leading annual Jungian conferences in Switzerland, integrating spirituality, was a bright spot in Sister Kay's life, and she did so for over thirty years. Sister Kay was involved in the life of our Franciscan Community in many ways: serving on the Area Council in Chicago and in the Southwest, and on various committees and task forces. Nothing pleased her more than having meaningful times together with our Sisters and Cojourners.

In Memoriam

Sister Lauren Weinandt (August 2, 1921 – July 31, 2023)

Sister Lauren was born on a farm in Brewster, Minnesota. Her formal education began in a one room country school through the eighth grade. The family then moved from the farm to the town of Brewster, where she graduated from high school in 1939. Ever since she could remember, she wanted to be a Sister. She felt there was something that was mysterious about the life. She also wanted to be a missionary and applied to the Maryknoll's. Unfortunately, because she had uncorrected scoliosis in her back, they felt that they could not accept her. Subsequent to this, she entered Business School and became a secretary. That began a long life as a secretary. She worked for Msgr. Jensen at St. John's Church. The next step was entering the Rochester Franciscan Community. From the time she entered the convent, and for the rest of her life, she served God as a secretary. At one time, Sister Mary Brigh Cassidy said that Sister Lauren was such a good secretary she did not send her for a college education. One verse in Scripture that depicted Sister Lauren's life (and this is a paraphrase) was "learn to be content in whatever circumstances you find yourself." Many different people walked into her office. Her focus was so present and her heart loving that most people felt uplifted and energized when they left. God told St. Francis to rebuild the Church. Sister Lauren rebuilt the church, day by day, hour by hour, ministering to everyone who walked into her office – from all walks of life, from all faiths, from all nations, all races, all cultures, blended and distinct.

Sister Mary Glynn (May 18, 1934 – July 13, 2023)

Mary Agnes Glynn was born on a farm near Janesville, Minnesota, the second in a family of eight children. Her mother died when she was 8 years old, and as the oldest girl in the family, she learned responsibility at an early age. Mary attended country school until the 7th grade, and rest of her schooling was spent in Janesville. Upon graduation from high school, she worked at home and also in a canning factory in Waseca. At age 21, she entered the Rochester Franciscans, where she had many relatives. She was given the name Brideen, which honored her Irish heritage. She wanted to be a nurse, but there was a shortage of teachers, so she was missioned to teach. Her 18 years of teaching first grade began in Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, followed by assignments in Waseca, Owatonna, Winona, North St. Paul and Austin, Minnesota, as well as Chicago, Illinois. When Sisters were encouraged to find their own place in ministry, Sister Mary chose to do clerical work for the Mayo Clinic Blood Bank for five years. From 1981-82, she spent a year in a personal growth program at Derham Community in St. Paul, then became employed as a clerical worker at Park Nicollet Medical Center in Minneapolis. After these experiences, she returned to Rochester and used her gentle and compassionate spirit to serve persons needing home health care through Shamrock Home Care for 9 years. During this time, Sister Mary became a certified nursing assistant and joined the staff at Hiawatha Homes in the position of Resident Home Care. All of that prepared Sister Mary for her next ministry which was helping her Franciscan Sisters in health care at Assisi Heights. She went about her work in a quiet, unassuming way, doing whatever needed to be done. The Sisters appreciated her kind manner in attending to their needs.

Sister Mary Kathryn Esch (April 27, 1926 – April 6, 2023)

God gave the world a touch of beauty the day Mary Kathryn was born in Caledonia, Minnesota. She shared that beauty in so many ways with her family, those she worked with, and her Franciscan community. As a teacher and principal, she was loved by faculty and students. There were often a number of young Sisters on the missions when she was superior, and they remember that she allowed them to have fun. Her appearance was always immaculate and color-coordinated (including the bow in her hair). Sister Emmanuel once remarked as Mary passed through a room where a group of Sisters had gathered, "When Mary walks into a room I am proud." As Sister Shirley Schmitz wrote, "She dressed like she was going to a Queen's Banquet and was the main guest." Proper until the end, Mary had even selected various outfits and had them ready for her wake. When Sister Dorothy Hansen was House Director, Sister Mary Kathryn served as her secretary, but was so much more than that. What Dorothy remembers was her extreme kindness and the beautiful way she treated the Sisters. Decorating was her greatest joy. The dining room and other areas in Assisi Heights received her gift of beauty. She was fastidious; every flower, every place setting, had to be just so, but that was because she wanted to make our house a home. She could take nothing and make something beautiful out of it. As the Bookstore coordinator for ten years, order and beauty and service made the bookstore a place to not only buy things, but a place to appreciate the many gifts of Sister Mary Kathryn and others. She had many friends, but a very special one was Sister Jean Schulte. They enjoyed time together, especially traveling. Her Caledonia family remained close to her heart, and her Christmas card list was a long one. Faithfulness to prayer was no doubt the source of her inspiration. As soon as she got into a car she led a prayer, and when her eyesight began to fail, she and Sister Helen Haag prayed over the phone each afternoon.

Sister Mary Pat Smith (March 27, 1940 – August 15, 2023)

Sister Mary Pat Smith was born in Rochester, Minnesota, the eldest of four children, with an older half-brother. The majority of her growing years were spent in Austin, Minnesota. It was evident that she was very fond of her family, siblings, nieces, nephews, grandniece, and grandnephew, and delighted in sharing their pictures with us. Sister Mary Pat enjoyed the memories of visiting her Smith grandparent's farm, which today is Salem Glen Winery. Her life of service began in Queen of Angels Parish, where she helped the Sisters with church work on Saturdays. Sister Mary Carroll remembers that, as a high school classmate, Sister Mary Pat was generous and willing to help wherever she could. She also had strong opinions about how things should be done, as many of us well know! She graduated from Pacelli High School in 1958, and joined the Rochester Franciscans that same year and received the name Sister Donall. Her first years of ministry were in elementary education. She is remembered for her special ways of connecting with children. Sister Mary Pat moved to Assisi Heights, in 1992, to become Activity Director, guiding the Sisters in the craft room and other activities. Her compassion was deeply felt by the Sisters. She transitioned from that position to serving as the Administrative Office Clerk. She was meticulous in carrying out assistant administrative duties, especially computer support for Congregational events' registration. She set up the Benefactor Relations database when that office was established. Sister Mary Pat also shared her gifts with nature, becoming one of the Umbrian Gardeners after she moved to Assisi Heights. In a 1998 Interchange article, she stated, "What I get from (gardening) is the satisfaction of seeing something grow, and watching all of the changes that take place up until the harvest."

In Memoriam

Sister Neal Logan (December 11, 1924 – June 12, 2023)

Sister Neal was born in 1924, in Stewartville, Minnesota, the youngest of 9 siblings, and given the name Harriet Kathleen. She was a graduate of St. Margaret's School of Nursing in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1946. Most of her nursing profession was in private duty nursing. In 1952, she joined the Sisters of St. Francis. Two of her sisters were already Rochester Franciscans: Sister Nora Logan and Sister Fidelis Logan. Sister Neal was a private person; however, she was a delightful conversationalist. She would listen carefully, engage with interesting questions and follow through on the events and people that she heard about. Even when walking was difficult, and up to her last day, we would find Sister Neal in the Community Room reading the New York Times and keeping abreast with a wide array of topics. She had wide interests, enjoying classical music and, at times, everyone on her floor was subjected to the volume! In fact, the Activities Director would be given a list of certain concert series to get for her at the library. One thing Sister Neal wanted others to remember about her was that she enjoyed recalling a trip to Ireland in the 1950 Holy Year. She had Celtic memorabilia that were important to her, as were her Irish roots. In retirement, with all the skills she developed as a nurse, she volunteered in child and elder care and delivered flowers to patients' rooms, for 12 years, at St. Marys Hospital. Sister Neal would stop in the pediatric ward to pick up a cup of coffee, park her flower cart near her friend Esther's room, and go in for a visit at the end of her rounds. It was a memorable moment when Sister Neal returned from shopping and in her Irish (thanks to her Sister companion), she said, "Ta' me' i ngra leat," which is "I love you."

Sister Rogene Fox (December 20, 1927 – April 16, 2023)

Sister Rogene Fox loved life! She loved Community life, but many times she had unique ways of living this life. Sister Rogene enjoyed being a good nurse, and her longest period of sharing life with the Sisters during her younger days, was while she worked at Saint Marys Hospital, from 1964-1974. Caring and allowing others to feel good was her idea of being a nurse. Under her supervision, she provided direct guidance and stressed being well-organized and precise. Both the patients and those working on her floor were addressed and known. Sister Rogene loved and praised 'her' nurses. She wasn't concerned with who or why the patients were there to be cared for, it was her mission to provide comfort and joy, encouraging rest and bringing peace to their bodies and soul. Another place Sister Rogene found favorable and rich in adventures was at the Jewish Home for the Aged in San Francisco, California, where she worked for six years, from 1992-1997. Sister Rogene liked to travel. She offered her nursing skills at Mercy Hospital, in Portsmouth, Ohio; at the Retreat house in Gloucester, Massachusetts; at Bethania Hospital in Wichita Falls, Texas; and she served in nursing positions in Missoula, Montana; Oakland, California; and at the Tau Center in Winona, Minnesota. In 2001, Sister Rogene utilized her nursing skills to serve as a Parish Nurse for St. Pius X Catholic Church, and her administrative skills at the Gift of Life Transplant House, both in Rochester, Minnesota. Coming to live at the Heights meant finding duties such as serving with the Elder Care Network, as well as serving as receptionist and giving tours to visitors at Assisi Heights. As the years passed, Sister Rogene spent her leisure time writing short letters and watching only 'good' TV. Her sister, Daisy, visited often, along with her children and grandchildren. Her retirement meant more visits to and from her family, which she cherished.

Sister Sean Clinch (July 7, 1923 – April 7, 2023)

Sister Sean was born Lorena Agnes Clinch, on a farm east of Norfolk, Nebraska. She was the seventh and last child given to parents with deep Irish faith and abiding trust in God. She lost them both when she was in seventh grade; they died just five months apart. Being left to the care of each other, the closely-knit Clinch family had ample opportunities in the 1930s to live the faith they were born into. "At the age of five, my parents enrolled me in Sacred Heart School in Norfolk. For the next 12 years, I experienced the wisdom, expertise, care and guidance of the Rochester Franciscans…Besides my family, an uncle priest, and our pastor, the Sisters had the greatest influence on my life…" It's not surprising that the faith life in which Lorena began living would lead to religious vocation, after a retreat led by a Jesuit priest in her senior year. When she came to Rochester to explore joining the Congregation, though, Lorena said she wavered; and then she satisfied herself with "I'll be back in two weeks." Obviously, she stayed, and continued to be educated both formally and by life's opportunities and graces. Sister Sean ministered for many years in assignments to parish schools, as teacher and principal. The last leg of ministry became the care of her only sister, Mary Kay, in Lemon Grove, California, from 1991 until Mary Kay died in November, 2004. "How grateful I am for the privilege of caring for my sister," she said. In 2005, Sister Sean came to Assisi Heights, where her "retirement" years became daily life. From this perspective, came Sister Sean's vision of the Rochester Franciscan Family: to pray and put our future in God's hands, and meanwhile to "Be who we say we are." This Irish lady, who always loved music, spent mornings helping in the Craft room, and helping with other tasks with the Sisters. In the afternoons, she enjoyed reading and taking part in activities provided at Assisi Heights, especially music and movies. True to formation of family and Community living, daily Eucharist, and the Psalms she memorized, Sister Sean expressed humble gratitude for all that has been; especially being able to care for her sister, Mary Kay, and a hope-filled joyous "Yes" to tomorrow, savoring God's nearness.

"In Gratitude, I Will Sing Forever the Goodness and Mercy of God."

- Psalm 89

In Memoriam

Sister M. Severina Caron (December 31, 1924 – September 15, 2023)

Sister M. Severina was the last of 12 children born to George and Rose Caron. She called herself an "ordinary person simply endeavoring to live out the Franciscan call," but even a small glance at her life reveals the extraordinary ways she enriched our world for 80 years. Family was always very important to Severina. It is there she learned a love of God and was introduced to devotion to the Sacred Heart, Our Blessed Mother, and other Saints early in life. After graduating from high school as valedictorian, she was awarded a four-year scholarship to the College of Saint Teresa (CST) in Winona, Minnesota. From the time she was five years old, when she first visited her sister, Sister Donata, at CST, she knew she wanted to be a Sister and she became a postulant in December 1942. Teaching was her main ministry for 44 years, serving in Chicago, Illinois, and various locations in Minnesota and Ohio. She also taught religious education in the summers in schools in five small towns in Minnesota. Besides earning a bachelor of science degree in education from CST, and later, a bachelor of arts degree in math and theology, there were summer studies at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which led to a master's degree in math education and counseling. She participated in many other programs, such as: liturgical formation; lectionary-based preaching; Red Cross education units; archival workshops, and National Science Foundation programs in science and math. Sister Severina's organizational and writing skills won high praise from Sister Mary Brigh, who stated, "You are my favorite summer secretary." She served for two years as secretary to three Congregational offices, and for nine years she served as the assistant to our Community Archivist. She was a member of the team who wrote the book: *They Came to Teach: The History of Catholic Schools in Minnesota.* When she was in the Diocese of New Ulm, she served on the Regional and Diocesan Catholic Councils, the Diocesan Board of Education, and the Regional Diocesan Sisters' Council. Another ministry that Sister Severina held dear was her work with the Marriage Tribunal of the Diocese of Winona for 28 years. She saw it as a way of bringing compassion to persons who were hurting. Social justice always ranked high on the list of her interests. She initiated the Franciscan International Cluster at Assisi Heights in 1993. Sister Severina continued to serve in her 'retirement' driving the early clinic car; being on call during nights and weekends; switchboard duties; serving on the liturgy and worship committees and as a Eucharistic Minister, and house-sitting to earn money to help the poor; and serving at the Community Food response. God was always the center of her life.

"My Heart is Ready, O God; My Heart is Ready!"

- Psalm 57

Sister Valerie Usher (November 12, 1944 – July 22, 2023)

A woman of great integrity, Val was unfailingly kind and welcoming to all. She was a great listener, deeply interested in the other, and focused intently on the person before her whatever that person's pain, joy, or sorrow. She was loyal to her many friends and they were loyal to her. Val was deeply in love with God, faithful to prayer, and had a love for Liturgy and celebration, often expressed through her music and song. With God as the center of her life, she was able to receive whatever happened along the way, knowing that God was in it all. Val grew up in Monroe, Wisconsin, along with her four younger sisters. Val entered the community from Monroe, Wisconsin, in 1963. Little did she know what the years ahead would hold for her: teaching high school students (even learning French, and then Spanish!); religious education and pastoral ministry; novice minister; three years in Bogotá, Colombia; followed by twelve years in Congregational Leadership, including six years as President, and then back to Bogotá for another twenty-one years. She returned to Minnesota in 2022 with health concerns. Her deep love for her family was evident in many ways, including sharing memories with us of their times together, sharing pictures as her siblings grew, and then those of each of her nieces and nephews and others important to her. The five sisters enjoyed weekly Zoom meetings during the months of her illness, which gave her an opportunity to connect with each of them regularly and brought them even closer when miles separated them. The stresses of leadership, whether in a parish, the Congregation, or Bogotá were immense, but she met each challenge with wisdom and grace. Val's faithfulness to the journey, no matter what she faced, gave her a deep sense of God's presence to carry her through. Music was an important part of her life, and she shared her musical talents freely. There was always a song in her heart, and she would pull one out from her vast storehouse whenever the need arose. Through the challenges in her life, Val came to learn, and expressed many times: "Once you face things, you can move forward." She lived each day as if opening a gift, while also recognizing what was happening in her body. This, too, she faced and moved through to her last breath…believing as Julian did "All shall be well." Julian also said: "The greatest honor we can give God is to live gladly because of the knowledge of God's love."

"I shall be well, and all shall be well,
and all manner of things shall be well."

- Julian of Norwich

This is a truth by which Sister Val lived and could be heard saying many times throughout her life.

Recalling Stories of Inspiration

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I have several stories of inspiration to share that I witnessed during my years of nursing at Saint Marys Hospital.

Ida

Ida was a person who began picking crops as a young teenager and continued to do so her entire adult life. Having graduated from the hot sun, now when she was elderly, she chose entertainment to her liking. She frequented the casinos and seemed to have a good time playing the nickel and penny slots. She never earned much nor lost much. As long as she did not have to raise her arms above shoulder level she was fine. Her shoulders gave out a long time ago.

One early evening, she had a mishap at the casino needing an ambulance. She was taken to the hospital emergency room with the notation that someone would pay the bill in the total amount. No one knew who volunteered to pay the invoice. She was admitted to the to the Coronary Care ICU and was settled in. She was very quiet and thanked us profusely for every small task or even when giving her attention. She remarked that the staff in the emergency room treated her better than any other place she had been in her entire life. She wished she could stay there and was anxious about moving. But the people in the ICU were all nice as well. Of course, there were the snide remarks of a few – *like a Casino!* There was also a bit of laughter.

For the most part, however, there was respect for this elderly woman who had worked so hard and who asked so little. My personal wish was that she could sit at my dinner table so I could eat my vegetables and thank her. They say that in eternity the tables are turned. It makes me wonder if I will pick the vegetables for the former people of color, like Ida, who furnished so many for my dinner.

Jimmy

Jimmy was an eleven-year-old who came from Boys Town to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. He had a brain tumor in a location where it would cause more harm than good in a surgical excision. As a result, different medical interventions were studied for treating it and chemotherapy was the top choice. Though searches were made, his biological parents could not be located. Consequently, a philanthropist provided a plane trip and lodging for his foster parents at Boys Town to come for a visit. In Boys Town, the boys live in houses with others their age and the foster parents lived with them.

Jimmy eventually reached a point where even the most aggressive chemotherapy did not work. The doctors and nurses explained that he needed to go back to Boys Town, and everyone would be praying for a miracle. Jimmy was silent. Then he threw his arms around the neck of his primary doctor, and he said to her through his and her tears, "God is my real Daddy and there, I will always have my real Daddy and he will never leave me – ever!"

The miracle did not happen, but Jimmy now dwells with his Daddy.

by Sister Cashel Weiler

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Image courtesy of Saint Marys Hospital Archives

Marriage Vows

It happened on a Mother's Day that a man in his thirties hit a concrete wall on a motorcycle. Many times, doctors and nurses work very hard to give an elderly patient a few more years of quality living. So, when someone at the age of thirty-two has a severe head injury, it is a heartbreaking tragedy, knowing that it could have been prevented.

Working in research at the time, it was difficult to avoid noticing this man, even though he was not in the study that brought me to this ICU. His wife was sitting in a chair by his bed. The patient looked straight up, his wife straight out as though still in shock. The couple had three children in grade school.

One might wonder why this story would have any inspiration connected to it. What inspired me was how difficult marriage vows can be. Even though her anger kept her from tears, she sat in a chair by her husband until he died, even though his unthinking moment would cost her for years.

Convent Vows – I vow and promise to be poor, obedient and chaste. Marriage Vows – I take you to have and to hold for better or for worse until death we death do part.

Chapel Story

Recently while praying in Saint Marys Chapel, a patient on a cart passed by me. A nurse and a PCA carried and guided things like an IV stand and portable oxygen. The patient had a tracheostomy. They took the patient right up to the altar. It both astonished me and touched me knowing all that had to go into getting the patient there. A patient like this will never be able to make a large donation or influence a power structure. But that doesn't matter. Mayo employees act with values. It is not something written in a book. It is written in their hearts. The young employees who still have stars in their eyes make sure the spiritual needs are met, no matter what. They are special employees who represent the face of the Mayo Clinic.

It made me want to speak to the staff. When the patient saw the altar, his emotion caused tears. The nurse asked him if he needed to be suctioned and he shook his head yes. In only two minutes, someone was there and hooking up plastic tubing. The patient was fine afterward. Now, in his everyday life, this patient navigates a wheelchair with the one finger that still works.

The chapel journey started with a staff doctor saying yes. The patient will most likely remember this forever. What I will remember is the radiance on the face of the patient and the love shining in the eyes of two young employees, along with being struck by their skills. I think even the heart of God was touched and gives a reason for our success.

All of these stories have inspired me over the years, and I am grateful to have been in a position to care for others and share their stories.

The Center is Everywhere

He came up to me, holding his drawing in both hands like a special present:

"Sister, look what I made."

"I'd love to, Johnny. Let's see it." I pulled up one of the first-grade chairs at the front of the room and motioned for Johnny to sit down next to me. I looked at his drawing: a blue sky lay like a ribbon across the top of the page. Then an open space stretched across the paper. And then green for grass lay across the bottom, with a house, a tall stick-man, a bit shorter stick-person with long brown hair, and then 3 smaller stick-persons in graduating size. And, finally, what I thought was a stick dog or cat; I'd have to let Johnny tell me which.

"This is lovely, Johnny. Tell me about it."

"Well," he said, wiggling a bit in his chair as if to get just the right spot to speak from, "this is my dog Ollie. She's a Corgi. And that's my dad. He's really tall. And my momma. She has long hair. Then that's me. See? I have my ball bat."

Sure enough. There it was. A stick in his hand. His ball bat. "And that's my sister Anna and my little brother Mike. He's too little to play ball yet."

"What is this empty space between the sky and you and your family and your house and the grass?"

"That's the air, 'Ster," he said with a note of "what a silly question" in his voice. "That's what we breathe and that's where I play ball."

That scene in my memory makes me smile. So many years ago, I taught first grade, my brown wool habit keeping me warm in the chill of the Minnesota evenings. I smiled at Johnny's drawing then, thinking how sweet the innocence he showed in thinking the sky was "up there," up above the air we breathe, not connected exactly with the green grass on the ground, just one of them "up there" and the other "down here," where we breathe and play ball.

But now, so many years later, I realize Johnny had drawn a picture of how I, in my own style of innocence, also thought of the earth as where I breathed and played ball, and space was "out there," the "beyond" to be explored by astronauts and

by Eileen Lundy, Cojourner

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telescopes. I knew enough to see blue sky between the leaves of the oaks and cedars, but space, with its vastness and galaxies, our Milky Way, our sun and our moon and our neighbor planets, well, that was "out there." I must admit I knew, but didn't know, we are immersed in space. Now, I stand on my deck here in the hills and realize in words I recently read, "The center is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere."

"If God is everywhere, why do we not see him?" asked the Baltimore Catechism. I don't remember the memorized answer, but I carried away the idea that "He" could not be seen with my bodily eyes. What I didn't know then was that my answer to that Catechism question now might well be "…because I did not know how to see." A recent meditation by Richard Rohr carried that phrase that made me pause and read it over—and over and over. "The center," he wrote, "is everywhere. And the circumference is nowhere." The center is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere. Yes. Of course. I am an astronaut, sitting here in the midst of space, surrounded by air, twirling on this planet as it swings around our sun, as our galaxy is home in the vastness of space without the limit of a circumference. Amazing! Wonderful! Close to unfathomable. Certainly, unfathomable by me with my meager grasp of all its wonder.

In some ways this all makes me feel insignificant, smaller than the most microscopic speck in all this vast darkness lighted by stars. But that's just it. It's a darkness lighted by stars, the yang and the yin of the universe. Rather than being lost in this vastness, it's an honor to be part of it, to be part, even if so very tiny, of all that greatness.

Oh, I know terrible things are happening on our planet: wars and the rumor of wars, mass shootings, children orphaned by "collateral damage," assassinations, hunger, floods, tornados, mud slides, tsunamis. The horrors might bury us in terror, if we did not have the light and the darkness, the birthing and living and dying, and birthing again, in this great vastness to console us, to tell us, "You are part of something much greater than just you. You are part of something wonderful."

But so much darkness! Not the vast darkness of space

continued...

The Center is Everywhere... *continued*

Image courtesy of Pixabay

but more the darkness of that which we humans perpetrate on one another. These are our times of darkness. Other times in the past have seen theirs. In the 1970s, when I used to commute to my work, I would listen to the news during my hour-long drive. Those were the days just after the passing of the Civil Rights legislation. Schools were being desegregated in Arkansas. Black children had to be accompanied by armed policemen to enter their school building. A racist segregation-promoting governor was promising his candidacy for president of our struggling country. Just a few years earlier, we had marched in front of the White House, protesting police brutality in Selma, Alabama. Those were dark days, too. Years later, my husband Ed and I stood on a high deck of a building at Tantur Ecumenical Center in Jerusalem, close to the checkpoint between Jerusalem in Israel and Bethlehem in Palestine. We looked out over the countryside and saw the wall snaking its way into Palestinian land, usurping territory and daring a response. We visited the refugee camp in Bethlehem where 11,000 people lived on one square kilometer of land. We heard the stories. We felt the tension. We listened and we looked. Those were dark days there and they have continued and worsened to our present day.

There is darkness over the land. There was then, there is now. So, what do we do with the darkness within which we live on this crying planet? What did the mustard seed do? It gained strength, darkness surrounding it, opened, sent out sprouts, grew. It knew it had life within it. So, we open to the challenges, do what we can, say what we can, pray the way we can, hope and love and breed life into our words, actions, deeds in whatever way we can.

It was a hot summer here in Texas, breaking heat records right and left. Last February, an ice storm split our cedar and oak trees, seemed to kill our lemon tree, and lay waste to our jasmine bushes. We thought we would have to replant, begin again after almost 40 years of tending our acre. But you should see it now! The crepe myrtles all over town are ablaze in riotous colors. Our young lemon tree has over a dozen lemons growing plump, still green but full of promise. The begonias are as thick and full of blossoms as they ever were. Gerard Manley Hopkins said, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God..." And later in that same poem, "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things." There it is. "The dearest freshness deep down things." The mustard seed had it. Our lemon tree, begonias, jasmine bushes, and crepe myrtles have it. And, so do we. We're all one, after all, all part of one great wonder, greater than any one of us, any group of us, any species of us, greater, so much greater. The center is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere.

That's where I get my inspiration… from everyone, everything around and beyond us. I think again of Johnny's picture that made him happy: the sky, the earth, his family, his dog, his ball bat, and the air he breathed and played ball in. And something he didn't name, but his pictures showed it: he was in the midst of his world of love. And so are we in the midst of a universe of love. Johnny's picture makes me smile again. In spite of the horrors and terrors, I hear Louis Armstrong singing, "And I think to myself, what a wonderful world."

How Trafficking Awareness Programs Inspired a Novel *by Lois Kennis*

In 2011, while working at University of Minnesota Extension in Rochester, I began to attend a series of human trafficking awareness programs offered by the Sisters of Saint Francis. It astounded me to learn slavery is alive and well in the 21st century. I had thought America was supposed to be the land of the free, and modern-day slavery happened only in third-world countries. Granted, I knew prostitution was against the law in most states, and was often referred to as "the world's oldest profession," but sadly, the phrase itself makes the exchange of money for sexual favors sound mutually agreeable and business-like, and almost legitimate. Information at the programs boldly revealed the enormous and growing industry of sexual slavery thriving here in the Heartland.

My heart burned with anger to learn that women and children are daily violated and abused so greedy traffickers can make huge profits. Articulate guest speakers and heartfelt video documentaries ignited a passion in me to share this knowledge. One of the programs included a display of library books the attendees were encouraged to take home and later return to the library. I chose to read *The Slave Across the Street*, by Theresa L. Flores with Peggy Sue Wells. It is the heart-wrenching true story of how an American teen survived human trafficking. This book and the series of trafficking programs forever changed my life.

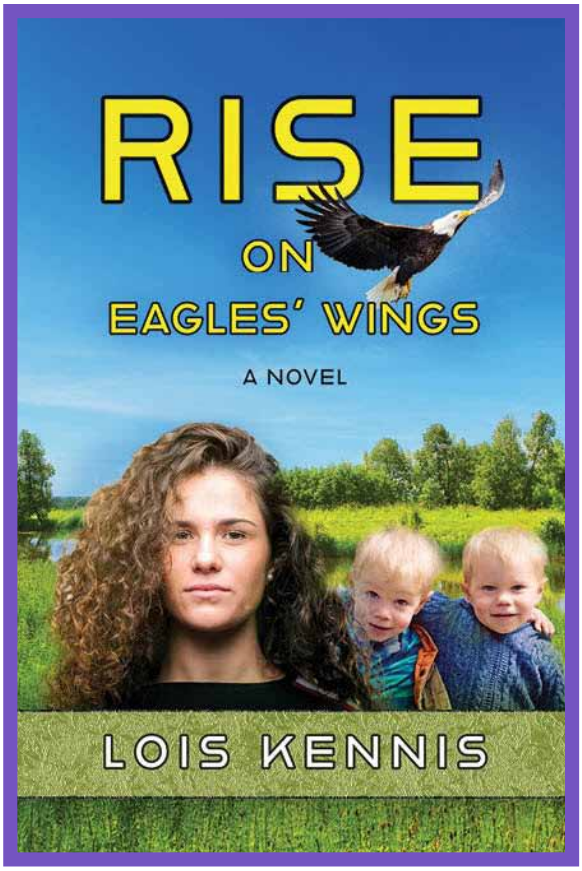
Every program I attended taught me something new. At each event, the number of attendees seemed to grow. At first, the audience seemed to be predominantly mature women, but gradually, younger women showed up. Eventually, gentlemen also appeared in the audience.

I had come to Rochester, in 2002, for sanctuary after long-term domestic abuse. I was never trafficked. But I had allowed myself to become someone's property. I had allowed a fallible human being to completely take over my life. The women's shelter helped me in many practical ways to break free, and encouraged me to put my life back together.

When the trafficking awareness programs were introduced, I was completing a BA degree from University of Minnesota. Creative writing classes were fresh in my mind and I was writing the first chapters of a coming-of-age novel about a tenacious teen mom I had once met. The trafficking issue took hold of my mind and soon worked its way into the plot of my fledgling novel, which was published a decade later, in June 2023, and is titled, *Rise on Eagles' Wings*.

People shiver when they hear about trafficking. It's an offensive, disgusting topic they'd prefer not to discuss. Many adults simply deny that trafficking exists in their communities. Young people—who are prime targets of traffickers—tend to think they are invincible. They scoff at the idea of being deceived into sex slavery. "It can't happen to me," is a common belief.

Sometimes, difficult truths can be more easily digested if they are woven into a realistic story with lovable but imperfect characters. I write to stir the hearts of seekers and fortify the souls of believers. It is my hope that my realistic novel, *Rise on Eagles' Wings,* will help raise awareness and offer a healthy gleam of hope.



Inspired by the Sound of Music

Image courtesy of Pixabay

Growing up in Windom, Minnesota, a small town of about 3,000, there was precious little for adolescents or teens to do – especially on snow-packed Sunday afternoons. But fortunately, my parents had the solution for that (though as a teenager I was not so sure!). It was simple – yet amazingly profound. Music! My sister, Joan (five years my senior) and I had music lessons from grade school through high school – both vocal and instrumental. Thus, on any given snowed-in Sunday afternoon, music filled our living room. Joan played B flat clarinet and piano, I played a B flat cornet, my mother the piano, and my father a violin.

Beyond that, we always had tickets to the Community Concert Series. In that "Kennedy Era," federal monies were given to "the arts," allowing the orchestras and choruses from major cities to perform in the smaller rural communities across the U.S. And then, there was my mother's prized possession – her beautiful "stereo cabinet" that housed an AM/FM radio and a turntable for playing the classical music records that arrived monthly from the "Columbia Record Club." Thus, there were few evenings when classical music (choral or instrumental) was not gently resounding through our home.

One evening, I heard a choral piece that penetrated my heart and soul! I was caught off guard by the way each note seemed to enfold me in a never-before-known and overwhelmingly deep peace that penetrated the very depths of my being. What was softly wafting from the speakers of Mom's stereo was, "God So Loved the World," a movement from the oratorio *The Crucifixion* (1887) by British composer Sir John Stainer (1840–1901).[i] To this day, whenever I hear that work or read the text of John 3:16-18, I readily return to that sacred space.

Stainer's velvet-soft, reverent, yet supple vocal harmony conspires to penetrate the heart, drawing me to marvel at the profound message it proclaims: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-18).

Stainer was a professor of music at Oxford; however, he was never considered among the "first-rank" composers of his time. Yet, even today, this one movement from his oratorio can be found in the repertoire of nearly every English-speaking church choir: "God So Loved the World." How can these words make sense for us today? What new insights can we gain if we reflect on these words in light of evolution, quantum physics, or ecology? What does all of this have to do with St. Francis and finding sustainable ways for daily living? What does this have to do with Franciscans and our community life?

Today, amid what can seem like chaos, the Creator

Image courtesy of Pixabay

continues to sustain the world (Greek = *kosmos*). Jesus Christ, whom Christians confess to be the Son of God and Savior of the world, holds center stage in the New Testament, not the belief that God has created and is sustaining the world. However, early Christians experienced the Creator God of Genesis and understood the original goodness of creation through Jesus, his teaching, and his actions.[ii] Thus, the New Testament presents the themes of creation and redemption as two related aspects of God's one engagement with the world in the incarnation. Simply put, through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God's creative activity continues as a work of redemption (healing, renewal, re-creation). The theme of creation is constantly in the background of all that Jesus says and does, and it undergirds how the early Christians viewed Jesus as the bringer of the new creation. What a marvel this is! What a treasure this presents to us! What a gift we have been given!

The meaning of the term *kosmos* is helpfully explained by Scripture scholar Sandra Schneiders.[iii] *First*, "world" refers to this earth as God spoke all things into being (Gen 1:1–2:4a)—the very place of God's revelation (Wis 6:24; 4 Macc 17:14). This world, this universe, emerged at God's expression through the Word, and it is a place God called "very good." *Second*, "world" refers to "the theater of human history," this place of material existence where we humans live among other creatures. It is into this history that the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14) was born. *Third*, and particularly significant for Christians, the world is the place where the reign of God opens up and the place where disciples of Jesus over the ages are sent (John 17:15). And *fourth*, "world" refers to "a synonym for evil," or the one Jesus calls Satan, who is the one with whom Jesus and his disciples struggle in the pursuit of God. It is into this multivalent world that God's creative love bursts, first as the emergence of creation and then in the redemptive action of the new creation. All in all, the world, the kosmos, is the place where God is revealed through what God created, and it is the object of God's abundant love—a love that dynamically continues to grow and deepen in each and every moment, bringing forth ever-new and renewed life.

Indeed – "God so loved the world!" Might we be inspired to do the same?

[i] Morphting 1, June 21, 2009. From Sir John Stainer's 'The Crucifixion' God so loved the World. Score from cpdl.org Sung by the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLvthjDEUnQ.

[ii] Michael D. Guinan, *The Franciscan Vision and the Gospel of John: The San Da¬miano Cross; Francis and John; Creation and John,* The Franciscan Heritage Series, vol. 4 (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2006), 32.

[iii] Sandra Schneiders, "God So Loved the World... Ministerial Religious Life in 2009," June 14, 2009, 22–24, http://www.ihmsisters.org/www/media/about_us_autogen/SSchneiders Lecture2009.pdf.

Books That Have Surprisingly Inspired Me

Images courtesy of Pixabay

"Truly, God is in this place, and I did not know it!"
- Genesis 28:16

I know many people who look for inspiration in the books they read: The Bible, their favorite spiritual writer or poet, or perhaps biographies of inspiring people. These can also move me. Often, however, I look to the texts outside of the explicitly spiritual (e.g. the Fantasy Genre), or those outside of our Christian tradition (especially Buddhist or Hindu texts). These "outsider" writings have the capacity to shift my attention or understandings to a sometimes-startling place in ways that bring freshness to my inherited Christian belief.

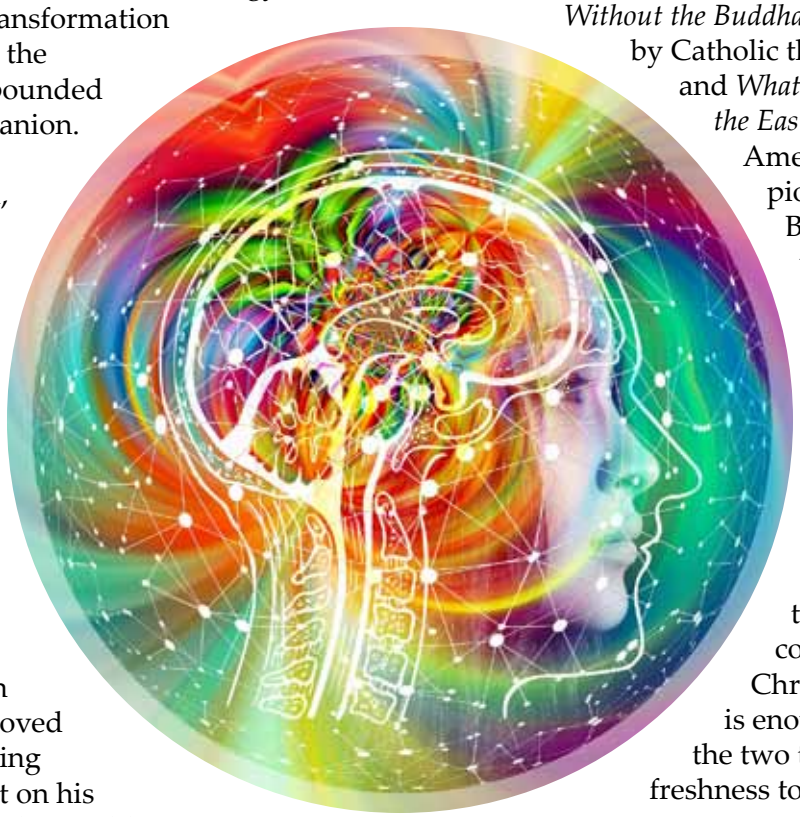
The fantasy genre is especially helpful to me in bringing freshness – not all fantasy, nor even most fantasies, but those which engage profound questions of life and self-transcendence. They are not easy to find, but when I do, I feel as if a real hunger has been satisfied.

What makes fantasy so rich is that it is able to engage the deep questions from outside the usual givens. We know the Biblical texts so well, that it is sometimes harder (for me) to get inside them apart from the platitudes that we hear in homilies or may read in books of spirituality. Fantasy, on the other hand, creates a world that has new rules of relating, new value systems, strange customs and ways of thinking. Anything is possible; and from those possibilities can emerge within me fresh perspectives on my own questions, my own seeking, my own life.

I recently consumed (yes, it is like sitting down to a rich banquet!) a trio of trilogies – that is a *lot* of pages! I

had opened the first book reluctantly, partly because I knew it would be a lot, and even more so because the first title of *The Realm of the Elderlings* was *Assassin's Apprentice.* Why ever would I even consider reading about an assassin? I finally stuck my nose in that book, though, because I had read the author (Robin Hobb) before and liked her writing.

I was quickly hooked and transported to a world which ultimately (by the end of the third trilogy) became a place of literal transformation for the main character and the illumination of utterly unbounded love in the life of his companion. That unbounded love was so breathtakingly revealed, from the first through to the end of the ninth book, that it took me a long time to recover from the experience of it. It took time to realize that I had encountered the author's evocation of a Christ-figure, complete with the initial name of "Fool," through to a much later revelation that the parents' name for him was "Beloved." It was with consciousness of being Beloved in every sense of the meaning of that word that he set out on his sacrificial mission to move the world out of its current rut of sin and limitedness into a more whole/good existence. Yet, the evocation of "Fool/Beloved" was so seamless that at no point did he become a cliché or even a "Christ-figure." He was wholly, uniquely himself.



Of course, this very limited summary of a complex world and the lives of two figures and their compatriots cannot convey the power of the books. What I want to say here, is that the power was enabled by its "outsider" status. Fantasy as a genre usually has less prestige than other literature, and is not ordinarily looked to for spiritual nourishment. But it is exactly its outsider status that clears away the fog that can arise around truths about surrender, self-sacrifice, self-transcendence, Spirit. It is the fresh ground upon which the fantasy world is built which allows the reader to then see her own world with new eyes.

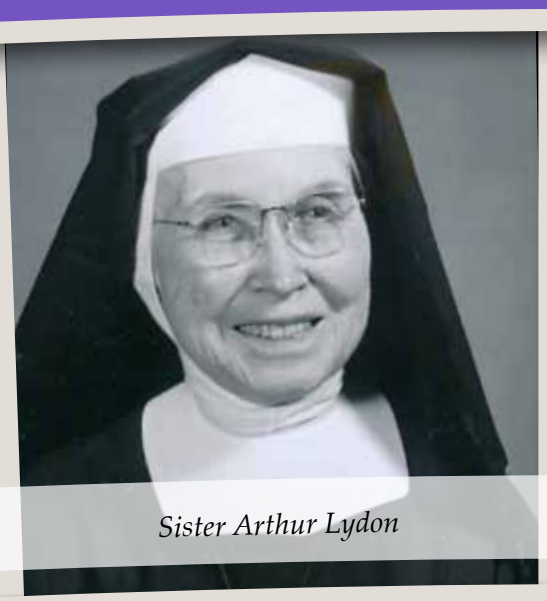
The relative "outsider" status of some books from or about Eastern religions also helps shine new lights on my understanding of Christianity. Two such books are *Without the Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*, by Catholic theologian Paul F. Knitter, and *What We Can Learn From the East,* by Beatrice Bruteau, American philosopher and pioneer in Interspirituality. By illuminating the basic tenets of Buddhism and Hinduism vis-à-vis Christianity, these two books stimulate "aha" moments for me when I suddenly see a meaning in our Christian practice or belief that had been obscure before. Practices and beliefs within Eastern traditions sometimes have correspondences within our Christian tradition, yet there is enough difference between the two that the one can offer freshness to the other.

The ongoing dialogue between the leaders of Eastern and Western spiritual traditions is grounded in the recognition that each tradition is a sacred path which contributes to the fullness of Revelation; a revelation which necessarily exceeds the limits of human categories. Two books which typify these explorations are: *Speaking of Silence: Christians and Buddhists in Dialogue*, with Thomas Keating, The Dalai Lama, David Steindl-Rast, Chogyam Trungpa, and others; and *Living Buddha, Living Christ* by Thich Nhat Hanh. To me, it is the light shining out of these other religions which, as if from the side, differently highlights the peaks and valleys of my own tradition so that a whole new perspective emerges. I see with new eyes what had always been there, but which I had not noticed.

From the Archives: Inspired by Our History

Sister Ancille Brown

Sister Benedicta Malikowska



Sister Arthur Lydon

As the deadline neared for writing this article, and I was waiting for inspiration to write *about* inspiration (this issue's theme), it dawned on me that all I had to do was look around me in the Archives! I am surrounded by the documents and photographs and artifacts of the hundreds of Sisters who have gone before me, inspiring stories waiting to be discovered.

A practice over the last several years has been the national observation of Catholic Sisters Week, held in March each year, to highlight the contributions of Women Religious in many fields. For the Rochester Franciscans, inspirational vignettes from former students and work colleagues have been printed on our congregational Facebook page and they have elicited many memories.

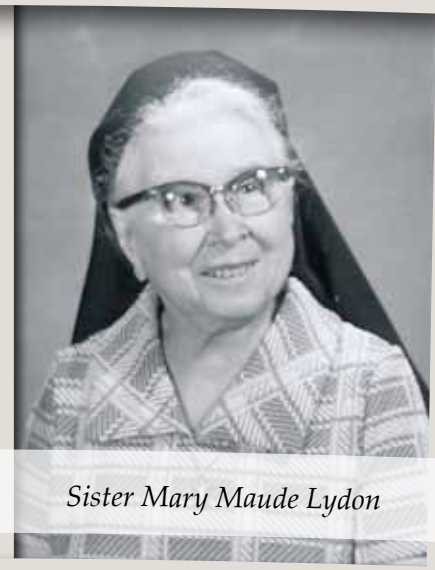
Some of the Archive requests have led me to search out stories with which I was not very familiar. An example: A few years ago, a New York social science professor doing research discovered that several graduates from a small Minnesota school (Cotter High School in Winona) became Civil Rights activists in the 1960s, and he wondered how that happened. After visiting with some of those alumni, it was decided that some of the Franciscan faculty at Cotter encouraged the students to develop intellectual and moral thinking, so that they could not help but act on those values.

Sometimes I wonder about the story behind a photo that I have discovered. A few years ago, one of those photos was of Sister Ancille Brown, who was known earlier in her life as Mildred Brown. She did graduate work at Julliard (New York), earned a Master's degree in Music, and held the position of concertmistress for the Chicago Civic Orchestra. She later joined the Sisters of Saint Francis in 1924, and taught at the high school level and at the College of Saint Teresa in Winona.

The published histories of the Congregation (*Keeping the Memory Green* by Sister Ingrid Peterson), of the Sisters at Saint Marys Hospital (*The Sisters' Story*, in 2 parts, by Sister Ellen Whelan) and the self-published (and unfortunately out of print) story of Mother Alfred (*Odyssey in Faith* by Sister Carlan Kraman) contain many inspiring examples. There is also a yet to be published history of our lay associates (Cojourners) coming this year in anticipation of celebrating their 40 years of existence (1984-2024), which will contain more inspiring stories of the women and men who have chosen to walk with the Rochester Franciscans.

I recall some of the requests that I have had over the past years from persons remembering and wanting to know more about one or more of the Sisters. Many of the requests that I receive are genealogical in nature; but I also hear from persons with fond memories of former teachers and coworkers.

by Sister Marisa McDonald



Sister Mary Maude Lydon

Sister Leocadia Stanton

Sister deLellis Hinrichs

The following represents some of the type of comments that I have received. I am not including names of Sisters who are still alive or who left the Community:

- "I've always had a soft spot for the Rochester Franciscans ever since college, 40 years ago, when the former Sister _____ pretty much saved my life from despair."

- "Sister Benedicta was a teacher at St. John's Elementary School (Rochester) until the late 1960s when she retired to the Motherhouse. She was my most beloved First Grade teacher in 1965-66."

- "Sister Benedicta remains iconic in my memory. She was an extraordinary woman and left a lasting impression on me. That sparkle in her eyes is still so familiar!"

- Referring to his relatives, the Lydon sisters (Sister Mary Arthur and Sister Mary Maud): "Their dedication to do good works was evidenced to me as a youngster. I had Sister Arthur as a teacher in 4th grade at St. Francis in Rochester. One day, while she visited us at home, she was talking with me on the couch and told me that she was going to a school in Chicago the next Fall. It made me very sad, and I asked her if she could ask to stay in Rochester instead. She said, "But I want to go to Chicago." I asked her why she would want to go to Chicago and she cheerfully said, "I want to go wherever they send me.""

- "I am curious if Sister _____ from Lourdes High School (Rochester) is still living? She was a unique and beautiful individual that had a great impact on my teen years. I know that Sister Leocadia, Lourdes librarian, is long gone, but she was a gem, too. Sister _____ was the principal at my elementary school in the late 1960s; she was most kind. I greatly miss the nuns that I grew up with. They were a wonderful influence."

- From a former Professor of Elementary and Early Childhood Education: "Sister Delilis was my teacher when I was in 2nd grade in a split 2nd / 3rd classroom (Portsmouth, Ohio). To this day (age 75) I remember many things that she taught us and how she taught us. I still use the way she taught us to remember the order of the planets. I especially remember some of the activities she had us do to become better readers. Some of them were way before they were used across the board in reading instruction. Her teaching methods were directly on target with what we now know to be effective reading instruction and some I never experienced again in elementary school. I know I became a better reader because of her instruction."

- "Sister _____ was my teacher in 3rd and 8th grade. She was an excellent teacher. She had us do so many hands-on projects that really impressed the knowledge she was imparting. One of my favorite

continued...

memories of her was when I was in 3rd grade and we were all trying to learn to jump "Double Dutch." At that time, 1953-1954, the nuns were in full habit. Yet, she decided to "show us" how to do it and jumped in as we turned the rope, holding up her habit and telling us to watch what she was doing. It was just amazing. After we learned to do it, she went on to teach us "Double German." Again, demonstrating and telling us how to watch what she was doing."

- "Sister _____ was my Junior [High] English teacher. When I graduated in 1963, she wrote a special letter to each of us. I still remember one of the guys just sitting there almost stunned saying "No one has ever told me I was good at anything, but she listed several things she thought I did well. Wow!" He went on to graduate from Ohio State University."

In a recent conversation with a Cojourner, she commented that years ago she told one of the nursing Sisters: "You don't know what a difference you made in my life. I wanted to be a nurse like you." The Sister's response: "We were just doing our job."

So kudos to all the Sister educators, nurses, parish workers, housekeepers, etc., who just "did their job" and provided inspiration for the way that they lived their lives and witnessed Gospel values.

P.S. While this article focuses on the contents of the Archives and the deceased Sisters, I am also regularly inspired by the lives of the current Sisters and Cojourners!

One of my favorite items in the Archives is the twelve framed lists of all the Sisters who have gone ahead to the reign of God – from the first death in the community to the most recent.* The lists include the birth dates, death dates, and years lived in community – a wonderful testament to the thousands of years of ministry they represent.

**According to a Master of Arts dissertation written by Sister Francis Ann Hayes, the first to die in this new community was Sister Edmunda Bingen. She entered in Joliet, Illinois, then moved to Rochester as a novice, and died of consumption just a few years later in March 1879.*

Through the Eyes of a Child

by Sharie Furst

Sharing knowledge and the love of Jesus brings me to a very special 10-year-old girl I met during the Eucharistic Miracles event held in our parish. I witnessed several people who shared various experiences about how the Eucharistic Miracles impacted their belief about the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Little did I know that a 10-year-old girl who came to me and asked if she could touch the statue of Mary was going to have such an impact on me. She said, "All I want to do is hug the statue of Mary." Her deep love of Mary was evident and I found out it began when she was in kindergarten. Sister Dale Lewis came to her classroom at St. Pius. Sister Dale taught that Mary was someone to pray to through the Rosary and other prayers. She taught that if there was a problem, prayer is where we can find the answer. Mary was viewed with a gentle face and soft clothing. She said Mary should be special to all girls because she is, after all, a girl! She includes, along the lines of WWJD, WWMD -- what would Mary do? Unbeknownst to Sister Dale, she offered inspiration to this little girl, who still feels the impact five years later!

Be an Inspiration to a Child!

YOU can be an inspiration to a student in Bogotá by becoming their Godparent!

This is a life changing opportunity to help build a future full of hope for a student!

Colegio Anexo San Francisco de Asis (CASFA) is a school for children and youth from low-income families in a disadvantage sector of Bogotá, Colombia, founded 38 years ago by the Sisters of Saint Francis of Rochester, Minnesota.

The students receive a well-integrated formation; in addition to the strong academics, they develop and live out of Franciscan values, demonstrating genuine leadership skills and a commitment to the needs of their local community. As one student put it, "Thanks to my school, I have experienced the power that education has to break the multi-dimensional cycle of poverty and structural violence. All that I am began at CASFA, in an absolutely richly human educational experience, thanks to the incredible teachers I had that animated me to break my own barriers."

The 'miracle of CASFA' is that it has grown up from a school-after-school for hundreds of children without access to any school, to a Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade school with an excellent reputation for quality education. Graduating seniors test out at the highest level of all national schools and 85% of them go on to higher education.

But the difficulty is, that the parents of the students, given their financial situations, can only respond for roughly 10% of the actual cost of educating their child. This means that we must look for generous persons like YOU to help them make up the 90% difference!

Cost of Education:

The cost per student, depending on the grade level, is about $1,750/year in American dollars. A suggested donation amount is $50 monthly or $600 annually. Plus, if you wish, an extra $25 donation at Christmastime to purchase an article of clothing for the child or a food basket for the family. Please feel free to give any amount you desire. If you can afford more, that would be wonderful. As you can tell from those figuress we need about three godparents per child in order to make ends meet.

If your heart is moved to be the inspiration these children need, please send an email to the Rochester office of the Sisters of Saint Francis, at mission.assistant@rochesterfranciscan.org and we will provide you with details and assign you a student. Donations can be made by sending a personal check made payable to: Sisters of St. Francis/CASFA, by credit card, or by monthly giving.

Charitable Contributions for CASFA:

Under U.S. International Revenue Code § 170(c) (2), direct gifts from individuals to foreign charities are not tax deductible, regardless of the nature of the foreign organization. In order to ensure that donors will be entitled to a federal income tax deduction, the Sisters of Saint Francis are required by IRS rulings to retain full authority over the assets granted to it and cannot accept gifts that are required by the donor to be paid, or to be used, only to further the work of a specific individual or that are required to be used overseas by our organization or another foreign charity or religious institution. While the Sisters retain this legal discretion, we are serious in honoring the intention of our donors.

Thank you for being the inspiration for a child in need!

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