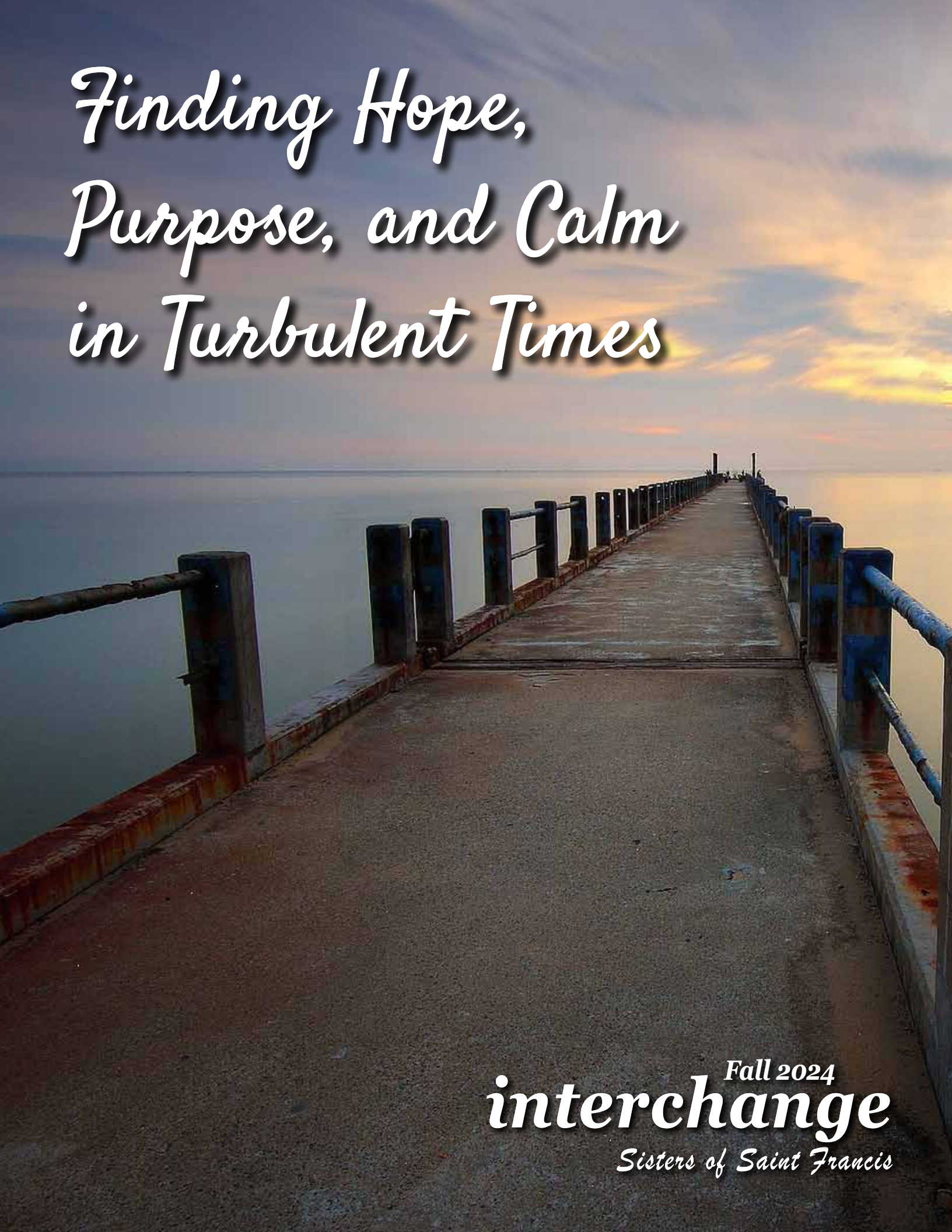
Finding Hope, Purpose, and Calm in Turbulent Times



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Focus: Finding Hope, Purpose, and Calm in Turbulent Times

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Letter from the President

Sister Tierney Trueman

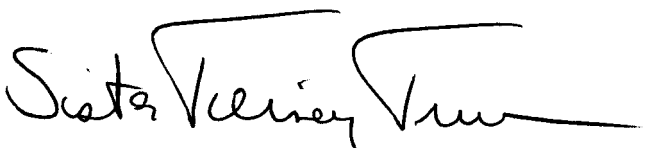
Dear Friends and Family,

"Finding Hope, Purpose, and Calm in Turbulent Times" – what an incredible focus for this issue of Interchange! And what a rich potpourri of images to nourish our souls in these turbulent times, enabling us to truly find *hope, purpose and calm!*

- *"Variety adds to the beauty – flowers/people – would the world be as beautiful if we were all the same?"*
- *"What helps me most is the persistent, good examples of others who deal with the same world as me; to keep looking up and out, and beyond, believing, hoping and loving us all to a better place."*
- *"Centering prayer embraces friendship – knowing God's presence and resting in that presence."*
- *"How do I find an anchor that draws me down deep into the ground of my being? How often do I go there?"*
- *"Take time to see the beauty that surrounds us. Art connects us to the world in meaningful ways."*
- *"Our hearts are wrenched." And we go to, and search for the "peace of wild things." "I go where my wild things are, go down under the arms of the big oak tree, take off my shoes so my feet touch the earth, and just be there, among the wild things."*
- *"God feels closer in the calm evergreen trees. I feel a lightening of burdens, fears, and tension." "Trees sing the morning into being."*
- *"Life is a gift, peppered in mystery, dyings, and risings, pain and healings. Life breathes color into Creation."*
- *And I ask, "What is my part in the healing of our world and our country?" What is the color of your hope?*

Can we frame our turbulent times in a beautiful image of our St. Francis?

"While it was yet twilight a figure appeared silently and suddenly on a little hill above the city, dark against the fading darkness. For it was the end of a long and stern night, a night of vigil, not unvisited by stars. He stood with his hands lifted, as in so many statues and pictures, and about him was a burst of birds singing; and behind him was the break of day."
- (G.K. Chesterton, St. Francis of Assisi)



Sister Tierney Trueman
President / Congregational Minister

The Experience of Beauty

Last week I experienced "beauty" in so many ways. I seemed to get a reminder wherever I went out. First of all, there was a choir concert. I wasn't going to go, I had too many other things to do, and I was tired. But, I decided to go and support this choir that I had sung with for several years. The selection of songs was amazing, all about joy and singing. There was the adult choir of more than 60 voices, a children's choir, and a younger children's choir that sang the Sesame Street "Sing, Sing a Song." What a joyful, calming experience. Sleep doesn't always come easy these days, but that night I think I slept the best I had in months, due to the music.

I spent another day at the Landscape Arboretum. It was a glorious, sunshiny day. We took the tram ride through the grounds and then walked among the many blooming plants and trees. There were lilacs, iris, azaleas, columbine, larkspur, and roses beginning to bud. Some had very, very tiny white blossoms, others, like the angel trumpet, had a huge orange bloom, maybe the biggest I've ever seen. There were pinks and purples, yellows and oranges. Some were brilliant, some very subtle in color. I just stopped in my tracks and asked my companion, "How can anyone not believe in a God when they see such variety, such beauty?" It made me think of the variety of people who are as unique as each of these blossoms. We don't expect an iris to be a rose, or a delphinium to be a tulip. We would not want all of these flowers to be the same color, shape, or size. Taken all together in the landscape they are overwhelmingly beautiful, and the variety adds to the beauty. Can we remember that God created that floral variety, as God created the variety of people, each unique, each equally precious in God's sight? Would the world be as beautiful if we were all the same?

The next day as I was reflecting on it all, I read an excerpt from Matthew Kelly's *Holy Moments.* He was

Photos Courtesy Mary E. Huettl

relating an experience and conversation between a Hermit and an Abbot. They sat in silence before a lake.

> *The lake was clear and still. The surface was like glass and the sun was reflecting perfectly on the water like a golden disc. The hermit began to speak, "A still pond reflects the sun perfectly. God is the sun. You are the lake. When your soul is still and clear, you reflect the truth, beauty, and goodness of God to everyone you encounter."* [1]

I thought of those flowers on that beautiful sunny day, reflecting the sun to all who encountered them. And I thought of how each of us reflects God in our own unique way, as different as the azalea is from the angel trumpet. May we each experience beauty in our surroundings, in music, in nature, in what we read, and in our neighbor.

"When your soul is still and clear, you reflect the truth, beauty, and goodness of God to everyone you encounter." [1]

[1] Mathew Kelly, *Holy Moments: A Handbook for the Rest of Your Life.* (North Palm Beach, FL: Blue Sparrow Books, 2022).

Hope in Times of Trouble

Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

There is much in our present world and in our day-to-day life that might cause us to feel hopeless wondering what we can do to make a meaningful difference. We see war and strife among people on an international stage, world hunger, and homelessness—often caused by the unjust ways that the goods of this world are distributed.

Both in Church and State, worldwide, as well as on a personal level in our everyday lives, we see that often, through systems of patriarchy and privilege, some "voices" are heard while others are not. Many times these "unheard voices" belong to women, those in the LGBTQ+ community, and increasingly today within our beloved Church, those who question teachings that no longer serve God's people. With just this much of a beginning, I have named enough things that, if we concentrated our thoughts on them, could make us feel quite defeated, down in the mouth, and basically hopeless.

Yet, as I write this, we have just completed the Easter Season wherein our brother, Jesus of Nazareth, who became the Christ, appeared many times to his disciples and friends telling them to "fear not" and with the greeting, "peace be with you!"

Jesus, as he was preparing to physically leave our world, encouraged his followers with the statement, "You will do greater things than me" (John 14:12). Jesus prepared these first followers well by the example of his human life among them, which would carry over to ourselves. With the sending of his Spirit, we would have all we need to "become our best selves" in his footsteps.

So, in times of trouble I implore our brother, Jesus, the Christ, to walk with me—even saying his name, "Jesus," and asking in that name for help beyond my poor attempts, at times, to make a difference and to give me hope.

For me, when thinking of "hope," I realize that "faith and love" are never really far behind. The writer of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews (11:1) says, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith, because we can't get "our heads around it," is best come through our hearts. Additionally, believing in Jesus and his ways among us and attempting to live after his example,

by Kathy Redig, Cojourner

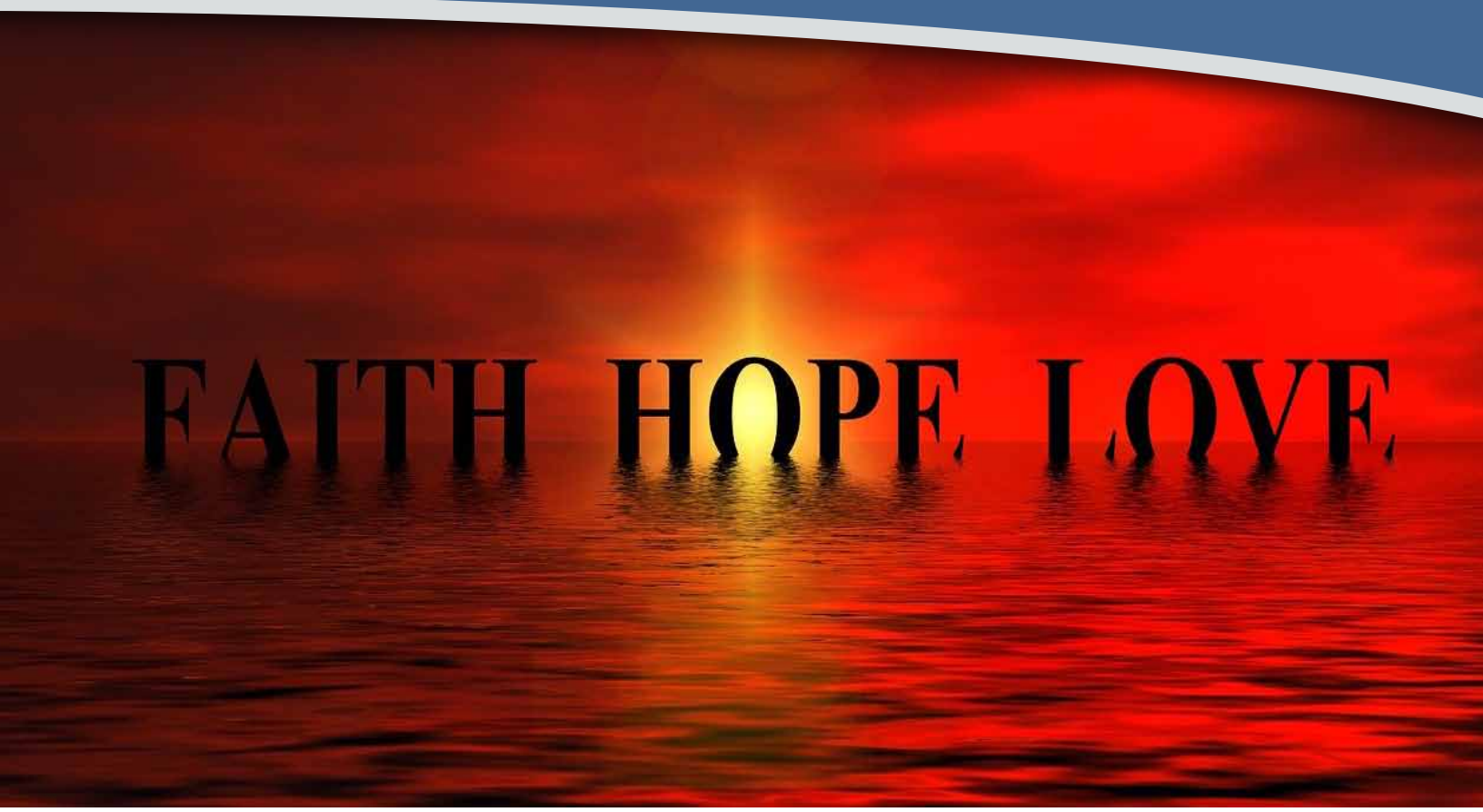


Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

naturally leads us to "love," as his whole coming among us was to let us know, each of us, who is loved by God and encouraged to do the same.

When all is said and done, and on days when I am tired, frustrated, and even angry with the inhumanity of some toward others in my world, what helps me most is the persistent, good examples of others who deal with the same world as me; to keep looking up, and out, and beyond, believing, hoping, and loving us all to a better place.

I will conclude with just two examples of present-day saints who have helped me hold onto hope:

- This past year, our Catholic world lost a man who rose to become a bishop within our Church, serving in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth. That man and prelate was Tom Gumbleton. Bishop Gumbleton never moved beyond being an "auxiliary," or support bishop in Detroit, in his religious, ministerial career because, as a friend said at his passing, "When Tom had to choose between the law and love, he always chose love."

- Sister Marie Regine Redig, SSND (School Sisters of Notre Dame), part of our extended Redig family, lived nearly 94 years, dying this past March. When I was ordained a Roman Catholic priest, through RCWP (Roman Catholic Women Priests), 16 years ago, "Gina," as she was known by family and friends, came into my life as a staunch supporter of my call, and weekly "commentator" of my homilies. It turns out that way back, 70 years ago, when she chose to become a Sister, she was forced to deny her God-given call to priesthood.

When I wonder whether I can truly make a difference in my world, I remember folks like Bishop Tom and Sister Gina, and am newly inspired with hope, which we are told, "springs eternal," to keep on trying, believing, and doing, that is, loving.

Kathy Redig is the pastor of All Are One Catholic Church in Winona, Minnesota, and a member of Roman Catholic Women Priests.

Finding Hope, Purpose and Calm in Turbulent Times… Through the Appreciation of Art

Sister Bernadine's Free Art Giveaway

Is everyone an artist at heart? Not all agree, and some will always say they can't even draw a stick man or woman. But many would agree that the breathtaking experience of viewing a gorgeous, multi-colored sunset is an example of God's beautiful artwork. Whether appreciating God's art in nature or creating a piece of art, both can offer a calming moment to stop and experience the presence of God.

Throughout my life, I have always been drawn to art and creativity. In fact, my favorite time while attending grade school was Friday afternoon. This was when we had the opportunity to participate in classroom art projects. Fast forward to about 18 years ago. While participating in a retreat near Lake City, Minnesota, I was searching for a way to pray without using many words. My retreat director introduced me to drawing Mandalas.

Off I went to the Public Library to find a good space with a book, black paper, and good colored pencils. Since then, I have found purpose and calm while creating hundreds of Mandalas over the years. Mandala means "circle" in Sanskrit. Creating a Mandala is a meditative practice of slowing down and taking time to listen to one's heart. After a short meditation, the process involves drawing in the circumference adding shapes, lines, and maybe a few words. Revealing the image can evoke a discovery of self and can lead to a feeling/prayer of hope and gratitude.

During a recent pondering of how I could share my art with a larger audience, I set up a "Spring Art Event" at Assisi Heights. This occasion was a "free art giveaway." Each person could choose a piece or two to decorate their own space. I was gratified and thankful for the conversations I had with each person as they

Photos Courtesy Sister Bernadine Jax

told me why they chose that particular piece.

Research has shown that meditating, prayer, and creating art all have the same effect on the physical body; they alter the brain waves by inducing an alpha state of deep relaxation. Another way to calm the soul in these trying times is simply to assemble some watercolor paints, water, paper, and brushes. Dip a brush into water, choose a favorite color, and let your brush flow easily across the paper. Repeat as often as you wish. Then stop and let your soul experience a sense of calm. You can also journal or pray silently, as you search for a hopeful connection within our turbulent world.

For many years I have enjoyed being a photographer while assembling albums of pictures that tell a story. Living at Assisi Heights offers a plethora of grace-filled opportunities and moments to capture the seasons, animals, convent activities, and sunsets using an iPhone or a camera. Again, if we take the time to see the beauty that surrounds us, these moments can bring much pleasure and peace to our hearts and the world.

In conclusion, I found this quote from East End Art and Music School in Riverhead, New York, "Whether we're creating or appreciating it, art allows us to explore our thoughts, express our feelings, and connect with the world in meaningful ways."

Sister Bernadine Jax is a resident artist at Assisi Heights and displays her art at SEMVA (Southeastern Minnesota Visual Artists) Art Gallery in the Kahler Grand Hotel in Rochester, Minnesota.

Seeking Calm and Safety

Image by jrico144 from Pixabay

"Go to a safe place now!" This spring we have experienced many tornadoes and storm warnings in our nation that have alerted us to take shelter. As the potential for tornadoes came closer to those of us in Southeastern Minnesota, the news broadcasters were very emphatic almost shouting "**Now**, go to your safe place." The immediacy of 'now' makes me think about, "How do I take shelter in our turbulent world beyond our tornadoes and storm threats? Is there a safe place where I can go?" Amid all the upheaval with the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, the political wars within our country, and maybe even wars within our hearts, how do I find a place of shelter? Am I awake to the turbulence of all that is to look at my fears, and maybe even my despairs, to find a place of shelter from all the conflicts and noises of my soul?

As a person desiring to live my spiritual journey, I do not wish to be complacent or not affected by what is going on around me. But how do I find an anchor that draws me down deep into the ground of my being? I need to find a place where the storms around or within me do not take me off course. How do I anchor myself in that safe place? For me, prayer, meditation, and mindfulness practices have been very helpful.

Each morning, I sink myself into the ground of my day through prayer; holding the truth of what is in my world, our world, and asking for peace and awakenings to discern what is mine to do within this world. As I move through each day, whenever stresses arise and conflicts are blaring on TV channels or phone alerts, I make a choice… do I limit the length of news

by Sister Linda Wieser

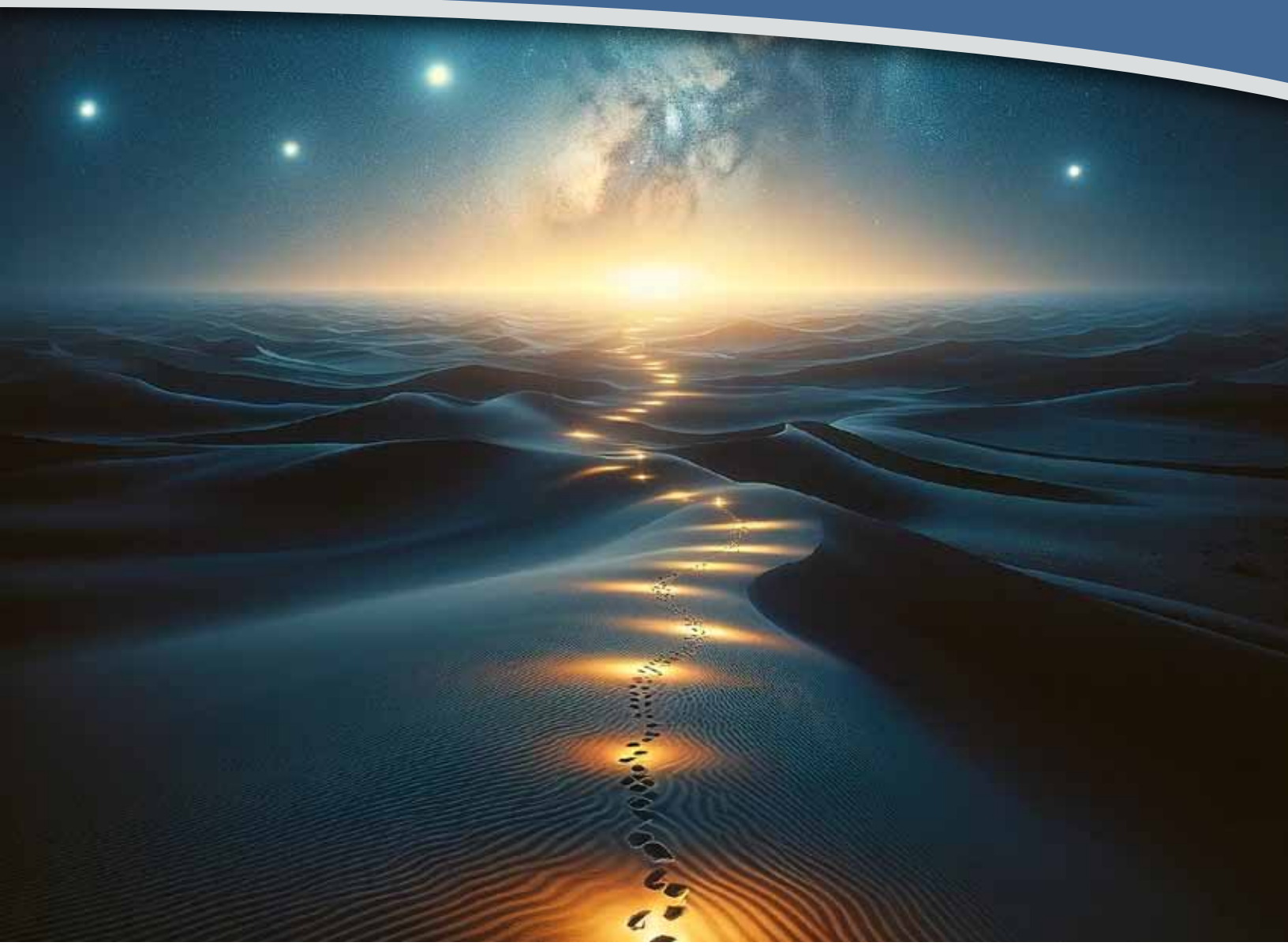


Image by S K from Pixabay

or time scrolling on my phone? Maybe journaling or walking in nature can bring me back to the anchor of my inner safe place. I continue to try to remember that God's presence is with me.

Recently, I heard someone say, "God cares for us like a mother hen cares for her brood." It reminded me of parts of Psalm 91 which continue to confirm that we have safety and refuge in the shelter of God's faithfulness. "You shall not fear the terror of the night or the arrow that flies by day… because you take refuge in God… God has given the command for the angels to guard you in all your ways." At the end of the day, I reflect on the day and recommit myself by naming things for which I am grateful, reviewing the griefs of the day, and then I surrender them to my safety net, by surrendering all to the heart of God.

Maybe over these next months, you might be invited to be more alert and aware to **"go to your safe place now!"** Do not let the turbulence swallow you up, but find that sense of hope, peace, and calm in the midst of all that is. For me, I anchor myself in the mantra of Julian of Norwich, a great mystic in the 15th century, who said, "All will be well, and in all manner of things, all will be well."

Centering Prayer: Finding Hope, Calm and Purpose

Image by Karen.T from Pixabay

Many of us feel that our lives are ordinary, very ordinary. We live each day doing ordinary things, interspersed with other things. We remember those *other* things, but not the ordinary. However, it may be that the best things we do each day *are* the ordinary things! We know how to do them and get them done. Yet, what we remember and share are the *other things* – such as going out for lunch, gardening, or reading an exciting book. We think and talk about the *extraordinary* things that happen to us.

But, something needs to be said about the ordinary. Centering Prayer embraces the ordinary.

Known as *Lecto Divino*, Centering Prayer is taking the Scriptures and living with them in your heart. It is getting acquainted, making friends, and seeking what Jesus is saying to you. Centering Prayer embraces friendships and the adventures of life; all the while knowing God's presence and resting in that presence. A person desires to form this union with the Creator of life.

As we continue in the daily flow of life, we often pray for peace, calm, affirmation, and tranquility. You may feel you have tremendous insight and God is truly blessing you above all others. Then God seems to disappear, and you try other methods of prayer. You wonder what happened to your *real* prayer.

The language of God is silence. Through connectedness to seeking Jesus, we learn that silence. It is this commitment that brings us through troubled times, through crises, and it brings with it a trust in God. Most persons have experienced alienation in early childhood, as a teenager, as a married person, or as a member of society. Centering Prayer helps us get in touch with alienation and generates the power of security and affection. We face this alienation and realize that there is a God who loves us.

by Sister Claren Sellner

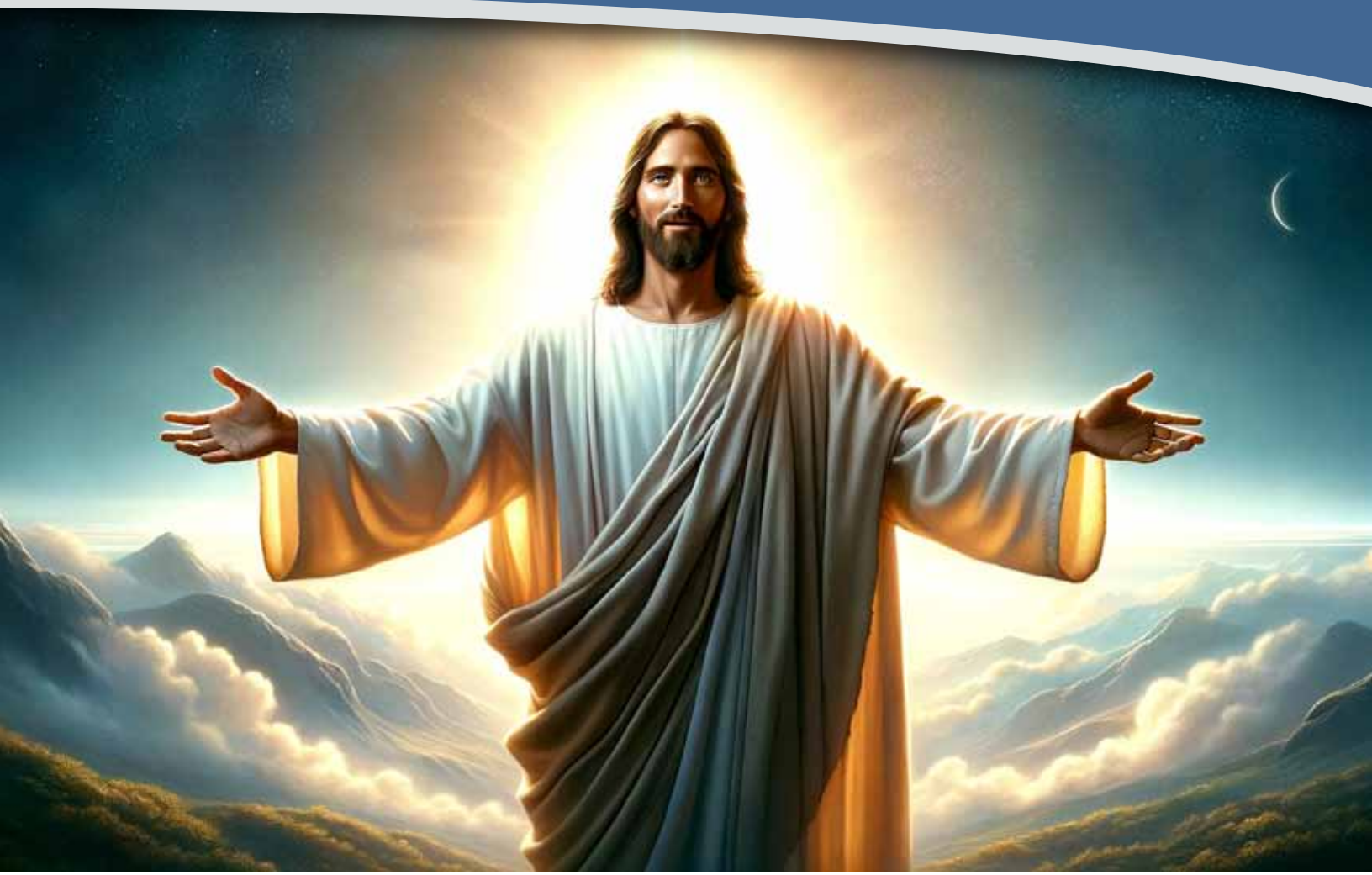


Image by Karen.T from Pixabay

God does not demand perfection; God is not a harsh judge. God relates to each of us and is present to us. We are the ones who move away. Giving love is compassionate, tender, luminous, total self-giving, seeking no reward. All have a basic core of goodness that is dynamic and will develop further.

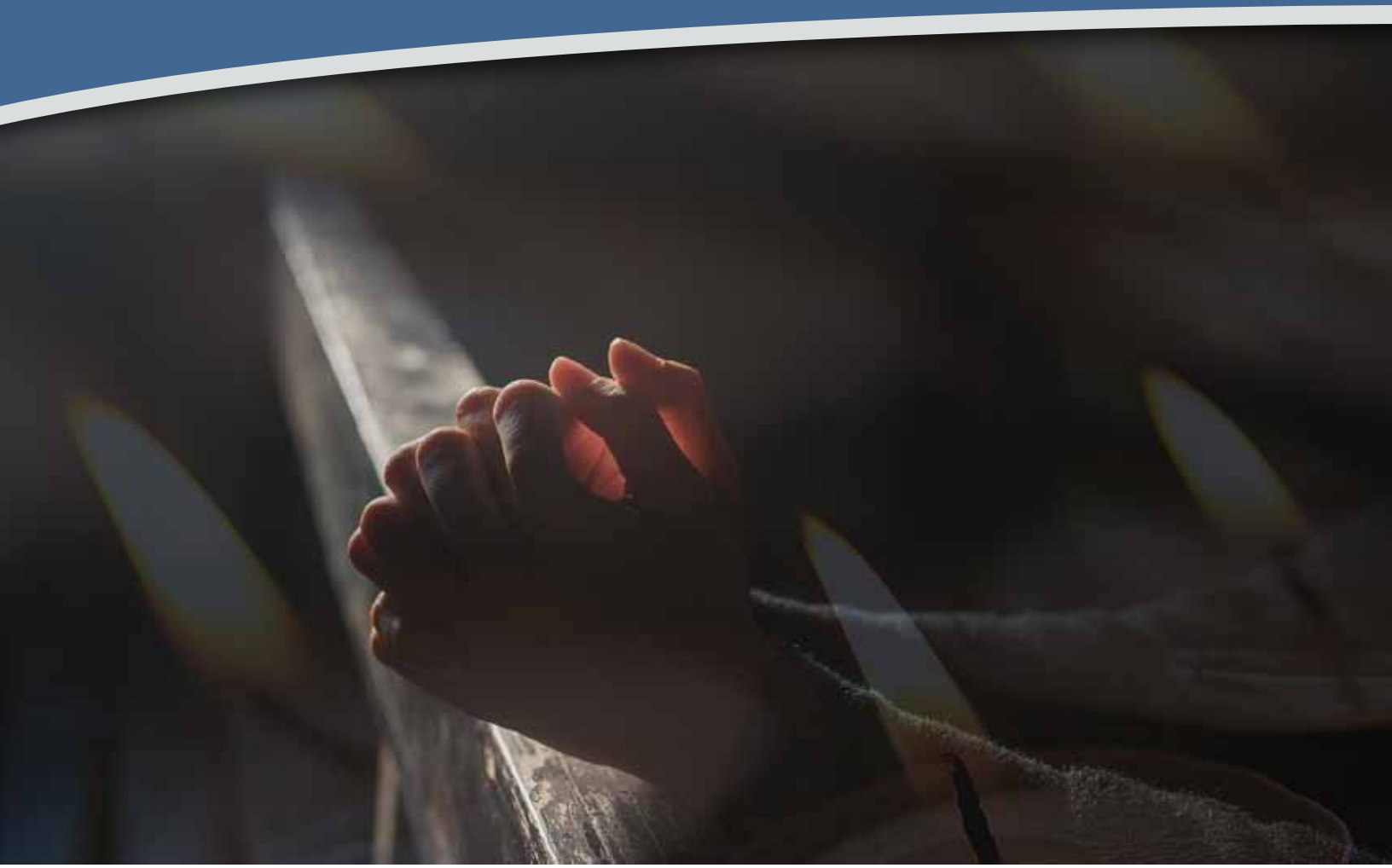
Centering Prayer is not a relaxation exercise. It is not a charismatic gift. It is not a psychological phenomenon, nor does it attempt to exert control over your mind or body. It is not mystical, you just do it!

In Centering Prayer, we remember the inner dynamic of a phrase or word to keep us centered. The word becomes a mantra, a repetition of love. There can be darkness and discomforts of the body, and emotions such as anger, fear, and frustration may enter our minds. With Centering Prayer, we resist no thought, recant no reasoning, react to no emotion, and return to the sacred word or mantra. You can feel being affirmed by God's love and know you are loved, even when bombarded by darker memories and emotions.

As we search for greater insight, we realize there is something more than just 'self.' In this prayer, there can be transformation of consciousness. It is union with Jesus. We simplify what we do think about and are attentive to the driving energy within us. Centering Prayer evolves through a personal relationship with God.

There is a true uniqueness in silence. As with breathing, we can do this without thinking. We can go beyond the limits of our mind, and stretch ourselves to discover a new dimension and another level of love… God's love.

Finding Your Way to Happiness, Hope and Purpose



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If at any time in your life you have felt a lack of hope, purpose, or calm you will likely understand, as I have, how Moses must have felt as he wandered around the desert for 40 years. It is a feeling of such complete emptiness and lack of direction that you wonder how you will ever find your way back again to a feeling of happiness, hope or purpose.

I believe we have all felt this kind of turmoil from personal experiences as well as from the problems we hear about daily that are going on in our world. People seem more disconnected and divided. We have what seems like unending wars, political turmoil, discontent and so much more. Regardless of whether we feel this stress from personal or worldly concerns, we each have to learn for ourselves what brings a sense of calm to us and gives us that feeling of hope and purpose again.

On a personal level, the two most gut-wrenching events where my sense of calm and/or hope felt very threatened were the death of my 6-day-old son Ryan in 1977, and when I was diagnosed with cancer in 2018. I truly wondered initially, in both situations, how I would ever experience life in the same way again.

When my son died, my mistake was in thinking that if I just kept busy, very, very busy, all would improve with time and I wouldn't have to do anything. Somehow purpose and calm would just magically return. By keeping so busy, I didn't have to think about the painful emotions or deal with them. It took 20 years before I figured out how much grief I was still carrying from keeping my emotions so deeply held.

By the time I was diagnosed with cancer in 2018, I had learned how to find calm, peace, hope, and purpose even amid a potentially life-threatening illness. After the initial shock of hearing I had cancer, I have truly found the years since to be some of the highest-quality years of my life. Fortunately, I found ways to deal with emotions and stress as it happens.

by Dee Thatcher, Cojourner

Image by Joe (jplenio) from Pixabay

Thankfully, we have hope; which I believe exists to give us the push we need when things are out of kilter for whatever reason, and we know something needs to be changed. But, how do we figure out what needs to be changed when we are in distress or anxiety?

When I think back over my entire life, I realize it has been the gift of solitude in nature that has helped me the most to figure out what I need to restore my calm. I read from the book, *Precious Solitude* by Ruth Fishel, "What we have been looking for all along has always been within us, we just have to stop long enough to find it." [1]

I think of Mother Earth as one big Cathedral. For me, it is a very spiritual, sacred, and healing place. I can best sort out my emotions, feelings, and struggles when I am alone in a quiet setting without the distractions of daily living. Sitting in silence, my mind can listen to what my heart is telling me I need. Being in nature, I witness the cycles of life and realize nature goes through harsh times, too. And even in winter, when it seems like we will never see the beauty or joy again of the flowers or trees, miraculously, we see rebirth in the spring. Nature needs each season to be at its best.

Life stresses are likely always going to be a part of our lives. I am grateful I have found a way to restore my calm through nature. I have learned some of my best lessons in the darkest times of my life. This has made other times feel brighter than they otherwise would be. Being in solitude with nature, I have learned that our world and our lives go through changes, as it does with nature. If we can't love what each season has to offer at least let us respect the lessons learned and let it guide us to change what we can to bring us calm, hope, and purpose. Life is good and can have a purpose even in the midst of chaos if we believe it to be so.

[1] Ruth Fishel, *Precious Solitude*, First Edition (Stoughton, MA: Adams Media, 1999).

Finding Hope

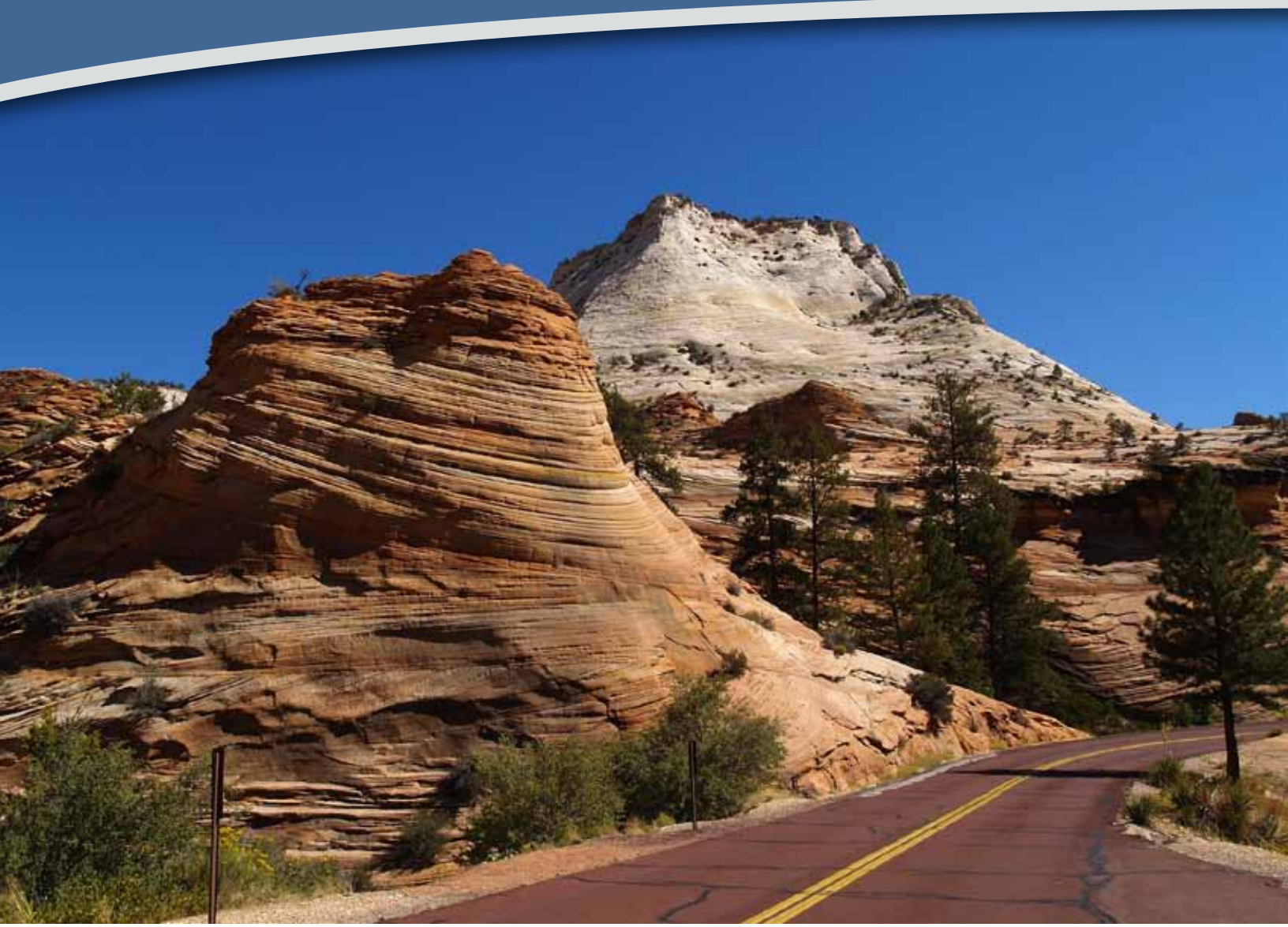


Image by Brigitte Werner from Pixabay

My husband, Urb, and I pack the car, head for the desert, and drive up the mountains to clear our minds of the alarming violence, pain, and suffering we read and see in the news media. Our recent trip leads us to Utah's Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks. We are weary and ready to escape from the chaotic National and Arizona politics and the increased gun violence in Phoenix.

"Where are You, my God and my All? What is my part in the healing of our world and country?" My prayer is in my heart and mind. I know God is inside and all around me; so, why are many people suffering in Gaza, and other war-torn zones? Are You with the injured crying child searching for his mother? Why? Why? I was looking everywhere for hope. I was listening for purpose in pain and poverty in Phoenix, in the US, in the world. No answer came my way, only silence.

Soon after we start driving, we are in the mountains high above the Valley of the Sun, heading towards Flagstaff. We are embraced by the rocks, boulders, and cliffs. Mount Humphry still has some snow on high peaks. God feels closer in the calm evergreen trees, cooler air. I feel a lightening of burdens, fears, and tension.

Living in the "Valley of the Sun" surrounded by the McDowell and Superstition Mountains feels comforting from October through May. Come summertime, the temps have reached 122 degrees

by Fran Weidner, Cojourner

Image by Christian Lund from Pixabay

Fahrenheit as the climate creeps to warmer temperatures. As seasonal climate concerns arise, so do the daily stresses of living in hard times. I was born during World War II. I didn't meet my daddy until I was three years old. Reminded of the stories my mother shared of the pain from living through family separation and loss during war, it is hard not to ask if anything ever changes. Then, I see the magnificent rock walls of Zion Canyon National Park.

Passing through Zion we look up the stone peppered in shades of rosy-beige canyon walls, our Creator's magnificent handiwork.

We spend several nights here, before repacking the car for the drive to Bryce Canyon. Here we look down into the glorious red rock canyon. Shapes of swirling-water-formed castles, an artfully formed arch, await our awe. God is here inside and all around us and our fellow tourists as we become quietly in touch with beauty that cannot be duplicated by mankind's hand.

Peace and Hope rise within me in those moments. Life is a gift, peppered in mystery, dyeing and risings, pain and healings. Life breathes color into Creation. What is my purpose at eighty-one years old in these troubled times? Just to live is Holy. All life is Sacred. I breathe in and exhale Francis' prayer, "My God and my All."

Trees, Birds, and Friends

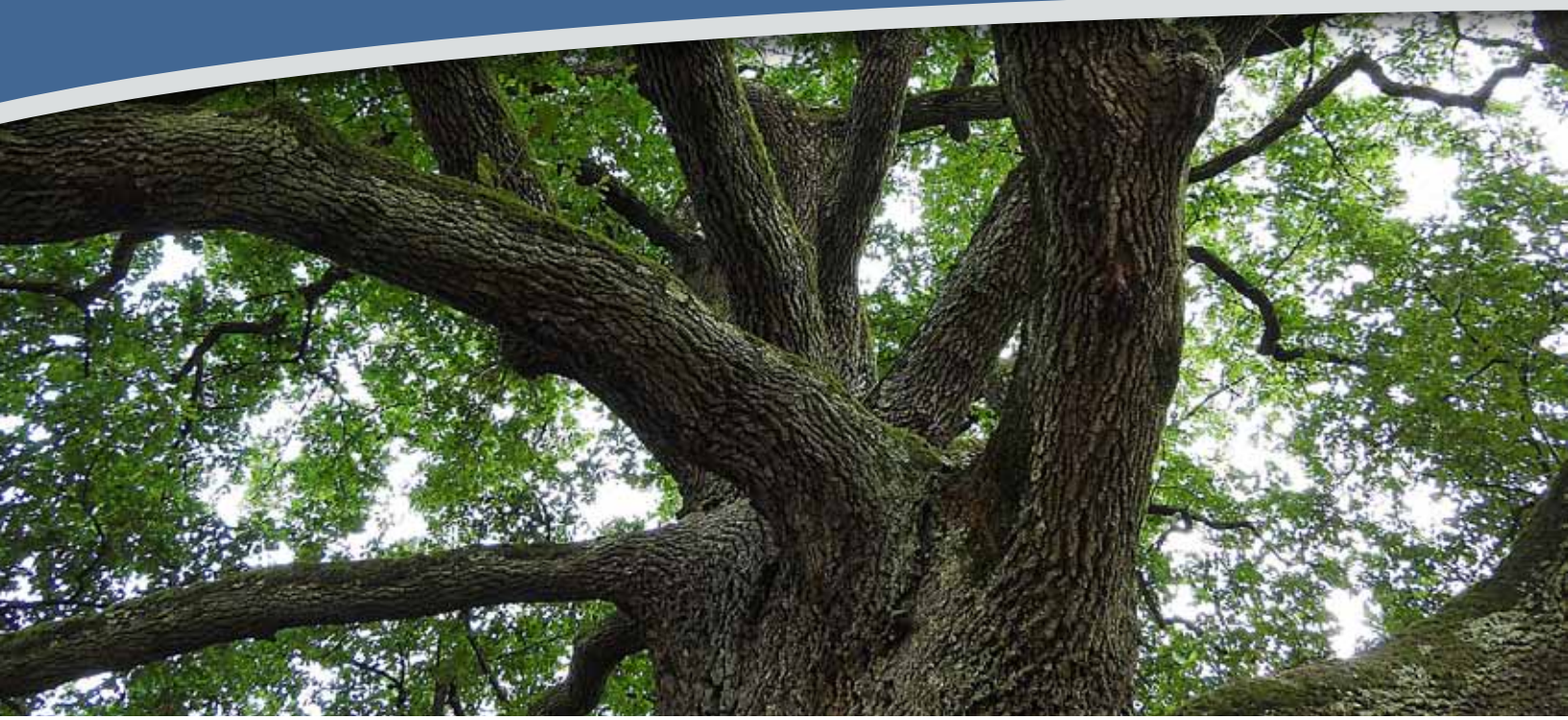


Image by Csaba Nagy from Pixabay

What do we do for our peace, our sanity, when every day brings us more terrible news, more devastating pictures of suffering in Gaza, the West Bank, Israel, Sudan, and in parts of many other countries, and in parts of our own? Our hearts are wrenched.

We give what we can in actions, in our presence, in assistance of whatever we can give. We sign petitions, participate in webinars, and hear voices from the many sides of each issue, hoping to understand, wanting to help, but feeling helpless still. So, what do we do?

Wendell Berry, a poet, has a poem that has been read and read and read by many who find themselves in need of a path to peace amid all the horrors and fears we see going on in our world. He says when he feels this way, he goes out where the wild drake and the heron are and he comes "to the peace of wild things."[1] It brings me peace and restfulness just to read his poem. But I don't have a drake and a heron here or anywhere nearby, so I look around for wild things I can go be with. I know where they are, but I had to bring the wild things to me.

I live now in a lovely retirement community in Austin, Texas, not far from the home my husband, Ed, and I built over 40 years ago. We chose this apartment, just two months before Ed died because we had lived on over an acre of trees and we needed trees. This small apartment enabled us, forced us into the simplicity of living as we both wanted, just what we needed, no more. But we needed trees. This small apartment has a tiny patio that leads to a patch of land with three crepe myrtle trees and a fence sheltering this small garden from a road with parking along its sides. Just outside the fence, a majestic Spanish oak stretches its many trunks and branches as far to the left and right as I can see. It has been here many decades and it must know many stories of people who lived here in these apartments and on the land long before these buildings were built. So, my garden is private and has its own guardian, the Spanish oak.

But it wasn't wild, this garden, just weedy, and filled with birdsong in the mornings from birds nearby but not here. So, with the help of a friend, I planted bougainvillea, impatiens, caladium, and hung bird feeders and a hummingbird feeder. Now many different kinds of birds come and sing the morning into being. Of course, at times I hear traffic sounds from a distant highway, and the humming sound of our nearby power plant cooling our buildings and doing laundry, but they are just the various sections of the urban orchestra of this city.

So, Mr. Berry, I have my place where wild things are, but I live in Austin, Texas, where no matter what the

by Eileen Lundy, Cojourner

Image by Christiane from Pixabay

calendar says, we have been in full summer for weeks. It is dangerously hot soon after 9:00am for old folks to be out and about. But before that in the morning, and the evening after 8:00 or 8:30pm, I can go where my wild things are, go down under the arms of the big oak tree, take off my shoes so my feet touch the earth, and just be, there among the wild things who do not fear or worry about the state of affairs in the world.

Thank you, Wendell Berry.

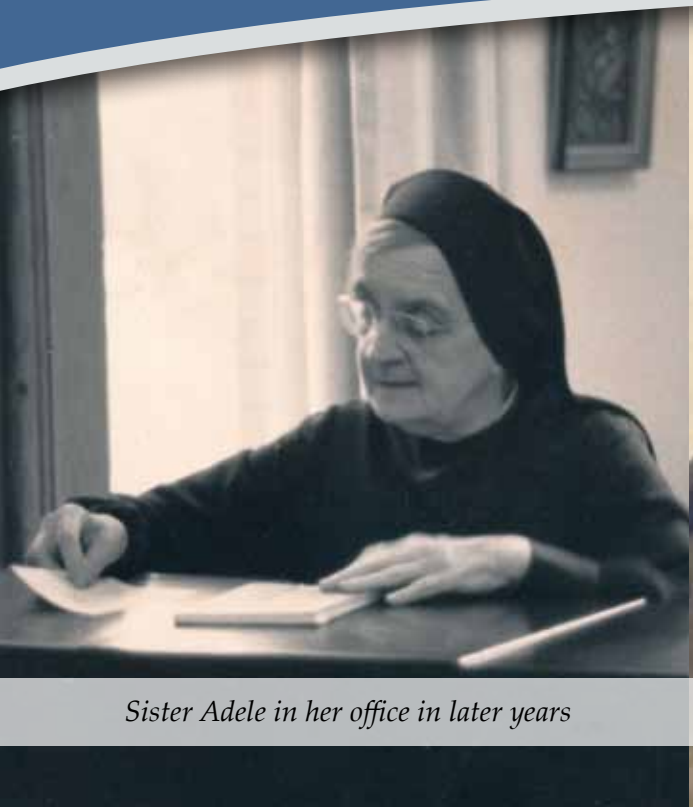
But, then, the next morning the waves of news come. Fortified by meditation and reading, I face the onslaught of the day's news. My heart breaks again. I sign more petitions. I give to a deeply needy cause. I hold the suffering children in my heart. I pray as best I can when I can. And Monday tumbles head over heels into Friday, and another week of horrors has passed. I have my garden, my peace of wild things.

But I need my friends. So, I call a few. They feel as I do. We meet here or in one of their homes, usually on a weekend evening. We sit with a glass of wine and talk, sometimes about what is happening, in the world and in our lives, and we laugh at some old story. Old stories drummed up from the past are the best. We laugh and enjoy ourselves. Maybe someone would ask, "But should we be laughing at a time like this?" These may be the times when we need laughter the most. I think Desmond Tutu would agree. He once said, "Life is hard, you know, and laughter is how we come to terms with all the ironies and cruelties and uncertainties that we face."

So, then, what do I do to stay sane, to keep the peace in my own heart? I go where my wild things are and share a glass of wine, dinner, and a comfortable evening of laughter and love with friends. Simple, nothing dramatic. We know those waves of worry will be there again, but so will the trees, the birds, and friends.

[1] Berry, Wendell, "The Peace of Wild Things," *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry,* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 1999).

From the Archives: Hope in the Midst of Chaos



Sister Adele in her office in later years

Sister Adele as a young Sister

Mother Aquinas

The "Great Depression" was one of the significant moments of the twentieth century. Even before the great Stock Market Crash of 1929, people living both in cities and rural areas were already facing difficulties. Many farms and businesses had expanded production during World War I to meet needs – but then struggled when there was less demand for goods in the 1920's. It was indeed a turbulent time.

So, what about the Sisters of Saint Francis of Rochester? In the Congregational history, *Keeping the Memory Green*, authored by Sister Ingrid Peterson, she states: "As the last of Mother Leo's three terms drew to a close (in 1933), large doses of both grit and wit were needed. The stock market crash of 1929 uprooted the nation's economy, impacting the general population in devastating ways... The scarcity of goods demanded increased frugality lowering indoor temperatures in the winter and getting along without sugar, butter, and household staples, for example. Along with other institutions across the country, the Congregation struggled to remain financially afloat, especially as debts from its previous building projects came due. The Great Depression also curtailed further expansion of the Sisters' charitable work. It was a period of gloom and doom." [1]

Ask any Rochester Franciscan knowledgeable about the history of the Community, and which Sisters were most responsible for keeping the Congregation solvent during this time of economic hardship, the names most likely to arise are Sister Adele and Mother Aquinas.

Before Mother Aquinas (born Anastasia Norton) entered the Congregation, she had earned a degree from the brand new College of Saint Teresa (CST) in Winona, Minnesota, and had worked as a bookkeeper in her father's company. She later earned additional degrees and was a faculty member at CST at the time of her election as Mother General. Her financial and business skills would serve her well during this time.

Sister Adele (born Florence O'Neil, and raised in Ashland, Kentucky) had also worked in her father's business for a few years before she entered the Congregation. Her intellect and abilities were noticed early. In a 1982 oral interview of Sister Adele, she said, "I came in 1921, novitiate in 1922, 1923 treasurer of CST and part-time student, graduated in 1928." For a few years, she taught business at the College but began spending part of her week in Rochester, as well as summers working towards her Master's degree. In 1933, she became General Treasurer of the

Image by Dominique from Pixabay

Congregation, and served in that capacity for 37 years!

When Sisters think of Sister Adele, the usual first comment is about the trips to Chicago.

The Congregation had been expanding – and building projects at the College of Saint Teresa and our hospitals had necessitated borrowing money. It wasn't intentional, but the broker in Chicago had not called in notes and had used monies to pay off other notes, since he had projected that he would have enough money in the office when the Congregation's notes were called. The man admitted his error to Mother Aquinas and the Council, and this situation prompted Sister Adele and Sister Rita (Rishavy) to establish a relationship with the Continental Bank in Chicago.

In Sister Adele's own words from the 1982 interview, she said about her twice weekly trips through the fall of 1933: "We'd go down to Chicago on the night train, and after going to Mass in a nearby church, we'd work all day there from 9:00am - 5:00pm and take the train back at 5:00pm and get into Rochester the next morning..." The bank set aside a conference room with a telephone and typewriter for the Sisters to use. Again, the words of Sister Adele: "We didn't have any modern conveniences, copy machines, tape recorders, mimeographing was just beginning, not data processing machines, computers. We wrote 5000 letters."

Sister Adele and the Council worked hard to keep the Congregation out of bankruptcy. They were so successful that, a few years later when money was needed to expand Saint Marys Hospital, their creditors were willing to reinvest, knowing that the Sisters would be good for the payment. Sister Adele "was a talented accountant and shrewd financial director. Together, Sister Adele and Mother Aquinas were intrepid businesswomen." [2]

How could Mother Aquinas or Sister Adele have foreseen that, when they entered this Franciscan Congregation to be women of prayer and service to their God, the challenges of the turbulent times ahead would define their role of providing some calm to the Community?

[1] Ingrid Peterson, *Keeping the Memory Green: Mother Alfred Moes and the Sisters of Saint Francis* (Rochester, MN: Sisters of Saint Francis, 2013), 48.

[2] Peterson, *Keeping the Memory Green*, 49.

In Memoriam

Sister June Kaiser (June 19, 1926 - May 6, 2024)

Mary June Kaiser was born in Columbus, Ohio. She first met the Rochester Franciscans when she attended the College of St. Teresa, graduating in 1948 with a degree in Economics. She entered our community in 1951 and received the name of Sister Sarto. Her first missions were as a teacher in three of our high schools: Notre Dame in Portsmouth, OH; Lourdes in Rochester, Minnesota; and Loretto in Caledonia, Minnesota, where she also served as principal. Then it was back to Winona to serve in four very different ministries: Associate Director of Assisi Hall; Novice Mistress; Campus Minister at the Newman Center for Winona State University; and Registrar at the College of St. Teresa for nine years. She also served as the Congregational Treasurer for twenty years. It was during that time that the integration of St. Marys Hospital, Methodist Hospital, and Mayo Clinic took place, and the picture on the first floor of Methodist Hospital shows her seated for the signing of that agreement. Her generous spirit led her to serve on many important congregational committees, including the Finance Committee for over 20 years, and that of the Renovation of Assisi Heights. Her wisdom and advice were sought by the Rochester civic community and beyond. She served on the Boards of Trustees of the College of St. Teresa, St. Marys Hospital, St. Anne's Hospice, and Madonna Towers. She also served on the Saint Marys Hospital Poverello Fund Board and the Lourdes High School Foundation Board, among many others. It's obvious that June was a hard worker, but we also remember her as a joyful companion who enjoyed playing golf, a good game of bridge, conversation about world events, and as a "fun-to-be-with person."

Sister Lorraine Stenger (May 4, 1932 - June 1, 2024)

Sister Lorraine was raised in Austin, Minnesota in a family where faith and education were important. After graduation, she worked as a secretary. However, the 'call' had always been on her mind. She entered the Rochester Franciscans in 1952, and then taught in schools in southern Minnesota. When a call was made to priests and Sisters to assist the church in Latin America, Sister Lorraine responded, ministering in Bogotá, Colombia for ten years. She became fluent in Spanish and had a profound love of working with Hispanic communities in Las Animas, Colorado, and Alamosa, Colorado, where she continued her ministry for 24 years. Upon hearing of Sister Lorraine's death, many messages came from her former students in Bogotá, expressing gratitude for her kindness, love, laughter, and wisdom, for making them better women and teaching them to appreciate music and the arts, while also complimenting her beautiful voice. When asked what she loved, Sister Lorraine replied, "…to sing; to speak Spanish; to look for undiscovered talents; to raise awareness of injustice in the Church and the world; to call women to full ministry; to speak of God's many gifts in nature and beauty, to house in all a deep appreciation of art, color, the animal kingdom, life in all its forms; to empathize with those who suffer; to be faithful to friends."

Sister Elizabeth Gillis (February 4, 1931 - July 28, 2024)

A woman of radical resilience, Elizabeth Gillis was unequivocally welcoming, hospitable, and gracious – all qualities she learned early in life on the Gillis family farm New Richmond, Wisconsin. After high school, Elizabeth took a summer job as a nurse's aide at St. Marys Hospital, awaiting the fall semester at the College of St. Teresa where she intended to begin studies in social work. But after her summer experience, she opted for nursing as a profession and eventually enrolled in St. Marys School of Nursing. It was at St. Marys Hospital where she developed a relationship with the Franciscans that led to a new name, and a new identity as Sister Maristella. Then came a College of St. Teresa nursing degree, advanced nursing study, Clinical Pastoral Education for Chaplaincy accreditation, and 54 years of ministry related to the healthcare field. During her ministry, she immersed herself in Franciscan history, spirituality, and values, continuing her study after a pilgrimage to Assisi, Italy. Her ministry was interspersed with domestic and international health systems, specifically in the southern hemisphere. It included St. Marys Hospital Nursing service; 25 years as a Nursing Instructor in Rochester, Winona, and Colorado; and staff nursing in Crosby-Ironton, Minnesota. She volunteered in Haiti; Kentucky; a hospital in Mexico; and Orphanages in Guatemala, and Peru. She also served as Assisi Heights Health Care Coordinator. Her final ministries were as a 10-year parish nurse in Our Lady of Tepeyac Parish in Chicago, followed by 11 years as Chaplain of Bethlehem Woods Retirement Center in La Grange Park, Illinois. Nestled among her visible talents/gifts was her eye for the divine in nature. Elizabeth captured the moment in time with the click of her Kodak digital camera, creating Hallmark-quality greeting cards of God's gorgeous florals. Her care for the hearts of humanity was grounded in her life's work, whether nursing or listening with compassion and offering a smile or a hand.

Sister Maureen Dolan (June 29, 1935 - August 13, 2024)

Sister Maureen was born in Chicago. Every Sunday, her dad took the family somewhere in Chicago. He wanted to be proud of his family and taught them to be good, proud to be Irish, and free and responsible. The family trusted God was in all of life – a blessing. A friend who attended St. Juliana's Parish introduced her to the Franciscan Sisters from Rochester who taught in the school. Maureen said she saw joy in action – a spark was lighted within her. She wanted this with all her heart: living together, loving all of it, the prayer and teaching. Her first assignment was teaching 62 first graders at St. Mary's School in Owatonna, Minnesota. Sister Maureen continued as an educator in primary grades in the diocesan schools of Winona, Minnesota for 15 years. Maureen came to know the importance of family and parish community for integrated spiritual growth. This insight guided her toward whole family ministry in four area parishes in team ministry, later in one larger Winona Diocesan Parish. Her ministry of Religious Education and pastoral ministry eventually took her to Holly, Colorado. When Maureen's aging mother wanted her near, she returned to Chicago where, following training, she was hired in Chaplaincy at St. Elizabeth Hospital in Chicago, serving in this ministry until 2007. Sister Maureen returned to Assisi Heights in 2015. In her living and her dying, Sister Maureen was often led where she would rather not go and discovered God awaited her there. She allowed God's desires for her to interrupt her plans. Maureen was thrifty in her needs, trustworthy, resilient, reflective, truly a witness to the grace of surrender to what is.

In Memoriam

Sister Mary Frederick (September 9, 1936 - August 31, 2024)

Mary Elizabeth Frederick was born in Mankato, Minnesota, to Raymond and Agnes Frederick; the firstborn of a family that would become four girls and six boys. A farm in rural Waseca, just four miles from Sacred Heart School and Church, became home to the Frederick family. Toward the end of her senior year of high school, her religion teacher asked what vocation she planned to pursue. Without hesitation, Mary responded that she wanted to join the Sisters after completing high school. However, her dad felt he needed help in caring for her mom (following the birth and subsequent death of a baby girl in July 1954), the family, and the dairy farm. After consulting with Sister Colman, Mary was able to postpone entering the Community and joined the January class of 1955. After her postulancy and novitiate, Sister Mary began her 37-year teaching career, all of which was spent with primary-grade students. In 1986, Sister Mary was honored to be named "Catholic Teacher of the Year" by *Today's Catholic Teacher.* She was teaching in Glencoe at the time and had previously been named "Teacher of the Month" in October by the same magazine. For her reward, Mary received a trip to the National Catholic Education Association Convention in New Orleans. Her teaching career included Watertown, South Dakota, and Santa Ana, California, as well as several locations in Minnesota: St. Augustine in Austin; St. Kilian in southwestern Minnesota; Glencoe; and Easton; and summer vacation schools in various parishes. Upon completing her teaching career, Mary had numerous years in ministries at Assisi Heights, including Assisi Community Center for 7 years, followed by 4.5 years as a food service assistant, and as housekeeping staff. Intermingled with these was 24 years of gardening, planting and harvesting. Wherever she saw a need, she was willing and ready to serve. Mary was a woman of deep faith, admirable virtue, cheery disposition, and kindness toward others. Her sharing of humorous, wisdom experiences from her teaching days made her even more loveable.

"Almighty God, we rejoice in your promise of love, joy and peace. In your mercy turn the darkness of death into the dawn of new life, and the sorrow of parting into the joy of heaven; through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who died, rose again and lives for evermore. Amen."

Sisters of Saint Francis
Assisi Heights Spirituality Center

What Does it Mean to be Franciscan in Today's World?

November 4, 6:30-8:00pm

$15 | Via Zoom

Friar Tony Luevano will talk about his journey as a friar and share his thoughts on the Franciscan vision in this chaotic world. He is recently professed as a Friar Minor in the Saint Barbara Province in California. Tony spent a year-long Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at St. Marys Hospital in Rochester. Currently, Tony works as a chaplain offering spiritual care at St. Anthony Foundation located in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco, which provides essential services to the homeless.

Exploring the Emotional Reactions to Illness

November 12, 6:30-8:00pm

$15 | In Person and Via Zoom

What are the normal emotional and psychological reactions to illness and disease? What are the most common signs and symptoms of psychological distress? Where do you find the wisdom, strength, and guidance in giving emotional care to friends and relatives in your family or local community? Lastly, how can a parish nurse give emotional care in their assessment, while ministering to the family of believers suffering from the stressors of illness?

Kathy Zarling is a Nurse Educator and Clinical Nurse Specialist in adult health. Currently, she serves as a Parish Nurse with an active program in her church community. She has 40 years of working in acute health care, developing educational programs and leading support groups as well as creating a variety of wellness activities seeking optimum health.

To view more events offered please visit: www.rochesterfranciscan.org/events/.
If you have event or registration questions, please contact Bob Taraba at 507-280-2195.

Jubilarians 50
fifty years

Sister Elizabeth Ann Kenny

Jubilarians 75
seventy-five years

Sister Faith Huppler

Jubilarians 60
sixty years

Sister Christine Stanoch

Sister Janice Halbach

Sister JoAnn Haney

Sister Judith Angst

Sister Marlys Jax

Sister Mary Goergen

The Many Colors of Hope

by Sister Ruth Snyder

Hope is:

Green (the color of growth) – When it moves a mother with two small children to leave her home in Venezuela, cross the Darien Gap and begin walking to the United States – hoping for a better future for her and her family.

Red (the color of fire) – When, with enthusiasm, the members of Franciscan International write letters to congressional leaders encouraging them to support the Farm Bill that includes food aid to the poor... hoping their voices will be heard.

Beige (the color of everyday kindness) – When Sisters, who themselves are elderly, give time to visit the sisters on Health Care – hoping that their visit will bring moments of mutual joy and blessing.

Brown (the color of marginalization) – When those who have been oppressed because of the color of their skin and we who have oppressed them are hoping for a change of hearts and for progress in racial justice.

Blue (the color of suffering) – When in the midst of inner darkness our eyes can embrace the vast sea of sky above, always there, that brings alive again the best of human dreams and – a hope as new as day.

Yellow (the color of sunrise) – When we see the rising sun, symbol of the Resurrection and of a new beginning, we are – hoping for the Spirit's guidance throughout the day.

What color is *your* hope?

Photo Credit: Dean A. Riggot

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