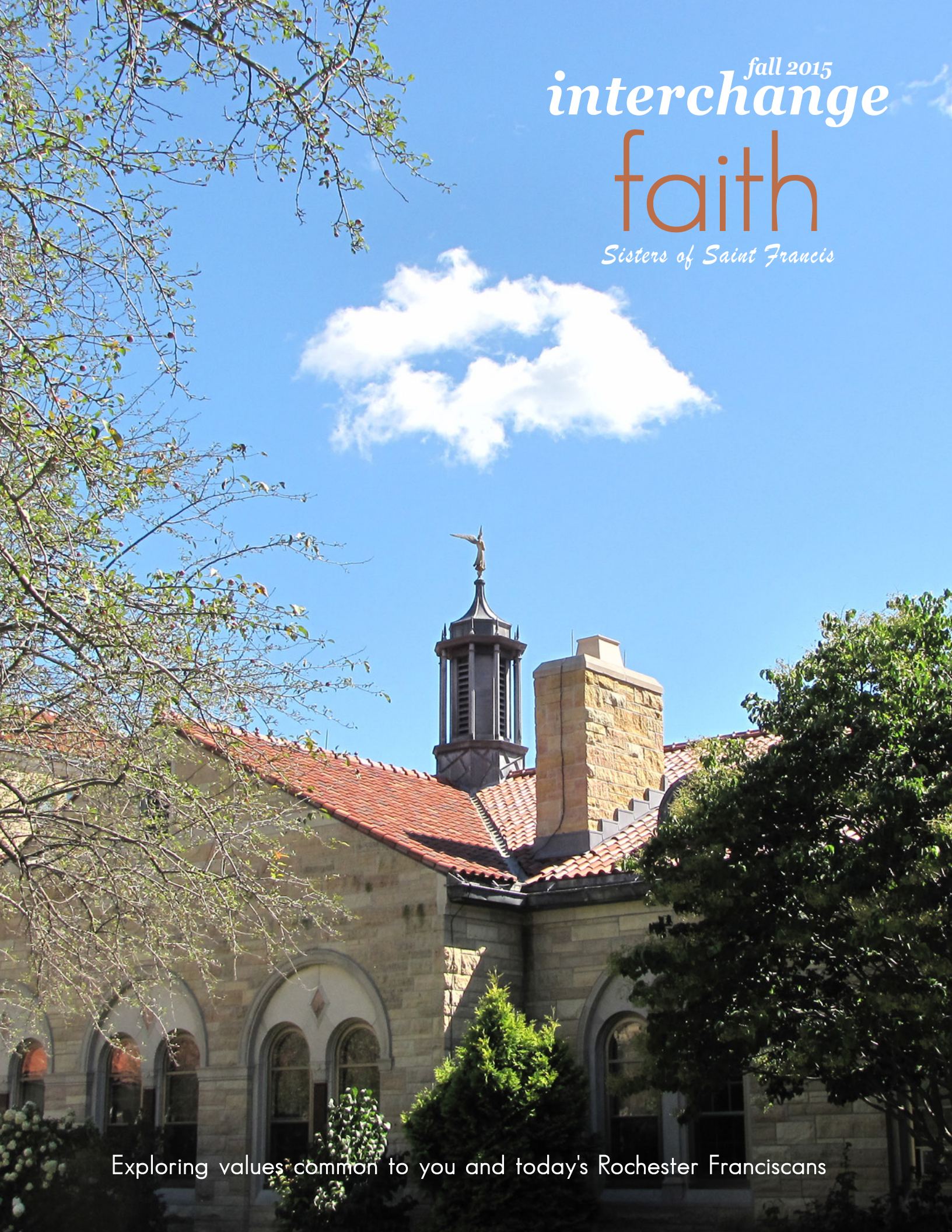

fall 2015

interchange

faith

Sisters of Saint Francis

Exploring values common to you and today's Rochester Franciscans

Focus: faith

interchange

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From the National Catholic Development Conference

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Letter from the President

Sister Marilyn Geiger

Dear Family and Friends,

For me, it is my faith that sustains me as I face challenges on a daily basis in my role as Congregational Minister. In this issue of ***interchange***, you will find that each article contains a personal story of one's faith journey. Each gives voice, in different ways, to the transforming faithfulness of God over the many years in a person's life.

Faith is the conviction that we shall receive the things for which we hope. Yes, there have been differences in the things I have received, compared to that which I had hoped to receive. It is at those times that I ask myself, "Is this how we experience the transforming faithfulness of God?" We understand all things that are truly good are meant to be shared and enjoyed together.

Recently, Pope Francis said, "*whenever we let our thoughts, our feelings, or the logic of human power, prevail and we do not let ourselves be taught and guided by faith, we become stumbling blocks*." I have no desire or inclination to be one of those stumbling blocks. Faith in God is the light of our life that sustains us each day.

As faith-filled people, we face perplexing times. We are being challenged and, at the same time, being transformed in ways we could not predict. God is truly with us as we Sisters experience a Religious Life we could never have imagined when we each answered the call from God with a "yes" to this life. I dare say, that we share this gift of faith with all who receive this ***interchange***, and all who optimistically continue to be inspired with hope for Religious Life in the future.

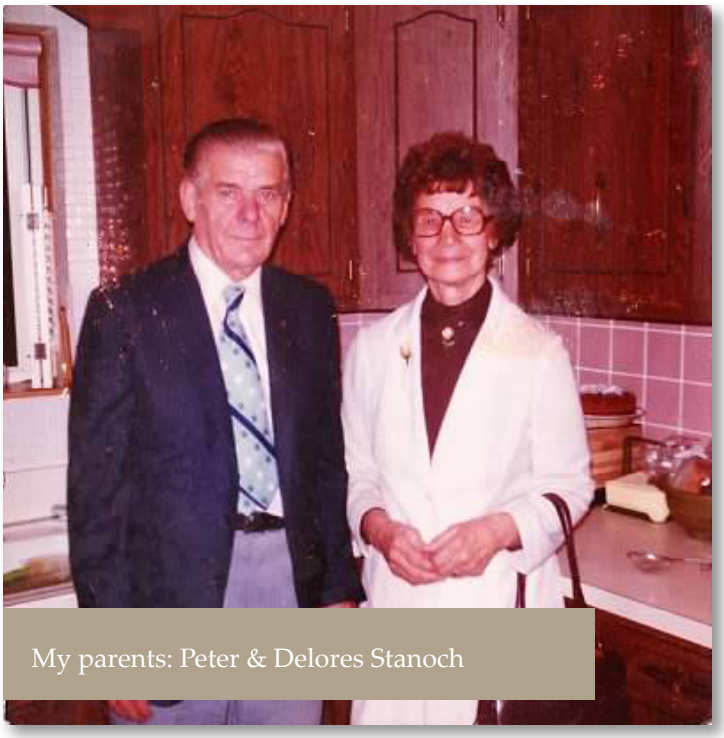
Thank you for your many kindnesses, your support, and your prayers. We pray that you continue to be blessed with faith, love and hope in your future.

Sr Marilyn Geiger, OSF

Sister Marilyn Geiger

We Walk by Faith

On Mom's lap, with Jerry, Phillip and Dad.
(Brother Peter had not arrived on the scene yet!)



My parents: Peter & Delores Stanoch

We Walk by Faith

We walk by faith and not by sight:
No gracious words we hear
Of him who spoke as none e'er spoke,
But we believe him near.

We may not touch his hands and side,
Nor follow where he trod;
Yet in his promise we rejoice,
And cry, " My Lord and God!"

Help then , O Lord, our unbelief,
And may our faith abound
To call on you when you are near,
And see where you are found:

That when our life of faith is done
In realms of clearer light
We may behold you as you are
in full and endless sight.

Text: Alford Henry, Psalms and Hymns, 1884
Music: Marty Haugan, 1983, Mass of Creation,
1984 © 1984 GIA Publications Inc.

The song "We Walk by Faith" was the entrance song for my 25th Jubilee. It has been a favorite song of mine since then. The message of the song has far reaching implications for all of life. My faith is centered on family togetherness, and faithfulness.

My parents were great examples of faith, and I have always felt God's presence in my life. My parents would pray together in bed before they went to sleep. They sacrificed and sent us all to Catholic School. My mother often invited persons who would be alone at the holidays to share a meal with us. My father would help someone struggling with finances by providing groceries to tide them over for a while. Every Sunday, we would go for a ride to Des Plaines, Illinois, and stop at a little Chapel near the roadside at the home of the Sisters of Nazareth. We all would jump out of the car and go into the little Chapel and say a prayer. Dad would light a candle and then we would drive home and stop for ice cream. (Maybe the ice cream was the biggest part of this weekly event. I don't know!) We would repeat this tradition every Sunday rain, snow or shine.

I have been blessed with seeing faith in action, something they taught my brothers and me. I have seen my parents on their knees asking God for guidance. Because of that, when I was being

With Mom & Dad on their 50th Wedding Anniversary

challenged or experiencing difficulties, I always had my faith as a rock to weather any storm.

One particular memory that I will always treasure, happened while I was working on my degree in Counseling at Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois. It was during my internship, when I came home from an evening with clients, that I found my Dad in distress. He was unable to swallow food, so I gave him some liquids. However, the next day he had the same issue. I called my oldest brother who came to help convince Dad to go the emergency room. Dad was very reluctant and seemed quite afraid, although he was never one for complaining. My heart sank as I think about what might be ahead. What would this mean?

Dad was admitted to the hospital that night. After comforting him, I left him there. The next day, I went back to the hospital. The doctor had ordered tests and placed a feeding tube through his nose so that he could receive nourishment. My mind wandered… how would this affect my current situation? I had several months left to finish my degree, and could foresee that I would have to juggle class schedules, meetings with clients, homework, but most of all, care for Dad. Quite frankly, I did not know how I would do it, but I trusted in God that things would work out.

After spending three days with my Dad in the hospital, I was exhausted. We were waiting for answers and hoping that this problem could be easily resolved. It was nearly the end of visiting time, and my eyes filled with tears. I could tell myself that things would work out, but it didn't feel that way. I approached my Dad's bed and I held both his hands, smiling at him with love. I closed my eyes so that he would not see the tears. I prayed to my Mom asking her to help us both through this difficult time. During my prayer, I felt my Mom's arms circling us and holding us. I felt her comfort and her presence. After a while, I opened my eyes and looked into my Dad's eyes again. With love, I assured him I would be back the next day and that I hoped he would have a good night. I kissed his forehead and left. I walked out of the hospital with a peaceful presence surrounding me. It lasted nearly an hour. I was amazed and did not want it to end. When I arrived home, I just sat in stillness. I prayed for my Dad that night, but I felt I could face the new day because of the comfort I had during this experience. And I learned a little more about my faith, and that of my parents. The presence of love and the faithfulness of this man were evident. And even though my Mother was no longer with us on earth, her loving presence held us and comforted both of us.

Celebrations: Sister Paula Turns 100!

Sister Paula Leopold's family members gathered on September 10th to celebrate her 100th birthday, as shown in the photos above. Born on Friday, September 10, 1915 in Heron Lake, Minnesota, she entered the Rochester Franciscans in 1934. Following her novitiate, she entered nurse's training at Saint Marys Hospital, where she also worked for two years. After that, her nursing ministry kept her on the move, serving in Portsmouth, Ohio; St. James, Minnesota; Denver, Colorado; back to Saint Marys in Rochester and then again to Denver. She also worked in Jenkins, Kentucky and in Louisville, Kentucky, with another stint in Denver in between! Later, she companioned Sisters in Augusta, Georgia and Clearwater, Florida. Although she retired to Assisi Heights in 1984, she continued an active ministry as sacristan, liturgical minister, driver, child and house sitter, and as a volunteer at Saint Marys Hospital. When asked about living 100 years she said, "Well, wherever there was a hole somewhere, I filled it. That's the story of my life."

50
Golden Jubilarians
1965-2015

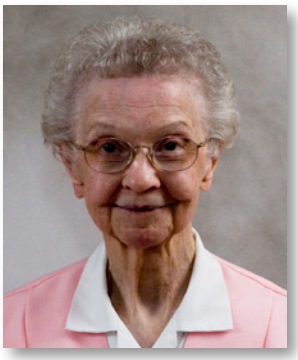
artwork by Barb Agerter

Standing: Sisters Diane Frederick, Marilyn Geiger, Tierney Trueman, Clara Marie Schotzko, and Ruth Peterson.
Seated: Sisters Arnold Ritchey, Jesse Capparelli, and Kathryn Minar.

60
Diamond Jubilarians
1955-2015

Standing: Sisters Yvonne Elskamp, Neal Logan, Dorothy Hansen, Monessa Overby, Lorraine Stenger, and Carmen Sonnek.
Seated: Sisters Virgeen Ernster, Zoa Braunwarth (deceased), and Marga Ernster.

75
Diamond Jubilarians
1940-2015



S. Regina Buskowiak
(Deceased)

S. Yvette Kaiser

Saint Francis: Qualities of Faith

During the recent experience of Pope Francis' visit to the United States, we saw and heard him remind us of the Gospel, and remind us of our own Franciscan calling in the spirit of Saint Francis to be joyful persons radiating God's love to the poor while influencing all leaders to care for the common good, including the common good of the environment.

When Pope Francis wanted to teach the world to be sensitive to our common home, the environment, he used Saint Francis' Canticle as a teaching tool for the entire world to become aware of the beauty and the needs of the environment. The mystical Canticle of the Creatures, which burst forth from Saint Francis near the end of his life, followed years of reflection on the beauty of creation speaking to him of God. He had gazed upon such scenes of creation which led him to pray, "Laudato Sí, mi Signore," a song of joy and praise.

The language "gaze upon Him" is part of our Franciscan DNA. Both Francis and Clare gazed upon the cross and through their example we have learned to be more contemplative; but the Canticle reveals that Saint Francis gazed upon the universe and, in so doing, came to the wisdom that all of God's creation praises God. Our imperfect selves, with our self-interests, do not praise God fully the way other creatures praise God, because creatures without free will completely please God being who they were created to be. Our source of joy is the humble surrender to the reality that we are meant to reflect God by our existence and our words and actions.

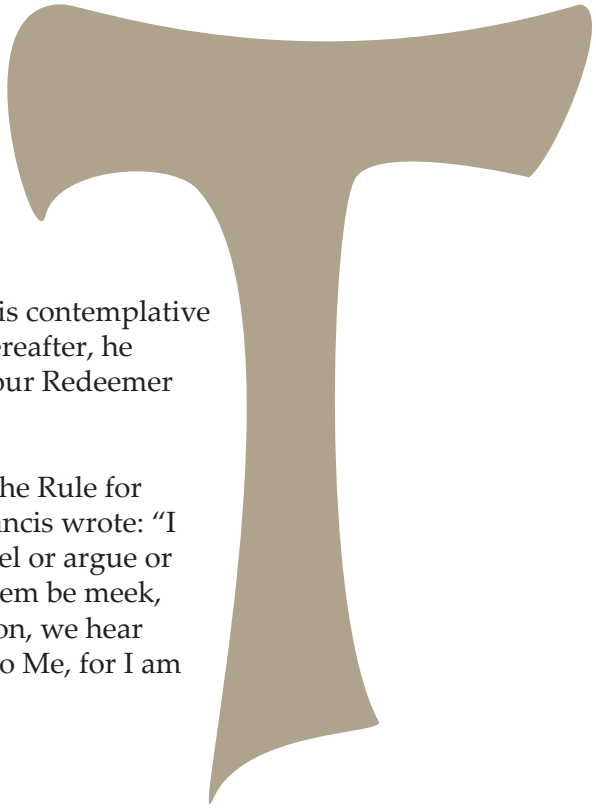
In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he concludes by saying, "let no one make trouble for me for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body." Paul was very clear that circumcision was not the branding mark for Christians. The "marks of Jesus" that come to mind would be the stigmata Saint Francis received on Mount LaVerna. But what are the bodily signs of Jesus that we have? Pope Francis does not have the physical stigmata, but there is no doubt, as we viewed him interacting with the crowds and teaching and preaching, that he bears the signs of Jesus. Three signs that came to my mind are: inclusivity, unwavering love for the poor, and gentleness.

The life of Saint Francis provides us with examples of these same qualities:

Inclusivity. The directives Francis gave his first followers when going out was that they were to preach to everyone the Word of God and God's commandments. He told them, "Some will receive the words with joy and love (AP IV) and others will resist and criticize." And those who resist? "Bear all with patience and humility." There is great wisdom here… Francis understood that we,

his followers, are not to judge others, but to bear witness to others by our words and actions about who God is, especially who God is in us. Francis desired that all persons would be included in the circle of God's Love. This is why Francis so joyfully told the early penitents that they are more than included in God's Love—they are "spouses, brothers and mothers of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (1LFt 7).

Unwavering love for the poor. Saint Francis did more than have an unwavering love for the poor, he became poor in his lifestyle—his adamant insistence of living without property, sleeping in ditches or caves, or small hermitages; tending to the lepers even after he was weak and sick himself when he returned from LaVerna in the fall of 1224. In his Rule (the form of life written for his followers), Francis says, "…they are to live simply without anything of one's own— to follow in the teaching and footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ." Being poor for Francis and loving the poor is all about drawing ever closer in union with Jesus, who had nowhere to lay His head.



Gentleness. As a young man, Saint Francis was a knight sent off to war with the intent to kill the enemy. His conversion from being a militant to being a gentle pacifist was a transition that happened over a few years while he rebuilt churches and pondered what God was asking of him. Through his contemplative prayer life he grew in his desire to imitate Jesus, and thereafter, he taught his disciples to desire nothing else but to please our Redeemer and Savior who is merciful and gentle.

Toward the end of his life, Francis needed to formalize the Rule for the friars. In that Rule (which all friars follow today) Francis wrote: "I exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to quarrel or argue or judge others when they go about in the world, but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle and humble. In such exhortation, we hear the echo of the Gospel from Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart."

What about us? How do we assess the marks of Jesus that we bear?

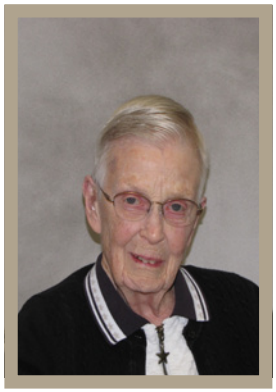
Inclusivity. We have daily opportunities to extend our concern and love beyond our friendship circle to others to whom we may not initially be attracted. On a global scale, there are thousands of refugees needing to be included in new societal circles. We might not be personally involved in resettlement, but we can plead with God that hearts will be open to providing the necessary and merciful response to persons who are fleeing violence. We are grateful that our Leadership Team has given a generous donation to Catholic Relief Services to aid the Syrian refugees.

continued...

Unwavering love for the poor. This past summer, I was poor in my illness that required time living in healthcare at Assisi Heights. Those of us who live at Assisi Heights do not experience economic poverty, but we can reflect on our attitudes toward the poorness of those whose illnesses cause them to be different than they might have been when they were healthier. Each of us in our own circumstance can reflect on how our words and actions convey an unwavering love for the poor and sick. This will require us to notice others and to be selfless in our concern for them. Once I returned to teaching, I experienced the challenge of time and energy required for the students who are poor academically.

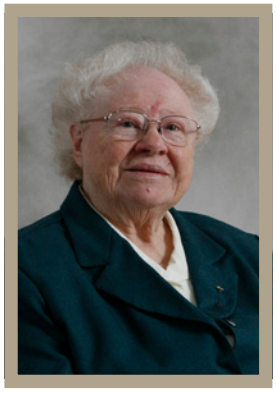
Gentleness. How do we become gentle? Both Saint Francis and Pope Francis provide for us the example that when we take heed of Jesus' words to "Come to Him for rest for our souls," Jesus will transform us as is evidenced in both of their lives.

Coming to Jesus with humility renews our Franciscan vocation to be joyful persons who bear the marks of inclusivity, unwavering love for the poor and gentleness.



Sister Gavin Hagan: I first experienced the call to religious life in high school, when I met the Sisters of Humility from Great Falls, Montana. They were serving in my hometown of Glendive, Montana. I immediately felt an attraction to their way of life and found excuses to visit them in their school and convent. Fast forward a few years to my enrollment at the College of Saint Teresa in Winona, Minnesota. My faith life was strengthened by participation in the varied and beautiful liturgical expressions during my time there. I was beginning to feel a call to religious life. My contact with the Franciscan Sisters and postulants also strengthened my desire to respond to God's voice. So, here I am, over sixty years later, serving as a Rochester Franciscan. I have no regrets.

Sister Ramona Kruse: I was invited to join a friend working at the FBI in Washington, D.C., after graduating from college. I fully intended to make that career choice. However, during the summer of 1942, the Rochester Franciscan Sisters visited my home, seeking applicants for the College of St. Teresa. I had never met a Franciscan Sister, and was very impressed by them and what they had to say. Finally, I got up enough courage to ask them how one could become a Sister. They spent a couple of hours explaining the process and promised to "keep in touch." So, with God's help, I was able to say, "Good-bye, FBI!" and "Hello, Rochester Franciscans!"



Sister Francine Balster: She is known as a woman of strong faith; a faith which she initially learned from her family. Over the years, she has expressed her strong love for her Franciscan vocation and Sisters. For 47 years, she served as a well-respected teacher. Since 1994, she now serves in ministry to the elderly, in their homes or nursing homes, where she shares her love and compassion.

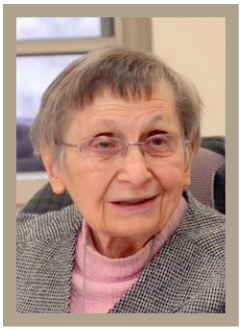
Sister Vinciana Bauer: She has lived a faith-filled life, serving in a ministry dedicated to Community life, the children she taught and the parishioners she served. As principal of St. Kilian Grade School, she also worked on a merger of schools in order to maintain Catholic education in the surrounding area. In her later years, she faithfully ministered in pastoral care at St. Theodore's parish in Albert Lea, while also serving as spiritual leader of the Teams of Our Lady. Her personal prayer life now has been strengthened by her encounters with others in her ministry.

Women of Wisdom are Sisters celebrating nine decades of life this year.

In Memory of...

Sister Ethylind Loudner (November 20, 1924 - July 12, 2015)

Sister Ethylind Loudner was born November 20, 1924 at Fort Thompson, South Dakota. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis in 1947 from Sts. Anthony and Margaret Parish, Superior, Wisconsin. Sister Ethylind (formerly known as Sister Conrad) made her first vows in 1950 and Perpetual Vows in 1953. In 1946, she received a BA Degree in Social Science and History from the College of St. Teresa in Winona, Minnesota and, in 1959, an MA Degree in Sociology from Notre Dame University. Sister Ethylind was a secondary education teacher for nineteen years teaching in Caledonia, Austin, Sleepy Eye, Rollingstone and Waseca, Minnesota, and in Norfolk, Nebraska. While in Rollingstone and Sleepy Eye, she also served as principal. Following her years of teaching, Sister Ethylind was Assistant Director of the CST program: Women's Institute for Life-Long Learning at Assisi Heights (1968-1970). Other areas of ministry included working in adoptions through Catholic Charities for the Diocese of Winona (1971-1978), Religious Education Director at St. Francis Parish, Rochester (1978-1980), assistant librarian at Cathedral of Christ the King School, Superior, Wisconsin (1980-1989), and receptionist/secretary at the Ministry Center, Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis. Throughout her life, she kept in contact with many of her former students.

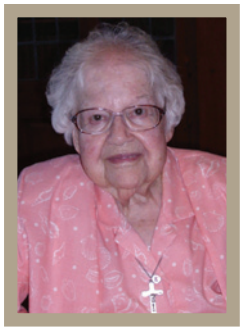


Sister Joseen Vogt (February 25, 1922 - October 18, 2015)

Celestine Caroline Vogt was born February 25, 1922, in Waseca, Minnesota. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis in 1940 from Sacred Heart Parish, Adams, Minnesota. Sister Joseen made first vows in 1943 and Perpetual Vows in 1946. In 1954, she received a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and, in 1963, a Bachelor of Arts in Biology from the College of St. Teresa, Winona, Minnesota. Further education included an MS in Biology from Notre Dame University in 1967, and an MA in Curriculum Development from Goddard College, Plainfield, Vermont, in 1989. Following her novitiate with the Sisters of St. Francis, Sister Joseen taught elementary and secondary students at several schools in Minnesota: Sleepy Eye, St. Kilian, Austin, Waseca, Iona, Currie, and Wilmont. She also taught in Watertown, South Dakota, St. Juliana's in Chicago, and Wehrle in Columbus, Ohio. From 1974 to 1976, she taught science at Preston Girls High School in Thornbury, Australia. It was there that her life made a dramatic change. For nearly three decades, Sister Joseen would live and teach and set up teacher training and English language schools in some of the world's most troubled countries. She found work through the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone, West Africa, where she established teacher training centers in villages across Sierra Leone. She did similar work at a refugee camp in Bataan, Philippines and on the Thailand/Cambodia border. Through her experiences, she came to know the struggles of the poor and the kind of physical suffering she had not imagined possible.

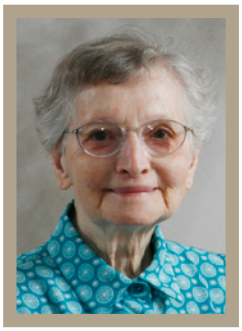
Sister Marcella Reilly (August 6, 1937 - October 22, 2015)

Marcella Joan Reilly was born August 6, 1937 in Huron, South Dakota. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis in 1957 from St. Martin Parish, Huron, South Dakota. Sister Marcella (formerly known as Sister Bernán) made her first vows in 1960 and Perpetual Vows in 1963. In 1971 she received a BS Degree in Elementary Education and History from the College of St. Teresa in Winona, Minnesota and in 1998 was certified in the Befriender Ministry. Sister Marcella was an intermediate teacher at several schools across southern Minnesota: St. Pius X, Rochester; Holy Trinity Rollingstone; St. Francis, Rochester; St. Raphael, Springfield; and St. Augustine, Austin. She also taught at St. Margaret Mary School, Golden Valley, Minnesota and Cathedral School, Rapid City, South Dakota. Following her years of teaching, she served as a Parish Worker at Sacred Heart Parish in St. Paul, Minnesota and St. Stephen Parish, Minneapolis, Minnesota. She was a Gift Shop volunteer at Saint Marys Hospital 1982-1983. Sister Marcella served in Pastoral ministry at St. John's Parish, Rochester, from 1983 to 1995. Following a year of sabbatical, Sister Marcella served as the Congregational Retreat Coordinator for eleven years. She retired in 2008.



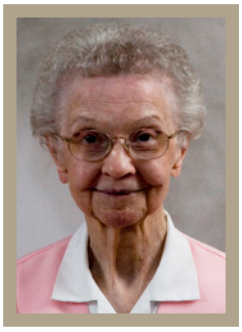
Sister Mariana Boltz (November 4, 1917 - April 2, 2015)

Eulalia Magdalen Boltz was born on November 4, 1917, in New Albin, Iowa. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis in 1937 from St. Peter's Parish in Caledonia. In community she received the name Sister Mariana and professed vows in 1940. For thirty-one years, Sister Mariana taught elementary students in Wausau, Wisconsin, Chicago, Illinois and several schools in southern Minnesota: St. Paul, Fairmont, Austin, St. Peter, Rose Creek, Winona, Easton and Adams. In 1971, Sister Mariana began her ministry as librarian and for sixteen years served as school librarian in Golden Valley, Rochester and St. Paul, Minnesota as well as in Silver Spring, Maryland. From 1971-1976, she served as President of the North Central Catholic Library Association. On retiring from full-time library work in 1987, she continued to serve, volunteering at the Rochester Public Library, Saint Marys Hospital In-Patient Library, and as a Hospital volunteer until her retirement to Assisi Heights in 2004.



Sister Petrine DeSplinter (June 8, 1919 - June 1, 2015)

Marie Nancy DeSplinter was born June 8, 1919 in Jasper, Minnesota. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis in 1950 from St. Leo Parish, Pipestone, Minnesota. Sister Petrine, the name she received in community, made her first vows in 1953 and Perpetual Vows in 1956. In 1973, she received a diploma on completing a clerical-stenographic program at what was then the Rochester Area Vocational-Technical Institute. Throughout her life as a Franciscan, Sister Petrine's ministry was in Rochester, Minnesota. She served from 1953 to 1972 in Secretarial Services/Patient Accounts at Saint Marys Hospital, at Assisi Heights as an office clerk (1973-1983), and then as telephone billing clerk and in the Assisi Heights mailroom (1983-2012) when she retired at age 93.



Sister Regina Buskowiak (May 9, 1919 - September 14, 2015)

Was born May 9, 1919, in Utica, Minnesota. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis in 1939 from Saint Charles Parish, St. Charles, Minnesota. Sister Regina (formerly known as Sister Mary Raymond) made first vows in 1942 and Perpetual Vows in 1945. In 1955, she received a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the College of St. Teresa, Winona, Minnesota. Sister Regina worked at Saint Marys Hospital, Rochester, for 20 years. She was head nurse on 1st Joseph East during the polio epidemic in the 1950's and is featured in the Mayo Clinic Heritage Film "A Cheerful Heart: The Dave Madden Story." From 1962-1979, Sister Regina became the Director of Nursing at what was then St. Anne Hospice, Winona, Minnesota. For ten years, she served as a nurse in the Assisi Heights Health Care wing, before her retirement in 1989.

Sister Zoa Braunwarth (December 1, 1925 - August 2, 2015)

Jane Esther Braunwarth was born December 1, 1923 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis in 1953 from Saint Joseph Parish, Waconia, Minnesota. Sister Zoa made first vows in 1955 and Perpetual Vows in 1958. In 1969, she received a Certification in Religious Education from the College of Saint Mary, Omaha, Nebraska, and, in 1971, a Bachelor of Science in Education from the College of St. Teresa, Winona, Minnesota. Starting in 1955, Sister Zoa taught elementary students at St. Priscilla School, Chicago, Illinois, and then at St. Peter School in Delano, Minnesota. After six years of teaching, Sister Zoa ministered in religious education and pastoral ministry for a number of years: Hayfield, Edina, and Albert Lea, Minnesota. From 1972-1974, Sister Zoa served as Director of Novices for the Sisters of St. Francis. Her additional ministries included: serving as a House Parent and Religious Education Coordinator at the State School for the Deaf in Faribault, Minnesota; Family Centered Coordinator at St. William Parish, Fridley, Minnesota; and Pastoral Associate and Adult Education Coordinator at St. Peter Parish, Mendota, Minnesota. Following her retirement, in 1993, until her death, Sister Zoa was actively committed to Social Justice concerns.

A Woman of Faith: Sister Joseen Vogt

We celebrate the earthly life of Sister Joseen Vogt. She is one woman who was developed completely from scratch! How might we describe this diminutive woman of faith and give her back to God? If Peter meets her at the door, and asks the question, "How many talents were you given and how many were used, and how many are you bringing back?" We know as any good science teacher she would demonstrate by dragging in a truckload of texts, programs and educational series in every subject, all developed from scratch.

She is the true embodiment of the Scriptures she chose for her funeral liturgy. In the Acts of the Apostles we read, "When Pentecost Day rolled around they met in one room. They were hit with a powerful wind and fire appeared and came to rest on the head of each. Each left speaking in a multitude of tongues." At one such Pentecost, Joseen was there! That fire rested on her head (but not too long) and took over her heart and her takeaway from that upper room with map of the world, not a new tongue. In so doing she was able to bring a new learning to Minnesota schools including Hawthorne in Rochester, as well as Ohio, South Dakota, Illinois and every country and continent she set her *Itchy Feet* on. Like Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Joseen had a call within a call. Her first mission call was to educate. Later, it was a little child dressed in rags that changed her life's mission. Her book, *Itchy Feet*, *Walking Humbly with My God* (see photo above), chronicles her roadmap to find poor seeking education. It is a diary of Sister Joseen's interactive dialogue with God and her everyday life struggles as a missionary educator in a third world country. Interestingly enough, one of the recurring themes throughout this *Itchy Feet* text is the doubting question, "Am I doing God's will?" Yet one feels that each day she is guided, literally, by a power above!

She grew up on a farm in southern Minnesota, knew a tight knit family and learned the value of hard work and creating everything from scratch. This pattern of life and work was then transferred to the Franciscan values when she entered the Community. Amazingly, she stayed connected with family and classmates despite being all over the world. Cambodia had been home for her more than 20 years. She served in a country where war made poverty worse. Living in a culture not her own, with limited personal and educational resources, she was determined to use everything available to make it work and make a difference. Her determination was rooted in her lifelong devotion to better the life of the poor.

Indeed, she recognized her natural talent in education, and sought to find a way to use it for the most underdeveloped and underserved in the classrooms of the globe, including Peace Corps service in Sierra Leone (see photos on page 13). To the people of Cambodia, Sister Joseen was an agent for increasing and maximizing opportunities for students to get an English education and be ready to enter the world marketplace that negotiates in English. She was deeply interested in nurturing educators so life's lessons could be given away again and again. Creatively restless, she did not conceive of her life fulfilled apart from lesson plans.

Sister Joseen was in the trenches for all the phases of developing, mentoring and supervising teachers and administrators. She wanted life to go on beyond her, for which we can say, "all is well and in good hands." She carefully selected and mentored her successors who exemplified the virtues and values that she knew would bring success. That was in her lesson plan! Her success came from her ability to translate fortitude into perseverance from scratch.

She was fired with enthusiasm and carried on her desire for equal opportunity for all peoples. She had a Franciscan heart and simplicity was her mode of operation. Words that best describe her are resourceful, generous and prayerful. Her style was tenacious.

The second text she selected for her funeral was that of the Beatitudes. Her life was the message in the Sermon on Mount. She needed a mount to be seen (but not heard). The first line of the Beatitudes reads: Seeing the needs of the crowd. Yes, Joseen saw the needs of the crowd…. went up the hill and sat down. She began to speak to them. This is what she taught them, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." She knew the rich are closed – for their yearning is taken away. No poverty is ever blessed. She noted that poor have the possibility of opening us up to God. For her, every person was the very symbol of God – incarnate. She opened up the world of education to thousands of students. Those students realized, that with Joseen, education was not given to them on a silver platter … she had none. Rather they had to earn it by her standards. Never once did she mention God, but they all knew she walked with God (or maybe ran with God).

Another Beatitude she personified is, "Blessed are those who show mercy, they shall receive mercy." Mercy is the compassion, concern and care for every human being. On the side, she fed the hungry, nursed the injured and broken hearted and on occasion baptized. She made God visible. Abraham Heschel, a Jewish philosopher, said "God is never neutral. God is always partial to justice." Joseen was never neutral, nor in neutral. She was insistent on justice and implored faculty, teachers, and students to be honest, disciplined persons of integrity, and to produce quality work. These were her four values. It was her message at every faculty meeting, graduation, or school dedication. Bribery was very common in the early days of the school. With poverty so prevalent, it was hard to resist when the family was starving. If someone offered a bribe or took a bribe, they were automatically released from the school. The student or teacher was never able to re-apply to re-enter. The message passed quickly.

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A Woman of Faith: Sister Joseen Vogt *continued...*

"Blessed are the pure of heart, they shall see God." This beatitude speaks of one who dwells in the presence of God. We are called to look at where our treasure is… that is usually where the heart is as well. Certainly her heart was not in prestige or possessions. She arrived home after serving over 20 years in Cambodia with one suitcase measuring 12 x 18 inches, with three dresses, four prayer books and a few treasures given to her at the airport.

I went back to Cambodia with Sister Joseen two years ago for the dedication of the COERR School, which we, her family and friends, helped to build. Today, the school is thriving with over 4900 students and 60 teachers. I was in awe everywhere we went. One day we were in the northwest border of Cambodia going to see the reforestation project of the Buddhist monks. We arrived about 4:30 pm in a small remote village motel, and were sitting on a park bench waiting for the Buddhist monks. Meanwhile, a motorcycle drives in, parks and the very dusty gentleman, hesitates, looks and runs over and kneels in front of Joseen and says "Sister Joseen, you were my teacher in Site 2! I went on to get a master degree in communications and now work for Radio Free Asia!" With a warm sweaty embrace, she was covered with as much dust as he had to offer. He then traveled with us to the forest and did a story of our Franciscan partnership with the monks to save the livelihood of rural families who make a living in the forest. The next day we arrive in Phnom Penh (population 500,000) and while walking the streets, it was if people came out nowhere to say, "Are you Sister Joseen? I am one of your students!" While seated in a local street restaurant someone recognized her, stumbled over some chairs and embraced her and said "Sister Joseen, thank you for teaching me. How do you like my speaker English?" Before dinner was completed, the neighborhood got word she was about and 4 or 5 other students arrived, with their children in tow, wanting to greet her. And, at the airport, another former student ran up to embrace her "I learned English from you!"

She was small, but her influence covered the streets of the world. Many called her mother. I contend that Sister Joseen is the Mother Teresa of Cambodia!

Presenting to the graduating class of COERR

Ribbon-cutting ceremony for newest site of COERR

Reflections of Faith

by Sister Patricia Keefe

When I was a young person, I wrote a paper in my Philosophy class on how St. Thomas Aquinas had not proven the existence of God. The professor gave me an A, but noted that St. Thomas had not tried to prove the existence of God, but had provided a rational basis for the choice to believe in God.

The topic of faith has also had an interesting history in the Reformation of Martin Luther and the Catholic Church. Luther emphasized that we are all saved by faith, while the Catholic Church maintained that good works were also needed. Luther's position is found articulated in the Letter to the Romans. The Catholic position is often identified with the Letter of James, although it is also based on Gospel passages such as found in Matthew 25, wherein the Son of Man separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep were the ones who gave him food when he was hungry, drink when he was thirsty and so on.

Recently the dialogue between the Lutherans and Catholics resulted in a joint statement on faith and works: "In faith, we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God…Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works." In 2006, the Methodists also signed on to this agreement.

At some point in our life, each of us needs to move forward to an adult place of choice about faith; especially those of us who grew up in a faith-filled environment. Our childhood faith is not generally sufficient to sustain our growth into adulthood. The statement agreed upon by the Lutherans, Catholics and Methodists is a statement of adult choice-making. The choice is one to believe in the Trinity, in the saving work of Christ and the presence in our lives of the Holy Spirit.

Fortunately, we all know persons who represent adult choice-making regarding faith. Such persons are witnesses to the kind of basic humility that shouts: "This is not about me." Those persons often stand out, but do not pretend that their gifts are their own or that they should be lauded for them. An example is Pope Francis. I appreciated hearing him saying that he sometimes falls asleep when he is doing centering prayer! His kind of defenselessness is based on faith. His faith impels him to closeness to those who are poor. His faith disarms others. Life is a great teacher no matter what the circumstances. Our journeys present us with opportunities to grow in faith. Reflection is a great aid in the process of growing in faith. Ignatius of Loyola is one who urged people to do an examination of conscience every night. Such a practice opens for us the ways God is active in calling us to move forward in our faith.

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Faith

[feyth]
-noun.
confidence or trust in a person or thing; the obligation of loyalty or fidelity; belief in God

My own journey into adult faith was the result of changes following Vatican II that revolutionized the lives of women religious. I was only 25 when I was assigned to study graduate theology and found myself at Fordham University in the Bronx, New York. Sisters doing graduate study often had worked years to obtain college degrees while teaching before going to graduate school. I had only taught two years in standard convents. I often say that New York was my novitiate since I was alone in terms of family and Community for the first time. New York was a real eye opener; and theology in the 1960s was a great gift to me. I studied historical theology for the most part. Learning the history affected my faith significantly because I was freed from thinking of the Church as more than a human institution while, at the same time, grasping the richness that the institution had amazingly carried forth for more than 2,000 years.

After obtaining my Master's Degree and teaching theology for several years, I applied to Law School at the University of Minnesota. This decision was based on my perception in the early 1970s that lawyers could do more for justice in our society and world than theologians. I no longer believe that, but it seemed that way to me at that time. Law School was kind of a "desert" experience for me; much time spent studying with less time for prayer. When I finished and began practicing law, I took advantage of pastoral leadership in my Community and made several retreats. A major paradigm-shift occurred in my thinking, it opened me up to recognizing parts of myself that had been rather hidden up until then. Since that time, one practice that has helped me stay in adult choice-making stance and growth in faith, has been journaling regularly, especially reflecting on the action of God in my life while attending annual retreats. Now, after retiring to Assisi Height for the past few years, participating in daily Eucharist, as well as teaching short courses on the Eucharist and Centering Prayer, have deepened my desire for further transformation. The journey continues.

"In faith, we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God...Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works."

Counting Our Blessings

by Barbara DeCramer

Recently, we received a note in the Development Office that warmed our hearts. It was from a CST alumna, Class of 1970, who told us that she and 7 of her classmates get together once a year for a weekend reunion. One of their traditions is to join together to select a worthy cause for a donation. This year, they chose the Sisters of Saint Francis. When she sent her gift, here is what she told us about her relationship with the Sisters: *"You have all impacted our lives in ways you can't know. You empowered us as women to go on to do special things with our lives. We have (or did have, as many of us are retired) careers in education, medicine, business, service. We have raised happy, healthy and educated children who all serve others. Thank You! Thank You!"*

All of us who are friends of the Sisters know about that special ability the Sisters have to empower us, always looking on the bright side of things, and continuing to have a strong impact on the world.

Truly, it is you, our friends and benefactors, who make this work possible.

Your support means that Sister Patricia Jean will continue to minister to women in prison. Your friendship means that Sister Mary Kay is able to minister to immigrants and prisoners in El Paso as they await news about their future. Generous gifts of service, prayers and financial support enable the community to continue to care for our retired Sisters so that they may live safely and with dignity. In so many ways, you are the foundation of this community.

To me, being a friend of the Sisters of Saint Francis is a continuation of the First Pentecost. It took a whole team of Apostles, each speaking in his own way, to be sure that the message was delivered in the ways that could be received all of those who were assembled. Each of those folks in the crowd was able to find someone who's telling of the story they could understand. We, who are friends of the Rochester Franciscan Sisters, add our voices to those of the Sisters in furthering Franciscan spirituality in the world. There will be something about the way that we tell the story that will speak to new listeners, fostering their faith.

What a blessing that is in our lives! And what a blessing you are to the Sisters of Saint Francis!

Make a Gift Today

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

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

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