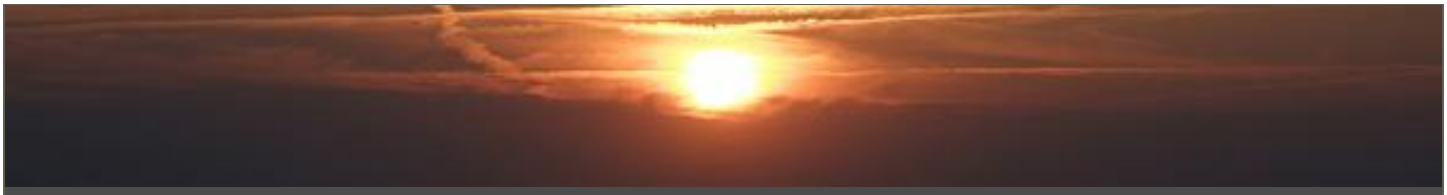

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a trip down Memory Lane...

Volume 20, No. 3 - Summer 2016

Dear Family and Friends of the Rochester Franciscans,

Shortly after I started my ministry (employment) at Assisi Heights in October 2008, I sent out surveys to the Sisters in an effort to get to know them better. The survey questions were used as a starting point for further discussion. For instance, I asked about their past and present ministries, what activities or experiences brought them the greatest sense of joy, the best piece of advice they received, and their favorite quote or book. The responses were great! I have referenced them over the years, but, in the meantime, I feared that some good stories might be lost.

Sister Therese Jilk

Recently, I asked Sister Therese Jilk if she would assist with a project to capture these stories. With surveys in hand, she began interviewing Sisters, and expanding the questions to include their spiritual views and thoughts on living in Community. In this issue, you will find out a bit more about what is important in the lives of each of those she interviewed.

We hope you enjoy this trip down Memory Lane as much as we enjoy the opportunity to share these stories with you! *(And thank you, Sister Therese, for capturing their essence!)*

Kathy Gatliff

Editor, Director of Communications

Faithful Gospel Disciples: Leader and Cheerleader

Sister Marga Ernster and Sister Gladys Meindl are two friends we see daily, walking, talking and praying rosaries together in the Inner Courtyard at Assisi Heights. What great witnesses of Rochester Franciscans!

Sister Gladys came from the little town of Cobden, six miles northeast of Springfield, Minnesota. She tells me how amazing it is that, from those humble beginnings, she traveled to Europe twice with Sister Larkin, (now Eileen Gallagher Haugh) and Eileen's parents, on the Assisi Tour. She is also amazed to think back on moving from Chicago to Ohio in teaching positions, where she says she loved every child and companion Sister she was blessed to meet in her ministry years. She admits it was not always easy--especially recognizing that Ohio accent--but teaching kids that were so ready to learn was a joy.

Sister Marga reminisces about the family farm, where she and her brother, Fr. Milo Ernster, shared life with their parents. When looking back on her ministry, Sister Marga says that she liked what she did - especially teaching little children. And she adds that, as a Franciscan, she believed "God's will was wherever I was sent." She doesn't recall choosing her place of ministry, but again, her memory isn't very helpful.

Sister Gladys

Sister Marga

As Sister Gladys was responding to the interview questions, Sister Marga frequently would look at Sister Gladys and comment on what she'd just spoken with an abundant affirmation, i.e., "That was a great way to say that." Or "What a wise saying." Followed by, "My memory doesn't work as well anymore."

When asked about what was spiritually nourishing, both Sisters agreed that they feel gifted with yearly retreats and also the monthly Desert Days at Assisi Heights [those days reserved for silence]. They also said they benefit daily from praying Morning and Evening Prayer in Community.

Sisters Gladys and Marga definitely see life from "where they stand now." And they agree that a large part of where they are in their personal lives is precisely God's will--the road that leads to full participation in church and in society as Gospel witnesses, praying for and being peace for all the world.

Sister Gladys kept repeating, "I've had a wonderful life, and I ask God every night what did I ever do to deserve it?" At length, God has responded, "Gladdie, those 60 years in the classroom is why 'you deserve this.'" And Sister Marga offers an enthusiastic "YES!" to that... as do so many of us privileged to be your companions on the journey!

Walking with Jesus

Sister Evelyn Thillen's response to the request from our Communications Office is so typical of the wonderful Franciscan woman we've come to know and love for many years. She chose to write about "Spirituality and Prayer."

It seems appropriate, therefore, to quote her description of this singular experience:

"On a Sunday afternoon, I went to school to do my lesson plans for the week. First, I stopped in church to make a visit to Jesus. It was such a special time, but then I needed to get to my lesson plans. I said to Jesus, 'I am sorry I need to go and I hate to leave You here.' Jesus said back to me, 'I am going with you.' I never forgot that. We walk together. I had been teaching first grade in Silver Spring, Maryland in 1983."

Sister Evelyn continues to express the sentiments she shared in this personal experience. She radiates a simplicity and a deep down loving goodness as she takes early morning walks alone in the halls of Assisi Heights; still living in that wonderful Gospel knowing that she and Jesus continue to walk together, and will, until the candle is extinguished because LIGHT HAS COME.

Sharing Reverence for God with Children

Preparing second grade children for first reception of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist was most fulfilling for **Sister Andrenee Lynch**. In fact, she named it to be one of the highlights of her many years in ministry.

Regarding Community living, Sister Andrenee recounts the times when Sisters' respect for each other was clearly and vibrantly apparent. And though she values sacred silence, she admitted that finding the blessings in it required an intentional, disciplined search on her part! Sister Andrenee has experienced spiritual growth in yearly retreats, particularly with focus on the Eucharist, and quiet times together.

It is quite obvious to see the integration in Sister Andrenee's responses to these questions. Her spiritual prayer life matches her desire to instill in little ones a reverence for life in God, especially through the on-going graces of real daily life.

Describing her mission, her Franciscan life and her ministry, Sister Andrenee realized how she "contributed to the larger mission of Jesus and our mission as a Community in the church," which she recognized as a true value. She listed several specific contributions, to include: "being a teacher in our Catholic schools; my respect for each child and their parents; understanding students' needs, their learning abilities...their home life..."

A dearly valued contribution indeed, and a wonderful legacy, for who doesn't benefit, and prize, being respected and appreciated as a unique human being of God's family? Truly, she has a gift that keeps on giving.

High Points and Fulfillment in Ministry

Sister Alverna O'Laughlin writes first of her life as a Franciscan through the lens of enjoying "high points and fulfillment in ministry." She was working at St. Louis Park Methodist Hospital and, after seven and a half years, desired a change in ministry.

She went to Courage Center, where they trained persons with disabilities on the use of Ham Radios, as well as training for other skills. She was hired as Educational Services Coordinator and stayed for over sixteen years. She really enjoyed working

with the people, and the use of amateur radio! She writes, "It was really nice doing what I enjoyed."

A specific memorable moment in community life for Sister Alverna was speaking to her religious superior, Sister Gretchen, who at that time was in Peru. It gave her the chance to use Ham Radio!

Sister Alverna (standing, left) with Sister Martine (seated) and Sister Baptiste (right) as Ham Radio Operators.

Their conversation was about permission to take Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) training; and that put her into a whole new ministry experience. Another great memory was "having Sister Edmund tell me that she wanted to have me as her nurse if she ever got sick."

Sister Alverna's opportunities for spiritual growth were clearly focused on attending an annual retreat. She writes, "For at least three years, I had the opportunity to travel about fifty miles to make my retreat with members of the Charismatic Movement. Still in my memory, these were times of closeness to God and to other people who love God, and who live holy lives."

Doing what she loved to do, and enjoying it, Sister Alverna expresses her valued contribution to the larger mission of Jesus and our Congregational mission. At the end of her CPE training, she was offered a year's residency as chaplain at Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park. She was the first Catholic Sister to work there, according to Chaplain Pitt. "This was, in a real way, a move into the greater community representing the church, as well as of our Community... as I worked with patients who were dealing with death and dying, wellness and illness, I tried to act as the hands and heart of Jesus."

What a beautiful and meaning-filled journey into the heart of the matter for all of us: God's Immense Love!

Editor's Note: *When Sister Therese read the final version of this interview to Sister Alverna, she kept smiling throughout and at the end her eyes shone with tears of gladness. No less than two months later, Sister Alverna went to her eternal home. Sister Therese was so grateful to have been able to share these special moments with her, affirming her life's work before she passed away on May 30, 2016.*