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interchange

Sisters of Saint Francis

living from our common heart

Focus: Living From Our Common Heart

interchange

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Letter from the President

Sister Ramona Miller

living from our common heart

Dear Friends and Companions,

In anticipation of being installed as new leadership for the Rochester Franciscans, the five of us prayed and deliberated on a theme that would be foundational for our years in service. "Living From Our Common Heart" became our mantra. Each of us reflected on one of the words of this mantra during our installation service on July 1, 2018. These reflections are shared with the hope that each reader will find a link to their own life journey with the larger Franciscan community. There are no walls to experiencing a common heart; it creates a sense of belonging which increases personal well-being and prompts sharing love with others.

At first glance, our human journey seems very common and ordinary: eating, sleeping, and breathing. However, there is an extraordinary aspect of each person, each creature, each star and all that exists, which reflects the Spirit of God. When we notice life in the smallest things and events throughout the day, a reverence for God, the Source of all life, awakens in us and meaning unfolds. Being alive is more than breathing; it is living... living with meaning. We observe persons whose meaning in life is to work for a better world by their joyful witness of generous service. Some, like the Poor Clares who live at Assisi Heights, serve by a life of prayer, while others serve in their professional ministries and/or in volunteer work.

Our culture tends to reward individualism, becoming strong independent persons. Our Franciscan mission softens the ego-driven self to become a compassionate presence for peace in our world. We live for the day when every person experiences belonging to a common heart.

Sister Ramona Miller

Sister Ramona Miller, OSF
Congregational Minister

Living From Our Common Heart

by Sister Ramona Miller

Sister Ramona Miller with the schefflera plant

LIVING is so much more than merely existing, breathing and being alive. A symbol for me is a seven foot schefflera plant at the end of our administration corridor. Sometimes its droopy leaves demand our attention to give it water so it can be a living plant. When it is "living," its beauty enhances our environment, causing us to notice its multi-colored leaves, and giving us energy by its beauty.

A shift in the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, from merely existing to living, happened in his encounter with Jesus who spoke to him from the San Damiano icon cross saying, "Francis, go rebuild my House; as you see it is all being destroyed." The voice of Jesus echoed in Francis' life so that his living had meaning, as he rebuilt society through his example and his words.

Living as Franciscans makes a difference in our lives. First of all, the eyes of our heart are opened to see and feel the life we share with all of God's creation, all of our brothers and sisters of the human family and all living creatures. Living with eyes wide open, we commit ourselves to actions that enhance the dignity of all persons. This compels us to be engaged in rebuilding society in a twofold manner: by hands on ministry – especially to the marginalized – and by advocating for systemic and structural change where there are injustices. Of grave concern for us is the need to care for our common home with a focus on climate justice. We sing with St. Francis: *"Laudato Sí, – praised be You, my Lord with all Your creatures; and through our sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us."* Singing this canticle deepens our sensitivity to respecting and caring for God's creation, so that future generations will also be able to sing with grateful hearts as they enjoy and benefit from God's gifts.

Our ministries of rebuilding flow from a dedicated contemplative prayer life. Like water to the plant, without prayer we merely exist, but do not flourish.

Living makes demands on us to spend time in prayer, to share our time and talents with others, and in so doing, we are more alive and beautiful like the schefflera plant.

Living from our common heart makes a difference for us individually and communally. This kind of living gives praise to God from whom all life comes.

Living *From* Our Common Heart

by Sister Jennifer Corbett

Sister Jennifer Corbett and her 'tribe' of extended family members

...and her parents.

I am from South Bend, Indiana. My father is of American Irish descent and my mother was from France. I have an older sister, Mary, and a brother Phil. That is my "tribe" so to speak. It defines my origins, and you may come to some conclusions about me from these three facts.

Jesus was from the Tribe of Judah, born into the line of the House of David. His parents, Mary and Joseph, were fervent Jews. He was born in Bethlehem and lived in Nazareth, in Galilee. This was His tribe. It shaped Him, but did not limit Him.

One Sabbath, He went into the local synagogue in Nazareth and unrolled the scroll of Isaiah the Prophet and read:

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. The Spirit has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.
>
> "To proclaim the year of Jubilee, the reign of God. Today this has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)

Then, this is what He did: He touched a leper. People with unclean spirits became calm. He saw the needs of the crowds and fed them with words of authority and food. He allowed people to touch Him. He reminded those who would preach never to forget the unnamed woman who anointed His feet. Those by the wayside and who climbed trees had His attention. He enjoyed wine and good food. He went to deserted places to pray. "Where did Jesus get all this?" He was too much for many. He was Mystery. He was Love.

The Gospel is concrete. It is a Person, not a theory. Jesus teaches what The Law intended: to be engaged in all life – the neighbor, the stranger, the enemy, children, livestock, the community, the excluded, lilies of the field. He claimed to be the fulfillment of The Law. He interpreted it from life experience of first century Palestine. He was not confined by His tribe… and nor can we be in our own 21st century.

For many today, where one is "from" is a matter of life and death. We make assumptions about others with minimal information. Religious communities and churches can be tribal and use rules to define and limit, rather than to safeguard and break barriers for a common life. Those who challenge us by their human need, from all over the world, do us a great favor. If we notice, we can learn the cost of living in the reign of God. It can cause conflicts with cultural norms, with the Tribe. This can be very disturbing. But slowly, as God's love transforms us, we too, will be healed from any blindness and inability to speak and to hear. We will become humble enough to be counted among the hundredfold of brothers and sisters.

Living From *Our* Common Heart

by Sister Mary Eliot Crowley

Evelyn and James Danley, grandchildren of Cojourner Barb DeCramer, reading "The Velveteen Rabbit."

What is *Ours* to live and share?

One baptism, one faith, one hope, one God, creator, brother and in-spiritor;

One call to embrace our way of life of incredible diversity;

One Franciscan Rule and Constitutions with its Companion as guide to our life of relationship.

We have experienced, and are currently in, a time of immense change and opportunity to continue growing in relationship with our origins, our giftedness, and the challenges of our future. To be in relationship well, we must know who we are individually, and as a community of loving, compassionate women. The invitation for our collective legacy during these next four years and beyond, is to "deepen our interconnectedness with one another, our Cojourners," and with all of you here today and those beyond these walls.

One of my favorite stories is *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams. This children's book tells the story of a velveteen rabbit who becomes real through the love of a little child.

Early in the story, Rabbit meets the Skin Horse, who is real, who explains to the Velveteen Rabbit what real means:

> *"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."*
>
> *"Does it hurt?" asks the rabbit.*
>
> *"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."*
>
> *"Does it happen all at once," he asked, "or bit by bit?"*
>
> *"It doesn't happen all at once," said Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily or have sharp edges or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But those things don't matter at all because once you are real you can't be ugly except to people who don't understand."*

© Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit.* George H. Doran Company, 1922.

For me, to be real is to love another into being. It is to have the passion of Jesus, of Francis and Clare of Assisi.

Being real is our challenge as women of this Franciscan community. It calls forth courage, a newly focused vision of who we are. It calls for our family and friends to provide encouragement and support. You are integral as together we move forward into the unknown.

Living From Our *Common* Heart

by Sister Char Hesby

When I was in my 30s, the Sister I lived with kept talking about the importance of living an ordinary life. I had NO clue what she was talking about. I didn't want ordinary. I wanted the extraordinary, the mystical, the depths of God. It wasn't until ten years later that I began to understand what she was saying. By that time, I was living as a hermit – hardly an ordinary form of life! But the ironic thing is that, as unusual as being a hermit might be, the life itself is all about the ordinary. It is just waking and sleeping, eating and washing dishes, praying and reading. Just daily things – but daily things with attention to the Holiness that dwells in and around everything. And it is the Holy in that ordinariness that is available to all of us – it is the commonality that we share.

Whether we have the most brilliant mind, or the most charismatic personality or are limited by memory loss or physical impairments, we all share the ordinary things of life: eating and sleeping and breathing. When we eat, we are taking in the substance of God. When we sleep, we are cradled in God's arms. When we breathe, the Spirit fills us. Our lives are common, ordinary and filled with Spirit.

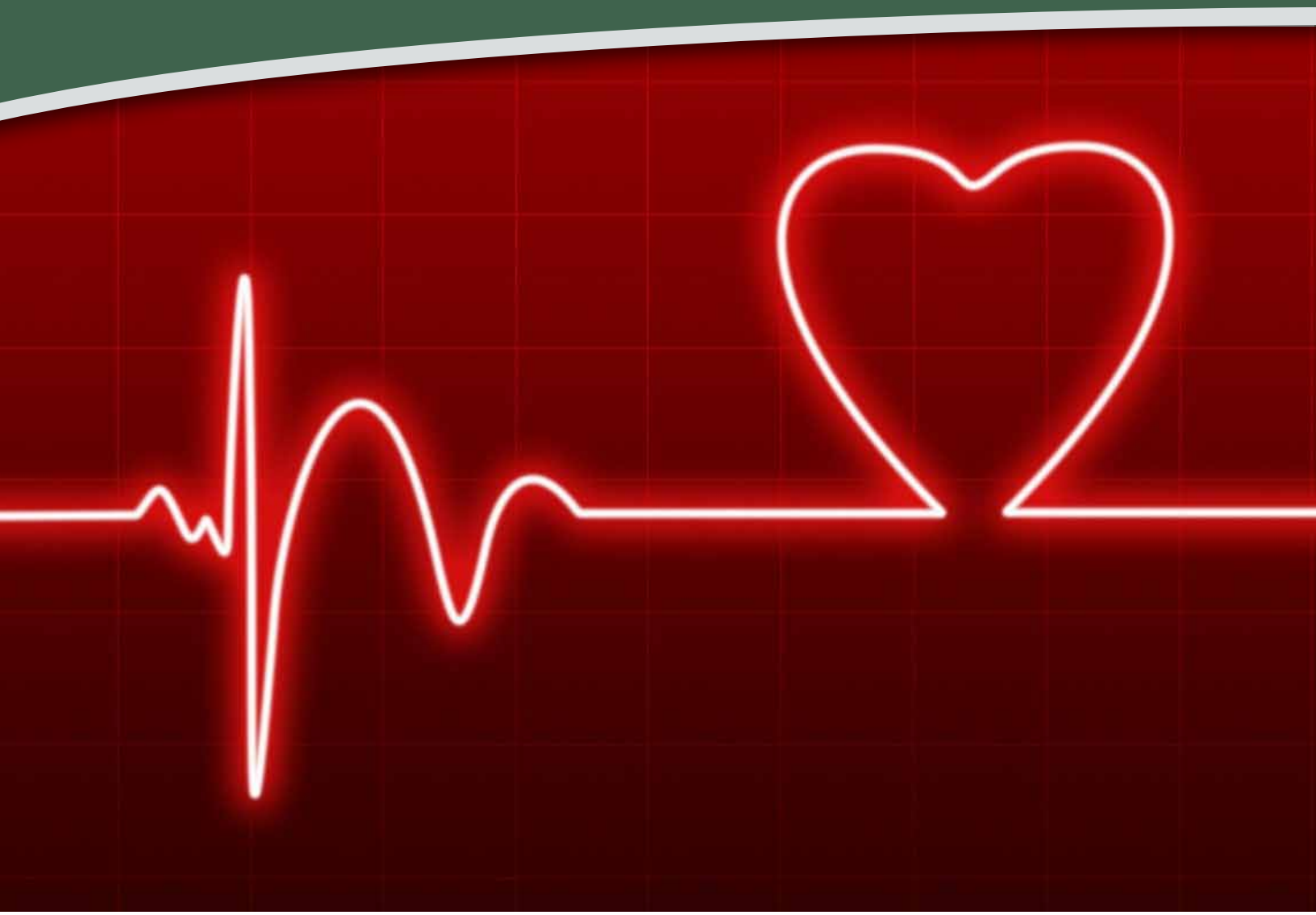
But it is not just OUR lives. It is not just the living beings on this planet who move and have their being in God. At the core of all creation, living and non-living, we share the same substance. In every atom of every particle of this planet, every galaxy's stars, every speck of space dust, there are protons, electrons and neutrons, quarks, and as yet undiscovered particles that make up those atoms. At that depth of reality, there is no distinction between animate and inanimate. It is all alike. Even deeper than those subatomic particles, at least according to some physicists, are energy strings. And I would say, deeper than those strings of energy, is Spirit. What we ultimately hold in common, is the Spirit of God. The reality common to humans, animals, plants, mountains, rivers, stars, and star dust is Spirit. Thus, at the core of all, we are literally, indivisibly One.

So, I invite each and all of us to keep diving deeper to discover and experience for ourselves, the truth of this one Spirit.

Image courtesy of Pixabay.com

Living From Our Common *Heart*

by Sister Judi Angst



Heart.....Heart.....Heart.....

What does former Minnesota Twin star, Rod Carew, have to do with "Living From Our Common Heart?"

On December 16, 2016, Rod Carew, who had suffered a serious and nearly fatal heart attack, received a heart and kidney transplant from 29-year-old Konrad Reuland, a former NFL star who had tragically experienced a brain aneurysm and died four days later. Reuland idolized Carew in his youth, and had even met him. It didn't take long for the Carew and Reuland families to connect the dots and realize that it was Konrad's heart now sustaining his hero, Rod Carew.

Less than three months later, the Reulands hosted Mr. Carew at their home. After preliminary socializing, Konrad's father, who was a doctor, pulled out his stethoscope, and carefully placed it on Rod Carew's chest. Once again the doctor heard the thump, thump, thump of his own son's heart. Konrad's mother, then had the same privilege of listening to her son's heart. We can only imagine the emotional impact on both father and mother.

Friends, our loving God does not give us a transplant, but rather, at creation each of us was endowed with a Divinely Loving Heart – one that truly would never die. One that is aglow with goodness, kindness, compassion and hope. We don't need a stethoscope to hear it. We hear the Divine Heart beat in ourselves, in others and in creation. It is there, we need only to be living from our common heart.

Heart.....Heart.....Heart.....

Image courtesy of Pixabay.com

Volunteers: The Heartbeat of Our Activities

by Kim Jaworski

Sister Bernadette Svatos

Sisters Kate Martin (Poor Clare) and Evelyn Thillen with Grace Lagerlund

Sister Charlotte Dusbabek talks to baby Andrew, held by his mom, Lisa Wiederholt, as Sister Mary Frederick looks on.

Whether it's helping with Bingo, Coffee Talk, Wednesday morning Sunshine group, getting Sisters to hair appointments or Frank's monthly program, our volunteers are at the heart of it all. They generously give of their time and talents to enrich the lives of Sisters at Assisi Heights, and they do it all with a warm smile and a skip in their step. In the Life Enrichment Department, we know we could never keep all of our activities and events afloat without our dedicated group of volunteers. We have a saying "there's no such thing as too many volunteers." Each person brings their own stories, experience and personal touch to their volunteer shift. We are all richer for their sharing of their gifts!

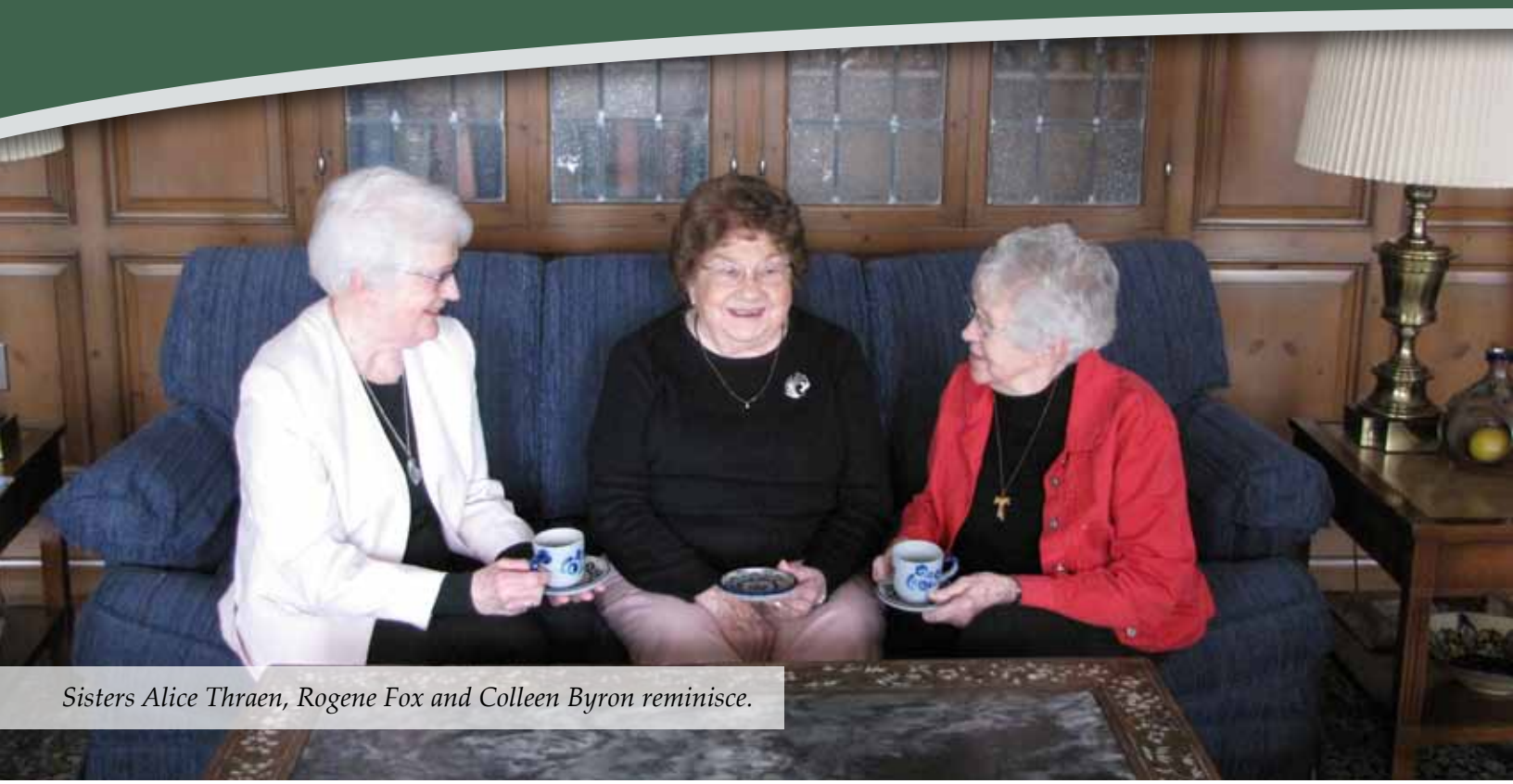
New to our volunteer ranks are junior hosts and hostesses who help out in the dining rooms on 2nd and 3rd Francis. These young volunteers serve with an adult (parent, grandparent or other relative) and help with beverage service, delivering desserts and clearing used dishes. More importantly, they bring their cheerful faces and warm conversation to brighten the dining rooms. For retired teachers in the dining room, there is just nothing like a chat about schoolwork with a 6th grader!

Even younger volunteers (the preschool group) are joining in this year at Assisi Heights. Moms and kids are coming to the Sunporch for 'Preschool Playtime with the Sisters.' This might include some balloons, or puppets, or just peek-a-boo and shared smiles. It's clear from the first visits that this has been a hit with both volunteers and Sisters. There were smiles all around!

Sometimes our volunteers come in furry shapes. We have therapy dog visits, Vinnie the Guinea Pig, and now 'Kitten Playtime' happening. These furry, four-footed volunteers bring their enthusiasm and wet noses to put a twinkle in the eye of Sisters (and staff). What could be better on a snowy winter day than playing with kittens?

Regardless of age or species, volunteers bring their special heart to their service here at Assisi Heights. And they put the heartbeat in our activities!

Weaving a Common Heart



Sisters Alice Thraen, Rogene Fox and Colleen Byron reminisce.

Over the past twenty years, the Rochester Franciscans have woven a unique place in my heart. I vividly remember the first time I drove through the wrought iron gates of Assisi Heights, up that steep winding hill. It was winter 2003… the white snow accentuated the beauty of the Romanesque style buildings. It reminded me of Assisi, Italy, where a similar winding road leads up to the area where Saint Francis and Saint Clare carved out lives of peace and prayer while doing good works with the poor. The beautiful surroundings of Assisi Heights took my breath away. The Sisters of Assisi Heights changed my heart.

A few years prior, I'd met Sister Ramona Miller through a mutual friend. On this particular visit she gave me a personal tour of the various rooms and hallways and chapel. The atmosphere was quiet and serene. I tried to imagine what it was like when scores of novices filled these halls in the 1950s and 1960s, professing vows to commit themselves to God and the service of the Church. They practiced a mode of living that is much less common now.

These days, the number of Sisters roaming those halls may be diminished, but their constancy of purpose remains. Assisi Heights remains a community of a common heart. It is a beloved community where the Sisters submit themselves to their institution. They have discovered the good in serving it, and they allow themselves to be formed by it. That service takes many different forms, with a variety of goals. I don't think there exists a truly "retired" Sister at Assisi Heights. All Sisters, to the best of their ability and talents, continue to perform acts of sacrificial service with a humble everyday spirit – a common heart.

David Brooks, a columnist for the New York Times wrote a book entitled, *The Road to Character*. It focuses on the deeper values that exist within the core of our being – values like kindness, honesty and faithfulness. These values should guide our lives, but often struggle to compete in our fast-paced, 21st century "selfie" society that never sleeps.

Here is what Brooks wrote that made me immediately think of the 'Common Heart' of the Sisters of Saint Francis:

> *"About once a month I run across a person who radiates an inner light. These people can be in any walk of life. They seem deeply good. They listen well. They make you feel funny and valued. You often catch them looking after other people and as they do so, their laugh is musical and their manner is infused with gratitude.*

They are not thinking about what wonderful work they are doing. They are not thinking about themselves at all. When I meet such a person it brightens my whole day."

My trips to Rochester and Assisi Heights have ebbed and flowed over the years, allowing me to get to get to know some of the Sisters on more than a first name basis. Sister Iria Miller, recently deceased, was perhaps my favorite. We shared a love of current events and social justice issues. We could talk at length about politics and the environment. She was always up-to-date on the latest news. I will miss our quiet conversations. She always ended our visits by telling me, "I'm praying for you." I came to regard her as my guardian angel.

I became acquainted with Sisters Colleen Byron, Margeen Hoffmann, Jane Francis Gregoire and Rogene Fox when they managed the Gift of Life House in 2004. Sisters Mary Frederick and Alice Thraen taught my niece and nephew in grade school in the 1980s. Fifteen years ago, Sister Kathy Warren serendipitously introduced herself to me at a breakfast table in a guesthouse in Assisi, Italy. What are the odds! Most recently, Sister Theresa Hoffmann brought me communion while I was a patient at Saint Marys Hospital. Yes, the Sisters of Saint Francis seem to be everywhere, and continue to weave their common heart.

Author David Brooks notes that,

"Moral improvement occurs most reliably when the heart is warmed, when we come into contact with people we admire and love and we consciously and unconsciously bend our lives to mimic theirs."

That is a powerful sentence. Please go back and read it again.

The Sisters of Saint Francis continue to change my heart. They continue to warm my heart. They continue to warm our Common Heart.

Finally, I leave you with the words of G.K. Chesterton: *"Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly."*

© David Brooks, *The Road to Character*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2015.

Sister Ramona Miller (left) and Iria Miller (center) with David Garron

Sister Theresa Hoffmann

Why Consider Spiritual Direction?

Sister Linda Wieser (left) with a directee and the empty chair for the inner spirit

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience;

We are spiritual beings having a human experience.

- Attributed to Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

Do you believe that, as we live from this common heart, all of us are on a spiritual journey? You might be asking, "What is this thing called spiritual direction?" "How do I know if it might be helpful for me?" "How do I find a spiritual director?"

Spiritual direction is a misnomer because, as a spiritual director, I'm not directing the person who comes for spiritual direction. It may be more accurate to say I am an ally, mentor or companion to the person who is on this journey. My call is to be open to listen to his or her inner spirit or voice. As I am in session with another, I imagine three chairs in a circle: One for the director and one for the directee and one empty chair for the inner spirit of the directee. As a spiritual director, it is a privilege for me to help the person hear the invitation of the inner voice for more life, truth and well-being in relationship to self, God, creation and others.

This inner voice or spiritual energy is heard in a variety of ways, some recent comments have been:

- My life is unmanageable; I don't know where to turn.
- I don't go to church anymore, but yet I want a spiritual practice and community.
- My mother just died, I feel so lost in my grief.
- I feel anxious and stressed about the realities in our world; how do I find God in all of this?

You might ask, "What will I receive if I come for spiritual direction?" The Spiritual Directors International (SDI) website identifies the following possible opportunities or outcomes as a result of this encounter.

- Identify and trust your own experience of God
- Integrate spirituality into your daily life
- Discern and make difficult choices
- Share your hopes, struggles and losses

- Develop sensitivity for justice and concern for the poor
- Live the essence of your spiritual affiliation with integrity

Spiritual Direction is a sacred, confidential exploration of "how can I truly live my life in hope and peace?" My favorite poet, Mary Oliver said it well, "Tell me what you plan to do with your one, wild precious life." It is an opportunity to go deeper into my God, self-reflecting on what brings me LIFE. Jesus says," I come so that you may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Spiritual Direction is a time to pause from all the activity that life brings, to ponder and awaken to the choice maker (Holy Spirit). It is from this place one can act upon life's challenges through the assistance of another's eyes, ears, and heart.

Typically, a person would meet once per month with a well-trained director, who has the skills and resources to be present with you to the Mystery of Presence. The session usually lasts one hour, held in a confidential, sacred space. Some people choose to have the session via phone. You do not need to be a member of a church, mosque, synagogue, or temple — the only requirement is to have an open heart desiring to be more aware of living as a "spiritual being having a human experience." This, I believe, is the essence of living from the common heart.

To find a Spiritual Director: Please go to www.rochesterfranciscan.org and click on the Spiritual Direction button. Someone will respond to your inquiry. Or call Assisi Heights, 507-282-7441, and ask to talk with someone about spiritual direction. In addition, you may search the internet for: Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Directors.

The Spiritual Directors International (SDI) website describes spiritual direction as "the contemplative practice of helping another person or group to awaken to the mystery called God in all of life, and to respond to that discovery in a growing relationship of freedom and commitment (and)... an encounter that explores a deeper relationship with the spiritual aspect of being human..."

In Memoriam

Sister Andrenee Lynch (June 16, 1928 - November 16, 2018)

Sister Andrenee was a quick, lively, graceful, free-spirited Franciscan. Andrenee's ministries as a Franciscan were many. She began teaching first and second grades for 40 years, after being a homemaker for the Sisters for 5 years, and before becoming her hometown's parish worker in various roles for 2 years. Next, she served as an assistant in Assisi Community Center at Assisi Heights, all before settling down to "active retirement." Andrenee's sparkly eyes, love of her ministries— especially teaching first graders and First Communicants—and her warm and prayerful personality endeared her to many.

Sister Evelyn Thillen (January 15, 1927 - March 18, 2019)

For 41 years, Sister Evelyn's ministry was teaching in the primary grades; mostly in Minnesota, with several years in Silver Spring, Maryland. While teaching first grade in Silver Spring, Sister Evelyn wrote, "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'm 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." She had the ability to instill in the students a sense of their self-worth and a respect for each other. Later, Tau Center at the College of Saint Teresa in Winona, became Evelyn's place of ministry for 11 years. She also had the privilege of going on a pilgrimage to Assisi, Italy where she noted in her journal: "...if you are led into solitude, you are being led into the heart of God."

Sister Gretchen Berg (May 24, 1920 - November 27, 2018)

Sister Gretchen was a giant of a woman; a leader with the simplicity of the troubadour. Prior to her election as Congregational Minister in June of 1970, Gretchen brought excitement to the Community by creating the Pastoral Weekends. This fostered unity in the midst of diversity. Sister Gretchen, a woman of faith, was a steady presence… unwavering in her trust in God and imbued with confidence in the teaching of Vatican II, which had begun for her in Peru. Her contemplative life of prayer and her love of Clare gave her the clarity and intensity of trusting life experiences.

Sister Iria Miller (June 1, 1924 - January 26, 2019)

"I found a beautiful group of praying women, a life of adventure and challenge, a cause I could believe in, and a ministry of service and love." Thus, did Sister Iria describe her vocation. She captured her own essence in this simple sentence and lived her 72 years among us faithfully embodying this way of being in God. Sister Iria served in schools of several small towns in southern Minnesota, including Rochester and Winona, as well as Chicago, Illinois and Portsmouth, Ohio. Following her years in the classroom, Sister Iria moved on to parish work as a Pastoral Minister in Minnesota, Iowa and Kentucky, and Director of Religious Education in Indiana. Iria was passionate about justice up to the time of her death.

Sister Johanna Orlett (May 25, 1936 - January 5, 2019)

Sister Johanna was plucked from the Appalachian mountain region with a proactive mind. She graduated with an AA degree in business while still a junior in high school. She revealed herself to be a prodigy. Attending the College of Saint Teresa, Johanna went on to achieve five masters' degrees and a PhD to develop expertise in her emerging ministries. It was in working with Hispanics that she had a profound faith experience. It was her 'call within a call' to the Hispanic community that touched her heart. "Whatever I once thought about helping the "church" turned out to be an unending receiving from the Church… Everything was gift. I thank God and everyone in my life for that!"

Sister Marga Ernster (December 9, 1928 - October 18, 2018)

"Pray First Then Act" - This seems to be the motto that Sister Marga Ernster lived by for 89 years. In August of 1952, after working six years beyond High School on the family farm, Marga acted on the call to become a Rochester Franciscan. She prayed about what ministry to select and decided to become a teacher because she loved little children. Marga's love and dedication for her students was reflected back to her from all the first graders she taught for 39 years... always in Minnesota. Sister Marga's last act of prayer and ministry was shared with Sister Lorraine Doherty for many years while serving at Crucifixion Parish in La Crescent, until they both returned to Rochester in 2008. At Assisi Heights, Marga continued to pray and share her joy for the Lord.

Sister Margaret E. Kiefer-Russell (September 28, 1924 - December 5, 2018)

What was perhaps most significant about Sister Marg was her insatiable inquisitiveness that turned her into a lifelong learner. She was a woman of boundless love. So many people give testimony to the fact that her simple, humble presence and her "care-full" listening were so healing and restorative! She was an unequivocal witness to the importance of peacemaking in every single conflictive situation that presented itself! Marg never missed an opportunity to be of service. She was always a great example of a true Franciscan, from her genuine desire to be poor, humble and simple, to a true commitment to a fraternal community life with our Sisters, the homeless, or in mixed communities focused on a cause.

Sister Rose Gillespie (May 17, 1931 - February 14, 2019)

Thoughtful, thankful, deeply spiritual, kind, helpful, unassuming, fun-loving – these characteristics were so evident in Rose. She was a "behind-the-scenes" person, not wanting to be in the limelight. Rose's life as a woman religious began in 1951, when she joined the Missionary Benedictines, in Norfolk, Nebraska. As Rose became better acquainted with the Rochester Franciscans, she began to realize that the Franciscan way of life was more fitting for her. In 1969, she joined our Community. Her primary career was spent as a dietitian at Saint Marys Hospital - a position she held for nearly 40 years. After retirement, volunteering became a prominent part of her life.

Getting to the Heart of the Matter: **Support for Immigrants**

by Sister Marlys Jax

Amplifying the Story of the Exploited – Standing Beside the Voiceless

Millions of immigrants risk deportation and imprisonment by living in the USA without legal documentation. They arrive from around the world for countless reasons. Some are fleeing persecution or violence in the country of their birth. Others leave because of the lack of jobs, poverty, and the inability to support their families. They are fearful, living under stress having to navigate a somewhat "hidden" life, with little protection from exploitation at the hands of employers. They struggle to carve out a life for themselves here in Southeast Minnesota.

The Rochester Interfaith Immigrant Rights Coalition (RIIRC), with several Rochester Franciscans participating, initiated the Southeastern Minnesota Legal Defense Fund (SMIILD). Their purpose is to establish a legal defense fund for the support of persons in Immigration Court proceedings. The fund will provide the services of a lawyer for those at risk of deportation, who are seeking a fair hearing. Representation enhances the efficiency of the legal system and protects due process. Most often, low-income individuals lack this access to counsel.

According to the Olmsted County census, we have:
25,350 persons considered foreign born
13,583 are not naturalized,
5,800 are undocumented
3,100 children have at least one undocumented parent in Southeast Minnesota

In the last four years, 188 undocumented persons have been arrested in Olmsted County, of which 13 were for felony offenses and 7 for misdemeanors. The other 168, or 89.4%, had no known criminal offenses. Forty-six percent have been gainfully employed in the U.S. for anywhere from 10–30+ years. TRAC data (Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse) indicates 277 persons are currently in Southeast Minnesota Immigration Court. Ninety-seven percent are unrepresented. From a New York City report, 74% of immigrants who were represented had successful

Facing deportation? Nonprofit has started legal defense fund for you

BY MATTHEW STOLLE

A new nonprofit representing a coalition of Rochester area churches and faith communities has begun to raise money to fund a legal defense for immigrants facing deportation or detention, the leaders announced during a press conference this morning.

The legal defense fund will target low-income Olmsted County immigrants who are unable to afford attorneys of their own, leaders of the Southeastern Minnesota Interfaith Immigrant Legal Defense said.

As of September of 2018, 89 county residents had cases pending in immigration court, according to the nonprofit. Of those, 35 were not represented by an attorney.

Similar efforts at the governmental level have been taking place in Minnesota. Both Ramsey and Hennepin counties and the city of St. Paul have looked at or created legal defense funds for low-income immigrants.

Nonprofit officials say an attorney can have a decisive impact on the outcome of an immigration court proceeding. One study revealed a person who has an attorney is far more likely to be granted relief and avoid a deportation order than one who does not.

Phil Wheeler, the nonprofit's chairman, said the defense fund is meant to benefit not only undocumented immigrants, but asylum seekers, refugees and people on temporary protective status.

"We don't know that all the people who are at risk of deportation deserve deportation, but we do think the system ought to be fair enough to give them a hearing," Wheeler said. "That's all the legal defense does. It gives them a chance to have their case heard."

Many of the churches and faith communities involved with SMIILD are also part of the area sanctuary movement.

See DEPORTATION, page A2

Four of the 10 board members of a new nonprofit meet before a press conference at the First Unitarian Universalist Church in Rochester this morning. From left are: Marlys Jax, Phil Wheeler, Kathryn Lozada and Kent Bailey.

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outcomes vs. 18% of unrepresented immigrants. According to the National Study of Access to Counsel, detained persons who have a lawyer are 10.5 times more likely to be granted some form of relief. The Safety and Fairness for Everyone Network, which is located in Colorado, reports that in 2018, 38% of the immigrants who had lawyers were able to remain in the U.S. compared to 3% of those who did not have representation. According to TRAC data, Minnesota deported 919 persons from October 1, 2018 - January 31, 2019.

As Franciscans, we promise, with our common hearts, to live with our eyes open and commit ourselves to advocate for systematic and structural changes where there are injustices. We have chosen to stand in the trenches with those who are marginalized and stand with immigrants when they come to court. Finally, we stand by with compassion.

Seventeen faith communities and community organizations have taken positions in support of the legal defense fund, including the Rochester Franciscan Community. This legal defense fund was inaugurated at a press conference on January 23, 2019. It was publically declared at an Interfaith Immigration Prayer Service entitled, "When our Immigrant Neighbors are Hurting, How Can We Be Silent?" held at Assisi Heights on January 27, 2019.

Coming from the Heart: **My Lifelong Relationship with the Sisters of Saint Francis**

by Nancy Gilliland, Cojourner

Sisters Casilda Chavez and Wanda Mettes with Nancy Gilleland

My association with the Sisters of Saint Francis began at birth. I was born at Saint Marys Hospital in Rochester in 1939. At that time, the hospital was very much owned and operated by the Sisters. I had a good start in life. The Sisters had a very fine newborn nursery!

I attended grade school at Saint John's. Although there were a few lay teachers, the teaching staff was primarily made up of Sisters. After grade school, I attended Lourdes High School. Though their numbers were fewer, the Sisters were still very present as teachers and staff in the school. I especially remember Sister Olga Graf *(shown above)*. She was the Assistant Principal at Lourdes when I was a student. We had a close relationship. Years later, when she was in retirement, I would visit her at Assisi Heights.

After high school, I attended the College of Saint Teresa (CST) in Winona, Minnesota. This was a small Catholic women's college, owned and operated by the Rochester Franciscan Sisters. I entered the nursing program, spending two academic years at the CST in Winona, then two full calendar years at Saint Marys Hospital in Rochester. During the second two years, we had all of our clinical rotations at the hospital. My degree from CST helped me to gain meaningful employment as a nurse.

The time I spent as a student at Saint Teresa's was very important to me. I am totally indebted to Sister Ancina Adams. Sister Ancina *(shown right)* was the Director of the Collegiate Nursing Program at CST. She encouraged me to enter that program. I stayed in touch with Sister Ancina for years and years. When she passed away, I was living in Rochester and able to attend her funeral in the Lourdes Chapel at Assisi Heights.

It was Sister Loretta Klinkhammer who first suggested to me that perhaps I would like to consider becoming a Cojourner. At that time I was not familiar with the program. When I indicated I would like to become a Cojourner, Sister Wanda Mettes helped me with the preparation. It was very nice working with her. I have been a Cojourner for 17 years.

When I became a Cojourner, I was given two Franciscan prayer partners. One partner was Sister Nicholine Mertz. Sister Nicholine passed away in 2018. My other prayer partner is Sister Casilda Chavez. They have sent many, many prayers my way.

For several years, I have belonged to a "Franciscan Life Group" - a small group of Cojourners meeting with the Sisters residing at Saint Marys Hospital Convent. We meet on a fairly regular basis to share prayers, meals and time to visit. During those gatherings, we have often viewed videos with a spiritual focus, or a social justice issue, followed by meaningful discussions. And so, my life with the Sisters continues!

From the Archives: 100 Years Ago at Mary Knoll – Saint Marys Farm

by Sister Marisa McDonald

It's 1919… picture yourself driving four miles west of Saint Marys Hospital, and finding a 200+ acre farm owned by a group of Sisters!

In the early years of Saint Marys Hospital, the land around the building (south of the hospital) was able to accommodate the vegetable gardens, as well as the chickens and cows used to feed the patients and the staff. However, both the hospital and the city were growing, and other options were needed. In 1919, the Governing Board of the Sisters authorized the purchase of 212 acres of farm land.

This farm was known as the Mary Knoll Farm. According to an article in the Rochester Post Bulletin, in 1931, a "herd of 80 grade and purebred Holsteins head the livestock on the 207 acre farm. They provide about 100 gallons of milk daily, and much cream for the hospital."

Pasteurization was just becoming commonplace in those years, and Sister Ludovica Rybinska was in charge of the pasteurization process. The farm was used as an educational opportunity for nursing and dietetic students who visited to see the sanitary methods used to produce the milk supply.

Sister Ludovica, along with her sister, Sister Natalia, and Sister Julia Wilhalm visited the farm every afternoon to check on the animals and the crops (alfalfa, corn, oats), and to bring food to the workers.

The dairy barn itself was an interesting structure – it was actually two very large barns connected by a third barn, built at a cost of about $40,000.

Reports from 1936 detail the inventory of this busy farm. In fact, a few hospital patients paid on their account with livestock or straw, which they contributed to the farm.

In 1953, when the pasteurization equipment was becoming outdated, the farm began to sell its milk to some local dairies, and several years later, the dairy herd was sold. For a few more years, the farm continued to be used for crops while discussions were held about what to do with the land. The Congregational Treasurer at that time, Sister Adele O'Neil, advised that it would be better to look for a developer rather than try to sell it as farmland. The farm acreage was finally sold in 1969, but the main barn still exists.

For half a century, the farm had contributed fresh and high quality milk, vegetables and meat to aid in the healing ministry at the hospital.

We are grateful for gifts given in honor of a Sister or loved one who has been a vital part of your life.

We remember those who have gone before us, and you, our generous benefactors, through the daily prayers of our Sisters.

Gifts received October 1, 2017 through September 30, 2018.

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Committing ourselves to be a compassionate presence for peace in our world, while striving for justice and reverence for all creation, is possible because of our generous benefactors.

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With the support of our benefactors, Sisters are able to continue their ministries of service, prayer and influence. We continue to share our message through Facebook and our newly updated website, as well as through our traditional media such as the *Interchange*. We are truly blessed by each one of you!

Did You Know?

Automatic withdrawal from your checking account is a worry-free way to make your monthly gift. There are no fees associated, and it is as easy as letting us know your routing number, account number, and the name on the account along with providing us with a voided check. On the 15th of each month, your designated dollar amount will be withdrawn and allocated to the fund of your choice at Assisi Heights.

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You can use your credit card to support the mission and ministry of the Sisters of Saint Francis. To make a secure, on line donation, click on the homepage "Donate Now" button at www.rochesterfranciscan.org. Visa, MasterCard, and Discover are accepted.

Contact Information

Please feel free to email or call the Office of Mission Advancement at 507.529.3536 with any questions.

June Howard, Director | june.howard@rochesterfranciscan.org

Cathy Bakken, Assistant | cathy.bakken@rochesterfranciscan.org

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

As I reflect upon my past year working for the Sisters of Saint Francis, one of my favorite parts of being the Director of Mission Advancement has been meeting and working with so many wonderful people who are involved in the care and well-being of Assisi Heights and the Sisters' ministries. Your partnership helps to fulfill the Sisters' mission to be a compassionate presence for peace in our world, striving for justice and reverence for all creation, by providing a place of hope, prayer, reflection and enrichment.

Cathy Bakken and June Howard

The faithful generosity of our benefactors is such a blessing. Your gifts have sustained the great works of ministry that the Sisters of Saint Francis do in our community, the United States, and beyond our borders. Your continued support helps to maintain their home, and provides care for our retired Sisters. Assisi Heights welcomes countless numbers of people each year, who come to Lourdes Chapel and Assisi Heights Spirituality Center for educational programs or retreats.

The volunteer impact of those who give of their time and talents at Assisi Heights is remarkable. We are so happy you share yourselves with us. Your help and acts of kindness are so important to Assisi Heights, and an inspiration to all. You are the beat to our heart, crucial to our success, and serve as a vital link between the Sisters and our local community. Thank you for partnering with the Sisters of Saint Francis.

P.S. Thank you to the Sisters, who with dedicated hearts, continue their prayer ministries daily. You have enriched our lives and give us hope for a beautiful future.

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.

We are a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Your gift is tax-deductible as allowed by law.

To make a donation, you may use the enclosed envelope or donate online at www.rochesterfranciscan.org. Click on the "Giving" button at the top of the homepage. Then scroll down and click the "Donate Online" button.

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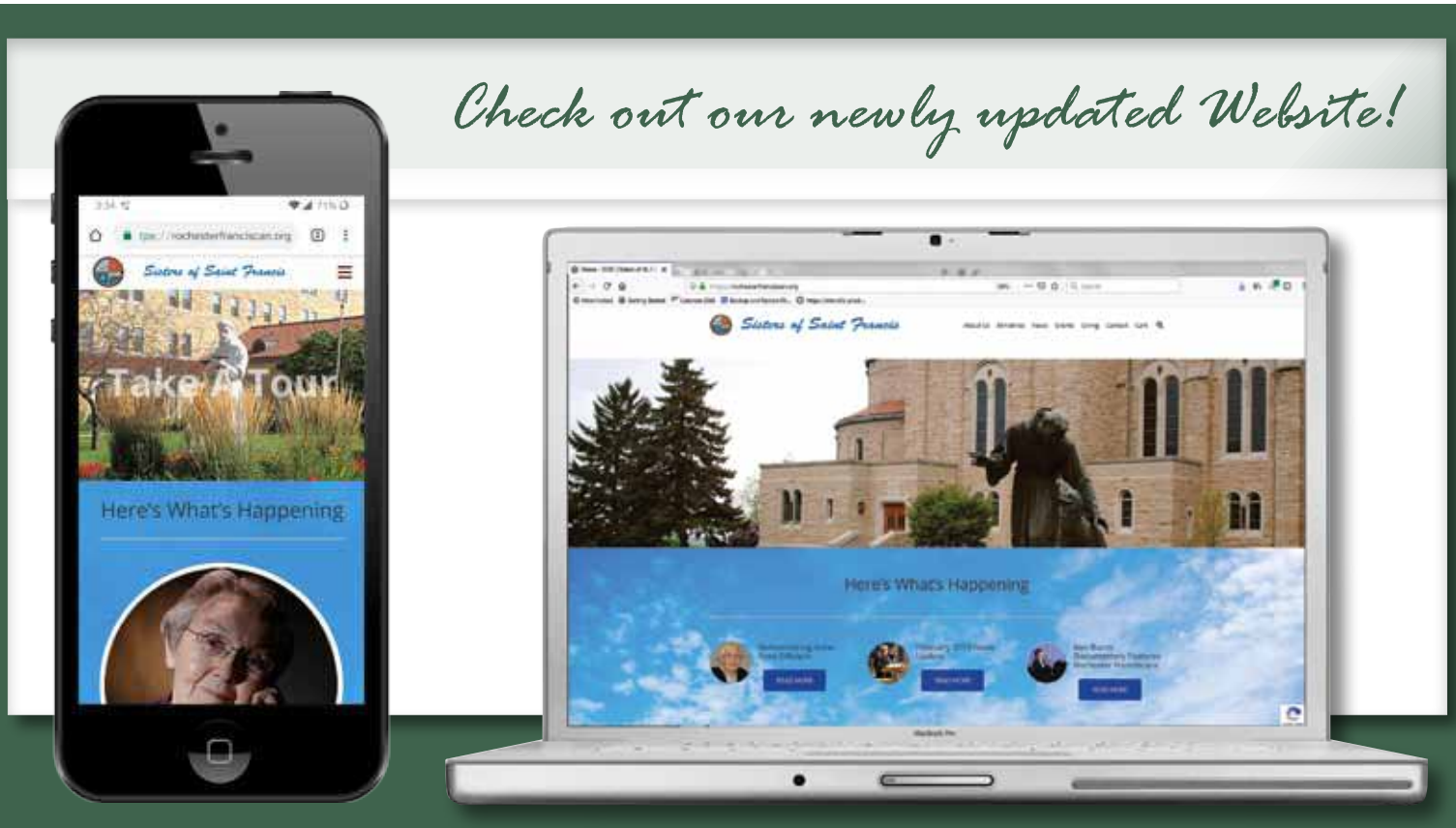

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