Healing Energy

Spring 2021

interchange

Sisters of Saint Francis

Focus: Healing Energy

interchange

a publication of the
Sisters of Saint Francis
Volume 26 Issue 1

editor
Kathy Gatliff,
Director, Communications and PR

layout/design
Ben Sebesta,
Communications Specialist

cover photo
Gerd Altmann
from Pixabay

telephone: (507) 282-7441
fax: (507) 282-7762
info@rochesterfranciscan.org
www.rochesterfranciscan.org

1001 14th Street Northwest
Rochester, MN 55901

interchange is published quarterly. Issues are sent via email in Winter and Summer to accompany our magazines published in Fall and Spring. To receive our email editions, please complete the form on the back of this magazine, or send an email request to: info@rochesterfranciscan.org

There is no subscription fee. However, donations to help cover the cost of printing and postage are accepted and appreciated.

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Letter from the President

Sister Ramona Miller

Dear Friends and Family,

After a long Minnesota winter, there comes the day when sitting in the sun feels so good… it provides healing energy. No matter what the body is enduring with disease, or if the mind is stressed with a work situation needing to be resolved, a moment in the sun on a cool day can dispel focus on these tensions. Perhaps this was the insight for Francis of Assisi who acclaimed "Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom You give us light." I imagine that Francis, who sought out caves for solitude, rejoiced at dawn with the sunrise after a cold, dark night.

Healing energy comes to us in a multitude of ways. In this issue, you will find inspiring reflections on healing that happens in quiet solitude time, or through increased knowledge obtained from internet research during the COVID pandemic, or by interacting with nature. Healing energy applies to all living creatures and to creation itself.

Pope Francis has called us to ecological conversion, a life in which we are more aware of our deep interconnectedness with God and all His creatures. Our life journey is about conversion, always changing toward wholeness, toward achieving the full potential of being in the image and likeness of God in the historical social context in which we were born and live. Saint Paul exclaimed "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me." (Gal 2:20) Our spiritual life impels us toward wholeness, to become all that God has given us the potential to become. Healing energy happens when we engage in reconciliation, in peacebuilding, in truly listening to the other, in all the moments of openness to the overflowing fountain of Goodness, God. But those who desire a cure from a disease may ask, "Why isn't God healing me?" Healing energy provides hope and nurturing, but not necessarily a cure. The true healing during a terminal illness is the inner peace of heart with all relationships—relationship with God, close relatives and acquaintances, as well as with one's self.

We are grateful for all those who give of themselves in the ministry of healthcare, as they provide healing energy for the sick and vulnerable, particularly through these months of the pandemic. While we acknowledge their ministry, may we also gain greater consciousness of the ways we experience healing energy and extend it to others in the ordinary acts of living and loving.

Sister Ramona Miller

Sister Ramona Miller, OSF
Congregational Minister

A Container for Survival

by Sister Chris Stanoch

Photo courtesy of StockSnap from Pixabay

Several months ago, at the beginning of a surge in COVID-19 cases and the request that we shelter-in-place, *America* magazine published an article about the "container" of COVID, that our shelter-in-place becomes a monastery. Novel idea? Maybe. I soon learned, through the days and weeks that followed, that I would need to find a way to live through the mounting threats of the virus, my personal anxiety and the almost certain isolation that would instantly exist. I was challenged on all levels to realize that I was facing not being able to control many things. I had to stop in my tracks and say out loud, "I am not able to control the uncontrollable." Where to turn?

I opened my heart to these new truths. Spending time in silence became a regular part of the day. I did read more books, spent time sorting through things, and praying more frequently. I found myself second guessing if I sanitized things correctly and I changed some of my habits. The path to discovery of known characteristics of the virus was constantly changing. Monitoring new safety measures was a full-time job. This became a significant part of stage one of survival.

With the next stage came the realization that this new way of life was not going away quickly. After reflection and problem-solving and reading the article in *America* magazine about viewing life as if in a monastery, I decided to live in the present. This was my connection to the article and a way to view my living space as the container for survival. Choosing to live this way began to reduce my anxiety. I spent time in silence, which I had befriended in this process. I relied on practices of the spiritual life which had become habits throughout my life. I sensed a feeling of healing in my spirit and it freed me to let go. I diverted my focus from self-consideration and opened my heart to compassion toward our world and the many people who were suffering. This virus was not just a problem for the USA, but the world. I started to treat each day as a gift and listened with an attentiveness that surprised even me.

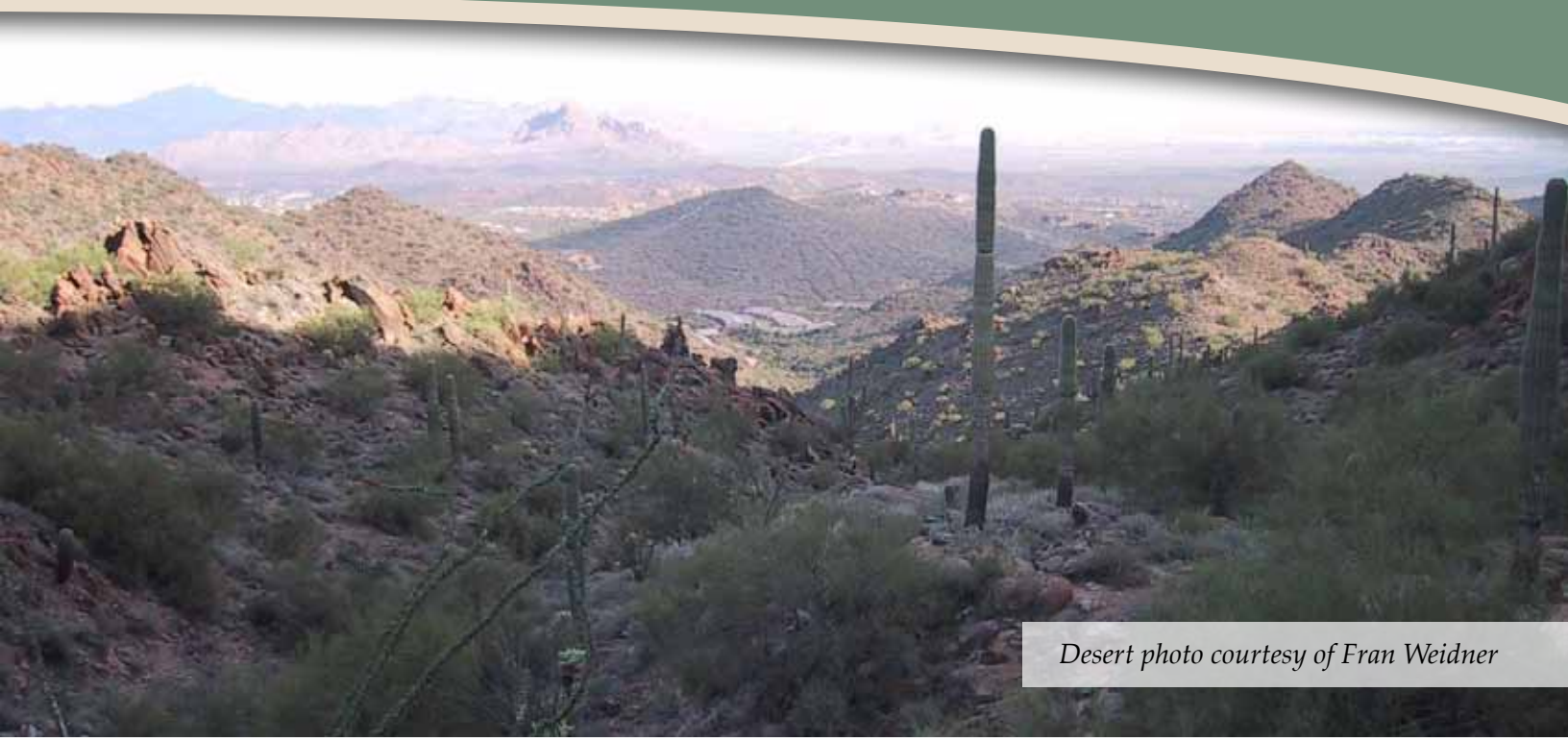
As the days turned into weeks, and months, and beyond… silence stayed my friend. My eyes were opened and I became less interested in survival and more interested in a future that was emerging. My monastery acknowledged the fragility that I shared with so many others. My monastery has been that container, my world, and my soul with the energy from the awareness of the presence of God in its midst.

All the
darkness
in the world
cannot
extinguish
the light of
a single candle.

St. Francis of Assisi

Overcoming a Spiritual Desert

by Fran Weidner, Cojourner



Desert photo courtesy of Fran Weidner

During these days-weeks-months of pandemic, I've often felt my mind floating in a holding pattern. There is nothing to complain about. The daylight hours in Phoenix give me the brightness I need. Yet, I feel huge pain of loss – a kinship of loss with all forms of life.

Local news reports losses of jobs, loss of learning and social time for the children, and isolation of the elderly. A young father was released from hospital following seven months of recovery from COVID-19, adding the burden of income to his family. Food shelves, always a concern, empty faster than before the pandemic. Who would have guessed face masks would become a fashion statement?

Our close family friend and restaurant owner had to close for most of the past year, except for curbside pickup. Fortunately, enough customers bought food to pay for his business lease. Friends helped stock his home pantry.

Parents have no extra cash flow to pay for child care, while the kids are attending classes online. Women and men, who work for hourly wages are laid off from their jobs – gratuities play a large part of restaurant employees' pay. Some Phoenix businesses have closed permanently. So much sadness, fear covered with angry outbursts, linger in the atmosphere.

Some days I try to pray and connect with my God, but it feels like a feeble effort on my part. I think of the familiar ism, "When God seems far away, who moved?"

In the Arizona desert, I experience my spiritual desert. Thirsting for the close feeling of Christ inside and all around me. Faith leads me to trust in the Spirit who breathes life into my parched center. It reminds me that I do not need to "feel" grateful to express gratitude.

Our daughter, Kristen, and our grandson, Zane, built a container garden to grow fresh food in their backyard within the Sonoran Desert, where we live.

Outside my window, I see sister palm trees, breathing in sunshine, breathing out gratitude. Crimson bougainvilleas, join the song of praise to Creation with fairy pink oleanders and lavender lantanas: sisters in harmony with the universe. Our friendly lizard scurries up the calm mesquite tree. Sister breeze breathes on the wind chimes, eager to join the symphony of praise. Green Nation proclaims her richness all around me. I respond to the invitation to let go of fear and replace it with gratitude. Life is sacred – just *to live* is Holy. And now, as the season of spring grows closer, all Creation prepares to welcome the risen Christ. And so do I.

Living in Lockdown

by Sister Shirley Schmitz

L to R, clockwise: Sister Shirley was crowned "Queen-for-a-Day" on her birthday; Sisters gather for communal prayer and mass; a funny fashion show lifted spirits, with Sisters Martha Mathew in hoop earrings and Pat Himmer with a scoop neckline, and then Sister Shirley with a plunging (plunger!) neckline; and sharing birthday treats on the corridor.

It is almost a year since we heard that we would be sheltered-in-place for months, perhaps until the end of June or July. Little did we imagine that it would last a year or longer. I'm sure many thought, as did I, "What am I going to do all of that time?" Well, immediately I thought about my hobbies. I am a quilter, and I knit and paint, although I have not done much of the latter recently. I quickly moved my sewing machine and quilting materials to an empty room across the hall. Like everyone else, I stocked-up on books, searched YouTube for Masses, presentations and music. Walking was also a daily activity.

For various reasons, I feel that I have coped with isolation and social distancing quite well. The primary reason is that our corridor of ten Sisters has a unique situation. We have turned a former classroom into our Community Gathering Place. We gathered twice-a-day for prayer, which usually included conversations about personal, communal and national topics. Our Communal Prayers brought to mind the families and persons suffering from the many effects of the virus, the frontline workers, the homeless, marginalized, those lacking food, healthcare, etc.

The Sisters on my corridor have often commented on how we have grown to know and love each other. This did not seem to happen before the pandemic because our lives were involved in many different activities around Assisi Heights which took us off the corridor for most of the day. I would simply say that though sometimes this time felt confining, it truly was a 'gift.'

Healing Energy

Brother Bonaventure gave us a dynamic image for healing energy.
Picture the Overflowing Fountain of Goodness
Flowing from our Triune God,
With its solid foundation built on Truth and Love.
The True Source of healing energy available in abundance.

Truth, often is distorted in our media and political discourses.
Censorship is a growing wave of instability.
Thousands of military troops guarding our Capital is another wave.
COVID-19 has questionable tentacles causing waves of confusion.
Forty-plus Executive Orders in three weeks releases potential tidal waves.

Truth, based in reality, is becoming intentionally blurred.
Good is Evil; Evil is Good.
Summer chaos in our streets and homes surfaced the looming darkness.
Parent against son; Daughter fights mother.
Silence keeps an unnerving false peace in our nation.

Truth, that overflowing gift from our Triune God, will overcome
the Dark Power Clouds dimming light and freedom.
Healing does not occur in decaying and murderous past theories.
Healing Energy flows always from the Source of Life.
"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," says Jesus, the Christ. (John 14:16)

Love is the opposite of hatred. Love has many attributes,
such as: kindness, peacefulness, never rejoices in evil, seeks the good.
Love activates the four cardinal virtues that hinge goodness to truth.
Prudence weighs truth and wisdom before action.
Justice demands fairness beyond the popular norms of social justice.
Courage risks popularity for honesty and integrity.
Temperance seeks moderation by calming the impulses of the Ego and ID.

In the end, there will be three lifeboats for our lives:
FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE
AND THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE. (1 Corinthians 13:13)
Paul, Francis, Clare, and Mary Magdala would resoundingly agree.
The Fountain of Goodness, Truth and Love energizes healing.

Image courtesy of Jplenio from Pixabay

Moving from Fear to Hope

L to R: Sister Valerie Usher, Gloria Gómez and Constanza Guzmán.

"Always be ready to give a reason for the HOPE that is in you."

1 Peter 3:15b

The following conversation took place between S. Valerie Usher and two of our former Sisters, Constanza Guzman and Gloria Gómez, while sitting on a porch high in the mountains of Colombia.

S. Valerie: It's hard to believe that we are calmly sitting here, reflecting on our experience of an entire year living under the shadow of a global pandemic which has changed so much about our daily lives! Do you remember what it felt like, way back in March of 2020, when all of this began for us?

Constanza: I remember how deeply afraid I was! It started out like news from the other side of the world – in China or in Europe – but all of a sudden, one day it was at our doorstep!

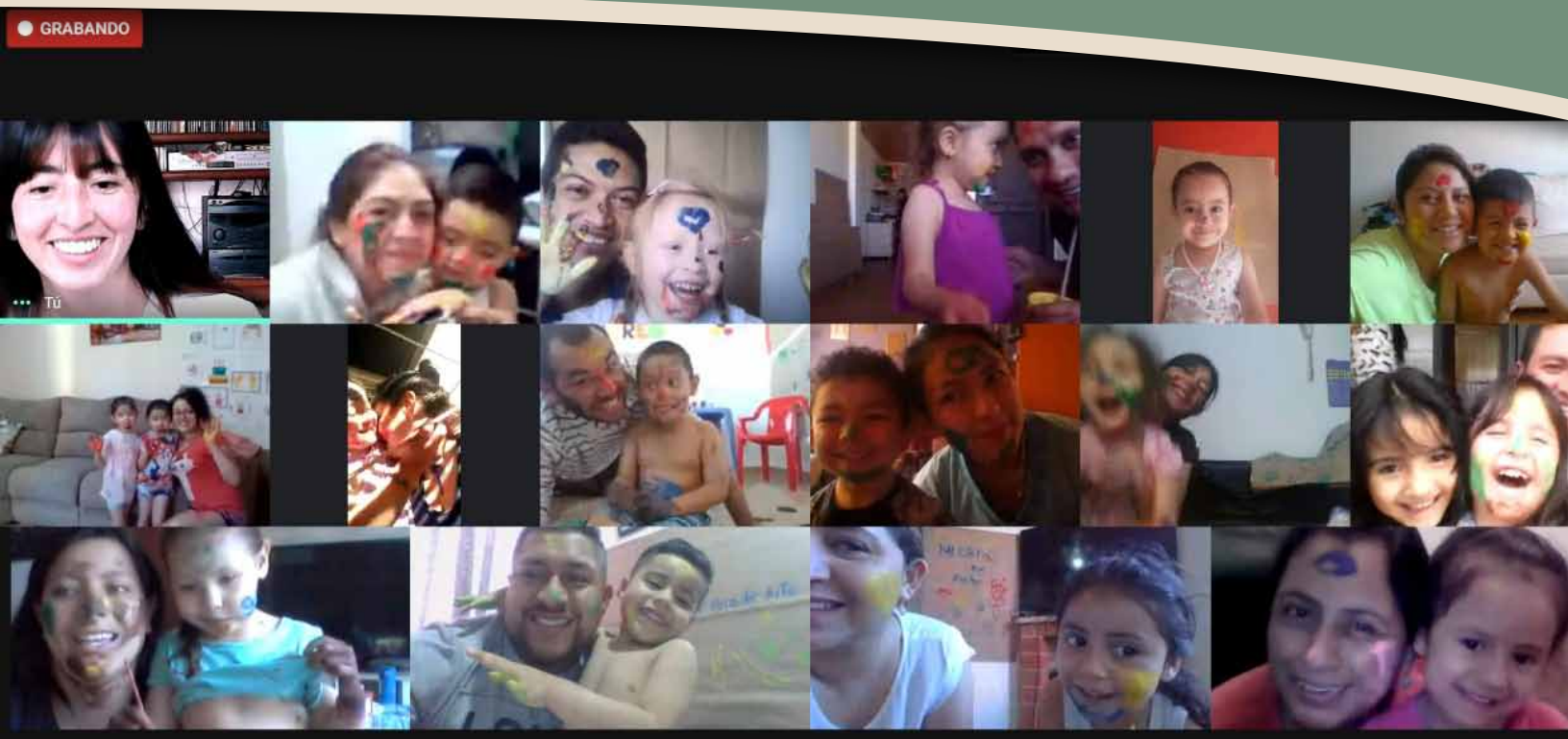
Gloria: It certainly began as an experience of fear of the "unknown"…was this really happening *here* in Colombia? The nightly news was giving us really disturbing details of how contagious this was, how quickly it could be debilitating and how many unknowns there were about how to treat it, much less prevent it!

S. Valerie: My first conscious "taking in" of this news was in relation to a stark picture in a daily newspaper of our new mayor's order to turn the city's largest convention center into a bare-bones "hospital" (something like the Mayo Clinic's bomb-shelter hospital in the basement of Assisi Heights over 60 years ago!) The plan was to move currently hospitalized patients to this new site so that the city's hospitals could be equipped and ready to receive the alarming anticipation of countless COVID patients!

Constanza: She is the one who called for an "experiment" of staying home by closing all movement into and out of the city on a three-day holiday weekend, when normally there is *much* movement… and before we knew it, we were legally confined to our homes, with tight restrictions on how to access basic needs like food and healthcare items!

S. Valerie: My first shock after being "quarantined" at home was to learn that one of our Santa Pacha graduates, a supervisor at United Airlines in the Bogotá airport, whom we had just seen there less than

by Sister Valerie Usher with Constanza Guzmán and Gloria Gómez



Entire families participated with their children via online classes.

two months before, had died of the disease! And then it hit home: "Oh, my God – I could DIE from this!!" (This was reinforced by the idea that it could come to choices of who could be treated and who couldn't, given the circumstances… and I realized that I could fall into the "not to be treated"category, just given my age!) This direct confrontation with my own mortality was sobering, indeed, and produced a range of emotions!

Gloria: I remember the challenge of how directing a school of 330 students, from Pre-Kinder to seniors in high school, was turned upside down overnight! With the closing of the city's schools, we were forced to rethink *everything* about how we operated, in a context in which resources are scarce and "going virtual" was truly difficult, given the limited access our students have to adequate digital devices.

Constanza: What really affected me was to see how quickly this dire situation turned into an explosion of autonomy, creativity and solidarity! We were able to move from "doing what the authorities told us" to realizing that we *wanted* to be responsible for our own self-care and the care of those around us. Among our school families and their neighborhoods, there were many hardships: many people either lost their jobs or couldn't get to them, elderly were left without access to basic needs, some folks were literally without food (as a red rag hanging in the window would indicate). But then, an amazing thing happened! People began to share what little they had with their neighbors and care for one another's needs. Our own school staff reached into their pockets and contributed to this process. Our older teens and available adults began doing errands for others. It was truly heartening to see! It helped us all believe once again in the essential *goodness* of our fellow human beings.

Gloria: One thing we observed was that, with adults and children alike forced to stay at home, parents obviously were spending more time with their children… and our teachers quickly caught on to the idea to create their virtual classes in such a way that the whole family could participate in the learning activity! We received very good feedback on this – and the results were obvious!

S. Valerie: Another aspect of creativity blossoming was the way in which people whose jobs and businesses were in jeopardy began to "reinvent" themselves, coming up with amazing ways to not only secure

some income, but to do so considering the actual needs of those around them. Another true benefit of all this was the number of courses and input sessions that became available online at little or no cost, so that great numbers of people could take advantage of this unanticipated "free" time to engage themselves in learning something new in everything from university-level courses to cooking classes to guided meditation to chat rooms on topics that had wide appeal and connected innumerable "strangers" in pursuits around which they felt some passion.

Gloria: One thing that really struck me as all of this evolved was the new sense of "alone" time. We had more time to think, to reflect on the meaning in our lives and to literally pray more, connecting with God in deeper ways. For some folks, this was like a "black hole", but for many, their faith came to the fore, and they got in touch with what (and who) they really believe in! It has been a time of "new grace" abounding.

Constanza: That has certainly been true for my family. When one of my sisters and her husband contracted the disease, it became an unbelievable nightmare for my entire family. Our large family was connected every night via Zoom, riding the emotional rollercoaster of my sister's quarantine at home, while her husband was hospitalized, quickly intubated and moved from bad to worse in short order. The worst part, especially for her, was not being able to see or even talk with her husband!

There were moments of much anxiety, interspersed with brief periods of hope… but just when he seemed to be getting better, he died! My sister couldn't even see him dead! We were all plunged into great grief and sadness.

Yet, it was in the midst of all of this, that our shared faith over the course of a lifetime bolstered our grief and led us to come to know that death is not the *worst* thing… that we don't need to be afraid of death, because there *is* life after death, and that dying is a natural part of our life's story. As my sister said to us, "There is great sadness – but without despair. I want to keep living." And so we continue to support her "long distance" through our Zoom connections.

S. Valerie: All of these unasked-for, yet incredible, experiences have actually given us so much, haven't they? Life as we have known it in this past year has helped us "put things in perspective". We have learned that it is the *present* moment that counts… and within that, there is MUCH to be grateful for!

It is good to talk about all of this together – to reflect on and share what all of these experiences have taught us, and to realize that with our faith, sense of solidarity and genuine care for one another, we *can* offer HOPE to this world of ours!

Constanza and Gloria: Amen! *¡Que así sea!*

Healing Our Society, Bird by Bird

by Eileen Lundy

I look out the window as I write this. Six inches of snow fell last night here where just last week we had days in the mid to high 70s. It is 12 degrees now and will hit only 9 degrees tonight, for the second night. And this will continue for several more days and nights. I can see the Minnesotans smiling as you read this, looking out your windows at your often seen winter snows. But it's a gorgeous and dangerous occurrence here in Austin, Texas. We don't know how to handle this frigid situation. With power outages and the internet out, the warnings are not getting to those who want or need to go somewhere: an emergency room, a doctor, for groceries or water. Pile-ups on highways scream, "Danger!" A beautiful inundating blanket of snow glistens in the sun, a white wonder over an ice sheet below. Crisis in Texas!

But it will pass. By a week from now, we will be coming out of this. Our warm sunshine will gradually return. There will be lots to do, broken branches to be cleared, fallen trees to be taken care of, wires and cables to be mended, and in some places, the most important and most difficult challenge: mourning for those we lost to the freeze. But we will heal from this. We will never forget it, but we will heal, even from this. We cannot say we will be cured of the extreme weather that has brought us floods, fires, and this freeze. That great challenge of climate change will require much more of us. Even though not cured, we will heal from this.

The healing and the cure. What is the difference? A dictionary tells me that to cure means to get rid of all evidence of the problem, the illness, the disease. To heal, it says, is to make something whole. The cures for the ills in our society come slowly and with persistence, patience, and work. So while we are at the slow but steady cures for our society's diseases—wars, endangering the planet, racism, sexism, lust for power, cruelty, and all the ways we harm others and ourselves—can we move toward becoming whole, toward a unity in our diversity, toward trust in one another even as we differ in our ideas, our political views, our needs, our goals?

Can we heal ourselves?

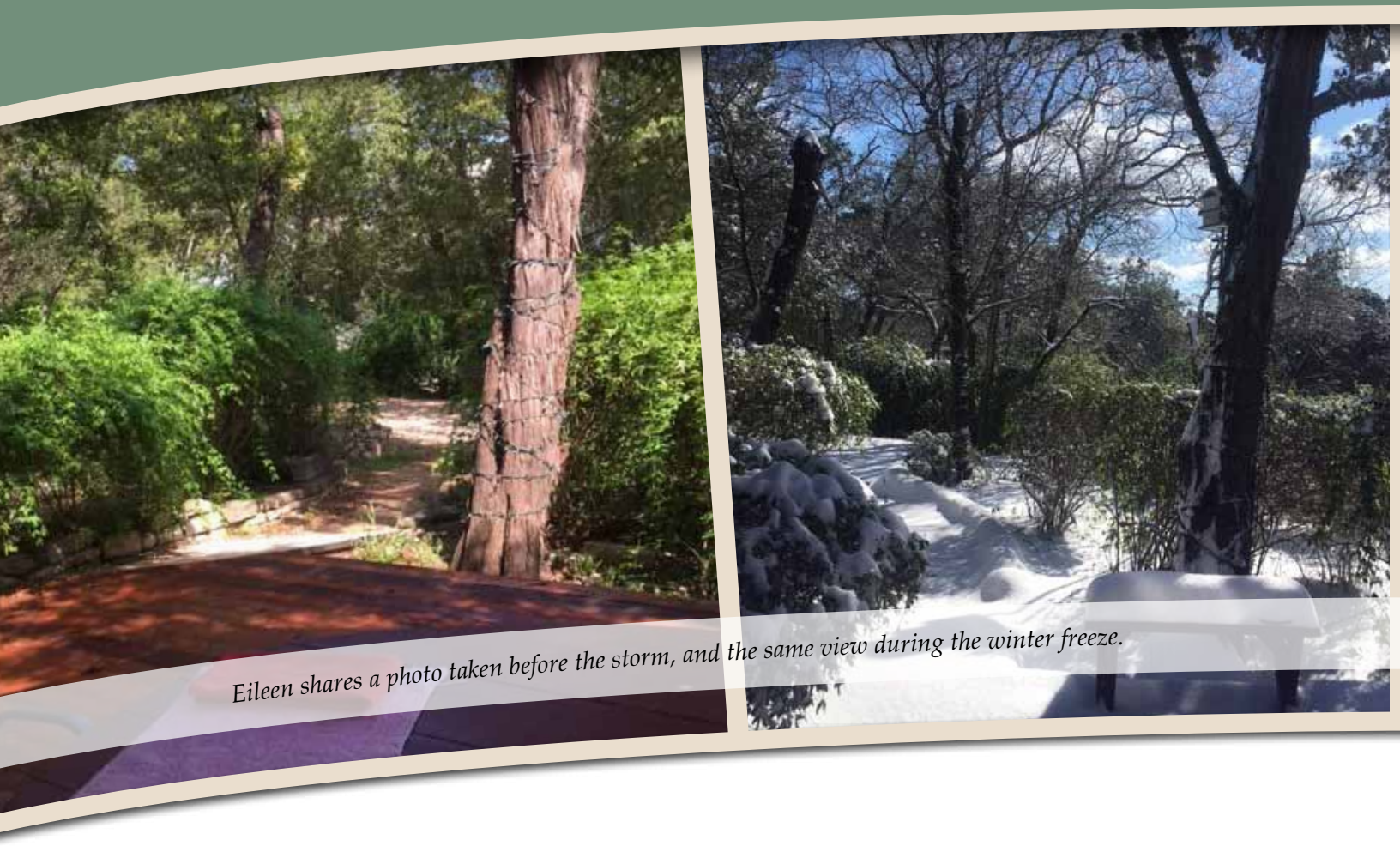
Our society is inundated with theories and policies of how we should live and work together and is deeply divided in these ideas. How will this division be healed? We have the resources among us to open spaces where we and others can take up the challenging questions our divided society poses to us. We can, if we choose to do so, initiate what Krista Tippett calls "Civil Conversations."[1] She says,

> *"Yet you and I have it in us to be nourishers of discernment, fermenters of healing. We have the language, the tools, the virtues—and the calling, as human beings—to create hospitable spaces for taking up the hard questions of our time. This calling is too important and life-giving to wait for politics or media at their worst to come around. We can discover how to calm fear and plant the seeds of the robust civil society we desire and that our age demands."*

We human beings do so need one another. The Sisters who live in community; we lay people who live in couples, or groups, or alone but with related family and friends, or belong to parishes or other groups—we all need others or loneliness deeply saddens us. So, as we live and work and communicate with others, what can we do about the healing our society needs? Even in a close-knit community or family, ideas and goals and views can differ, and sometimes be polar opposites. Some choose simply to avoid any talk of differences, and maybe that's the way of wisdom in some cases; but even that can be done with kindness.

Most writers on this subject offer the same suggestion on how to begin: listen, they say, to one another's stories, without taking difference personally, stay present, really listen. This isn't a new idea. Years ago, Rollo May suggested we listen to the other's story then retell what we have heard until that person nods or says, "Yes, that's it; you understand what I have said."[2] As we listen, deeply listen, to the other's story or point of view and we hear ideas that spark defensive or angry emotions or feelings of discomfort, we must acknowledge them to ourselves, not take them personally, and continue to listen. Easy to write about, hard to do.

Healing Our Society, Bird by Bird... *continued*



Eileen shares a photo taken before the storm, and the same view during the winter freeze.

As Tippett says, approach civility in conversations involving differences "as an adventure, not an exercise in niceness." The adventure involves conversations in which the differing parties tell their stories, what they think or feel or believe, and how they came to those ideas without having the goal of changing the opposing ideas of others. The goal is to understand, not to end up in agreement.

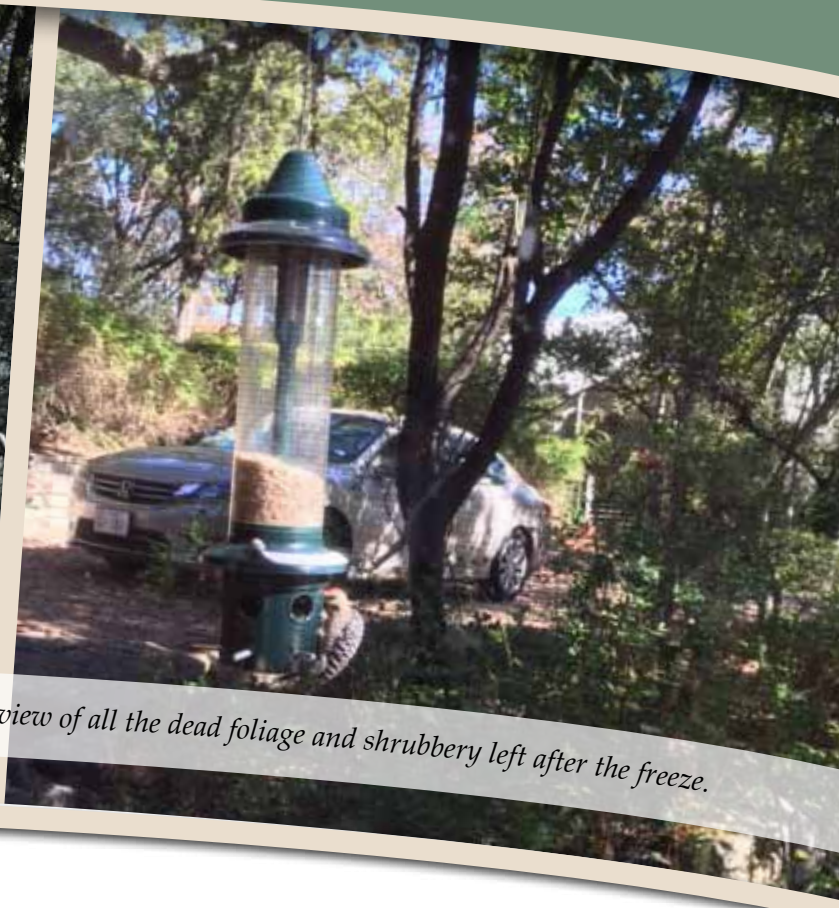
This, then, makes the process of civil conversations an adventure in creating small societies healed of hate, fear of the other or bitterness. These small societies become microcosms of the large, public society where differing persons and groups become united across a bridge of understanding.

A civil conversation group here, another there, the movement is spreading. It reminds me of Ann Lamott's story of how she came to call her book of writing: *Bird by Bird*.[3] When she was a little girl, she had the assignment to write a paper on birds. But there were so many birds. She was overwhelmed. She didn't know how to start. "That's easy," her father told her. "Just go bird by bird." So she did. She chose one bird, then another and another until she had a focus and wrote the paper.

So our conversation groups can go "bird by bird," building bridge after bridge of honor and understanding of the "other," slowly bringing healing to our divided peoples.

There is so much more to this process. Krista Tippett's *Civil Conversation Project* offers podcasts, a guide for holding such conversations, and other resources available for download. It is a treasure trove of assistance in forming these conversations.

Whether we employ the resources of the *Civil Conversations Project* or use our own or other resources, our times are asking us to help build the bridges across which our divided people can unite. Then we can heal, we can be healed, small group by small group growing in understanding, coming to love the "other."



Another photo taken during the freeze, and the same view of all the dead foliage and shrubbery left after the freeze.

And with kindness. "Kindness is all," says the Dalai Lama. Kindness. And grace. Kindness and graciousness go hand in hand, don't they? But what is grace? I hear myself as a second grader answering this way, "Grace is a supernatural gift of God to enable us to do good and avoid evil." Given my not-always-trustworthy-memory, that answer may be off a little, but it's close to the Catechism answer.

A friend in my meditation group told of a visit to his dying mother. She had been an alcoholic most of her life, leaving deep scars in his memory. She said to him, "Can you ever forgive me?" "I can and I do, Mother," he said. That is grace. To ask for forgiveness; to forgive. That is kindness. That is all. That is grace.

So now, I sit here at my computer and look out the window, some days after I began this piece. And the day is a blue and gold beautifully warm day. Brown leaves and broken branches greet me, reminding me of our recent freeze and of the clean-up still needed. But the snow is over and gone. The days are moving toward springtime. The limbs that have fallen can be life-saving firewood for us if another freeze comes next year. We are healing. The earth, happily drenched by yesterday's rain, now heals in the sunshine.

And so, may the healing of our society continue. May the barriers among us and between us fall and become bridges joining us as a whole and wholesome society.

[1] Tippett, Krista. *"Civil Conversations and Social Healing/The On Being Project"* onbeing.org/civil conversations project.

[2] May, Rollo. *The Courage to Create*. W.W.W. Norton Co., 1994.

[3] Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird; Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. Anchor Books, 2019.

In Memoriam

Sister Colleen Byron (April 10, 1930 – December 18, 2020)

Sister Colleen not only heard these words of Pope John XXIII as young 33-year-old Sister of St. Francis while teaching Latin at Lourdes High School in Rochester, but her life was dedicated to being that *"Spark of Light, A Center of Love and A Life-giving Leaven."* Her early years in a loving Irish family were the foundation of her essence as a *"spark of light."* At the core of Colleen's *"Center of Love"* was her deep faith in God and others. She was truly a Franciscan woman steeped in the call of love. Her heart of listening and being an agent of building bridges created connections that were long lasting. This love gave her a creative, contemplative and compassionate presence as a Spiritual Director. Colleen's heart, *centered-in-love*, was evident in the many ways she served in leadership in our Franciscan Community: as a member of the Council, Academy Board and the Personnel Board. She served on the staff Assisi Community Center and at the Holy Spirit Retreat Center. She was an ambassador for the Cojourner program, believing in God's call to all. There are many ways that Sister Colleen was a *Life-giving Leaven*. It overflowed to all those she served at the Gift of Life Transplant house, especially while holding people's hands as they received bad news. She loved giving tours at the Ronald McDonald house. Colleen's humility and presence was a *leaven of life*, all was done with love and joy. On the very Feast Day of Mother Alfred, December 18, Colleen embarked on her final journey into the promised land of God's garden, God's love, and God's eternal Light.

Sister Charlotte Dusbabek (July 9, 1930 – December 16, 2020)

Charlotte entered the Sisters of Saint Francis in 1953, and made Perpetual Vows in 1959. She attended the College of Saint Teresa, Winona, Minnesota, received a bachelor's degree from Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1960, and a Master's Degree in Nursing Service from the Catholic University in Washington, D.C., in 1962. She was assigned to Mercy Hospital, Portsmouth, Ohio, after her novitiate for a few years, and later to Saint Marys Hospital in Rochester. In the early 1960s, her efforts were directed to the beginning of Critical Care Units. She served as Staff Nurse, Head Nurse in Psychiatry and Cardiovascular Inservice Instructor. Her last assignment was Administrative Assistant responsible for coordinating a Computerized Nurse Productivity Program for Nursing Service. After 40 years of service at Saint Marys Hospital, she retired from her nursing duties. Sister Charlotte had other underlying ambitions other than retirement. She had a deep desire to help the poor and underprivileged. During the day, she visited patients, made countless candles from used candle wax for sales, raised African Violets, mended clothing for Dorothy Day House and the Women's Shelter. At night, she packaged leftover food from the Saint Marys Convent cafeteria and delivered it late at night. She was always doing for others who were in need.

Sister Yvonne Elskamp (December 9, 1934 – March 17, 2021)

Sister Yvonne (formerly Sister de Ricci) focused her entire professional career on education. She embraced primary grade children, children in special education, college students, children and adults with mental retardation, and frail elderly needing special attention. In her eyes, each person was exceptional and her love for each of them was genuine. Even while serving as an assistant professor in the Education Department at the College of St. Teresa (CST), Sister Yvonne heard that inner call to do more for the "little ones." (Mt. 19:13) She was a founding member of the National Apostolate on Mental Retardation and developed a religious education curriculum to prepare challenged children and adults for specific sacraments. She was an active member of the Winona Association for Retarded Citizens, and by 1975, through her input and efforts, the first home for mentally retarded citizens was opened. Sister Yvonne remained active in these programs until the closing of CST in 1989. You would think that she would have left us some written memoirs of her much-loved family, of her rich and fulfilling professional life, or her 66 years of faithfully living as a Rochester Franciscan. Yvonne left us with no lesson plan to fall back on as we prepared to celebrate her life. Many Sisters simply stated, "You know, she was a very quiet, private person." Yvonne exemplified the true characteristics of being a "little one:" joy-filled, trusting, welcoming, rejoicing in the simple things in life, resourceful, lover of the natural world, and humble dependency on God.

Sister Merici Maher (July 26, 1926 -February 15, 2021)

Born Patricia Ann Maher, she was a spiritual woman with a deep love for the Eucharist and learned from her father the importance of daily Mass. From grammar school until the present, she attended daily Mass. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis in 1944. She received her bachelor's degree from the College of St. Teresa in Winona, Minnesota, in 1952, and although she always planned to be a primary grade teacher, she was asked to be a nurse. Sister Merici loved Saint Marys Hospital! After graduating from Saint Marys Nursing Program, she continued on to become a Head Nurse in General Surgery and then Operating Room Supervisor from 1953-1969. She went on to obtain her master's degree in public health, from the University of Missouri, in Columbia, in 1970 and worked for a federal program in Chicago, which gave people in the projects an opportunity to change their lives – moving from dependence on welfare to obtaining a job. While Sister Merici continued her work in community nursing, she spent 13 years teaching community nursing to students at DePaul University in Chicago. She remained in Chicago for many years, tutoring elementary students at St. Julianna's School and serving as a caregiver for her nieces and nephews. This fulfilled Sister Merici's original desire to be a primary teacher. One of Sister Merici's favorite quotes was, "It is absolutely necessary to keep smiling. The essential and most fruitful gesture is to smile with Love in the Smile." She lived the Smile.

Sister Janet Sieve (June 18, 1943 – December 25, 2020)

Janet was always lending a helping hand, no matter if was filling sand bags during Winona's flood, or teaching religious education at Fort Gordon Army Base, or driving the Sisters' taxi on Rochester roadways! All were of equal value and importance. It was in the quiet background of service that measured success for Janet. She was never too busy about the urgent to forget about the important. She always pulled together for the common cause. Ministry locations in Chicago and summer SAIL program Charleston, South Carolina, expanded her worldview. Her ministry options were in education and health care. She found the most satisfaction in her ministry of accompaniment; whether it be on the streets of Charleston, or visiting families in Chicago neighborhoods on Sunday afternoon, or with companioning a Sister on personal appointments for health or dental needs. This niche brought her joy beyond measure! She had the gift of listening treasured by many. It was a Janet Sieve style of innate instinctual talent for listening. She did it naturally, unaware of its gift or importance.

"...for it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

- Francis of Assisi

Healing for Our Environment

Image courtesy of Geralt from Pixabay

A Personal Note

It was a quiet, late May evening in Windom, my southwestern Minnesota hometown. Having finished planting our large vegetable garden, I sat with my mother on the backdoor steps of our three-bedroom stucco house, sipping ice cold lemonade. The air was moist with the petrichor of newly turned soil, seasoned with wisps of sweetness from the freshly mowed grass, and the piney scent from the tall spruce trees nearby. The evening sky signaled the day's end with shades of pinkish red orange and contrasting shades of grey. A soft high-pitched insect chorus lulled us into restful meditation. Then, gracefully harmonizing with that flow, mother whispered her awe-filled affirmation: "Only God can make the garden grow!" Those faith filled words awakened "something" deep within me. Secretly, I loved gardening! I was awestruck by the fact that you could put this hard, flat, little yellow thing in the ground, and weeks later there was a sweet corn plant in its place! Though I could not name it, mother's words drew me to meditative silence on that "something" for many years.

During my Silver Jubilee as a Rochester Franciscan, I joined a pilgrimage to the "Franciscan Holy Land," of St. Francis and St. Clare - Assisi, Umbria, Italy. There, none could miss the lush, verdant, fertile fields of sunflowers, olive trees, and vineyards covering green rolling hills. Those striking vistas magnified St. Francis' *Canticle of the Creatures* and reawakened my many "garden experiences" – especially my mother's words. Like me, St. Francis and St. Clare came to know well what I had only tasted on that late May evening – the vestiges of an incarnate God cradling them in love and mercy in the miraculous, lush nest of creation!

For about thirty years I've lived in Chicago, but always with a nagging love-hate relationship with those environs. Everything is huge, impersonal, paved over, fast-paced, human built, constantly in motion, competitive – often violent. For me, the "saving grace" was the park system abutting Lake Michigan. There, some semblance of intimacy with the web of life pervaded amid trees, grass, flowers, open sky; people smiled and greeted one another; and Lake Michigan stretched out to the horizon, while the rhythm of the waves lap against the sands of extensive beaches, setting the tone and pace of more peaceful living. The manifestations of the sacred there readily dwarf the cavernous cathedrals that dot street corners of that sprawling metropolis!

Yes, St. Francis was definitely "on to something!" The vestiges of the incarnate God can be seen all around us, if we not only look, but open our eyes to see! As Franciscan scholar Ingrid J. Peterson, OSF, noted, Franciscan spirituality "is sacramental in that all created things are also seen as signs pointing to God as Creator." [1]

Healing Through the Sacrament of Creation and Ecological Conversion

Like St. Francis, we can experience the "sacramental and healing value of creation" by observing the beauty and splendor of the natural world and in the loving ways we touch each other's lives. [2] Indeed, we can only begin to heal our planet if we begin to live within it, not just from it. As Pope Francis teaches in *Laudato Si' – On Care for Our Common Home:*

> 139. When we speak of the "environment," what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it.
>
> We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature. [3]

A wonderful story from *Midrash Tankhuma, Parashat Noach*, [4] depicts a conversation between God and Noah:

When Noah came out of the Ark, he opened his eyes and saw the whole world completely destroyed. He began crying for the world and said:

"God – how could you have done this!??"

God replied:

"Oh Noah, how different you are from the way Abraham will be..."

"He will argue with me on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, when I tell him that I plan their destruction..."

"But you, Noah, when I told you I would destroy the entire world, I lingered and delayed, so that you would speak on behalf of the world."

"But when you knew that you would be safe in the ark, that the evil of the world would not touch you..."

"You thought of no one but your family... And – now you complain!?"

Then, Noah knew he had sinned!

Though this story comes from a very different era than ours, I think it illustrates how easy it is for us to lose track of our many connections with our sisters and brothers across the globe – our fellow humans, animals, plants, the air, water, soils and other earth

Healing for Our Environment ... *continued*

elements. There are so many ways we have become distracted from these very important relationships. Yet, deep down we know, none of us can live without drinkable water, clean air, or good soil for growing food.

Though it's not always apparent, everything on the planet is related with everything else: the cities, the forests, the oceans, the air... EVERYTHING!

When something happens to one, it affects everyone and everything – nearby and far away – a smoking factory, a contaminated stream, a strip-mined mountain – everything and everyone around it suffers, and our most vulnerable neighbors suffers the most.

Noah's sin was not that he cared for his family. Rather, it was that he did not ALSO care for them IN RELATIONSHIP WITH everyone and everything else!

In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis calls us to "ecological conversion," to take time to reflect on the many ways you and I are deeply and profoundly connected to everything and everyone else. Daily - we need to value and treat each and every one of our fellow creatures – in the same loving and respectful way – that God values and treats us.

Caring for God's creation and healing "Our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us," as God does for us, requires each and all of us to stop using up more than our fair share of God's many gifts.

Pope Francis calls everyone to a lifestyle rooted in integral ecology – a world view and a way of thinking, being, and acting that recognizes that, everything is related to everything else.

Today, take five minutes and look around you …

How are you connected to the world?

What will you do today to heal Our Sister, Mother Earth?

[1] Ingrid Peterson, "Franciscan Spirituality: The Footprints of Jesus in the Classroom and the Marketplace," in *As Leaven to the World: Catholic Perspectives on Faith, Vocation, and the Intellectual Life,* ed. Thomas M. Landy (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2001), 291.

[2] Louise Delagran, MA, M.Ed., "Enhance Your Wellbeing In Nature," University of Minnesota, https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/enhance-your-wellbeing-nature. Also, Andrés R. Edwards, "Why 30 Minutes of Nature a Day Is So Good for Your Health," Apr 10, 2019 https://www.yesmagazine.org/health-happiness/2019/04/10/health-nature-science-outside/. See also dozens of links to Catholic Parish nd Retreat Center gardens as places for physical and spiritual healing and renewal.

[3] http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

[4] From Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, *To Till and to Tend: A Guide to Jewish Environmental Study and Action* 3, 6.

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Photo courtesy of Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

Clare of Assisi, a Healer

Two years after Saint Clare of Assisi died in 1253, Pope Alexander IV recognized her holiness and her healing energy by canonizing her and promoting her as an example of someone who was so loved by God that she channeled **God's healing energy** to those seeking relief from their ailments. The pope wrote in the announcement of her canonization:

> "…the power of holiness shone in her life with many and various miracles. Thus, she restored the voice of one of the sisters of the monastery [after] it had been almost totally lost for a long time. She restored the ability to speak to another who had long lost the use of her tongue. She cured by making the Sign of the Cross over them: one struggling with a fever, one swollen with dropsy, one infected with a fistula, and others oppressed with various ailments."

Clare so identified with the Gospel stories of Jesus' healings and the desire to extend Jesus' love to those she encountered that she claimed her identity as beloved by Jesus and therefore acted in Jesus' name.

Celebrating Jubilees!

Although celebrations have been postponed due to the Pandemic, we would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge them!

2020 Jubilarians

Golden Jubilarians 50
fifty years

Sisters Kathleen Warren and Sister Marlene Pinzka

Diamond Jubilarians 60
sixty years

Sisters Avis Schons, Bernadine Jax, Joyce Stemper and Rosemary Zemler

Diamond Jubilarians 75
seventy-five years
(since entrance)

Sisters Francine Balster, Jeanette Klein, Lorraine Landkammer, Mary Kathryn Esch, Merici Maher† and Ronan Degnan

2021 Jubilarians

Silver Jubilarian 25
twenty-five years

Sister M. Carolina Pardo

Diamond Jubilarians 60
sixty years

Sisters Briana McCarthy, Dolore Rockers, Dominique Pisciotta, Kay Rundquist, Mary Beth Burns, Mary Pat Smith, Nancy Kinsley and Ramona Miller

Diamond Jubilarian 75
seventy-five years

(since entrance)

Sister Agnes Malone

From the Archives: Mercy Hospital

by Sister Marisa McDonald

Original Mercy Hospital, 1921

Ss. Macrina, Pachomius, and Eugenia with student nurses in 1926

S. Elizabeth Feldmeier at bedside, 1940

Ss. Priscilla and Maura in the nursery at Mercy Hospital, 1940

The Rochester Franciscans have a long history with ministries of healing, beginning with Saint Marys Hospital in Rochester, but also including other health care facilities and works. One of those was Mercy Hospital in Portsmouth, Ohio, serving southeastern Ohio and northern Kentucky. Because they were known and respected in the area for their work in the schools, the Sisters were asked by a local pastor and member of a hospital committee to manage the yet to be built hospital. Two Sisters visited Portsmouth in 1918, initially thinking that they would probably refuse the request. However, after seeing the urgent need for additional hospital beds and trained medical staff, they decided to accept the request once the hospital was built.

What had been a little frame home on Kinney's Lane received an expansion, and the 27-bed hospital opened on June 15, 1921. The hospital began with 14 members on the clinical staff plus a nursing staff of five (superintendent, dietician, operating room nurse and two floor nurses). Sister Blandina Schmitt, a chemistry professor at the College of Saint Teresa, was the first superintendent. In her first term of six years, Sister Blandina saw the hospital through its opening time and such rapid growth that a new five-story building was constructed and opened in 1924.

Also in 1924, the School of Nursing opened. In its 39 years of existence, 378 nurses graduated; they were mostly from the Portsmouth area so it provided a convenient pipeline of nursing staff for Mercy and other hospitals in the area. The original hospital building became a residence for nurses.

Although the Portsmouth community was as generous as they could be with their support, other building projects and the Depression years meant that it took over twenty years for the Sisters to make their final payment on the building debt. By that time, expansion began again - another wing for additional beds, updated facilities and equipment, and a larger residence for nurses.

Over 150 Rochester Franciscans served at Mercy Hospital between 1921 and 1994, when the last Sisters (Sister Hilary Hacker and Sister Alethea Stifter) left. Before the first lay administrator was hired in 1972, there had been 11 Sister administrators to guide the direction of the hospital – Sisters Blandina (twice), Claudia, Bertrand, Pachomius, Raymunda (Loretta), Gervase, Felicitas, Priscilla, Eudes, and Hilary.

According to an article in the *Portsmouth Daily Times* (January 31, 2018), some nursing school alumni donated two benches at the site of the former hospital in tribute to the Hospital and to the nurse graduates from the school whose compassionate presence and excellent skills influenced care in the area for many years.

While the Sisters have been gone from Mercy Hospital and Portsmouth for some time, their response to the Gospel's invitation to care for our brothers and sisters through this particular healing ministry made a significant impact.

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, 2019 through September 30, 2020.

In Honor of:

60 and 75 year Jubilarians
70th wedding anniversary of Dean and Mary Lent
All the Sisters of Saint Francis
All that the Sisters have done for Mayo Clinic
All that the Sisters of Saint Francis do
All the great former and current women of the community
Ambassador Patricia A. Butenis
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Milena Barrios
Sister Joy Barth
Sister Pat Beck
Sister Geneva Berns
Tony Binstock
Sister Margaret Boler
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Schneider's 53rd Wedding Anniversary
Sister Avis Schons
Sister Claren Sellner
Roy Senn
Sisters of Saint Francis - St. Marys Convent and their continued support of the hospital mission
Sisters of Saint Marys Hospital
Sisters of Saint Teresa College and my parents who made it possible for me to attend
Sisters that served at Saint Juliana School in Chicago
Sisters who taught in Winona
Sister Mary Pat Smith
Sister Ruth Snyder
Landon Solberg
St. Mary's Elementary Teachers and Cotter High School Teachers
Sister Lorraine Stenger
Don & Eileen Stiller
Bunnie Suilman
Teachers at Cathedral High, Winona, Minnesota
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Sister Lauren Weinandt
Sister Kathleen Welscher
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Sister Kate Zimmerman

"Please know how grateful we all are for all that you do in our community and world!"

- Mark

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.

Gifts received October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020.

In Memory of:

Sister M. Ancina Adams
Larry Agerter
Dennise Ahlstrom
Audrey Alberti
All Deceased Sisters who taught at Cathedral and Cotter Schools
All Deceased Sisters of Saint Francis
Robert E. and Arleen Anderson
Haavis Aureen
Grace Dahm Backus
Diane Barry
Sister Vinciana Bauer
Sister Gretchen Berg
Margaret Bee Betts
Sister Juniper Bickel
Sister Alphonse Billian
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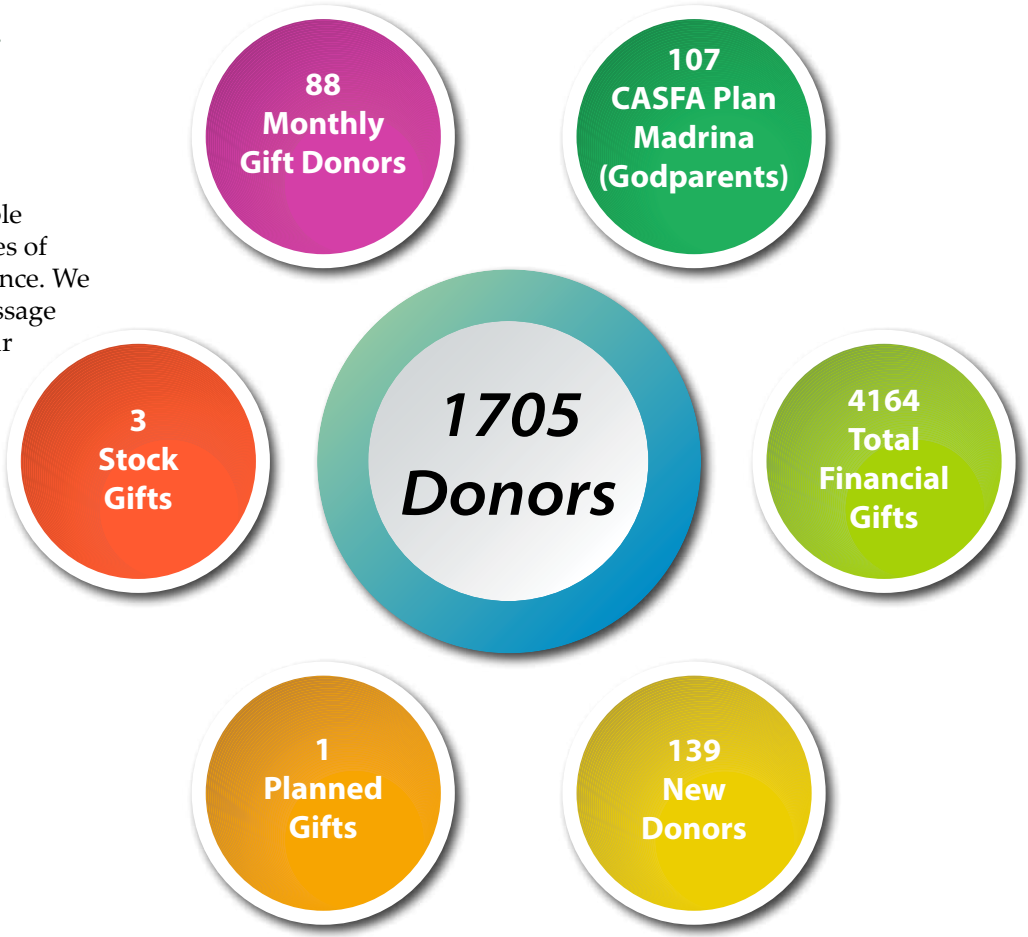
With the support of our benefactors, Sisters are able to continue their ministries of service, prayer and influence. We continue to share our message through Facebook and our newly updated website, as well as through our traditional media such as the *Interchange*. We are truly blessed by each one of you!



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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.

Did You Know?

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 cards 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

Robin Stearns, Assistant | mission.assistant@rochesterfranciscan.org

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

"For what else are the servants of God but his minstrels, whose work it is to lift up people's hearts and move them to spiritual gladness."

-St. Francis of Assisi

Mother Alfred

Dear Friends,

Our giving is a reminder of the blessings God gives us and gave to us through Jesus Christ.

By remaining faithful amidst the chaos and crisis of the past year, you have demonstrated that through generosity and giving comes healing for others as well as ourselves.

With your gifts you enable the Sisters to sustain their work, their mission, and their home.

As we look towards our future with hope, we invite you to join the **Mother Alfred Legacy Society**.

Named after the Foundress of the Sisters of Saint Francis, the Mother Alfred Legacy Society is comprised of those individuals and families who value the mission of the Sisters of Saint Francis and their continuance into the future. They do this by remembering the Sisters in their wills or estate plans.

Your legacy gift assures the continuance of the mission of the Sisters of Saint Francis in our world for years to come. Estate planning has many rewards:

- Directing funds to continue ministries that you believe in
- Peace of mind for settling your estate according to your wishes
- Designating a bequest for a specific amount of money, or a percentage of your estate
- Tax relief. If your estate is subject to estate tax, your gift may be entitled to a charitable deduction for the gift's full value

All who have already named the Sisters of Saint Francis in your will or estate are the members of the Mother Alfred Legacy Society. These persons are remembered in a monthly Mass intention and invited to special events at Assisi Heights.

Please contact the office of Mission Advancement at 507-529-3536 for more information.

Love, Joy and Peace be with you,

Sisters of Saint Francis
Academy of Our Lady of Lourdes

Communications Department
1001 14th Street NW, Suite 100
Rochester, MN 55901

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- ☐ Please add the name(s) listed below.

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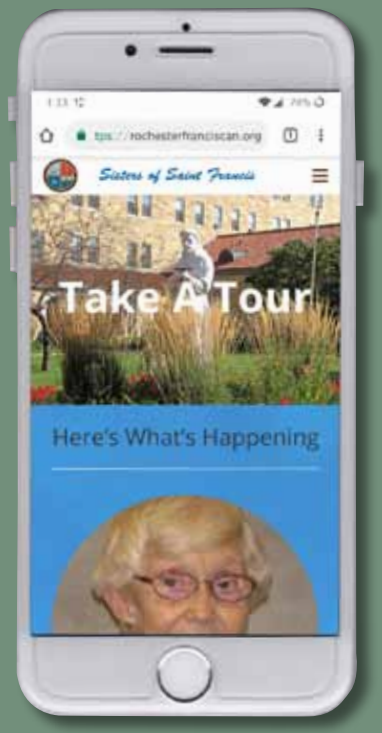

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www.facebook.com

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