Sisters of Saint Francis
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interchange

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Teachable Moments

Dear Friends & Family,

We all have experienced and remember certain teachable moments in life... whether it be in a classroom or at home. Some experiences stand out in our mind and resonate with us throughout our lives. In this issue we share reflections of such moments... one that is in the making, and another carried forward from the past. We hope you enjoy these stories, and perhaps, it will help stir up memories of similar moments in your life.

Kathy Gatliff, Editor
Director of Communications

The Spirit at Work

By Maureen Bigelow, Cojourner

My daughter, Mariah, is a Montessori teacher in La Crosse, Wisconsin, at a school that is in the lower income area of the district. She teaches 4th and 5th graders. Last year they had a plant sale where the students did all the work including gardening, marketing, researching, etc., in order to buy swings for their playground. It was a huge success and this year they are looking to purchase a greenhouse to place on top of the school. Here is a better explanation from Mariah of the work that they are doing:

"We believe bringing nature into the classroom and providing students with opportunities for hands-on learning promotes equity in the classroom environment and beyond. Many families lack access to land and do not have knowledge of gardening and growing practices. It is our experience that children who have access to the natural world including gardening are more apt to have a better understanding of the world, have increased resilience and self-efficacy, and have an increased sense of self-reliance. A greenhouse would provide a living classroom for students and help bridge the gap of environmental and economic inequity.

"Furthermore, there is currently a food desert on the Northside of La Crosse, particularly surrounding Northside and Coulee Montessori schools. There is not a grocery store within 2 miles or more of the school neighborhood which makes grocery shopping difficult for the families who do not have access to a car. Currently 100% of our students from both schools receive free lunch as part of a national grant to help alleviate the impact poverty and food insecurity may have on student learning and achievement. We currently provide 50 bags of food to school families on a bi-monthly schedule. While our food pantry does help supplement

food needs for some of our families, the food we can send home is often canned or boxed, which is highly processed. A greenhouse would allow students to grow fresh, healthy food which could be used to supplement dry goods for our food pantry."

A message was shared early on with the Rochester Franciscans to see if any Sisters or Cojourners were interested in donating plants.

The impact that the Rochester Franciscan Sisters and Cojourners had on the project was absolutely spirit-filled. Here are the contributions the Franciscans made to this project since last spring when I first asked for help and support:

- Rochester Franciscans provided prayers and support through this whole project. I don't know who ordered the weather for the two days of the sale, but it was perfect!
- Rochester Franciscans donated $415 that was used for soil, pots and shelving carts to get things started. Another $400 was donated that will go directly to the greenhouse purchase.
- Rochester Franciscans donated plants and plant food that was part of raising at least $7500!!!
- Someone from the Rochester Franciscans contacted the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA) in La Crosse and they donated plants; including 3 tables of perennials and many bulbs. In addition, the project was awarded a grant by the FSPA that will be used as part of the purchase of the greenhouse.
- Sister Jennifer contacted her friend, Tom Schlesinger, who has a nonprofit working with climate change, and encouraged him to go to the plant sale. Mariah had a great conversation with him and they are going to collaborate on heating the greenhouse (which was an issue) and he offered to volunteer to present to students about climate.

Wow, wow, wow! It was an amazing two days. It was a true reflection of the Spirit at work! The plant sale that the Rochester Franciscans have been praying for and supporting was a huge success. There were over 2000 plants (vegetable starters, houseplant, perennials and bulbs) The greenhouse will be built this fall thanks to your support.

The morning of the sale, Mariah, along with her fiancé, Matt, said *The Prayer of St. Francis*, as she was anxious that it all would go well. The first thing that happened that day was that she and Amoreena, (the other teacher on the project) were interviewed by a local television station: https://www.news8000.com/news/student-community-plant-sale-mariah-bigelow-amoreena-rathke/video_1177b8e1-61f0-55e2-9897-dfbc0287e26b.html

In addition, the project was awarded a grant by the Rotary that will also be used as part of the purchase of the greenhouse. The Rotary will also assemble the greenhouse in August/September and help with maintaining it and share their time volunteering with the students.

Because of the two grants and the money made from the plant sale ($7500), not only will they get the greenhouse, but they will be able to buy one large enough so that they can have class in the greenhouse. These things don't happen without prayer!

Here is where the Spirit really started working even more! Mariah and Amoreena were concerned about what they were going to do with leftover plants. At noon on the second day, there were about 250 houseplants and 40 perennials remaining, along with some bulbs. They just didn't know what they were going to do with them all without a greenhouse in which to place them. A woman came to the table asking how they went about organizing the plant sale and getting so many plants. She was from Blessed Sacrament School, and they were having a plant sale to support a woman who was a victim of sex trafficking. They were raising tuition money so she could go to Viterbo University.

Everyone's prayers were answered; this would be the perfect home for the leftover plants! What a wonderful lesson for the students to learn to pay it forward. This could only be the Spirit at work!

Here are some photos from this amazing project:

Learning is a Lifelong Process

By Sister Therese Jilk

"If we can tame that wild colt, we will have a saint among us!"

Rosemary Cordell was born at 12:10 am on August 6, 1924, the hottest day of the summer, to Rose Lindner Cordell and Paul Cordell. Her mother was of German descent and her dad was of both German and French descent. Her parents were farm folk. Rosemary's dad died at the age of 67,due to cancer of the larynx, and her mother lived until the age of 95.

Rosemary was the fourth in a family of seven children from Watertown, South Dakota, although the last child lived only days. After baby #7 died, there were three boys and three girls in the family. This was a very religious family, with typical connections and involvement in their church on a regular basis: daily Mass, Stations of the Cross, and family Rosary every evening after supper. Living in town, they were located close to the church and school.

Sister Rosemary's given name in religious life was Saul. She kept that name until we were offered the choice of going back to our baptismal names. When she discussed the name change with her parents, they said they'd always liked the name Rosemary, and that sealed the deal. Rosemary she would be, and continues to be, among her Franciscan Sisters.
Sister Rosemary's first mission assignment was to teach at St. Priscilla's in Chicago. She remembers those first teaching years as very dedicated to sharing the gift of learning. In fact, she thought she could "do it all" quickly. In her first days of teaching, she taught the pertinent-to-grade books and workbooks; and then informed her Principal and Superior, Sister Finnian, that she needed more books, as these were all finished!

But Sister Rosemary's teaching years were about much more than finishing workbooks. In fact, she considered other avenues of learning to be very significant. During her ministry in Colorado, she visited each family home of her students. She also visited shut-ins, as well as the school children's families. And about finishing all the books so quickly, she quipped: "Nobody told me how!" (No doubt a sentiment familiar to a lot of us those first years of being obedient when sent on mission.)

And, of course, education is about a lot more than book learning. Sister Rosemary credits a lot of her deepest learnings to her parents. They meant business about telling the truth as a base of learning and living. Lies have real consequences. There were very important “conversations” with her mom and dad about teenage behavior, including dating and drinking, which kept her on the straight and narrow path of life. “Rosemary, if you learned to keep your mouth shut, you’d be in a lot less trouble,” was often stated by her parents. And she remembers her parents crying along with her at the end of sharing about certain incidents. Some learnings are like that…

Sister Rosemary was asked to study at Winona State College in order to further her education as a teacher and to become a principal; a double role she took on and mastered in several mission assignments. Looking back on those years, it seems an easy entry into spirituality. Moving through “Keep the rule and the rule will keep you” years, from the letter of the law to the Spirit’s prodding, is a natural progression of maturing. These days, you will find Sister Rosemary at Assisi Heights, happily committed to visiting the Sisters in healthcare, and on occasion, accompanying Sisters to clinic or dental appointments.

Richard Rohr, Ronald Rolheiser, Meister Eckhart and Greg Boyle are authors who nourish her spirit… with each one sharing their own life experiences. And along the way, there continues to be opportunities to recall the wisdom of Rosemary’s parents. It all comes together in receiving life as it is - the joys and sorrows - happily and at ease. And so, Sister Rosemary’s story goes on, deepening the truth of what long ago was observed by Mother Alcuin and Sister Callista: “If we can tame that wild colt, we will have a saint among us.” For sure, this wild colt is still being tamed, and I dare say, we have a saint in the making among us!

Sister Saul (Rosemary Cordell) at left in her teaching days, along with Sister Damiano (Helen Haag) and students.

Sister Rosemary Cordell today!

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