Sisters of Saint Francis
Rochester, Minnesota
www.rochesterfranciscan.org

interchange

Winter 2022-2023 | March 2023
Volume 27 | No. 4

Dear Friends and Family,

At a gathering last spring, we captured the image below of the 'oldest' and 'youngest' members of our Community. This image caught my attention and led me to explore what drew them to join the Rochester Franciscans... What were their passions and concerns at the time, and do they still hold those viewpoints? What are the commonalities for these two Sisters, who joined the Rochester Franciscan Community over 40 years apart? Find out by reading their responses below!

Kathy Gatliff

Editor, Director of Communications

Sister Lauren Weinandt (left) and Sister M. Carolina Pardo Jaramillo (right) have very different backgrounds and life experiences, but are united by their common Franciscan values!

Different Generations, Similar Values

As we enter the month of March, we recognize that it is Women's History Month, March 8th is International Women's Day, and from March 8-14, we celebrate Catholic Sisters Week! What better time to celebrate our Sisters?!

The following are reflections of two of our members - Sisters Lauren Weinandt and Sister Carolina Pardo - who represent not only two different generations, but also life experiences from two different continents!

Question: How did you know that being a woman religious was your calling? How old were you at the time?

Sister Lauren: My mother's sister, Rose, was a Religious Sister in St. Louis, Missouri. She came to visit our family when I was about six years old. I was curious as to why she became a Sister and why she was so happy. It made me feel that I wanted to be a Sister, too. Then I read some missionary magazines and I began to think I should be a missionary Sister. I can say I always wanted to be a religious Sister and a missionary. The thought never left me. I graduated from Brewster High School, Brewster, Minnesota, in 1939. I went to the Oshkosh Business College. This would only be a 12-month course instead of four years. I worked in several places after graduation: 6 years I was an assistant cashier in the First National Bank of Brewster and some other short-term places (meat market, pottery shop, music store, garage, etc.). I did go to Maryknoll in Ossining, New York, to pursue my desire to be a missionary. Because they discovered I had a curvature of the spine, they sent me to the Mayo Clinic here in Rochester. Dr. Ghormley told me I should not pursue my desire to be a missionary and they sent me home to have therapy, and if I was better to come back. In the meantime, I obtained a position as secretary for the Propagation of the Faith for the Diocese of Winona, located in Rochester, and stayed for six years. During this time, I told Father Jansen of my desires and he suggested that I should be a Rochester Franciscan and took me out to meet Mother Alcuin who gave me an application. I was accepted, and when I finished my Novitiate in 1956, my first mission assignment was at Saint Marys. I have been here since – 67 years in August. I was appointed to be Secretary to Sister Mary Brigh Cassidy, then Sister Generose; Receptionist in Administration and then to help and organize the archives at Saint Marys Hospital. I'm still here… the longest paid employee of the Mayo Clinic!

Sister Carolina: Since I was a little girl, I felt the urge, the pull towards God; to know God, to experience God, to be filled by God. I remember I would climb up a tree and sit there for hours contemplating. I was taught by

the Rochester Franciscans and they were a vessel for that longing. By the time I graduated from high school, I knew I wanted to join the Community, but they asked me to wait until I had a degree and had grown up a bit! So, the day I received my undergraduate degree in Psychology I moved in with the Sisters. I was 23.

Question: What year did you join, and how many years have you been a Sister of Saint Francis?

Sister Lauren: I entered the convent in February, 1954. I was 33 years of age when I completed the Novitiate and was missioned to Saint Marys Hospital to be Secretary to Sister Mary Brigh. On August 12, I will have been here 67 years.

Sister Carolina: As you know, the process has many stages. I graduated from high school in 1987, and until 1992, I was an interested person – meeting with various members of the Congregation. In 1992, I became an associate and moved in with Sisters Pat Himmer, Joan Connors and Eileen Buryska. I was the first person to go through formation in Colombia. I became a novice in 1994, and professed my first vows in 1996. And in the year 2000, I professed my final vows. Effectively, I have been associated with the Sisters of Saint Francis of Rochester, Minnesota for 29 years.

Question: What was the key factor that led you to choose this Congregation?

Sister Lauren: As mentioned, Fr. Raymond Jansen, the Director for the Propagation of the Faith for the Diocese of Winona, knew that I had always wanted to become a Sister, so he suggested the Rochester Franciscans. I liked Mother Alcuin very much and was impressed; but I also was little disappointed because I did not think I could do any kind of missionary work in this Community. However, I would fulfill my desire to become a Sister, and at least I could take care of that desire. I might mention that the Rochester Franciscans would come to Brewster every summer for two weeks to teach the catechism and prepare us for Holy Communion and Confirmation, so I had that exposure to the Congregation. We did not have a Catholic School. I recall two Sisters who taught summer school: Sister Mary Gilbert Glynn and Sister Cornelius. I still have a holy card from Sister Cornelius for my first Communion Day.

Sister Carolina: I was taught by the Sisters of Saint Francis from preschool through high school and I was always struck by their joy! They were, and are, such interesting women! Committed with transforming the social inequities, walking with the impoverished, building justice and peace; they were welcoming, joyful, open, prepared, educated, engaged with the

problems of our country (Colombia) and our city of Bogotá. They supported our creativity as students, they nourished and fostered our faith in a deep, rich, liberal way. They led retreats, showed us how to find meaning in life, and invited us to live our faith as leaders in service, never in isolation. They modeled that for us -- each one in a unique way. When I came to the United States to meet the larger Community, I realized this was the Spirit of our Congregation and fell in love with it again. They were, and continue to be today, well prepared, faith-filled, deep women. I was drawn to this Community because the way we live religious life and experience spirituality is different from the more orthodox religious communities I was exposed to in Colombia.

Question: What were your passions and issues of concern at the time?

Sister Lauren: My passion was to become a missionary, a desire I had since I was a child. But based upon my previous experience with the Maryknoll Sisters, my biggest concern with the Rochester Franciscans was that they might not keep me because of my back condition. Instead, they welcomed me with open arms and appointed me as the Executive Secretary to Sister Mary Brigh. This was a job that would not be too strenuous on my back. There were 120 Sisters missioned at Saint Marys when I first came here to work. We had countless get-togethers at meals and in the evening recreating and getting acquainted. I was also an Auxilian and worked in the Gift Shop. When the Auxiliary began in 1958, they did not have anyone to order smocks, keep track of their hours, type, mail and send their newsletters, etc., so I did that for them. With these “jobs” to do, plus amateur radio, I didn’t have too much “extra time” for many social activities. My work was “fun” and I enjoyed it all. I wish I could do it all over again…

Sister Carolina: I want to give you a little context of what was happening in the world during that time. As I was going through school, during the mid-1970s and early 1980s, there was a lot of social upheaval in Latin America. This was preceded by the Latin American (L.A.) Bishop´s conference of Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979), where the L.A. Church called for a “preferential option for the poor” and started to denounce the unjust social structures oppressing masses of peoples. The Bishops urged Catholics to fight for the rights of the poor. Liberation theology started in 1971, with Gustavo Gutierrez, while there were civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala. In 1980, Monsignor Oscar Romero was murdered, and in 1989, the Jesuits were murdered in El Salvador. So, these were also the areas of concern at the time for us. What was happening in the world was affecting us. Another issue, and passion of mine, was how to educate the 500 children of the invasion barrio, just 15 minutes away from where I was studying! These children, whose families ‘squatted’ on the land, had no access to school! That really changed my heart and my life. For me, the question was always, “What is God saying to me, and to us, in this context? How can I/we respond to this reality?” And I still ask the same questions today.

Question: Do these issues still impassion you today?

Sister Lauren: Yes, they do impassion me today and I continue to do what I can to help others by praying for patients and visiting them if they are alone or there are times when I am asked to visit a certain person. Many people and patients stop by with their family member to ask me to pray with them or just visit because they are lonesome.

Before I came to the convent, an elderly brother of my mother was dropped off by our doorstep with no money, little clothing and in poor health. My mother and I took care of him for three years before he died. We felt sorry for him, and it empowered me to help the poor, sick and disabled. I had a desire to help the handicapped with amateur radio. I helped them learn electronics and secured equipment for them. It opened a "new world" for them as they could communicate with the world through amateur radio. I did organize a club for them called The Christian Harmony Club with about 40 members. The group met once a month with noon lunch, a priest or minister from one of their churches gave a homily, then they played games, sang songs and other activities and outings to a concert or trip to the river for a picnic etc. It gave me a feeling of missionary work to fill a "void" in my life.

Sister Carolina: Yes, I am still actively involved in these issues. Rooted in the Gospel and in deep spirituality, how can we respond to the needs of the time? Today, my passion is the same: listening to the cries of the earth; and the cries of the migrants and the indigenous; joining the youth protecting the moors and the water; listening to nature speak, finding God expressed in a flower, a being, hiking, writing… all that vibrancy and passion are still the interest of the Community, today.

Question: Looking back, what is the most significant impact that being a Rochester Franciscan has made in your life?

Sister Lauren: The greatest impact in my life is the impact the other Sisters and I have had on other people's lives, especially the sick and suffering at Saint Marys. Not a day goes by that someone doesn't stop at my door and asks me to pray with them for a patient, staff member, their family and loved ones. People often tell me that Saint Marys has a wonderful spirit they haven't felt any other place. That's the Franciscan spirit, which I have helped bring to the hospital all these years. I can see the impact in their eyes.

Sister Carolina: This is such a rich life and I cannot take it for granted. It is very meaningful to be part of something bigger than myself. Knowing that we share the same values has given me the strength to work for the rights of others. It has empowered me to live my values and principles, and that is very important to me. I believe that we can build a different world together, relieving the world from some its suffering. It is very different from doing it

alone. Being part of this Community has expanded my world to see the relevant issues of social justice, women, and a deeper understanding of God. It has empowered me to believe in myself, and to know myself, so I know God better. I have been exposed to so many things I would not have experienced otherwise. It has taken me to an ever-deeper place to know and meet God, and serve others from that place. It has encouraged me to find my gifts so we can collectively put them into service. It has stretched me beyond what I could have ever imagined.

Question: What are your parting thoughts and hopes for the future?

Sister Lauren: I am most grateful to my Community for permitting me to be a Rochester Franciscan and allowing me to do many things "outside of my work." I feel I was an "armchair" missionary! I was permitted to have rummage sales, bazaars and other fundraisers to help the poor. I ministered to the spiritual needs of those in health care and was able to expand the horizons of those who were handicapped through my involvement in amateur radio and through the rummage sales. Also, I feel privileged to have met and worked with some of the most admirable women, such as Sisters Mary Brigh and Generose Gervais, and many other Sisters, who helped to show me the "way." It has been a wonderful journey and I am MOST GRATEFUL. THANK YOU!

Sister Carolina: We have a very important role. My hope is that we can be a bridge to open up spirituality for the future generations, to share the meaning and values of the Rochester Franciscans with the world, and to share our spiritual wisdom. To see that we can be part of an emergent spirituality gives me hope… and gives me a mission, a purpose. The following prose, by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., sums up that, above all, we need to trust in the work of God. It resonates with me because it really captures where we are in this time of turmoil and chaos, and offers hope:

Trust in the Slow Work of God
Above all, trust in the slow work of God,
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay,
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability
and that it may take a very long time.
And, so I think it is with you.
Your ideas mature gradually – let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,

as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

- *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. (1881-1955)*

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