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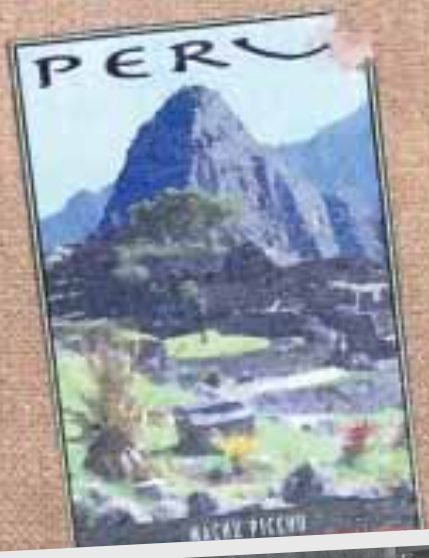
FALL 2012

THE IMPACT OF VATICAN II

Sisters of Saint Francis



Exploring values common to you and today's Rochester Franciscans

interchange

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Sisters of Saint Francis
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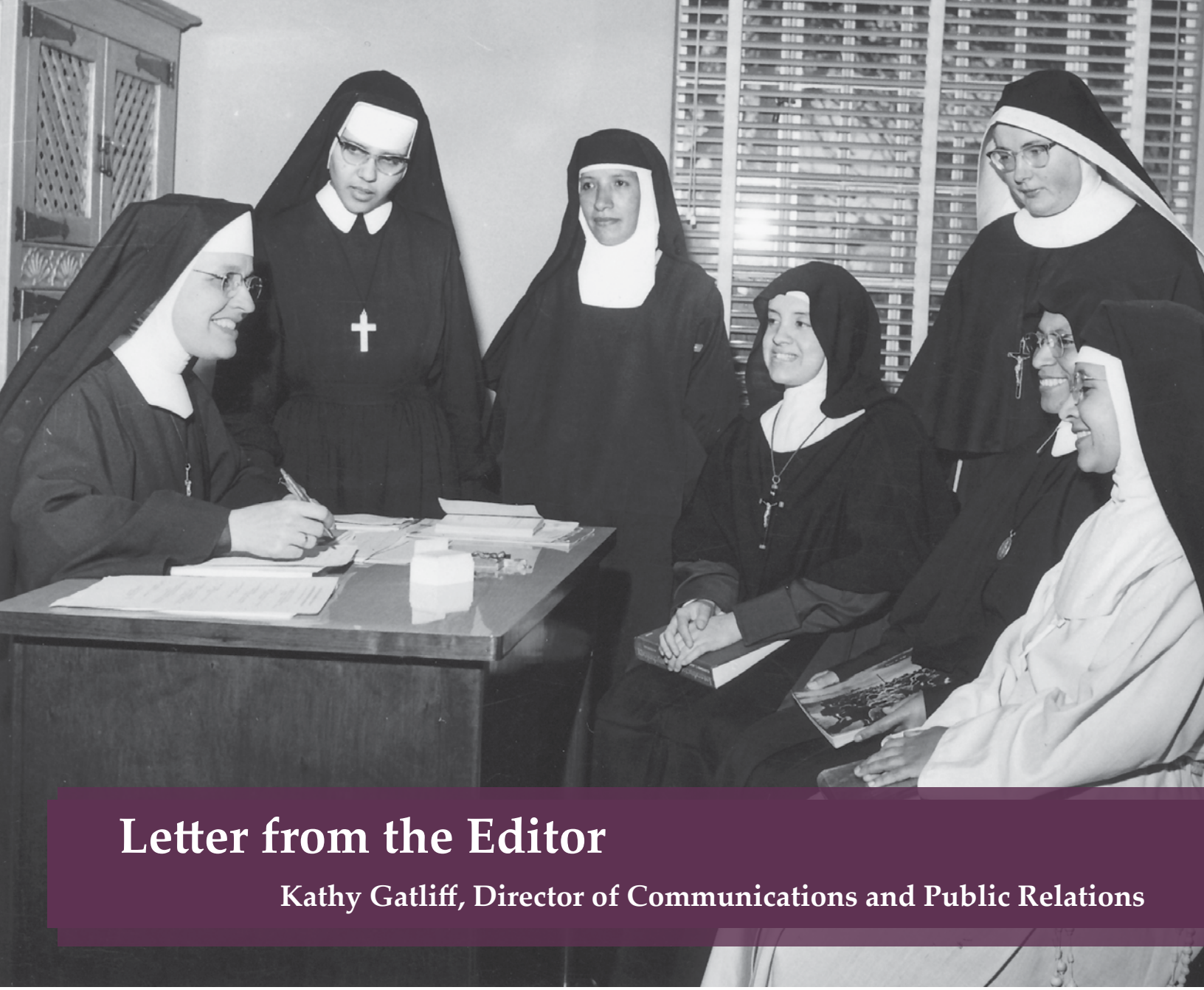
Cover Photography, Clockwise: 1) From 1962, Sisters encircle the globe (L to R) Ss. Baylon (Edith) Zamboni, Robaire Joswick, Mary Beth Modde, Consuelo Chavez, Maeve Cashman; 2) Sister Theresa Hoffmann reads to schoolchildren in Bogotá, Colombia; 3) in Peru, Sister Ruth Snyder rides a horse to visit a family in a remote village.



Letter from the Editor

Kathy Gatliff, Director of Communications and Public Relations

Fifty years ago, the Second Vatican Council (also known as Vatican II) addressed the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the modern world; calling for a modernization of some church practices as a means of opening a dialogue with the world and better spreading the good news of the Gospel. The celebration of the Mass in the current language of the respective country was one such change. Another was the expansion of the role of the laity in the life of the Church.

As Sisters were encouraged to serve in the southern hemisphere, Rochester Franciscan ministries spread into Peru and Colombia. Dramatic changes were also taking place here in the United States. Not only did the Sisters' ministries expanded beyond the walls of the local parishes, schools and hospitals, but Sisters also became active in a wide variety of roles in the local community. In doing so, they adapted their attire; even forgoing the traditional "habits" to better fit into their roles and not be singled out.

It was a time of great transition, not only for women religious, but also for women in general.

The impact of these changes on the lives of the Rochester Franciscans can be witnessed on the following pages—a testimony to the pioneering spirit and the strength of conviction of these dedicated Franciscan women.

Above: Sister Gretchen Berg (behind desk at Regina Mundi in Lima, Peru), with her class of Sisters from other Congregations.

Mother M. Alcuin (center), Chairman of Conference of Major Religious Superiors of Women's Institutes, on occasion of retreat held for this group at Assisi Heights, 1958.

Looking Back... Looking Forward

An historical view of the impact of Vatican II on the Rochester Franciscans

Sister Ingrid Peterson

Change in the lives of women religious, in Minnesota and across the continent, began before Vatican II. Mother Alcuin McCarthy led the congregation from 1946-1958 as Mother General during a time of postwar prosperity and growth in the Diocese of Winona. She initiated the construction of Assisi Heights, along with large hospital building programs at Mercy Hospital in Portsmouth, Ohio, and Saint Marys Hospital in Rochester, Minnesota. The membership and apostolic works of the congregation expanded along with the numbers of buildings. It was also a time for expansive visions. In 1953, Mother Alcuin gathered a national network of Sisters, called an Institute for Religious Superiors, at Assisi Heights. Four years later, 225 different congregations came together at Assisi Heights to form the Conference of Major Superiors of Women (CMSW) and to elect Mother Alcuin as its first president. Today, this organization continues to thrive as the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) to unite Sisters, address common concerns, and speak with one voice on issues of ecclesiastic, national, and global importance.

From 1954-1964, the national Sister Formation Conference began to implement programs for Sisters to be professionally prepared for their ministries. The Sister Formation Conference–top-heavy with Rochester Franciscans–inaugurated cooperative movements between congregations to develop ways for Sisters to be spiritually, psychologically, and intellectually prepared for ministerial service. The College of Saint Teresa in Winona, Minnesota, was selected as one of two centers to model a reformed undergraduate education for Sisters. Built in 1964, Winona's new Assisi Hall, began to house a Juniorate [a time of study following Novitiate] which was designed to link spiritual formation, professional training, and active involvement in the world.

The stage was set for the bold changes fostered by the Second Vatican Council. Sisters were professionally educated and networked nationally as a formidable force within the church. The Council sparked their efforts

in 1965, when it issued the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, urging congregations to return to their foundation in the Gospel. Sisters came together for discussion with their well-worn copies of Walter Abbot's red paper-bound *Documents of Vatican II*, either to resist or adapt its tenets into their lives, relationship with God, others and the church.

Church historians claim the impact of Vatican II was not so dramatic for women religious because their earlier collaborative efforts had prepared them for change. The externals of Council reform are obvious to identify: the shift of ministries away from large institutions and parish schools. Sisters began to forsake convent living to join in small groups, and to move away from strict uniformity, symbolized by the traditional religious habit. Their prayer lives became self-directed instead of prescribed. Sisters moved from a semi-cloistered life into a wide geographical marketplace to begin "hands on" ministries with those under-served in society. What is not immediately evident is how power within the Congregation shifted. No longer was power held solely by an appointed superior, but given to all to share responsibility for each other and the common good.

Although the internal changes within the Congregation may be less perceptible, they are profound in the hearts and souls of Sisters in their freedom to respond with compassion for all as they walk in the footprints of Francis and Clare of Assisi.

Mother Alcuin McCarthy, President of the Sisters of Saint Francis, is named First National Chair of the Conference of Major Superiors of Women in 1956.

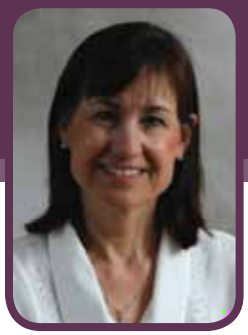
1967 - Religious habits change with the times! L to R: Sisters Terence Gilbert, Cheryl Fritz, Juniper Bickel, Nancy Kinsley, and Ramona Miller.

Sisters in the Juniorate at Tau Center in Winona enjoy recreation with music!

Assisi Hall, the former home of the Juniorate in Winona, MN in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Above).

Winds of Change

Barb Agerter, Cojourner



Pope John XXIII prayed that the Second Vatican Council would be a "new Pentecost." He also desired for it to be sensitive to the "rhythms of history," and be seen as a "moment of grace." Vatican II was an invitation to the world. The Catholic Church had become separated [from the lives of the people] and he felt that it was the Church's responsibility to reach out and engage with the rest of the world…..a desire for unity. It was a Council like no other in the history of the Catholic Church. How did the world respond to this invitation?

As I reflected on this time in the history of the Church, I began to paint. In the following paragraphs I will describe my painted reflection, shown on the adjacent page.

As one views this painting, there is a feeling of movement. Something seems to be happening. The figures are moving in a number of directions. Is it a joyful occasion? Or, is it a feeling of disruption? Depending on the person's perspective of Vatican II, it could be either of these thoughts.

Joy? Yes!! The people in this painting represent the church, "The People of God." The blue color embracing the figures represents baptism. Through our baptism we are ALL called to holiness. We are ALL invited to participate in the life of the Church. This feeling of movement within the painting represents that call.

This was a fundamental vision of the Vatican II Council.

Maureen Sullivan, OP, shares with us in her book, *The Road to Vatican II*, "We use various vehicles to attempt to bring God to birth again in each new generation. These vehicles are historical realities. They grow, change, and develop. There is however, one constant: the gift of the Holy Spirit." In the painting, this thought is illustrated by the illumination of light above the cross and figures. The gold leaf flecks that are scattered throughout the painting are also a reflection of this "new Pentecost." In other words, wherever we are in our lives, the Holy Spirit is with us as we "grow, change and develop."

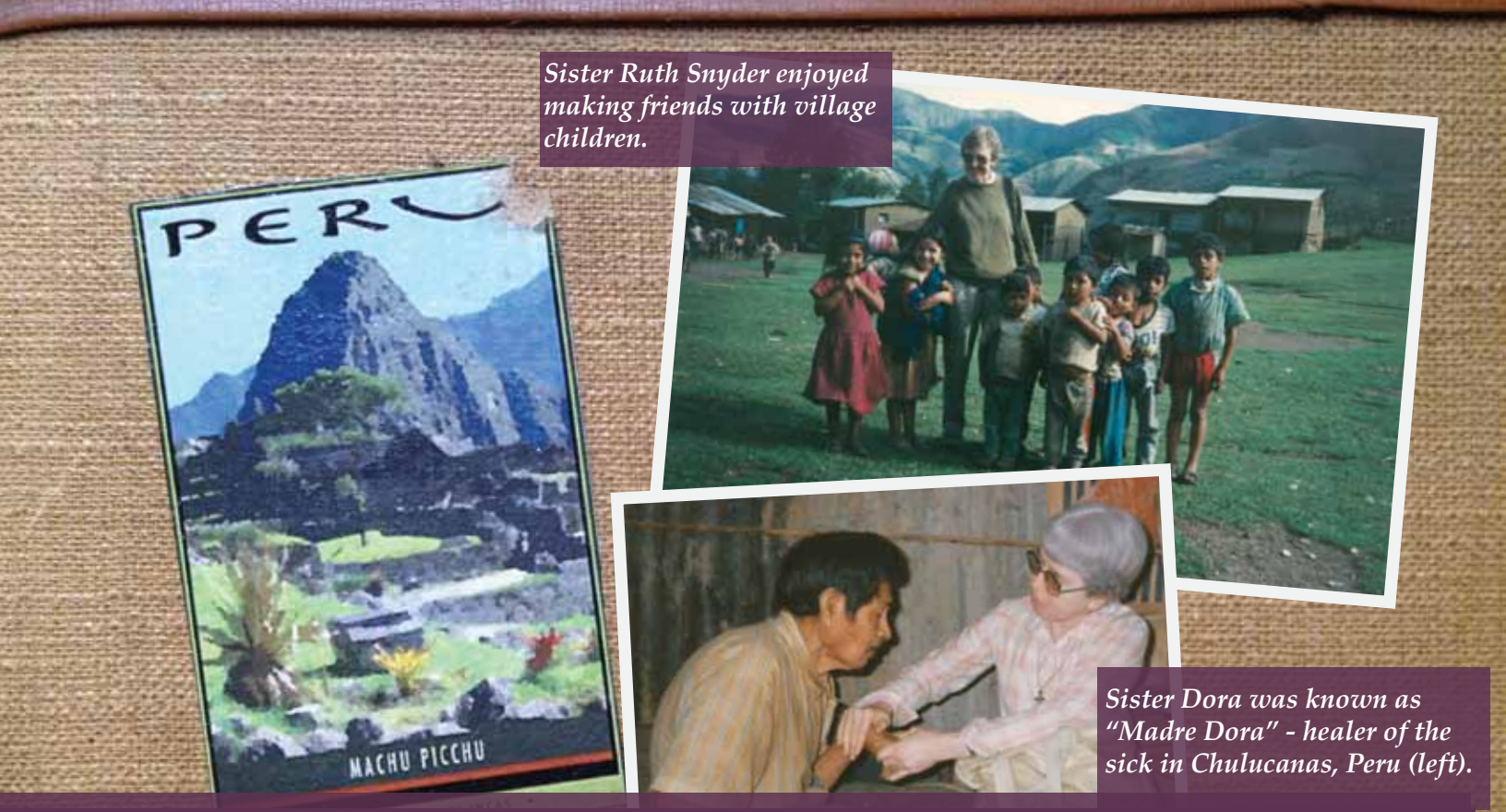
Continuing to interpret the painting, one will notice that there are lines swirling around the figures. These moving lines represent change... "the winds of change." Vatican II was responding to the needs of a changing world. This change allowed the Spirit of our hearts to move with new insight and inspiration. Indeed, the Council responded, and yes, the winds caused some disruption because not all agreed with these changes. However, many embraced them. This is illustrated in the painting by the figures beginning to move out and into the "winds of change." The figures also become larger and clearer. This symbolizes bringing to life the reality of our call to holiness.

At the center and throughout the painting you will see the Cross. This represents Jesus with us always as we continue our search for truth, unity and peace.

I have one final note about the painting. Viewing it from a distance, it is as though the Cross and figures are inside a flame... dark in the center rising to the light. We stand with Christ in this flame in the midst of the "winds of change."

Today, we are still trying to live out Vatican II. This vision was presented to the world fifty years ago. In the history of the church, this is not a very long time. Dr. Rose Beal, professor at St. Mary's University, shares with us, "We are still in the process of receiving what it means in the life of the Church."

At left:
"Winds of Change"
by Barb Agerter, Cojourner



Sister Ruth Snyder enjoyed making friends with village children.

Sister Dora was known as "Madre Dora" - healer of the sick in Chulucanas, Peru (left).

Going Out Into The World: Peru

Sisters in touch with the world… and the beautiful country and culture of Peru

Sisters Ruth Snyder and Patricia Himmer

"The Nun in the World" was the title of a book written by Cardinal Suenens as the Second Vatican Council opened. How interesting to read his description of nuns as he saw them at that time. He wrote: "She appears to the faithful to be out of touch with the world as it is: an anachronism. She is too isolated, too remote, too encased in a habit that estranges her from the very people she would serve..."

The story of our Sisters' work in Peru is a story of nuns very much in touch with the world, who loved and were loved by the people they served. It all began in the 1960s, when Pope John XXIII urged every congregation to dedicate 10% of their membership to helping the people of Latin America. The first response of our congregation was to send five Sisters to Bogotá, Colombia in 1962. Peru was our next outreach in 1963.

Sister Romana Walch, along with a few other Rochester Franciscan Sisters, had been working in the Sister Formation Movement. As part of that work, she visited various Latin American countries, often in very poor areas, to see what was being done to train young religious women. It was decided that there was a great need in Lima, Peru, where many Sisters were not able to meet university requirements and often were sent out to teach with very little preparation. She rented a building in Lima suitable for a university which was given the name "Regina Mundi." Sister Gretchen Berg was named as the director. Joining her on the staff were Rochester Franciscan Sisters Marguerite Chavez (Consuelo) and Elise Horihan. The University offered courses leading to a two-year Associate of Arts degree. Sisters from various Congregations enrolled in the program.

That effort was highly successful. Sister Gretchen remembers that 24 of the Sisters from their program were accepted in the University. Another exciting program offered at "Regina Mundi" was a weekly seminar program for 53 major superiors and novice directors, where the recently published documents of Vatican II were the textbooks... and three of the professors were priest theologians just back from the Council! As a result of this program, the participants were less isolated and estranged and were better prepared to help their congregations in renewal.

"Regina Mundi" existed only four years before closing, but it had served its purpose. Sister Gretchen

Bishop John McNabb with Sisters Ruth Snyder and Pat Himmer.

Sister Ruth Snyder with Peruvian woman and 2 of her 3 children.

Seven of the nine who served in Northern Peru: Back: Ss. Mary Ann Dols, Lois Knipp, Pat Himmer. Center: Ss. Dora Medina, Elizabeth Gillis. Front: Ss. Eileen Buryska (deceased), Ruth Snyder.

was asked by Mother Callista to return to Rochester. When others begged her to stay, she said "I have a vow of obedience and I'm returning to Rochester."

The work of the Rochester Franciscans took a different route when Bishop Juan McNabb* from the Prelature of Chulucanas in northern Peru, invited Sister Marguerite Chavez to be part of a team to train lay leaders. The pastoral plan adopted by the diocese was based on reading the signs of the times and its spirituality and incorporate into the teachings of the Council. Over the course of a few years, more than 800 men, representatives from all of the parishes, were invited to participate in weeklong courses and then returned to their parishes to assume leadership roles. Later, when Sisters worked in mountain parishes, they would meet some of these students of Sister Marguerite who always lovingly remembered her.

In 1972, Sister Eileen Buryska joined Sister Marguerite. She enthusiastically gave herself to many different areas of service, including: youth ministry both in Chulucanas and in outlying parishes, promoter of the pastoral plan, parish ministry, and secretary for the Diocesan Pastoral Office. When she was asked by the bishop to take on this latter work she prayed over it and said to the Sisters, "I´ll say "yes" because the beatitudes can be lived in whatever situation."

Sister Dora Medina arrived in 1975. In Bishop McNabb's *Memoirs of a Vatican II Witness-Led Where I Did Not Plan to Go*, he devoted an entire chapter to Sister Dora– lovingly called the Mother Teresa of Chulucanas. Her work in tending to the sick in their homes, teaching the health care workers from many of the small villages throughout the diocese, and caring for the health of all the pastoral agents endeared her to all. As the bishop writes, "She literally radiated JOY in just about everything she did."

For over 40 years, right up until 2005, other Sisters made the option to work for the poor in Peru, including: Sister Lois Knipp, Sister Patricia Himmer, Sister Ruth Snyder, Sister Elizabeth Gillis, Sister Mary Kay Mahowald, Sister Avis Schons and Sister Margaret Kiefer, as well as former Sisters Cheryl Fritz, Benita Grupa, and Mary Ann Dols.

Much of their work was in poor mountain parishes where they traveled by horseback or on foot, visiting up to 135 villages which comprised a single parish. Teams were formed in each village and courses were offered in sectors to prepare those leaders to carry out their ministry to the people.

All of the Sisters valued the experiences of collaborating with and empowering the laity to assume their role as people of God (*el pueblo de Dios*) living out the direction set by Vatican II. They had been guided by the gospel and a Latin American theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez, who wrote: "I am convinced that without gratuity, without love, without prayer, without joy, there is no Christian life. But without solidarity, without those who are most poor, without making ours their sufferings and their hope, their right to life, there is also no genuine Christian life."

**Bishop McNabb was greatly influenced by Vatican II and is one of the four living bishops who participated the Council.*

Ref: Gustavo Gutierrez: Spiritual Writings, edited by Daniel G. Groody, Orbis Press, 2011.

Going Out Into The World: Bogotá

Vatican II - Then and Now

Sister Tierney Trueman

The image of the Catholic Church in Colombia in the 1960's would be framed by a kaleidoscope of colorful fragments:

• a society of marked socio-economic differences, large segments of the population living in utter poverty, visual contrasts between wealth and poverty, e.g. the Mercedes or BMW sharing the same street as an emaciated horse-drawn cart;

• radical divisions among the clergy–those allied with wealth and power, and those allied with the poor and destitute; and

• guerrilla groups, labeled as Marxists, communists or subversives, in open combat with the Colombian army.

The environment was heavy with the tension generated by the social unrest permeating much of Colombian life.

It was into this milieu that Vatican II erupted, bringing hope and possibility to the faithful. Following the closing of the Second Vatican Council, Bishops were invited to return to their homelands and, in the spirit of collegiality (a renewed gift to the Church from the Vatican Council), were encouraged to convene an Episcopal Conference. The fruit of this invitation was the epic, historical l968 Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellin, Colombia. The deliberations of these Bishops, and the document that became the fruit of this conference, were to become cataclysmic in their effect on the Church in Latin America. Medellin, the "city of eternal spring," was the fertile soil for the seeds of liberation theology; the flowering of basic Christian communities, the commitment to the preferential option for the poor, the recognition of structural sin and the terrible cost to the poor in the oppression it created. The "see, judge, act" process from the document, *Gaudium et spes*, was chosen as the way to create a rebirth in the Church and her understanding of her call in the contemporary world.

Liberation Theology spawned the birth of Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) – small groups of laity, primarily the poor, who gathered to analyze their social reality in light of the Gospel, pray together, mutually support one another, and act to eradicate the various forms of oppression that were so destructive of life. They were often persecuted – accused of being Marxist, Communist or subversive, and then targeted by the military. For instance, in my address book I had the name of one of the catechists who worked with

Clockwise from Top: Sister Margaret Kiefer with friends; An early group of Bogotá Sisters: Back row: Sisters Darryl (Francis) Thomas, Gratia (Lorraine) Landkammer, Mary Beth Modde, Doyle Larkin, Lea (Jean) Schulte and Seamus (Carol) McKenna, Front row: Sisters Robaire Joswick, Baylon (Edith) Zamboni, Bruno the dog, and Sisters Maeve Cashman and Robard (Lorraine) Stenger; A mountaintop village

a Basic Christian Community in the south of Bogotá. I had his name on one page, his telephone number on a separate page, and his address on a third page, in order to protect him, should my address book be lost. When I was interviewing a woman from Brazil about the BCC's and asked her if she belonged to a parish, she looked at me, rather surprisingly, and said, "Sister, the only form of Church that I have ever know is the Basic Christian Community!"

Later, Pope John XXIII's call for *aggiornamento* [bringing up to date: modernization] truly opened windows in the Church and allowed the fresh breezes of change to envelop the people. A "clerical church" began to become a "church of the people." Reflection on reality through the lens of the Gospel and the Church's social teachings renewed the awareness of Jesus' presence as Redeemer in the lives of the people. Not everyone welcomed this fresh breeze of change. One strong opponent was the former Cardinal Lopez Trujillo. He was adamantly opposed to the challenges from the Medellin document.

2007 marked the celebration of the 5th CELAM conference at Aparacida, Brazil. Again, as in Medellin, almost 40 years later, the clarion call was to steward the legacy of liberation theology: support the life of the Basic Christian Communities; manifest an unwavering commitment to the preferential option for the poor; and eradicate the sinful structures that maintain so many in such dire poverty.

Have the images changed? There are fewer horse-drawn carts on the streets of Bogotá – they are no longer permitted on most streets. The polarity in our Church continues today, not only in Colombia, but in many parts of the world. There are those who, like Cardinal Lopez Trujillo, hope to reverse the changes brought by Vatican II and return to a reformist, clerical Church. There are others who, like the giants and martyrs of the Latin American Church, work to support the growth of the Church as the people of God, a Church where everyone truly is welcome at the table.

Article 4 of the document *Gaudium et Spes* describes the reality that: "Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the world's citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy. Never before has man had so keen an understanding of freedom, yet at the same time new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance." It would appear that Pope John XXIII's window has blown shut. Please, John, help us to re-open your window of *aggiornamento* and know our prophetic call to "scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel."

Franciscan Values: Post Vatican II

Sister Ramona Miller

To those inquiring to become members or Cojourners, the introduction of the spirituality of Rochester Franciscans includes the identification of the four basic values: conversion, prayer, poverty and humility. In order to name what these behaviors look like, the question is asked to describe synonyms and antonyms for each of the four values. By so doing, everyone becomes more familiar with their daily practices that outwardly express these values. Antonyms for conversion include prejudice, close-mindedness, hard-hearted… Synonyms revolve around the desire to hear God's Word new each day, openness, and flexibility. Obeying the voice of God spoken through others who offer us advice, or who need our services, is a profound penitential form of life. But how did we get to this point in understanding?

The post-Vatican II renewal of religious life has been a rich experience of opening a treasure chest to find new affection for the old. A document that emerged in 1965 from the Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Up-To-Date Renewal of Religious Life*, focused on all men and women religious. Having professed vows of poverty, chastity and obedience according to the Church's guidelines, the religious receiving this document wondered about the recommendation that the renewal of religious life required returning to "the primitive inspiration of the institutes." What was the primitive inspiration of Mother Alfred Moes in founding the Joliet Franciscans, and later the Rochester Franciscans? What did we know about her? Why did she choose a Franciscan form of life? How were we connected to the thirteenth century Franciscan movement?

The following year, in 1966, at the invitation and leadership of Mother Viola Leininger of Millvale, Pennsylvania, Franciscan major superiors in the United States gathered with their formation personnel to explore the meaning of their common Franciscan identity, forming the Franciscan Federation of Third Order Regular Women Religious. Several years later, in 1974, the friars of the Third Order Regular (TOR) held a Congress in Madrid, Spain, to hear reports on research about the origins of the Third Order. As a result, they paved the way for a new development in thought and organization: the "primitive inspiration" for all Franciscan congregations (of Third Order men and women religious) was the penitents of Assisi at the time of Saint Francis.

Discovery of the historical foundation underlying these congregations sparked great enthusiasm to provide a common articulation of the principles by which they live that linked with the traditions of TOR through the centuries. National Franciscan conferences attempted to create documents to guide their renewal efforts. By 1980, a work group representative of the global Third Order family met to develop a common document that articulated the charism common to all the congregations, an inspirational guide. In 1982, following much study and serious dialogue, the group presented *The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis* to Pope John Paul II for approval. The pope said this Rule contained the elements and motives for the Franciscan ideal, and that "it be effectively binding both in the present and in the future."

Sister Margaret Carney, currently the president of Saint Bonaventure University, who served on the work group that drafted the 1982 Rule, recalled that the most contested aspect of the proposed rule text was naming a set of values. Consultation with the worldwide Franciscan family, along with review of the TOR documents through the centuries, arrived at the inspired statement found in Article 2 of the Rule:

"With all in the holy Catholic and apostolic Church who wish to serve God, the brothers and sisters of this Order are to persevere in true faith and penance. They wish to live this evangelical conversion of life in a spirit of prayer, of poverty, and of humility."

Evangelical conversion of life was new terminology to 20th century Franciscans, but the explanation resonated with their intuitive desire and professed commitment to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Understanding "penance" as daily turning of one's heart to God, this contemporary phrase of evangelical conversion described the Third Order Regular Franciscans as continuing the primitive inspiration of the thirteenth century penitents of Assisi.

Love One Another...

These five women, entering their ninth decade have witnessed the impact of Vatican II in their lives.

Sister Casilda Chavez

Sister Corona Malis

Sister Joseen Vogt

Sister Joyce Rowland

Sister Margaret Manahan

For forty years, ***Sister Casilda*** was an excellent teacher of children in the primary grades of our Catholic Schools. The following decade, she assisted in various Congregational Offices at Assisi Heights. Today, Sister Casilda continues to be involved in a variety of Assisi Heights Ministries, including providing photocopy services for residents.

For almost 40 years, ***Sister Corona*** served as an accountant in the Business Office at Saint Marys Hospital. Retired in 1994, Sister Corona remains active. She belongs to the Saint Marys Auxiliary and assists in their Gift Shop, and also volunteers at Hope Lodge, a residence for those receiving cancer treatments.

Having taught in Congregational elementary and secondary schools for almost 30 years, ***Sister Joseen*** joined the Peace Corps, serving in Sierra Leone. She has also written stories of her life and travels, assisted in various refugee camps and spearheaded the COERR projects in Cambodia and Thailand. Currently, Sister Joseen is a tutor for ESL and Adult Literacy individuals and groups in the local area, often using teaching materials she has developed herself.

After teaching in parish secondary schools, ***Sister Joyce*** pursued advanced studies, receiving degrees preparing her to serve at the College of Saint Teresa as faculty member, Academic Dean, and then President for ten years. She received numerous awards and recognition and was pleased to be part of the committee that eventually led to the implementation of Title IX. Now retired, Sister Joyce enjoys visiting friends and living a more leisurely life.

For many years, ***Sister Margaret*** was an Elementary Education teacher and was involved in Catechetical and Religious Education, including serving as Campus Minister at St. Thomas University. Now, Sister Margaret assists with Assisi Heights Ministries, enjoys joining others on day trips, and sings with the *Young At Heart* group from the Rochester Senior Center.

Jubilarians

Celebrating Diamond, Golden and Silver Anniversaries

Golden

These women professed final vows just as Vatican II was taking place.

Seated (L to R): Sisters Chabanel Hayunga, Anne Walch, Lorraine Loecher, Nancy Casey, Mary Carroll

Standing (L to R): Sisters Joan Hrabe, Lois Knipp, Lucille Hass, Phyllis Sellner, Theresa Hoffmann, Geneva Berns, Ann Redig, Valerie Kilian, Judith Chiodo

In Remembrance: Carol Kaufmann (1999)

Diamond

These seven women have celebrated 60 years of faithful service in our Franciscan Congregation. Recently, each was asked to share a sentence or two regarding the impact or influence that Vatican Council II had made on them as young religious who had completed Noviate training and were in the early years of nursing or teaching when Pope Pius XII began the process of change in the Church, and was followed a few years later by John XXIII who, to the surprise of many, opened wide the windows of change.

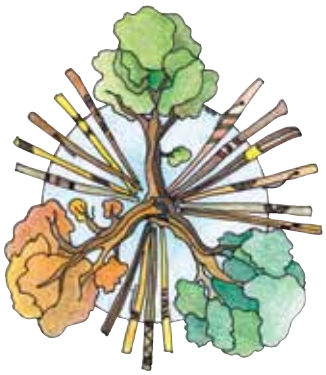
Sister Bernadette Svatos... "there was an attitude of expectation and hopefulness... the Documents were challenging, but exciting to explore."

Sister Clairvaux McFarland... "The Vatican II Council only deepened my commitment to my community and to God..."

Sister Kate Zimmerman... "Vatican II was an exciting time to be living the Religious life! We studied the Documents and accepted the invitation to renew our lives in so many ways."

Silver

Sister Sara Ruble



Sister Michon Welsh... "The text [the Liturgy] impressed me; use of the vernacular presented the voice of God speaking to us individually as well as to the total Church."

Sister Renata Walch... "Vatican II communicated its messages to the entire world and made me so aware of my brothers and sisters far away..."

Sister Rose Gillespie... "I just knew that this event was an opportunity for open communication which would enhance and unite our religious and civic communities."

Sister Ruth Snyder... "As a graduate student at the University of Notre Dame, I was privileged to hear a number of well known speakers–Hans Kung and Cardinal Suenens, for example–who shaped my personal spiritual life and awakened me to the role of pastoral ministry."

Vatican II Fifty Years Later: A Memoir

Father James Buryska

Fifty years ago–on October 11, to be exact–my classmates and I were excused from our other activities at the North American College to make the ten-minute walk to St. Peter's Square and join the thousands of other people present to observe the procession as some twenty-five hundred bishops filed into St. Peter's for the opening ceremonies of the Second Vatican Council. Having arrived in Rome as First Theology students just the week before, we were running on adrenaline. In my case, at least, that placed me at a disadvantage to appreciate the dimensions of the event we were all witnessing–the first ecumenical council in nearly a century, and unquestionably the most significant ecclesial event of the Twentieth Century. In fact, surprising as it may seem, only recently have I come to appreciate how truly unique Vatican II was in the life of the Roman Catholic Church.

But back then we were all young and idealistic–besides being preoccupied with our studies, travel and the novelty of being in Rome. In my own case, it took an excursion through the letters I wrote home, all of which my mom saved, and which I read only recently, to remind me of how little I appreciated what was happening ten minutes' walk from our front gate. Anyway, as the Council proceeded through its four sessions, and we proceeded toward ordination, all of us–some more and some less –did absorb to an extent what later came to be called "the spirit of Vatican II"–a sense of hope and possibility about the future of the Catholic Church, along with the belief that, as new priests, we would be part of it.

Newly ordained Father James Buryska's hands are anointed.

What none of us realized then–who did?–was that mining the treasures of the Council and bringing them to practical reality would not be smooth sailing, and would in fact be a long-term project. We should have known–the Roman Catholic Church thinks in centuries, after all–but somehow it escaped us that the results of the Council would probably not come to fruition in our lifetime. More distressing to most of us who came of age during the Council years, are the efforts that have been made in the intervening half century to roll back the insights and ideals of the Council–to "reform the reform," as some say.

There's a fair amount of email traffic among my classmates still today–particularly around the anniversary of events like the Council's opening. One of them recently commented that, in spite of everything that has and has not happened in the Church, he remains confident that in the future the unique and genuinely inspired character of Vatican II will be recognized. To borrow the words of G. K. Chesterton when challenged with the apparent failure of Christianity: "It is not that Christianity has been tried and found wanting; rather, it has been found difficult and not tried." I hold on to the same belief as well.

We Remember...

Sisters who have entered eternal life.

Sister Alice Marie Burns (1914-2012) entered the Rochester Franciscans at the age of 48, a rare phenomenon for that era, known as a 'delayed vocation.' Mother Callista, aware not only of her successful teaching career, but also of her patient generosity in caring for her elderly parents, recognized her as devoutly prayerful and truly service-oriented; sensing that her vocation had been there all along, it was only her entrance date that had been delayed! In her retirement years, she continued in the same spirit of generous service both at Saint Marys hospital and as part-time Librarian at St. John's School. A woman of personal discipline, she cared for her health by daily walking the hospital grounds and parking lots, not to mention the 'miles' of corridors she covered in her patient visits. It was in these same years that she began the personal project of collecting glass, cans and newspapers from throughout the hospital, long before 'recycling' was a household term.

Sister Jean Schulte (Sister Lea) (1925-2012) loved life. She joined the Rochester Franciscans with her best friend, Sister Mary Esch, and chose to become a nurse. After graduating and making her final vows, she was assigned as supervisor of a 62-bed medical unit. Being at Saint Marys Hospital, Sister Jean landed in a learning 'mecca' of her dreams; working with top Mayo Doctors who had recently discovered Cortisone. Later, she received a Masters of Education with a focus on nursing education, and taught at the College of St. Teresa on the Rochester campus. In 1963, Sister Jean's missionary spirit took her to Bogotá, Colombia, where she established a four-year nursing program at Javeriana University. She became proficient in Spanish, a top administrator, a creative mentor and teacher to many Colombians. In 1968, Sister Jean went to Guatemala where she mentored nurses, worked with the poor, and gave national workshops in Spanish. There she found her deep identity as a Gospel woman. She continued her ministry for seventeen years in New Mexico. After suffering a serious car accident, she returned to Assisi Heights, where she lived her last years mentoring young Sisters and Cojourners by naming their gifts.

Sister Ricarda Raab's (1926-2012) vibrant life unfolded unpretentiously as a faithful religious, willing learner, diligent student, trustworthy teacher, and attentive bilingual educator and guide to Spanish-speaking peoples. Eleven years of ministry were spent as a teacher in elementary and secondary education, followed by graduate studies in St. Louis and Bogotá, followed by twenty-one years of teaching Spanish at St. Teresa's in Winona and seven years in Illinois. Dearest to her heart were the summers helping coordinate college students and seminarians to provide services to Mexican-American migrants in Church-government sponsored programs in the Hollandale, Minnesota area.

Sister Stellan May (1926-2012) excelled in medical record keeping, a job that required a close attention to detail and time spent in a private office. This included nearly twenty years spent as Director of Medical Records at Mercy Hospital in Portsmouth, Ohio, followed by a similar position at St. Anthony Hospital in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and later, serving as Medical Records Librarian at St. Francis Hospital in Evanston, Illinois. For a period of time she was in charge of the Tumor Register, and later remained on as a volunteer, until her retirement to Assisi Heights in 2002. Sisters found her to be gracious, reliable, faithful, committed, and very frugal. She seldom expressed her opinion or shared her knowledge, but both were evident in remarks or observations she made when she chose to participate in gatherings held on her floor. Sister Irene Dobson, perhaps her closest friend, described her as a good listener–not only a "head" but a "heart" person, too.

Assisi Heights Spirituality Center

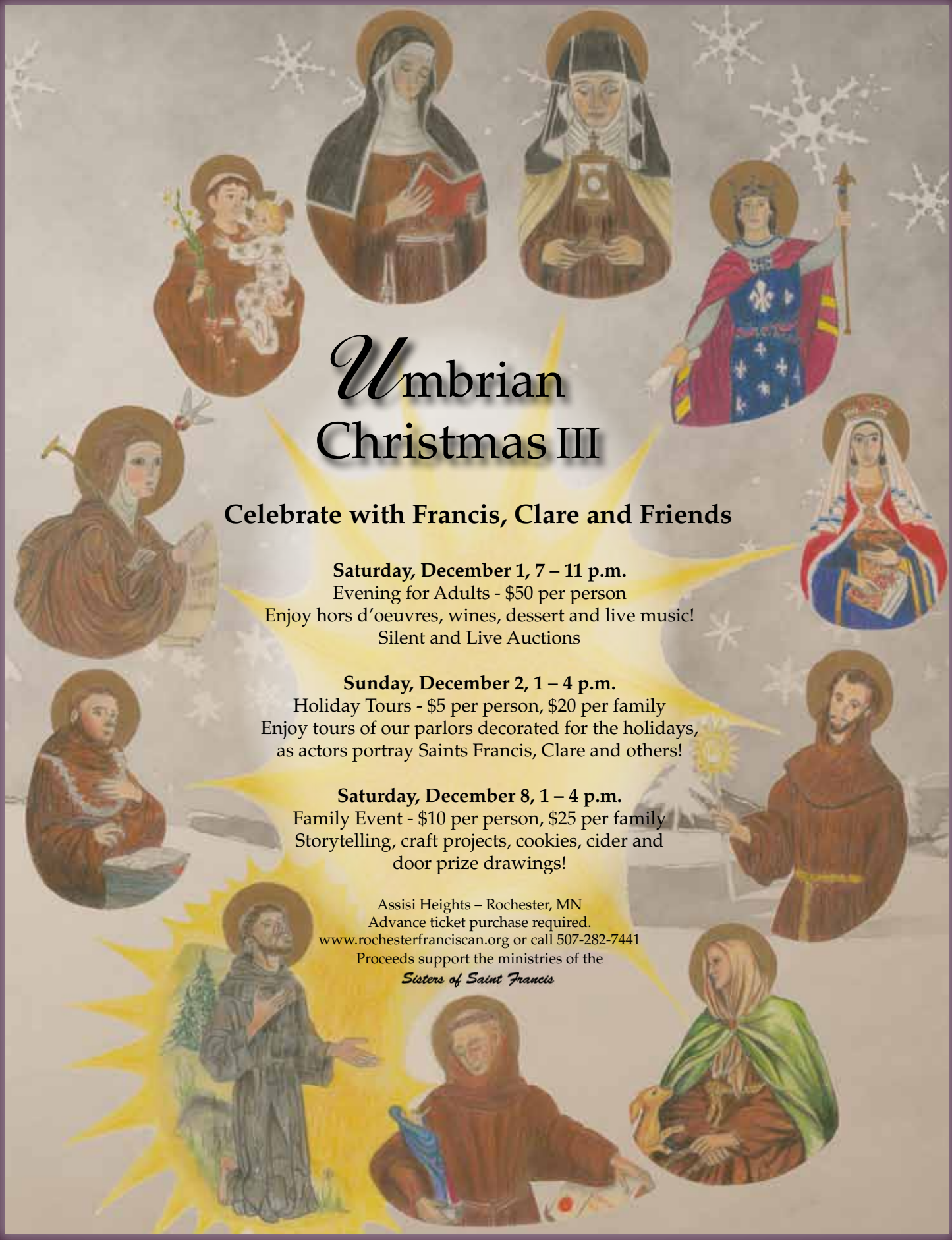
Sister Marlys Jax,

We, at the Assisi Heights Spirituality Center, encourage all to consider the role compassion plays in our lives. Our Congregational Mission Statement compels us to be a "compassionate presence to all." It may not be a new way of seeing or being, but rather a new realization about how we recognize our place in the world. Pema Chodron says, "true compassion does not come from wanting to help out those less fortunate than ourselves, but from realizing our kinship with all beings." That is in tune with the vision of St. Francis.

With the struggles facing our world and church, we chose to focus much of our upcoming programming around the theme of cultivating compassion. Programs such as ***Compassion: Bridge over Troubled Waters*** will bring the stories of care and compassion from four women celebrating International Women's Day on March 8. ***The World Day of Prayer***, held on March 1st, centers around welcoming and showing compassion for the stranger, migrant, foreigner. Other activities bring forward our kinship with animals, especially the healing qualities of horses when human efforts fall short, as will be experienced at the April 13th program: ***" … and a horse shall lead them."*** And, of course, you'll find compassion in ***Some Enchanted Evening*** on February 12, when we celebrate with those who share their gift of love and care for another. Last, but not least, we experience one's undying compassionate presence as revealed in ***Corresponding with a Death Row Prisoner*** on March 19th. Yes, all these programs are designed to cultivate compassion!

For more information about our upcoming programs and events, go to: **www.rochesterfranciscan.org.**

If you wish to schedule a day of Quiet and Solitude, please call 507-280-2195 or email: ahsc@rochesterfranciscan.org for date availability.



Umbrian Christmas III

Celebrate with Francis, Clare and Friends

Saturday, December 1, 7 – 11 p.m.
Evening for Adults - $50 per person
Enjoy hors d'oeuvres, wines, dessert and live music!
Silent and Live Auctions

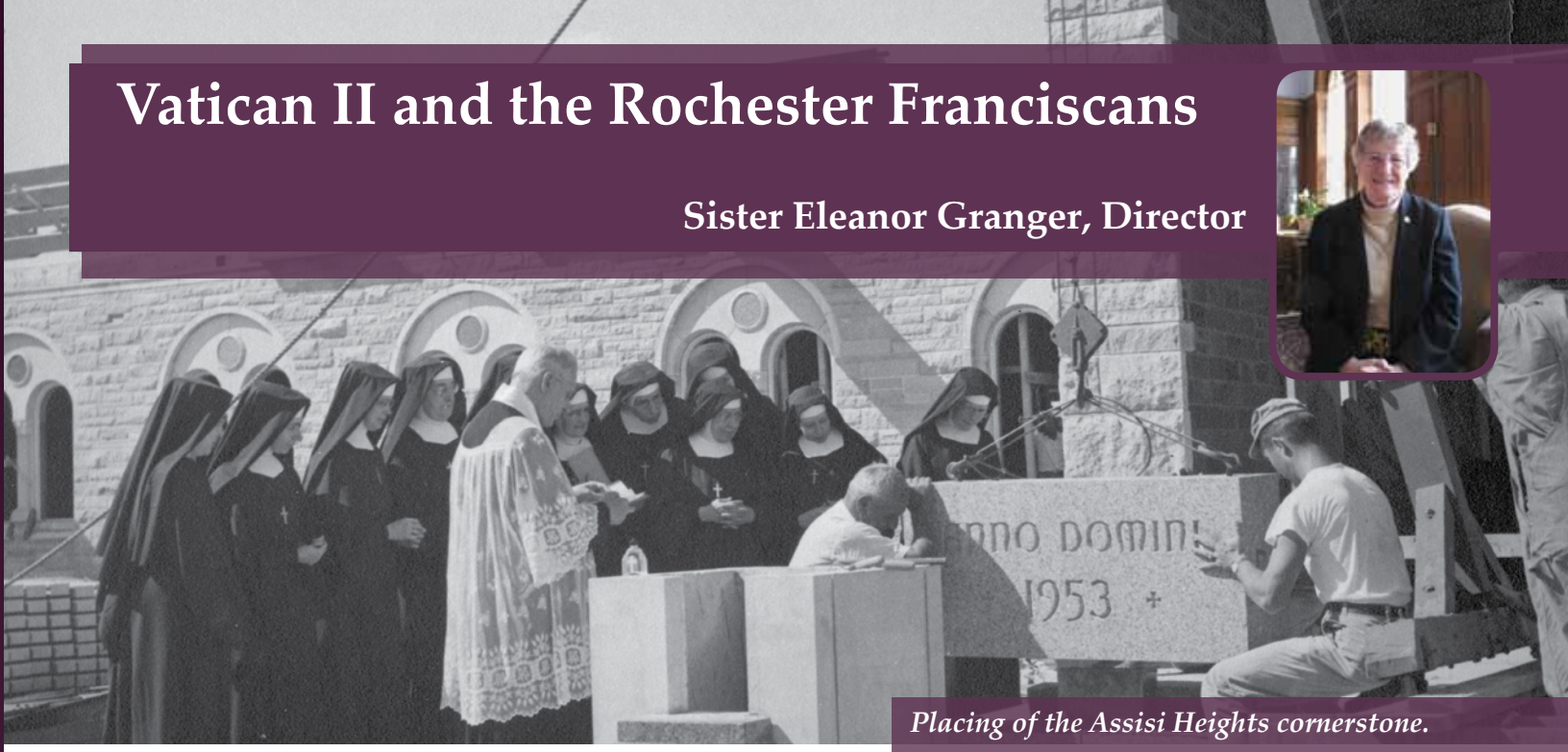
Sunday, December 2, 1 – 4 p.m.
Holiday Tours - $5 per person, $20 per family
Enjoy tours of our parlors decorated for the holidays,
as actors portray Saints Francis, Clare and others!

Saturday, December 8, 1 – 4 p.m.
Family Event - $10 per person, $25 per family
Storytelling, craft projects, cookies, cider and
door prize drawings!

Assisi Heights – Rochester, MN
Advance ticket purchase required.
www.rochesterfranciscan.org or call 507-282-7441
Proceeds support the ministries of the
Sisters of Saint Francis

Vatican II and the Rochester Franciscans

Sister Eleanor Granger, Director



Placing of the Assisi Heights cornerstone.

In 1955, the Sisters of Saint Francis of Rochester, MN moved from Center Street in downtown Rochester to the edge of town into the newly built Assisi Heights.

In the years before the opening, the Congregation realized they needed a larger building to house the many young women who had joined in those years and two classes of novices who were eager to become Sisters of Saint Francis. Therefore, the dream became reality under the leadership of Mother Alcuin McCarthy. The Sisters were well aware of the expenses needed for the new building, the living and housing expenses of the Sisters who served as nurses, teachers, social workers and so many other ministries. At this time in history, our congregation of Franciscans numbered approximately 1,000 women!

In 1962, the Catholic Church, the world and the Rochester Franciscans watched as the Second Vatican Council addressed relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the modern world. It opened under Pope John XXIII on October 11, 1962, and closed under Pope Paul VI on December 8, 1965. One of the first issues considered by the Council, and the matter that had the most immediate effect on the lives of individual Catholics and religious communities, was the revision of the liturgy to provide greater lay participation.

The changes that resulted from the Council affected all Catholics–and specifically religious orders of women–resulting in changes in language, shared prayer, habits, and ministries and, yes, even the numbers of young women joining religious congregations. Women realized that it was their choice to serve in various ministries as laity, not only as women religious.

Fast forward to 2012. The Rochester Franciscans continue to carry out the values of Vatican II! We invite you to collaborate with us as we live out our Congregational Directional Statement:

We, the Sisters of St. Francis, rooted in Gospel and Franciscan values, and steeped in contemplation are impelled to speak respectfully and act courageously on issues of oppression and marginalization of women in our church and society:

- *by studying, analyzing, and acting on issues that lead to systemic change*
- *by sharing our human and material resources*
- *by collaborating with others*
- *by becoming more inclusive in our relationships.*

Along with many other issues of injustice, our focus includes efforts to overcome human trafficking and destruction of Mother Earth, as well as efforts to promote the empowerment of women and the engagement with persons of various religions and cultures. We continue to embrace our efforts related to Immigration, Ecology, and Interreligious Dialogue.

We invite you to support the Sisters in these endeavors by participating in our upcoming events or offering a donation.

Visit **www.rochesterfranciscan.org** to learn more. To discuss bequests or other methods of giving, please contact Sister Eleanor Granger, Director, Office of Development at 507-529-3536, or Barb DeCramer, Office Assistant, at 507-282-7441, ext. 545.

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Academy of Our Lady of Lourdes

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