



Our Journey

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FRANCISCAN SISTERS
OF LITTLE FALLS, MINNESOTA

Our Journey is published three times a year by the Community Relations Department of the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, for donors, associates, friends, relatives and employees. This publication shares the journeys of our sisters and associates as they work in joyful service in the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare.

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Cover: Photo from the 2017 Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

Our Mission:

We, Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, are a community of women religious whose members are called to live the Gospel joyfully and to reverence the earth and all of God's creation. In the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare, we embody a life of prayer, simple living and service to those in need.

We are committed to nonviolence as we recognize the need for healing in ourselves and in our world. We seek to build communities of peace and justice wherever we are called to serve.

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Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls,
Minnesota

Taste of St. Cloud

Family and friends of the Franciscan Sisters came in droves to the 2017 Taste of St. Cloud, the annual fundraiser that supports Franciscan Community Volunteers. In March, the program celebrated a major milestone of providing 50,000 hours of community service to nonprofit agencies serving the needs of the poor and marginalized in the St. Cloud area.

“Words cannot express the generous and loving spirit of the evening,” said Pat Flicker, director of the program. “It is so fun to see the excitement people have to see and visit with the sisters. What a testament to their hard work and the many beautiful and life-giving relationships they have created and sustained over the years.”

This year's Taste raised almost \$31,000 for Franciscan Community Volunteers, a sponsored ministry of the Franciscan Sisters. We're grateful for every person who attended, for those who donated silent auction items and to the many volunteers who offered their time to make the event a success. And we're most grateful to the 16 restaurants that provided the excellent food which, according to many attendees, was the best ever. Thank you!



Engaging Franciscan Spirituality

In May, the inaugural Engaging Franciscan Spirituality program held its closing retreat. Over the course of two years, participants gathered for 20 monthly sessions to learn and engage with the primary pieces of Franciscan Spirituality.



Pictured here are the participants with their certificates of completion. Front row: JoAnn Dahl, Sandy Scholz, Garry Dahl and Rita Feddema; back row: Lori Johnson, Nancy McCoy, Maureen Spanier, Pat Flicker, Kathie Pflueger, Brianda Cediell and Paul Schlauderaff (not pictured: Debra Galvez).

Dear Friends,

There was no “other” for Saint Francis. His love of Christ led him to understand his oneness with each person and creature he encountered, knowing that God loved each one completely and unreservedly. That meant there were no strangers in Francis’s life—his brothers, a leper, a nobleman, a worm (he moved it out of the road), the merchants, the “poor ladies,” the Sultan—all reflected upon him the love and goodness of God.

As you will see in this issue of *Our Journey*, we seek to open our hearts and home to all persons—our neighbors, people of differing religions and cultures, curious visitors and all those who in some way are part of our broader Franciscan community. This includes all those we met through our series “My Neighbor is Muslim.” Teachers from the local school district, which has more than 40 Muslim students, and men and women seeking greater understanding of the Muslim culture and religion were among the 100 persons who attended the class. The openness between the presenters and the group was a powerful witness of the value of meeting face-to-face and learning more about each other.

You will see other instances of breaking down the separation caused when we label another person as “other.” Sister Betty Berger works with Muslim women one-on-one to learn English. Sister Mary Obowa teaches sewing skills to Muslim women in St. Cloud. Our jubilarians witness to the rich resources—especially the people and experiences—that have shaped them during their many years as Franciscan women.

We take our inspiration from Saint Francis who lived among persons with leprosy and learned kindness, patience and humility from them. During the Crusades, he traveled afar to try to negotiate peace and came away with a deep appreciation for the piety of the Sultan.

Think about the many people and experiences that invite you to open your heart and mind to the “other.” Be it a child with Down’s syndrome or substance abuse problems, an elderly parent or a handicapped spouse, the loss of a job, a fire that destroys your home. What do these relationships and experiences teach you about patience and kindness and humility?

Francis assures us that as we move through life and learn to love and reach out to the other, even in the midst of life’s hardships, the Spirit of the Lord will come and dwell within us. This is God’s promise to us; may our promise be to open our hearts to God’s love as it comes to us in our daily encounters.

Peace and all good,

Sister Beatrice Eichten

Sister Beatrice Eichten
Community Minister/President



At a tasty Somali dinner, Nasteho Abdi and I visited with the aid of her 12-year-old nephew who did a valiant job of translating.

Jubilarians 2017

We often refer to the summer issue of *Our Journey* affectionately as the jubilee issue. This year we invite our readers to join with 12 sisters as they celebrate milestones as Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota. This group of women religious are teachers, counselors, therapists, artists, spiritual directors and pastoral ministers. Enjoy their reflections on gospel living, welcoming the stranger and serving God's people.



As I look back over the past 50 years, I continue to be surprised at the variety of people God has sent into my life, in various places and at various times. While I was ministering in Tucson at St. Nicholas Indian Center, we gave food and other assistance to the needy who came to our door. One day a frail white man came and asked if we could get him a rain coat as he was hitchhiking to his sister in California. He gave me his blessing as he confided that he was a recovering alcoholic priest trying to get his life together.

Sister Louise Bauer

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

My call to religious life has given me opportunities to be a healing presence; to be an instrument of God's peace; to minister to those with mental health issues, those with addictions, those who are marginalized. I've had the privilege of doing parish ministry, visiting the homebound and elderly, being present with those who are unable to attend Eucharist on weekends. Hospitality, joy, simplicity, reverence and respect for all are Franciscan values I treasure and will witness to all the days of my life.



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

Sister Charlene Grossman



My various ministries over the past 60 years of religious life have given me the opportunity, and much satisfaction, to be creative and serve others. Preparing food for others often reminds me of the gift of the Eucharist. Caring for the physical needs of people reminds me of Jesus comforting and healing the sick, and guiding and encouraging children with emotional problems reminds me of Jesus' loving care—especially of children. I find it important to pray on a regular basis to maintain my relationship with God and to be aware at all times of the direction He is leading me.

Sister Loretta Bloch

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS

Living as a Franciscan Sister for 60 years has been God's generous gift to me. The Gospel has been my guiding light and opened up a wide range of opportunities to love, to bring compassion and healing to others. Saint Francis of Assisi wished for all his followers that "the Spirit of God should be at work in us." This is my desire as I move ahead in faith and trust in a loving God.



CELEBRATING 60 YEARS

Sister Cordelia Korkowski



Even as a child I wanted to know God as living and still revealing. So, after 60 years as a Franciscan Sister, along with current cosmology, I now know all creation is actually ongoing, evolving, outpouring LOVE. Each and all being is an incarnation, an expression of that God/LOVE. To enjoy and celebrate these gifts is a great prayer of thanks.

Sister Adeline Kroll

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS

I said "yes" to the call of consecrated life as a Franciscan Sister, which included saying "yes" to deeply living the gospel mandate. My main ministry has been caring for the elderly. Presently, I'm involved in ministry to women at the local jail. This work truly helps me to live the gospel values daily. "I was a stranger and you made me feel welcome; . . . in prison and you came to see me." Mt. 25:36-37



CELEBRATING 60 YEARS

Sister Sylvia Opatz



Welcoming strangers was part of my 39 years of teaching in the middle grades. It was a privilege to have students of different races, religions, economic means and various disabilities. This gave me the opportunity to reflect on Gospel living and pass on my Franciscan values to many students and my community.

Sister Marguerite Ostendorf

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS

I have been given many opportunities over these past 60 years. Life still feels overwhelming at times. Then I remember that this moment is the most precious and only moment I have. I am grateful. All of my ministries: teaching, walking with Venezuelans, Nicaraguans, Mexicans, learning from spiritual seekers at Clare's Well have led me to this moment. I offer this quotation from Eckhart Tolle: "You are here to enable the divine purpose of the universe to unfold. That is how important you are."



CELEBRATING 60 YEARS

Sister Carol Schmit



I've heard it said that "most of us would love to live our life with foresight when in reality we understand it best in hindsight." Sixty years ago, I couldn't imagine how my life would unfold as a Franciscan. Today I'm learning from Pope Francis, so inspired by Jesus and Saint Francis, that the essence of Christianity means humility and compassion (mercy) for others, especially the most vulnerable. Today, I appreciate opportunities to enrich my Franciscan life through dialoguing with our Muslim sisters and brothers, teaching English to refugees and immigrants, and serving in hospice ministry.

Sister Clara Stang

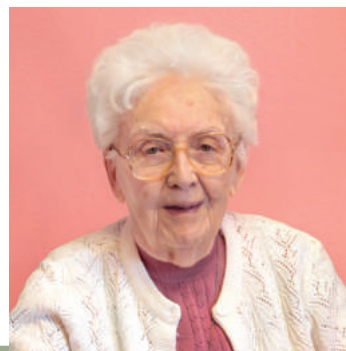
CELEBRATING 60 YEARS

My call as a Franciscan over these past 75 years has allowed me to live a simple life of prayer with a deep awareness and appreciation of who God is and what He might be asking of me at this time in my faith journey. Come, Lord Jesus, show me the way.



CELEBRATING 75 YEARS

Sister Annella Bieniek



I am grateful for my vocation in this Franciscan Community, for my talents and education, and for the opportunities to minister to so many people. I have always had complete confidence in Divine Providence. As director of religious education, I devoted much time and energy to developing and improving religious education programs.

Sister Alice Doll

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS

My commitment to gospel living has evolved over my 75 years of religious life. For many years I was very active in ministry, including responding to “Peru in ’62” when my community was called to mission in Latin America. Today, my ministry is one of prayer and loving others as Jesus loves me. I look back with a heart full of gratitude for all the blessings God has given me.



CELEBRATING 75 YEARS

Sister Frances Kempenich

Francis meets the Sultan: a model for our times

Sister Elise Saggau

There is today, and always has been, a need for respectful dialogue between peoples with widely varying historical, cultural and religious differences. It is our common experience that such differences feel threatening to us. To “demonize” those whom we consider “other” causes us to live in fear and to maintain continually a defensive, if not offensive, posture. This state of affairs greatly diminishes us as a human community. In our times, Islamophobia is just such an irrational response to our Muslim brothers and sisters. Francis of Assisi confronted this very issue in its militant form during the time of the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221). In 1219, he took a companion brother and traveled to Damietta in Egypt, where a great battle was being prepared between the Christian and the Saracen forces. The Christians lost this battle, and Francis used the opportunity of the calm after the storm to cross the border into the Saracen camp. There, he sought out the Sultan, ostensibly to preach the Gospel to him (or get martyred, whichever came first). Marvelously, the Sultan Malik-el-Kamil welcomed him as a holy man and respectfully listened to him. But, in spite of his graciousness, the Sultan held fast to his own religious convictions. Francis did not succeed in making a convert, but he did make a friend. In the end, Francis and his companion were given safe conduct back across enemy lines!

This event is a paradigm for us today in how human beings might transcend deep differences through mutual respect. This initiative of Francis was rooted in his most



St. Francis and the Sultan, by Br. Robert Lentz, OFM

formative experience: an encounter with a leper during which it was revealed to him that this suffering person was not a repulsive threat but a brother to be met on an equal footing. Dis-orienting events like this cause people to rethink their values, their behaviors, even their worldviews. After this meeting, Francis reframed his way of living. He and the brothers declared their solidarity with the lepers and the poor and moved outside of Assisi to live with these unfortunate people. Here they saw a different world. Here they found Good News, God and the desire of their hearts.

-Continued, Page 8

The encounter with the leper and the encounter with the Sultan both offered Francis and his followers an alternative to prevailing inhumane systems. People change not through coercion but when they are shown a better way of putting the pieces of life together. “Transformation,” says Walter Brueggemann, “is the slow, steady process of inviting each other into a counter-story about God, world, neighbor, and self.”

After this awakening, Francis saw a different world—a world renewed by compassion, mercy, kindness, tenderness, courtesy and respect. This understanding directed and sustained the early Franciscan movement and had profound implications for its mission of peace and its vision of universal fraternity. Conversion does not mean changing the mind or the

religion of another to agree with your own. In that sense, neither Francis nor the Sultan was converted. Yet, in another way, Francis did experience a profound conversion and so did the Sultan—a conversion rooted in a new experience, in a new and deeper truth. They had a new awareness of the depth of the human brotherhood and sisterhood that transcends all differences and leads to love, respect and peace.

Much of the above material was taken from Sister Kathy Warren, “Background Material Related to the Encounter between Francis and the Sultan,” pp. 22-25. (From *In the Footprints of Francis and the Sultan: A Model for Peacemaking*, a two-part DVD program with accompanying resources. Produced by Sister Kathy Warren, OSF, and Joyce Hart and published by Franciscan Media, 2013.)

Franciscans welcomed in Ocampo, Mexico

Sister Carol Schmit

On March 31, Sisters Isa Berrones, Aurora Tovar and I, along with three companions, arrived at our destination: the 19th century—but a recently renovated church of St. Catherine of Siena, Ocampo, Coahuila, Mexico. The five-hour trip, in a pick-up truck borrowed from the mission in San Rafael, was mostly through desert, ringed by the magnificent western Sierra Madre Mountains. The Bible with its numerous references to mountains and deserts, must have a message for us, I thought. Isaiah says it best in 52:7: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings.” May it be so!

The area is known for its dusty winds. The sisters who preceded us left in early January, so, we had dust and leaves to attend to. With catechist helpers, mostly high school students, we began to make this place our home. Our house, adjacent to the church, has a lower level with kitchen, office area, small living room and chapel whose doors all open to a tree and flower filled patio. Our sleeping rooms, up 18 outside steps, are nicely tiled, each with a bathroom, sometimes with water.

On our first Sunday here, Father Hector Raciél, one of the three

pastors who tend this enormous area with its many communities, presided at two Masses. We each introduced ourselves and expressed our desire to get to know the parish, its way of being a community and our commitment to accompany them in their daily lives as best we can.

It has been the custom that one of the parish groups provide a breakfast between the 10 a.m. and noon Masses for the priest and sisters. We found in our kitchen a lovely breakfast. Then, to our surprise, after the noon Mass, everyone present was invited to a gathering in the parish meeting room. There was another delicious variety of foods—a lovely welcome.



Sisters Isa Berrones (far left), Carol Schmit (center) and Aurora Tovar (far right) were warmly welcomed to St. Catherine of Siena Parish.

Living the Gospel with energy, spirit, peace



Sister Helen Hassler spent years ministering in health care and, like many sisters, was given a lot of responsibility early in her nursing career. She received her RN in 1957 and served as a nursing supervisor at St. Gabriel's Hospital in Little Falls. She then went on to Cudahy, Wis., Davenport, Iowa, Alexandria, Minn., Spokane, Wash., New York City and Minneapolis. She sees her life as a journey—both an inner and an outer journey. She's had a wide range of experience, but was often too busy and too consumed by the work itself.

She received her bachelor of science degree in nursing in 1972, then, as a means to discern how to continue the journey, she made a 30-day Ignatian retreat. This opened doors to the interior life and new ministries of retreat programming, spiritual direction and serving on the Franciscan Leadership team.

As she continued in spiritual direction, she developed an interest in the integration of theology and psychology. Two master's degrees, one in religious studies, the other in theology, paved the way for new work in counseling. She received a certificate in pastoral counseling and worked in Minneapolis and Phoenix. During her time in those two places, she participated in the practice of centering prayer and Christian meditation, which provided the discipline and nurtured her inner space for quiet, silence and stillness.

Sister Helen retired and moved back to Little Falls in June 2011. Later that year, she experienced some acute health problems, which continued over the next six years. During the healing process, she experienced a deepening desire for solitude, silence and stillness—a challenge amidst the busyness of life at the motherhouse. Sister Helen continues to live the journey and reflect on her life experiences, remembering the words of Olympian Steve Fontaine, “[Life] isn't how far you got, but the distance you travelled from where you started.”



“I am in the beginning stage of active wisdom which means that I'm doing spiritual renewal, theological updating, contemplation, personal and group prayer, dream analysis and a listing of daily blessings,” said Sister Janice Welle. “All of this results in a deeper commitment to Christ.”

On a personal enrichment level, her current reading includes novels by Patricia Gregory and Sue Grafton along with poetry by Rumi; she also participates in the Good Earth Food Co-op in St. Cloud. For the Franciscan Community she serves on the election committee and is chair of the advisory committee for the Franciscan Gift Shop. She also cantors during Mass and plays the piano, chapel pipe organ and accordion. In addition, she is a member of NETWORK, a Catholic social justice lobby group.

Sister Janice has managed the Franciscan Gift Shop since 2004 and works four days each week. Along with a team of dedicated volunteers, she sells art and crafts made by her Franciscan Sisters along with commercial items such as Franciscan Blend coffee, food items from local farmers, puzzles, greeting cards, CDs, books on Franciscan spirituality and other assorted religious items.

“We have something for every generation,” she says of the shop, “and our prices are modest. Customers often comment on the beauty and simplicity of the displays. Sisters say that this is a good place for me to use my gifts. I agree and feel blessed to have this experience.”



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Make ME an Instrument of Peace

Sister Carmen Barsody

Make *me* an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let *me* bring love.
Where there is offense, let *me* bring pardon.
Where there is discord, let *me* bring union.
Where there is error, let *me* bring truth.
Where there is doubt, let *me* bring faith.
Where there is despair, let *me* bring hope.
Where there is darkness, let *me* bring your light.
Where there is sadness, let *me* bring joy.

I have recited this peace prayer many times in my life. I have sung it with soft, sweet and slow melodies. I have shared it with hundreds of others through bookmarks, magnets or reading it to end a homily. It always made me feel good and I loved hearing a group pray it together. Today when I read the words they didn't sound sweet and soft, but rather I heard a command, a call to accountability that doesn't allow me to pass the buck to someone else. The word that reverberated on my tongue and in my mind was "**me**." Let **ME** bring love. Let **ME** bring pardon. Let **ME** bring union.

I don't know about you, but for me and all those I live and work with there is no lack of opportunities to bring love, pardon, union or any of these gifts into the world and into the lives of people we encounter every day. It is all of our responsibility to help create a world where prejudice, hunger and acts of hatred are not a norm. For Francis, if there was division or conflict, whether it was with the Pope, a brother, the Sultan, a leper or the mayor, he made an effort to build a personal relationship grounded in mutual respect and worked toward a shared desire for peace. He was persistent and



Faithful Fools Sam Dennison, Sara Warfield and Mary Ganz walking with other members of the Tenderloin Community encouraging one another to use their voice by voting.

insistent and so must we be.

I am grateful to bring a renewed energy to this simple prayer. This familiar prayer is now a profound challenge and a personal plea to be courageous to be able to do what I am asking of God, to be made an instrument of peace. Let's keep reading it over and over. Let us touch our heart, hands and lips as we do so. Let us feel the longing and find the courage to be peacemakers. Let us join our efforts with others and together we can be a beautiful orchestra of living peacemakers.

Donating to the Franciscan Sisters:

Please, feel free to express any wishes you may have for your gift. However, be advised that in order to ensure that donors will be entitled to federal income tax deduction, Franciscan Sister of Little Falls, Minnesota, is required by Internal Revenue Service rulings to retain full authority over the assets granted to it and cannot accept gifts that are required by the donor to be paid, or to be used, only to further the work of a specific individual or that are required to be used in another country by FSLF or another foreign charity or religious institute.

‘I was at first judgmental and uncomfortable’

Sister Susan Knutson

Over the years, the meeting of Francis with the leper has had significant meaning for me. It was Francis’s moment of awakening through which he was transformed. Now he saw the world and smelled its smells in a new way, and so he began to act differently.

When I lived in California, I didn’t like going from Berkeley to San Francisco. I didn’t like seeing the homeless. I didn’t like the smells; I didn’t like people asking me for money or handouts. Then Sister Carmen Barsody invited me to make a street retreat. She sent us out with a simple question: “What’s going on in your mind and heart as you walk the streets?”

That day and those interactions while sitting with

the homeless at lunch, encountering both strong sights and very strong smells, made me realize I had to come back for a second retreat.

The second time I simply held a paper cup, sitting all day next to an ATM machine. It was painful. Mostly I was totally ignored. Some even crossed the street rather than come near me. It was dehumanizing, and I saw how the homeless are our modern-day lepers. There *were* some who did stop, even if they gave no money, and spoke to me, looking me in the eyes. That was so completely different, so necessary to my feeling human.

It was like the scales fell from my eyes. I felt, like Francis, that this is where I wanted to spend my time—on the streets with the homeless. My experience was similar to others making street retreats: I was at first judgmental and uncomfortable, yet I found I was able to step away from the smells, the dirty clothes, even the mental illness and see the human being. It was the start of my own “Francis moment.”

I felt the same Francis and the leper parallel during my trips to Nicaragua. Everything I was used to, relied on, took for granted in my daily life was not available to me. It was a poverty I had never known. “No water today. Maybe tomorrow,” the people would say, taking it in stride. I was like a baby. Everything was stripped away. I was not a nurse, not a Franciscan, not an administrator. Just Susan. Just a human being.

These two experiences are very connected for me. When your old heart and mind get stripped away, you get a whole new heart and mind. It affirms what I believe of the Franciscan way of life. When I, like Francis, step out of my clothes and leave them behind, then I can be embraced by the homeless. It was the same with the people of Nicaragua—all happy to see *me* . . . just as I am. Just Susan.



Sister Susan Knutson remembers her tired feet from all the walking and standing she did on a seven-day retreat.

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Sewing class teaches basic skills, brings women together

Elizabeth Rydeen

Every Wednesday in the basement of First Presbyterian Church in St. Cloud a group of women gather for sewing class. The program “Sew and Grow” is sponsored by African Women’s Alliance, a nonprofit that provides advocacy and support for immigrants and refugees. Sister Mary Obowa, who learned about the program from the retailer where she purchased her own sewing machine, has been involved with the organization for four years. “I love being here. I love the energy that the women bring,” Sister Mary said.

Presently, most of the students are from Somali and Kenya and hear about the class through word of mouth. Some share native tribal languages; almost all can communicate in Swahili. Their understanding of English varies, which creates a challenge for Sister Mary and the other volunteers. As she gives instructions, Sister Mary speaks to the women in English as she would the general population. But it’s her gentle way, eye contact, body language and hand gestures that allow the women to learn the skills. “They may not understand my words, but they learn the basics of sewing. Somehow it works. That’s the beauty of the class,” Sister Mary said.

Classes take place in Hallelujah Hall, the church’s small gymnasium, and run for six weeks with a \$10 registration fee that helps ensure the women’s commitment to the program. Some have never seen a sewing machine, yet they are eager to get started. Initial instruction teaches basic sewing skills: how to thread the machine, sew a straight seam, turn a corner. Fabric and supplies are provided for a pillow case, then a skirt, followed by a dress and finally a hijab. A basic pattern, adjusted for length, fits everyone.

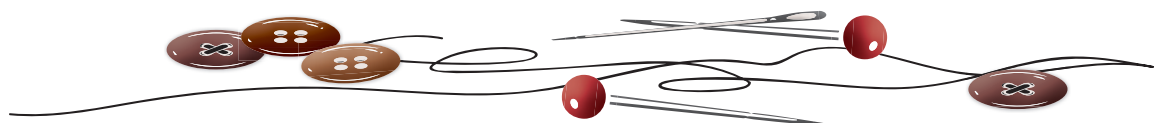
A few women continue coming beyond the six weeks. They bring their own fabric and mending from home. Some of the women are sewing for other families and generating a bit of income, while others have found industrial sewing jobs. Their foot in the door: the skills they learned from Sew and Grow.



Volunteer Mary Flynn helps with threading the machine.



Sister Mary Obowa takes time to get to know the women’s tastes, what colors and fabrics they like. Her highest compliment: “You understand our culture.”



Franciscan values guide Hands Across the World

Associate Geri Dietz

In 2003, Associate Brianda Cediel and Sister Tonie Rausch created Hands Across the World (HAW). The two share a powerful passion for serving immigrants and refugees in the St. Cloud area of Minnesota. In addition to offering ESL classes, HAW provides basic living skills and makes possible “essential connections between our students and the institutions and services they need to successfully navigate their new lives in St. Cloud,” said Brianda, the executive director.

St. Mary’s Center in St. Cloud currently houses HAW. When you walk through the doors, you immediately see a banner that reads: A Learning Community for New Citizens! Hands Across the World—Welcome! The hallways are adorned with the artwork of the students, who range from preschoolers to adults. This work tells stories of their journeys and dreams. In the areas used by the students, one discovers a healthy-eating station, a recycling station, a sewing room, and a parenting classroom. In each room, posters portraying the names of God can be found on the walls side by side with a crucifix. Brianda claims that such a display is good, for “it teaches respect for the faith of the people.” In one room alone, there are as many as seven faiths represented.

After Sister Tonie retired a few years ago, Brianda continued the mission with volunteers and teachers from the local school district. The teachers not only teach but also walk alongside the students as they learn a new language and new skills and adapt to a new culture. Brianda says that many of the people are already educated, and “we need to show them kindness as they learn a new language and culture.” She expounds on how all the students practice habits of kindness, generosity, and care and compassion for one another. She teaches them how to be actively involved in the community so they might help build a better place for their children, themselves and America. When asked, “What has HAW done for you?” Etienne, an adult student, said, “Hands Across the World for us is life! We find hope, love, a sense of belonging and respect here. HAW is what we need to start our new life in America.”



Brianda Cediel, co-founder of Hands Across the World, brings light to the darkness of suffering people as they transition from war-torn countries to central Minnesota.

One grandmother waited eight years to share with Brianda her story of suffering. “She wanted to heal and it’s a process,” Brianda said. “She finally found someone she could trust with her painful story. Building a relationship takes time and compassion. People feel a need to communicate. HAW is a place where you can learn to communicate and begin healing and having hope.” This grandmother also had a desperate desire to understand her grandchildren, who spoke only English. Imagine her joy as she became capable of understanding the people in her own family!

One of Brianda’s major accomplishments was to help establish a “Police Agreement.” It took two years to work out and involved participation by law enforcement agencies and local communities. It is based on the assumption that police officers, in their training, need to learn about the cultures of the area in order to protect citizens. Brianda is grateful to be able to work with the police department in helping the immigrants.

Over the years, HAW has served people from 26 countries and has moved four times in order to meet the growing needs. No matter where it is located however, many of the students consider HAW their second home—a safe and sacred place. “People come with a lot of experiences of intense suffering,” said Brianda. “Every day I need to connect with God. I need God’s presence to give good counsel with hope. I have been a part of and witnessed great growth in the lives of the people I serve, and Saint Francis has been a guide for me.”

My neighbor is Muslim

Sister Betty Berger

My father's parents emigrated from Norway around 1910. They learned English but spoke it with a heavy Norwegian brogue. In the small farming community in western Minnesota where I grew up, broken English and languages other than English were normal.

In my first legal job, I had a paralegal who spoke Finnish and interpreted for my Finnish clients in Duluth. Later, in St. Paul, I had a Hmong interpreter for my Hmong clients and a Somali interpreter for my Somali clients. Other attorneys in the office could interpret for Russian- and Spanish-speaking clients.

After I retired from practicing law, I took literacy training so that I could become a tutor. When I began teaching English to adult English language learners in Minneapolis, I met learners who spoke many other languages. Some students knew three or four languages but now needed to learn English. Every student started at a different place. My job as a tutor was to accompany them to the next level.

At that time I lived at Sabbath House, a three-story home built in 1905—five years before my grandparents emigrated from Norway. The stairs became too

challenging for my bad knees and prompted my move to Little Falls. Shortly thereafter, Sister Tonie Rausch invited me to meet a Somali family she had met at Maple Island Park. A former missionary in Tanzania, Sister

Tonie was able to exchange some Swahili greetings with the adults and converse with the children who knew English. As a result of that meeting, I began to tutor their mother who wanted to learn English. From my training with the Minnesota Literacy Council, I knew that there were literacy needs in almost every community, but I had not expected to connect with a student so quickly.

Soon more Somali families moved to Little Falls, and Sisters Tonie and Clara Stang, who have been part of a Christian-Muslim dialogue in St. Cloud for many years, became acquainted with them. Last fall I was asked to be part of committee, along with Sisters Clara and Joan Tuberty and Jeff Odendahl (coordinator of Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation for the Franciscan Sisters) to plan a study course using the resource, *My Neighbor is Muslim*, published by Lutheran Social Services. The four-week course, attended by over 100 people, concluded with a panel and a Somali meal with over 40 Somali guests. Even though we do not all speak the same language, we are no longer strangers but neighbors.

I enjoyed the one-on-one tutoring with my student, but I wanted her to have a class experience and knew that there were more people who wanted to study English. Last March the Central Minnesota-North Adult Basic Education started an adult English class in Little Falls. The class now has seven students. Sister Clara Stang and I are class assistants. It warms my heart to see the efforts of the Little Falls community in welcoming these newcomers. Although the sheer number of immigrants and refugees in the Twin Cities far exceeds the families here in Little Falls, I did not experience the same outreach as I've witnessed in Little Falls evidenced by the Muslim study course, the support from the local school district and other groups and individuals.



Sister Betty Berger, retired lawyer, received her literacy training through the Minnesota Literacy Council.



Sister Clara Stang and Ayan Omar, a middle school teacher, are members of a Christian-Muslim dialogue group that began 10 years ago in St. Cloud. In March they were part of the team that led the "My Neighbor is Muslim" study course, which drew over 100 people to St. Francis Convent to learn about Islam and the culture of the Muslim people.

Thousands, worldwide, follow Franciscan way of life

Sister Elise Saggau

Around the same time Saint Francis founded his Order of Friars Minor in the 13th century, he also invited lay people to live the Gospel faithfully in their own homes. He composed a simple rule for them and, in 1221, the Church approved it. The “Secular Franciscan Order” (OFS, also called “Third Order Secular”) grew over the centuries. Today thousands of women and men all over the world follow this way of life as members of local “fraternities.” They gather monthly to pray and study and intensify their Franciscan gospel spirit. They carry forward their spirituality to many services in their local parishes and in other areas of apostolic endeavor as the Spirit leads them. Traditionally, priests from the First Order (Friars Minor) or other priests served as spiritual assistants to these Secular Franciscans to help guide them in their continual conversion of life. But eventually, as fewer priests were available, sisters began to offer this service. The Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls were among the first.

In 1987, Sister Thomasine Schmolke broke new ground in Minnesota when she became the spiritual assistant to the OFS fraternity in St. Cloud. Sister Joel Bieniek soon became her assistant and, in 1997, Sister Joel and Sister Alice Doll replaced Sister Thomasine in this role. The ministry grew and, eventually, many sisters became spiritual assistants to various fraternities in Minnesota. During the past 30 years, the following other sisters have served in this capacity: Sisters Loretto Schneider, Maureen Kelly, Mary Lou Eltgroth, Frances Kempenich, Mary Schuman, Giles Weyandt, Marcelline Virnig, Karen Niedzielski, Annella Bieniek, Lillian Kroll, Joyce Brandl, Beatrice Eichten, Mary Ann Capizzo, Georgine Larson, Nancy deMattos, Maurita Niedzielski, Louise Bauer and Betty Berger.

From 2008 to 2015, Sister Mary Lou Eltgroth served also as spiritual assistant to the Queen of Peace Region of the Secular Franciscans, which represents 31 fraternities in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska and North Dakota. In April, the region held a day of reflection at the Motherhouse in Little Falls with over 100 members participating. The speaker was Father Dan Horan, OFM, of Holy Name Province of the Friars Minor. In the course of the day, the region presented the Franciscan Sisters with a certificate congratulating them on the 125th anniversary of their congregation and acknowledging the faithful service the sisters have provided to so many OFS fraternities and to the region over the years.

The interchange of spiritual gifts between the members of the different branches of the Franciscan order is a witness to the ongoing work of the Spirit. Down through the centuries since the time of Saint Francis, the brothers and sisters who follow him continue to share with one another the gifts that have been given to them through their membership in the Franciscan family—gifts that they, in turn, share with all with whom they come into contact.



Members of the St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity in Little Falls: Charlotte VanRisseghem, Leona Mattock, Janet Berendt, Sister Georgine Larson and Patty Commerford

Planned Giving

Please let us know if you would like more information on remembering the Franciscan Sisters in your will and estate planning.

Contact: **Sister Bernice Ebner**

116 8th Avenue SE

Little Falls, Minnesota 56345

(320)632-0699 • bebner@fslf.org

Gratitude abounds: Franciscan friends, donors come together

Sister Cordy Korkowski, director of Donor Relations

“On the road again . . .” I’ve always loved Willie Nelson’s popular song from 1980. My recent 12-day road trip to Texas and Mexico, full of twists and turns, led me to some special people.

It was my privilege to visit Sisters Anita Jennissen, Mary Hroschikoski and Shirley Mueller in McAllen, Tex., and learn about their ministry along the border. All three are providing direct service to immigrants and refugees who come to this country seeking a better life—such important *and* heart-breaking work. The sisters hosted several gatherings where I met friends and donors of the Franciscan Sisters, wonderful people who shared stories that exemplify their commitment to gospel living and Franciscan values. In my development work, nothing takes the place of meeting people face-to-face. I was honored to meet these beautiful people.

The sisters gave me a taste of the Texas countryside. We went to Brownsville for a lunch with Associates Joe and Jean Krause and their daughter Rachel and toured Alonzo Cantu’s ranch near McAllen. Our donors are a lifeline to our ministries. What an honor to say “thank you” on behalf of my Franciscan community.

After McAllen I went further south to Mexico. In Saltillo, Sisters Carol Schmit, Isa Berrones and Aurora Tovar were preparing to leave their mission and move to Ocampo at the end of the week. Nevertheless, they took time to show us the sights of their beautiful city. We visited churches, marketplaces, walked the streets and



Betty Blanco, Irma Garza, Sister Cordy, Rosie Otsuji, Robert Otsuji, Mac Perez and Carlos Perez together in McAllen, Tex.

enjoyed a wonderful dinner with a local family.

From Saltillo I traveled to San Rafael and Casa Franciscana where our sisters provide room and board and other support for high school students. Seeing the mission and meeting the girls made real the many stories I have read about this ministry over the years. Sisters Mary Dumonceaux, Janice Wiechman and Ange Mayers, who live at Casa Franciscana and minister to the girls, also share faith formation, sacramental preparation and pastoral care throughout the parish.

I felt God’s love and presence in all aspects of my trip. I witnessed the faith of our sisters, the local parish communities, friends and donors to the Franciscan Sisters. Breaking bread together, sharing our lives and struggles with the people of Texas and Mexico was the Gospel in its most dynamic expression.

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and your cell phone number. Thank you!

Sisters Ange Mayers and Janice Wiechman join San Rafael mission

Sister Mary Dumonceaux

In September 2016, Sisters Ange Mayers and Janice Wiechman joined Sister Mary Dumonceaux at Casa Franciscana in San Rafael de Galeana, Mexico. Sister Ange soon became involved in youth ministry in the parish. During Advent and Lent, she helped prepare 69 young people and adults to serve as missionaries in seven villages in the high Sierra Mountains during Holy Week. Sister Janice accompanies the pastor on his rounds to say Mass in various villages of the parish. She herself visits the sick in their homes and gathers with the people for Bible study. Sister Mary continues working with a team of adult leaders who prepare parents and godparents of the First Communion and Confirmation students from all the villages of the parish. This team will offer a retreat in 13 centers for 500 adults.

The ministry of providing support for young women living at Casa Franciscana while they attend high school is also changing. Understanding that there will be a day when the Franciscan Sisters may not be physically present, a lay woman has been engaged as sub-director. She has formed a team with three other employees: the administrative assistant, the overseer of food preparation and housecleaning, and the person who maintains the plant and the vehicles. Together, this team is in charge of the day-to-day care and guidance of the students. Sister Aurora Tovar, while not routinely present, still serves as the director of the program. The three resident Franciscan Sisters—Ange, Mary and Janice—are, of course, present to the students daily.



Sisters Janice Wiechman, Mary Dumonceaux and Ange Mayers serve the Mexico mission in San Rafael, Nuevo Leon.

There is always good news to share: three of the current students will graduate from secondary school in July. They plan to continue their studies: two in nursing and one in business administration. Among former students, four will have graduated from nursing programs by the end of this year and several more will complete their studies in business systems and computers. Still others, of course, have started families and serve in their villages.

These ministries in the parish of San Rafael continue to be strong and support the growth of the Catholic Christian community of the whole area, as well as open new opportunities for young women.

St. Francis High School GATHERING

July 16, 2017 - 10:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.
St. Francis Convent, Little Falls

The Franciscan Sisters invite former students, staff, and faculty to gather on Sunday, July 16, 2017, for Mass and lunch.

This is a great opportunity to enjoy one another's company, to share memories, and to nurture and promote the Franciscan spirit that was instilled during your high school years.

Please send your name, address, year of graduation and phone number, together with your registration fee of \$20, by July 1 to:

Mary Ellen Imdieke
3395 125 Ave. NE Blaine, MN 55449-6572
Phone: 763-785-0295 • E-mail: sfhs.reunion@outlook.com

The icon: Jesus in Gethsemane

Sister Joan Tuberty

This icon, more than any other, enabled me to hear the silence of Jesus as he knelt in prayer. David Stanley tells us that a whole school of prayer is contained in Gethsemane. It is here that Jesus surrenders his life freely and reaches out to death and the pain and suffering that accompanies it. Repeatedly in nature, plants and animals die to become the food and energy for other living things. In nature we see that death serves the larger purpose of life. How awesome the surrender of Jesus, the anointed, christed-one, offering his flesh and blood as the nourishment for humanity, as food for our journey! Lord, teach us to pray! Lord, teach us to be with you in the ultimate surrender of our lives in our Gethsemane!

I do not pretend to understand this icon and its meaning. I think it pertains to the surrender of our egos to the deeper spiritual self, a death to self which serves a larger, fuller, deeper life. I painted this icon to symbolize the surrender asked of me in responding to my religious vocation.



*“My Father, if this cannot pass me by without drinking it, may your will be done.”
(Matt. 26:42)*



In loving memory

Sister Mary Evangeline Stanoch, 95, died February 23, 2017, at St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, Minn. Eleanor Stanoch, the sixth of 10 children of Michael and Mary (Pintok) Stanoch, was born April 19, 1921, in Opole, Minn. Eleanor attended school in Holdingford. She was eager to learn and was able to complete her elementary education by the time she was 12 years old. Due to the ill health of her mother, Eleanor put off high school for two years to help with the work around the house. After that, she attended St. Francis High School.

Sister Seraphine, an older sister of Eleanor, was a Franciscan Sister in Little Falls. Eleanor also felt the call to religious life and made arrangements to enter the Franciscan Community, but two weeks before the entrance date, she canceled and went to work at St. Benedict's Convent in St. Joseph, Minn. During her time there, Eleanor became acquainted with Mathilda Jonas and Helen Zenzen (later Sister Mary Celine and Sister Mary Rachel), who joined the Franciscan Sisters. Eleanor followed them two weeks later. She was accepted as a Franciscan Sister on August 12, 1940, and received the name Sister Mary Evangeline. She made first profession of vows on August 12, 1942, and final vows on August 12, 1945.

Sister Evangeline enrolled at St. Gabriel's School of Nursing and became a registered nurse. She served as a staff nurse, medical-surgical supervisor and director of nursing. Physical limitations caused her to turn to pastoral care after more than 30 years nursing. Patients and staff appreciated her gentle, compassionate presence. To her, these encounters were both an awesome challenge and a humbling experience.

In loving memory



Sister Mary Vianney Weier, 92, died on April 4, 2017, at St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, Minn. On the feast of Saint Francis, October 4, 1924, Helene was born at St. Joseph's Hospital, Dodgeville, Wis., to Francis "Frank" and Nora (Coffey) Weier, the seventh of 12 children. When she was baptized, she was given the name Helene Frances. Her parents were hardworking farmers of German-Irish descent, with a deep faith they imparted to their children. "God will provide," was the phrase often heard in the Weier home.

Helene attended a one-room school named the Weier School, as it was built on their property. She spent one year at the Dodgeville High School and the remaining three years at St. Francis High School, Little Falls.

Inspired by her older sisters, Sisters Lenore and Camillus, Helene entered St. Francis Convent in her senior year. On entering the novitiate, Helene was given the name Sister Mary Vianney. She made her final vows on August 12, 1947. Other siblings also entered the Franciscan Order: Sister Elizabeth (Urban) entered St. Francis Convent, Helen became a Poor Clare and one brother, Thomas, became a Capuchin Friar.

Sister Vianney became a registered nurse and later a surgical nurse. She enjoyed the many years she served the sick and dying always looking out for the good of the patient. Beginning in 1989, Sister Vianney moved into pastoral care. She felt it was a deep privilege to be present at the time of a patient's death. Sister Vianney continued her pastoral care as she ministered to the elderly sisters at St. Francis Convent. She was known for her compassion and understanding of each individual sister's needs.

In loving memory



Sister Elizabeth (Betty) Martell, 89, died April 15, 2017, at St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, Minn. Betty was born April 26, 1927, in River Falls, Wis., the third of nine children of the late Flavien and Florence (Gartland) Martell. She was accepted as a Franciscan Sister of Little Falls, Minnesota, on August 12, 1948, receiving the name Sister Mary Pierre. She made her final vows on August 12, 1953.

During her high school years, the Presentation Sisters from Fargo came to Grafton to catechize and work with the youth. The sisters made a lasting impression and planted the seeds of Betty's vocation. After graduation, she worked for several years and searched out different communities. She settled on the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls.

Sister Betty was a perceptive, insightful person who ministered well with teens and women who were trying to find meaning in their lives. She had a thoughtful and understanding heart that reached out to those who needed her assistance. In her ministries of social work, she utilized all these qualities serving in Breckenridge, Little Falls and the St. Cloud Children's Home; in Lexington, Miss.; and at Becker House in Chicago.

Betty's sister, Jeanette, followed her into the Franciscan Community and they shared a close bond throughout their lives. Family ties were very important, and both sisters reached out to family members especially to their sister, Yvonne. She continued to enjoy long walks in nature and was faithful to an exercise regime. Sister Betty was an avid reader, an expert Scrabble player and baked many delicious cookies.



- SAVE THE DATE -

Green Fair Folk Festival
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