We are living through challenging times. As we rang in the New Year, things were looking good for 2020. Just a few short months later, the world is in the midst of a pandemic. Are there ways we, as Franciscan Associates, could approach these challenging times?

I recently read an article from David Brooks, an opinion columnist for The New York Times. The article was titled, "Pandemics Kill Compassion, Too — You may not like who you’re about to become." He writes, “Some disasters, like hurricanes and earthquakes, can bring people together, but if history is any judge, pandemics generally drive them apart.” He goes on to give examples of different pandemics throughout history: the plague, a TB epidemic, cholera, etc. He says that as things got worse, people sadly found themselves setting aside their usual virtues and values. After the epidemic subsided, people realized their failures. The epidemic became a subject families no longer talked about because they would have to recognize their failings.

I spoke with Sister Michelle L’Allier about the article. She recalled a story she heard a long time ago from one of the older sisters in the community about an epidemic happening in Little Falls and how the sisters helped. She was able to find the story in the Community’s history, “In the Shadow of His Wings” (p. 281). In brief: In 1918, there was a smallpox epidemic in Little Falls and some of the girls in the orphanage contracted the disease. The decision was made to quarantine the children. Tents were erected near the river and the boys and girls were separated, as were the sick girls from the healthy ones. Three sisters were assigned to care for the children. The sisters lived in the tent encampments, too, and were not able to attend mass or receive any of the sacraments. Food was brought out to the encampment and a doctor visited the sick on occasion. This went on for three months.

The convent’s routine schedule was disrupted in several ways — it is specially

Living the Gospel courageously ... with energy, spirit, peace.
noted two major events were postponed: the sister’s retreat and the annual profession of vows. It is noted that because very drastic measures were immediately taken to prevent the spread of smallpox, the illness was limited to a few girls. (The text did not mention any deaths.)

The reason I mention this story is to show that when epidemics arose in the past, the Franciscan Sisters took decisive action to care for the ill, but at the same time limit the exposure to the community. These stories speak well of the actions of the community as they met the challenges upholding Franciscan values and action. While today we may not need to set up tents along the river, the sisters will take some difficult but necessary steps. As people who espouse following the example of the lives of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, how will we apply our values and virtues in our lives during these challenging times?

I was heartened to read recent emails concerning the ongoing work of associates Harry and Mary Fleegel as they continue to aid the homeless in the St. Cloud area. While this is one couple who are associates, I realize there may be many of us aiding those in need in various ways, both simple and complex. Our stories of support may be known only to those we help and ourselves.

Saints Francis and Clare were known for sensing and seeing people in need. While they didn’t have great means for helping, they did what they could. Here is one story that may be enlightening:

The mother of two of the brothers once came to the saint, confidently asking for alms. Sharing her pain, the holy father said to Brother Peter of Catania: "Can we give some alms to our mother?" He used to call the mother of any brother his mother and the mother of all the brothers. Brother Peter replied: "There is nothing left in the house which we could give her." Then he added: "We do have one New Testament, for reading the lessons at matins, since we don't have a breviary." Blessed Francis said to him: "Give our mother the New Testament so she can sell it to care for her needs, for through it we are reminded to help the poor. I believe that God will be pleased more by the giving than by the reading." So the book was given to the woman, and the first Testament in the Order was given away though this sacred piety.


Here is my challenge: Let us continue to see the world with Franciscan eyes – seeing and anticipating the needs of others and be of assistance as much as possible. When this pandemic is over, may we have good stories to tell our family, friends, sisters and associates, of how our Franciscan values guided us in these difficult times. Hopefully, in a couple of years, we will be able to say, “Remember back in 2020 when we…”

Associates Harry & Mary Fleegel
When Geri asked me to write this, my first thought was of the labyrinth on the grounds of the motherhouse in Little Falls. I remember walking the labyrinth when I was there for Associate Commitment day on October when it was very warm. I have since spent some quiet retreat days there, sometimes walking in my bare feet. To me, the labyrinth connects me with all the sisters who have ever walked the grounds or lived the Franciscan life. I feel like they are all watching over me, helping me to identify with Saints Francis and Clare and grow in my own spirituality.

I learned in the Engaging Franciscan Spirituality cohort that Francis wanted to be moved to the earth in his final hours to be connected to Sister Mother Earth when he greeted Sister Death. While I mostly find the labyrinth a place of joy, I can understand the need to feel the earth connected to me through my feet.

Walking the labyrinth brings to mind the Canticle of the Creatures and the care of Sister Mother Earth, which sustains and governs us. Science is now catching up with Saint Francis in that research shows that walking barefoot or “earthing” has a number of health advantages, such as increasing antioxidants, reducing inflammation and improving sleep. Earthing means walking barefoot on soil, grass or sand. These health benefits sustain us and help govern our lives.

The labyrinth connects me to Brother Sun, who warms the earth as I walk upon the grass, feel the coolness of the stepping stones, see the images on the stones that prompt meditation. I feel Brother Wind on my face and hands. He whispers through the tall grasses, sending calming thoughts and happy memories of my childhood playing in the fields surrounding our home. There is also a reminder of Sister Death as the changing of the seasons brings the labyrinth through different stages. In Autumn, the flowers and trees fade and it becomes cold; in winter, there is the shortening of days and a sense of dreariness. For me, winter is brightened by the snow which makes all things white and new, giving more color to the evergreens. Spring is the beginning of new life. The flowers and trees are budding and in the full bloom of summer, we have the beauty and fragrance of the flowers.

I have a sense of peace in the garden that I’m protected from the chaos of the world for a while. There is calm. I can bring that calmness home with me and it will always be with me. During the routine of life, work, chores, visiting, I remind myself of the calm I experienced and bring it into my prayer time. Becoming a Franciscan associate has brought me such joy and an awareness of the earth and all its benefits.

“Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, all praise is yours, all glory, all honor and all blessing!”
Several of our countries have adopted measures to stop the spread of COVID-19: states of emergency, isolation, quarantine, etc.

We are showing more than ever how we are interrelated between all human beings (and other living beings) on this planet Earth that lovingly hosts us.

One of the coincidences that those of us who are part of this great Franciscan community have had to experience is to suspend our meetings.

We received an email from our minister, Geri Dietz, inviting us to be creative and continue in a Franciscan relationship in some way, without the monthly meetings.

For some years now in Latin America, we have chosen to maintain and participate in a couple of social networks, Facebook and WhatsApp, as extra communication channels. In these groups are some sisters, some associates and some applicants from Ecuador, Colombia, Nicaragua, Mexico and the United States. They have been tools in which personal messages come and go, chains with greetings, etc.

Given the need this month, we included several people who already had one of these networks and began to challenge ourselves to see if we would introduce ourselves again (at least by sending our name and geographic location) and/or participate in a possible video call (via Zoom).

The road is long. There will be time for responses and accompaniment. There will be times of fear and lethargy. There will be times of individual and world need. This is when community is vital.

As followers of the saints of Assisi, we have a call to be instruments of peace, forgiveness, joy, light and hope. And this mission is also essential in our written communications, that each word we send, by any means, is our authorship and not a "copy paste" of so many chains that will come to us daily. May each word we send be from our own experience. May it carry truth and hope. We don't need more than this, but to be connected. We have made sure to pray for each other. Blessed is the brother or sister who has listened and encouraged another.

This pandemic can bring us a second chance as human beings who inhabit a planet in urgent need of life changes. That we learn to live without consuming to the extreme, without running from one place to another, by looking into each other's eyes and spending quality time with the family, with the community.

AS Verónica Rivadeneira, Quito, Ecuador
As Palm Sunday approaches, Sister Rose Mae Rausch recalls several Palm Sunday celebrations during the eight years she lived in Venezuela during the mid-1970s to mid-1980s. Her parish, El Buen Pastor, was divided into neighborhood or ‘barrio’ groups, which met weekly to pray together and discuss needs in their small communities. On Palm Sunday, processions started in each ‘barrio’ with everyone waving palms, branches and flowers picked from their own yards, while walking and singing through the streets. More adults, youth, children and dogs joined in as the groups advanced. Coming from all sides, the processions converged at the church where a teenage boy, riding a donkey, played the part of Jesus on the first Palm Sunday. "It was a thrilling spectacle," says Sister Rose Mae, "watching this grand convergence of hundreds of people, called by God, coming together for Eucharist. There were so many people – all welcoming each other – that we had to celebrate Mass outside the church. It was a deeply spiritual experience."

It is easy to imagine similar celebrations in Saint Francis’ day. Francis insisted the brothers walk and not ride horses, even on their multiple trips to Rome and other places. One can imagine the crowds of people – even animals – that may have followed along behind the friars on special feast days, participating in the joy of the Gospel.

Like Francis and his followers, Sisters Rose Mae, Carol Schmit, Janice Wiechman, two priests and one laywoman who made up the Pastoral Team of the parish El Buen Pastor, lived in conditions similar to the poor people among whom they served. They embraced a simple lifestyle and rejoiced in the richness they experienced as they came to know Jesus more deeply in the faces of the poor. They recognized the need for their own conversion as Francis did when he embraced the leper and his deepest fears, and came out of the experience transformed.

For this reason, Sister Rose Mae is deeply pained by news coming out of Venezuela today about children sifting through garbage dumps for bits of food or recyclable items instead of attending school. The posturing and aggression of people in power, both within and outside the country, only serves to aggravate the suffering of the poor.

Like Francis, may we come to realize that beyond the physical structures needing repair, God calls us to renewal of mind, heart and commitment in order to see God suffering in our world today along with the homeless, the immigrants, the imprisoned, the grieving, the poor in our neighborhoods and throughout our world. Entering into the lives and suffering of our sisters and brothers, as did Sister Rose Mae and others, we will experience Jesus suffering and crucified again in our day. As we work, pray and walk together, we shall catch a glimpse of “grand convergence,” transformation and newness of life!

Reference materials provided by Sisters Rose Mae and Carol Schmit contributed to this article.
Doing “little things” the Franciscan way

As Mary Dongoski, Howard Lake, Minn.

Note: Mary Dongoski is a recent associate, having made her commitment last October. The article below is taken from an email she sent regarding a visit she made to a nursing home prior to the coronavirus restrictions. She graciously gave her permission for us to share her story. We hope you are inspired to do “little things” the Franciscan way as well!

As a part of my being a little Franciscan, I’ve been visiting the nursing homes in Winsted and Howard Lake, as well as the lodge where folks live independently with some assistance.

In a trip to Winsted about 10 miles away, I went to see two of our church people from Waverly. I told the one gal that I was sorry I could not come for her birthday party as I was with the Franciscans. Lo and behold, another lady in the dining room heard me, saying she knows the Franciscans. She said, “I know Geri Dietz.” Her name is Carol Dagit. (Note: Carol has been an associate for 20 years!)

I decided that I will start visiting with her and see if we can start doing little things the Franciscan way together! Thank you, Mary, for sharing your delightful story with us!

Due to concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19, the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls have cancelled the following events:

- All Worship Services until May 17 are closed to public, including Holy Week services
- Centering Prayer & Taize Prayer services during April and May
- Family of Origin Workshop—March 20-22
- Concerts and recitals during April and May
- Good Friday Walk for Peace—April 10
- Pasta Bar fundraiser—April 18
- Earth Day Prayer Service—April 22
- Taste of St. Cloud—May 4

Thank you for your understanding and for helping us keep our sisters safe!

O God, like children we fear what we cannot see and draw back from what is difficult for us. In your compassionate mercy, give us eyes to see the light and hearts to embrace the challenges of our human condition. We ask this through Christ, who goes before us in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Franciscan Prayer Book, p. 191
For AS Mary Steinke who has a blood clot. We pray that it goes away with medicine and prayers.

For AS Alejandrina Proaño’s and her children while the world says stay at home: Sandra lives in Quito, Ecuador (she has breast cancer), she needs to continue working in restaurants if possible to help her family. Rodrigo lives in Spain (he has had an open heart surgery twice) and his work is on the streets. Christian lives in London (he suffers from diabetes) and his job is cleaning. Angelo lives in the Amazon region in Ecuador and his job could finish.

For AP Kris Shefveland’s mom, Norma, who is at Country Manor Long Term Care Center, and all those working in senior housing/nursing facilities during this time of COVID-19. We pray for protection of all our elderly and those who work and minister to them.

For ASs Indira López, who is a teacher, and Luis González, who is a sacristan in the church of Puembo (in Ecuador), and others like them who are facing financial hardship if the coronavirus quarantine continues for very long.

For AS Merida Wilson who is suffering from a concussion.

Health and safety for our most vulnerable during this pandemic.

Please pray for Associate Gerry Leonard and her family. Her husband, Michael, passed away at the age of 79.

For AS Monica Rudawski, as she faces two complicated surgeries on her hip and leg.

For AS Jennie Schlumpberger, who has severe Rheumatoid arthritis.

For AS Mary Dongoski, whose left heart ventricle is working overtime. Also for her throat/voicebox, which has been damaged and is unable to be treated by surgery or medicine.

Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them. (James 3:14)
April 2020

A Rose to the Living

Birthdays -- Sisters

3  S Maureen Kelly
4  S Michelle L’Allier
6  S Colette Toenies
10  S Betty Ann Berger
22  SM Callista Robinson
24  SM Juanita Mauer

Feastdays

8  SM Julien Dirkes
23  SM Georgine Larson
29  SM Siena Wald
29  S Kay Watts

Birthdays -- Associates / Applicants

2  Dawn Roginski
3  Estrella Carrera
3  Megan Rohrer
3  Jim Vogel
4  Clara Helvig
5  Sheila Gardner
6  Mary Pull
6  Monica Rudawski
9  Deb Colombe
10  Terry Sakry
15  Tully Ellsberg
15  Erika Spofford
16  Tom Noud
17  Jim Blake
17  Jan Duhnke
17  Floria Hernández
18  Russ Kadow
18  Allen Webskowski
19  Maria Karpinski
19  Teresa Voge
21  Luis González
21  Norma Salazar
22  Cindy Eversman
23  Camilo Barrera
23  Gloria Castro
25  Kathleen Brusso
27  Mary Poser
30  Arlen Casco
30  Jerry Park
30  Betty Pasela

A Prayer for the Dead

1/2007  AS Mildred Reynolds
2/2012  SM Marcelline Virnig
3/1971  SM Mildred Heavey
3/1987  AS Lani Zangs
3/2010  SM Deborah Honer
4/2012  S Marcella Schuller
4/2016  AS Anne Rinde
4/2017  SM Vianney Weier
6/1998  AS Alice Zangs
6/2006  SM Paschaline Stengelein
7/1907  SM Joseph White
9/1905  SM Dolorosa Jolin
9/1968  SM Stanislaus Sczygiel
10/2006  AS Lois Buhse
10/2008  AS Cindy McElhone
12/2005  AS Art Marty
13/1982  SM Cecile Meyer
13/2018  AS Fr. Gene Heerdink
15/2011  AS Tom Pendergast
15/2017  S Elizabeth Martell
16/2002  SM Lucina Ahles
17/2006  AS Lucille (Sally) Anderson
19/1962  SM Magdalen Goldin Gamades
19/1996  SM Alexandra
19/1998  AS Margaret Lindahl
21/2019  AS Betty Kampa Miller
22/2004  AS Fr Thomas Maney Gallagher
23/1910  SM Immaculate
23/1968  SM Emerita Ohmann
25/1971  SM Celestine Schindler
27/1982  SM Eugenia Schneider
28/1912  SM Agnes Keppers
28/1990  SM Teresita Sobiech
30/1940  SM Alexius Blonigen

Go green and receive The Associate via email!
Contact Christi (chartwell@fslf.org) to be added to the list.