

A new kinship with all creation

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Franciscan Sisters and Associates have long been attentive to caring for creation. In 2008, *Our Journey* highlighted the prairie restoration undertaken at our former farmland, now retreat space named Umbria, south of Little Falls. More recently, Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si* calls us all to deepen our care efforts. Slowly we are growing past the earlier scriptural and Western cultural sense that we humans have dominion or stewardship over all God created and continues to create. Instead, in the words of Saint Francis, each part of God's creation is sister or brother. Today we are striving to deepen our understanding and living of Saint Francis's intuition that everything is connected, that we exist as kin.

So, during direction-setting meetings last October, our sisters affirmed a dream for the future of our Little Falls Motherhouse campus. Over the next 10 years, as sisters' need for space decreases, we hope to transform the campus into an environmental learning center on land restored to a more native habitat. It will be a space of beauty welcoming to wildlife and all human visitors, wholistic in its educational service, incorporating our existing Music Center and Health & Wellness Center, and valuing a spirituality of integral ecology, that everything is connected in relationships of kinship.

The journey to realize our dream will involve new partnerships and collaborations, an ongoing focus on land justice issues, priority for underserved communities, and help with funding from donors and grants. In addition to educational and recreational offerings, this center will provide new and varied job opportunities for the area. Ultimately, it will be part of our legacy.

To date, we have partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for restoring prairie grasses and forbs on the now invasive grassland areas of campus. The Morrison County Soil and Water Conservation District is offering us valuable technical support. This spring we will be extending our informational outreach in the Little Falls area, following initial contacts with area leaders that have been affirming, even enthusiastically so. National contacts with nature centers and environmental educators also share the helpful wisdom of their experiences.

We Franciscan Sisters, with our associates and staff, have begun another long journey together. As poet Antonio Machado says, "we make the road by walking." Today, it is by listening and responding to the cries of the earth and the cries of those made poor—all creatures great and small.

