

Our Journey

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FRANCISCAN SISTERS
OF LITTLE FALLS, MINNESOTA

Our Journey

SPRING 2021 • VOL. 39 NO. 1

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 Franciscan community as we work in joyful service in the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare.

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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.

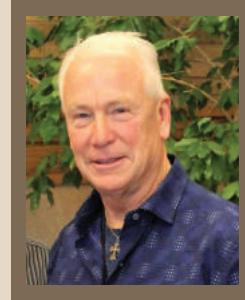
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Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls,
Minnesota



When we offer NO RESISTANCE TO LOVE

Associate Garry Dahl

*When we offer no resistance to love
The hungry are fed
The poor and naked are clothed*



*When we offer no resistance to love
The homeless are found shelter
Refugees are offered welcome,
while fear borne of hate is given
no home*

*When we offer no resistance to love
The inherent dignity of all God's children is honored
The sacredness of all life is known and loved as One*

*When we offer no resistance to love
The One Being who is Being itself is true sanctuary
Those suffering violence and oppression are given refuge*

*When we offer no resistance to love
The Spirit and Will of God finds expression
We are made whole in the One who is Love*

*When we offer no resistance to love
The cross of a suffering humanity is borne
The joy and promise of Christ experienced*

*When we offer no resistance to love
Loving our neighbor as our very self is a command lived
and obeyed
The image and likeness of God is as Christ in us*

*When we offer no resistance to love
Heaven is in our midst right here on earth
We know our very essence is of God*

*When we offer no resistance to love
Grace and Mercy heal us
We know that all is gift and that we are entitled to nothing*

*When we offer no resistance to love
There is no scarcity of God's Blessings
The world is made anew*

*When we offer no resistance to love
We are our true selves in this one love which is in Christ
We are whole in God's vision for our lives*

*When we offer no resistance to love
We are in the flow of eternal relationship with love
God's very self in Christ and the Holy Spirit in us forever*



Sister M. Siena Wall



Sister Louise McKigney



Sister Maureen Kelly



Sister M. Maureen Blenkush



Sister M. Eileen Ghesquiere



Sister M. Fabian Schneider



Sister M. Therese Lenz



Sister M. Blase Kulzer



Sister M. Cecilia Schmitt



Sister Cleone Renner

Greetings,

This issue of *Our Journey* also serves as our annual report. Hundreds of names are listed within these pages. They are friends, family and partners who support the mission and ministries of the Franciscan Sisters and their gospel way of life. Last spring when COVID-19 began to take hold, we prayed for you and your loved ones, for the nation and the world. We continue to pray for you and know you pray for us as well. We thank you. In addition to prayers, you responded generously to our requests for financial support. Our elevator and Christmas appeals exceeded our expectations. Support for our retired sisters and our outreach ministries remained strong throughout the year. Thank you!



The Franciscan Sisters are a community that thrives on relationship and hospitality. It was a sad day in March 2020 when we closed our doors to the public in response to the growing threat of the coronavirus. No one could predict what the weeks and months would hold. Our first priority was the safety and well-being of the sisters at the motherhouse. For a time, we did well and kept COVID-19 at bay. Despite our efforts, the virus found its way into St. Francis Convent in the fall; a number of sisters tested positive and two died soon after diagnosis.

Sadly, ten Franciscan Sisters passed away since the last issue of *Our Journey*. Each was remembered in a simple burial service with a promise that a memorial Mass will follow later. We still hold onto that hope. They ministered far and wide—California, Mississippi, Arizona, Tennessee, the Midwest and across Minnesota in too many places to name. We remember these beautiful sisters. You can read more about their lives of service on our website: fslf.org/inmemory.

To prepare for this issue and highlight as many sisters as possible, I posed this question: What have we learned? Enjoy the sisters' thoughtful responses. Thank you for supporting the Franciscan Sisters in prayer and with your generous gifts. May God bless you and keep you today and always.

Blessings,

Elizabeth Rydeen

Elizabeth Mahoney Rydeen
Director of Development



Dear Friends,

Years ago, when I was returning from ministry in Venezuela, I attended a gathering of missionaries who had served in countries throughout the globe. There were stories of hard moments, living in a culture unlike the one of our childhood. There was a free flow of conversation expressing what we learned from persons who lived a different, and I might say, much simpler life than most of us gringos. One priest who had served years in Sierra Leone, West Africa, taught us a greeting that is as common as our “How are you?” We practiced, **fa da, ghi** (rhymes with she) **ub**. In their blend of English and local languages, it carries the profound meaning, “I fell down, but I got up.” Say it again, “**fa da, ghi ub**.” Hear the resemblance?

Forty years later I see how this greeting can describe my experiences since March 2020. I fell down, but I got up.

I fell down when seven sisters died within six weeks of each other; two from the coronavirus, a pandemic still denied by many. I fell down

when we retired the 2020 calendars but still couldn’t take down the “**No visitors at this time**” signs on our doors. I fell down when our national capitol suffered an invasion by our own violent citizens!

Remembering our brothers and sisters from Sierra Leone who say many times a day, “I got up,” I acknowledge our many reasons for hope in 2021.

I look again at the essentials of our Franciscan life. I have only to go to the Poverty section of our Constitutions to receive the gentle reminder:

“In our life in community each one shares her personal gifts and talents in order to enrich the life of our congregation as well as to enrich the lives of those we serve.”

We have each other. Our long months of trusting have shown how the goodness of God is constant. I stand up with gratitude when we receive the steady stream of letters from you our generous supporters, family and friends. A reason I stand up this year is to join with global efforts to carry out the goals of Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si*. He asks us to “live as conscious members of the world community” and specifies “our common home is falling into serious disrepair . . . Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can redirect our steps, that we can always do something to save our common home.”

Starting now, I am banishing some words from my 2021 vocabulary. For sure *hope, prayer, relationship, responsible stewardship and gratitude* will be prominent in my vocabulary in this fresh new year.

Peace and all good,

Sister Carol Schmit

Sister Carol Schmit
Community Minister



San Felix, Venezuela 1982

The Tenderloin votes!

Sister Carmen Barsody

Faithful Fools, together with other organizations and residents, take seriously the right to vote. We work together, not only to get out the vote and make voting accessible, but we also work together so people are registered ahead of time and informed about the issues and the candidates running for office.

In the past (pre-COVID) we were a place where people could come and learn how to read the materials sent out by the office of elections and how to look at the various sides of issues. As part of a citizen group called TL(Tenderloin) Votes, we would host sessions with candidates running for public office so residents could have a chance to come to know them, ask challenging questions and make an informed vote for themselves and the well-being of the larger community. It is part of our mission to be a place of education and advocacy. We value deeply being a multi-cultural community with many diverse strengths and needs.

In the midst of differing opinions, we work together. This year, though we could not bring people from the neighborhood together for informative meetings due to shelter-in-place orders, we were able to be a polling place. Chucky, one of the people we have walked with for many years, has worked the polls on election day for the past few years. This year we loved having her at Faithful Fools to welcome people and make sure everyone was registered when they arrived.



Charlie, our faithful Puppet for the People, demonstrated the process—checking to see if his name was on the list.



Many faithful poll workers made it a fine day at the home of Faithful Fools. Pictured in front of the Fool's Court: Sam Dennison, "Charlie," Chucky Torres and Sister Carmen Barsody.

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 a federal income tax deduction, Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota (FSLF), 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 a foreign charity or religious institute.

Sister Doretta Meier's second career

Sister Elise Saggau

After many years of health care administration and having served in congregational leadership for five years, Sister Doretta Meier decided to change her career path. In 2015, she took a position at the Alexandria office of a Minnesota state program called "Experience Works," which assists persons over 55 to find jobs. She found the clerical work a pleasant break from the hectic pace she had been used to. One day, she read an ad about a workshop for training substitute teachers. The only pre-requisite was a bachelor's degree. Intrigued, she attended the 3-day session, one of 18 participants—all professionals looking for a career change. She then applied for and received her "Short Call Substitute" teaching license and moved to St. Cloud to begin her new profession. Starting as an observer, she felt particularly encouraged when another, an observer, told her that she brought a special sense of peace into whatever room she entered.

Sister Doretta decided to pursue substitute teaching seriously. She became an employee of Teachers on Call, a multi-state organization that partners with over 750 school districts, charter schools and early childhood education centers to provide substitute teachers. Within a year and a half, she had subbed in all the public schools in St. Cloud, K through 12! Because of the number of immigrant students at the upper levels, she found herself primarily teaching English as a second language (ESL). She proved so successful that she was soon asked by one of the schools to place her name on the "preferred call list." By doing this, she was able to be specifically named by a client school as a substitute of choice. In March 2016, she was nominated as Minnesota Public Schools' Teachers on Call "Substitute of the Month," and again in October 2017.

In fall 2017, Sister Doretta was asked to sub for an ESL teacher who was on medical leave. The initial assignment was for a few weeks (10 hours a week), but it ended up being the entire semester. During this time, she also subbed in other classrooms throughout the district. To improve her teaching skills, she took an online graduate



Students are eager to learn and share their different cultures with "Teacher Doretta."

course at St. Cloud State University on methods and strategies of teaching ESL. Deciding to apply for a Minnesota State teacher's license, she worked under a mentor while taking a training course in cultural competency. She then passed her licensure examination on the first try. She now holds a Tier 1 Educator License from the State of Minnesota, allowing her to teach English as a Second Language level K-12. In addition, she also holds a Short Call Substitute Teaching license.

Over the years, Sister Doretta has come to prefer teaching immigrant adult learners in upper level courses. Many have been professionals in their own countries. Some are seeking, not only English proficiency, but their graduate education development certification (GED or high school diploma equivalency). Most, of course, strive to improve their English in order to get better-paying jobs.

Sister Doretta finds these adult students appreciative and

-Continued, Page 7

committed. They call her “Teacher Doretta” and are happy to share their life experiences and cultural backgrounds. Many work all day and come to class in the evening. Some have children at home. All have a commitment to learn the language of their new country and overcome the challenges they face. They respond eagerly to the sincere attention Sister Doretta gives them and to her own passion for teaching and for helping people develop needed skills.

The year 2020 provided great challenges for Sister Doretta as for all teachers. Distance teaching required a different vision and the development of new skills. She met these challenges head on, successfully switching to online methods. While this is not as satisfying, she still successfully guides her students and helps them along their chosen paths. Her mastery of new computer skills and programs makes it possible for her to carry forward her education mission successfully.

Sister Doretta never counts the hours she puts in. She is constantly inspired by the students’ positive attitudes and their joy in the opportunities that life in the United States affords them. She also delights in learning about other cultures firsthand. Her new niche suits her very well. While she enjoyed leadership in health care institutions and in her religious congregation, she finds now that all the abilities she developed in her previous ministries can be used effectively in teaching. The primary factors, she claims, are good relational skills and the instilling of enthusiasm. Her favorite quote is: “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire” (William Butler Yeats). Sister Doretta likes people and experiences them as gift. “This is what it’s all about,” she says, summing up neatly the success factor in both her first and second careers.

Franciscan influence on the Stations of the Cross

Associate Rick Dietz, director of the Franciscan Life Center



Praying the Stations of the Cross has become a standard tradition during Lent for most Catholics. But it wasn’t always that way. In fact, it was through the influence of Franciscans that it came to be at all.

Until the 14th century there were no Stations of the Cross. In 1342 the Franciscans were given “custody” of the holy sites in the Holy Land by Pope Clement VI. It was shortly thereafter that we have documents that speak of pilgrims praying at “stations” or stops along the streets of Jerusalem. William Wey, an English pilgrim, visited the Holy Land in 1462, and is credited with the term “stations.” While over the years pilgrims prayed at these stations and received special blessings while doing so, Franciscans knew that only a relative few of the faithful would be able to visit the Holy Land and walk the streets of Jerusalem.

In 1686 the Franciscans petitioned Pope Innocent XI asking for permission to erect Stations of the Cross in all of their churches. The Franciscans’ request was granted (after the pope’s personal travel to the Holy Land). Thus, Stations of the Cross were only permitted in Franciscan parish churches at this time. In 1731 Pope Clement XII permitted other churches to have the Stations of the Cross

erected as long as they were put in place by Franciscans. It was at this time that the number of “stations” were set at 14. It wasn’t until 1742 when Pope Benedict XIV exhorted all priests to have stations in their churches. In 1857 permission was given to churches in England to install Stations of the Cross even without the availability of Franciscans to do it. Finally, in 1862 all restrictions were removed and it was permitted that any church could erect the Stations of the Cross, without the need for Franciscans to do so, as long as the local bishop approved.

As you can see, Franciscans were instrumental in the development and the spreading of the devotion of the Stations of the Cross. I hope that as you join your church members in praying the Stations of the Cross, you might remember the role Franciscans played in its inspiration and development.





Fratelli Tutti – Who is my brother?

Sister Jan Kilian

We fail to see that we are all one, not separate from any of the totality of God's creation, human or otherwise. We just "don't get it."

One of our goals for 2021 is to open our minds and hearts to outrage at what we are doing to our home, our Mother Earth. How could we Franciscans have tolerated her destruction for so long? Our founder, Saint Francis, loved Earth as his mother and cared for all creatures as his brothers and sisters. We sing in his *Canticle*, “Be praised, my Lord, for our sister, Mother Earth, who nourishes and watches us while bringing forth abundant fruits.”

Francis knew himself as brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh. In his letter on fraternity and social friendship, Pope Francis begins with the words Saint Francis used to address the Friars in his community: *Fratelli Tutti*, i.e. all brothers. Pope Francis quotes

Saint Francis calling for a love that transcends the barriers of geography: “In his simple and direct way, St. Francis expressed the essence of brotherly openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives.” Both men witness to brotherhood and sisterhood in their travels to share with people from other faiths and cultures: Saint Francis met Sultan Malik-el-Kamil as a brother in Egypt during the time of the Crusades, and Pope Francis meets members of many faiths on Earth, now planning to go to Iraq in August.

Most of our world today live in “a cool, comfortable, globalized indifference while failing to realize that we are all in the same boat.” We so readily think in terms of “us” and “them.” We fail to see that we are all one, not separate from any of the totality of God’s creation, human or otherwise. We just “don’t get it.”

One of the highlights of *Fratelli Tutti* is the story told by Jesus of a sick man lying by the side of the road, passed by and ignored by his own people. I know the story well. I also have crossed to the other side of the street to avoid people, not considering them my people who needed my help. Pope Francis says, “The decision to include or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project. Each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders.” Our challenge today is whether or not we will bend down and help another get up or ignore and pass by.

Jesus tells us this story for a reason. He and Pope Francis encourage us to persevere in love, to restore dignity to those who are down and out and to build a society worthy of the name, worthy of being called a society—a community, defined as a group of people having a particular characteristic in common. The characteristic we all share as a community is that God sent Jesus to be one with us as our brother. *Fratelli Tutti* is our Holy Father’s call for us to care for all creatures as our brothers and sisters, daughters and sons in one family of God.

When one door closes, another opens

Sister Bea Eichten interviews Sister Callista Robinson

Life changed. Whereas before I could connect with people face-to-face with hugs and kisses—a way of being for Black people—now I need to wear a mask and keep my distance so as to stay safe enough so I can carry on my other responsibilities.ⁱ I needed to focus on other ways of connecting: phone, Zoom, email, letters. *I learned that when one door closes, another opens.*

Our offices at the Learning Center, for people acquiring a GED, lent themselves to staff keeping distance. I serve as assistant administrator/receptionist and greet students, take their temperature and settle them at a computer or with a tutor. Our director's computer skills enabled us to be one of few such centers to remain open with virtual and in-person teaching and tutoring. We learned that many preferred virtual learning because they didn't need to miss work or classes; we may continue this new way of working with students, both near and far. *COVID taught us a new way to serve our students!*

I also work with the Brother Booker Ashe Lay Ministry Program which has continued by Zoom. Through the funding provided by the Black and Indian Grant through the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, we are able to continue to strengthen lay ministry in our parishes.

The community life at our parish shifted greatly—no touching at the sign of peace or the Our Father, having a cantor and piano rather than our choir. We especially missed gathering after Mass for coffee and conversation. Still, people chimed in to help decorate for Christmas. They see what others need and reach out. Our food shelf, though limited, helps those facing food insecurity. *I learned that even when things seem hopeless, hope is there. God is an on-time God and will come through.*

Personally, I find myself singing my mother's favorite hymn:

I don't feel no ways tired,
I come too far from where I started from,
Nobody told me that the road would be easy,
I don't believe He brought me this far to leave me.

I've learned again to rely on the resilience of our people and open myself in prayer to others. I pray for you, you pray for me, and watch God change things.

ⁱI'm busier than ever with the Black Catholic Ministry Commission, Dr. Martin Luther King Prayer Service Committee, Brother Booker Ashe Lay Ministry Program, National Black Sisters Conference, chairing the Prayer and Worship Committee at St. Martin de Porres Parish and the Black Religious and Clergy of Wisconsin.

ⁱⁱThe Brother Booker Ashe Lay Ministry Program bears the name of the late Brother Booker Ashe, a Capuchin religious and founder of the House of Peace in Milwaukee. The Lay Ministry Program is a three-year course of study which forms students who are laity, religious and clergy in meaningful and effective ministry within the Black community and fosters new leadership among Black people.



Sister Callista, far right, participates in an orientation session for those interested in becoming students in the Brother Booker Ashe Lay Ministry Program.ⁱⁱ

On the phone again . . .

Sister Cordy Korkowski, director of Donor Relations

Willie Nelson, move over . . . your hit song from 1980 found a new verse: "On the phone again, just can't wait to get on the phone again." When the pandemic rendered me sheltered in place, the phone became my main tool for keeping in touch with donors.

Though 2020 brought many challenges, the Franciscan Sisters have been lifted high by our faithful friends. When we closed our doors to the public back in March, we panicked a little. What will happen with our appeals and fund-raising efforts?

Well, day after day, the donations continued to arrive and the financial support never let up. We ended our calendar year with jubilation. Thanks to each one whose names are listed in this issue of *Our Journey*, those who are anonymous and others who prayed for our health, safety and well-being. It was pure joy opening the many stacks of envelopes, noticing the online gifts, reading your special requests for prayer and experiencing the flow of support.

Our August appeal for the elevator was a total success . . . the elevator fund went to the 17th floor, so to speak, culminating in funds of \$117,000. No more need to use the hammer or crowbar for imminent repair, as Sisters Carol and Georgine's photo implied.

I was back on the phone in October, calling our 13 matching donors to support the 2020 Give to the Max campaign. In no time at all, we secured \$27,000 in matching funds, paving the way for \$67,913 in donations. Thank you!

Finally, our Christmas appeal for the health care needs of our retired sisters ended with a grand total of \$127,500. I can't stop humming, "On the phone again . . . I can't wait to get on the phone again!" I extend sincere gratitude from my Franciscan community! Together, we are doing Gospel work.



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

This issue of *Our Journey* recognizes individuals, businesses and organizations that have made cash, planned and in-kind gifts and donations to the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, during the calendar year, January 1 – December 31, 2020. Donors who have passed away during 2020 are identified with an asterisk (*) behind their name.

Every effort has been made to recognize donors according to their wishes, including those who wish to remain anonymous. If names have been listed incorrectly, omitted or appear against the donor's wishes, we apologize and encourage you to bring the matter to our attention by contacting Elizabeth Rydeen (320) 632-0624 or erydeen@fslf.org so that the error can be corrected. Thank you.

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We extend our sincere thanks to our many donors who wish to remain anonymous.

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St. Francis Music Center instructors, John Tetrault and Amanda Jansen, are showing off the tubulum they created for the Percussion Ensemble. A tubulum is an instrument, similar to a marimba, made from PVC pipe. Amanda's dad is a plumber and provided lots of help!

The Percussion Ensemble, UROCK, and St. Francis Orchestras are back rehearsing, masked and socially distanced. Most of the teachers are back to teaching in-person lessons, while three teachers are teaching online only. About 150 students are currently taking lessons. The student count is down, but the Music Center is still creating great music and looking forward to having all musicians and ensembles back as soon as possible!

The Music Center strives to make music education available for all who wish to participate. Many families in our rural area struggle to pay for their children's lessons, especially during the pandemic. Donations to the Music Center's financial aid program ensures that all students have the opportunity to benefit from music and the arts. Thank you!

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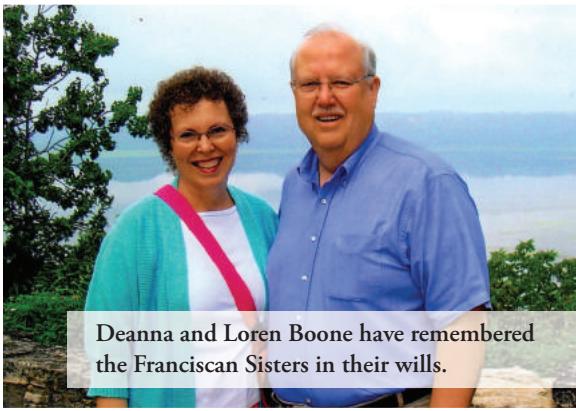
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When I donate to the Franciscan Sisters, it brings back memories of my time at St. Francis High School from 1947-1951. The sisters just keep going, from one generation to another. I feel very fortunate to be a part of this journey with the sisters from the beginning of my days with them until the present. —Joyce H. Thielen, Roseville, Minn.



Deanna and Loren Boone have remembered the Franciscan Sisters in their wills.

We're on her 'list'

Deanna V. Boone

Even during these times of social distancing, Sister Bernice Ebner works solo from her bedroom to maintain contact with members of the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Society.

As director of Planned Giving, she calls donors who are committed to the Franciscan Sisters and their ministries. They enjoy staying in touch, especially during times when visits and events at the convent are not possible.

From time to time, my husband, Loren, and I get a call from Sister Bernice. We're on her "list" so to speak because we've included the Franciscan Sisters in our wills. Loren and I believe in the Franciscan values and hold dear each of the sisters.

I worked with and for the Franciscan Sisters from 2005-2016. We contributed during my employment because we knew how much good they accomplished with our donations. They worked with their hands and hearts, and we wanted to help them make a difference in the world. Circumstances have changed over time and there are fewer sisters in active ministry, but the relationships established and the work accomplished endures. Lay people, especially in the missions, now carry on the work they started years ago.

The sisters' commitment to prayer and their Franciscan values is as strong as ever. I remember well when sisters expressed absolutely no anxiety about their smaller numbers. One said, "Jesus had 11 disciples to carry on His work after death. We know how well that turned out. God has a plan and we place our trust in Him."

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Society

Anyone who names the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, as beneficiary of a will or other estate gift automatically becomes a member of the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Society. Saint Elizabeth, our patron saint of planned giving, was a royal woman who embraced the Franciscan values and dedicated her life to the poor. We extend our sincere thanks to the people named below as well as the members who prefer to remain anonymous.

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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
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I want to donate to the sisters since they are like part of my family. I was a student at St. Francis High School from 1960-1964. I was a "boarder," and the sisters were like my surrogate parents. My parents had wonderful values, reinforced by the sisters. I have lived out these values throughout my life. I developed strong relationships with Sisters Judine Cassidy, Liz Weier, Carol Schmit and many others. —Mary Ellen Imdieke, Blaine, Minn.

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FINANCIAL REPORT 2020

Fiscal Year Oct. 2019–Sept. 2020

Source of Funds

Donations/Grants	\$710,640.33
Memorials	69,529.00
Gift Planning	157,320.19
Sales/Special Events	94,658.21
Total	\$1,032,147.73

Designation of Funds

Franciscan Ministries	\$913,057.09
Franciscan Missions	21,244.50
Retirement Needs	97,846.14
Total	\$1,032,147.73

What have we learned?

In the last issue of *Our Journey*, sisters responded to the question: How are you coping during the pandemic? No one knew what the coming months would hold, no one knew how the coronavirus would change our lives. Recently, the sisters were asked to look back at the last year with this question in mind: What have we learned?



During this pandemic, I found new ways to “be sister!” I read to those with vision problems and lead communal prayer. I learned skills in flower and plant care to beautify our chapel.

—*Sister Ange Mayers*



What I have learned during the pandemic is that I need people. They cannot see my smile under my mask, so they tend not to acknowledge me. Some can catch my “Hello” by looking at my eyes, but many do not. When I offer a wave with my right hand, it’s great to get a wave back.

—*Sister Rose Mae Rausch*



I've experienced God's light in a much deeper way during the darkness of COVID. Also, because of God's grace in giving me strength and courage, I know I can be resilient in adversity. Finally,

I've learned to better balance action and contemplation in my life. BEING and DOING are both very important.

—*Sister Gloria Haider*



During this time, I have come to truly understand and experience the reality that it is God who is in control. I've realized how important self-care is and not just being busy. I am aware that I am not called to be a hermit. I hope we all will be ready for a “new,” whenever and whatever that may be.

—*Sister Gert Brixius*



I've learned during this pandemic a DEEPER GRATITUDE for the life God has given me. I am so grateful and thankful for my faith, community, family, friends, ministry and all that God has placed in my life journey. I

have hope in the future. This cloister period gave me time to reflect on the blessings of God in my life.

—*Sister Marjorie Bischoff*



I have learned to enjoy the present moment with the positive aspects of life and not focus on death, even though many loved ones are enjoying the heavenly banquet. I have learned more patience and to trust in God, for He is the one who organizes our time and our life.

—*Sister Aurora Tovar*



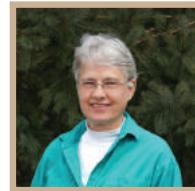
During the pandemic, I have taken time to learn small steps I can take to better care for the earth. During Advent, I received daily reflections from Earthbeat. One reflection invited readers to take a survey on the sustainability of one's lifestyle. I was shocked to see that there would need to be 2-3 planet earths to sustain my lifestyle. I am challenged by the recommendation to eat more plant-based (vegan) meals.

—*Sister Janice Wiechman*



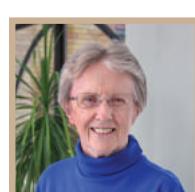
Living during this pandemic? No more taking anything for granted, even the smallest of things and happenings. I have more easily come to see what is real. While quarantined, I have learned how much I need happy people.

—*Sister Mary Zirbes*



I have learned that it takes a village to manage a crisis. My thanks to all our staff for their practical and professional wisdom that have helped us navigate COVID-19. I am also learning that we need to be willing to stick with the “long-haul.” We are so used to quick fixes, aren't we?

—*Sister Carolyn Law*



I took an online class in writing spiritual memoir and am finding light in dark memories. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5).

—*Sister Betty Berger*



I have adjusted to participating in livestream Mass but miss communion the most. Instead of exercising at the gym three times a week, I now follow a senior exercise program on the computer and use two cans of beans for arm weights. I also connect by Zoom with my siblings on special days. —*Sister Janice Welle*



With a little more time, I read *Family Circus* and learned the perfect gift is a hug: relieves tension, improves blood flow, reduces stress, generates good will, builds self-esteem, no batteries required, non-taxable, fully returnable, extremely personal. Let us remember that we all need kindness and deserve the loving embrace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

—*Sister Mary Ann Capizzo*



I learned during the pandemic how to let go and let God be in control of my life. I let go of my agenda and help others when asked. I experienced joy in doing this and found I had enough time to finish my own tasks as well.

—*Sister Loretta Denfeld*



When my daily routine of doing ministry and moving about freely was no longer possible, I discovered creative ways of being and experiencing life: communicating with sisters, family and friends through new technology.

Through Zoom, I participated in "The New Story Festival," a series of monthly reflections on spirituality and other topics. Paying attention to the pandemic protocols is extremely important in keeping ourselves and others free of COVID-19. We can do this! —*Sister Bernice Rieland*



I have seen manifested how ONE being, not even living, can make us aware we are planetary, calling us to be responsible to and for each other, even moving us to transform our daily lives. The challenge from Brother Covid is to face our divisions, our illusions of who we are in our hopes, fears, power struggles and religious righteousness. By highlighting these we can learn where the Spirit leads us to "LOVE ONE ANOTHER." Brother Covid reveals where the Spirit is calling us today to live interconnected, interdependent, interwoven—for "whatsoever you do to the least, you do unto me." —*Sister Ade Kroll*



During the pandemic, I have relearned that I am not the center of the world. I alone cannot save myself from threat or danger, nor can I save another. We do survive when we have a common will like goodness or healing or peace that draws our energies together. Then threat is transformed into a new creation: virus to vaccine, division to endearment, duplicity to communion.

—*Sister Mary Dumonceaux*



One thing I have become aware of in a powerful new way is the ability of one tiny virus to control the entire world.

—*Sister Jean Schwieters*



What I have learned through this pandemic is the stark reality of our connection to all the world. Just as this virus was transmitted from person to person throughout the world, what we all do makes a difference. It is a wonder to consider the effect that each of us have as we share with one another. May it all be of care and kindness and yes, together, we can have a loving world.

—*Sister Anita Jennissen*



For one full year, while confined to limited spaces and places albeit near my dying brother, at my sister's memorial service and in solidarity with the global stress of COVID, gratitude prevails. The light in my life is brilliant, shining in every aspect of prayer, service to the poor and to one another. Christ is more, the light of Christ is quiet, is alone, is MORE in each family member, and is More in the Holy Spirit speaking. This time has held me in the closeness of God's light and star of goodness. —*Sister Pat Forster*



The thing that has stood out in my mind and stays with me is how important the wake, reviewal and funeral liturgy are in the grieving process. The process we adopted over the past months is important and the best way to keep us survivors safe, but the passing of our sisters seems unfinished. Hopefully, we will be able to celebrate the sisters' lives with their families and each other soon. —*Sister Sharon Fyle*



I feel blessed that I have not felt isolated over these past months. Being able to work in our mailroom, I see our sisters and some employees coming for the mail, and I've been able to see my family via Zoom. Being a crafty person, I keep busy crocheting, knitting, embroidering, making cards and spending extra time praying for family, friends, employees and our country. —*Sister Georgine Larson*



Greater silence, time, quiet and snow-laden pine trees provided the perfect atmosphere for contemplative listening. A deeper relationship with Jesus reaffirmed my awareness that many blessings in my life come from my relationships with my Franciscan Sisters, my family and my friends. I am nourished on every level due to so much love, care and prayers. —*Sister Rose Margaret Schneider*



I have learned the importance of recognizing how blessed we are and expressing gratitude. We are created as social beings to love and be loved. Virtual is good and helpful, but not the same as in-person encounters. I miss conversation with our sisters and employees, as well as family and friends. I miss our funeral and wake liturgies, sharing laughter, memories and prayer with families and friends of our deceased sisters, which aid in the grieving process. —*Sister M. Christelle Watercott*



A few random thoughts: Do you know there are many different meeting sites or "platforms" other than Zoom, and they all operate a bit differently? You really can teach old people new tricks, and time flies when you are on the computer. The neighbors love it that I can't cook for just one person; so do some of the sisters. Did you ever try to blow out a candle with a mask on—in front of people in church and wonder why it wasn't going out? —*Sister Mary Pat Burger*



I learned that it was okay to be sad when separated from family and friends for so long. I learned that it was necessary to give a warm hug when someone was grieving. I learned to be humble when giving and receiving. I learned this pandemic is about LOVE. —*Sister Char Grossman*



What have I learned from the pandemic? The question brought to mind the Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change," which I have already had to learn in my life. The meaning of surrender is letting go of what I want. Living during the pandemic, there are things I do not like, but it's best for me and everyone to learn from the professionals: wear a mask, stay in your room, keep your distance. I do have a choice in some things: "Courage to change the things I can." I can be positive and not let darkness and gloom overtake me. I can choose importance of relationship, reaching out more through phone calls, letter writing and emails. God's deep love gives me the "wisdom to know the difference." I see more clearly that we should not take for granted our responsibility to love God and neighbor, as it says in the Commandments. —*Sister Sylvia Opatz*

*God,
grant me the serenity to
accept the things I cannot change.*

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The Franciscan Sisters were my teachers at St. John's in Foley. My wife and I were happy that our seven children were also educated by Franciscan Sisters. It gave us great calm to know they were in the presence of good role models in the classroom and while taking piano lessons. —Bill Kotsmith. Oak Park, Minn.

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We love the mission of the Franciscan Sisters. My mother attended St. Francis High School and entered the community as Sister Perpetua Klimek. She died in 1989 from Lou Gehrig's disease. I want to provide money for the retirement needs of the Franciscan Sisters in honor of my mother. —Bob and Trish Manning, Waterloo, Iowa

— T —

Sharing food and hope

Sister Isabel Berrones

About a year ago, our mission in Ocampo, Coahuila, Mexico, came to a close. Sister Aurora Tovar moved to San Rafael to work more closely with the students and sisters ministering at Casa Franciscana, while starting a master's degree. I chose the large city of Saltillo to begin a new ministry and have joined the diocesan social ministry team. During the pandemic, many activities have been curtailed; on the other hand, the diocese has welcomed a new bishop. Meanwhile, I am getting to know the city, the people, the needs and the problems that challenge our faith, hospitality, generosity and creativity.

This past October I visited a chapel dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi not far from where I live. There I met Esperanza, her daughter Benita and son-in-law Carlos. Benita and Carlos are leaders of a group called Warriors of God, formed by several couples and their families. The men have recovered from drugs or alcohol addiction and their mission is to support others to recover from this disease that destroys lives and families. While we are in this pandemic, they have decided to share food with homeless people, since it is there, in the street, where drug and alcohol addicts are also.

"In addition to sharing food with these brothers and sisters, we want to make them feel that their lives are valuable and matter," said Lupita, one of the women who distributes meals to people who live on the streets. This reality is very

sad and painful. At this time, many are migrants who continue to arrive in Saltillo, which is about five hours away, by car, from the border with Texas. Every day they arrive on the train that comes from the south of Mexico. Most of them are from Nicaragua and Honduras. At this time of the year, the cold is another cause of suffering and risk to their lives. Due to the pandemic, the migrants' house in Saltillo was closed, so they crowd on the sidewalk to spend the night—covered only by a blanket. One of them, with tears in his eyes, told us, "Last night I felt that I was going to die of cold. I had no blanket, until one of them approached me and gave me one. I know that it is God who accompanies and protects me."

Their faith in God and the desire to achieve a better future for their families are the forces that drive them to face all the risks and sufferings of their migration. They bless us for sharing some food and hope with them. God himself blesses us through them. "Because I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me into your home" (Mt 25:35).



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 Darlene & John Zurawski
 Robert & Jane Zweifel

I came to know the Franciscan Sisters when our Benton County Extension group spent weekends at St. Francis where we sewed and planned projects for 4-H students. Eventually, my seven sisters also came to St. Francis for sewing and crafts on weekends. I felt a sense of peace being with the sisters at Mass and in the dining room. I'm grateful for the sisters. —Janet and Leon Skroch, Rice, Minn.

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Getting creative at St. Francis Music Center!

Robyn Gray

The pandemic has caused real disruptions in the lives of children. In response, the Music Center is determined to make sure that students still have music in their lives on a regular basis. So, the very creative—and talented—staff are teaching in person, via Zoom, on phones or a combination of all three! Sean Derry is taking in-person lessons with his teacher, Olivia Munson, while at the same time his brother, Oliver Derry, is in a room down the hall taking an online piano lesson from faculty member Kevin Stueven. Most online students take lessons from their homes, but sometimes it works out better to be at the Music Center, especially because internet connections in our rural area aren't always the best!

Olivia also directs the orchestras. She's excited to have string players together once again on a weekly basis. Rehearsals take place in the gymnasium in order to keep socially distant. All the orchestra members, young and old, expressed great joy to be back playing together in person.

Whether online or in person, the teachers at the Music Center understand the healing powers of music, and the importance of personal connections with their students. The students, faculty and staff are all hoping for the most inspiring and beautiful Christmas concerts and recitals ever in December 2021!



St. FRANCIS **MUSIC CENTER**

Jay Grove's philosophy on personal training is all about customization, efficiency and providing guidance to achieve personal goals: "Resistance training is a crucial factor for raising metabolism, burning fat, gaining strength and optimizing your health and fitness level. My clients often tell me they have fun, feel great afterwards and enjoy our sessions!" Elise Carey, one of Jay's regular clients, said, "My personal trainer helps me reach my goals. Thanks, St. Francis Health and Wellness, and thanks, Jay!" Personal training is available for all ages and abilities. See the website for fitness classes and swimming pool schedule.

 **St. Francis**
Health & Wellness

Current hours:
Monday – Friday
5am-2pm, 3-7pm.



Lives reprioritized by Brother Covid

Associate Harry Fleegel

We are old, retired folks living on Social Security; what could we do to feed masses of hungry unsheltered scared people?

Saint Francis admonishes us to put our entire lives into the Lord's hands. Our hearts, souls, time, energy, assets, all these things which in fact are not really our possessions but rather belong in total to our creator. We are only obliged to listen, trust and heed our call with humility, compassion and love. So, when Brother Covid arrived there was much to learn from him. Those of us comfortably ensconced in our committee meetings or engaged in all manner of good works and ministries suddenly found all our routines destroyed. We at Homeless Helping Homeless were busily collecting and distributing furniture and other household items to those who needed them. Brother Covid demanded that this and everything else we were doing must stop. Why was this happening? For what purpose? What were we supposed to do now? Retreat and hide? Or was Brother Covid bearing another call from on high for us to respond to? Was the Lord using him to refocus our mission on more fundamental challenges?

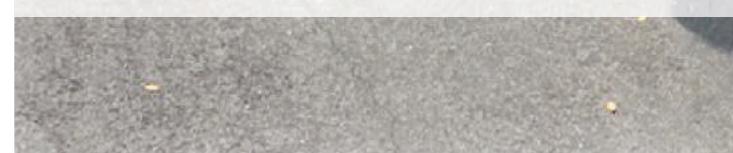
As the normal world shut down all around us, many were inconvenienced, but it soon became apparent that those most vulnerable among us were being devastated. Our friends experiencing homelessness were becoming increasingly desperate as community meals shut down, food shelves closed, welfare offices emptied, gyms used for showers were shuttered, restaurants and libraries used for warming were no longer open. People were hungry, dirty, tired. Shelter capacity was reduced because of social distancing. There was nowhere to go, no place to sleep, no place to eat. Brother Covid reprioritized our lives. He refocused our mission on a fundamental call the Lord gave us, his church: "Do you love me? Then feed my sheep."

We are old, retired folks living on Social Security; what could we do to feed masses of hungry unsheltered scared people? Like the apostles in the parable of the loaves and fishes, we wondered how all these can be fed with so little. But the Lord expects us to not worry about such things, for the Almighty can do all things. So, we joined with other groups and started handing out food at Lake George near downtown St. Cloud. And other people came bringing food, clothing and donations; all faiths and political persuasions joined in, at first in one location then ultimately four. The city gave us a grant to shelter folks in motels through yet another state-funded motel project. Ultimately over 150 people found a place to lay their heads and over 250 a day are being fed by an army of volunteers seven days a week.

For years, our committees have sought a warming center to protect those sleeping outside from our horrible winters. It got nowhere. This fall the city approved not just one but two, and now 37 more people are safe and warm. How could all this happen in so short a time? Certainly not through the efforts of a couple of worn-out retirees, but rather through the Lord using Brother Covid to motivate and inspire the community of St. Cloud to refocus onto what really matters—the care and nurturing of the most vulnerable among us.



People wait in line for food at Lake George, St. Cloud, Minn.



Starting from scratch: a new recipe for a podcast

Sister Michelle L'Allier

Have any of you made a recipe from scratch? It may have been cookies, or a casserole, or perhaps homemade soup. I have, enjoying new combinations of ingredients and spices, and sharing the fruit of these labors of love with my local community as we rotate cooking at Franciscan Welcoming House.

One of the big surprises of this past year was an unexpected email from Franciscan Associate JoAnn Dahl asking me to let her know when I started a podcast on Franciscan wisdom. Her suggestion resounded in me as a timely opportunity, one which would require readiness to try something new, a new recipe so to speak. I knew nothing about how to start a podcast, so turned to Paula Jenkins, friend and full-time podcaster (www.jumpstartyourjoy.com). Part of Paula's work is to help others start their own podcasts; she mentored, encouraged and nudged a small team we put together in learning the language, the landscape and the work of podcasting. By October we launched the *Engaging Franciscan Wisdom* podcast!

I'm surprised by the power of the medium of stories in each episode. Our underlying theme is bringing Franciscan wisdom to bear on living a wise and discerning life. Franciscan values and wisdom gleaned from life experience are lifted up in each person's unique voice. The podcast guests are women and men, lay and religious, from a range of generations and backgrounds. Those interviewed include Franciscan Sisters and Associates as well as a broader circle of Franciscan-hearted men and women. Learning with those who live Franciscan Gospel values, we hope the podcast will invite reflection, inspire loving as God loves, and bring peace in the midst of difficult times.

New episodes are published on the first and third Tuesdays of each month. To learn more about it, to listen to episodes in English, and to check out the informative show notes (see the "Read More" of each episode), visit www.engagingfranciscanwisdom.org. Listeners can subscribe to receive an email reminder (let us know at fslfpodcast@fslf.org), or subscribe directly through Apple or Google podcasts, Stitcher or Spotify.

One more surprise has unfolded: *Engaging Franciscan Wisdom* now shares Franciscan values with a broader public

both in English and in Spanish! Under the leadership of Franciscan Associate Veronica Rivadeneira, and thanks to the collaboration of additional Spanish speaking associates, English episodes are being recorded in Spanish as well. As a result, it is now possible to listen to each podcast episode in Spanish, savoring these audios with Venezuelan, Nicaraguan, Colombian and Ecuadorian dialects!

We trust that with the help of the Spirit, these Spanish versions will be offered with increasing quality as we expand the scope of sharing good news and inspiring stories! We invite you to check out Facebook and YouTube. Search *Sabiduría Franciscana*, to link, listen, reflect and post a comment.

In summary, Covid-19 opened up the space to embark on the adventure of starting a podcast from scratch. May you enjoy the flavorful nourishment that is put together in tasty new dishes in each episode. May peace and all good be yours!



If an opportunity comes your way to try something new, I highly recommend it . . . it adds spice to life!

Our Journey

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Weather permitting