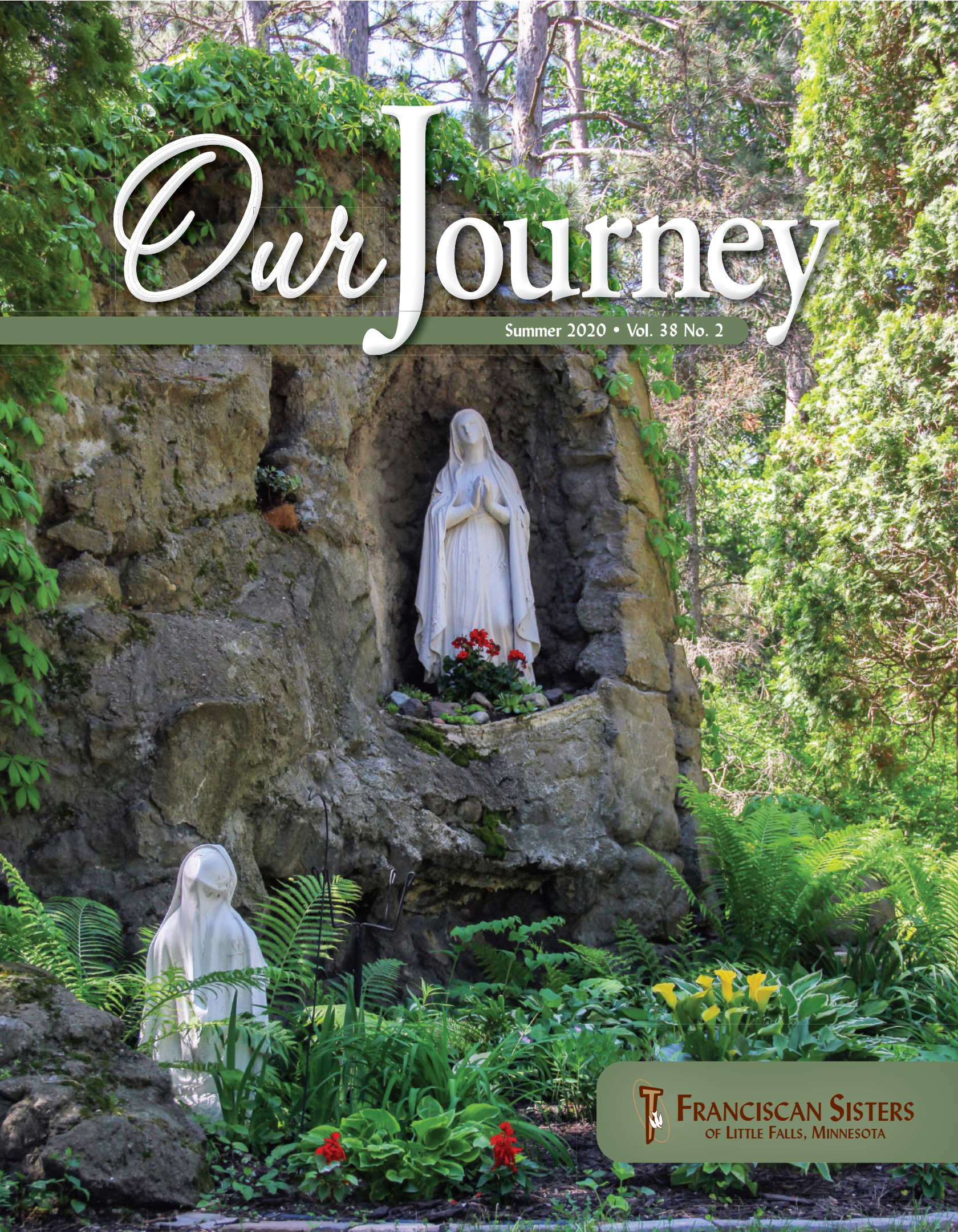


Our Journey

Summer 2020 • Vol. 38 No. 2

Franciscan Sisters
of Little Falls, Minnesota

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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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Cover: On the pathway to the sisters' cemetery stands the grotto. See full article on page 8.

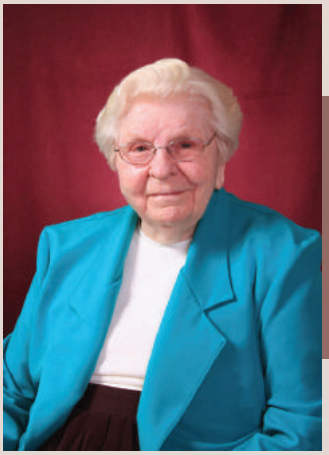
Photo by Amanda Lampert

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.

© June 2020
Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota



In loving memory . . .

Sister Mary Antonette (Rita) Ahles, 99, passed away April 13, 2020. Rita Ahles was born on March 14, 1921, in Bluegrass, Minn. She was the 11th of 12 children born to the late Joseph and Elizabeth (Nett) Ahles. Joseph and Elizabeth were very prayerful people and the family loved to sing.

In 1927, Rita started first grade in Bluegrass. In 1930, the Ahles family moved to Kerman, Calif., where she completed grammar school in seven years. Rita's oldest sister, Sister Mary Assumpta, entered the Franciscan Community in Little Falls, Minn. Since the sisters had a high school for girls, Rita was sent there in 1934. On December 8, 1936, Rita entered St. Francis Convent and received the name Sister Mary Antonette. She was the sixth member of the Ahles family to join the Franciscan Sisters and her brother, Jerry, became a Franciscan Friar in California.

Sister Antonette received her RN at St. Francis School of Nursing, Breckenridge. She did post-graduate studies and graduated from Marquette University, Milwaukee, with a BSN in nursing in 1955. She served as an instructor at St. Francis School of Nursing and at St. Gabriel's School of Nursing, Little Falls. She obtained a master's degree in Public Health Nursing in 1964. Sister Antonette utilized all her gifts ministering in nursing, nursing education, home health, pastoral care and migrant ministry. As a pioneer in providing health care to migrant farm workers, she was part of a program initiated in 1969 by women religious to set up clinics in areas where migrant workers toiled in the fields. Sister Antonette was a public health nurse in Nacogdoches, Tex.; a staff educator and pastoral minister at Sacred Heart Home, Plattsburgh, N.Y.; and did pastoral ministry at Holy Family Parish in Chimayo, N. Mex. Later she served as development director for the Franciscan Sisters.

Sister Antonette had a quick wit and a great sense of humor and could entertain others with her delightful storytelling. As a way of relaxation, she enjoyed reading, crocheting, painting and taking road trips, often accompanied by her sisters.

Dear friends,



During this time when we are urged to be a little more quiet, a lot more reflective, I decided it would be a good time to begin a project I have had in mind for a long time: prepare my ethical will.

An ethical will is a personal document that expresses the values, experiences and life lessons you want your family, friends and significant persons in your life to remember when you are gone. It could take the form of a letter, diary or just notes scribbled at the time an inspiration comes. It could be written in that partly used notebook you found while cleaning out the hall closet. Today I am going to give my ethical will a start.

At this time it doesn't seem right to start at the beginning. Much more important is what is happening in my life as a Franciscan Sister of Little Falls right now. My guess is that the life changing impact of COVID-19 will end up in the history books, scientific journals and messages from our popes and religious leaders. My growing up on a little family farm will have to wait until I come to a more peaceful, predictable chapter.

Who would ever believe that I begin the first chapter of my ethical will with *This is my life and it's ending one minute at a time!* Our Leadership term began June 10, 2018. We saw the need, in collaboration with women religious across the country, to delve into the serious issue of racism. It reminded us that the church's social teachings list Dignity of Every Person as a first priority. Admitting our white privilege, we invited an American Indian to share with us his experience of living in Nice Minnesota.

By early 2020, we found ourselves cancelling events and celebrations and foregoing community gatherings. The same has happened to you and your families. This is the only moment we can really count on. We are holding loosely any plan for the future. We are learning to be sister in a separated yet more intimate way.

Stay at home directives encourage us to read that favorite book again, tackle cleaning that hall closet. I name my biggest fears. I feel the need to rush on. The German proverb, Fear makes the wolf bigger than he is, titles my second chapter. Will we experience positive virus tests, maybe even death? What will be left as we come out of this peacetime emergency? How long will it take?

I walk the parameters of our precious property and pray for health and protection for all who are involved in some way in our lives and ministries. We couldn't deny our sadness when we buried 99-year-old Sister Antonette Ahles in a simple service with only 10 of us accompanying her ashes to the cemetery. We have learned that it is very difficult to tame that wolf.

I refuse to get stuck in fear. The next chapter I simply call HOPE with the subtitle Life is like a shipwreck, but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboat.

Today, as summer matures, we can say, "This moment is just fine." Thank you, loving, healing God! I should change my first subtitle to read, This is my life and I'm living it one minute at a time.

Be blessed in all you are, in all you do,

Sister Carol Schmit, OSF

Sister Carol Schmit
Community Minister

2020 Jubilarians

The Franciscan Community honors five jubilarians who celebrate 25, 60 and 75 years as vowed members of the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota. Their commitment to the values and the Franciscan way of life are exemplary. Thank you, sisters!

75th Jubilee – Sisters Rosaria Hagel and Dorothy Ann Rudolph

The Franciscan Sisters honor the 75th jubilees of Sisters Rosaria Hagel and Dorothy Ann Rudolph. Sisters Rosaria and Dorothy Ann entered the Novitiate at St. Francis Convent on August 12, 1945, and professed final vows on August 12, 1950. Together they have seen many changes in the Church and their Franciscan Community throughout these 75 years.



Sister Dorothy Ann Rudolph

Sister Dorothy Ann was born at her family's home in Opole. She served in many capacities over the years: dietary, homemaking, parish ministry, housekeeping and home visiting. From 1976-1991, Sister Dorothy Ann managed the Clothes Review, an outreach ministry located on St. Francis Campus. Her ongoing ministry of hospitality remains very important to her. She continues to be an active member of St. Mary's Church, Little Falls.

As Sister Dorothy Ann reflected on her years of religious life, she said that Divine Providence has its way—and here she is 75 years later, a people-person who operates with faith and love toward everyone. She appreciates staying close to nature. "After 75 years in God's service, I wish to continue to be a 'Thanksgiving Song' to the Lord."



Sister Rosaria Hagel

Sister Rosaria was born and raised near Rogers. Nearly all of her active ministry has been in the areas of homemaking and hospitality, roles that matched her skills and came naturally to her.

The years since Sister Rosaria entered the convent have gone by fast. She says, "There have been times of joy, laughter and pain. There have been struggles and disappointments, but knowing that God is always with me has allowed me to live through them. I truly believe that God called me to this place and this lifestyle."

60th Jubilee – Sisters Lorraine Olmscheid and Bernice Rieland

Sisters Lorraine Olmscheid and Bernice Rieland celebrate 60 years as Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls. They entered the Novitiate at St. Francis Convent on July 31, 1960, and made final profession on August 12, 1967. Their 60 years as vowed members represent decades of dedicated service to the people of God in the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi.



Sister Lorraine Olmscheid

Sister Lorraine was born near St. Martin, and her primary areas of ministry were in food service, homemaking and home health care.

Now retired, she resides at St. Francis Convent. Sister Lorraine is grateful for her 60 years as a Franciscan Sister. One of her favorite Scripture passages that has been very life giving to her is Matthew 10:8: "The gift you have received, give as gift."



Sister Bernice Rieland

Sister Bernice, originally from Belgrade, has served in a variety of ministries over the years. In 2001, she started the Franciscan Life Center, which continues to serve as a resource for Franciscan education and spirituality and promotes the Franciscan values.

Since 2014, Sister Bernice has ministered as an office assistant at St. Francis Music Center, Little Falls. She said, "I have become more aware that what is given to me each and every day comes from the abundance of God's love and generosity. I would not have ever imagined when I entered the congregation that my life would be so rich, so rewarding, so full of experiences and so blessed! Thank you, God."

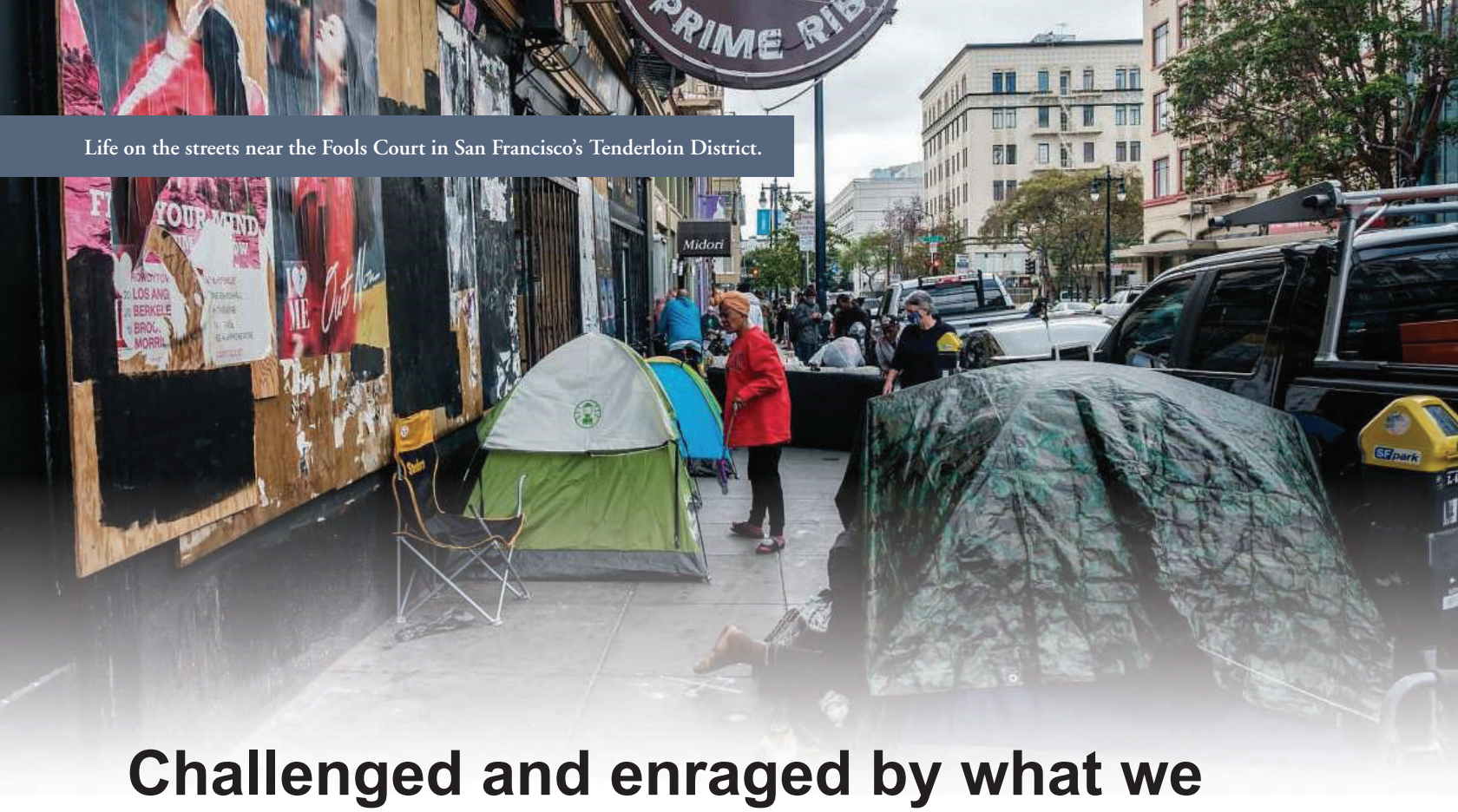
25th Jubilee – Sister Gloria Haider



Sister Gloria Haider

Sister Gloria entered the Novitiate at St. Francis Convent on March 25, 1995, and made her final profession of vows on August 27, 2000. Originally from St. Paul, Sister Gloria's years with the Franciscan Sisters have filled her heart with enormous joy and thanksgiving.

Presently, Sister Gloria lives in McAllen, Tex., where she ministers at the Catholic Charities Respite Center, helping with the needs of immigrants. She also teaches ESL to Latino men and women through the Rio Grande Valley Literacy Center. Sister Gloria looks forward to following the Spirit's call as she continues on this "journey of generosity."



Life on the streets near the Fools Court in San Francisco's Tenderloin District.

Challenged and enraged by what we witness

Sister Carmen Barsody

I heard a voice say inside me, "I never want to wake up where this reality is not before me."

It was an early morning in Nicaragua when I awoke and looked out into the neighborhood in which we lived. My eyes fell on the barbed wire fences, on the houses made of tin or slabs of wood and those made of concrete blocks. I noticed the sounds of people who were beginning to start their day. I heard the rhythm of someone's hand making tortillas, and I could hear someone bathing, using a bowl to splash water from a plastic barrel they had filled a couple of nights ago when running water made one of its rare appearances. We were all accustomed to rationing water because we never knew when it would come again. As I stood looking out, I began thinking of the ones who were working hard in sweatshops and in the markets yet didn't have enough to eat. I found myself thinking of the many who were navigating the effects of trauma from years of war. I wondered what kept people getting up each day amidst so many struggles. As my eyes and heart took in the scene, I heard a voice say inside me, "I never want to wake up where this reality is not before me."

Fast forward 23 years and I awaken looking out the windows of the Fool's Court into the streets of the Tenderloin of San Francisco. I see tents zipped up as some people are still sleeping. I look across the street and see people laying on the sidewalk unprotected by a tent or blanket, while others lean against the building after being awake all night. There are street cleaners rolling their big plastic cans down the sidewalk helping to keep the neighborhood clean. A few people are wearing masks, but it takes a special effort to remember to do so. For most of our neighbors, the threat from this new virus is not much different than any of the other threats they and their parents and grandparents have lived with for decades.

Inside the Fools Court, Sam and I begin our day. We notice a bit of weariness in our own energy.We, like the folks on the streets, know that fundamentally things have not changed much since the beginning of the pandemic. We are more than eight weeks into "shelter in place" and there

-Continued, page 7



Sister Carmen, Michelle, Sam and Jazmine receive a foodbank delivery from Merida Wilson, a Franciscan Associate and former Faithful Fools intern. Her service ensures people have food during this pandemic.

are still no garbage cans or bathrooms or potable water on our block, just like every other day of the year. No streets have been closed or lanes blocked off as have been done in other neighborhoods to provide space to get fresh air with appropriate social distancing. Here we navigate narrow sidewalks filled with tents and crowds of people.

Jazmine, a woman I have known for years, came to the door today to check in. She tells me she was just released from the hospital back to the streets. The city is paying for emergency hotel rooms, one of which she would be happy to have even for a short respite, but they are reserved for COVID-19 positive and at-risk individuals. Jasmine's health issues don't meet the criteria, so she is back on the streets. Last week nurses and social workers did a laydown protest in front of the mayor's home. They are angry and heartbroken when they have to discharge people onto the streets, now or any time. For people who give their lives to be healers, sending people back to the streets is devastating.

It is heart wrenching and overwhelming to see the decades of social and racial inequalities being laid bare across the globe during this pandemic. It was an intentional choice for our Franciscan community to live in the marginalized barrios of Nicaragua, and it is an intentional choice of Faithful Fools to live in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco. As Jesus and Francis were challenged and enraged by what they witnessed, so are we enraged and challenged to speak and to act, wherever we find ourselves.

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 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.

Grotto offers a devotional setting

Sister Clara Stang

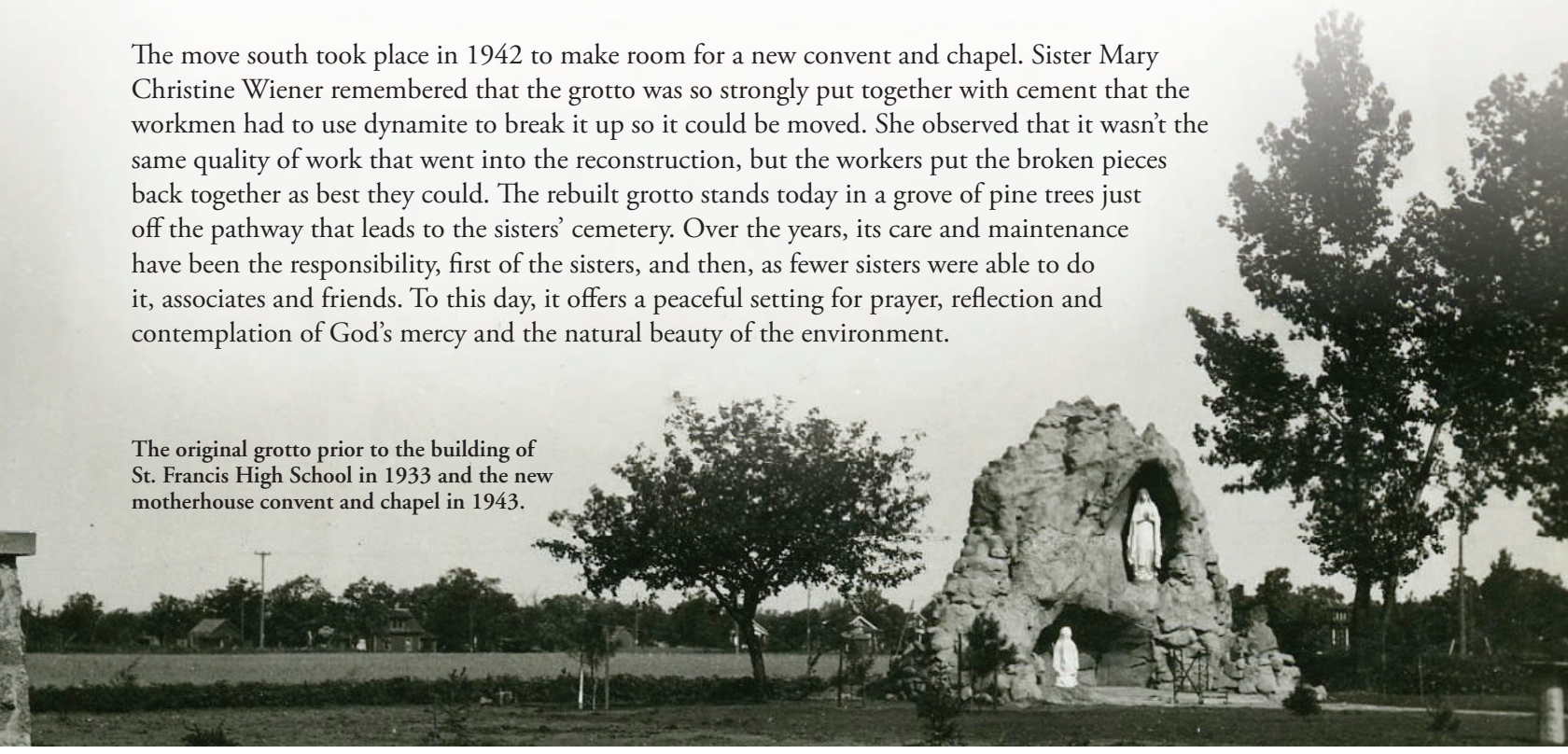
When the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls was established in 1891, the 16 founding sisters lived for a time in a small slab shanty on donated land at the south end of the city. Though poor, the sisters were ambitious and energetic and, within a year, managed to build a large motherhouse. Membership grew quickly, and the congregation flourished with an array of ministries in response to the needs around them—care of the sick and elderly, care of orphans, training of nurses and formation of new members. By 1895, the sisters had erected another large building to house the diocesan orphans, named St. Otto's Orphanage in honor of Bishop Otto Zardetti, the first bishop of the St. Cloud Diocese.

In 1926, the area immediately to the west of these buildings was chosen as the site of a grotto in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes. Constructed of stone and cement, it was carefully modeled after the actual shrine in Lourdes, France, and dedicated by Bishop Joseph Busch on August 12, the feast of Saint Clare of Assisi.

The origin of devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes goes back to a 14-year-old peasant girl named Bernadette Soubirous, who, in 1858, saw a series of visions of the Virgin Mary in a cave-like grotto on the bank of a river near her home. The Virgin introduced herself as Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and asked Bernadette to keep coming back to pray the rosary for sinners. The grotto quickly became a popular pilgrimage site and to this day remains one of the most frequented Christian shrines in the world. More than three million visitors and pilgrims visit it yearly to pray for healing and spiritual comfort.

The Lourdes grotto of the Franciscan Sisters has changed over the years but has continually been a place of prayer and devotion. Special celebration days such as reception of the habit, final profession, high school graduation, and May crowning have all drawn celebrants and visitors to the grotto for prayer and picture-taking. Some of the older sisters of the congregation cherish precious memories of the grotto. Sisters Maureen Blenkush, Patrice Kiefer, Sharon Fyle, Therese Furnstahl all remember that it was larger and more elaborate in its original form and before it was moved further south on the campus. They recall that it included running water in imitation of the original spring water at Lourdes.

The move south took place in 1942 to make room for a new convent and chapel. Sister Mary Christine Wiener remembered that the grotto was so strongly put together with cement that the workmen had to use dynamite to break it up so it could be moved. She observed that it wasn't the same quality of work that went into the reconstruction, but the workers put the broken pieces back together as best they could. The rebuilt grotto stands today in a grove of pine trees just off the pathway that leads to the sisters' cemetery. Over the years, its care and maintenance have been the responsibility, first of the sisters, and then, as fewer sisters were able to do it, associates and friends. To this day, it offers a peaceful setting for prayer, reflection and contemplation of God's mercy and the natural beauty of the environment.



The original grotto prior to the building of St. Francis High School in 1933 and the new motherhouse convent and chapel in 1943.

God is with us

Sister Cordy Korkowski, Donor Relations

During these months of the pandemic, I recalled my mother telling me when I was feeling sad, "We need to take things as they come." Robert Lee Frost, 20th century American poet, had the same idea when he wrote, "In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life. It goes on."

So many faith-filled responses have come my way recently—people seeing the blessings in the pain and finding meaning during this time. Our donors have included notes with their gifts, writing that they are praying for safety for our sisters and staff and the promise of better days ahead. I am learning from others how to benefit from life's events as they move us in new directions.

I decided to ask a few people how they have been blest during this time. Teresa Leonard of Robbinsdale, friend and donor, commented, "I am very grateful to be connected with my two daughters, relatives and friends by phone. I live on the phone, my lifeline. I am in touch now more than ever . . . and might even continue in this way after COVID-19 is out of the picture."

Father Jerry Dalseth, longtime friend of the sisters and presider at our Eucharistic gatherings, stated, "We have no appointments at this time, and I see this is really a time of prayer and reflection. I take long walks and pray while I do so. I miss coming up to be with the Franciscan Sisters because I have known them most of my life. It is always a joy."

Virginia Jensen, 85, from Roseville, Calif., says this time has given her opportunity for deeper conversations and tapping into her need for quiet. She stated that even though she is losing her vision, it is happening gradually and gives her time to adjust to the changes. "I have time for reflection," she says. "My faith is most important to me." She considers this a blessing along with leaning on her experience living through World War II and the Depression, knowing that eventually "it will be fine."

Well, after those phone conversations, I said to myself, "Thank you, gracious God, for these people who shared with me their blessings and goodness." Life goes on . . . and God is with us.



Thank you, Annette!

When asked how many masks she sewed during the COVID-19 outbreak, my dear sister Annette Korkowski O'Donnell, remarked, "I stopped counting at 1200." An avid seamstress her entire life, she was dialed into action when her son Ben, 38, a 2017 Ironman finisher, was the first person hospitalized with COVID-19 at the University of Minnesota Hospital. "Because my son was unable to communicate with me, I felt comforted knowing I could do something. I could sew protective facemasks."

She initially began making masks for her husband Al and his work associates along with her extended family—then kept on sewing. Among the agencies that received facemasks were three hospice-homecare groups in the Rochester, central Minnesota and Fort Dodge, Iowa, areas. In addition, chemical dependency and mental health agencies, hair salons and extended families near Rochester also benefitted.

Of course, my own Franciscan community was delighted to receive about 120 masks. She was able to use fabrics from her past quilting projects along with donations of materials that came from close friends. Other friends and Franciscan Sisters added to the facemask supply needed for the sisters and staff members in Little Falls.

When I see the sisters and staff wearing the easily recognized facemasks, I am filled with gratitude for my sister and her everlasting ability to see a need and respond. This is Annette. The Franciscan Sisters are grateful to Annette and all the diligent seamstresses who added to our stockpile of protective facemasks, helping to ensuring our safety and well-being.

Sister Annella Henger remembers a meaningful life

Sister Elise Saggau

Sister Annela Henger was born at St. Francis Hospital in Breckenridge, Minn., on January 11, 1931, of Frances Ann (Lenzen) Henger and William Francis Henger. The family home was about 15 miles directly west in Mooreton, N. Dak. She was the youngest of three. Her sister, Mary Ann, was five years older, and her brother, Al (Alcuin), three years older. Her father worked as a postmaster and rural mail carrier. Her grandfather Henger was the village blacksmith. His grandchildren enjoyed helping him by turning the blower as he pounded out plows, horseshoes and iron rods (which he made into butcher knives). They especially enjoyed the mid-afternoon breaks when Annella ran to "Frenchies" to purchase a beer for Grandpa and ice cream cones for herself and her siblings.



Sister Annella (center of the back row) graduated from St. Gabriel's School of Nursing in 1955.

On April 1, 1943, when Annella was 12, her mother was taken to Rochester for cancer surgery, a procedure from which she did not recover. She died on April 15. This loss influenced Annella's vocational choice. She decided early on that she would become a sister-nurse so she could be nice to dying moms.

During her high school years in Wahpeton, N. Dak., Annella was a conscientious student, but her first, last, and only love was sports! Every Friday night she'd cheer the home team to victory. To this day, she is an ardent fan of the Notre Dame football team. She also participated in 4-H. One year she received a gold wristwatch for leadership and a trip to Washington, D.C. for the National 4-H Club Congress.

In her younger years, Annella learned to stick up for herself. Later, this quality served her well. During her training as a nurse, there were occasions when she felt she needed to take more initiative than her supervisors thought appropriate. Once, she recognized some subtle polio symptoms in one of her patients. She contacted the doctor. He took immediate action, sending the patient by ambulance to the Sister Kenny Institute in Minneapolis. The doctor expressed appreciation for Annella's drawing his attention, but the head of the nursing school was upset that a second-year student would presume to contact a doctor directly.

As a child, Annella had known few religious women—two daughters of a neighbor family (both were Benedictines) and some Hankinson Franciscans who came to teach catechism in the summer. Yet she knew she wanted to be a sister. At St. Francis Nursing School in Breckenridge, she came to admire her Franciscan teachers, who were not only competent nurses and instructors, but attractive and sympathetic women. She joined the congregation in December 1950, and later completed her training at St. Gabriel's School of Nursing in Little Falls.

During her affiliation at St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, she was able to meet the doctor who had performed surgery on her mother. This was a particular comfort to her. Another highlight of her time there occurred when she was working in orthopedics. She politely asked a gentleman to step out of a room while she cared for one of her patients. When she emerged, he was waiting in the hallway. She thanked him and told him he could return to the patient. He asked her name, then held out his hand and said, "I'm Dr. Charles Mayo." He wanted her to know how much the staff appreciated students from

the Franciscan Sisters' nursing schools.

After receiving her R.N., she began nursing at St. Gabriel's Hospital. Sister Karlene Weyandt, head of the medical records department, influenced her to train for medical records. She became accredited through the training program at St. Francis Hospital in Breckenridge. Subsequently, she oversaw the medical records departments in the various health care institutions where she worked, often in addition to serving in other capacities.

In 1963, Annella went to St. Joseph's Hospital, Dodgeville, Wis., to work in medical records. In 1970, she also became assistant administrator. In 1973, St. Joseph's Hospital and Dodgeville General Hospital merged under new management and a new name—Memorial Hospital of Iowa County. Annella continued to serve there until 1979.

When she went to the Villa nursing home in South Milwaukee in 1979, she discovered a completely neglected medical record system, which she organized from scratch. Later, she organized the medical records for Marian Catholic Center, a 360-bed nursing home in Elm Grove, Wis., operated by the Wheaton Franciscans. Later, at this same facility, she served as secretary for the ministry team of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, who housed many of their retired sisters there. She enjoyed relating to the elderly sisters, who were experienced women with rare tales to tell.

Over the years, Annella lost all the members of her immediate family. In 1990, her father passed away at St. Francis Home in Breckenridge. In 2000, she was privileged to care for her sister Mary Ann as she died from cancer. Annella had always wanted to end her nursing days caring for cancer patients, but this was not how she had envisioned the experience. In March 2010, her priest brother, an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, also died from cancer.

Sister Annella feels that she has had a very blessed life. The training that the community provided helped her grow to maturity as a responsible and competent adult. She appreciates the help of "great women" who saw her through some of the important moments of her earlier years as a sister. She recalls with fondness Sister Caroline Torborg, who was especially supportive to her in discerning her vocation and who helped her have realistic expectations of what it is like to live in a community



Sister Annella (right) peels potatoes with Sister Patrice Kiefer in the convent kitchen.

of women. Annella has particularly dear memories of Sister Mary Anthony Lyons, the last of the 16 sisters who founded the congregation. As a nursing student at St. Francis Hospital, Annella cared for the aging foundress. One was not allowed to call her Sister Anthony. If she heard that, she would immediately correct the speaker: "My name is Sister Mary Anthony or Tony!" She had a habit of hiding her daily vitamin pills. Her caretakers would often find them in her bedclothes when they were changing the linens.

In 2018, Annella left Milwaukee and returned to Little Falls. Here, she enjoys all the supports that the motherhouse offers. She makes her personal contributions to the common life by assisting with sacristy work, getting the pages of the office book ready daily for the sisters in the care center, and being a member of the "potato-peeling crew" in the kitchen. One thing she particularly enjoys is her walking exercise. While living in Milwaukee, she developed the habit of walking to daily Mass in good weather—a four-mile round-trip. Now, at the motherhouse, she treks from one end to the other of the extensive campus, checking out all the curiosities she discovers in some of the more out-of-the way places.

Reflecting on her life as a Franciscan Sister, Annella expresses special appreciation for the regular prayer life. Daily Mass has always been important to her, as well as the sisters' communal morning and evening prayers. Looking back, she also recognizes the value of the personal support she has received over the years from so many sisters. "Though [my life] has had its hard and frustrating moments," she says, "it has been a heart experience—a blessing."



In these pandemic times

Associate Jeff Odendahl

"*Laudato si', mi' Signore*" – "Praise be to you, my Lord." Pope Francis adopted this phrase as the title of his 2015 encyclical from the opening lines of *Canticle of the Creatures* composed by Saint Francis of Assisi. How ironic that as we celebrate the encyclical's fifth anniversary, "Our Common Home" is besieged by the COVID-19 coronavirus!

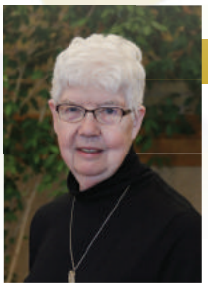
The irony, of course, is not that there is a causal link between climate change and COVID-19, but that the pandemic, as devastating as it is, has given us a chance to reassess our way of living and to seek a new way of living together that is loving, compassionate and in harmony with all Creation. It's as though the Earth has pushed a giant "pause button," giving us time to pray and reflect in anticipation of the next act. We must, as citizens concerned for the well-being of Mother Earth, play a leading role in this next act.

So, how can we use this "pause" responsibly? We might begin by re-reading *Laudato Si'*. I've taken advantage of this time to do just that, and I'm noticing things that I may have skipped over earlier. For example, Pope Francis cites "rapidification" as a challenge to our ability to live sustainably. We've all noticed the fast pace of our lives these days—at least until this recent "pause." This, the Pope reflects, is a result of technologic change that is not subject to the same constraints as biological evolution. Notice that he isn't saying that technology is bad, nor that change is bad, but that we must not allow ourselves to be swept along in a current of change that isn't always healthy for us or our planet.

Our culture has chosen a way of life that looks to the power of technology to master and manipulate nature. Implicit in this outlook is the belief in infinite or unlimited growth. Not so, says Pope Francis. This way of life "is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit." In our rush for economic recovery from the pandemic, we appear all too ready to return to a pre-pandemic way of life. While the Earth has received some temporary respite from carbon dioxide and other pollutants, many seem anxious to get back to our ways of conspicuous consumption. Instead, we could use this as opportunity to change how we interact with one another and Mother Earth. Instead, we could begin to acknowledge the interrelatedness of all life and choose to act in solidarity with one another and our planet. Instead, we could work toward solutions to the challenges of poverty, inequality and excessive global violence.

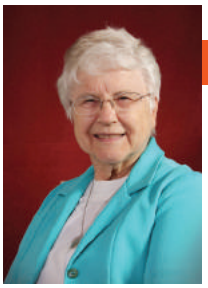
In 2007, we Franciscan Sisters and Associates endorsed the Earth Charter, which pledged us to change our self-destructive abuse of the planet and our failure to care adequately for one another. In these pandemic times of 2020, we have a chance to review how well we've done, both individually and as a society, and to renew that pledge.

Like everyone around the world, the Franciscan Sisters are dealing with the effects of the global pandemic. Here, a few sisters share the ways they are coping during these uncertain times.



Sister Pat Imdieke

As a pastoral care minister for the Church of St. Mary in Willmar, I am working from home. I am calling parishioners to see how they are coping with the pandemic. I have made over 400 calls and am amazed at how well most people are doing. My experience tells me that these communications are so RIGHT for the parishioners and for me. I am grateful for my daily prayer walks and for being able to sleep in spite of all the uncertainty.



Sister Therese Lenz

I think I am doing Okay. Praise the Lord! I DO miss Mass and Communion. I miss the swimming pool, hot tub and our exercise program. I go outside, weather permitting. The songs of the birds praising God lifts my spirits. I spend more time communicating with email and writing, keeping up with the news and enjoying the excellent educational movies we are able to watch.



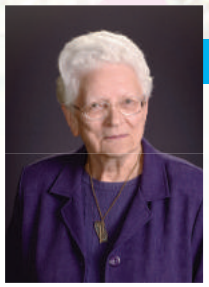
Sister Karen Niedzielski

I'm doing great. I just spent two months in quarantine in Little Falls. It was a good place for me to be. I had tons of things to do. I am now in St. Cloud working at school to finish up in the library.



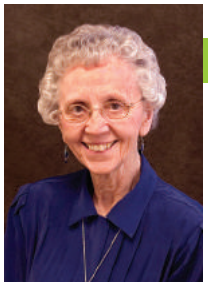
Sister Maurita Bernet

I'm trying to "be" more as I "do" less. The gift of faith is to believe that God holds every creature in loving arms, always, no exceptions!



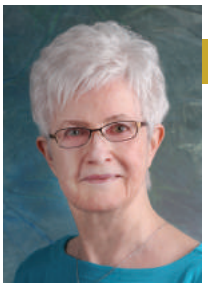
Sister Gert Brixius

I find this time as both a blessing and a liability. It is good not to have major ministry responsibilities at this time. Having technology to stay connected is important. The four of us in our group have a conference call twice a week to chat. Without technology and getting timely news, I'd feel a lot more isolated. I enjoy having a more relaxed schedule to pray longer and journal throughout the day. I also have tried an old family pastime that we did in the wintertime living on a farm: setting jigsaw puzzles. I limit myself to one hour otherwise it is "just one more piece" and too much of the day is gone. Work in our community garden plots has started and will be a good diversion for the rest of the summer.



Sister Ardis Cloutier

As an introvert and also someone who lived alone for quite a few years, I probably am not having as much of a problem coping with the current situation. We can go out and walk and, as you know, we have a lot of grounds. I walked for over an hour one day and never covered the same path/sidewalk twice. Also, I love to read and am enjoying more time for that. I am most grateful to our wonderful, dedicated employees, especially those in Dietary and Housekeeping. We have wonderful meals, and I think the staff is being especially good to us, knowing we can't leave campus. We are very lucky and very well cared for.



Sister Janice Welle

My method of coping is sticking with a routine each day, which includes praying, exercising, eating, phoning, sewing, reading, walking, hearing news, writing notes and sending messages.



Sister Mary Lou Eltgroth

I think I am coping quite well, though I don't like this pandemic. So many people suffer so much—ever so much more than I do. We have a safe, warm home with good food and good care. So many don't have either of these things. We know we will get through this thing sooner or later . . . for now it just tests our patience. May God be with us and bless us in the meantime.



Sister Gloria Haider

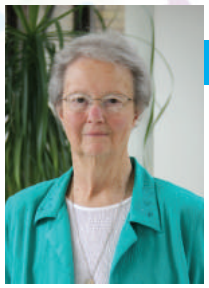
I miss my Centering Prayer group. Instead, I'm using a Centering Prayer app on my phone. I find "Psalms for Praying" by Nan Merrill positive and helpful in the midst of fear and anxiety during this time. "May we become bearers of joy, we who are invited to share in the Cosmic Dance! . . . May we walk in faith all the days of our life—confident in your Divine Presence, even in times of trouble, and with assurance for what is and all that is to be. May we have faith in the unfolding of our lives, and radical trust in the universe!"

Finally, I'm reflecting on the various changes the virus has brought about in people's lives. Wearing a mask feels uncomfortable for me, but I'm happy to wear it in public because it helps stop the spread of the disease. This week I had blood drawn while sitting in my car. I put my arm out the car window, and the lab tech drew my blood. I said to myself, "How weird was that?"



Sister Carol Schmit

I had been convinced that the most successful way to accomplish a task was guided by the vocabulary: *strategic plan, vision, goal, outcome*. COVID-19 flipped that agenda. Now I find that a fulfilling day is when I figure out what day it is, I listen, I pay attention, and I let the work of the day emerge.



Sister Jan Kilian

God is certainly helping us cope these days: the lilacs are blooming, the tulips were the brightest and longest lasting ever, the birds sing their hearts out in this springtime. I spend quite a bit of time in my room where I pay attention to the activity in our yard through my windows. I also see it from the kitchen window where I enjoy baking and some cooking. The members of the community I live with work more from home. Their company during the day uplifts my spirits.



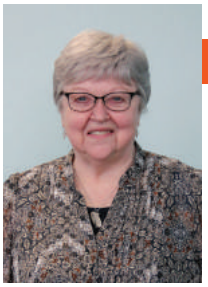
Sister Janice Wiechman

Where I want to be is out visiting the communities, but since I cannot right now, I have found many other things to do. I am experimenting with a garden, seeing what grows well here and what doesn't. It seems onions don't like growing here, but cabbage is doing well and cucumbers are coming up. There's more time to pray and read, and with the students away, we have been tackling some painting and cleaning projects. I responded to Sister Carol's challenge to do something for Earth Day. From there came the two videos on care of the earth. I have become more aware of the earth and aspects of the way we live that are harmful to the earth. I cannot say that I have been bored, only wishing to get back into the communities and back to working with the students.



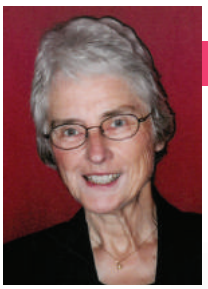
Sister Georgine Larson

I have been coping okay during this time. Now that I've recovered from shoulder surgery, I can get back to updating my family history book. I keep busy crocheting and have had more time for reading. I also want to get back to making cards.



Sister Joanne Heim

During these times, I am grateful to enjoy the blessings of each day. I revel in the cool gentle breeze during my daily walks and meeting people relaxed and ready to share. A real treat is time spent watching many different birds from my balcony: cardinals, robins, finches, red winged blackbirds. One day even a beautiful blue bunting! The many chirpings create a grand symphony. Plus, I enjoy watching the Baltimore Oriole feed from an orange I have mounted to my railing and the humming birds drink from my feeder. One day one drank, flew to a nearby branch, sat still, then to the feeder and back to the branch sitting still. I had never seen one sit still before. We also have a robin capped with a white beany. I call him Pope Robin. I am most grateful for my faith, knowing God is with us in all of this.



Sister Ade Kroll

I am coping quite well. I love this hermitage business. I am making masks for anyone who asks as well as the homeless. I have a weekly class on Zoom that I love preparing for on Faith and Science. I daily read something from the Quran during Ramadan. I want to know what is my prejudice, ignorance and informed understanding about Muslims. Each day I take time to prepare food and enjoy it immensely. I listen to the news and music while doing all of the above. I do not have time to be bored or have cabin fever.

I am hearing the language change about who we are as humans on this planet. We aren't talking about national powers or who's on top or dominant—but about sharing materials, information, etc. Cooperation seems to have replaced domination. There is a concern for the other—the reason for wearing masks. It isn't all over, but it is all growing. Earth seeks to bring about a balance through this virus. If we persist in old patterns, we take the consequences. If we pay attention, we can change our CULTURE—that is my hope and prayer.



Sister Shirley Mueller

I am getting stuff done that I haven't had time to do before, so I see this time as God's powerful care of and for me. I trust God's larger plan of cleaning up the earth to heal itself of our presence. It is a great call to conversion—to change our ways and really turn to God for peace and love in the world. It is a call to share all of what God has given us. There is no reason not to share in God's vision for all of us to come together in unity and appreciate the beauty in diversity as it reveals how wonderful and awesome God is. Let's make our way to a higher consciousness of how magnificent our God is. Let's trust God to make us one as we journey together even when alone.

Sisters Rita Kuhl & Jeremy Hein





We cope well due to a variety of daily activities. We enjoy our emotional support cat, planting and weeding in the garden, biking to various Little Free Libraries and stocking up on super finds, praying the Mass via smart phone or TV from various parishes or St. John's Abbey, walking in the parks and breathing fresh air, and taping and watching old movies. We're also connecting with sisters, needy parishioners and others.

Our Journey
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THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

Their smiles may be covered by masks, but you can still see the twinkle in their eyes! Thank you to our wonderful staff who are working above and beyond to keep the sisters safe and healthy.

