Holy Thursday
In Reynosa, Mexico, faith is sustenance

Jesus was asked by the disciples on Holy Thursday, “Is it I?” Yet, those who were asking knew they were not the ones who would kiss Jesus and sell him for 30 pesos. During Holy Week, the Catholic community of some 150 immigrants gathered in Reynosa, Mexico, to celebrate with liturgy and ritual—all eager to participate. A lovely choir prepared music for each special prayer of Holy Thursday. Picture women and men washing the feet of the person to their left and lines of people receiving the Eucharist, followed by rice and beans together after the liturgical celebration.

In the photo we see the priestly people washing one another’s feet. Sister Pat Forster washes the feet of Father Louis Hotop, SJ, after he had washed the feet of a woman who washed the feet of another, and at the end of the line Sister Pat washed his feet to complete the procession. These Holy Week celebrations expressed the strong faith among the community of immigrants believing beyond the possible . . . to the impossible. The testimony in tents, on dirt floors, is a testimony of “I am.” Like Jesus, each of us was happy to witness to our faith in community, in the Eucharist, in death and resurrection.
Dear friends,

We greet you this season with abundant gratitude for your friendship and support. Your generosity helps us carry our Franciscan values out into the world. Thank you! Your donations help us maintain a constant level of compassionate care for our sisters and our properties here in Little Falls we have called home for these 131 years.

We acknowledge that this land is part of the homeland of the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples who for generations have treated the land as a living relative. We honor the indigenous peoples in Minnesota and on every part of the planet.

We are fortunate to have many writings by and about Saint Francis of Assisi, our patron. We know that when life got too busy for Francis, he would retreat to his sacred space, a cave in the mountain on the edge of Assisi.

One biographer reported, “To Francis, this cave was a place of perilous beauty.” Coming out of his cave, Francis could not remain silent because of what his quiet time revealed to him.

This summer maybe we can experience this perilous beauty simply by taking time apart . . . in a room in our homes or a corner of our gardens. Or better still, by going on a conscious walk on the earth—not on a neat cement sidewalk but on grass, a field or a dirt path—with the awareness of the fragile beauty of this land which is home to all of creation.

Peace and all good,

Sister Carol Schmit, OSF
Sister Carol Schmit
Community Minister
The call to Integral Ecology

Associate Rosanne Fischer

“We are faced not with two separate crisis, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” (Laudato Si #139)

The Franciscan community has been engaged in intense dialogue over the past year around Pope Francis’s call in *Laudato Si* to respond to both the Cry of the Poor and the Cry of the Earth, since these things are integrally related. As Franciscans, we attempt to follow the ways of Francis, Clare and all who have followed them, by living in right, loving relationship with our marginalized brothers and sisters and with “Sister Mother Earth.” It is clear that Earth and its systems are part of the marginalized and endangered in our world today.

We have joined the *Laudato Si* Action Platform, which Pope Francis created for all sectors of the church and society. We agree with the urgency of taking specific, committed action for the good of ALL: two-legged, four-legged, six- and eight-legged, winged, finned, organisms and minerals in the soil, water and everything over and under the Earth. Our Franciscan community is growing in our effort to incorporate Integral Ecology into our prayer, food, ministry and actions. We are finalizing a land ethic statement and working to align our actions more closely with our beliefs, a life-long process.

In addition to ongoing commitment to community and school gardens; pollinator projects; efforts to reduce, reuse, recycle and use Earth-friendly products; divestment in enterprises such as fossil fuels and weapons manufacture and investment in environmentally and socially conscious enterprises; we are working in a number of new areas. We continue to explore the possibility of transitioning to solar energy on St. Francis campus. We are listening and dreaming with the lands we inhabit in order to develop a plan for habitat restoration, and consider possibilities for creative use of buildings for ecological education in addition to the spiritual, music, health and wellness uses already underway. Sisters in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas are engaged in various ministries serving the needs of endangered brother and sister immigrants, and nine sisters and associates have formed a Circle of Welcome to companion one immigrant family newly arrived in St. Cloud. A number of associates serve people in vulnerable situations in central Minnesota. As Pope Francis has stated, “Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.” (*Laudato Si* #217)

Please join us in dreaming of all that God draws us together to do and to be. Let us continue to expand our horizons and relationships with the diversity of all life, from the smallest insect within the soil of central Minnesota to the farthest community endangered by war, violence, poverty and environmental destruction. “Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.” (*Laudato Si* #244)
Saint Francis. . .determined to be like the lepers themselves

Sister Elise Saggau

It is clear from the earliest Franciscan sources that Francis of Assisi did not found an order primarily for the purpose of helping the poor and marginalized of his 13th century society or raise their social status. Actually, Francis did not really “found” an order at all. It just “grew up” around him until it demanded to be recognized as such. In the early days of his discernment, before he even had any followers, before he had any real clue about what direction to take in his life, he had a dramatic experience. It shed new light on how he perceived his world, on how he perceived himself. His early biographer, Thomas of Celano, says:

When he started thinking of holy and useful matters with the grace and strength of the Most High, while still in the clothes of the world, he met a leper one day. Made stronger than himself, he came up and kissed him. He then began to consider himself less and less, until by the mercy of the Redeemer, he came to complete victory over himself (1C 17).

Franciscan theologian Bonaventure later reflects:

From then on, he clothed himself with a spirit of poverty, a sense of humility, and an eagerness for intimate piety. For previously not only had association with lepers horrified him greatly, so too did even gazing upon them from a distance. But, now because of Christ crucified, who according to the text of the prophet appeared despised as a leper, [Francis] . . . showed deeds of humility and humanity to lepers with a gentle piety. He visited their houses frequently, generously distributed alms to them, and with a great drive of compassion, kissed their hands and their mouths (LM I:5).

After this life-changing encounter, Francis seemed determined to be like the lepers themselves, to share their deprivations and, especially, their low position in the eyes of the world. He did this because he found in their situation a peculiar form of Christ’s presence in the world. Thus, he spent a good deal of time with lepers. He cared for their needs, not as one richer or healthier or more skilled, but as a brother determined to share their poor and lowly lot in society. As others joined Francis, he insisted that they, too, spend significant time among the lepers, not just to care for them but to learn from them how to be like Christ—lowly and rejected by society. It was an essential feature of Francis’s “formation program.”

In his first rule, he says: “The brothers must rejoice when they live among people considered of little value and looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside” (ER 9:2). A later

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writer tells us: “At the beginning of [the order], after the brothers grew in number, Francis wanted them to stay in hospitals of lepers to serve them. At that time, whenever nobles and commoners came to [the order], they were told, among other things, that they had to serve the lepers and stay in their houses” (MP 12). This was not primarily to teach the brothers how to be charitable towards the less fortunate, but how to be LIKE THEM.

Someone once said: “The hand of the giver is always superior to the hand of the receiver.” Francis, immersed in meditation on the humility of the Lord Jesus, determined that neither he nor his followers would voluntarily hold social or economic positions above those they served. As much as possible, they lived outside the secure walled cities of their time, because the “lesser people” lived outside the walls. As much as possible, they performed manual labor for their daily sustenance and shared what they earned with those who had even less. When they were not able to earn enough, they begged. They believed that among the “little and neglected” people there was the greatest likelihood of finding and serving the Lord Jesus.

Over the centuries, this aspect of the Franciscan way of life has not been so consciously subscribed to. Today many congregations are characterized by economic security and effective services to society. The lives of the brothers have become clericalized and that of both brothers and sisters generally secure and socially acceptable. However, there remains in the spirit of well-formed Franciscans a noticeable directness and simple relationality that transcend the services they render. There is no agreed-upon name for this. It might be called humility, or simplicity, or poverty, or perhaps, as one bishop once named it for the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls—kindness. Whatever the name, it is always an effort to be a brother or a sister to the other.

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Jubilarians

This summer issue of Our Journey honors four Franciscan Sisters celebrating their jubilees. Together, they represent 285 years of commitment to the Franciscan way of life and decades of gospel living and ministry around the world. May God bless them abundantly.

Sister Gertrude Brixius 60th
Sister Olga Neft 75th
Sister Audrey Jean Loher 75th
Sister Adella Gross 75th
Grateful for her call to religious life

Julie Haldenwanger

Sister Gert Brixius has spent a lifetime serving people. She became a Franciscan Sister in 1962 and began her ministry at St. Gabriel’s Hospital in food services. She worked in the food services field in institutions run by the Franciscan Sisters, including nursing homes where she began serving as supervisor of dietary and learning the skills needed for management. Because of her experience, she was asked to direct the Senior Meals program that was being established by Catholic Charities of St. Cloud in 1974. Her role was to work with the elderly population in a seven-county area to encourage them to join in communal meals.

In 1980, the Franciscan Sisters decided they wanted to start a ministry in an area that did not have the presence of many religious sisters. Tennessee was the chosen destination, because at that time there were more Catholics moving south for work and very few church workers to minister there. A meeting was held with the bishop in Memphis, and he welcomed them to come. Sister Gert joined the ministry and started working in food service in a senior housing complex. During that time, she began to really understand the extent and effects of racism. She remembers one incident where she assisted a Black client who needed dental work. The two went to dentist after dentist trying to get him seen, but none would treat him.

Because of her experiences in the South, Sister Gert felt a new calling and decided to attend Mount Mary College in Milwaukee at the age of 45 to get a degree in social work. While in school she worked at St. Benedict’s Center, an organization that helped women get their GEDs. Most of the clients were recently released from jail and were trying to get their lives back in order. Some would quit coming to the program, and Sister Gert’s job was to track them down and try to get them to return. She was surprised at her naiveté and had some eye-opening experiences during these visits. She also worked for Community Advocates in Milwaukee, helping people find housing. The program was able to place families in HUD houses to allow them time to save money, help them understand what it took to maintain a house, have access to social services and secure permanent housing.

Sister Gert felt she needed a master’s degree in social work, so she continued her education at the University of Illinois in Chicago. During her schooling she worked for the Department of Child Protective Services. She would go out to visit clients who had been reported to CPS to check on them. She remembers one client who had four or five children and only two mattresses on the floor and little furniture in their home. The mother paid the rent and knew how to stretch her food money by having her children utilize services like after-school programs that offered food. It was an awakening for Sister Gert to see just how some people are able to manage. She could see why a report was made to CPS, but she felt the mother was doing the best she could and didn’t feel she needed her children taken away. After working for CPS, during the height of the AIDS epidemic, Sister Gert was assigned a field placement working with a program that helped people who had the dreaded disease. She helped clients with programming and learned a lot about AIDS during this time. She found it to be a wonderful, enlightening experience—a real blessing.

From 1989-02, Sister Gert worked at Community Advocates, Milwaukee, helping people find adequate housing.
While she was still working toward her master’s degree, Sister Gert started volunteering at the area Catholic Worker House. This was an organization that was using a former convent to house homeless women with children. Sister Gert was asked to be the director of this particular house when she graduated from school. Most Catholic Worker Houses rely only on donations, but Sister Gert helped maintain the program through fundraising, grant writing and government funding programs to support the house. She also worked with clients and remembers one family that was made up of a mother with five or six children. The mother had possible substance abuse issues and the oldest child was 8 years old. This child acted as a parent to his siblings, caring for them when their mother couldn’t. Sister Gert felt helpless to change his situation but learned to trust that just being there for him made a difference in the child’s life.

After returning to the Motherhouse to serve as the executive director of Ministries and Services for six years, Sister Gert moved on to Minneapolis. A neighborhood community group there founded a vegetarian restaurant, St. Martin’s Table, that served soups and sandwiches. She was hired as the director, but eventually needed to help close the restaurant because it was not able to sustain itself. She found the endeavor to be quite challenging at times. She then moved on to help the Good Shepherd Sisters transition out of their convent and into a retirement home, after which they closed their convent. Sister Gert then served in pastoral ministry at St. Bridget’s Parish in north Minneapolis. This created many challenges working within the neighborhood, but she found the parishioners were determined to keep their church alive despite the circumstances. Sister Gert has since retired but keeps busy serving on committees and being involved in community activities.

Looking back, she is so appreciative of being called to religious life and her Franciscan Community—it has graced her with indescribable support, opportunities, challenges, good times and great memories.

She felt in her heart God was calling her

Excerpt from Sister Olga Neft’s 75th Jubilee biography

It all began December 14, 1929, when the fifth child in a family of six was born to Henry and Otillia (Funke) Neft in Blackduck. It was a bitterly cold day, but Mrs. Norbo, an experienced nurse-midwife, offered a warm birthing room in her home to Otillia. Named after significant ancestors and friends, this new baby was baptized Olga Otillia Seraphia on December 15. Her mother told Olga, “You were a very tiny baby. Your head was the size of a teacup and you could fit in a cigar box. We had you baptized the very next morning at St. Ann’s Church—we were so worried that you would not live.”

Olga attended Shooks Elementary School, District 11, a one-room school with a yearly enrollment of 20-25 students. Olga loved school and the opportunity to tutor the little kids as she advanced through

Sister Olga organized the library for the newly founded St. Clare College.
the grades. She remembers her joy when the school got a *Compton’s Pictured Encyclopedia* and a whole new world opened up to her as she eagerly read it and everything else she could lay her hands on.

Like all farm families, Olga and her five siblings helped with the daily chores. When she was 9 years old, she learned how to milk cows by hand. In 1944, the Rural Electric Association (REA) replaced the kerosene and gasoline lamps with electricity. By that time, Olga was a sophomore at St. Francis High School in Little Falls.

Her senior year was a time for discerning and choosing a way of life. She intended to go to business college, yet on the night of January 18-19, 1947, she found herself tossing and turning in her bed as she wrestled with a call from God that she felt in her heart. The next morning, she went to see Sister Mary Eve Goering, Mother Mary Anastasia Ohmann and Father Henry Soenneker, and by early afternoon she made arrangements to enter St. Francis Convent. She hurriedly wrote a letter to her parents asking their permission and blessing, and on January 26, at 17 years, she “crossed the street” and became a postulant. She made her first vows on August 12, 1949, and final vows on August 12, 1952.

Sister Olga earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in library science, and later a master’s degree in theology from St. John’s University, Collegeville. Her ministries spanned education, retreats/spiritual direction, parish ministry and community service. She began as a librarian and teacher at St. Francis High School and served on the Leadership Team of the Franciscan Sisters. She ministered in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa.

Of all her years of service, the 1960s were most critical in her personal/professional formation. During those summers at the Catholic University of America and with the Jesuits at Woodstock College in Maryland, she moved into a whole new sense of her identity as a Franciscan woman. Subsequent opportunities for study and work supported and enhanced the pivotal choices she made in the 1960s.

The summer of 1971 brought her face-to-face with her own mortality as she went through major surgery for cancer followed by a lengthy recuperation. Her experience of the love and concern her sisters in community taught her the strength of community, bonding in a way that words and theories had never done—she no longer believed that she was loved, she knew that she was loved.

When Sister Olga celebrated her 60th Jubilee, she said, “I feel so blessed. Although my life has had its share of ups and downs, God has always been there whether in presence or in perceived absences. Whenever I have felt most abandoned, God has sent a messenger of peace and love. I am privileged to belong to a wonderful community, to have caring relatives and faithful friends, to have meaningful ministries and opportunities to continue to live and to grow.”

Sister Olga (right) and Sister Mary Schuman at St. Francis High School, 1970s. “Hmmm, what should we do next?”

Sister Olga and Sister Elise Saggau were colleagues at St. Francis High School. She recalls, “During the late 70s Sister Olga studied theology at St. John’s University. Here she became great friends with many of the seminarians. During those days, the young men had considerable leeway in planning their leisure time, and some of them liked to go dancing at the Medina Ballroom. They often took Sister Olga with them, and she became a real old-time dance enthusiast. Even during her early days at Clare Residence, she would be the first up to waltz and polka when the music started to play.”

Sister Olga, now retired, lives in Clare Residence. Despite living with memory loss, she is always pleasant and has an appreciative smile for everyone who visits, especially for the occasional furry friend.
From Peru to Venezuela to Guatemala

Julie Haldenwanger

Sister Audrey Jean Loher believes that to be a missionary is to be an instrument in helping people of all ages come to believe in themselves, realize their potential and do things they thought were impossible.

Sister Audrey Jean has ministered in many places, both domestic and international, and has served in a variety of roles. Wherever she was stationed, Sister Audrey Jean was involved in teaching music—giving lessons for piano, organ and choir. In her early years as a religious, she learned what the vow of obedience meant as she was moved to a new mission every two to three years. This was difficult for her because she would need to leave just when she was getting to really know the people. She lived in small local communities of three sisters during those years on what were called catechetical missions. There she realized that life is often what one makes it, so she developed a positive attitude and decided to make her life a good one.

In 1964, Sister Audrey Jean was drawn to foreign mission work and was able to go to the mission in Yunguyo, Peru, which served the local Aymara indigenous people. Sister Audrey Jean, along with other team members, lived in a small mud hut in order to gain a better understanding of the local culture and beliefs. She remembers that they had no oven, so they did their baking in an oil drum. She assisted in the mission’s healthcare services and was sometimes called on to drive both nurses and patients to locations to receive care. But the majority of Sister Audrey Jean’s time was spent teaching religion, including in the public school which allotted two hours per week for religious instruction. Sister Audrey Jean also served in Zepita and Mocachi, for a total of 10 years in Peru. During this time, she helped develop liturgical services by transcribing traditional Aymara hymns and songs to sheet music, incorporating customs and symbols from the culture—the first time this had been done.

Sister Audrey Jean’s next mission was in Maracay, Venezuela, in 1979. There she ministered as a pastora, working to create a community of the faithful in San Carlos barrio, a place where the people lived isolated lives even though they dwelled in crowded conditions. She served San Bartolome Parish, and it was there that she witnessed the best example of the concept of community. There was no physical church in the neighborhood, and the people had to walk several miles to get to the nearest one. There was an overgrown lot that had a shack on it, and it was decided to build a chapel on that lot. Sister Audrey Jean was tasked with organizing the project. The community came together to clear the land to get the lot ready for construction. A local woman who was an architect designed the new building, and a local man who could read blueprints took charge of the construction. Sister Audrey Jean organized funds for building materials, much of which came from donations from her family. Unfortunately, she needed to leave before the chapel was finished; the community came together and completed...
the project. Sister Audrey Jean was able to return for the dedication to see the finished chapel—a true testament to the power of community.

In 1992, Sister Audrey Jean embarked on her final international mission in Guatemala, volunteering as a member of Witness for Peace, an organization that accompanied Guatemalan refugees who had been living in Mexico and were returning to Guatemala. Since the Franciscans Sisters have a history of giving sanctuary to refugees whenever and wherever needed, this ministry seemed quite natural to her.

After her retirement in 2004, she continued her service to refugees by volunteering at Humane Borders. This organization’s purpose is to save the lives of people crossing the Arizona desert from Mexico by maintaining water stations throughout the desert. The 80 stations consist of large barrels filled with water, marked by blue flags attached to 30-foot poles. The volunteers were confronted by the Border Patrol on a regular basis, but the officers wanted to save lives as well. The main conflict was with people who were against their efforts and would vandalize the barrels and flags.

Looking back at her different missions, she noted that people and communities around the world all have similarities, no matter where they are. All have difficulties and hardships and negative aspects. But they all have beauty, too, and good that balances the bad. This has made her overall experiences positive in the end.

Celebrating her 75th Jubilee this year, Sister Audrey Jean reflected, “I am grateful to the many people of different lands and cultures who were so patient and loved me, even though I was different and spoke with a ‘gringo’ accent, and for those who did not agree with me, challenging me to be open to change and growth.”

Scholarship awarded!

Abby Noyes, daughter of Christina and Jamie Noyes, is the recipient of the 2022 Judine Cassidy Scholarship. Sister Cordy Korkowski made the presentation on behalf of the Franciscan Sisters at the annual scholarship awards ceremony at Little Falls Community High School.

During high school, Abby was a swimmer and loves all water-related sports. In 2022 she was the manager of the softball team and participated in the prom and homecoming committees. Abby plans to study nursing at Bemidji State University in the fall.

Sister Judine was principal of St. Francis High School from 1958-1977. She had a passion for education and a desire to see young women reach their full potential. Congratulations, Abby, on receiving this $500 scholarship!
Brief but spectacular moments

*Sister Adella Gross*

"With joy we shall draw water from the streams of endless life. With joy we shall draw water from the living well of God." Isaiah 12:3

Looking back over 75 years is like looking into a deep well. Much of what happened is buried in mystery in the recesses of my mind. It is forgotten. It’s like looking down and seeing what floats to the top. What is it that brings life and meaning to all those years? Here, with apologies to PBS, are a few of my brief but spectacular moments.

In 1950, after a year at school in Milwaukee, I returned to the Motherhouse where I was picked to accompany Mother Anastasia and several other sisters to open the House of Studies on Summit Avenue in St. Paul. We arrived early in the morning to find the house locked. The archbishop was expected within the hour. Sister Lorraine Allen took a broom from the porch, broke a window and opened its latch. We slid the window open; I crawled in and opened the door. Preparations were fast and furious for the arrival of the archbishop. He blessed the house and sat down to coffee, oblivious to the break-in. So began decades of Franciscans living on Summit Avenue.

My years in Peru were full of adventure. Sister Donna Zetah and I headed for a prayer meeting in the campo after participating in Good Friday processions around the plazas in Yunguyo. It was dark when we started up the mountain. Ahead, we spied a huge rock in the road. The Aymara believe that, when Jesus died, the devil was loosed into the world, so they set up traps for protection. Was this one? We were caught between the mountain, the rock and a precipice. We couldn’t budge the boulder. Two men appeared but ran on by. Normally, they would’ve happily helped us “madres.” Donna studied the situation and declared, “We can make it.” I stood on the driver’s side, controlling the brakes with my hand, while she pushed from behind. The jeep inched into place. Donna climbed behind the wheel and directed me to jump in. Oh dear! Surely a tire would go over the edge. She drove and I prayed. We made it! We joined the gathering of people singing and praying. We left them with trepidation about encountering the same obstacle in the road. “Miracle of miracles,” the stone was moved! What a relief, but it took me a long time to fall asleep that night.

From 1991-97, I worked at the Catholic Bishops Conference in Washington, D.C., as coordinator of pastoral care for the organization People on the Move. This included migrant farm workers, circus and carnival workers and race car drivers, among others. While my main focus and time was spent on working with farm workers, I developed a great love for the circus and became as involved as possible with that ministry. During these years, I had wonderful opportunities for travel and interactions with numerous people, both well-known and common, ordinary folks.

"With joy we shall draw water from the streams of endless life. With joy we shall draw water from the living well of God." Isaiah 12:3
I could write volumes, but space is limited. Some of my brief but spectacular moments were spent with Martin Sheen, Pope John Paul, Mario Andretti, Dolores Huerta, Msgr. Higgins (the labor priest), the fabulous Nock family (performers with the Ringling Brothers Circus), Cesar Chavez and his successor Arturo Rodriguez, to name a few.

So, as I gaze into this well and capture these brief moments of a long life, I am filled with gratitude for God’s loving care and guidance which have led me in directions I could never have imagined. Thanks for the memories and the spectacular moments.

Sister Anita’s memoir now available!

Over the years when Sister Anita Jennissen shared stories of her work as a missionary, she’d often hear, “Sister Anita, you should write a book.” What better time to focus on a writing project than during a pandemic? With more time on her hands, she spent about a year reliving her missionary years and creating her memoir. “One cannot ever fully express the gifts received through living the life of a missionary—experiencing a new country, language and religion. For certain, I learned that each culture has something special to offer if we are open to receive and appreciate it,” she said.

Turning her stories into a book, Sister Anita feels a sense of accomplishment and hopes it inspires others to travel and learn about other places, other people, other perspectives. *The World is My Cloister* is available in the Franciscan Gift Shop at St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, for $18 or by mail (+tax and shipping). Please call (320)632-0606 or stop by the gift shop.

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.
Thank you, Clare and Joe!

Sister Cordy Korkowski, director of Donor Relations

A primary task for the development staff is opening the daily mail. Along with their donation, people often share news (births, deaths, retirements, etc.) and ask for prayers. Such notes often come from Clare and Joe Reagan. Clare and I were classmates at St. Francis High School, so I love the updates, especially at Christmas time. I remember Clare fondly—her friendliness, academic aptitude, kindness to her classmates. I also remember the invitations from her mother, Catherine, to host Clare’s “close friends” for special occasions. Catherine loved celebrating her only child, and I, being a boarder at St. Francis, looked forward to homemade food and an evening of fun off campus at the Bednark home. The Franciscan Sisters are deeply grateful for how Clare and Joe have continued their connections with the Franciscan Sisters. Thank you, Clare and Joe, for your 364 gifts to the Franciscan Sisters over the last 23 years. You have truly shared your blessings with us.

In appreciation . . .

Clare & Joe Reagan

The Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls have been a part of my life for a very long time. My grandparents, Clara and George Calhoun, moved to Little Falls around 1931 with their large family. My mother, Catherine Calhoun Bednark, attended St. Francis High School her junior and senior years. My relationship with the sisters began in 1946 when I made my first communion. My mom was a patient at St. Gabriel’s Hospital, wheelchair bound, and could not attend my first communion. The sisters arranged for me to make my first communion in St. Gabriel’s tiny chapel, and I was able to spend the day with my mom. Many of the sisters stopped by with holy cards to celebrate my special day. This kindness remains a special memory 76 years later. My four years (1953-1957) at St. Francis High School flew by. I have great memories and still have contact with some classmates. The solid moral education and academic foundation I received prepared me for the next four years under the guidance of the Sisters of Saint Francis of Rochester, Minnesota, at the College of St. Teresa in Winona.

My husband, Joe, and I were married August 12, 1961, at St. Mary’s Church, Little Falls. We began our married life in Chicago totally unaware of what God had in store for us. With Vietnam heating up, Joe joined the Navy and received his commission as an Ensign through Officer Candidate School in Newport, R.I., in 1964. We spent 26 years on active duty serving in various land and sea tours on the East Coast. I became a Navy wife, a challenge all its own. We are blessed with six wonderful children and seven grandchildren. God has been so good to us, granting us a long life together. After Joe retired from the Navy, we became involved in Holy Trinity Parish in Norfolk, Va. Joe worked there as business manager for 18 years, and I volunteered weekly in the Social Ministry food pantry. This close-up view of the church’s ministries gave us an appreciation of what religious orders do, with diminishing resources, to support the local community. We are aware of what the Franciscan Sisters do and feel compelled to support them as best we can, returning to them some of the many blessings they have given me during my childhood and young adult years in Little Falls and my college years in Winona.
Welcoming House celebrates 20 years!
Sisters Jan Kilian and Michelle L’Allier

July 31 marks the 20th anniversary of opening Franciscan Welcoming House, a Franciscan residence in St. Cloud. We give thanks for all who participated in creating this place and contributed to the community and the programs that have filled these years.

Sisters Loretta Denfeld and Cordelia Korkowski co-founded the Welcoming House in 2002 in a rental home at 1615 9th Ave. S. in St. Cloud. In this home, they developed programs to build relationships with young adults, primarily with students from the Newman Center who attended St. Cloud State University. Their programs included the Busy Students Retreat, hosting Soup and Psalms with the Sisters and a series on nonviolence. In 2004, what was known as Franciscan Residence, and before that as Holy Spirit Convent, at 1600 11th Ave. S. in St. Cloud, became the new home of Franciscan Welcoming House. Sisters Marie Dockendorf and Bernice Rieland joined the community in this newly renovated building and broadened the base of people served through Welcoming House.

A Franciscan Community Leadership Report in October 2005 described the purpose of the Franciscan Welcoming House in these terms:

1. To experience community living and integrate Franciscan spirituality in daily life as women of energy, spirit, and peace.

2. To provide young adults and/or other persons opportunities for prayer, discernment, theological reflection, and enrichment sessions focusing on the Franciscan way of life.

Welcoming House entered a new phase of sharing life with young adults in 2009 with the formation of the Franciscan Community Volunteers (FCV) program. Sister Clara Stang was asked by our then community minister, Sister Mary Obowa, to consider new forms of young adult ministry at Welcoming House. With Sister Clara’s leadership, young adult ministry at Welcoming House developed into a long-term volunteer program. She, together with Katie Janssen (now Cassady) who had experience with Vincentian volunteer programs, created a new year-long volunteer program for women and men. FCV attracted young adults from all over the United States, as well as Australia and Nicaragua.

Sister Clara worked with nonprofits to provide a service site in the St. Cloud area for each volunteer. These service sites paid a stipend to the program for their volunteer’s work, helping to fund the experience. In addition, AmeriCorps contributed an education award of up to $5,000 for each volunteer. Volunteers received spiritual formation, experienced Franciscan values and studied Catholic Social Teachings.

A strong component of the program was the experience of the combined community of resident sisters, volunteers and FCV staff, sharing life through prayer and reflection, meals, recreation and household chores. Another circle of relationships included matching each volunteer with local lay community companions, a sister companion and a praying sister, who accompanied a specific volunteer during their time in the program.

Sisters Loretta Denfeld, Cordy Korkowski, Katie Janssen and Sister Clara Stang in 2009, ready to receive the first group of volunteers.
An FCV advisory board supported the program in many ways and helped create the Taste of St. Cloud, a fundraiser and silent auction where people sampled food from local restaurants. The annual event brought in significant financial support for FCV and participating restaurants benefitted from the publicity they received. All were blessed through relationships that were developed and strengthened over the years.

Sister Clara Stang directed the program for four years, followed by Franciscan Associate Pat Flicker who served as director for seven years until the program was discontinued as interest in long-term volunteer programs waned nationwide. All told, 53 volunteers served at 24 service sites and offered over 67,000 hours of service to area nonprofits. What a mutual blessing for all involved!

Nine months ago, in a time of life-changing discernment, I was steadily drawn to living in spiritual community with the sisters of Welcoming House. Together, we are creating an intentional intergenerational community that supports inner spiritual work and outer relationship skills that break through barriers to build loving relationships. Living with others where practical actions embody ideas of spiritual kinship and non-dualistic thinking and support what is being nudged for transformation continues to be a great blessing and gift.

—Jamie Deering

Today Welcoming House serves as a home for a newly forming intentional, intergenerational community, that hopes to respond to the need for community in these current times. This follows our call as stated in the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls Constitutions: “Participating in the Church’s mission, we promote community through the works that we undertake and through our personal presence among those we serve.”

The structure of this intentional community is based on regularly shared prayer, participation in community life, faith sharing and reflection opportunities, recreation and household responsibilities. Franciscan Sisters Jan Kilian, Karen Niedzielski and Michelle L’Allier and lay woman Jamie Deering form a stable core group to welcome and engage in mutual mentoring relationships with others in Franciscan
gospel values. Preparations are in process to welcome young adults in their 20s and 30s who seek a healthy communal environment to support personal, relational and spiritual growth for a commitment of a few months up to a year. There is an application and discernment process for both the core group and young adult dimensions of this intergenerational community.

In happy continuity with the FCV program, former community companions serve as an extended circle of relationships and mutual support, participating in shared activities and prayer on a regular basis.

Welcoming House also provides office space for Franciscan Associate Rosanne Fischer, the Franciscan Sisters’ coordinator of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, and for Sister Michelle L’Allier, part of the program staff for the Franciscan Life Center. Serving as an outreach of the Franciscan Life Center in Little Falls, Welcoming House provides space for shared prayer and learning on topics related to Franciscan spirituality and mission. Welcoming House continues to be a space of hospitality and outreach to people who desire to integrate Franciscan gospel values into their lives.

We celebrate everyone who has shared in the ministry of Welcoming House over these past 20 years. This corner lot with wonderful green space has been host to countless residents, volunteers, visitors and program participants. We remember sisters who have lived here, including Ange Mayers and Rose Mae Rausch. Also, Franciscan Associates Rick and Geri Dietz and all those who contributed to or studied with the four cohorts of the Engaging Franciscan Spirituality (EFS) program!

Welcoming House is a sacred place, blessed by God and by the beauty of rich relationships and activities. We look forward to experiencing this mission continuing to unfold into the future!

“During my seven years with FCV, lives were transformed through a year of meaningful service—learning and leaning into the Franciscan way of life. During that time, I was blessed to companion 29 amazing young adults through their year of transformation. The Welcoming House was, and still is, a sacred space where people can gather and grow. Young adults discerned their next steps and formed relationships that endure today. The Franciscan Sisters dream of inspiring young adults to live a Franciscan life at Welcoming House is just one example of the ministry there, for it is all hearts that enter Welcoming House that are changed. I know mine was!”

—Associate Pat Flicker, former director

Pat, (far right) with Sister Michelle and Alison Swoboda, Anna Taylor and John-Caleb Vacheresse, all former FCVs who are now Franciscan Associates.
Thank you, generous donors!

Each year, as Memorial Day nears, we send a special appeal asking people to remember their loved ones with a gift to the Franciscan Sisters. So many generous gifts have made their way to our Development Office. Thank you! Perhaps Sister Carol Schmit’s prayers in solidarity with the people of Ukraine struck a chord. Her plea, “What more must we do? What more can we do?” holds true as the war, death and destruction continue. With grateful prayers, we remember you and your loved ones—and the people of Ukraine.

Here at St. Francis Convent, we are presently hoping and dreaming of a new piano for our Sacred Heart Chapel. When we learned that our beloved piano had come to the end of its life, we thought what better use of memorial funds than for a new piano that’s used almost daily for Mass, celebrations and concerts? As we hear the music in our chapel, we will be mindful of you and your gift.

‘Bee stops’ attract pollinators

With help from the One Planet Fund, Laurie Schoeck, teacher at Little Falls Middle School, designed a series of lessons on climate change and caring for the Earth. Her goal: teach students to become part of the solution in reducing carbon emissions and protecting biodiversity. This amazing group of middle schoolers created “bee stops” with plants that attract bees and other pollinators. “My hope is that students develop a passion for environmentalism and conservation that continues into the future,” Laurie said.

Applications for the next cycle of the One Planet Fund are due July 1. Contact: Elizabeth Rydeen, (320)632-0624 or erydeen@fslf.org.
In loving memory

Sister Mary Lou Eltgroth, 87 — Mary Louise Eltgroth was born September 10, 1934, in West Union, the oldest of five children of Louis and Emma (Rosonke) Eltgroth. Growing up on a farm, chores, such as milking cows, collecting eggs, driving the tractor and helping with haying and harvesting, were a part of Mary Lou's daily life. Her one-room school had a dozen students. Mary Lou's parents, fervent Catholics, provided a Catholic high school education for all their children. She and her sisters, Cecilia and Rita, attended St. Francis High School in Little Falls, while her two brothers went to St. John's in Collegeville.

She entered the Franciscan Community as a senior in high school and made her final vows August 12, 1958. Sister Mary Lou ministered in education, receiving her bachelor's degree from the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul and a master's degree from the University of Minnesota. She dedicated almost 50 years teaching the youth in the Diocese of St. Cloud and the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis. Wherever she was, Sister Mary Lou's ministry extended from the classroom into the parish and surrounding community.

Once retired, she devoted her energies to local ministries: Clothes Review, teaching English to immigrants, reading to first graders at Lindbergh School and working in various areas of St. Francis Convent. In 2009, she received the Volunteer of the Year Award from the Little Falls Chamber of Commerce, recognizing her many years as a volunteer with the Arts and Crafts Fair and Paint-A-Thon. Her ministry reached to the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO) where she served several terms as regional spiritual assistant. She loved reading and studying Franciscan writings and scripture, all of which enhanced her prayer life. Mary Lou's ready smile and special greeting to all, from the UPS driver to residents from Alverna Apartments with whom she shared a game of cribbage, brightened everyone's day.

September 10, 1934 – March 31, 2022

Contact: Sister Bernice Ebner
116 8th Avenue SE, Little Falls, Minnesota 56345
(320)632-0699 • bebner@fslf.org

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

PLANNED GIVING

Contact: Sister Bernice Ebner
116 8th Avenue SE, Little Falls, Minnesota 56345
(320)632-0699 • bebner@fslf.org

SUMMER RETREAT

Creating Peace through Franciscan Discernment

Held via Zoom August 15-19 • $80

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday at 9:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. Thursday and Friday at 9:30 a.m.

For more information and to register by August 10, please call the Franciscan Life Center Office at (320)-632-0668 or franciscanlife@fslf.org.

Retreat presenter,
Sister Christine Still, OSF
St. Francis Music Center celebrates National Night Out

— TUESDAY, AUGUST 2 • 6 – 8 P.M. —

St. Francis Music Center along with the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls celebrate National Night Out with an outdoor concert. National Night Out celebrates community which is a perfect opportunity to celebrate our rural musicians! Enjoy performances by the St. Francis Percussion Ensemble and St. Francis Orchestras along with other students from the Music Center. Also performing will be singer/songwriter Andy Spofford. Andy is a well-known musician who travels throughout the Midwest entertaining and delighting audiences of all ages.

This community concert is free and open to everyone!

Bring your chair or blanket and enjoy this outdoor event on the west lawn of St. Francis Campus, Little Falls.