

# Our Journey

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**FRANCISCAN SISTERS**  
OF LITTLE FALLS, MINNESOTA

*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:**  
**Franciscan Life Group**  
Standing: Mary and Joel Donnell,  
Geri Dietz, Sister Joanne Heim;  
seated: Jan Everson, Sister Doretta  
Meier, Kathie Pflueger. See the  
article on page 6.

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 2025  
Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls,  
Minnesota



*The letter below was originated by women religious congregations on the East Coast and has now been signed by over 25 such congregations across the country.*

## A vision for a future full of HOPE

To Our Dear Neighbors,

As Catholic Sisters, vowed women religious, we deeply value the relationships and encounters we have with so many of you while serving in schools, hospitals, parishes, retreat centers, nursing homes, food pantries, and outreach centers. Even if we do not know each other personally, we feel compelled to reach out to you today to express our heartfelt sadness, grief, and lament as we witness sudden and devastating changes severely impacting people in our communities—people we know, love, and who are our neighbors.

Many actions we observe in our nation today seem to contradict values that underlie our shared humanity, values which we have nurtured and endeavored to embody in our actions—although not always successfully—over our lifetimes as Catholic Sisters. Love, compassion, empathy, radical hospitality, and mercy are central to our lives. These values shared among all the world religions make us genuinely human. We firmly believe these values must ground us as a nation if there is to be a future full of hope for ALL generations to come.

Imagine a future centered on principles that allow for the full flourishing of all humanity and our common home, Earth. We know these principles as Catholic Social Teaching. Although you may use different words, the essence of this teaching transcends faith traditions and resonates in the lives of all people of goodwill. Adopting these principles can guide us in the days ahead.

### *We believe that:*

- Every person is an expression of God. All life is sacred.
- We must prioritize the needs of those who are the most vulnerable.
- There is dignity in all work, and the rights of all workers must take precedence over profit.
- Earth is God's gift to us, and we have the privilege to cherish, defend, and protect her for future generations.
- Justice is the path to lasting peace.

Today, we ask you to join us in living these values with courage. Love our neighbors! Welcome the stranger! Care for the most vulnerable among us! Speak the truth! Work for justice! Only when "We the people" lead with compassion and empathy will a future filled with hope for all generations be possible.

May God continue to bless us on this journey.

With love and hope,

*The Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls*



Here I am in the Peace Garden at the Basilica of St. Francis. I never dreamed I'd be in Rome waiting for our new leader to be announced. We watched for white smoke with eagerness and were amazed and pleased to have a pope from the United States and especially from Chicago. I am impressed by his presence and words of wisdom. *Viva la papa!*

# Dear Friends,

As I browsed through the stories for this issue of *Our Journey*, I became aware of the many commitments that shape our lives and our world. Every day, we make commitments—promises to ourselves and to our spouses and children, our neighbors, our local community. Commitments shape our lives and build relationships of trust and care. There are big commitments like marriage, religious vows or starting a job. In this issue, we celebrate Sister Doretta Meier, who made a life commitment 60 years ago; and we welcome two new Franciscan Associates, who commit to living Franciscan values within their families and in the workplace.

We also make smaller commitments—joining the chorale and showing up for rehearsal, taking action to promote care of the earth and land justice, being with the sick and disabled and so much more. Each of you, our friends and donors, makes a commitment every time you offer a donation that sustains our ministries, supports health care for our retired sisters or helps replace an aging dishwasher or repair a roof. You know who you are. Thank you!

Undergirding these big and small commitments is our belief that our lives make a difference. We anchor that belief in hope, entrusting ourselves to the Divine Energy that surrounds and sustains us, enabling us to reach out to others. Hope builds community as reflected by Pope Francis:

“A single individual is enough for hope to exist, and that individual can be you. When hope is given to another, there will be another ‘you,’ and another ‘you,’ and it turns into an ‘us.’”

—Pope Francis, TED Talk, April 2017

I send you greetings of peace as we move into these summer days, rich with hope and possibility in the midst of the opportunities and challenges each day brings.

Peace and love,

*S Bea Eichten, OFM*

Sister Bea Eichten  
Community Minister

# God gave her the grace to move on

*Julie Tomala-Haldenwanger, Community Relations*

On an early June morning, Bernard and Magdalene Meier welcomed their daughter Johanna into their farming family near Zeeland, N. Dak., The sixth of 13 children, Johanna was blessed to be a part of such a large family where the values of sharing responsibility and accountability were instilled. Her parents taught their children that everything is a gift from God, to be treated reverently and received in gratitude. Sharing meals and praying together as a family were a priority. A large family gave Johanna many things to celebrate such as the birth of nieces and nephews, baptisms, graduations and weddings; it also offered support during the tougher times of life.

Johanna felt a calling to religious life at an early age. Despite having relatives in the Benedictine and Presentation orders, she wasn't attracted to either one. Instead, she was drawn to the simplicity and joyful spirit of the Franciscan Sisters from Hankinson, N. Dak., whom she grew to know through summer catechism lessons. These encounters led her to attend high school at St. Francis Academy and eventually enter the postulancy at St. Francis Convent in Hankinson. Accepted into the novitiate in July 1965 and given the name Sister Doretta, she made her final vows to join the order on August 10, 1971.

As a young sister, she eagerly participated in the changes and experiments in her community that occurred after Vatican II. However, in the early 1980s her community decided to return to a more traditional form of religious life. As a result, many of her dear friends in the community decided to leave, beginning a challenging time for Sister Doretta. She decided to stay for a few more years and enter discernment. In her heart, she felt called to live religious life as directed by Vatican II, and above all, to continue living the Franciscan way of life. During discernment, she felt the Spirit of God guiding her to where she was called to be.

After visiting other communities, she found one that shared her vision of religious life—the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota. Numerous experiences during



From 2006-2011, Sister Doretta was part of the community living group in Flensburg which at that time included Sisters Bernarda Sanoski, Fabian Schneider, Christelle Watercott and Rose Mae Rausch. On her daily walks, she enjoyed the beauty of nature and the people who stopped to chat. Franciscan Sisters served in Flensburg for decades, beginning with summer religion classes in 1936. An official mission was established in 1941. The sisters remained active in the parish until 2014.

her first visit affirmed her decision to join the order, but one that stuck out was seeing a large bulletin board filled with posters, newsletters, meeting announcements, etc., showcasing the community's active engagement and ministries serving those who are poor locally and globally, caring for the environment, and providing housing and employment to immigrants.

On March 19, 1986, Sister Doretta transferred from the Franciscan Sisters of Hankinson, N. Dak to the Franciscan Sisters in Little Falls. Looking back, she says she loved her years with the Hankinson sisters and is still connected with them—they will always be a part of her life and is grateful for her 20 years spent there.



Sister Doretta teaches ESL at Quarryview Education Center, St. Cloud. Here she assists an English learner from Venezuela.

For most of her 60 years in Community, Sister Doretta ministered in health care administration in hospitals and nursing homes in North Dakota, Minnesota, Illinois and Ohio, serving in various capacities including CEO, vice president and business manager. She also served on the Leadership team for the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls from 2006-2011.

After completing her term on the Leadership team, Sister Doretta moved into the field of education. She remembers how she enjoyed teaching and working with youth in Faith Formation when living in small rural parishes. She was inspired by a workshop in Fergus Falls offered for people holding a bachelor's degree in a non-education field who were interested in substitute teaching. This prompted her to move to St. Cloud and begin subbing in grades K-12 and in adult education. She then pursued and received her Minnesota Educator's Tier 1 and 2 licenses. She is currently teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to adult immigrants



Sisters Julien Dirkes and Doretta ready for the 60th Jubilee celebration

from many different countries. Teaching English to immigrants has been a great privilege for Sister Doretta.

Sister Doretta is also currently involved in a variety of volunteer ministries, serving on several community and diocesan committees. In addition, she serves on the St. Francis Hospital Board in Breckenridge, Minn. and the foundation board for the FSLF ministry in Mexico. One of her favorite volunteer ministries is jail ministry, working with a team that coordinates weekend retreats in county jails in the St. Cloud Diocese. She says all her ministries have been so life-giving, usually transitioning peacefully from one to the next, led by the Spirit to where she needs to be.

In reflecting on her 60 years in religious life, Sister Doretta says, "Being faithful to God's Spirit continues to challenge me in living the Gospel values as a Franciscan. Living with Hope and trusting in the Power of the Spirit brings me inner peace and deep joy."

## Donating to the Franciscan Sisters

Please feel free to express any wishes you may have for your gift. However, be advised that in order to ensure that donors will be entitled to a federal income tax deduction, Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota (FSLF), is required by Internal Revenue Service rulings to retain full authority over the assets granted to it and cannot accept gifts that are required by the donor to be paid, or to be used, only to further the work of a specific individual or that are required to be used in another country by FSLF or a foreign charity or religious institute.



Kris and Michelle Shefveld were welcomed into the Franciscan Community as Franciscan Associates. During Mass on May 25, they proclaimed these words: *We desire to be Associates of this Franciscan Community to respond to God's call: we wish to be brother and sister to all of you and to all of God's creatures. With you and with God's help, we want to make the world a more loving, just, and peaceful community. Together with you, we want to bring the spirit of Francis and Clare to our temporal context.* Welcome, Kris and Michelle!

Pictured: Jen Jimenez-Wheatley, Associate Camilo Barrera, Sisters Michelle L'Allier and Clara Stang; new Associates Kris and Michelle, Associates Rick Dietz and Verónica Rivadeneira

## Sister & Associate Relationship

Associate Verónica Rivadeneira

In 1973, the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls initiated a way for interested lay persons to relate more or less formally to the congregation. Since then, this effort has blossomed into what is today called Franciscan Associates—women and men, even families, who purposely live the spirit and mission of the Franciscan Sisters within their own lifestyle. Eventually, the relationship expanded beyond the United States to Central and South America.

Many associates become part of Franciscan Life Groups, generally made up of both sisters and associates. These groups meet periodically, staying up to date on Franciscan teachings, creating bonds, and providing mutual support. Here the associates consider values of simple living, reflection, prayer, ongoing conversion, and caring for the needy. By their example

and witness of hope, they are an inspiration to their families, friends and neighbors.

People who wish to formalize their relationship in this way contact the Office for Associates. They receive detailed information and are partnered with a companion who can guide them in their formation and discernment journey. If they decide to formalize the relationship, they celebrate their commitment in a ceremony attended by the Franciscan community, meaning sisters and other associates. Here, they express their desire to become an associate and their intention to help, along with the sisters, make the world a more loving, just and peaceful place. Thus, they hope to bring the Franciscan spirit to our temporal context. Active associates renew their commitment every five years.

*All are welcome*

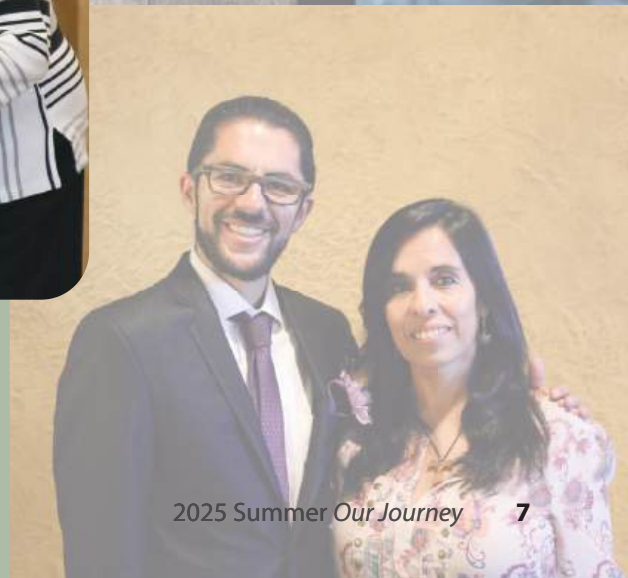


Are you interested in becoming a Franciscan Associate? For more information, please scan the QR code to visit our website or e-mail [associates@fslf.org](mailto:associates@fslf.org).

**Franciscan Life Groups:** The title says it all. Whether you are an applicant to the Franciscan Sister & Associate Relationship, a new associate, a long-time associate or a Franciscan Sister, you are invited to gather with others (in person or on Zoom) who are inspired by the life and teachings of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi. About once a month these groups meet to pray, reflect on a Franciscan book, DVD, or article and share how the stories of Francis and Clare can inspire and challenge our own unique way of living the Gospel values. Together we learn and discuss how we can love all creation as sister and brother, foster peace and justice, and serve one another and our world, all the while reverencing the unique dignity of each person. Commitment to the monthly gatherings helps nurture our relationships as we build Franciscan-inspired, Gospel-caring communities.

“For over 20 years I have been in the same group and have been with members as they were dying, crying and offering hospitality and support to new members, just like families do. These Franciscan Life Groups are lifegiving; it is a prayerful and joyful life that I cherish anew every time we meet.”

—Associate Geri Dietz



Standing: Associates Mary and Joel Donnell and Geri Dietz, Sister Joanne Heim; seated: Associate Jan Everson, Sister Doretta Meier, Associate Kathie Pflueger. (Not pictured: Associate Jan Murch.)

# Hope springs eternal

Jamie Deering, *Franciscan Spiritual Connections*

Hope. It springs eternal, we are told. It's a fundamental human need, a source of strength, and an enduring force in the face of adversity and mayhem. Hope can be light in dark times.

Hope. Sometimes a sense of it seems elusive, just out of reach. Like the doorbell dash of my youth where we rang the doorbell and ran away leaving the homeowner opening the door to emptiness.

Hope. What does it really mean to "have" hope? To possess it with a sense of assurance and confidence that is not deterred by chaos and anxiety? Julian of Norwich was a woman who lived her life in a 100-square-foot stone room attached to a church with windows to the outside world. Starting at the age of 30, severely ill and death imminent, she had 16 revelations of divine love that embodied God's unconditional love for all humanity, particularly in the face of suffering and pain. She wrote volumes about these visions called *Revelations of Divine Love*. Living during the Middle Ages, she faced the horrendous Black Death, religious oppression, and culture shifting socio-political uprisings. Death by disease or revolt were the realities of her time. Daily, she faced the need for hope. For her, hope came in knowing unconditional love as the grounding force for life.

Sitting at her window, Julian talked with those who sought her counsel. She is best known for saying, "All shall be well and all shall be well and in all manner of thing, all shall be well . . . for there is a force of love moving through the universe that holds us fast and will never let us go." To those who came, she echoed her belief in God's ultimate plan of love for all of creation. I've often wondered if the mutuality of speaking and hearing mirrored her deep belief of ultimate Love assisted in her own resilience.

"All shall be well  
and all shall be well  
and in all manner  
of thing, all shall  
be well . . ."

—Julian of Norwich



My neighbor, Deb, recently adopted a dog. The dog was rescued from a hoarding situation where it appears he was chained up for most of his short life. Other dogs from the same home have chain marks embedded

in their skin. Benny doesn't know how to walk down stairs and is very timid around people. He's bonded with Deb, wanting to always be near her. I watch them walking around the neighborhood together, Benny tucking himself to Deb's side, and I reflect on hope; Deb's hope for Benny to have a good life and Benny's hope for a life outside bondage to a chain.

As Christians, we often understand ourselves as bound to the chains of our fears and the ways we miss the mark in loving. Our way of worry and criticalness confuses, confounds and separates us from hope. We stumble around in a forgetfulness of what we believe is true—that Christ's resurrection invites us to celebrate that we are no longer chained. As Easter people, we live, move and have our being in the force of Divine Love.



## Birthday present for Father Jim Minette lives on

In the early 1960s, the Franciscan Sisters who were teaching at the parish grade school at Holy Spirit Church in St. Cloud, along with the principal Sister Rose Mae Rausch, wanted to help the students prepare a special kind of gift for the birthday of their pastor, Father Jim Minette. Together with the children, the sisters decided to create something to which all could contribute—a large mosaic of the risen Christ on the cross. An outline was prepared and then framed and set near the front entrance of the school. Every day the children brought small pieces of colored glass and broken pottery plus interesting stones (especially agates) to place on the outline. Eventually some mosaic tiles were also added and all these offerings were arranged artistically to create a beautiful figure of the glorified Christ.

The mosaic has hung in the school ever since. To this day, it can be seen near the front entrance of the building, now called St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School.



Over time 174 sisters served on the faculty of Holy Spirit School. These sisters have fond memories of creating the mosaic in honor of Father Minette. Seated: Ade Kroll, Rose Mae Rausch (principal); standing: Karen Niedzielski, Janice Welle, Bernita Lindstrom.

## Not the least bit surprised . . .

Sister Ardis Cloutier worked at St. Rita's High School in Chicago from 2007-2016. As secretary to the principal, Augustinian Father Tom McCarthy, she often attended meetings as the minute-taker. During her tenure, she had a couple opportunities to meet Father Robert Prevost who would become Pope Leo XIV. When she heard the news, Sister Ardis said, "I was not the least bit surprised. He was an ordinary person, but had real leadership qualities."

She remembers Pope Leo XIV traveling from Peru to attend a meeting at St. Rita's. "Would you consider coming to Peru? I could really use you and your skills." In no uncertain terms, she replied, "No, I will not be going to Peru."



Sister Ardis with Father Tom McCarthy (far left), standing next to Father Bob Prevost (now Pope Leo XIV), along with other Augustinians.

## SISTERS RESPOND

# How do I see hope in the world today?



*Sister Betty Berger*

Someone has said, "Hope has two lovely daughters: Anger and Courage." I see hope in those who are angry at the harm done to the least of our brethren, and hope in the courage of those who speak out against the harm done.



*Sister Mary Ann Capizzo*

There are so many people expressing concern for others today. This is a sign of hope for me, and I am inclined to join others in this pilgrimage of LOVE.



*Sister Gloria Haider*

I see hope in the world today where dialogue is happening with people of various faiths even though their beliefs are different. I also see hope where young people are active in social justice involving climate change, racial equity, civic engagement and many other social issues in the world today. Most of all, I see hope where people are letting go of their anthropocentric perspective of seeing humans at the top and instead see the interconnectedness of all of creation.



*Sister Pat Indieke*

What gives me hope is seeing the overwhelming number of young people who attended the funeral for Pope Francis. One way of listening to them may come through the synodal process in the Church, itself an expression of hope.



*Sister Georgine Larson*

I walk each day with hope and faith, believing God is in control of my life and events in our world even in times of uncertainty. I also see hope in all those who show kindness to my brothers and sisters in need after any type of loss: a loved one, a home, a job.



*Sister Pat Forster*

As part of the planning committee for our May 2025 meetings, I looked for a new song themed "HOPE." To my delight Marty Haugen wrote "Choose to Hope." We are already singing this song of Hope. Hope is when we believe love is stronger than hate. Hope is when we believe each person is sacred. Hope knows the closeness of the Divine.



*Sister Doretta Meier*

I see hope in all the associates in our Franciscan community. Their witness to Gospel values during these challenging times in our Church and society is inspiring.



*Sister Karen Niedzielski*

I see hope when people share their personal talents to bring joy to others. I try to bring hope to my world by having a positive attitude which comes from trusting in the constant love of Jesus.



*Sister Cordy Korkowski*

I feel called to the ministry of hope with others in times of loneliness, loss, illness, isolation and emotional need. The Spirit of God prompts me to respond as a Pilgrim of Hope through personal presence, prayer, the written and expressed word and however I feel the movement of the Spirit within me.



*Sister Jan Kilian*

I see hope in the world when I see people who work with other good people before they make choices that affect our world.



*Sister Ange Mayers*

I see hope in the world each morning in using the resource *Give Us This Day* (Liturgical Press). Along with the Scriptures, the Reflection, Intercessions and Saint of the Day bring me HOPE daily. A reflection by Sister Joan Chittister, "... if the life of Christ was to continue here on earth, it must continue in us."



*Sister Rose Margaret Schneider*

We experienced the death and funeral of our dearly beloved Pope Francis. I believe Francis witnessed great HOPE to all of us by his life and leadership, his outreach to the poor and marginalized and acceptance of ALL PEOPLE, giving them the gift of HOPE. May we all have the courage to give HOPE to others, as Pope Francis did. With the election of our new Pope Leo XIV, the gift of HOPE continues and expands.

# To Hope

*Sister Mary Dumonceaux*

Hope is

To embrace sunrise, sunset,  
To feel the light dawning  
darkness dusking,

To join the dance,

The to and fro

of light and dark

of day and night

of tide in and tide out

of death and rebirth

of suffering and dissension.

Light is shades of darkness;

of light and darkness.

Hope is the ying and yang

of light and darkness.





*Sister Carol Schmit*

Our brother, Pope Francis, entitled his recently released book simply, *Hope*. He includes this image, "Hope is a light in the night." Our immigrant brothers and sisters are living in fear. I try to be a spark of light to them in both languages: Hope/Esperanza.



*Sister Rose Mae Rausch*

Hope is for the light beyond all darkness, when the reign of sin is done and heaven has been won; It is for resurrection splendor with the coming of Beloved Christ, sharing life all done (inspired by the Easter Vigil).



*Sister M. Christelle Watercott*

Belief in Jesus' resurrection gives me hope that life wins over death. The passion I see in young people caring for the earth and all creatures gives me hope; their desire to end war and for humanity to live peacefully amidst diverse cultures and backgrounds gives me hope.



*Sister LaVonne Schackmann*

Wherever love and kindness exist, hope is present. We sense it when people reach out to others in times of joy or difficulty. We witness it also in the rhythm of the seasons, in spring flowers and in sunrises—all promises of renewed life.



*Sister Mary Zirbes*

I pray for hope every day. Understanding the Paschal Mystery of the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus gives me hope. We need to face reality and admit reality in order to make proper changes.



*Sister Janice Welle*

I'm inspired by various organizations of women religious in the United States. For example, the Upper Mississippi Valley Franciscans from Clinton and Dubuque, Iowa; La Crosse, Wis; Rochester and Little Falls, Minn. The collective wisdom of women religious who are concerned about water and the environment working together for change gives me hope.

## *Sister Bernice Rieland*

Hope reveals itself in many ways. The swelling of a bud on the tree in the late winter foretells the coming of spring. Hope is also in the small green bud emerging from the brown earth. Is it a tulip, red, yellow or pink, ruffled, multi-petalled, or of simple form with great elegance? With whom can it be shared: a sister, a special friend, or someone chosen at the spur of the moment just to brighten their day?

Hope is an amazing thing. It can be seen in many forms in nature and life, shared in the simplest of acts—and sometimes a simple act of kindness can have a life-changing effect on another, moving from despair to hope. The effects of hope cannot be understated. As a pilgrim of hope today, I can enable another human to persevere through challenging times by being a listening presence, recognizing their dignity, beauty and goodness. Hope can help a person get up each morning in anticipation of having a good day. Hope can also allow a grieving person to know she/he will see their loved one again in God's presence for all eternity. Hope is at the heart of the Easter season!



## **Sister Judine Cassidy Scholarships awarded**

In May Char Berns from the Community Relations Department, guided by her mentor Sister Cordy Korkowski, had the honor of presenting two \$1,000 Sister Judine Cassidy Scholarships, one during the award ceremony for the Little Falls Community High School (LFCHS), the other at the graduation ceremony for Little Falls Continuing Education Center (CEC). What an amazing evening for these young adults who, with support of their families and community, are ready and eager to pursue their dreams.

Thank you to the St. Francis High School alumnae for making these scholarships possible for Little Falls students who pursue studies in education or health care.

Congratulations, future nurses Amber Dunn and Veronica Puchalla! May God bless you as you begin the next chapter in your education.



CEC graduate Veronica Puchalla will pursue studies in nursing at Saint Cloud Technical & Community College this fall. Veronica's proud parents are Sally and Joseph Gohn.



LFCHS graduating senior Amber Dunn will attend Central Lakes College in Brainerd this fall and study nursing. Amber's proud parents are Derek and Jessie Dunn.



In 2005, Barb Stumpf and Vicki Spofford held the first rehearsal of what would become the St. Francis Community Chorale. On May 4 the chorale, with 50-some voices, celebrated its 20th anniversary. Pictured: Robyn Gray, Vicki and Barb together in the Music Center.



## A grassroots effort celebrates 20 years!

*Robyn Gray, St. Francis Music Center*

"Creating music with others places us on common ground. No matter what our day was like, no matter where we are in our lives, when we join together to sing, our cares are put on hold and we come away reinforced by music and community."

—Linda Weiss, chorale member

For the past 20 years, on Thursday nights from September to May, the St. Francis Community Chorale gathers for rehearsal. Greetings, hugs and quick stories are exchanged before settling down, making way for the magic of choral singing to take over. The common goal and joy of singing together transcends age, background and the stress of the world.

St. Francis Community Chorale grew out of a grassroots effort of people looking for a place to sing. As traditional church choirs diminished and modern praise teams gained popularity, opportunities for choral singing disappeared. Local musicians Barb Stumpf and Vicki Spofford had choir experience and the Music Center

was eager to start a choir. So, thanks to a grant from the Five Wings Arts Council, the community chorale was created. There are no auditions; a love of singing is the only requirement!

The choir went from nine members to 50 in a short time. Two annual concerts include performances by the St. Francis Youth Chorale, the Brass Ensemble and many other musicians, often bringing the total number of performers to over 100 from all over central Minnesota. The Community Chorale celebrates "community"—sharing lives and the love of music has created deep and meaningful connections and a place to belong. Everyone is welcome in the St. Francis Community Chorale.

# Volunteers celebrated!

*Karen Wussow, Volunteer Manager*

On May 1, sisters and staff gathered to celebrate over 50 of our wonderful volunteers. With a May Day theme, the volunteers and guests enjoyed a chicken dinner and entertainment provided by a trio of sisters playing bluegrass music.

There were door prizes for the lucky winners and May baskets for everyone. What fun! We are grateful to all our dedicated volunteers and the loving service they provide for the Franciscan Sisters.



Jen VanTassle, Jodi Tretter, Sara Wussow, Cassandra Bangasser, Karen Wussow and Courtney Birr were part of the clean-up crew.



Sister Mary Ann Capizzo (standing) visits with volunteers Linda Scepurek and June Shutter.

The Franciscan Sisters are always looking for volunteers for a variety of tasks around St. Francis Convent. For more information, contact volunteer manager Karen Wussow at 320-632-0691 or [kwussow@fslf.org](mailto:kwussow@fslf.org).

## Opportunities to serve:

- Activities with sisters (reading, crafts, music, etc.)
- Working in the dining room
- Assisting with the flowers around the campus (outside)
- Door greeters (directing people to the chapel or St. Francis Hall)
- Blood Drive
- Sister Companion
- Green Fair Folk Festival

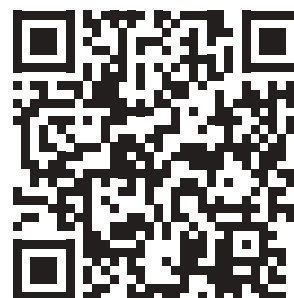


Sister Lillian Kroll (103 years old) never one to miss a party, shares her table with longtime volunteer Arlene Spiczka.

## E-Newsletter

The e-newsletter is sent monthly via email by the Community Relations Department. It provides current news about the Franciscan Sisters, Associates and our ministries. It also includes upcoming events.

Scan the QR code to sign up!



# What's new at the Motherhouse?

*Tim Houle, COO*

It's summertime at the Motherhouse, which means we've been busy doing summer improvement projects on campus.

We recently completed the addition of more parking on our campus. Despite our big lot on the west side of our buildings, we needed more accessible parking spots closer to the entrance for St. Francis Health and Wellness and the Music Center for our patrons with mobility issues. To help with that, we added a small parking lot close to the entry with the elevator.

We now have 10 spaces designated for those with a disability license plate or sticker for easier access to these ministries.

Less obvious, but equally important, we recently re-roofed the old high school building. It's not a flashy project, but it's a necessary maintenance project that helps ensure the continued use of the building into the future. We've also added new fencing around our outdoor mechanical equipment to spruce up things a little.

On the grounds, we continue our work caring for the trees on campus by removing dead and diseased trees and trimming off dead limbs. We're really trying to focus on care of the trees that we have, their beauty, their need for loving care too. While that's going on, we are also adding additional prairie grass seeding along our utility corridor to restore native grasses and flowers to that area of the campus. Our long-term goal is to do that in the open areas across the property to restore these lands to the condition they were in when the sisters first arrived.

Once again, we've planted a large vegetable garden, the



The campus wouldn't be ready for summer without flowers. We have beds scattered across the grounds; some sisters still have a bed that they tend. I must say that their flowers tend to look better than the ones we guys maintain, but we're really trying hard not to make it too obvious which is which.

produce from which we use in the sisters' dining room. Fresh fruits and vegetables are served at harvest and also frozen for later use by our excellent cooks. As in past years, we are encouraging sustainable agriculture practices in our community gardens where folks who sign up for a plot commit to using more organic growing methods, rather than conventional pesticides.

Summertime at St. Francis is a wonderful time. Like all of us, sisters flock outdoors in the summer to enjoy God's creation. Come visit us and enjoy a walk around.

**give** TO THE **MAX**   
**Nov. 20, 2025**



# The Doctrine of Discovery: Potentially the most consequential history you've never heard of

*Michael Schut, Integral Ecology*

Sarah Augustine is an important leader in the land justice movement. She is the executive director of The Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery which "calls on the Christian Church to address the extinction, enslavement, and extraction done in the name of Christ on Indigenous lands." Sarah spoke at the Little Falls motherhouse in April. Here she is with members of the congregation's Land Justice Circle: staffer Mike Schut, Sisters Janice Wiechman and Mary Hroschikoski, Sarah, Associate Rosanne Fischer, Sister Gert Brixius. (Learn more about Sarah's work here: <https://dismantlediscovery.org/>.)



The set-up was simple: three people in white T-shirts, three people in black T-shirts, and two basketballs. Bernard, our instructor, gave clear instructions: "Count the number of times the white team passes the ball." He pushed "play," and the video rolled.

The six players wove in and out, passing the basketballs to their teammates. We closely followed every movement of the white team.

The video ended. "So, what did you get?" Our answers ranged from 17 to 20. "Did you notice anything else?" Bernard inquired. A few students said something about an elephant. A what!?

Bernard then asked us to watch the video again with new eyes, with no specific instructions. This time I saw, midway through the video clip, someone in an elephant suit saunter very leisurely to the center of the picture. The elephant faced the camera, swayed back and forth, slowly turned and shuffled out of view. Most of us had not seen the elephant; we had been instructed to see something else.

**Family History** My dad was raised on a dairy farm just outside Silver Creek, Minn., one hour south of Little Falls. My mom grew up on a diversified small farm outside of Pella, Iowa. Childhood visits to my grandparents' farms are among my favorite memories: gathering eggs, picking raspberries, playing with cousins in the hay mow, and donning the little boy's version of the blue-and-white striped OshKosh B'Gosh overalls favored by my grandpa.

I am proud of my family's stories: Dutch immigrants settling in small agricultural communities in the 1860s and 1870s. They worked hard, raised families, and were stalwart members of the church. And they were farming stolen land.

*-Continued, Page 18*

**The Doctrine of Discovery** Both my family and the larger culture raised me to focus on the beauty in my family's history. The reality of stolen land? Not so much—that's the elephant in the video clip of our shared story.

By now, both farms have been sold to other families; Schuts and Van Roekels no longer own the land. And while I still don't know how the two farms came to us, I do know a bit more about what is known as the Doctrine of Discovery: a worldview that cleared the way for European settlers, like my ancestors, to claim places like Minnesota and Iowa as "home."

The doctrine—which justified European claims to land that it "discovered," and the oppression of peoples encountered there—is founded on three papal bulls. In *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) Pope Nicholas V authorized the Portuguese to conquer enemies of Christ and "reduce their persons to perpetual servitude." Pope Alexander VI's *Inter Caetera* (1493) gave similar justification to the Spaniard's conquest of the Americas and the eventual westward expansion of the United States.

In other words, these papal bulls justified the European seizure of Indigenous lands and the enslavement and genocide of Indigenous peoples. They offered the theological and political justification for slavery, white supremacy, colonization, and land theft.

**Integral Ecology** I work with the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls as director of Integral Ecology. In the last edition of *Our Journey* (January 2025), I reflected on kinship as central to what integral ecology means. Kinship is a core characteristic of Franciscan spirituality: as Saint Francis wrote 800 years ago in his *Canticle of the Creatures*, the sun is our brother, the moon our sister. We are all siblings, all kin.

The Doctrine of Discovery is stridently antithetical to the reality of kinship. Indeed, the doctrine reinforces the view that humans are our only kin, and only certain humans at that. Other-than-human species are given even less consideration and become invisible, collateral damage. While the doctrine stands for separation,

conquest, hierarchy, and competition, integral ecology recognizes and requires kinship, liberation, solidarity, and cooperation.

**Land Justice: The Earth Is the Lord's** If you've never heard of the Doctrine of Discovery, you're not alone. Our country's dominant culture instructs us to look elsewhere, to ignore the elephant, to not acknowledge the impacts of a way of thinking that became embodied in the subjugation of land, people, and other species across the globe.

The movement toward "land justice" offers an alternative pathway—to first turn and look squarely at the impacts of this doctrine, to learn from Indigenous people and African Americans whose lives and lands were forever altered by those three papal bulls written over 500 years ago.

And second, land justice then asks us to consider our response in light of that history. It's an opportunity and a challenge for many families and communities—a challenge that the Franciscan community of Little Falls has recently accepted by partnering with Land Justice Futures (LJF). LJF works with religious communities and movement partners to "create new land transitions rooted in racial and ecological healing."

With LJF and other women religious communities, a group of sisters, associates, and staff are learning about the history of the land the sisters have called home for over 130 years. As a community we are actively discerning what land justice might look like here—how we might embody justice in decisions about our home's future.

**Editor's note:** In March 2023, the Vatican formally repudiated the doctrine of discovery, declaring that it "is not part of the teaching of the Catholic Church" and acknowledging that it had justified "immoral acts against Indigenous peoples. It is only just to recognize these errors, acknowledge the terrible effects of the assimilation policies and the pain experienced by Indigenous peoples, and ask for pardon." (Taken from the Fall 2024 edition of *Abbey Banner*, published by St. John's Abbey.)



# In loving memory...



**Sister Kay Watts**, 91, died June 2, 2025, at St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, Minn. She was born May 2, 1934, to Earl and Emily (Peaslee) Watts. She was the middle child with two older and two younger brothers.

She attended school in Eden Prairie and Gray's Bay near Wayzata, graduating from Deephaven High School. She sang in the choir and enjoyed playing the saxophone in concert and pep bands. After graduation she worked for three years at Northwestern National Insurance Company.

Sister Kay was introduced to the Franciscan Sisters through a Franciscan priest who came to her parish to help out when their pastor was on vacation. Her mother told him that Kay was interested in becoming a sister. He also told her about St. Francis High School, which Kay said, "never did interest me."

Sister Kay wrote, "However the idea of becoming a sister never really left me. Finally, I visited St. Francis Convent. Before leaving that weekend, Sister Mary Eve asked me if I wanted to join. I didn't want to say 'no,' so I said 'yes!' I made arrangements to enter on August 22, 1955, and on July 31, 1956, I was accepted into the novitiate and given the religious name Sister Mary Eunice." Later she returned to her baptismal name.

Sister Kay attended the College of St. Catherine. She held a certificate from the American Dietetic Association. In her quiet and gentle manner, and with a spirit of hospitality, she prepared food that gave pleasure to the palate and delight to the eye of those who enjoyed it.

At the time of her 60th Jubilee, she said, "These 60 years of religious life have flown by so fast. This has been a very good life for me in getting to know our sisters, time for prayer and the special gatherings of all of us together. I look back in gratitude for all that has been and look forward with peaceful hope for all that will be. 'Thank you, God, for all you have done in my life.'"



## Green Fair Folk Festival

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Sister Mary Hroschikoski repeats the three-step process to her group: sweep your foot in front of you to clear a small area of bare ground, sprinkle the seed, then stomp the seed into the ground.

## Habitat restoration project engages local middle-schoolers

In April sisters and staff were on hand to welcome 160 5th graders from Little Falls Middle School to the south end of the campus grounds. They came with a mission to seed 10 acres in the south pine plantation with a native woodland grass mixture—an effort to help suppress buckthorn regrowth. This delightful event,

orchestrated by Great River Greening, is part of the ongoing habitat restoration project.

Students and their teachers were eager to participate. They were divided in groups of three. Each trio in the group had a role: sweep the ground, sprinkle the seed, and stomp it in. Rain the next day was the gift finale!