National Night Out concert draws huge crowd

What fun to gather on the grounds of St. Francis Campus to celebrate National Night Out with a free concert highlighted by talent from St. Francis Music Center. The summer orchestra and percussion ensemble, along with the new ukulele orchestra played a variety of music that inspired toe tapping and singing along. All of these groups are supported by grants from The Five Wings Arts Council. To finish the evening, Little Falls native, singer/songwriter Andy Spofford took to the stage with a wide range of music to please everyone.

Our “community helpers” from the Little Falls Police and Fire Departments joined the celebration. Kids were able to try on equipment and see the inside of a squad car and fire truck. People were awed when the United States flag was raised over the crowd. It was a perfect night.
Dear friends,

This issue of *Our Journey* invites us into a “journey” with some of our associates, a journey that, for some, started in 1986 when the official Franciscan Sister and Associate Relationship began.

But first, a prologue. How journey connects us: In 1872 Mother Ignatius Hayes stepped out of a stagecoach, the first Franciscan presence here in Morrison County. Imagine traveling all the way from Rome! By 1877, railroad tracks brought settlers to Little Falls and beyond. Our community was only 25 years old when Orville Wright took that 12-second flight with his brother Wilber running alongside.

Fast forward to December 2021 when we learned of the successful launch of the James Webb Space Telescope. It has been able to capture pictures of the very first stars in the universe. It verifies the birth of the earth, at least 4.5 billion years ago. Amazing.

Please God, help me keep in mind that today is my day to be amazed as I marvel at the sky, delight in the landscape and walk on this sacred land which we acknowledge as homeland—recently of our Dakota and Ojibwe sisters and brothers and their indigenous ancestors who carefully lived on this land for thousands of years. We are all related.

Yes, we are all related, especially to you who know us well, who support us at every turn, who walk with us, not only on the ground we share but in all we do as Franciscans living the gospel. Be assured of our grateful prayers.

Peace and all good,

*Sister Carol Schmit*
Community Minister

Our community is in the process of testing soil to begin developing two areas of land for native plants. I joined a group of sisters who walked the land, the homeland of the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples. With song, water and smudging, we blessed each plot.
Finding a path forward

Candace Adams, Minister of Associates

A little over a year ago, I began serving as the Minister of Associates. It has been a joyous journey with many twists and turns along the way. I have learned about the beauty of the Franciscan values and connected with associates and sisters.

One message that I have heard repeatedly is that the core of the associate ministry is relationships. Forming deep connections with individuals makes my soul sing. Relationships are integral to one’s spiritual vitality. Saints Francis and Clare had a beautiful faith-filled relationship. Their devotion to God was central to their commitment to one another. Therefore, sisters and associates have made it a priority to strengthen their bonds—to grow our relationships with one another to live the Gospel joyfully and courageously.

Over the years, sisters and associates have strengthened their bonds through numerous ways. They have studied and supported one another through Franciscan Life Communities, retreats, days of reflection, companioning relationships and more.

In September 2021, a work group was formed to consider how bonds between sisters and associates and associates may be strengthened for the future. The process has involved looking back to find a path forward. The work group in consultation with the community has identified several ways to form new relationships and support existing ones.

Covid-19 has brought both challenges and opportunities. While it has significantly impacted the number of in-person experiences that we offer, it has created new possibilities for gatherings of individuals who are geographically distant from one another. Several virtual opportunities have been created to form meaningful relationships: Franciscan Spiritual Reflection Experiences, Franciscan Spiritual Journey Conversations, Franciscan Faith & Life Conversations and Franciscan Prayer Gatherings.
Franciscan Spiritual Reflection Experiences are a high point for sisters and associates from Latin America and the United States. In this virtual space, individuals connect to God and one another; participants offer thoughtful insights, which are a blessing to all.

Franciscan Spiritual Journey Conversations are virtual gatherings in which a sister or an associate share one’s spiritual journey. It is incredible to hear how God has woven together the beautiful tapestry of one’s life. These testaments of faith are a rich blessing.

Franciscan Faith and Life Conversations address current topics such as loneliness, gun violence and more.

Franciscan Prayer Gatherings occur both in person (outdoor prayer walks) and virtually. Saint Francis was a man of prayer.

In addition, Associates MJ and Jerry Park have extended their gifts to sisters and associates through Peace Circles. These opportunities help us support one another as we seek to live lives of peace.

Along with virtual opportunities, a group called Compassionate Connectors was created to form meaningful relationships between sisters and associates. These individuals send personal notes, have telephone conversations and visit.

Each of these opportunities helps to develop deep connections, which express the heart of Franciscanism. It is holy ground to share one’s experience. We journey the path forward trusting that God will be our guide and companion.

Becoming an associate begins with an initial inquiry to the Minister of Associates. If the person desires additional information, he or she becomes an inquirer and receives various materials. A follow-up conversation occurs, and the person indicates whether he or she desires to proceed with the discernment process. If so, a sister or associate companion is selected to guide the individual through the spiritual formation. The process is unique to each person. The final step is for a person to make a formal commitment to become an associate; this act is affirmed by the Franciscan community.

Candace Adams is on her own journey to become a Franciscan Associate. Her companion is Sister Clara Stang who has accompanied many associates over the years.

“It has been my experience that companioning another person on their spiritual journey is always one of mutual gift giving. As I reflect on my experience of companioning, I am aware that it is indeed a blessing of both receiving and giving. This is true whether it has been in parish ministry, in companioning an applicant on the path to becoming an associate or in a faith-sharing experience within a group or one-on-one. Someone once told me that none of us goes to God alone; we go with one another, or we don’t go. Thus, when Candace told me she was eager to become an associate and asked whether I would be interested in being her companion, I knew it was an invitation to mutual gift giving.”

—Sister Clara

Candace Adams
Minister of Associates
cadams@fslf.org
320-632-0698
Walking in the company of others

Associate Mary Ganz

Why would a Unitarian Universalist minister in San Francisco want to become an associate with the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota? Like so many things, it began with putting one foot in front of the other, walking toward a hard place. I was fortunate to be walking in the company of others, the Faithful Fools in San Francisco, which has been said to be a marriage of the Franciscan heart and the Unitarian mind. I was grateful for the guidance of Carmen Barsody as I walked into the streets in hopes of being present, and perhaps even useful, to the people I would encounter there. Through Carmen, and through Susan Knutson and Ade Kroll and others, I learned stories of Francis and Clare, and those stories became my guide too. (So many stories! But the one about Francis hugging a leper and thereby coming into the presence of God was especially relevant to some of my own struggles in the Tenderloin). I came to treasure a contemplative way of being, and Francis and Clare became more alive to me. It was only natural that I would want to spend time in the presence of those who also feel the presence of Francis and Clare, and I’m grateful for the chance to do so as a Franciscan Associate.

Let us joyfully live our mission together

Sister Carmen Barsody

For those who know me, you know I do not like to live or work alone. I come from a large family with many aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews and cousins, and grandnieces and grandnephews, and extended cousins, dispersed physically throughout the lands and yet connected by our heart strings. I need people with whom I can laugh and cry and dance—people who challenge me so that I can remain steadfast in my commitment to making justice and peace visible in this world. “Communal life,” not only with my Franciscan Sisters, but also with the many associates and committed companions with whom I share my life and ministry, is a natural way of being for me. We are a Franciscan family.

As a religious community we are guided, not only by the Gospels, but also by “Constitutions and Directives.” Within the constitution is written our “mission,” our calling. At first glance the mission statements may seem obvious for people who proclaim to be followers of Jesus, yet they challenge us, direct us, and require continuous prayer and discernment as we make practical
decisions in each unique place and context where we live and work.

As one who cherishes companions on this life journey, I am inspired by the statement in our Constitutions that says, “... we promote community through the works that we undertake and through our personal presence among those we serve” (Constitutions, Mission #4). This part of our mission guides me in how I live my life and engage in ministry as a Faithful Fool in San Francisco and serves as a foundation for our commitment as sisters and associates, ministry partners and employees. As a Faithful Fool and as a co-minister of Associates, my heart is enlivened and strengthened by the relationships with people throughout the United States and Latin America, all companions on this marvelously challenging and love-filled quest. Often separated by many miles, there is something inherently beautiful in being rooted in our communal connection and reflection, both in person and now through the magic of Zoom that allows us to see one another and traverse the different languages spoken amongst us.

And yet there is more. There is a purpose to our communal relationship, a “for what?” It is not for ourselves alone, but rather to make love visible, to bring about what some of us call the “Kingdom of God.” As Franciscan Sisters and Associates and friends, our mission also calls us to “hear the needs of our brothers and sisters in the human community and attend to them” (Constitutions, Mission #5). And to “direct our efforts particularly toward changing the unjust structures which perpetuate dehumanizing situations” (Constitutions, Mission #7).

Faithful Fools' purpose is to foster awareness and analysis of deteriorating social conditions in the United States and the world at large, seen from the level of the streets, and to facilitate individual and collective responses thereto.

—Faithful Fools Bylaws

This is the mission that calls me to rise each day as a Faithful Franciscan Fool and be steadfast in its pursuit. It is what links the purpose of my life with my global community of sisters, associates and Faithful Fools. This is the mission that compels us forward, together.
My Franciscan Life Group: life-giving and life-transforming

Associate John Lauer

I joined my Franciscan Life Group right after I became a Franciscan Associate in 2003. For the next 19 years, members, locations, meeting days and times have changed, but the purpose and meaning of the Franciscan Life Group hasn’t. We came together intentionally, as a community of Franciscan like-minded individuals, to deepen our relationship with God and to explore and learn about the charism of Saint Francis. Along the way we developed lasting relationships with the other members of the group and sought ways to strengthen our bonds with the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls.

At first, when we gathered together, we used the Experiencing the Greatness of God modules developed by a committee of Franciscan Sisters that included Sisters Jean Schwieters and Mary Zirbes. The modules explored Franciscan spirituality. We met each month to discuss one of the modules in order to deepen our understanding of Saint Francis and to discover ways that we could apply those beliefs in daily living. The modules were eventually replaced with book discussions with Franciscan themes and practices. Each month a different person would take charge of leading the prayers, formulating questions and leading the conversations. Although the discussions were lively and thought provoking, our group often hungered for more. So in between those monthly meetings, we would gather to socialize and have fun together. We’d work on projects to “walk the talk” we had been witnessing to each other during our monthly meetings. We hosted Share-a-Meals

Sister Elise Saggau and John Lauer have been members of the same Franciscan Life Group for years. “Our Franciscan Life Group offers us opportunities to strengthen our understanding of the spiritual tradition handed on to us by Saint Francis of Assisi. Sisters and associates together benefit from sharing our faith and our understanding of how this spirituality affects our lives. It gives us opportunities to experience the richness of learning, acting, and celebrating together.” —Sister Elise
at First Lutheran Church, helped tend and beautify the sisters’ Peace Garden with Associate Bev Gerads, hosted pot-luck suppers in the Heritage Room and Breezy Inn, and celebrated Christmas by donating books for kids in Central America and gifts for a needy family. We’ve celebrated birthdays and retirements. We’ve watched religious movies while munching on popcorn. We attended events, like the New Year’s Eve prayer service, and worked at the soup suppers and the annual Green Fair Folk Festival.

Over the years the Franciscan Life Group’s needs changed and evolved as the members have changed and grown. When Covid-19 began, we used Zoom to stay connected with each other, but that didn’t exactly work out for everyone. Since Covid-19, we’ve been reconnecting again as we reorganize and move forward into the future together—whatever form that might happen to be.

What do I value most about the Franciscan Life Group that I belong to? I would have to answer that question with one word: relationships. I have always valued the relationships that I have formed with the other associates and the sisters. I have appreciated being challenged with different ideas and values during conversations and discussions on the relevant issues of the day. It’s a great thing to have your ideas validated by others and then to be gently encouraged to take those ideas and apply them to daily living for yourself and for others. Mostly, though, I just enjoy spending time with the other associates in the group. I love their positive, can-do attitudes and the ways they support and encourage each other to live out our very best lives. Just like Saint Francis tried to do each and every day that he walked on this Earth, the planet we share with everyone and everything.

I see now that my Franciscan Life Group was exactly what I have needed over the years. It has been life-giving and life-transforming, and who could ask for more than that? The simplicity of meeting with a group of people to learn about and grow in our Franciscan spirituality has been a gift that keeps on giving in my life. I enthusiastically encourage you to start or join your own Franciscan Life Group.

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**EFW podcast expands to YouTube!**

The Engaging Franciscan Wisdom (EFW) podcast begins its third year in October! Much has been learned over the past two years as the podcast team continued to refine and grow this tool for sharing Franciscan values and wisdom. In August, a video option was added on YouTube for those who prefer a visual version of the podcast. Find the link at fslf.org/pages/podcast.

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**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.
For over 130 years, the Franciscan Sisters have been associating with people from all over the world, from all walks of life. From the very beginning they found people were longing for a closer relationship with God and a life centered on Franciscan values. Vatican II brought a new sense of purpose to the laity within the church, and people continued to search. Sisters, keenly aware that people hungered for deeper spirituality, launched a new endeavor in 1986: The Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls Sister and Associate Relationship. It was not meant to be a “program” but a relationship between sisters and lay people seeking deeper meaning in their lives and to grow in faith and service to others. Thirty-six years later, the bonds between sisters and associates are stronger than ever. In the following pages associates express the value of being an associate and what led them to choose this path, this journey with the Franciscan Community.

Maureen Gertken,
Little Falls, Minn.
I am privileged to work for the sisters in their Archives Department. The community’s history is rich with ministries of selfless, dedicated, hard-working, faith-filled, compassionate women; I knew they were amazing women I needed to know better and learn from. As an associate under their guidance, I have found a level of comfort and acceptance in my faith that I didn’t know existed. They have allowed me to be a part of their work family. I consider the sisters my family. I am grateful every day for my sisters. I feel like I’m home.

Fernando Navarro,
Managua, Nicaragua
I believe that when a person is in this type of spiritual accompaniment and decides to take the step to a stronger commitment according to the teachings of God’s word and, in this case, to the life of Saint Francis, you simply hear a call to decide to commit and pursue a lifetime of experiences supporting others on the journey.

In the Franciscan Community, I highly value the relationship with the sisters above all because of the accessibility they have for all the members of our community. We have taken care not to break the bond that many generations have formed. There has always been that openness of trust when there are doubts or emotional support for any setback that occurs in this learning process.

Ruth Pallansch,
Clitherall, Minn.
I became an associate to align myself more closely to the sisters who shared their joyous lives with us nursing students back in the early ’60s. This association has bound me to them, and I now belong to those wonderful sisters who welcome and love me every time. Belonging has meant sharing in their lives of worship, hospitality, friendship, spiritual growth, laughter and genuine love. I am blessed.

Leona Wieland,
Sartell, Minn.
I became a Franciscan Associate because I wanted to continue my relationship with the sisters and their values: communicating with and through peaceful, loving service toward people and Mother Earth, the way Jesus and Francis did.
Betty Pasela,
Little Falls, Minn.
I became an associate in October 2011. I was diagnosed with a sarcoma in 2020—and I found myself, for the first time in my life, unable to pray! This was during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, so hands-on contact was not possible, and I didn’t know what to do. I called Sister Clara Stang, a member of my Franciscan Life Group who I admired and felt close to, and confided what I was experiencing. She just took me under her wing with love and acceptance, no questions asked. She contacted the sisters at the convent who prayed for me, called and sent cards. It took time, but I slowly regained my prayer life. I will always be grateful to wonderful Sister Clara and all of the sisters for the beautiful return of the gift of my prayer life.

Joan Bednarczyk,
Andover, Minn.
I first came to know the Franciscans when Sisters Rita Barthel, Johnelle Becker and Cordy Korkowski came to minister at St. Stephen’s in Anoka. I can honestly say my life has not been the same since. All three of these incredible women have taught me about the Franciscan values of faith, joy, peace, compassion, acceptance, love, care for all of creation, etc.

For over 20 years I brought our parish Stephen Ministers to Little Falls for a weekend retreat; I wanted them to experience what I had walking through those holy halls. Sure enough, many commented how when they entered the Motherhouse, they had an overwhelming sense of calm and peace. Little wonder that just yesterday when I visited with a Stephen Minister from the class of 1992, she spoke about the wonderful sisters she had met when at the Motherhouse.

I became an associate in large part because these sisters have been such a significant part of my journey. Every morning when I enjoy a hot shower, I am reminded of Sister Rita who took cold showers in the Venezuelan mission; I think of Sister Johnelle when I strive for peace, compost scraps, use a cloth reusable bag rather than plastic and even choose to "tolerate" and bless the squirrel (Valentine) who eats my tulips!

In her book, Lent with St. Francis, Diane M. Houdek writes: "True humility is knowing so well who we are in God’s loving sight that nothing anyone says or does can shake us."

I have yet to meet a "shaken" Franciscan!

Shawn Phillips,
Brooklyn Park, Minn.
Mexico is when I experienced brother Francis in a more personal way. Franciscans were the first missionaries in the western hemisphere. A mural in the Cathedral, with Conquistadors leading the Nahutl to baptism or crucifixion, led me to Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe; the new evangelization was led by Franciscans with the Indigenous people of this hemisphere, who continue their efforts even to the present.
Sara Castro,  
Durán, Ecuador

Although I was associated with religious women in elementary school, time has distanced me from them. Several years later I learned that Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Bertha Gerads and Ramona Johnson, had arrived at my parish, Santa Marianita in Durán, Ecuador. It seems to me that San Francisco was the path through which God opened the doors of my heart. That is why I accepted Sister Ramona’s invitation to approach her missionary house and begin the transformation of my life. I have been engaged as a Franciscan Associate ever since, and I kept learning and practicing Franciscan service to all people.

I believe that the relationship with the FSLF was valuable from the first contact; they instilled in me the charism and since then I felt that I wanted to be there, closely with their community.

Anita Goth,  
St. Michael, Minn.

Working as church secretary in Waite Park, I shared my story with Sister Carol Virmg who told me, “Anita, you’re a Franciscan!” Through my relationship with Sisters Carol and Gloria Haider and the Franciscan Spirituality cohort, I learned about Incarnation Theology. It found a place in my heart. When I talk with others about what it means to be Franciscan, I explain that it’s about Love. The love God has for us, that He came as Love to bring peace to all. That God created all things to be beautiful and live in harmony. Continuing to learn with the sisters helps me to be Love to others in my daily life, my work, my family, my relationships.

Deanna Boone,  
Ripon, Wis.

Having worked with and for the Franciscan Sisters for 11 years and having seen them live their values, it was a natural decision for me to declare publicly that I want to follow their example. Living 350+ miles away, I may be far in distance but I never feel far from them in my heart. I have started a blog (https://ldboone.wixsite.com/ourthinspaces) where I often find myself citing something that I learned from these wise Franciscan women.

I talk with God endlessly. Looking back, I believe I did that even before meeting the Franciscans. Now, I believe the Franciscan Sisters have taught me to do so with more abandon, more freedom and energy.

Helen Taffe,  
Richfield, Minn.

I was a member of the Community for several years. A few years after leaving, I realized how much I missed that association, so I became an associate.

Having been a member of the Community, the sisters are very dear to me. I am inspired by their dedication, their openness to the Holy Spirit and their joy in living and loving.

Eva Rodriguez,  
San Rafael, México

Personally, I like the simple life and when I met the Franciscan Sisters I found that their preaching and practices were all about simplicity. It was then that I decided to be their associate.

Since I have been associated with the Franciscan Community, I have learned new things and I feel that I am still learning. I think that these learnings are deep, significant, wonderful and very valuable for my daily life.
Karen Zamora, San Diego, Nicaragua

Seeing that my parents had a beautiful relationship with the associates and hearing them talk about Saint Francis and sharing the history of Saint Francis in a group was what motivated me to become a Franciscan Associate. It is what largely helps me see life in another way and treat animals with love and learn to take care of the environment. It has also helped me a lot to get closer to God.

My relationship with the sisters is very valuable because they have taught us a lot, especially about the union as brothers and sisters—not only with the group but with everything around us.

Judy Virmig, Little Falls, Minn.

Why did I become a Franciscan Associate? The Franciscan Sisters, along with St. Francis High School, became my home for four years in the early ’60s. When the sisters decided to welcome associates, I had no idea what their plans were, but I was very interested! I became an associate for two reasons: 1) because I loved the sisters and wanted to continue being part of their lives and they part of mine; and 2) because I wanted to emulate their strong sense of social justice. Now I exchange emails and pray for them. They’re dear friends!

Benigno Tellez, Managua, Nicaragua

I made my commitment as an associate because I felt in my heart that this Franciscan Community would be fruitful in my spiritual life. It gives me values to put into practice in life, and I can understand the things that really concern humanity. It is our task to educate and/or raise awareness among other people.

I have had contact with other religious communities, but when I met the Franciscan Sisters, their form of welcome and relationship was so close and so open that I began to feel very connected with them. I feel that, for them, each person is very valuable in this community, which has taught me about communion with God and with others. That is why I also want to continue strengthening my relationship with the sisters and continue learning from their wisdom.

Pat Ricci, Little Canada, Minn.

I first met the Franciscan Sisters when they moved into a house in St. Paul and started participating in life at Sacred Heart Church. They were kind and generous in sharing their love of Saint Francis and his way of life.

When I learned of the opportunity to be a part of their community, I happily joined in 2000. I was sad when they left St. Paul, but the gatherings with others in the Twin Cities helped fill the gap. Covid-19 changed that, but online gatherings are keeping the relationship alive and even expanding the connection!

I really appreciate the opportunities to improve and develop my understanding of living the Franciscan way.

Lori Johnson, Royallton, Minn.

Why did you become a Franciscan Associate? My husband and I are faithful attendees of the Green Fair. Several years ago, when attending the fair we went on a horse-drawn tour of the Franciscan Convent. I was so inspired by the commentator Sister Mary Lou Eltgroth, who passed away March 31 of this year. I asked her at the end of the tour how I could become involved with the Franciscan Community. I have now been a Franciscan Associate for more than five years, and I was in the first cohort of Engaging Franciscan Spirituality and Engaging Franciscan Spirituality: Still Engaged. I feel so blessed to have the Franciscan Community in my life.

Robyn Gray, Little Falls, Minn.

I have worked with the sisters for a significant portion of my life; the campus has become my second home. While I always planned on becoming an associate, Sister Justina Bieganek “gently” pushed me so that she and I would be able to make the journey together. What a gift! I treasure my friendships with the sisters and associates, and it feeds my soul that together we are striving to make the world better for now and those who come after.
How do relationships begin? Sometimes it is a subtle comment, an 
aha moment that connects values or a shared dream. This is how I 
became connected with my first associate, Aina Essig of Anoka, back 
in the ’80s. She was a dedicated Lutheran woman, and I a Catholic 
sister. We met over a conversation at St. Stephen’s Parish where 
I was director of Volunteer Services from 1982-1994. Aina was 
active in the Lutheran church and dedicated to assisting the poor in 
Latin American countries. She was working with Pastors for Peace 
and talked to me about sending needed items, especially car oil, to 
Nicaragua. She asked for the parish’s support, and we have been 
walking together ever since. Her Franciscan values of simplicity, 
ecumenism and outreach to the marginalized have strengthened 
the bonds between us and created many conversations and a lasting 
friendship. One time when Aina walked into Sacred Heart Chapel 
on our campus, she commented, “I feel like I am in heaven being 
here with these dedicated Franciscan women.”

Last summer, Associate Mary Dongoski from Howard Lake talked 
about what it is that strengthens the bonds between sisters and 
associates. She stated firmly, “We are one in Christ.” Mary joins the 
sisters in the celebration of the Eucharist via livestreaming on the 
FSLF YouTube channel. A former member, she loves identifying 
sisters “on the screen.” Mary rejoices in her associate relationship 
with the sisters, bringing her life full circle. Mary states, “I have had 
a blessed life.” Mary is working on her technology skills to access 
more opportunities to connect with other sisters and associates. “My 
rich background has helped me raise my family of two boys and 
six girls. I have a special prayer room and love using the Franciscan 
Prayerbook for my private prayers. I feel connected with the sisters 
from morning until night.” Mary uses her gifts not only for her 
family but also her parish and community, giving credit to the Holy 
Spirit who guides her life throughout. The Franciscan Sisters are 
very honored to be a part of Mary’s life. Sister Georgine Larson, 
Mary’s companion sister, states, “Mary is very spiritual, has a great 
trust in God. Her life overflows to her family, friends and faith 
community. We share a mutual enriching relationship. I pray for 
her often.”

May time, conversation and grace continue to strengthen the bonds 
between Franciscan Sisters and Associates.
About six months ago, many of us hadn’t even heard of Dancing with Our Stars. Of course, we knew about Dancing with The Stars on television, but not the dance competition sponsored by the Women’s Fund to benefit nonprofits in central Minnesota. Wow, did we learn fast.

Bill and Chip Martin-Chaffee came to know the Franciscan Sisters through our Franciscan Community Volunteers program and were sponsors of the Taste of St. Cloud. When Chip, who had been a judge for Dancing with Our Stars in past years, decided he wanted to join the 2022 competition, he chose David Deblieck, dance instructor at St. Ben’s and St. John’s, as his dance partner. Bill, the creative mind behind the marketing plan and all the promotion, and Chip picked the Franciscan Sisters as their chosen charity. How lucky we were! The Women’s Fund supports girls, women in transition and elder women—so we qualified.

A dance party, a dozen or so videos and countless Facebook posts later, June 13 finally arrived. Bill, Chip and David, along with their families and friends and a number of sisters, enjoyed a reception outside the Benedicta Arts Center and then made their way to the Escher Auditorium for the performance. And it was spectacular! There were six dance teams supporting various nonprofits in central Minnesota. By the end of the night, over $648,800 was raised to support organizations doing great work in central Minnesota!

Chip and David placed third in the overall competition but received the highest score in the dance contest—and they received the Judges’ Choice award which came with a $3,000 prize. There was no doubt that Chip and David were the crowd favorite.

Photo: They did it! Bill and Chip set their fundraising goal at $100,000. Donations through the Women’s Fund, gifts directly to the Development Office and prize money of $8,000 (third place plus Judges’ Choice award) helped raise just over $100,000 for our sisters in Clare Residence. Thank you, Bill, Chip and David! Pictured: Bill Martin-Chaffee, Sister Michelle L’Allier, Olivia Martin-Chaffee, Chip Martin-Chaffee, Liz Rydeen, David Deblieck, Landon Martin-Chaffee, Dan Barth (videographer) and Sister Cordy Korkowski.
One Planet Fund completes first year!

Elizabeth Rydeen

The first year of the One Planet Fund resulted in 21 grants for a variety of innovative and worthwhile projects, many of which educate and engage students and youth, a primary goal of the One Planet Fund. From pollinator gardens, prairie restoration and tree planting to Earth Day and climate change curriculum, water testing clinics and recycling and clean-up projects, the fund accomplished its objective of encouraging and supporting climate emergency action projects in central Minnesota.

The One Planet Fund is one way the Franciscan community is responding to Pope Francis's encyclical Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home. The fund seeks to encourage faith-based groups, especially youth groups, and other nonprofit organizations or community groups, including schools, to develop creative projects that address climate change mitigation and promote sustainable living. Applications are due November 1, February 1 and July 1. Maximum grant: $1,000. To apply, contact Elizabeth Rydeen: 320-632-0624; email: erydeen@fslf.org. See application at fslf.org.

One Planet Fund completes first year!

Elizabeth Rydeen

With a grant from the One Planet Fund, the Morrison County Agricultural Society engaged a group of 10-year-old girls to beautify the Morrison County Fairgrounds. The girls raised the flowers from seedlings, then created various planters to be placed around the fair, including this one made from recycled cedar posts and tin from an old barn.

Blessing of Animals

Sunday, October 2, 12 p.m.

Washington Park/Playground, 113 NE 4th Street, Little Falls

Join the Franciscan Sisters and First Lutheran Church, Little Falls, for the traditional blessing of animals in honor of St. Francis of Assisi. A brief service of song and prayer will be held. Following the service, each animal present will receive an individual blessing. All are welcome!

Planned Giving

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

Contact: Sister Bernice Ebner
116 8th Avenue SE, Little Falls, Minnesota 56345
(320)632-0699 • bebner@fslf.org
Words fall short in times like these

Candace Adams, Minister of Associates

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

I have read these words to grieving families on countless occasions. Nevertheless, these words seem hollow as I read yet another headline involving a mass shooting.

I selected the topic of gun violence for an upcoming Franciscan Faith and Life Conversation after the tragedy at the elementary school in Uvalde, Tex. I am writing this article just days after the heinous act of violence that occurred on July 4 at a parade in Highland Park, Ill. My heart is broken as I read of a toddler whose mother and father were killed. A toddler who wonders, according to various reports, “When are Mommy and Daddy coming?”

As I reflect on the senselessness of gun violence, I am reminded of a song, “Tell Your Heart to Beat Again,” sung by artist Danny Gokey, that captures the essence of my feelings:

Shattered like you never been before
The life you knew
In a thousand pieces on the floor
And words fall short in times like these

Friends, for too many families this is their reality. They are shattered by the pain of gun violence.

Frankly, I am angry, I am sad, and I want it all to stop. What is most frightening is knowing that another, if not several, mass shootings will occur prior to this article being published. Franciscan friends, we cannot simply accept that nothing can be done. We cannot simply hope that people will stop picking up guns and murdering other human beings. We must pray and act, pray and act!

I don’t want to live in a country where individuals don’t feel safe to gather for a parade, or for school, or for worship, or for purchasing groceries, or . . . What is happening is not acceptable. We must pray and act, pray and act!
This fall, St. Francis Health & Wellness added something new: Boxing Out PD. As the name implies, this is a boxing class geared toward people with Parkinson's disease or other mobility issues. Studies show that exercise, especially intensive training like boxing, promotes brain repair and may induce neuroprotection which can slow, stop or reverse the progression of Parkinson's.

When a number of members asked for the class, St. Francis Health & Wellness was quick to respond. The new class is held Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:15 a.m.–noon. Class size is limited to six people, but another session may be added in the winter if there is enough interest. Attendees will be using adjustable, standing punching bags (no person-to-person contact) and will need to supply their own gloves. There is no mobility requirement—participants may even be in a wheelchair—and the instruction can be adapted to individual needs. Boxing Out PD is an exciting new offering for those dealing with Parkinson's disease or other mobility issues.

Photo: Instructor Lauren Brady says, “Boxing in particular helps with hand/eye coordination, balance, stability, cardio fitness and overall strength.”
Sister Frances Kempenich, 97, died July 22, 2022, at St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, Minn.

Frances Genevieve Kempenich was born May 18, 1925, to Joseph and Frances (Simones) Kempenich in Randall, the sixth of 10 children. She was accepted as a Franciscan Sister August 12, 1942, and received the name Sister Mary Matthew. She later reverted to her baptismal name. She made her first profession of vows August 12, 1944, and final vows August 12, 1947.

Sister Frances graduated from St. Francis High School. She studied Spanish at the Intercultural Formation Center, Cuernavaca, Mexico, and learned drawing and pottery at the University of Minnesota, Morris.

Sister Frances served as missionary, housekeeper, cook, cottage mother, parish visitor, counselor and personal care attendant. She ministered in St. Cloud, Elk River, Little Falls, Princeton, Breckenridge, St. Paul, Baudette and Pierz. She was in the first group of Little Falls Franciscans to serve in Latin America and was a missionary in Peru for nine years.

Known to everyone as Sister Fran, she was an “all-around-sort-of-person,” with a talent for candle making and pottery. She produced beautiful original pieces of pottery, including a ceramic “heritage table” made for her family, which they treasured.

Sister Frances was dedicated to serving others, especially the elderly and handicapped. She assisted her mother for the last few years preceding her death and also helped several of her handicapped sisters. She was the personal care attendant to Sister Mary Schuman for 23 years.

After many years of service, she enjoyed sharing community life in the “little” house on campus with Sister Bea Eichten and the cat called Boots.

Sister Fran will be fondly remembered for her love of fishing, playing the harmonica, cooking like her mother (mum) used to do, playing cards, making beautiful pottery and candles, acting out plays, and watching and feeding the birds. Her nieces and nephews have a deep appreciation, admiration and love for her, as she brought the religious life alive at family gatherings by being a role model and loving everyone unconditionally.

Associate Brianda Cediel honored

Associate Brianda Cediel, center, with Minnesota Lieutenant Governor Penny Flanagan and Pastor James Albert III. Brianda was recognized as one of the Pillars of St. Cloud on Juneteenth by the African American Male Forum. Brianda founded Hands Across the World in 2003 with Sister Tonie Rausch. Hands Across the World serves refugees and immigrants who have come with their families to make central Minnesota their home. Brianda is well known throughout the St. Cloud area and goes above and beyond to serve her community in countless ways.
A blessing for La Casa Maria

“Our deep gratitude to Monsignor Hilario Gonzales, Bishop of the Diocese of Saltillo, for his support and confidence in facilitating the house for this ministry.” —Sister Isabel Berrones

The Mexico mission has expanded to Saltillo, a large city about an hour from San Rafael. Sister Isabel Berrones leads this new mission. Following the model of Casa Franciscana in San Rafael, La Casa Maria provides services that help young women attending university in Saltillo succeed in higher education. More than a boarding house, the students will be part of a Franciscan community, participating in daily prayer with opportunities for spiritual growth and human development.

The diocese has offered the house to the sisters rent-free for five years. We are grateful for this partnership and new ministry—a tremendous opportunity to support the advancement of women through education. The program begins this fall with five students and could accommodate up to 10 in the future. Some students know the sisters from living at Casa Franciscana in San Rafael; others will be new to the sisters and their Franciscan way of life.

Photo: On hand for the blessing of La Casa Maria – seated: Sisters Michelle L’Allier, Carol Schmit, Pat Forster; standing: Father Luis Fernando Morales, Blanca Rosa Tamez (board member), Sister Aurora Tovar, Bishop Hilario Gonzalez, Sisters Isabel Berrones and Carolyn Law, Armando Rodriguez (board member)