

# Our Journey

Fall 2024 • Vol. 43 No. 3



FRANCISCAN SISTERS  
OF LITTLE FALLS, MINNESOTA



# Our Journey

FALL 2024 • VOL. 43 NO. 3

*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:** Delores (Bieganek)  
Preimesberger (seated) with her  
daughters Joann Pfluger and  
Lois Heigl all graduated from  
St. Francis High School. See the  
story on page 4.

**Photo by** Sister Cordy Korkowski

**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.

© September 2024  
Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls,  
Minnesota



## Welcome back, Char Berns!

*Hello,*

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Char Berns. I worked for the Franciscan Sisters from 1998-2003 in the Community Relations Department. I was interviewed and hired by Sister Adella Gross.

I grew up on a farm near Bowlus with my parents George and Rose Opatz and my five siblings and across the field from my cousin Sister Sylvia Opatz and her family.

I am a widow of a Vietnam veteran, a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. I was my husband's caregiver for a number of years. After he passed away, I struggled with finding my purpose and where I fit into society, so I became a hospice volunteer, which I find to be very healing and rewarding.

While having a very casual conversation at lunch with Sisters Sylvia and Cordy Korkowski, we talked about Sister Cordy's plans to retire and who her successor might be. Little did I know that two weeks later I would receive a phone call from Liz Rydeen, director of Community Relations, to discuss the possibility of a part-time position as Sister Cordy's successor. I felt that God was opening a door for me, and I decided to walk through. I have big shoes to fill, but I am looking forward to this wonderful opportunity I have been given. I'm excited to make new friends and build relationships as I get to know the donors in the coming weeks and months. I plan to get acquainted with you, our generous donors, through handwritten notes, letters, phone calls, in-person visits and perhaps some lunches along the way. I am blessed to have found my way back to the Franciscan Sisters.

Sincerely,

*Char Berns*

Char Berns  
Donor Relations  
cberns@fslf.org  
320-632-0603



*Every experience  
God gives us, every person  
God puts in our lives,  
is the perfect preparation  
for the future that only  
God can see.*



Dodging raindrops, people enjoyed the Green Fair Folk Festival. The Franciscan spirit prevailed despite the weather.

## Dear friends,

How true this quote is! We live our lives one day at a time and each day, each step, takes us into experiences that offer choices for life and growth. The wisdom person, the irritating person, the moments of awe and gratitude, the painful losses all contribute to the choices we make in our unfolding life. And each choice leads us one step further into that life.

Sixty years ago, I made the choice to enter my Franciscan community, a choice shaped by my family, parish and college experiences. I joined this community of wonderful women who commit their lives to the quest for God. Sister Mary Dumonceaux and I celebrate these 60 years as Franciscan Sisters with gratitude for the many opportunities and challenges that came our way. I think I'm becoming one of the "oldies," who remembers life in the past and can tell stories of sisters, staff, ministries that are no longer with us but live large in our memory. One delightful memory is of trips to "the farm" with fellow novices and other sisters for hayrides and picnics. John Lauer brings back the history of "the farm" where we experienced times of fun and relaxation.

You will see in this issue glimpses of many unfolding life experiences. St. Francis High School graduates

shared stories as they gathered with much laughter and delight at reconnecting with one another. Sister Mary H. updates us on our dream of healing creation by creating an environmental learning center and restoring native habitat on our properties. Sister Cordy shares about her participation in the Eucharistic Congress which took place in Indianapolis, truly an amazing experience of the gathered Church celebrating God's presence with us in the Eucharistic bread and wine and in the everyday Eucharist we experience. With Sister Cordy retiring, we are pleased to welcome Char Berns who will continue to extend our gratitude for you, our many friends and donors.

We are held in God's love and drawn forth into love through the people and experiences each day brings. Thank you for being with us as together we journey into our unfolding future.

Blessings of peace and love,

*S Bea Eichten, OFS*  
Sister Beatrice Eichten  
Community Minister



# She wanted her girls to graduate from SFHS like she did

*Elizabeth Rydeen*

Dolores Bieganek rode the bus from Harding to St. Francis High School in Little Falls. It was a long bus ride, almost two hours. She remembers the bus picking up about 50 kids from small rural neighboring towns. She was one of the few students who went to St. Francis. The majority on the bus went to the public school.

"I was a day student at St. Francis and, because we had to catch the bus for home, I couldn't participate in afterschool activities. I remember wanting to learn how to swim but wasn't able to because the bus left directly after school let out," Dolores recalls. Occasionally, she would walk to the courthouse where her dad was the county commissioner at the time. She remembers the car ride; he'd let her drive home!

Dolores had 11 siblings. She and three of her sisters graduated from St. Francis High School. Her oldest sister Therese (birth name Edith) came from New York on the infamous Orphan Train and was adopted by the Bieganek family. She attended SFHS and, in 1929, entered the Franciscan community and became Sister Mary Justina.



Graduation day 1971. Joann with her parents and Sister Justina. Joann said, "Sister Justina was always a huge part of our family."



Delores (Bieganek) Preimesberger, 95, attended the SFHS gathering. "I felt honored when Sister Carol Schmit asked if I would carry up a white rose in honor of all the deceased classmates. I had one condition, that my daughters Joann Pfluger and Lois Heigl, also SFHS grads, accompany me, one on each side. It was very special for me to have my daughters with me," Delores remarked.

Dolores graduated in 1946. In 1950, she married Henry Preimesberger, Jr. They had 13 children, six girls and seven boys. Their three oldest daughters graduated from St. Francis: Nora, '69, Lois, '70 and Joann, '71. While Dolores had been a day student, her girls were boarders as there was no school bus at that time to transport them to and from the Pierz/Genola area. They loved being boarders

Joann recalls: "Nora and Lois went to high school first, and I had to stay home to help with the younger siblings. Dad and Mom agreed that I would be able to attend the following year. I remember Nora and Lois coming home on weekends excited to share their new experiences. Stories of their adventures sparked my curiosity, and the day could not come fast enough for me to attend St. Francis High School!"

Joann remembers when Lois brought home Maria, the foreign exchange student from Mexico for weekend visits. "Getting to know her opened a whole new world for me. Perhaps this was the start of my own family adventures: my husband and I hosted and welcomed to our home three exchange students," Joann said.

She also remembers SFHS's modular educational system. "The classrooms were made up of small groups of students with our teacher. We sat in circles as we discussed and learned. We were challenged to 'think outside of the box.' I believe my love for learning and being a good student of life are rooted in my experience at St. Francis!" Joann said.



# St. Francis High School students and faculty together again!

*When we live our Christian values in the everyday details of our life, it makes a difference beyond what we can see or even imagine.*

—Sister Elise Saggau, Homily, 7/14/2024

On July 14, about 140 St. Francis High School alumnae celebrated a reunion at the motherhouse, the first since 2019. Sister Lillian Kroll, at 102, was the oldest attendee. She graduated in 1942. Sister Patrice Kiefer, who had graduated a year earlier (in 1941), was second oldest at 101. The day began with Mass in Sacred Heart Chapel, Father David Maciej presiding. Sister Elise Saggau gave the homily, reminding the worshippers that, as Christians, they had been called to the prophetic task of announcing God's good news wherever they found themselves.

During the luncheon, the grads enjoyed exuberant visiting. They were also able to view depictions of old high school scenes displayed in St. Francis Hall.

St. Francis High School began in a small room on the third floor of the original convent building in 1922 and was officially accredited by the University of Minnesota in 1926. In 1931, the sisterhood erected a modern building to house the rapidly growing school and expanded it in 1941. Eventually, it was able to accommodate 100 resident students and as many day students.

By the late 1960s, however, enrollment had begun to diminish, and the last class graduated in 1977. During the half century of its existence, St. Francis High School awarded diplomas to 2,358 young women. Indeed, the school had served as a Christian formation center for vibrant women who went on to make a difference in the Church and world. A small taste of their liveliness was on display at this happy reunion.



Mary Farmer was a lay teacher of mathematics at SFHS in the '60s. Here she is at the reunion pictured with Sister Elise Saggau, a '52 graduate who also taught at St. Francis in the '60s. Mary said, "It is very difficult to put into words my experience teaching at St. Francis. I have never had such a positive experience—from being hired by the wonderful Sister Judine Cassidy to every member of the staff and all the good students, too many to name without fear of missing someone. But I truly must mention Sister Beata Lorsung, my wonderful mentor, so smart, so wise, so funny. Having the chance to dine with Sister Elise and cross paths with Sisters Carol Schmit and Betty Berger was a plus. It is an honor and a joy to have experienced the love and wisdom of the Franciscan Sisters! As a young, non-Catholic math teacher, new to the area, I would have a hard time naming a place as accepting and supportive as SFHS. It was truly a very special place."



Sister Loretta Bloch with her sisters Julie Fernandez, Eileen Dwyer, Janie Philip and Bea Britz. They all graduated from SFHS and were happy to be together at the gathering!





Charlene (Britz) LeMieur, '74, Cindy (Adams) Skuza, '74, Faye (Santala) Waldvogel, '75 and Cindy (Tschida) Eversman, '75, were among the 140+ attendees.



Sister Carol Schmit (right) with classmate Marlene (Brixius) Jennissen. "As I helped organize the Frannie all-school gathering, my goal for the participants was to have them leave saying: 'I'm glad I came.' 'It was a good day.' 'I connected with classmates from 50 years ago.' I graduated in 1956 and taught from 1963-1977. Sometimes I forget who were my classmates and who were my students. It was a grand day!" Sister Carol said.



Elizabeth Rydeen (standing) with Mary Ellen Imdieke, '64, one of the primary organizers of the gathering. Without her, it would not have happened. Thank you, Mary Ellen, and all who contributed to the day's success!

**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, 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.

# Franciscan Spiritual Connections: New Name. Same Purpose.

*Franciscan Sisters Leadership*

As a ministry of the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Franciscan Spiritual Connections (FSC) has always been about inspiring and nurturing spiritual growth rooted in Franciscan values. You may remember the previous names: Franciscan Life Office, Franciscan Life Center and Franciscan Programs Ministry. Today, the name reflects our purpose of connecting people spiritually to the heart of what it means to live a Franciscan way of life.

Through FSC, our commitment and deepest hope is that you experience a profound belonging in Divine Love, deeply connected to God, community, self, and creation. We hope these experiences rouse you to actions of love in our world, to wonder and contemplate. Ranging from an hour to five days, offerings include evening conversations, wandering in nature at a local park, a day of reflection or weeklong retreat. All offerings hold elements of contemplation, reflection, conversation, and nature. FSC hosts programs at both Welcoming House in St. Cloud and the motherhouse campus in Little Falls,



## FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS

and perhaps in outdoor spaces. Most events are hybrid so that you can join from anywhere. Bi-lingual options in English and Spanish are offered.

Continuing the Franciscan tradition of noticing and living into what is emerging, FSC has responded to needs with a community mental health series, bringing clergy and mental health professionals together to offer ecumenical services and support for local teens. Real Conversations is a series that delves into what it means to stay grounded in difficult situations—a particularly relevant response to our world today. As Franciscans, we build bridges, meeting the needs before us while listening into emerging ones. You'll find FSC's upcoming events posted on Facebook. Join us for a time to pause, rest, ground, and engage in what your spiritual life calls for now.

*FSC team includes Jamie Deering, director,  
Christi Hartwell, communications coordinator,  
and Linda Dobosenski, administrative assistant.*

## Franciscan Life Circle

*Franciscan Sisters Leadership*

Engaging in the Franciscan tradition of listening, discerning and living into emerging needs, the Franciscan Life Circle (FLC) has been active in visioning the future. Made up of Associates Ministry, Franciscan Spiritual Connections, Integral Ecology, Intentional Community and Companionship Ministries, FLC's mission is sharing God's love through, with, and in our local-global relationships. You might think of FLC as the arm that extends Franciscan values into the world and invites people to engage spiritually in ways that love God, self, others and all of creation. Our focus is invitational and relational and includes sisters, associates, others known to our Franciscan community and those not yet known to us. Spirit weaves our connections as we seek to create ministries that nourish spiritual well-being through information, formation, reflection and action.

Nearly two years ago, we welcomed Jamie Deering as director of Franciscan Spiritual Connections. Jamie now expands her leadership into facilitation for the backbone support of FLC. This fall, we welcome the new Integral Ecology director, Mike Schut. Co-ministers Veronica Rivadeneira, Camilo Barrera and Arlen Casco facilitate connection and deepening spirituality with our associates. Sisters Michelle L'Allier, Carmen Barsody and Isa Berrones lead Companionship Ministry and Intentional Community. The work of the Franciscan Life Circle is deeply relational, both within the Circle and in its outreach. Stop by and say hello when you are in Little Falls.





How honored I was to be part of the St. Cloud Diocese delegation. We soon became one family.

Photo by: Dianne Towalski / *The Central Minnesota Catholic*

## ‘Profound joy carried me through the National Eucharistic Congress’

*Sister Cordy Korkowski*

When Sister Bea Eichten asked if I would be interested in representing the Franciscan Sisters at the National Eucharistic Congress, I thought to myself, well, I am now retired. I love the Eucharist. Yes, was my answer. What a whirlwind of activity, emotion, and Catholic emergence I experienced when I joined the 17 St. Cloud Diocesan delegates. We departed from the Minneapolis airport July 17 for the five-day Congress in Indianapolis. The delegates became family almost immediately. We looked out for each other as we made our way each day and night from the Marriott Hotel on the Canal to our meeting places, being either the Lucas Oil Stadium or the Indiana Convention Center, about one mile away. On Wednesday afternoon, opening day, Sister Alice Imdieke, my Benedictine friend and pilgrim partner, felt the hospitality as we stood in the hot sun along with thousands of others to begin our check-in process. Luckily for us, a gracious volunteer approached us and said, “I am taking the two of you to the head of the line.” We found out that this young adult, Rhett deBlieux, was a sophomore from Notre Dame studying economics, one of about 700 volunteers present to assist pilgrims. We were grateful, as others stood in the heat for two or more hours waiting in long lines.

There were many wonderful moments, especially when Bishop Patrick Neary welcomed the delegation and many others from the St. Cloud Diocese. He was jubilant, engaging and happy to see all of us.

The days zipped by. We listened to dynamic speakers with a prelude of jubilant music, readings, testimonials and prayer. There were breakout sessions on a variety of topics for participants, ministry leaders, young adults, families and other special interest groups. Themes of Eucharistic faith, mission and utilizing gifts for the good of our world family were woven into presentations. Assembling meals for the Million Meal Movement was another highlight. I enjoyed conversations with many other pilgrims on our shared Eucharistic journey. Yes, the opportunities were endless, but I wanted quiet and time for prayer too.

During the course of the days, there were flashbacks of processions from my childhood. I loved carrying baskets of flowers, walking next to my girlfriends on the feast of Corpus Christi and looking beautiful in our dresses. Saturday’s grand procession through downtown Indianapolis was by far the highlight. Thousands of people filled with the Spirit accompanied the Blessed Sacrament held in a specially designed monstrance. We stood in adoration, prayer, song and engagement as the procession passed in front of the crowds. More than 1500 priests, seminarians, bishops, cardinals and laity of every age were present along with thousands of religious sisters from many congregations, groups of little children, young adults and courageous elders.

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Personally, the National Eucharistic Congress provided moments of profound joy, appreciation of the gift of Eucharist, and witnessing the faith and goodness of all gathered. The many young adults and their sincere spirit gave promise to a “New Pentecost” for the Church.

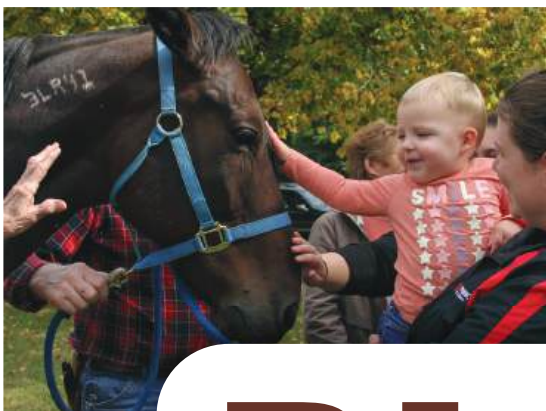
Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagel, Papal Nuncio, represented Pope Francis at the closing liturgy. Humorous and down to earth, he greeted the pilgrims in five languages. He asked Pope Francis for a message to bring to the Congress. Pope Francis replied, “Conversion to the Eucharist,” followed by one more remark for Cardinal Tagel: “Behave yourself!”

Bishop Cozzens, who led the Eucharistic Revival, gave an emotional farewell and thanked the many committees and persons who were instrumental in planning the 2024 event. He remarked, “It has been my experience, and I hope yours, that we’ve lived an experience of heaven. Of course, the Eucharist is a foretaste of heaven.”

There were tears of gratitude and a thunderous ovation as pilgrims left the stadium to return home and to live a recurrent theme of the Congress . . . as Jesus gave the gift of Eucharist to us, be a gift of love to others.



My Benedictine friend and pilgrim partner, Sister Alice Imdieke, and I were delighted to be greeted by Bishop Patrick Neary.



# BLESSING *of Animals*

**Sunday, October 6, Noon**

**St. Francis Campus, 116 8th Avenue SE, Little Falls, MN 56345**

*This event is in collaboration with First United Church and First Lutheran Church, Little Falls.*



# 60<sup>th</sup>

## Seeds of love harvest of gratitude

*On August 10, 60th Jubilarians Sisters Mary Dumonceaux and Bea Eichten renewed their commitment as Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota. In their renewal of vows, Sister Michelle L'Allier said, "Thank you for saying yes to receiving and being formed by God's bountiful love, and for sharing that with others. Rooted in lives of prayer, you have freely shared your gifts and talents for the good of the world, generously sowing seeds, tending to new life which emerged over time."*

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### Sister Mary Dumonceaux

Gregory and Lorraine (Miller) Dumonceaux raised their family of 13 children in Foley. I am the eldest, born September 28, 1945. Now, 78 years old, I am celebrating my 60th anniversary as a Franciscan Sister of Little Falls. Through the influence of my parents, I knew these sisters all my life. They nurtured God's people at St. John's Parish before there was a grade school. At least eight women from Foley joined this Franciscan community. Sister Justina Bieganek used to call us her "Foley girls."

One of my desires from childhood had been to be a missionary. I gave my Lenten offering for the "pagan babies" and faithfully read the pamphlet from Maryknoll. In 1962, the Franciscan Sisters opened their first international mission in Yunguyo, Peru. This fed my desire from 1963, when I joined the community, until 1975 when I was called to missionary work. I have been grateful for the opportunity to serve in Venezuela, four years, and in

San Rafael, Galeana, Mexico, for 11 years as well as in Hispanic parishes in the United States until the present. After our 20 years in San Rafael, I am proud that Sisters Aurora Tovar and Isa Berrones continue the Mexican missions in San Rafael and Saltillo.

In our home, my parents valued education, in part because they were deprived of a full education. For them this meant graduating from high school. All of us siblings graduated and almost all continued beyond. My religious community also shared this value and so, I have had opportunity to study through the doctoral level in historical theology, completing the degree in 1998 at St. Louis University, St. Louis, Mo. My siblings and I are eight brothers and five sisters: Gregory, Dennis, Jerome, Henry, Duane, Ralph, Daniel and Nicholas, and myself, Catherine, Cecilia, Kristelle and Alaina. Nicholas and Cecilia died as infants.

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Among my cousins, Martha Mary Bronder was my age and my lifelong friend. We, along with our mothers Fran and Lorraine, loved to read. All three have died, but I still pursue reading and adventures into new worlds. Marty and I had a close friend, Sharon Fitzpatrick, who joined the same convent in the same year as I did but died in 2021. That left Sister Beatrice Eichten, Sister Carol Virnig and me to celebrate our 60th jubilee, until Carol died April 20, 2024. Now we are two.

Martha Mary and I, Mary Martha, were named for her grandmother and my great-grandmother Martha Zawacki Bronder. She carried the banner for prayer in our family and was highly revered. When she died, my uncle Bud said that I needed to take up that banner. I am devoted to prayer as friendship with God. Sometimes this path has been rocky and dry. But I embrace it now as the grace and primary purpose of my life going forward.

Ten years ago, 2014, my mom, Lorraine, died on January 1 and on August 10, 2014, I celebrated my 50th anniversary. My dad, Gregory, died in 2008. This current decade without parents has been blest by some dear mentors showing up in my life, like Kathy Salzl and Kathy Woodruff, both of whom have passed. I feel lonely on the planet as the elders die, but fortunately this loss illuminates how the true anchor of life is God. Others also continue to call me to the path of holiness



Home visits are the backbone of the Mexico mission. Here I am with a family from the village of La Paz making plans for the foundation of a new two-room home. A team of volunteers from the United States will come to construct the rest of the house.

as my soul matures. I count now even more on the support and guidance of those who have passed since they are free to do so.

Friendship with God initiated a loving promise. In 1975 I received in prayer the assurance that I would always have friends. This has been true with the caveat that God chooses who they will be. I simply stay alert to who is sent into my path; then I appreciate the gift and give praise and thanks. Many of you are one of these gifts from God, whether family, sisters, or surprise persons sent by God. I cherish you and thank you for being steadfast. May you too always have friends to companion your journey.



The last local community of Franciscan Sisters to live and work in Rio Grande Valley, Tex. Sisters Gloria Haider, Pat Forster and I serve the immigrant community.



Three of my 10 siblings, Kate, Gregory and Dennis, on my First Communion, May 1952

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50th jubilee celebration: Sisters Sharon Fitzpatrick (1944-2021), Carol Virnig (1944-2024), Bea Eichten and Mary Dumonceaux. Sisters Sharon and Carol are dearly missed.

## Sister Bea Eichten

I was born September 15, 1943, to Everett and Mary (Beert) Eichten, the third of 16 children. We lived on a farm near Wanda, Minn., until we moved to Lindstrom in 1950 when I was 10 years old. It was quite a change to go from a German Catholic area filled with relatives to a Swedish Lutheran community, suspicious of Catholics. Our mission church was a lay-run parish, my early introduction to a church that was truly the People of God.



Reception day, July 31, 1964. My mom was very pregnant with my brother Pat, the second youngest of our family of 16 children. My parents were supportive of my choice once they knew I was happy. To my dad, I was always Sister Bea.

The first of my family to attend college, I chose the College of St. Benedict to receive more background in my Catholic faith. While there, I began to think about entering the convent. My sister Monica was at St. Gabriel's School of Nursing and urged me to consider the Franciscans. "Franciscans?" I'd never heard of them. When I visited our community, I felt "at home" and, two weeks later, at the end of the first semester of my junior year, I entered our Franciscan community.

As a novice, I was given the name Sister Mary Everett. (In 1967, I returned to my baptismal name.) That night, our novice director, Sister Elaine Sursely, died. Following a few months with Sister Anastasia Ohmann, we were blessed to have Sister Rose Mae Rausch become our novice director. Through her guidance, we received excellent theology and solid communication and interpersonal education. In 1966, I made my first profession of vows and entered the juniorate with Sister Kateri Conley as director. Throughout this time, I attended St. Clare College studying theology and liberal arts. In 1969, during our Renewal Chapter, as a junior professed sister, I was privileged to represent my cohort and serve with wonderful women on the Constitution Committee.

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I continued my education at the College of St. Teresa, Winona, earning a bachelor's degree in foods and nutrition and another in home economics education. Following graduation, I was a dietetic assistant at St. Ansgar's Hospital, Moorhead, and lived in community with 25 Little Falls Franciscans.

After final vows, I taught chemistry, home economics and child development at St. Francis High School from 1971-73, followed by three growth-filled years working with Hope Community on our Little Falls campus. I loved companioning the sisters as they experienced healing and personal growth.

In 1976, I was elected to serve on the Community Board in the administration of Sister Paula Pohlmann. As coordinator of our health ministry, I initiated and led a two-year study with our sisters and healthcare leaders that led to the creation of Franciscan Sisters Health Care, Inc. (FSHC). Realizing it called for professional leadership, in 1980 I stepped aside and moved forward with my dream of counseling.

In Chicago, I studied at Loyola University's Institute of Pastoral Studies, earning a master's degree. After graduation, I started a pastoral counseling service at Our Lady of Ransom Parish, Niles, Ill. I also received clinical training in pastoral psychotherapy from the Pastoral Psychotherapy Institute (PPI), Park Ridge, Ill.

I accepted a position as staff pastoral psychotherapist with PPI in 1985. Two years later, I was appointed coordinator of the network of PPI offices in local metropolitan churches in Chicago. I began offering workshops and retreats for religious communities and churches on topics related to family of origin and self-development.

In 1991, I returned to Little Falls to serve as president/CEO of FSHC. At this time of huge changes in healthcare, we realized that our community could not sustain the health ministries we sponsored. Over the next two years, we engaged our sisters and healthcare leaders in a process of determining how those ministries would continue in the future. We made the difficult decision in 1993 to transfer our



As president/CEO of FSHC, I had a great working team to assist in the process of transferring the sponsorship of our health care facilities to another Catholic health care organization.

health ministries to Catholic Health Corporation, Omaha, Neb., to withdraw from health care ministry and to close the FSHC office.

I then moved back to Chicago to begin a ministry of consulting/facilitation to religious congregations, which I enjoyed until 2001 when I was elected as community minister for the Franciscan Sisters. Recognizing the aging of our sisters and guests, we undertook a major three-year project renovating our Motherhouse to be handicapped accessible. One gift of leadership was involvement in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) where I met and worked with many wonderful women religious. In 2005, serving as president, I was privileged to be LCWR's representative in Japan during the 60th commemoration of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Returning to Winona in 2006, I resumed my consulting ministry. In 2011, I was elected to serve as community minister for a second time. The work of this team was to reconfigure our facilities and operations, consolidating our community administration in St. Francis Convent and freeing the St. Francis Center building for public use.

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After completing my leadership term in 2018, I moved to Racine, Wis. and connected with the Dominican Sisters of Racine. I retired from consulting in 2019, continued to work with LCWR, and served as a board member/president of Siena Retreat Center, sponsored by the Dominican Sisters.

In 2023, upon being elected community minister, I returned to Little Falls to serve our community as we undertake significant planning for transition into the future. It is a good time to be with the community as we explore and plan for necessary transitions in our life and mission.

I've been enriched by our sisters and associates who express deep love for our Franciscan way of life and share it through prayer, hospitality, and loving action. As life continues to unfold, I trust we are guided by Spirit alive and active in our hearts.



I travelled to Rome with LCWR leadership Sister Connie Phelps, SC and Sister Christine Vladimiroff, OSB to meet with Church officials. We laughed about our height differences which meant I needed to slow down when we walked together.

## Fall classes underway • Join today!

*St. Francis Health & Wellness Center*

### Aqua Fitness

M/W, 1-2 PM

Let the water cushion your workout! This class with get your heart rate up at the same time giving a gentle massage to your joints. This low impact, high-energy class is taught in our heated pool. Swimming skills are not necessary.

### Aqua Sculpt

T/TH, 10-10:45 AM

Love the effects water has on your body? Then you'll love this class filled with moves that will get your heartbeat up while you tone and sculpt your shoulders, arms, core and legs. These low impact full body exercises will strengthen your body without the impact on your joints.

### Complete Fitness

T/TH 4:00PM-4:45PM

Workouts that focus on a combination of mobility, endurance, stability, and strength for total body conditioning.

### Beginner Pickleball

T, 1-3 PM

A slower-paced class for those who are new to Pickleball or would like to learn how to play.

### Pickleball

M/W/F, 8-10 AM | M/W, 5:15-7:15 PM

A paddle sport created for all ages and skill levels. The rules are simple and the game is easy for beginners to learn, but can develop into a quick, fast-paced, competitive game for experienced players.

### Silver Sneakers

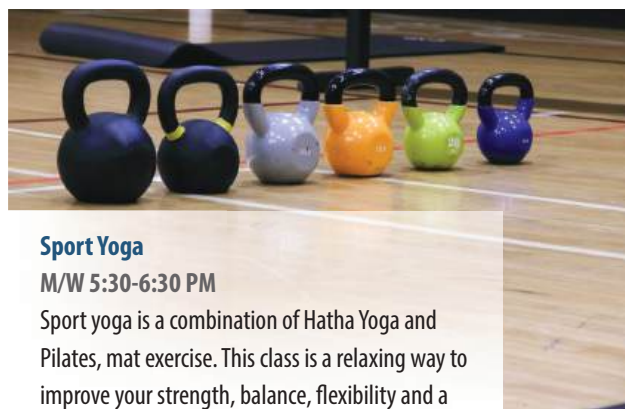
T/T, 11-11:45 AM

These programs are designed to improve your flexibility, increase your range of motion, control your weight and allow you to enjoy a social setting.

### Step Mix

W, 5:30-6:15 PM

Join in this cardio pumping step class. A combination of step intervals, some kickboxing moves and abdominal work ending with some easy stretching. A perfect way to get in a great workout afterwork.



### Sport Yoga

M/W 5:30-6:30 PM

Sport yoga is a combination of Hatha Yoga and Pilates, mat exercise. This class is a relaxing way to improve your strength, balance, flexibility and a way to relieve stress.

### Gentle Yoga

TH 5:30-6:30 PM - \*Oct. and Nov. only

This class highlights some of the foundation poses and sequences of yoga. Breath and postures are linked as mindfulness is cultivated. This class offers an opportunity to connect with ones own mind and body, cultivating more awareness.



To register call (320)632-0627 or email [info@stfrancishealthwellness.org](mailto:info@stfrancishealthwellness.org)  
116 8th Avenue SE, Little Falls, MN 56345



# Pop Stars first to use new recording studio

*Melissa von Itter, St. Francis Music Center*

When St. Francis Music Center instructor Tori Roe began her Pop Star Boot Camp this summer, she structured it on a two-part philosophy of walking the walk and talking the talk. Walking the walk focused on developing the musical skills necessary for vocal performance by refining the students' singing technique and exploring the process of thoroughly learning the music. Talking the talk empowered students with practical knowledge of the music business: using the equipment, stage presence, overcoming stage fright, and the recording process. Camp participants spent the summer choosing individual pieces and preparing for their first application of Tori's two-part philosophy with on-stage solo performances at the Green Fair Folk Festival.

The Pop Stars were the first artists to use the emerging St. Francis Music Center recording studio. This benchmark fulfilled the Music Center's first goal of the recording studio by offering students the opportunity to undergo the recording process and receive a quality recording in which they've invested their time and effort. This first phase of the studio is portable and includes all the initial equipment necessary to create vocal or instrumental recordings. Each of the Pop Stars had their own background track arranged and personalized by Tori to fit their vocal range, then experienced singing over the track while being recorded. The Pop Stars could then listen to themselves singing with their background track and later received a copy of their recording.

The Music Center was thrilled to offer this experience to a group of students already working so closely with this aspect of music making. Because the students had spent time with Tori cultivating their musical sound as well as an understanding of the logistics of performing



Due to rain, performances at the Green Fair were curtailed. Here's instructor Tori Roe with Pop Stars Paisley Larsen, Haven Imdieke and Jay Johnson during class.

and recording, they were able to enter the process enthusiastically and confidently. Tori's background in performing and recording music enabled her to bridge the class and the recording process perfectly for these students.

St. Francis Music Center looks forward to offering recording services to other students. Whether they are aspiring performers looking for a quality recording to release, preparing audition material for continuing education, or hoping to track their progress over time, they can utilize the recording studio. So far, this endeavor has been funded exclusively by grant money and donations specifically for the recording studio. The Music Center is grateful to Little Falls Exchange Club, Minnesota Power, and the Minnesota State Arts Board for supporting this new project. The equipment will also be used for training students and teachers, providing them with the skills and knowledge needed to create professional recordings. In the future, the Music Center aspires to continue growing the music studio to facilitate larger groups and more professionals as a unique resource for central Minnesota.





## Dream Project: past, present, future

*Sister Mary Hroscikoski*

This past year has been busy with planning and anticipation for the Dream Project, aimed at transforming the sisters' two major properties: the Little Falls campus and the property south of Rice. Initiated in October 2022, the project stems from the Franciscan Sisters' Delegate Assembly commitment to live more deeply into Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si* by deepening our relationship with and care for creation through our spirituality, our Land Ethic statement and this dream to create an environmental learning center on restored native habitat.

This center will complement our existing ministries, St. Francis Music Center, St. Francis Health and Wellness, and Franciscan spirituality, creating a beautiful, inclusive space where all forms of life—plants, animals, humans—can thrive together, embodying the principles of integral ecology (and native spirituality) that everything is connected and interdependent.

Supported by our Franciscan community, we've made significant strides in moving the project forward:

- Partnering with federal, state, and county agencies to guide and support land restoration, such as the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Partners Program and the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources. Engaging nonprofit and private partners for hands-on work, including a multi-year effort to remove invasive trees and shrubs.
- Establishing two prairie test plots with the USFWS to assess the feasibility of prepping invasive campus grasslands and how a curated prairie seed mix grows on different soils here.
- Engaging a DNR-certified forester to create our Woodland Stewardship Plan.
- Planning a marketing and feasibility study for essential planning information.
- Engaging local schools for future on-site programming.
- Updating and seeking feedback from sisters, associates, staff, and the public, along with varied public presentations.
- Preparing for vision planning and stakeholder engagement to begin next year, contingent on other community planning milestones set by our Leadership team.

We also now recognize ourselves as beneficiaries of the historical injustices faced by the Dakota and Ojibwe people here before us. It was painful to learn that the early European settler who gifted our early sisters with our first five acres of motherhouse land was one of many who actively dispossessed native peoples from their homeland. Over the past year, our Dream Project has engaged with the national Land Justice Futures program for women religious communities. Land justice is now a crucial part of the project. We continue learning and discerning what is ours to do as a community to protect land from extraction, to regenerate its health, and to expand equity and access to dispossessed groups.

We have long roads ahead yet for the land, the buildings, and the Dream Project as a whole. We are deeply grateful for the incredible partners accompanying us on this journey of living more fully into our Franciscan spirituality that says everything is connected and all creation exists as sister and brother.





Sister Mary Cecile Meyer plays the ukulele surrounded by sisters enjoying a day at the farm.

## Memories of the Franciscan Sisters' farm

*Associate John G. Lauer*

If you're of a certain age, you may have strong memories of the Franciscan Sisters' farm seven miles west of Little Falls on Highway 27. The farm was located in Section 18 of Pike Creek Township and consisted of 160 acres. The Franciscan Sisters acquired the property in exchange for caring for an older couple, John and Katherine "Katie" Kukla. John and Katie had immigrated to America from Poland in the 1870s with a daughter named Rosanna. They homesteaded near Little Falls after receiving a land patent for the farm in 1883. The couple built a log cabin that consisted of two rooms on the main floor with a large open attic upstairs with three windows. The outside of the house was covered with siding; the downstairs was plastered and painted, but the upstairs was just bare logs. There was also a barn and several small outbuildings.

Like most Polish immigrants at the time, the Kuklas were Catholic and became members of the parish of St. Stanislaus in Sobieski. They lived off the land and were largely self-sufficient until Katie got sick in the 1890s. John was unable to take care of her by himself, so the Franciscan Sisters cared for her at their hospital. Unable to pay their bills, the couple exchanged their farm for their subsequent life care at St. Otto's Home and Orphanage. The farm was deeded to the Franciscan Sisters on March 29, 1895. After many years of making their home with the sisters, Katie died of bone cancer on April 1, 1899, and John died of Bright's disease three years later on June 8, 1902.

In the early days of their religious congregation, the sisters tried to be as self-sufficient as possible. They

tended large gardens and raised cattle, chickens and hogs. They canned and butchered much of their own food. Soon after the sisters acquired the farm west of town, they erected a tall wooden cross on a high hill to the left of the road leading up to the house as a reminder that the place was special and sacred. During the earliest years, when groups of sisters went to the farm to work or to enjoy a picnic, they gathered for prayer around the cross on the hill to pray their Office and the Rosary. Some years later the cross was moved a little farther into the woods, which then served as the sisters' chapel. In time, the cross disintegrated and was taken down. The sisters' prayer place then became a shady spot in the nearby woods.

For many years the sisters' farm served many purposes. From May until late October the farm was used to pasture the sisters' cattle in a large meadow. The cows were milked, and the milk was stored in a trough built next to the natural spring in the pasture to keep it cool until it could be brought to the convent the next day. The tillable land was used to raise corn to feed the cattle. Many folks can still recall the sisters' cows being driven through the city of Little Falls in the spring and then again later in the fall, making the seven-mile trek two times each year. The workers stayed in the farmhouse. Wood was cut at the farm and hauled to town by sled or wagon to supplement the heating of the building housing the convent, the hospital, the orphanage, and the home for the aged. Wood was also used in the brick ovens at the convent to bake the bread. There were gooseberries, chokecherries, raspberries, and strawberries to be found

in the woods for eating and making jams and jellies.

Perhaps the most important use of the farm for the sisters was the spiritual respite that it provided them. For many years it was the sisters' favorite picnic ground. Each summer the sisters, young and old, looked forward to the annual outing of going to the farm. It meant a refreshing change from their year-round duties. The sisters were able to roam through the woods at will, looking for wildflowers or wild strawberries.

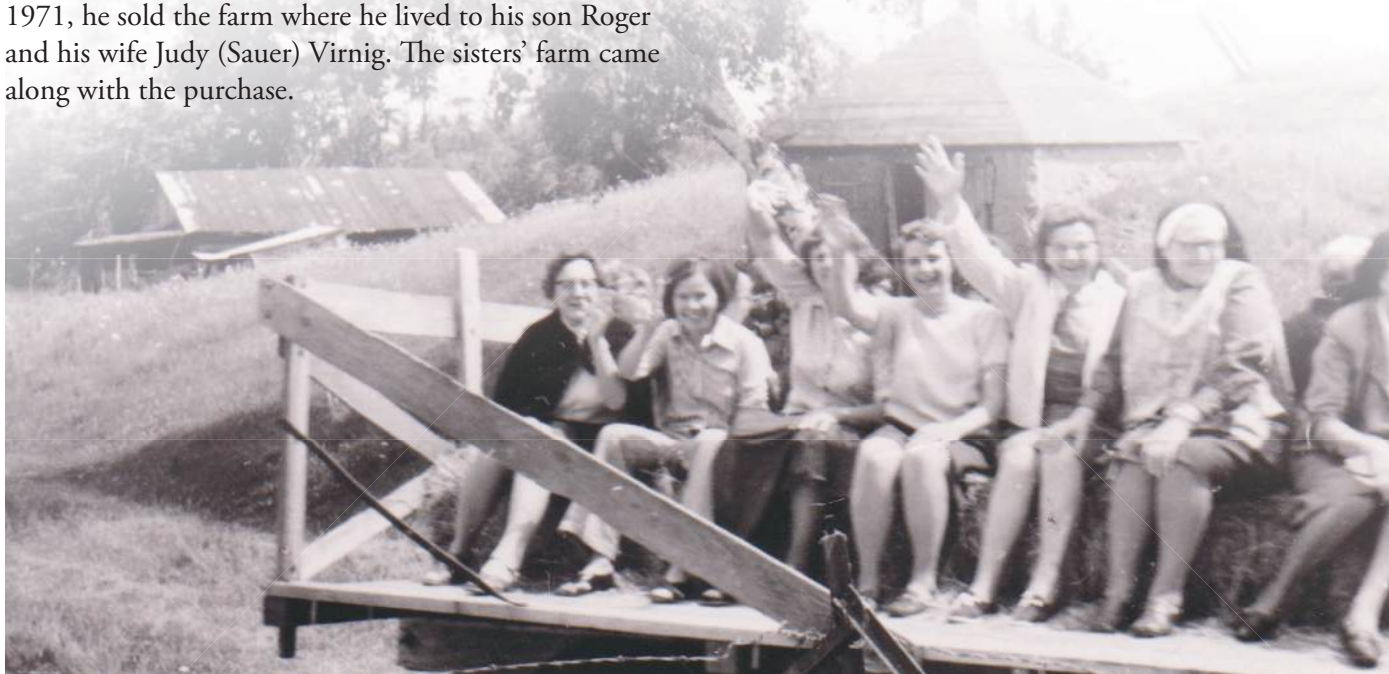
They enjoyed sitting under the large shade tree near the house just drinking in God's beauty all around and breathing in the fresh country air. It also meant praying outdoors in nature's beautiful cathedral.

When federal and state regulations for preparing and handling food for service institutions became too stringent and expensive, the sisters decided to divest from their farming practices. They sold the farm to Paul Virnig in 1962. Paul had two sisters living in the convent at that time: Sister Florentine Virnig and Sister Marcelline Virnig. Paul used the farm to pasture his heifers and grew crops of corn, oats and hay on the 19 acres of tillable land. When Paul wanted to retire in 1971, he sold the farm where he lived to his son Roger and his wife Judy (Sauer) Virnig. The sisters' farm came along with the purchase.



John and Katie Kukla built this cabin after homesteading the property in 1883.

Roger continued to use the property for pasturing young cattle and also opened up 42 acres for growing crops. Roger's sister, Sister Carol Virnig, joined the Franciscan convent in 1964. In 2011, Roger and Judy sold the farm to their daughter, Carrie (Virnig) Frank and her husband Jason, keeping it in the family. Carrie remarked that the place is very special to her and feels like home. The Franks recently completed building a house there. They plan to raise cattle, bees, maintain a big garden, and run a sawmill. They want to be as self-sufficient as possible—a fitting legacy for the land where the winds still carry the prayers of the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls to a heavenly vision of beauty and care for Earth and for each other.



"I remember riding through the pasture, hearing the birds singing, seeing the wildflowers, enjoying the fresh air and blue sky. In the old house, we started a fire in the wood burning stove and for lunch we fried potatoes and eggs. The large frying pan we used is an artifact in our archives," recalls Sister Julien Dirkes. Pictured: Sister Camillus Weier, Susan Adams, Sisters Carla Przybilla, Julien Dirkes, Beata Lorsung, Anita Hennek.



# SAVE THE DATE

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TO THE

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**Nov. 21, 2024**

## In loving memory...



***Sister Mary Pat Zangs***, age 92, died July 7, 2024, in Little Falls, Minn.

Sister Pat was born December 12, 1931, in St. Paul, the third of eight children of John and Agnes (Foley) Zangs. She was accepted as a Franciscan Sister of Little Falls, Minnesota, on July 31,

1952. She made her first profession of vows on August 12, 1954, and final vows on August 12, 1957.

Sister Pat earned a licensed practical nurse diploma from Miller Hospital School of Practical Nursing, St. Paul; became a registered nurse through St. Gabriel's School of Nursing, Little Falls; earned a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from Concordia College, Moorhead; and a master's degree in psychology and wholistic studies from Antioch University, San Francisco.

Sister Pat ministered as a staff nurse, supervisor, administrator, counselor and instructor in hospitals located in Little Falls, Sauk Centre, Breckenridge and Moorhead, Minn., and in Cudahy and Dodgeville, Wis. She also served as director and counselor at Wholistic Growth Resources, Little Falls.

Sister Pat had a great love for classical music, poetry and cooking—especially on the grill. She appreciated the opportunity to minister to her sisters in a wholistic program for 20 years. She will be remembered as a person with a vision for the future, a great sense of humor and a depth of knowledge that she readily shared. She had a great respect for people, was levelheaded in her judgments, and quick to affirm people for the good she saw in them.

Sister Pat loved parties and would initiate them wherever she was, so people could have a good time celebrating together. Sister Irenemaree Rodak formed community with Sister Pat for the past 20 years. They both love Dachshunds, especially Cassie, their current pet. Both Sister Irenemaree and Cassie will miss Sister Pat.

# Our Journey

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## FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS

**Franciscan Spiritual Connections (formerly Franciscan Programs Ministry) inspires and nurtures spiritual growth rooted in Franciscan values, connecting God, community, self and creation.**

**Programs and events are offered at Welcoming House in St. Cloud and St. Francis campus in Little Falls. To learn more about this evolving ministry, see the article on page 7.**

**TAIZÉ PRAYER SERVICE** — St. Francis Campus, Little Falls  
Sept. 24, Oct. 22, Nov. 26, Dec. 17 — 5:30 p.m.

**BEING WITH THE LAND: A TIME FOR GRIEVING AND HOPE** — St. Francis Campus, Little Falls | Sept. 26, 6-7 p.m.

**CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER SERIES: A TIME TO RECHARGE MIND AND SPIRIT** — Welcoming House, St. Cloud  
Oct. 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 — 6-7:30 p.m.

**BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS** — St. Francis Campus, Little Falls  
October 6 — Noon

*\*This event is in collaboration with First United Church and First Lutheran Church, Little Falls.*

**SOULCOLLAGE®** - Welcoming House, St. Cloud  
Oct. 13, Nov. 10, Dec. 8 — 1:30-3:30 p.m.

**CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER ON THE EVE OF ELECTIONS** — Welcoming House, St. Cloud **AND** St. Francis Campus, Little Falls | Nov. 4 — 6:00-7:30 p.m.

**ADVENT DAY OF REFLECTION** — St. Francis Campus  
Nov. 30 — 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

**PRAYER FOR PEACE VIGIL AND SERVICE** — St. Francis Campus | Dec. 30-31

**ENGAGING FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY PROGRAM RETURNS JANUARY 2025**



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