

Our Journey

Spring 2025 • Vol. 44 No. 1



FRANCISCAN SISTERS
OF LITTLE FALLS, MINNESOTA

Our Journey

SPRING 2025 • VOL. 44 NO. 1

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:

Betty Brezinka, Peggy Frieler,
Amanda Lampert, Eleanor
Lampert—four generations
living the Franciscan values
and benefitting from the sisters'
ministries. See article on page 14.

Photo by Julie Haldenwanger

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.

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Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls,
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Holy Week Services

- **Palm Sunday**
April 13 at 9:30 a.m.
Blessing of Palms and Eucharist
- **Holy Thursday**
April 17 at 6:30 p.m.
Followed by Adoration until 9 p.m.
- **Good Friday Silent Walk for Peace**
April 18 at 9:30 a.m.
Gather at the west entrance of St. Francis Convent
- **Good Friday**
April 18
11 a.m. Stations of the Cross
2 p.m. Liturgy of the Lord's Passion
- **Holy Saturday**
April 19 at 8 p.m.
Blessing of the fire, the paschal candle and scripture readings (no communion at this service)
- **Easter Sunday**
April 20 at 9:30 a.m.

Franciscan Spiritual Connections Opportunities

Taizé Prayer - Tuesdays, March 25, April 22 and May 22

5:30-6:30 p.m. | Franciscan Sisters Gathering Space, Little Falls

Contemplative Prayer Series - Mondays, March 10 - April 7

6:30-7:30 p.m. | Franciscan Welcoming House, St. Cloud or Zoom

Le(n)t's Talk About Mental Health - Sunday, March 30

Noon-1:30 p.m. | First United Church, Little Falls

Real Conversations - Mondays, April 21 - June 16

5:30-7:30 p.m. | Franciscan Welcoming House, St. Cloud or Zoom

SoulCollage - Sundays, March 23, April 27 & May 18

1:30-3:30 p.m. | Franciscan Welcoming House, St. Cloud

Wild Wandering - Tuesday, June 10

6-8 p.m. | Rockville Park, St. Cloud

Dear Friends,

Each New Year presents opportunities for a fresh start and hope for what will be. Perhaps a new job, new baby, new home—and this year a new presidency. All bring possibilities, challenges and hope.

How do we engage with all this in a world caught up in so many struggles and violence? I would say with hope. For me, that is a place where I stand each day to bring light and peace and kindness. I find courage as I reflect on Julian of Norwich's wisdom:

All shall be well, for there is a force of love moving through the universe that holds us fast and will never let us go.

This offers me “an emotional footprint,” an inner space that shapes how I respond to the events of each day.

This year, we are invited to be bearers of hope. When Pope Francis declared 2025 as a Jubilee Year of Hope, he invited us to a “logic of encounter, so that the future does not find us hopelessly adrift, but pressing forward as pilgrims of hope, individuals and communities on the move, committed to building a future of peace.” *

Our world needs the message of hope, that beyond the struggles of our lives and in our world, goodness and love and peace are possible. You and I are pilgrims of hope as we relate to another with kindness, as we do a small service for a neighbor or greet a stranger, and when we avoid cynicism and harsh judgment.

I hope you enjoy this spring issue with stories of our ministries past and present. This is the issue we dedicate to our generous donors, people who walk with us in mission and ministry, helping us to extend our Franciscan values out into the world. Be assured of our grateful prayers.

Peace and joy,

S Bea Eichten, OFM

Sister Bea Eichten
Community Minister

*Pope Francis's address to members of the Diplomatic Corps, January 2025.



Let's walk together as pilgrims of hope this year, responding from that inner space of peace and trust that God is holding us fast and will never let us go.
ALL SHALL BE WELL.





There's really something to this Franciscan way

Tim Houle, Chief Operating Officer

"I met Sister Sylvia Opatz on my first day on the job. Her friendly welcome warmed my heart. She exemplifies the Franciscan value of hospitality to everyone she meets."

One of the most frequent questions I get is "How do you like working for the sisters?" The answer is simple: It's not really working; I get to work with the sisters. I think I'm the lucky one. My name is Tim Houle, the new chief operating officer for the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls. I am the first lay person to serve in this capacity—a reflection of the need for more lay people to help lead the sisters' ministries into the future.

This is a demographic change facing religious communities across the world where fewer people choose religious vocations. Some could see that as an ending that would not include the sisters themselves. They are not planning for who will shut out the lights; they are planning for how to spread the Light even after they are no longer physically here.

The relationships these sisters have made span across this community of Little Falls, spread far and wide through central Minnesota, spill over into present-day Wisconsin and California and Mexico. Franciscan Associates hail from Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua and many U.S. places. To put it in simple terms: when they left the convent to go wherever they were going, they brought love; when they returned to the convent, they brought back even more love. To know them is to love them.

For the sisters, they surrender their will in favor of God's will and a new way of sharing their faith, of extending Franciscan values, of caring for the poor and caring for and with Mother Earth. They trust God will provide the people and the resources necessary to do this work just as they have been trusting God since 1891. They see themselves and all of us as the hands and feet of God carrying out God's will among God's people.

So, when people ask me what it's like working for the sisters, all I can tell you is that I've never worked for such an energetic and accomplished group of women in my life. I've never experienced such a gracious welcome, such ongoing kindness and appreciation. I've never experienced such a strong desire to help them accomplish some of what these amazing women see as the next thing needing to be done.

That is why I am calling our future planning work The Joyful Journey. All of us here—sisters, staff, associates, volunteers, friends—feel like we get the pleasure of serving others for, as Saint Francis taught us, it is in giving that we receive. They gave love and got so much more in return. There really is something to this Franciscan way.

Your donation supports Sister Carmen's work
with Faithful Fools Street Ministry.

Hello, Frank. Good night, Frank. See you later, Frank.

Sister Carmen Barsody

Saint Francis of Assisi (or “Frank,” as we warm-heartedly call him) is no stranger to Faithful Fools in San Francisco. Carved wooden images of him with birds on his shoulder, or one with a begging bowl in his hand are present in the Fools’ Court where Faithful Fools have lived for nearly 25 years. A colorful, framed image of Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio, recently gifted to us by the Franciscan Federation, hangs on a wall in our library. And now on an outside door is a newly painted mural . . . a colorful court jester ascending the stairs with words from the *Peace Prayer* printed on a ribbon moving with the fool who seeks to make them relevant.

Along with Francis’s fame of being a holy peacemaker, stories are told of him being a free spirit who ran through the fields singing as he rubbed two sticks together for a violin, or one of him taming a ferocious wolf that was terrorizing the townspeople of Gubbio, or the one where

he embraced a leper that had been exiled to the outskirts of the city, marking a transformational moment in Francis’s life. In our eagerness to sanctify Francis we run the risk of simplifying him, of stripping him of his own humanity, the very thing he counted on to find right relationship with himself, his God and warring ways all around him.

Being a peacemaker is no simple task for any human being, no matter how saintly they may be. I can imagine the wrenching frustration and at times exhausting perseverance required of Francis in facilitating conversations between bishops and mayors, townspeople and ferocious “wolves,” or merchants and beggars, and even between his own Brothers and family members. I have no doubt there were days he would have preferred to run carelessly through fields of grass, hearing sweet music in his mind as he rubbed two sticks together joyfully conversing with birds.

But nope, that most often wasn’t the case. His simple desire to imitate Jesus and adhere to a Gospel-centered life kept him immersed in the fullness of his humanity and the humanity of all those around him. To facilitate just and peaceful outcomes among people and institutions required him to work from a premise that every being had worth, and not just worth, but incredible worth!

“We acknowledge **each** human’s incredible worth,” as we say in our Faithful Fools’ mission statement, may sound like a saintly task in this world where we too easily dehumanize saints and sinners alike, but, frankly, it is the mandate to which we aspire as Faithful Fools. Our inspiration and daily guide is Francis, whose words are forever a call to action . . . “As they announce peace with their lips, let them be careful to have it even more within their own hearts.” Thanks, Frank!

To learn more about Faithful Fools Street Ministry visit www.faithfulfools.org.



Sisters Carmen and Ade Kroll with artist Robert Chambers at the entrance of the Fools’ Court in San Francisco’s Tenderloin District

Dear friends,

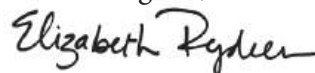
Notice the names on the following pages—hundreds of names of people who know, love and support the Franciscan Sisters and what they do. Really, it's quite staggering. Every gift is received with gratitude, every person acknowledged with prayers. The sisters give thanks to God for your generosity and for making their Franciscan way of life possible.

There are many facets to the Franciscan community—sisters and associates of course, family, friends, volunteers, ministry partners—and the employees who work for and with the sisters. Each year, the Values Committee sponsors an award to be given to a lay employee who lives out the Franciscan values: Respect, Open Communication, Hospitality, and Compassion.

I was so pleased when Maureen Gertken—one of our Franciscan Associates, received the 2024 St. Francis Award at the Employee Recognition Dinner last month. Maureen, who works in Archives, remarked, “Over the years, I have come to know and love the sisters. They welcomed me into their home and

accepted me. I am grateful to be surrounded by women that care and support their staff. I have always been a fan of history, so working with the history, the sacrifices, the selflessness of this amazing community of women has been so rewarding.” I couldn't agree more, Maureen!

Peace and all good,



Elizabeth Rydeen

Director of Community Relations



“I am honored and humbled to receive the St. Francis Award. It is a joy to work here, and I am overwhelmed to be considered worthy of such an award. Thank you.”

2024

ANNUAL REPORT

This issue of *Our Journey* recognizes individuals, businesses and organizations that have made cash, planned and in-kind gifts and donations to the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, during the calendar year, January 1 – December 31, 2024.

Every effort has been made to recognize donors according to their wishes, including those who wish to remain anonymous. If names have been listed incorrectly, omitted or appear against the donor's wishes, we apologize and encourage you to bring the matter to our attention so that the error can be corrected. Contact Elizabeth Rydeen 320-632-0624 or erydeen@fslf.org. Thank you for generously supporting the mission and ministries of the Franciscan Sisters.

THANK YOU

We extend our sincere thanks to our many donors who wish to remain anonymous.

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Learnings & surprises

Char Berns, Donor Relations



Sister Cordy, my friend, mentor and a tough act to follow.

“What have I learned?”

“What has surprised me?”

Eight months ago, I joined the Community Relations Department, succeeding Sister Cordy Korkowski. She is loved by many, and believe me a tough act to follow. What I have learned is to be myself. I am not a sister, and my writing and computer skills are a bit rusty. I view these obstacles not as difficulties but inconveniences. In times of doubt, my faith grows. I realize that I have my own God-given gifts and talents to offer—and have been given an amazing opportunity with an amazing organization. I’ve learned to


keep an open mind and stay awake to all the possibilities that are out there. I’ve learned that if you feel afraid, take the challenge and “DO IT AFRAID.”

What has surprised me is how much I enjoy being back at work after being retired for 20 years! I enjoy working with my much younger co-workers who, by the way, are all amazing and show me grace and kindness every day.

What does not surprise me, however, is the generosity of our faithful

donors. It’s my privilege to get to know you and your history and relationship with the sisters. Donors, volunteers, friends, family . . . we are blessed to have you on this journey with us. Thank you for your generous support of the Franciscan Sisters!

In closing, as we prepare our hearts for the upcoming Lenten season, you too may consider taking a few moments of reflection on these two questions: “What have I learned?” and “What has surprised me?”
God’s Peace, my friends.

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Karen, left, with volunteers Kate Miller and Patty Hammerbeck at the Employee Recognition Dinner

Welcome, Karen Wussow!

Volunteers play an important role in the Franciscan community—helping with campus events, working at the blood drive and assisting the sisters with various activities. Karen Wussow, from Little Falls, is the new volunteer and activities coordinator. She said, “I’m so happy to be working for the Franciscan Sisters. It’s great to meet new people, and everyone has been so kind and welcoming!” If you’re interested in volunteering for the Franciscan Sisters, contact Karen at 320-632-0691 or kwussow@fslf.org.

A ministry of God's people for God's people

Elizabeth Rydeen

When Sister Shirley Mueller entered the Franciscan community in 1962, the sisters would offer food for “brothers of the road” and invite the men to eat at a corner table at the convent’s freight entrance. “One day, on my way to Hurrle Hall, I met a brother and it was just like meeting Jesus,” she remembers. “My face got all flushed as I went out the door. I was excited when I told the sisters about my experience.” When Tim Houle heard Sister Shirley’s story, he could tell she missed ministry with the people. He connected her with the Morrison County Food Shelf and arranged transportation for her to volunteer on Tuesday mornings.

“My vision is blurred because of macular degeneration but I can sit near the door and welcome clients in . . . at least I get to greet them and pray for

them as they enter the building. Jesus continues to meet me in those who come and in all the gracious helpers who fill boxes with food according to the sizes of the families. God is so good, and I give praise for the abundance provided to over 400 needy people who come monthly to the Food Shelf,” Sister Shirley said.

In the early 1980s, the United States was in a recession and families were struggling to put food on the table. With the help of local churches, Sisters Julian Dirkes and Kathleen Kelly were instrumental in organizing the beginnings of a food pantry, first distributing food from Mary Hall, then the basement of Hurrle Hall. In 1983 the program became the Morrison County Food Shelf. By 1986, Morrison County had food distribution sites in Pierz and Motley as well. In 2004, a new Food Shelf was built on the west side of Little Falls on land donated by Bethel Lutheran Church. For over 40 years, the Morrison County Food Shelf has responded to people in need with generous support from local communities. In 2024 the Food Shelf served 12,132 individuals and distributed 325,876 pounds of food.



Sister Kathleen Kelly in 1985 when the Food Shelf was housed in Hurrle Hall on the campus of the Franciscan Sisters.

Sister Shirley (left) welcomes clients to the Food Shelf on Tuesday mornings. Sister Bernice Rieland currently serves on the Food Shelf’s board of directors. “As board members we do our best to serve the community of Little Falls and beyond by providing food to families in need,” she said. If you or someone you know is interested in joining the wonderful volunteers at the Food Shelf a few hours a week, please call the Food Shelf: 320-632-8304. It’s a great place to serve!



Your donation supports the sisters' outreach efforts in the Little Falls community and beyond.



**Your donation supports music and the arts in Little Falls
and surrounding rural areas.**

St. Francis ukulele program builds community

Melissa Von Itter, St. Francis Music Center

The ukulele program at St. Francis Music Center began in 2019 with a grant from Vitality Arts that provided training and funding for working with seniors. The grant secured the means to begin the 55+ ukulele program, an important demographic in our area. Today, the program consists of three instructional classes geared to the various stages in the learning journey. Kevin Stueven leads the program with enthusiasm and passion.

As the students' proficiency improved, a ukulele orchestra was started, bringing the number of string orchestras to five. This new group is inspiring because of their love of music and the friendships within the orchestra that make it an exceptional ensemble. The performances of the St. Francis Ukulele Orchestra are not limited to events on

St. Francis campus. The group is known for taking their show on the road and spreading the joy of performing in the community. They have performed in nursing homes and assisted living facilities in Little Falls, Pierz and Royalton, as well as the Little Falls library. You may have heard them at the Soup Supper in February.

All levels of ukulele players meet Thursday afternoons. For more information, call St. Francis Music Center: 320-632-0637. The ukulele program and other Music Center activities are made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

Pictured above: The Ukulele Orchestra is a fun ensemble that loves performing! Standing: Kevin Stueven (instructor), Charlotte Kastanek, Julie Poser, Louise Welle, Linda Andersen, Mary Anne Backowski, Sue Wasland; seated: Leora Wilkes, Dee Shaffer, Laurie Valesano, Colleen LeBlanc; not pictured: Julie May, Sandy Katzenmeyer, Dixie Beierman.

St. Francis Spring Orchestra Concert
Friday, May 2 • 7 p.m. Sacred Heart Chapel

St. Francis Spring Chorale Concert
Sunday, May 4 • 2 p.m. Sacred Heart Chapel

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Your donation makes a college education possible for young women from very poor, rural areas of Mexico possible.

Grateful for the opportunity

Sister Isabel Berrones

Casa María, located in the city of Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico, is a ministry that accompanies young women from rural areas in their efforts for higher education. The project began in the fall semester of 2022. To date, 11 students have benefited. Currently, there are five students enrolled at the local university and living at Casa María.

They are all excellent students, working toward degrees in human resources, industrial engineering, business administration, biotechnology and dentistry. They are happy with the progress of their studies, encouraged and eager to reach their goals. For them,



Students Devany, Alondra, Rosario, Victoria and Melisa live in community with Sister Isabel at Casa María. They are grateful for the project and thank the people who make it possible for them to study and receive support and accompaniment.

Casa María is a safe and pleasant place that provides the right space and environment to focus on their studies.

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

Franciscan ministries serve four generations

Julie Haldenwanger

Betty Brezinka has known about the Franciscan Sisters all her life, but didn't know about St. Francis Health & Wellness. At 87 years old, Betty stays actively involved in her fitness. She was a member of Curves in Little Falls, but when it closed, she discovered Health & Wellness through family members and became a member. She attends Silver Sneakers twice a week and has joined a group that gathers for chair yoga. She also uses other workout equipment to help maintain her strength and balance. Betty says that it is good to get out, exercise, and meet new people.

Betty's daughter, Peggy Frieler, was familiar with the Franciscan Sisters and all they offer because her husband, Neil, was employed as a groundskeeper and her daughter, Amanda Lampert, works in the Community Relations Department. The two gave great reviews about the facility, and when Peggy lost her job at Curves, she landed a position at Health & Wellness last summer. She initially worked at the front desk, but was asked if she would like to become an instructor and teach classes. She thought she would and pursued her certification to become a Silver Sneakers instructor and began teaching that class. She then got certified as an instructor for Aqua



Your donation helps sustain outreach ministries like St. Francis Health and Wellness and St. Francis Music Center.



Amanda's role with the sisters is to promote all the Franciscan ministries. It's natural that she and her family would participate in programs offered by Health and Wellness and St. Francis Music Center.

Sculpt and started teaching that as well. She enjoys being an instructor and her classes are well attended; many people love her as a teacher.

Amanda Lampert is Peggy's daughter, and she uses the facility after work and takes the Complete Fitness class. She says it is a fantastic class and really enjoys it.

The youngest member of the family is Amanda's daughter, five-year-old Eleanor. She takes dance classes at St. Francis Music Center and has taken swim lessons at Health and Wellness. More swimming lessons may be in her future this summer!

These women feel St. Francis Health & Wellness is a hidden gem that has so much to offer—exercise machines, pool, hot tub, gym, steam room, racquetball court and, of course, the classes. They encourage their friends and family to check it out whenever they can.

Betty visits Health & Wellness regularly, sometimes five days a week. Her favorite activity is Silver Sneakers, a class geared toward seniors taught by her daughter Peggy. "Everyone loves Peggy's class and her friendly, bubbly personality," Betty said with a smile.

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Your financial gifts support the Associate Relationship, extending the Franciscan values and way of life out into the world.

How cold is a Minnesota winter?

Associates Verónica Rivadeneira from Ecuador and Camillo Barrera from Colombia experienced their first taste of a true Minnesota winter when they visited the States in February for a short, intense time of work. They continue to build relationships with the extended FSLF community in attentive listening, reflection, and planning with other ministries with whom they work closely.

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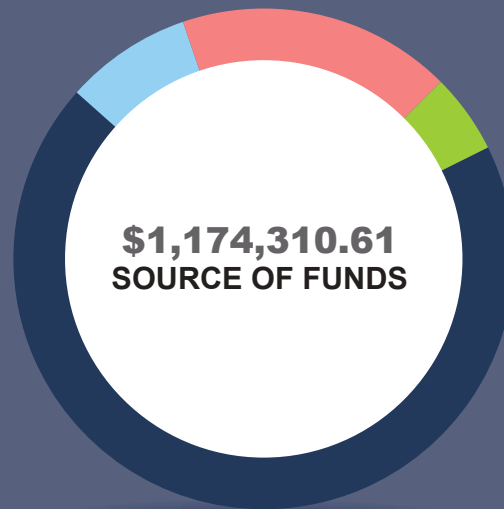


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- 2024 -

FINANCIAL REPORT

Fiscal Year: Oct. 1, 2023 – Sept. 30 2024



- \$795,408.80**
Donations/Grants
67.73%
- \$59,603.00**
Memorials
5.08%
- \$231,521.95**
Gift Planning
19.72%
- \$87,776.86**
Sales/Special Events
7.47%



- \$826,262.65**
Franciscan Ministries
70.36%
- \$21,143.07**
Franciscan Missions
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The “other” as kin: reflecting on Integral Ecology

Mike Schut, *Integral Ecology Director*

Integral Ecology: it doesn't quite roll off the tongue. When I share my job title, most people cock their head and look at me a bit quizzically. I suppose we could blame Pope Francis, though I would argue that we rather owe him our thanks for popularizing the term in his 2015 environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. And rather than describe the term theologically or argue about its meaning, I would like to instead briefly share three stories that I think point us toward integral ecology's essence.

Spring Lake Ranch About a mile up a gravel road whose every contour I still remember lies Spring Lake Ranch, a community committed to walking alongside those with significant mental health challenges.

The ranch is nestled in the green mountains of Vermont, 11 miles south of Rutland where I was born. My dad worked there. He led work crews: gardening, maple sugaring, animal husbandry, wood chopping—turns out that working outside together helps people heal.

My family and I lived at the ranch—meaning some neighbors were suffering with significant mental illnesses and others were my dad's colleagues. But I don't remember distinguishing between the two. Perhaps I would have had I lived there beyond my first eight years, but the ranch treated everyone with respect and compassion and did not “other” those with mental health challenges.

Samaritan Inns After graduating from college with a BS in biology I moved to Washington, DC, to serve as a resident manager of a home for 10 formerly unhoused men. I lived and built community with those men, most of whom were at least twice my age, of another race, from the city, and had been homeless; many struggled with substance use disorders. Being an authority figure there was foolhardy, I suppose.



But Samaritan Inns had been started by Church of the Savior, an alternative model of what church is all about. And I wanted to experience a church like that—it seemed like the kind of community where Jesus would hang out, in part because he moved toward those his culture deemed “other” or unacceptable.

Wolves I moved west after my time in DC, to the University of Oregon to study for an MS in environmental studies. One afternoon my roommate walked into our living room to tell me that the governor of Alaska had signed an order allowing hunters to round up wolves with helicopters—to kill them more efficiently. All to attract more deer and elk hunters. All to attract more money. I first felt disbelief, then waves of anger, and then deep sorrow as I walked outside, sat on the deck, and watched my tears fall on the summer grass.

Integral Ecology I started working with the Franciscan Sisters in October 2024 as director of Integral Ecology. I am not always sure myself how to describe what the job entails. But these three stories provide a glimpse into the heart of integral ecology: to see that we are more connected than separate. That though society might deem as “other”—whether the unhoused or a pack of wolves or those with mental

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Your donation supports Integral Ecology and care of all creation.

health challenges—are not in reality “other,” but kin. That experiences of kinship reveal something deeply true about the nature of reality.

When kinship is felt, when the reality of being in relationship with the “other” is the ground on which we stand, then working toward a society where no one and nothing in creation is othered flows from our being. Indeed, in each of the three stories, the recognition of kinship led to action: whether joining a letter-writing campaign to the governor of Alaska or helping to create a home for the unhoused.

Said another way, one of the tasks of integral ecology is to embody kinship through acts of compassion—housing the unhoused, for example—as well as acts of justice—such as lobbying for policies to increase affordable housing.

In my first few months here, we have provided opportunities for sisters and associates to advocate for clean water, to weigh in on policies to support the unhoused in St. Cloud, and to vote for the continuation of Minnesota state lottery funding to improve parks and protect wildlife habitat.

In an integrated world, all these actions belong, cohere, and make sense—because, as Pope Francis wrote in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, “The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are the same cry. Everything is interconnected.”

Editor’s note: Integral Ecology, which used to be called “Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation” was renamed following the release of *Laudato Si'*.



An inspiration to all . . .

About once a week, you can find Associate Garry Dahl reading to Sister Mary Zirbes in the “link” which leads to the back of the chapel. Together they are reading Pope Francis’s new encyclical letter: *Dilexit Nos: On the Human Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ*. Garry said, “Sister Mary is a wise woman of God who is tenacious in her desire for justice, peace, compassion and connection to others. Her faith and love are an inspiration to all.”

Garry and his wife, JoAnn, check all the boxes: Franciscan Associate, volunteer, donor. Thank you, Garry and JoAnn, for your commitment to the Franciscan community!

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A different kind of donor

Robyn Gray, St. Francis Music Center

Every 4-6 months, weather depending, all of the 15 or so pianos in St. Francis Music Center need tuning to keep the teachers and students happy. A quick call to Steve Krueger and soon we hear the ping-ping-ping all day long of the pianos being tuned.

I first met Steve well over 30 years ago when I started as director of the Music Center. Ever since then, Steve has taken care of all our pianos—and the piano in Sacred Heart Chapel as well—with tender, loving care. He not only tunes but fixes all the little things that need to be repaired on each piano—and comes quickly if we have a piano emergency!

Steve learned the basics of tuning from his brother, who learned from their uncle, who learned from his uncle. Soon he gave up his house painting and carpentry work to tune pianos full time. It helped that his wife worked full time with benefits so Steve was able to have the freedom to work around his customers' needs. He never stopped learning about piano technology, which has made him a “tuner in high demand!”

Steve is a great storyteller; he talks about his travels, hunting with his springer spaniels and stories around the campfire. I always look forward to visiting with him. Every time Steve comes to the Music Center, he spends the entire day. And the bill? About half of what any other tuner would charge. Steve's donation to the Music Center is significant when you consider the number of pianos we have, that he comes at least three times a year and makes an extra trip before our Christmas and spring concerts. Steve is a special guy, a kind soul and a different kind of donor!



Steve: “I like my job. Every day is different. I meet new people, their kids and pets. It is a low stress, fun job.”

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St. Francis Hospital in Breckenridge observes 125 years

Sister Elise Saggau

The year 2024 marked the 125th anniversary of St. Francis Hospital in Breckenridge. While the Franciscan Sisters no longer serve there, they were instrumental in founding this facility and administering it for many years. Today, Franciscan Sister Doretta Meier serves on its governing board.

In 1899, some of the city's visionary leaders invited the Franciscan Sisters to consider establishing a hospital in Breckenridge. Accordingly, Sisters Mary Francis Beauchamp and Mary Joseph White traveled to Breckenridge to assess possibilities. After receiving assurance that the city would back the project, the sisters agreed to undertake it.

Work began immediately, and the first patient was admitted November 10, 1899. Bishop James Trobec of St. Cloud dedicated the hospital November 21, 1899. By 1904, however, Breckenridge had outgrown this building. Plans immediately began to build a new one, which was dedicated May 3, 1905. The very next year, a typhoid epidemic struck the area, and the hospital treated 128 patients. Remarkably, only two died, much to the credit of the dedicated staff.

The challenges of the epidemic demonstrated the need for a larger nursing staff. In September 1908, the sisters opened a two-year program called St. Francis School of Nursing. In May 1910, seven sisters and five lay women graduated. By 1917, when the school was accredited by the Minnesota Board of Nursing, it had developed into a three-year program. Sadly, in 1964 St. Francis School of Nursing shut its doors. Three-year programs were going out of fashion.



Sisters Karlina Weyandt, Mario (Ardis) Cloutier, Caroline Torborg, and Loretta Schneider in front of St. Francis Hospital, Breckenridge (1958)

By the 1940s, the hospital had again outgrown its space. Another successful fundraiser made it possible to begin work on a new facility, which was dedicated in 1952. Soon after that, the former hospital building became St. Francis Nursing Home.

The hospital and home thrived under the management of the Franciscan Sisters until the early 1990s. By that time, the complexity and expense of owning and operating healthcare institutions was outpacing the sisters' resources. In August 1993, the sisters transferred their healthcare system, including St. Francis Hospital and Nursing Home, to Catholic Health Corporation (CHC), headquartered in Omaha, Neb. CHC was later absorbed

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into a larger national entity called Catholic Health Initiatives (CHI).

In 2005, under the auspices of CHI, Breckenridge built a new campus, offering state-of-the-art medical care for Breckenridge and the surrounding area and carrying on the original spirit of the institution.

In 2021, CommonSpirit Health replaced CHI and took over management of the St. Francis Healthcare campus. This arrangement continues to guarantee the quality and value-based care that Breckenridge and its neighbors have learned to expect.

In addition to direct healthcare services, St. Francis Healthcare recently undertook a community gardens project on its campus to address local food insecurity. The “Farm at St. Francis” aims at strengthening food security, increasing food access, and advancing food equity in the region. Awarded a grant of \$433,000 from CommonSpirit, the project constructed a commercial greenhouse. The field includes space for an orchard and community garden plots. In 2024, the Farm donated 3,627 pounds of fresh produce to the local food pantry



Records show that from 1899-1993 over 220 sisters ministered in Breckenridge. This group of sisters served in the 1960s: (seated) Sisters Donna Zetah, Mary Margaret Fruth, Ardis Cloutier; (standing) Sisters Julien Dirkes, Vianney Weier and a former sister.



In 2003, the sisters were invited back for the groundbreaking ceremony for a new St. Francis Medical Center. Pictured: Sisters Bernarda Sanoski, Carolita Mauer, Marcella Schuller, Patrice Kiefer, Charlene Grossman

Sister Charlene received her nurses training from North Dakota State College of Science in 1971. “After graduation I left for a year to work at the nursing home and hospital in Onamia. I returned to Breckenridge in 1972 and worked as a licensed practical nurse and in pastoral care until 1986. These were wonderful years for me. At one time there were nine of us sisters living together. That made for many good memories and today some of us remain very close. I have always said my time in Breckenridge at St. Francis Hospital were the best years of my ministry. We made sure the Carmelite Sisters at the monastery in Wahpeton, N. Dak., were well taken care of. It was fun being in Breckenridge. I made many good friends and stay in touch with some of them today. Health care in Breckenridge has always been important to the community. The people in the area appreciate what the sisters started in 1899. I served twice on the St. Francis Hospital board,” Sister Char said.

and to other community partners that serve people experiencing food insecurity. In addition, 317 pounds of produce were used in the kitchen at St. Francis Hospital. The farm has also partnered with the West Central Minnesota Food Council to develop a regional food plan. After 125 years, St. Francis Healthcare is still a vital resource and promises to be so into the foreseeable future.

*Sources for this article are from St. Francis Hospital website; Sr. Assumpta Ahles, OSF, *In the Shadow of His Wings, A History of the Franciscan Sisters*; and Sr. Doretta Meier, OSF, “Farm at St. Francis Hospital, Breckenridge,” *FSLF Community News*, Nov. 13, 2024.

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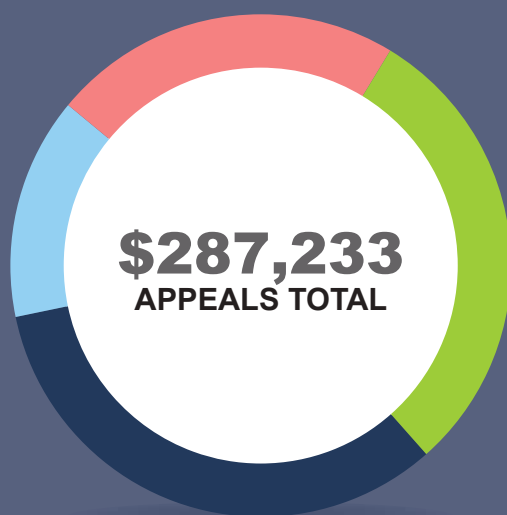
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THANK YOU!



Special Appeals!

\$98,466
August Appeal
34.3%

\$61,504
Christmas Appeal
21.4%

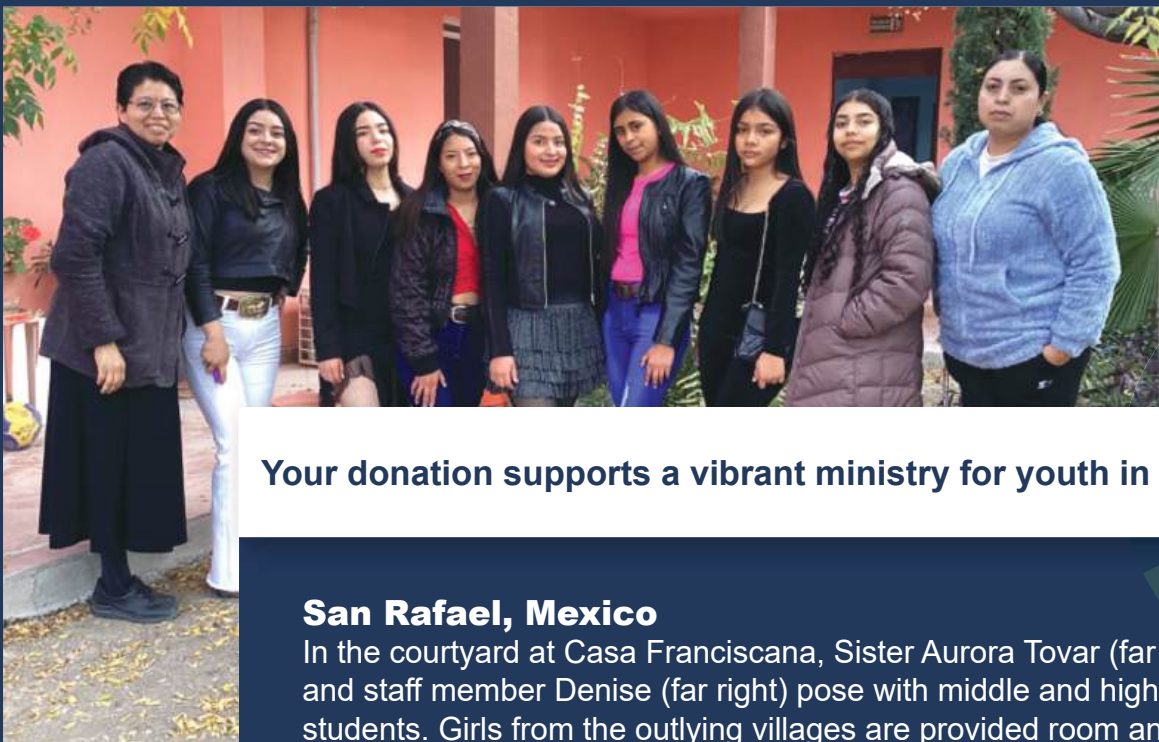
\$88,980
GTTM
31%

\$38,283
Memorial Appeal
13.3%



In addition to three yearly issues of *Our Journey*, the Franciscan Sisters typically create three intentional appeals when we seek support directly from our donors. The May Memorial Appeal provides an opportunity for donors to remember their loved ones; August Appeal seeks funding for special projects on the Little Falls campus, e.g., roof repair, technology upgrades or, in 2024, kitchen equipment and sound abatement; Give to the Max online campaign supports Franciscan ministries; and, at the end of the year, the Christmas Appeal funds the health care needs of our retired sisters.

With each special appeal, we are overwhelmed with the generosity of our donors. When we ask, you respond with love, kindness and open hearts. Thank you for supporting the mission and ministries of the Franciscan Sisters!



Your donation supports a vibrant ministry for youth in San Rafael.

San Rafael, Mexico

In the courtyard at Casa Franciscana, Sister Aurora Tovar (far left) and staff member Denise (far right) pose with middle and high school students. Girls from the outlying villages are provided room and board and other support enabling them to reach their education goals.



Green Fair Folk Festival

August 6, 2025
4-8p.m.



FRANCISCAN GIFT SHOP

Monday—Friday, 8AM-4:30PM

Saturday, 8AM-4PM

Sunday, 9AM-3:30PM

We welcome visitors to appreciate, and take with them, the beauty and art found in the Franciscan Gift Shop. Many items are created by our sisters. Commercial items are chosen for their expression of Franciscan values. Proceeds benefit the mission and ministries of the Franciscan community.



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SISTERS
OF LITTLE FALLS
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Located in the St. Francis Convent west entrance.
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Good Friday

Silent Walk for Peace

April 18, 2025 - 9:30 a.m.

*If the event cannot take place outdoors due to inclement weather,
a prayer service will be offered in Sacred Heart Chapel.*

In loving memory...



Sister Anita Jennissen, 91, died October 6, 2024, at St. Francis Convent, Little Falls.

Sister Anita was born February 3, 1933, the fourth of 14 children of the late Math and Margaret (Forster) Jennissen. 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.

Anita grew up on the family dairy farm in a rural area near Padua, with the address of Sauk Centre. Anita attended a one-room school where, after seven years, she passed the state exams to go on for high school. She attended St. Francis High School in Little Falls as a boarder while discerning a call to be a missionary and a nurse. She began nursing school and the following year (1952) entered the congregation of the Franciscan Sisters. She learned to know and love the sisters and spirit of Saint Francis while studying in their schools.

Sister Anita earned a registered nurse diploma at St. Gabriel's School of Nursing, Little Falls. She did further study at the College of St. Catherine, St. Paul; Divine Word Center, London, Ontario, Canada; Center of Inter-Cultural Formation, Cuernavaca, Mexico; Cardinal Stritch College, Milwaukee, Wis. She was also a trained pastoral minister and spiritual director.

Sister Anita had a deep, vibrant love for her family and people of all ages, nationalities and cultures. She served the poor, sick and dying in South America, Africa and the United States with respect and reverence. She said, "Some of the loudest sermons I've ever heard come from the poor."

Sister Anita retired to the Motherhouse in 2018 and decided to write her life story. During Covid she spent many hours working on the book and gave it the title, *The World is My Cloister*. She was thrilled to have it published in 2022.



Thank you for supporting Give to the Max!

Sisters Janice Wiechman and Maurita Bernet say thank you for supporting Give to the Max Day 2024! The statewide giving campaign raised over \$88,000 to support our Franciscan Ministries—the Mexico Mission, St. Francis Music Center and St. Francis Health & Wellness. The ministries are thriving, thanks to your generous gifts.

November 20, 2025
Save the date for Give to the Max!

In loving memory...



Sister Mary Joan Gerads, 93, died January 25, 2025, at St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, Minn.

Genevieve, or Jenny, as she was called, was born December 17, 1931, in St. Francis, Minn. (Stearns County), the sixth of nine children of Martin and Mary (Roettger) Gerads. She was accepted as a Franciscan Sister of Little Falls, Minnesota, on August 12, 1949, and given the name Sister Mary Joan. She made her first profession of vows on August 12, 1951, and final vows on August 12, 1954.

She became a registered nurse at St. Gabriel's School of Nursing, Little Falls; earned a bachelor's degree in nursing, a master's degree in nursing education, and a PhD in sociology.

Sister Joan ministered as staff nurse, supervisor and instructor; coordinated the first home care program at St. Gabriel's Hospital, Little Falls; was assistant director of St. Gabriel's School of Nursing; and director of health and social services in Maracay, Venezuela. During her 35 years as a missionary in South America, she helped found four schools for leadership training. In 1975, she and Maryknoll Father Tom Maney founded Parish Neighborhood Renewal Ministry, a program that trains missionaries to form Base Church Communities. She also offered the program in the Diocese of Duluth, which extended to other U.S. dioceses.

Sister Joan had a keen, penetrating intelligence that helped her accomplish many things in her varied ministries. She was gentle yet determined with a great love for the poor. She believed that no matter how poor or uneducated, each person has an inherent gift to give and a unique knowledge or experience to teach. She had a spirit of adventure with a lively faith and unquenchable love to work with people, many of whom had lost all hope for a better life.

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Welcome, pilgrims!

Pope Francis has proclaimed 2025 a Holy Year of Hope. The practice of pilgrimage holds a special place in the holy year because it represents the journey each person makes in this life. As Sister Bea Eichten said, "Our world needs the message of hope, that beyond the struggles of our lives and in our world, goodness and love and peace are possible. You and I are pilgrims of hope as we relate to another with kindness, as we do a small service for a neighbor or greet a stranger, and when we avoid cynicism and harsh judgment."

Our Sacred Heart Chapel in Little Falls has been designated a sacred site during this Jubilee Year. We welcome pilgrims on their spiritual journey to stop in our chapel for quiet reflection and prayer.

In the December issue of *The Central Minnesota Catholic*, Bishop Patrick Neary writes, "The logo for the 2025 Jubilee features four figures embracing each other to symbolize solidarity and our oneness as brothers and sisters in the Lord. The figure at the front holds on to a cross, which is a sign of faith and hope. The cross bends down toward humanity to offer certainty and hope."

