

# Our Journey

Summer 2024 • Vol. 43 No. 2



630



FRANCISCAN SISTERS  
OF LITTLE FALLS, MINNESOTA



# Our Journey

SUMMER 2024 • VOL. 43 NO. 2

*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:** Harry and Mary Fleegel  
standing in front of the Lincoln  
Center, St. Cloud

Photo by Amanda Lampert

**Our Mission:**

We, Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, are a community of women religious whose members are called to live the Gospel joyfully and to reverence the earth and all of God's creation. In the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare, we embody a life of prayer, simple living and service to those in need.

We are committed to nonviolence as we recognize the need for healing in ourselves and in our world. We seek to build communities of peace and justice wherever we are called to serve.

© June 2024  
Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls,  
Minnesota



## Oh, what a night!

Elizabeth Rydeen

The Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, was named 2023 Large Business of the Year by Little Falls Chamber and Tourism! The award was presented May 2 at the Chamber's annual dinner held at the Falls Ballroom. In her remarks, Sister Mary Pat Burger said:

*... The Franciscan Sisters are humbled to receive this recognition as Large Business of the Year. Throughout our history we have partnered with the community to do our part in providing services to the people of Little Falls and beyond. In the very beginning, it was a family from this community—the LaChance family—who offered us shelter after we were burned out of Belle Prairie. From there we built an orphanage, hospital, high school and nursing home. We started Home Health in the 1960s and the Food Shelf, the Music Center and Health and Wellness—all these things and more in partnership with the people of Little Falls. In the early days, we sent sisters to Chicago, Ohio, New York and places in between to get funds for these endeavors. Today, generous support from the community allows our outreach efforts and our ministries to thrive.*

*Again, we say thank you and are looking forward to continuing our partnerships with you, the community of Little Falls!*

The Franciscan Sisters are humbled to receive this award and offer special thanks to all the employees, past and present, who work side by side with the sisters to accomplish the mission and extend the Franciscan values out into the world.



Sisters Mary Pat Burger, Gert Brixius and Janice Wiechman accepted the award. Pictured: Purva Watten, Chamber president/CEO, Sisters Gert, Janice, Mary Pat, and Jim Bridges of Sea View Farm, the 2022 Large Business of the Year.

# Dear Friends,

Around the world, people celebrated the Easter mystery and promise of Jesus' resurrection from death into new life. We celebrate Easter during the early days of spring in Minnesota where nature speaks to and for us. The emergence of robins, flowers, new leaves always bring a surge of energy and hope. Franciscan Father Richard Rohr writes that "Jesus' resurrection is a potent, focused, and compelling statement about what God is still and forever doing with the universe and with humanity."<sup>1</sup> He points out that resurrection is an ongoing reality in nature as evidenced by "metamorphosis, condensation, evaporation, seasonal changes, and the life cycles of everything from butterflies to stars. The natural world is constantly dying and being reborn in different forms."<sup>1</sup> What a remarkable awareness!

You and I experience resurrection—new life—every time we move from judgment to understanding, from gossip to listening, from destroying to protecting our environment, from isolation to engaging with others with kindness and care and forgiveness.

Resurrection happens all the time. We have daily opportunities for life and growth in expressions of love that express our faith and hope. In this issue, you'll hear from persons choosing to stretch beyond their comfort zone to learn from encounters with the other in our Mexico mission, at the US/Mexico border and with persons experiencing homelessness. We honor Sisters Joan Gerads and Rose Mae Rausch, wonderful women who are celebrating 75 years of affirming and bringing forth new life. And we say farewell to Sister Cordy Korkowski who has been the loving, affirming presence to the many people who support our mission as Franciscan Sisters.

We are grateful for you and celebrate the gift of life that we share today and always as we journey together. Thank you! Celebrate the goodness of God in one another and in nature unfolding all around us.

Blessings,

*Sister Beatrice Eichten, OFM*

Sister Beatrice Eichten  
Community Minister

<sup>1</sup>Richard Rohr, *Daily Meditation* 4.3.24



Sisters Joan, Rose Mae (standing) and Bea all celebrate jubilees this year. Sisters Joan and Rose Mae joined the Franciscan community in 1949, and Sister Bea in 1964.



# Homeless Helping Homeless, striving to see Jesus in everyone they meet

*Sister Elise Saggau*

For the past six years, Harry and Mary (Jorgensen) Fleegel, both retired from their respective professions, have made care of the St. Cloud homeless the focus of their lives. They founded Homeless Helping Homeless which presently operates Lincoln Center, a low-barrier shelter that provides services for people in need.

As Christians, Harry and Mary are inspired by the Gospels through which, they believe, Jesus shares his intense love for them and for those they serve. “The Gospels,” Harry reflects, “exhort us to ‘pay it forward,’ and to share love with others.” As Catholics, they are inspired by Catholic social teaching to seek out others in need and to keep their eyes focused on the Lord. They strive to see Jesus in everyone they meet.

As Franciscan Associates, Harry and Mary are inspired by the values of simplicity and prayer. They believe we are surrounded by a communion of saints, some of whom have gone before us providing us with examples of how to fulfill the gospel mission. Some saints still live in our midst and encourage us on our journeys. Other members of the Franciscan community who also care for people experiencing injustice in society provide support through their care and prayer.

When Harry and Mary became aware of the extent of desperate needs in the St. Cloud area, they enlisted others to dream with them about how to extend services to more of the local people. Many of those consulted were themselves homeless. Out of these discussions arose the notion of Homeless Helping Homeless (HHH). One of the first services was those with cars ferrying people to necessary appointments. HHH began soliciting funds from local churches to help defray gas costs. A second project was locating furniture for those fortunate enough to get into apartments. Local realtors became a significant source. Apartments within the jurisdiction of these realtors were often vacated with furniture left behind. HHH moved this furniture in U-Hauls to newly assigned apartments. Again, homeless helping homeless.

By the time the Covid epidemic struck in 2020, the



Harry with Scarlett Rusch, Lincoln Center's social services navigator. She's been serving with AmeriCorp for about a year: "I wanted to do some kind of service and thought I'd be really good at it." And she is! She helps people navigate the complex world of social services and find the help they need.

organization had obtained 501(c)(3) status. It began receiving recompense from the government to house people in local motels/hotels. At one point, it was supporting 200 persons in this way.

In spite of the financial assistance, HHH was still not able to accommodate all who were homeless and who relied on donated food. To further complicate things, many restaurants that had been offering left-over food closed down. Some of the people living on the streets started eating garbage from residential refuse, and many were getting sick. The organization then began soliciting churches for donations and started distributing meals at Lake George near downtown St. Cloud.

Eventually, many people began pitching tents and camping in Heritage Park, a wooded area located behind Costco. This was not a good solution, as there were no services or sanitation available.

It became obvious to the city that something more needed to be done. Officials searched out a facility that seemed promising for the establishment of a

*-Continued, Page 5*



Clayton and Christine moved to St. Cloud from St. Paul. They've been living at Lincoln Center for about three months. HHH took them in when no other place would. They are on a waiting list for permanent housing, a referral service offered by HHH. The staff also helped Christine find a wheelchair. The couple takes pride in keeping their 7' x 10' room neat.

homeless shelter and offered it to HHH. This building was a vacated auto parts store on Lincoln Avenue in a commercial area. The landlord agreed to rent out the front part of the building to HHH but would continue to use the back part for storage. HHH agreed to try it. There were soon 30 people living in tents in the front room, which was not a sustainable solution. Eventually, fund-raising brought in enough to pay the rent, and other organizations pitched in to help with renovations. Little by little, the situation began to shape up. Heating and air-conditioning were installed. Volunteers built 23 private rooms. Showers, toilets and laundry facilities are available for both residents and others who come in off the street. The back section of the building now serves as a clothing and household goods distribution center.

The front room presently offers space for tables and chairs, TV viewing and food service. It is the daytime gathering place for both residents and those who drop in for refreshment, food, company, health services, counseling and even sleeping in chairs or under tables. Small private office spaces have been constructed in this area also. A special place in the parking lot is reserved for those who sleep in their cars at night and use the facility during the day. The center also shares services with people who are camping out near the



Mary and Harry with Tiffany, a resident who suffers from depression and is undergoing treatment for cancer. She was homeless for a period of time, bouncing around from friend to friend, until she found her way to Lincoln Center, a low-barrier shelter where people with mental health or addiction problems are not turned away. "This is a community. We love each other. We're like a dysfunctional family, but a family nonetheless," Tiffany says.

river and who come to shower, do laundry, eat and socialize. The center still needs to develop the ability to handle crisis situations, for which there is a clear need. At present, resources are lacking for such services.

The facility's location gave rise to its new name—Lincoln Center. Currently, it receives no government funding (state or federal) but enjoys a broad support system. Numerous donors and volunteers are generous with money, time and goods. Many churches, religious organizations and other organizations are also actively supportive. While neighboring businesses are not altogether happy with having the shelter in their midst and sometimes make their feelings known, neither do they cause undue trouble.

Those who serve at Lincoln Center, like Francis of Assisi, have cast their lot among the needy. Their joy in doing so gives daily witness to the Gospel: "What you do to the least of my brothers and sisters you do to me" (Matt. 25:40).



#### **Interested in supporting Homeless Helping Homeless?**

Scan the QR code or send a check to P.O. Box 475, St. Cloud, MN 56302. More information at [homelesshelpinghomeless.org](http://homelesshelpinghomeless.org).





Participants learned about the immigrant experience at the shelter La Posada Providencia. Pictured: Denise Hernandez (operations manager), Sisters Pat Forster and Mary Dumonceaux, Tom Stoy, Brigid Fitzgerald and Benjamin Duel (director).

## People hoping for a normal life

*Brigid Fitzgerald*

In 2019, I, together with seven other women including Franciscan Sisters Caroline Stoltz and Bernice Rieland, was part of a Border Encounter in the McAllen, Tex., area. We were hosted by the Franciscan Sisters who were ministering along the border: Mary Hroschikoski, Pat Forster, Gloria Haider and Shirley Mueller. After returning home, I talked about that experience so much that my husband Tom Stoy, a recently retired family practice doctor, got the itch to see this part of the Texas border. In January 2024, we journeyed south and visited some of the small cities that run along Interstate 2 just north of the Rio Grande River, including Mission, McAllen, Pfarr, Alamo and Weslaco. We were hosted by Sisters Pat Forster and Mary Dumonceaux.

To participate with the Franciscans in any form of encounter is to have a spiritual renewal experience. For Tom and me that meant quiet prayer times and sitting in the sisters' living space taking turns reciting prayers and listening to hymns. It was a good way to start our days and to wrap up our experiences at the end of the day.

We began our first day with Sunday Mass at the Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle. This Spanish language Mass was filled with families and had music performed by a mariachi band and a choir. They had been performing at this service for over 35 years. Spanish is spoken by a vast majority of the people

of the area, with English as a second language. (My 40-year-old Spanish could get me by in a crunch—if the speaker talked slowly.) The beauty of our Catholic Mass is that we can always follow along even if we are not proficient in the language being used. The Mass ended with all the children called forward to participate in a special song. The basilica has a large footprint in the diocese, providing offices, meeting rooms and outdoor Stations of the Cross.

With the Franciscans, you participate and learn. You have unique experiences that are just daily life to those of the area. The one touristy thing we did was visit La Lomita Chapel/Mission. First built in 1865 and rebuilt a number of times since, it was the base of the Catholic Oblate Missionary priests who rode up and down the Rio Grande valley ministering to the people. It is now a shrine.

We attended Mass at the Respite Center established by Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley to serve the needs of new immigrants. Here those who have applied for asylum in the United States but need assistance in any form are helped by volunteers, and Jesuit priests working in the area celebrate Mass. Those attending are from many countries. Most are families with small children.

We visited ARISE Adelante established in 1987. It serves to strengthen the Rio Grande Valley

*-Continued, Page 7*



communities and promotes the personal development and empowerment of immigrants, especially women, children and youth. Several locations serve over 1,000 families each year.

We also visited La Posada Providencia, an emergency shelter for approximately 24 individuals who are working on their next resettlement steps following approval to remain in the United States. Living a community life and sharing chores, they may stay two days or several months, depending on their circumstances.

Of course, there is the border wall—tall metal fencing, cyclone wire and patrols. Those patrolling were willing to talk with us, explaining their jobs and sharing what they feel helps them enforce the existing laws as well as what does not. They believe that drones, eyes in the sky, and electronic watch towers are more effective than the wire and metal barriers.

We walked across the bridge to Reynosa, Mexico, and visited the Casa del Migrante run by the Diocese of Matamoros. Solid buildings house men, women and children, who are provided with meals and the sacraments. Three young Jesuit priests began the mission. One of them offers a one-minute homily on the website <https://thejesuitpost.org/category/videos/one-minute-homily/>. I can only imagine how their ministry at the border enlightens these talks.

We visited the tent encampment in Reynosa. Here families await appointments with Customs and Border Patrol. In the camp, all share chores of cooking, clean

up and watching over the phone charging station. Some men of the camp stand guard at the gates to ensure that no gang members are allowed in. These gangsters will kidnap and hold hostages until money is paid over. When it was time to leave, we crammed into a minivan, along with several youths heading to Casa del Migrante to prepare for their First Communion or Confirmation. The seemingly ordinariness of life played out in this tent city.

We saw the hope of those seeking refuge, and we saw the beauty of the Rio Grande Valley. Daily we were inundated by birds in migration—NOISY! They perched by the thousands on the electrical wires! However, at the Quinta Mazatlan, which is surrounded by the World Birding Center, the atmosphere was quiet. Here we found many species of cactus, birds and even a turtle (okay, the one I saw was in bronze). Even in such a troubled area, beauty was all around us. We found it in nature and in the people hoping for an ordinary life.

One chilly morning we participated, by kerosene lantern and flashlight, in Mass at La Lomita Shrine—a gathering of peaceful people.



We drove across the border to Reynosa, Mexico, and visited the tent encampment, a mission started by Jesuit priests.



# I remember the joy of the people

Brother Steve Grieco

*Brother Steve Grieco visited San Rafael, Mexico, in April 2022 as part of a novitiate experience to witness the lived Franciscan religious life in a wider cultural context, mindful of the contributions the Franciscan Sisters continue to offer the people with whom they live and minister.*

More than two years ago, I entered a conversation that began 20 years prior, or, if broadened to our OSF (Order of St. Francis) and TOR (Third Order Regular) communities, 65 years. Through the foresight and kindness of Fathers Anthony Criscitelli and Robert D'Aversa, I was introduced to Sisters Janice Wiechman and Aurora Tovar. This conversation led, ultimately, to an opportunity to spend three weeks in San Rafael, Mexico, bookending Holy Week of 2022. Flying into Monterrey, I would meet up with Sister Janice and Abel (staff member at Casa Franciscana), who made the long drive up and back to get me through the mountains to San Rafael. I had been out of the United States only twice before. So, being both eager and anxious, I was quite glad when I received the Midwestern and Mexican welcome.

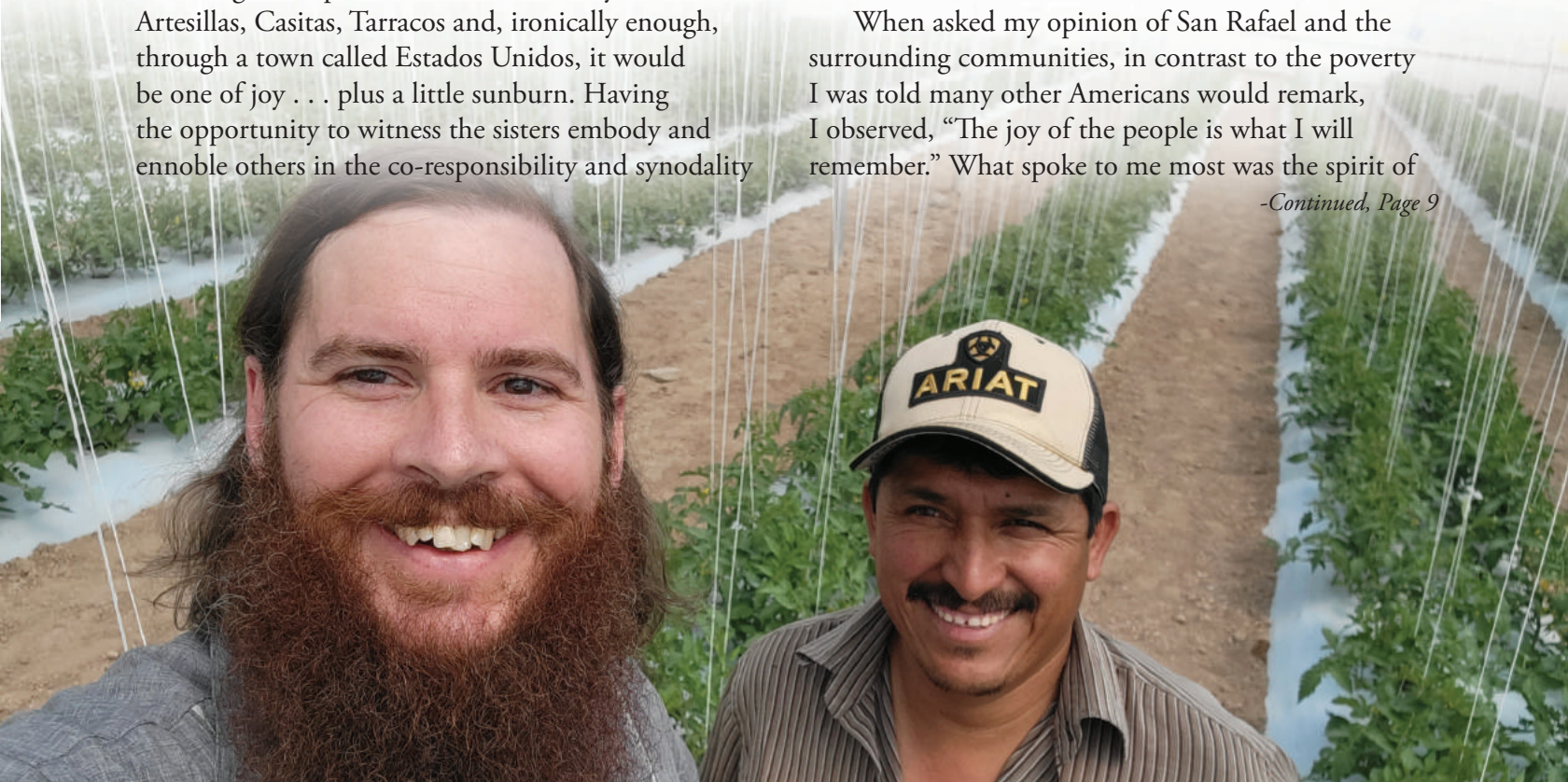
If I had to sum up my experience in San Rafael, including the trips to Galeana, Monterrey, Saltillo, Artesillas, Casitas, Tarracos and, ironically enough, through a town called Estados Unidos, it would be one of joy . . . plus a little sunburn. Having the opportunity to witness the sisters embody and ennoble others in the co-responsibility and synodality

that have come to be prescient terms today, I was not only grateful but edified to be there.

In Tarracos, Sister Janice worked with the women of the town to organize a shared leadership through the holy days. We processed to the chapel singing, with some kids and, perhaps, a dog or two in tow. Equally as memorable were the one-on-one interactions with people in various other towns who were working toward their equivalency degrees in education. Then, through Sister Aurora, I met a wonderful family that operated farmland; these folks I later saw leave to co-lead another Holy Week mission to the mountains. The staff at Casa Franciscana were more family than employees. The ebullience of everyone that came through there, either volunteer or employed, brought some of what I would come away understanding as a distinct Mexican capacity for joy that I, as an American, seemed to lack.

When asked my opinion of San Rafael and the surrounding communities, in contrast to the poverty I was told many other Americans would remark, I observed, "The joy of the people is what I will remember." What spoke to me most was the spirit of

*-Continued, Page 9*



Brother Steve and Iván in one of the greenhouses Iván owns/operates in La Paz, a village outside of San Rafael.



the Mexican people. The *acompañando*, the ability of the people to be joyful companions (*ser compañero*) of each other, struck my heart as a Northeastern raised American.

Sisters who have founded, lived and worked there, as the sisters who now live and work there, echo the gospel that lives, already, within the people of those towns and villages. Sisters Janice and Aurora lived and exemplified such care, concern and compassion for each other that I, a new religious (although not a young religious), was encouraged in my own ongoing journey. I hope one day, in the not-so-distant future, to have another opportunity to share in the joyful spirit of the people of San Rafael and its surrounding life. Until then, I remain deeply appreciative for the opportunity to witness to the life and ministries of the sisters, as I have a new awareness and shared gratitude for the relationship between our communities. The kindnesses of connection and the openness on the part of both sisters allowed me to taste a flavor of Christ's love that I, otherwise, may not have experienced—even if it may have been a bit spicy for this bland American!



We visited the family of Yoselin in Orita, a small community in an outlying area of the parish. Pictured: Denis Luna, Sister Aurora, Yoselin, Brother Steve and an unnamed little friend.

## Franciscan Federation honors Sister Carmen Barsody

Sister Michelle L'Allier

On Saturday, April 27, the Franciscan Federation sponsored an evening of storytelling and celebration at San Damiano Retreat in Danville, Calif. Sister Carmen Barsody and the Faithful Fools were honored as examples of living Franciscan values today. The evening also included stories of early lay Franciscan women by Darleen Pryds, music by Jesse Manibusan and art by Jen Norton. Present for the celebration as well were Sister Ade Kroll and Associates Katherine Giorgio and Stephanie Luna.

As she accepted the award, Sister Carmen had this to say, “Fools see the world in all its glorious absurdity and act on what

they see,” wrote Marie Dennis and Joe Nangle in their book, *Francis and the Foolishness of God*. It was this statement that inspired us in naming ourselves Faithful Fools. Our mission, our way of working, which is rooted in relationship, our commitment to building a community that works together for personal and social change, are deeply infused with the Franciscan spirit and values. It is an honor to be honored by the Franciscan Federation, and to receive the framed print by Jen Norton with the words of Saint Francis, ‘As they announce peace with their lips, let them be careful to have it even more within their own hearts.’ May it be so!”



Franciscan Federation Executive Director Sara Marks (left) presented the award: “When we began creating this evening, we thought that moving from stories of our Franciscan past to stories of Franciscans today in our world would provide us all with inspiration for our contemporary times. We thought of no better way to do so in the Bay Area than to honor the Faithful Fools! Their commitment to engaging in street retreats and welcoming so many into that experience is just one way they bring Franciscan values and commitment to their mission.”



# 75<sup>th</sup> Jubilarians

*These 11 young women entered the novitiate in 1949. What were their thoughts, their hopes, their dreams? Did they have any idea where religious life would lead them? Seventy-five years later, just two remain from the class of '49: Sisters Joan Gerads and Rose Mae Rausch. Wherever God called them to serve—Minnesota, Alabama, Mexico, Ecuador, Thailand, Venezuela—they ministered with deep love and unwavering commitment to the people in their midst. Thank you, Sisters Joan and Rose Mae.*

## An unquenchable love for the people

**Sister Joan Gerads** was born December 17, 1931. Baptized Genevieve, she grew up in a deeply Christian home on a farm in St. Francis of Assisi Parish, St. Francis, Minn. She was the sixth of nine children of Martin and Mary Gerads and enjoyed playing with her brothers and sisters. Besides the most common pastime, playing outdoors, Jenny loved to read and sew. She graduated in a class of three students from a little country school, then attended Holdingford High School for a year before transferring to St. Francis High School in Little Falls.

During her senior year, Jenny decided to become a sister and was accepted into the postulancy January 1949. Her sister, Sister

Bertha, had preceded her in joining the convent. At her entrance into the two-year novitiate she was given the name Sister Mary Joan. At the time of her first profession in 1951, she asked to study nursing and graduated in 1954 from St. Gabriel's School of Nursing in Little Falls. Except for a few intervals of further study, she worked at St. Gabriel's Hospital and School of Nursing until 1967, then began her studies at the University of Minnesota toward a master's degree in nursing education.

Just before she graduated in summer 1968, Sister Joan received her assignment to go to Venezuela to work with the St. Cloud Diocesan Mission Team. Although

Sister Joan had long wanted to go to the missions, the news came as quite a surprise to her. She had come to see hospital nursing as her future and had been happy in her work in Home Care. In fact, Sister Joan counts starting the Home Care Program at St. Gabriel's Hospital one of the most satisfying accomplishments. It brought her into contact with many poor and needy people. Seeing the basic desire of people to respond to one another and to help when they can stayed with Sister Joan, inspiring optimism in her missionary work.

Before beginning her endeavor among the poor in Maracay, Venezuela, where the Franciscan Sisters ministered, Sister Joan studied sociology and community

*-Continued, Page 11*





Sister Joan, waving, and Father Tom Maney with their missionary team. Sister Joan believes that when enough people in an area share the love they have received from God, they quickly become a Christian community.



Sister Joan, bottom right, visiting a Cambodian refugee camp in Thailand

development, receiving her doctorate in 1970. She says that she learned two very important lessons during her six years with the Maracay team. First, working to empower the poor requires a superhuman power, the power of the Holy Spirit uniting the people. Second, each person, no matter how poor or uneducated, has an inherent gift to give and a unique knowledge or experience to share.

In 1975, Sister Joan, working with Maryknoll Father Tom Maney, began laying groundwork for a mixed community: sisters, priests and lay people living community as brothers and sisters. They dedicated themselves especially to forming Base Church Communities in parishes throughout Latin America. Their work took them to remote areas in the Amazon Basin of Ecuador. They worked in urban parishes of Guayaquil, Ecuador, in areas where the guerillas had their training grounds in Colombia, and in Mexico, Chile, Bolivia, Venezuela and Peru. Sister Joan

says that one needs a spirit of adventure with a lively faith and unquenchable love to work with people, many of whom have lost all hope of ever having a better life.

Her concern for the afflicted pushed Sister Joan to work with Cambodian refugees in Thailand and Salvadoran refugees in Honduras. After 20 years of moving around Latin America with no stable place to return to, her Evangelization Community was able to build a missionary training center in Cumbaya, Quito, Ecuador, in 1995.

To help the people of the communities keep growing, Sister Joan was instrumental in beginning four schools for leadership training and a school for spiritual directors. She believes the development of people does not consist of guiding them toward a defined goal. It is rather the freeing of the innate energies God has given each person to follow the "law that God has placed in each person's heart."

Bringing them together in Jesus gives them the strength to continue the work of living an integrated Christian life.

Sister Joan brought people together for a common cause and witnessed respect, love and appreciation for one another grow—cultivating the seeds of knowledge and love of God. This approach is good and true. But it's the long, hard road. The quicker, easier way, she says, is to bring people as quickly as possible to know and love God through an experience of Him; then help them to act out that experience by responding with their own love, and so reach common ground with anyone else who has chosen to do the same.

In 2017, Sister Joan left her beloved mission in Ecuador and returned to her Franciscan community in Little Falls. Her days are dedicated to prayer. She is filled with the Holy Spirit and gives thanks to God for a full life of loving and serving the poor.



# May God be ever praised!

**Rose Mae Rausch** was born in Melrose in 1931, one of 13 children. Her parents were Val and Katherine. When she was six months old, the family moved to Ortonville, Minn., where her father had found he could make a living with Columbia Granite Company. Later they moved across the lake to Big Stone City, S. Dak.

Growing up in Big Stone City brought the broadening experience of contact with Protestants while attending Big Stone Public School. The Catholic parish at that time was fortunate to have a balanced, enthusiastic, progressive pastor, Father George Esterguard, who was a friend of the Rausch family. Religion was important to Val and Katherine. Val was involved as choir director and trustee. Katherine encouraged the rosary often and also daily Mass.

These early years for Rose Mae were carefree since she was never required to work outside their home. The nearness of the lake provided skating in winter and swimming in summer. The many children in the family and neighborhood provided "a picnic every day" at the Rausches', as a neighbor child expressed it.

By the time Rose Mae graduated from eighth grade in Big Stone City, six of her brothers had already left for a "good high school education" at Crosier Seminary in Onamia. She was registered and already had her uniforms for Holy Angels Academy in Minneapolis, but a last-minute notice from Sister

Lorraine Allen, principal of St. Francis High School, Little Falls, changed the plans and Rose Mae attended there in the fall of 1945.

There were two events of particular influence during her teen years. The first event was caring for her mother in her last illness. Rose Mae dropped a semester of high school to do this. This experience brought a closeness to her mother, to death, and to God. The other event was sharing about the meaning of life with her brother Jerry, who was in his first years in the Crosier Order.

Rose Mae was attracted to religious life through what she saw in the Crosiers. She was providentially brought into contact with the Franciscans and was supported through the difficult time of decision making by Sister Kathleen Kelly. Rose Mae, with her father's permission (in spite of being needed at home), joined the Franciscan Sisters during her senior year.

Sister Rose Mae received her bachelor's degree from the College of St. Catherine, St. Paul. She ministered for 10 years in two elementary schools of the St. Cloud Diocese: first as a seventh-grade teacher at St. Joseph's School, Waite Park, and later as a principal of Holy Spirit School, St. Cloud, where she was also superior for the sisters. She was appointed director of novices in 1964, following Sister Elaine Sursely who provided this community service until her sudden death on August 1. After three years as novice director, Sister Rose Mae was sent to study at the University of San Francisco, Calif., where, in 1969, she received a master's degree in theology.

Sister Rose Mae worked as coordinator of adult religious education in five parishes in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis from 1969-1971. From there she joined a pastoral team of four sisters and five

*-Continued, Page 13*



Sister Rose Mae served on the streets of San Rafael and in the homes of the people, building Christian communities.



priests in the Warren area of the Crookston Diocese in an apostolic area program set up by Bishop Kenneth Povish. Sister Rose Mae was elected a regional director by her community and took office in June 1972. From 1976-1985, Sister Rose Mae served as a missionary in San Felix, Venezuela, where she developed her Spanish-speaking skills and enjoyed her ministry, particularly the friendship of the beautiful Venezuelan people.

Sister Rose Mae served as a pastoral administrator for St. Jude Parish, Sylacauga, and Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Childersburg, Ala. She enjoyed “pastoring” in the rural area of Alabama where the Catholic population is only about three percent. People from Mexico began to move into the parish there. Inspired by her love for the Mexican people, Sister Rose Mae, along with Sisters Pat Forster, Janice Wiechman and Colette Toenies, began a mission in San Rafael, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. She returned to the States in 2008 and continued ministry in St. Cloud,



Sister Rose Mae, seated in the middle, at the 2013 Taste of St. Cloud fundraiser. After serving in Mexico, she returned to Minnesota and became a resident staff member of Franciscan Community Volunteers located at the Franciscan Welcoming House in St. Cloud. There she volunteered her services with young adults who were learning the ways of community living.

finally retiring to Little Falls in 2019.

Sister Rose Mae thanks God for the privilege of living as a Franciscan Sister these 75 years. She is grateful to all who have helped her on her way: her family—especially her sister, Sister Tonie, who joined the

convent two years after Sister Rose Mae and deeply shared enthusiasm and commitment to Franciscan living—her community of sisters, and the many people who have shared their lives with her as she journeyed to so many different places. May God be ever praised!



## All Shall Be Well with Your Soul

A SoulCollage® Retreat

**Saturday, September 14, 2024 • 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.**

**Franciscan Welcoming House, 1600 11th Ave S, St. Cloud**

Join Barbara Sutton, SoulCollage® facilitator, as we gather in this creative, enjoyable, imaginative day of retreat. Barbara will lead us in a reflective practice using images to create SoulCollage® cards. SoulCollage® uses images and meditation as a way to learn about ourselves in a gentle, respectful way. You can access deeper layers of inner knowing through this creative play.



**Scan the QR code to register by September 6**

Investment: \$49, includes lunch and all supplies

*\*Once registered, you'll receive an email with a payment link.*

For questions, contact Kris at [kmizutowicz@fslf.org](mailto:kmizutowicz@fslf.org).



*"I met Sister Cordy in 2000 when the Franciscan Sisters hired me as a grant writer. Wow, did I have a lot to learn. Sister Cordy (among others) helped me capture the spirit and essence of the sisters and their mission for those first few applications. I remember traveling to St. Cloud to interview Sister Cordy when she was pastoral minister at St. Francis Xavier in Sartell. When she joined the development staff in 2013, she brought the department to a new level in donor relations, setting an example for all. In 2016, I became director of CRD, and she's been a constant support, mentor and friend. Thank you, Sister Cordy! I wish you Godspeed." —Elizabeth Rydeen*

## Things I will miss . . .

*Sister Cordy Korkowski, director of Donor Relations*

Saying goodbye has never been easy for me. On June 1, my chapter as director of Donor Relations for the Franciscan Sisters came to a close. It has been 11 years since I was asked to minister in this role. My September birthday is registering my 85th. I figured it is time to enjoy new dreams of what still can be. I have loved my development ministry beyond words and consider it a privilege and joy to interact with our dedicated and generous donors.

I will miss the many wonderful staff members that were part of my daily world. We worked together to "get the word out" about the Franciscan Sisters. So many solicitation letters and calls asking for that special gift . . . Christmas, Memorial and August appeals all had their own audiences. Special events—Give to the Max, Green Fair and donor appreciation dinners—energized me. The Dancing with Our Stars fundraiser in 2022 rose to the top with extraordinary excitement, a new "fan club" and lots of fun.

How will I ever forget the voices of the donors that greeted me when I called, the many financial gifts that have provided a lifeline of support and friendship, the

endless cards and letters of gratitude over the years? Attending funerals and hearing of the death of loved ones I have come to know edged a deep furrow in my heart. Sometimes my ministry included late nights and weekend work. I was grateful for every opportunity to connect with our donors. New faces and interesting personalities arrived at our doors, wanting to be part of the Franciscan Sisters and Gospel mission. Seeing lists of names of our supporters in the spring *Our Journey* never tired me. Instead, it reminded me of God's generosity and goodness. I was honored to receive prayer requests, offer comfort in death and illness, worry about family, unemployment, pain and unresolved issues. They were placed in my spiritual lap for prayer.

In the coming months, I will spend time with family, friends and my community, enjoying a new sense of leisure, open to possibilities. I will leave my office, but I will not leave the memories, nor the trust and confidence I have felt from my Franciscan Sisters and our family of donors. Thank you to my community for this opportunity to minister and to all who surrounded me with support and love. Until we meet again . . . I will miss you.



# So many connections: classmate, co-worker, friend, donor!

Elizabeth Rydeen



Terry has fond memories of her 40 years working with the sisters at St. Gabriel's Hospital.

Terry (Weber) Zenner's connection to the Franciscan Community began when she was a freshman at St. Francis High School and rode the bus from Pierz with Adella Gross, a senior. Soon Adella would join the convent and become Sister Mary Peter (until she reverted back to her baptismal name in 1967). Terry graduated

in 1950 with classmates Sisters Johnelle Becker, Anita Jennissen, Blase Kulzer and Cleone Renner.

After high school, Terry pursued nurse's training at Union Hospital in New Ulm and became an LPN. She worked at St. Gabriel's Hospital for decades. "The

first few years, the nuns who were in charge of the departments worked the holidays so the nurses could be home with their families," she recalls. Terry and her husband, Don, who passed away in 2020, had six children. One son, Paul, worked in the lab at St. Gabe's with Sister Ardis Cloutier. "Paul was a high school student and was our 'dishwasher' back when everything we used was glass and had to be washed and sterilized. He was a fun kid," Sister Ardis said.

But wait, there's more. Terry's also connected to the community through marriage. Sister Sylvia Opatz's sister Rita is married to Terry's brother-in-law.

Terry lives at Alverna Apartments and has made friends with the residents there, including Sisters Nancy deMattos, Maurita Bernet and Janice Welle. Terry loves the sisters and is a generous donor to the Franciscan community. She enjoys the concerts in Sacred Heart Chapel and keeping in touch with the happenings around the convent.



Sister Carol Schmit enjoys the Frannie gathering both as a student and former faculty. She looks forward to being with you July 14. Sister Carol Schmit: "Tell your stories as you gather with classmates and friends. Those days can't be repeated but they can be recalled with gratitude and laughter, maybe tears. The most amazing story of all is who we are today!"

## St. Francis High School G A T H E R I N G

July 14, 2024 • 10:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

St. Francis Convent, Little Falls

The Franciscan Sisters invite former students, staff and faculty to gather on Sunday, July 14, for Mass and lunch.

Due to the pandemic, we have not been together since 2019. It's time to gather once again to share memories and nurture the Franciscan spirit that was instilled during your high school years!

Please send registration fee by July 1 along with your name, address, year of graduation, phone number and email to:

Mary Ellen Imdieke  
3395 125 Ave. NE, Blaine, MN 55449-6572  
Questions: (763)785-0295

**Registration fee: \$20 per person.**

**Checks payable to Franciscan Sisters. After July 1, \$25.**



## St. Francis Health and Wellness improves weight room!

*Shelley Douty*

Exciting changes are happening at St. Francis Health & Wellness! The weight room was recently renovated and received some much-needed improvements, including new flooring, new equipment and fresh paint.

One of the benefits offered to FSLF employees is a free membership to Health & Wellness, to encourage healthier lifestyles and promote well-being. Many of the employees who use their free membership at St. Francis also participate in the fitness classes that Health and Wellness offers. Amy Scholl (and husband Chris), Carol Johnson (retired), Al Riedeman, Gretchen Miller, Liz Rydeen and Amanda Lampert are currently taking the Complete Fitness class offered Tuesdays and Thursdays. Complete Fitness includes a wide variety of exercises that focus on a combination of mobility, strength, endurance and stability work.

Participants in the Complete Fitness class toured the updated weight room. Standing: Chris Scholl, Amy Scholl, Dee Okerman, Judith Hecht and Sue Edwards; kneeling: Amanda Lampert and Shelley Douty, H & W manager.

## E-Newsletter

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

Scan the QR code to sign up!



## Donating to the Franciscan Sisters

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



# A perfect fit to lead St. Francis Music Center into the future

Robyn Gray

Melissa von Itter is not a new face at St. Francis Music Center. She's been a member of the faculty since 2016. She graduated from Little Falls Community High School and continued her education at Concordia College in Moorhead, pursuing her bachelor's degree in music education. At Concordia she performed with the Concordia Band and Concordia Orchestra, as well as other chamber groups and smaller ensembles. Melissa toured internationally with the orchestra to the Holy Land, which is where she began her teaching career. She taught in different cities in the West Bank, including Bethlehem, Ramallah and Nablus, plus a year of teaching in Jerusalem. During her stay there, she taught with the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music while concurrently teaching in a program in the Aida Refugee Camp with Musicians Without Borders.

Melissa believes it is always important to keep growing and adjusting as a teacher and musician, so she is currently working on a master's degree in music education at Concordia.

Melissa started teaching at St. Francis Music Center six years ago and now conducts three of the orchestras as well. As a teacher, she is passionate about incorporating more than reading music in lessons. In explaining her teaching philosophy, she said, "Students learn in different ways, and music is taught



Melissa von Itter is the new manager of St. Francis Music Center.

in different ways, and I aim to find the best match for each student. I also love looking at music from the bigger picture and discussing it with students to help them to realize how music functions with society, culture and time."

Melissa's love of rural Minnesota, her admiration for the Franciscan Sisters, her passion for the Music Center and our families, along with her leadership skills, make her the perfect choice to carry St. Francis Music Center into the future.



Pamela Wolters, teacher, musician, composer

## Music inspired by nature!

The St. Francis Orchestras held their spring concert "Flowers on Loon Lake" May 2. The highlight was the world premiere of *Sundown at Loon Lake* composed by Pamela Wolters. Pamela spent 40 years as a K-12 music teacher and has been on the staff at the Music Center for over 30 years. Pamela wrote this piece to appeal to a Minnesota audience while challenging the St. Francis players. The St. Francis Brass Ensemble accompanied the orchestra for an outstanding close to the concert.



Beth Larsen, transportation coordinator for St. Francis Convent, and her daughter Paisley are delighted with the colorful mother/daughter aprons made by Sister Janice. Visit the Franciscan Gift Shop to see more of Sister Janice's aprons and other items handcrafted by a variety of sisters.

## Mother/daughter aprons made with love

*Beth Larsen*

It was a Wednesday afternoon when Sister Janice Welle requested a trip to Walmart. She asked if I would help her pick out a few fabrics to make mother/daughter aprons she wanted to sell in the Franciscan Gift Shop. I was happy to help.

On our way home, Sister Janice asked if my 8-year-old daughter Paisley and I would be willing to come to her apartment so she could get some "child size" measurements. Once the measurements were done, Sister Janice asked Paisley to pick out the fabric she liked best and said the first set of aprons would be for the two of us. We were delighted.

A few days later, beautiful, handcrafted aprons were delivered to me personally by Sister Janice. That evening, Paisley and I put them on while making shrimp alfredo and homemade chocolate chip cookies, knowing they were made with love by Sister Janice. We felt blessed.

## Save those plastic bags!

*Linda Dobosenski*

Employees at St. Francis Convent are excited to launch a plastics recycling effort as part of the NexTrex Recycling Challenge. The challenge is sponsored by Trex, Inc., a U.S. company that manufactures high-performance composite decking and benches from recycled and reclaimed materials. The NexTrex Recycling Challenge gives each participant group one year to collect 1,000 pounds of qualifying plastics. Coborn's Marketplace is our partner in the challenge.

If 1,000 pounds are collected within a year, a NexTrex bench will be awarded! Clean and dry polyethylene plastics qualify and include plastic bags from the grocery store, bubble wrap, zipper storage bags, dry cleaning and bread bags, plus clear toilet paper and paper towel packaging (no hard plastics are accepted).

Maureen Gertken, Julene Ley, Sister Mary Hroszkoski, Sherrie Wieling and Kim Seppelt are excited about the NexTrex Recycling Challenge!

Employees are storing what they collect and transporting it in batches to Coborn's. We're off to a great start. In the first two months, over 300 pounds have been collected. The challenge ends February 11, 2025. If you'd like to help, there is a drop-off bin inside Door F on the west side of St. Francis Convent, accessible 24 hours a day.





# In loving memory...



**Sister Lorraine Olmscheid**, 83, died February 28, 2024, at St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, Minnesota

Sister Lorraine was born November 4, 1940, in St. Martin, Minn. She was the youngest of 10 children born to the late Frank and Elizabeth (Wulfekuhle) Olmscheid. She was accepted as a Franciscan Sister of Little Falls, Minnesota, on July 31, 1960. She made her first profession of vows on August 12, 1962, and final vows on August 12, 1967. She was a Franciscan Sister for 63 years.

She ministered as a domestic worker and served in David, Ky.; Little Falls, Elk River, Breckenridge, St. Cloud, Duluth, Onamia, Anoka, Coon Rapids and St. Paul, Minn.

She enjoyed baking bread and finding ways to share it with others over a cup of coffee. She valued the relationships she formed with her sisters and the people to

whom she ministered. Sister Lorraine had a ready smile and a good word to share wherever she went. She viewed the years of her life as lofty mountains and deep valleys, depicting the joys and difficulties of a life committed to the Lord Jesus. One of her favorite Scripture passages was: "Not that we have loved God, but that He first loved us" (1 John 4:10).

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**Sister Carol Virnig**, 79, died April 20, 2024, at St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, Minn.

Sister Carol was born December 16, 1944, in Little Falls, the third of seven children of Paul and Lucy (Pauser) Virnig. She was accepted as a Franciscan Sister of Little Falls, Minnesota, on July 31, 1964. She made her first profession of vows on June 13, 1966, and final vows on June 13, 1969.

She grew up on a farm and enjoyed the activities of farm life and nature around her. She particularly liked berry-picking, fishing and winter sports. Sister Carol attended Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School in Little Falls. Her first grade was in the Antler Hotel where the priest's house and convent stand today. The hotel was used as a school until the present school building was completed.

She graduated from St. Francis High School in 1963. As a junior, she began working at St. Otto's Home as a nursing assistant. Sister Ramona Johnson, a cousin, was the administrator and inspired Carol with the mission slogan, "To Peru in '62!" that the Franciscan Sisters coined for their dream of serving in South America by 1962.

Sister Carol earned a licensed practical nurse diploma from St. Mary's Hospital, Rochester, a bachelor's degree in theology and a master's degree in pastoral administration/leadership from St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Tex.

She ministered in health care and pastoral ministry with a special love for outreach to the Hispanic community. She served in Yunguyo, Peru; Coroico, Bolivia; Chimayo, N. Mex.; Little Falls, Sauk Centre, Onamia, St. Paul and Waite Park, Minn. Ministering as nurse and pastoral worker, she became keenly aware of the reality of poverty, injustice and oppression.

Shortly after taking her final vows, she served as director of retirement and rehabilitation and developed a comprehensive personal enrichment program for the sisters. She also served as vocation director. She returned to the States in 2002 and began her work as the Hispanic and health minister in St. Cloud and Waite Park where her top priority was lay leadership formation.

Sister Carol's energetic, positive, loving approach and her enthusiasm for life endeared her to others. She appreciated the deep faith of the poor, joy in simple living and felt a deep solidarity as a religious sister with the poor and oppressed of the world. She moved to Little Falls in 2022 and ministered to her sisters at St. Francis Convent.

# Our Journey

SUMMER 2024 • Vol. 43 No. 2

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## Green Fair Folk Festival

*St. Francis Campus, Little Falls, Minn.*

**Wednesday, August 7, 2024 • 4-8p.m.**

Join us for a **FREE** family-friendly event that promotes  
care of the environment and sustainable living.

