




Troubadour

WINTER 2024 VOLUME 25 NO.1

A Greeting from Sister Mary Kemen

Welcome to 2024


Have you ever stopped to marvel at the beauty of a spider's web when it is covered with dew and wrapped in sunlight? It glistens as its intricate design is revealed to us. Each woven strand contributes to the spider's masterpiece. One can't help but stand in awe of how a little spider can spin such a delicate structure.



The spider and its web are part of a much larger web; the Web of Life. All living and non-living things on the Earth are interconnected and interdependent. Chief Seattle of the Duwamish tribe in Washington spoke of this relationship when he said, "Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect."

Realizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of all on the Earth and the preciousness of creation, Pope Francis has called all people to be good stewards of the sacred web of life that has been entrusted to us by our Creator. In his writings, *On Care of Our Common Home (Laudato Si'*, 2015) and *Praise God (Laudato Deum*, 2024), Pope Francis addresses "every person living on this planet" and calls for a global dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet through our daily actions and decisions.

Holding St. Francis of Assisi as a model, Pope Francis sees that St. Francis "reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us." (*Laudato Si'* #1) "St. Francis called all creatures brother and sister and felt compelled to take care of all that existed." (*Laudato Si'* #11)



In the spirit of St. Francis and responding to the call of Pope Francis, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, in November 2022, officially joined the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform (LSAP), an initiative of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. We have made a commitment to reduce our impact on the environment, to care for people on the margins of society, and to care for all of God's creation.

May the spider's web be our symbol for 2024, reminding us of our interconnectedness and interdependence with the Earth and all of its inhabitants. May we together be good stewards of this precious gift that "speaks of God's love, God's affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God." (*Laudato Si'* #84)

"The Letter: A Message for Our Earth" is about Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, "*Laudato Si'*, *On Care for Our Common Home*." (Documentary can be found on YouTube.)



Honoring the Native People of Nojoshing

“We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.”

– Pope Francis, Laudato Si’, #2

Mindful of our inherent connection to Mother Earth, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi strive to answer the Cry of the Earth in ways that sustain and protect her. On July 24, 2023, the Laudato Si’ committee presented a program looking at this from a Native American perspective.

Sister Judy Placzkowski opened the program with the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi Land Acknowledgement. It states:

“The land we inhabit reflects a shared history. As we gather today, we are mindful that we stand on the homeland of the Cherokee, Ho-Chunk (Winnebago), Iroquois, Mascouten, Menominee, Meskwaki (Fox), Ojibwe (Chippewa), Oneida, Potawatomi, Sauk (Sac), and Sioux nations who have known these lands for millennia.

“We acknowledge that the 1833 Treaty of Chicago signed by the United States and Potawatomi displaced these tribal nations, removing them from their land. When our community arrived in 1849, with honor and respect for these first nations, we used the word ‘nojoshing’ in the language of the Deer Creek Indians. It means ‘straight tongue,’ which describes the way the land juts out toward Lake Michigan. Gratefully, we honor the sovereignty of these first peoples and our shared connection to Mother Earth.”

July 19, 2023

Sister Helene Mertes shared some history about Deer Creek, which runs along the western edge of the grounds, including that the creek was moved to avoid flooding the convent.

Sister Rose Kordick researched the land and people who lived here before Sisters arrived in 1849. She shared her findings that included



Sister Rose Kordick (center) addressed the group.

documentation of human inhabitants going back 8,000 years. Given its ideal location on Lake Michigan and the intersection of three rivers, many indigenous tribes camped or passed through this area traveling with the seasons and trading goods.

According to National Geographic, native people make up less than five percent of the world’s population, yet they steward and protect 80 percent of its biodiversity. We have much to learn from their perspective.

Shauna’h Feugen, a professed Secular Franciscan and member of the Mohawk Nation, recently gave a talk entitled, “How My Catholic Faith and Mohawk Heritage Teach Me to Embrace Sustainable Living.” Shauna’h stated, “Indeed, we have forgotten that we are part of the earth that God created—not just the planet Earth, but the specific land that we live on.” She discussed the Haudenosaunee belief that we borrow the earth from our children’s children and it’s our duty to protect it for future generations. This is called the Seventh Generation Principle and colors all decisions about how to care for Earth. As the Sisters embrace Laudato Si’ as a congregation, they consider how their actions impact God’s Creation.

Celebrating the Season of Creation

Throughout the month of September, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi united with people of faith around the world to celebrate Season of Creation. The Sisters offered opportunities for all to pray, learn, and act.

Season of Creation kicked off August 28, 2023, with a dynamic presentation by Sister Mary Lea Schneider explaining “integral ecology” and exploring the Franciscan foundation of Laudato Si’. Sisters came away with a sense of our interconnectedness to all of creation.

On September 1, 2023, Kata Young from Clean Wisconsin presented “Natural Climate Solutions: Taste the Change” for Sisters and Juniper Court residents. Kata set her remarks in the context of Laudato Si’ and made clear that all must embrace changes to slow climate change. She praised the Sisters’ bird habitat sanctuary on convent grounds and encouraged them to support local farmers.

On September 5, 2023, a Sister-led ecumenical prayer service featured Sister Linda Greenwood reflecting on pas-

sages from Amos and from John’s Gospel. God’s love is inclusive, “All people are equal in the sight of God!”

On September 12, 2023, the Sisters joined with Sisters from five other congregations of Midwest Franciscan Justice Promoters to advocate for a just Farm Bill. In the spirit of Laudato Si’, Sisters wrote letters identifying priorities that support the dignity of all people, especially those in poverty, and include measures for preserving creation.



Kata Young



Sisters Mary Lea Schneider (left) and Linda Greenwood (below) made presentations to the Sisters.




Gathering for Prayer

“God of all creation, Your spirit dances throughout the earth... You bring life and make all things holy.”

As an act of Ecological Spirituality, encouraged by the Sisters’ commitment to living *Laudato Si’*, Pastoral Care Coordinator Susan Bashynski and Justice and Peace Animators Jill and Steven Haberman are collaborating on preparing monthly prayer experiences for

Sisters and staff. An example of one of these services was held on June 22, 2023. Sisters from Clare Circle and Elizabeth Hall, as well as staff, gathered at the fountain in front of the beautiful St. Francis relief. After acknowledging that at times we have caused damage to the Earth, the prayer, song, and reflections emphasized appreciation and awe for God’s creation.



“Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.”

– Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #42



Luncheon Book Study



You have heard of Oprah’s book club. In keeping with the Sisters’ commitment to care for the Earth and all its inhabitants, Sisters Helene Mertes and Felicia Schlechter have initiated a monthly book study on Pope Francis’s encyclical, *On Care for our Common Home*. Resident and non-resident Sisters and Associates gather at the large tables in the Elizabeth Hall dining room for “Lunch and Learning,” an informal conver-

sation about the encyclical using a reading guide provided in advance. It is a time of nourishment for body, mind, and spirit.

If you would like to learn more about *Laudato Si’*, here are some resources: *On Care for Our Common Home* by Pope Francis, Study Guides can be downloaded online, and *Laudato Si’ Action Platform*: <https://laudatosiactionplatform.org>

St. Francis of Assisi to the Rescue

Written by one of our donors

I must tell you a true story of how I am convinced St. Francis heard my prayers and reunited a very sweet older lady with her beloved cat.

“Romy” was found, along with two litter-mates, in a dumpster when he was only a few days old. It was cold and the three were near death. They were rushed to a veterinarian but unfortunately two of the three passed away as they were being seen and the vet recommended the third, Romy, be humanely euthanized.

My friend, Mrs. Kim, was adamant that this not happen and that she would nurse him back to health. She took responsibility and with advice from the vet, took him home. With several more trips to the vet and with her loving care, she gradually nursed the little guy back to health.

He was, and is, her pride and joy and grew to be a large, sweet ginger cat.

He lives with two other cats, also rescues, and unfortunately, they taught him that the outdoors can be fun. What they didn't teach him is that it can also be dangerous.

My friend was so worried that each day I said a little prayer to St. Francis to bring him home safely.

While my friend attempted to keep her cats indoors, now and then one would slip out for a night's adventure.

In February, this happened to Romy but he did not come back after his jaunt. Five very cold days passed and still no Romy. My friend was so worried that each day I said a little prayer to St. Francis to bring him home safely.

This went on for nine weeks, in bitterly cold Minnesota weather. My friend would not give up her search, including following many leads that led to bitter disappointment. I continued my daily talks with St. Francis.

Then the miracle happened! Without a clue Romy appeared! Gaunt and unkempt but “meowing” at her door for help. He had lost half his body weight, but had no frostbite or wounds. Our supposition was that he must have been trapped in a building or shed not often opened.

Why the building was opened when it was vital for his life is unknown but he managed to escape and found his way home, even though the ground was buried in snow.

Romy, of course, was taken immediately to the vet and his only lasting problem is a cracked tooth which will be removed when he gets his body weight back. He expresses no desire to go outdoors and is content to accept Mrs. Kim's love and the attention of his two best cat friends.

Both Mrs. Kim and I believe with all our hearts that St. Francis watched over him for those nine weeks and guided him home. How Romy survived is truly the answer to our prayers and the blessing of St. Francis.





Resting with St. Francis of Assisi

Written by one of our donors

I am not Catholic, but I have always felt a kinship with St. Francis because of his love for animals and the natural world. We have two statues of St. Francis. One is in a flower bed in the yard. The other is inside the house.

Our young dog, Toby, takes a daily afternoon nap. His absolute favorite spot is in front of the statue of St. Francis.

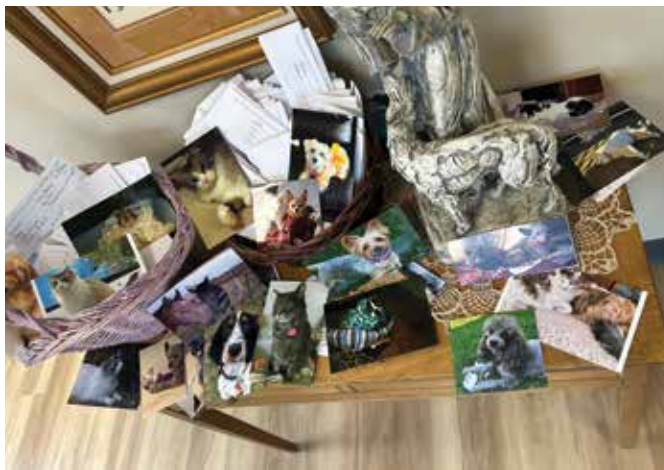
Blessing of Pets

We had to postpone our annual pet blessing for four years, so we were all looking forward to being able to invite our family, friends, and neighbors to our pet blessing on October 14, 2023. Signs were posted and invitations were sent out. The day before the blessing, Mother Nature decided to open the heavens. It rained and rained and rained all the way into the next day. With much disappointment, we had to cancel it.

Putting Plan B into action, on October 27, 2023, Sister

Mary Kemen blessed all of the pets whose names and pictures were given to us.

She thanked God for the gift of companionship and beauty that pets bring into our lives and our homes, and asked God's blessing upon them to keep them healthy and safe.



Troubadour is a publication of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. Please send your comments and suggestions to: **Troubadour Editor, Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, 3221 S. Lake Drive, St. Francis, WI 53235**



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