



**Sisters of
St. Francis
of Assisi**



NOJOSHING NOTES

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NOJOSHING is an Indian word. It means "Straight Tongue."

In 1849, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi built their Motherhouse on land that was called Nojoshing by the Indians, because it protrudes out into Lake Michigan like a straight tongue.

"Home" for Seven Sisters Is Small Iowa Town

There are a few places that stand out in their relationship to the congregation throughout our history. Certainly the small Bavarian village of Ettenbeuren from whence our foundresses came is one of them.



Here in America, there are several other places, among which is Houghton, a small farming town in southeastern Iowa. Drive slowly or you will surely miss it, as the population is fewer than 170. We Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi have been blessed, however, with the young girls from there who have become members since 1923 when St. John's grade and high school be-

gan. About a dozen have already died. Today, even with our diminished numbers, there are still seven from Houghton. They are worth meeting and learning about!

Why this place or any other like it? A common element seems to be a family truly living their faith; parents who respect and speak highly of sisters and can laugh fondly about "sister stories." They would be proud - or at least not oppose - having a sister in the family, even though it would mean no bride and no grandchildren; other relatives and/or friends who are supportive or at least not derisive.



But let's meet the Houghton Sisters.

SISTER ROSE MARIE KRUSE, quiet in movement and speech, radiates peace and calm. She has evidenced many talents in her ministries. She was a cook

Many proud to have a sister in the family

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for a number of years in different places, including serving Cardinal Stritch while he was Archbishop of Chicago. She moved into working with the developmentally disabled at St. Coletta's in Illinois. Like most sisters in that ministry, she moved from one institution to another. Illinois was followed by St. Coletta in Wisconsin, and then in Massachusetts. Her longest ministry was with mentally disturbed adults in Fall Rivers, Mass. While there, Sister Rose Marie had the experience of living with another community, something she found uniquely enriching. Now in retirement, Sister Rose Marie continues to serve with peace, calm and efficiency in several different capacities.

SISTER MARGARET KRUSE is the niece of Sister Rose Marie, and is the youngest of the present "Houghton group." She undoubtedly was told several times by parishioners, "But you're too pretty to be a sister!" Her chosen field is pastoral ministry. Though she has served in several different



parishes, to date they have all been in Iowa so she can readily get to the motherhouse for meetings and also home.

One of the many gifts she brings to these par-

ishes is her awareness of the call to justice issues, so important in today's world. In one parish, she was able to lead the parish in raising the \$5,000 needed to purchase a Heifer International (HI) Ark.¹

Dynamic and enthusiastic, rarely "preachy," Margaret gets others caught up in her enthusiasm. She has deep commitments to the many facets of parish work, and is not afraid to sink "heart roots" by involving herself in the lives of the people. Her Houghton roots show in her community building wherever she is.

Sr. Margaret (l) with Mercy Sister Delores Hanna at Holy Rosary Parish picnic in Cedar Rapids, Ia.



¹A HI Ark includes a pair of each animal HI works with: a male and female animal most beneficial for a given particular location (i.e., a water buffalo, goat, llama, cow, pig, etc.). On-going training on its care is also provided. Rabbits, chickens, bees and some trees are included. Individuals, as an alternative gift, can give only one animal or a part of one.

SISTER BERNARDINE MENKE

is a quiet, shy person who, like so many sisters, began her ministry career as an elementary teacher. There was little choice involved at the time she took vows in 1940, nor where one ministered. As a result, sister “saw the world,” or at least a pretty good part of the Midwest, having been assigned to schools in Illinois, South Dakota, Iowa, North Carolina, Colorado, and, of course, Wisconsin. After more than 20 years in elementary education, Sister Bernardine went to St. Coletta in Massachusetts and worked in childcare and helped in the library. This led to the next transition – full time assistant librarian at St. Coletta in Jefferson, Wis.

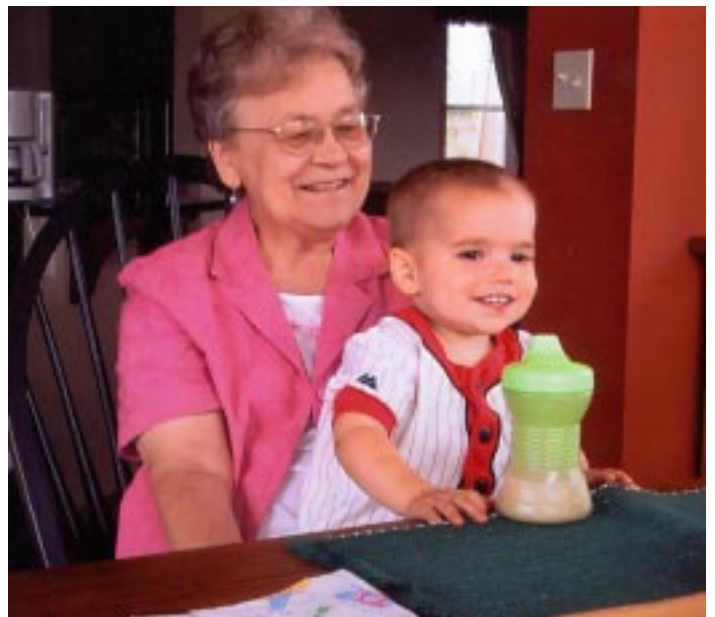


Then back to Massachusetts to Braintree, a day school for the developmentally challenged, where she again filled the role of librarian. She was



excellent at arranging, cataloging, and – most important – fitting the right book to the right person. She has enjoyed all of these ministries, but is also now enjoying her quiet days of full retirement to the motherhouse.

SISTER BERNICE MERTENS is one of the younger “Houghtonites,” having taken vows in 1957. Although a shy and quiet person as a rule, she is anything but when it comes to her ministry. She began as a primary teacher until she found her true love in the field of business education. She went back to school, received her training to teach in that field, and then went to teach at St. Mary’s Academy – our high school for girls, located next door to the motherhouse – for 27 years.



Sister Bernice loved the challenge of teaching the adolescents, some of whom now return to thank her. When the Academy closed, Sister Bernice had no difficulty finding another challenging position as personal secretary to the provincial of the priests of the Society of the Divine Savior, a position she holds to the present. Besides being an excellent secretary, Sister Bernice, in this position and in her own quiet way, is sometimes able to bring a Franciscan woman’s perspective to some of the issues with which the priests deal.



(l to r) Fr. Joe Denning, Sr. Jane Denning (brother and sister), and Sr. Roseanne Sanders with Pope John XXIII at Fr. Joe's ordination in Rome.

SISTER JANE DENNING loved to party. So much so that her friends couldn't believe it when word began to go around the small town that she was going to the *CONVENT* – now – not even finishing her last two years of college and all the fun that involved. After three years of formation, her first assignment was as group mother at St. Coletta's in Jefferson, Wis. After a number of years there, she was assigned to the orphanage in Cheyenne, Wyo., and then to the orphanage in Superior, Wis. A dramatic change in her plans came in the Chapter of 1970-71 when, much to her shocked amazement, she was elected to the Council of the Mother General, a leadership position with the Sisters of St Francis of Assisi. She held this position for eight years, until 1979. Vatican II was just beginning to be imple-

mented in the congregation, so it was both exciting and very challenging

When this administrative task was completed, she moved into a completely different field, accepting a position as neighborhood/parish outreach worker for Catholic Social Services in Lexington, Ky., and then on to become the pastoral minister at St. Michael's parish in Belle Plaine, Wis. This parish was over 100 years old, but Sister Jane was the very first sister to be part of the staff. The parishioners were thrilled and some very curious, because it was not in their lived experience to know a sister. They only knew stories *ABOUT* them, and Jane didn't fit any stereotype at all, doing things like joining the parishioners who went to Florida to help the survivors of Hurricane Hugo.



Sr. Jane, second from right, plans Communion Service at the local prison with Sacred Heart Parish volunteers.

Her next move was to Sacred Heart in Waseca, Minn., again in pastoral ministry, but different as parishes differ. A new experience there was provided when the parish adopted a family from Bosnia with all that is involved in helping them to adjust to a totally unfamiliar culture, vastly different from the impression they had received from

TV. Her present position is that of co-coordinator of the sisters in assisted living at the motherhouse. There is a deep satisfaction that comes from helping your own, even though it calls on all the ministry skills she has honed over her lifetime. Let's celebrate Sister Jane with a party.



Sr. Roseanne (l), with Sr. Leona Tischler (dec.), is the "voice with a smile" on the phone.

SISTER ROSEANNE SANDERS is a woman of many talents and many, many beautiful memories of a variety of ministries. A favorite activity prior to entering the community was dancing. Her friends could not believe she was hanging up her dancing shoes. But she did, and with few regrets. A big smile and a laughing voice accompany a warm and welcoming presence that is as natural to her as breathing. These certainly were part of the reason why her first ministry was as receptionist and assistant cook at the Archbishop's residence in Milwaukee. This was the first of several bishops' residences at which she served, including Cardinals Stritch and Meyer in Chicago.

For a number of years she was director of the aspirants, the young girls who entered

the congregation after eighth grade. It was a challenge to work with these young girls in their difficult adolescent years, but who nevertheless already were seriously considering becoming sisters.

It was also excellent preparation for the next 11 years when she was vocation director for the congregation. In this role, Sister Roseanne collaborated well with other vocation directors of women and men. Some of the papers she gave and the articles she wrote are pertinent today, if read for application beyond the high school girl.

The aspirancy ministry led to direct work with young women a few years older when Sister Roseanne was appointed residence director for the new Cardinal Stritch College. Then, finally, retirement!

In these later years she has continued doing what she does so well – welcoming, hosting, driving, being "the voice with a smile" as telephone receptionist.

SISTER LADONNA WOERDEMAN is not from Houghton, but from nearby Fort Madison.



She attended St. John's High School in Houghton, however, and so was readily "adopted." She entered the congregation after high school and began studies at Cardinal Stritch College while also being part of the formation program preparing her for vows. After receiving her degree in

home economics, she was assigned to St. Mary's Academy in Milwaukee.

From the beginning of her teaching ministry, Sister Ladonna went beyond the assigned curriculum and integrated Franciscan values as well. She went beyond the school, too, and taught after-school classes at the nearby school for the deaf, then to the boys at De Sales High and Thomas Moore High. She taught things they would enjoy, always linking it to values, to justice issues, – and fun.

Innovation and creativity followed her to Dowling High School in Iowa where teaching such courses as “Foods and Fitness”



Sr. Ladonna is pictured above with a group of Malagasy children.

captured the imagination, as did the week she devoted to careers in foods. Perhaps she also received inspiration from this as she left the classroom to pursue having a greater impact on the many questions about food and nutrition that every city and nation face today.

To do this, she became a registered and licensed dietitian in Iowa, and received certification as a diabetes educator. She moved away from Catholic institutions and involved herself in wider circles – being a di-

etitian at Iowa Lutheran Hospital and Grinnell Regional Medical Center, clinical/consultant with Iowa Health System, and president for a year of the Iowa Nutrition Education Network which targeted families with children and low income elderly. She was still teaching, but in schools without walls. In a residential psychiatric treatment center, she taught 4-H classes and provided a 4-H camp in the summer.

Most recently she was one of nine delegates from the Davenport Diocese to visit Madagascar for 11 days to learn how the two dioceses could collaborate.

Many years ago this quiet Franciscan reflected: “These past years have been a time of letting go of old forms of [Christian] life. We are coming of age. . . . we are called to be faithful to the challenging process of serving God and his people in new ways and in new places, and in new forms.” (Italics ours)

SISTER RITA MENKE is the youngest girl in her family and the second to become a Sister of St. Francis of Assisi, as Sister Bernardine is her older Sister. She, too, has held a variety of responsible ministry positions. She entered some of them with reluctance, but in the end enjoyed them all. Each time she came to be comfortable about it and would think, “This is the best; I can do this for the





Sr. Rita on retreat at a ranch in Wyoming.

rest of my life,” a phone call would come from the mother general and Sister Rita would be off in another direction. Her first assignment was teaching fifth grade as a senior novice since she had a year and a half of college completed. Primary grades were the next challenge for one year, and then she was sent back to college to finish in math. On graduation, she was sent to St. Mary’s Academy to teach science and math. She was also director of the resident students and involved in extra-curricular activi-

ties, particularly the operetta for which the Academy was well-known.

After five years, she was sent to Assumption High in Wisconsin Rapids, but only for a year before traveling to Sonoma, California, where she helped staff a home for court-mandated delinquent boys. Her summers had been spent at Notre Dame, earning a degree in secondary guidance. Sonoma gave her a chance to see counseling in action as the teachers sat in on all staff meetings with psychiatrists and others.

Yet another phone call brought her back to Milwaukee to assume the task of vocation director for the congregation. Vatican II had just ended and the confusion over implementation was beginning – not a good time for vocation work. Far more were leaving congregations than entering, and there were few definitive answers to the questions being asked.

Sister Rita is a true extrovert, loves being with people and is particularly gifted in working with adolescents. Because of these gifts, she enjoyed her next assignments as guidance counselor and vice-principal – and then principal at St. Mary’s Academy.

A true respite was the blessing of the next few years, when she returned to school for a degree in pastoral ministry and the opportunity, in a sense, to “return home” when she accepted a position as pastoral associate in rural parishes in Washington.

It was not to last. The next call was to be coordinator / director / pastoral minister for those sisters who were the first to live in a new retirement residence. It called for diplomacy and all of her skills to help them experience a new kind of living religious life – a life with greater independence, greater



Sr. Rita with Fr. Tom Ogg at St. Mathew’s in Gillette, Wyo.

20+ sisters came from town of less than 200

responsibility, sensitivity and attentiveness to others as well as to the group, a deeper intimacy with God and, most important, a realization that they were blessedly able to do it.

When she realized she had done all she could at Clare Hall, Sister Rita resigned, not to retire, however. Instead she returned to pastoral ministry work in a nearby parish for a few years and *THEN* retired. In retirement she remains fully active in a return to a primary love, working with adolescents-now-adults: she became the first part-time director of the alumnae association. One could say that Sister Rita has come full circle.

These are our sisters from Houghton – Franciscan to the core, involved in ministries that make a difference in people’s lives – concerned about our world, the environment, the injustice, dishonesty, and blind prejudice that permeate so many institutions.

They are willing to do what is possible to change their corner of the world and inspire us to do the same.

They pray for you, our benefactors, in so many ways. Do, please, pray for them and for more such people to join us.

May Francis and Clare intercede with God for you, that you be blessed in the way most needed.

Peace and Joy!

Thank You!

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