



# Troubadour

*A Greeting from Sr. Marcia Lunz*

## Wishing You Deep Peace in 2019

This newsletter arrives in mid-January, but I still want to warmly welcome you to the New Year.

I have been thinking a lot about welcoming and all the times that we use that word to convey hospitality/acceptance in our home, our neighborhood, or, perhaps most significantly, in our hearts.

When we say 'welcome home,' that adds another dimension to our greeting. Who doesn't want to feel at home wherever they may be. On our Motherhouse grounds, there are many spaces that offer a welcome. And it's not just a welcome for two-legged visitors like us! The urban forest, the grape arbor, the gardens, and the reflection area behind the gardens are just a few spaces that seem to call out, "Stay with me a while." You can read more about some of these spaces in this newsletter.

Whenever we encounter a feeling of being uncomfortable or unsafe or not trusted, everything in us is affected. It takes a while to settle back to normal after that kind of an encounter, but not when we are extended a warm, heartfelt welcome that is comforting and trusting.

People and pets alike respond to acceptance from those

around them. It is well known, and maybe a part of your experience, that pets who have been mistreated need a long time to let down their guard in new relationships. Children and adults who have suffered abuse have to work hard at extending trust to others.

Perhaps we can claim 2019 as a year of exploring anew what it means to say 'welcome home.' Creating a loving environment results in a peaceful environment, and a peaceful environment nurtures right relationships. There are too many war-torn countries and too much violence in seemingly peaceful countries. Many of us sing the song: "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."

May God bless you with all you need to be a peacemaker in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.

I wish you deep peace.



# What Does Homecoming Mean to You?

Homecoming...What does that word mean to you? What images come to mind? A welcome back to high school/college alums at a fall football game? A welcome home after being gone for an extended period of time?

But there are other homecomings that happen when people become aware of the oneness we share with all of creation on our home, Mother Earth. It happens when people work together to nurture and care for all of God's created world.

St. Francis of Assisi had a great love and respect for all of creation. His early biographies are filled with stories of his relationship with God's creatures. Insects, birds, fish, and mammals all received his loving care. In Francis' eyes, they were his brothers and sisters. For Francis, the earth was his home, given to all of us by a loving, all-good God.



On the Motherhouse grounds, a former soccer field has been turned into an urban forest. Serving as a gateway for wildlife between the Seminary Woods and Lake Michigan, it is nurtured and cared

for by the sisters and volunteers. A homecoming is taking place as native plants and animals return again to what had once been home for them. Now that the trees are spreading their canopies and the wildflowers are blooming, creatures of all kinds are making their homes in the forest.

This past summer it was abuzz with all kinds of bees enjoying sweet nectar on the blossoms of the wildflowers. Rabbits, squirrels, skunks, fox, and deer were seen strolling down the path which winds through the forest. Birds' song filled the air. Nests were seen in the branches of the trees.

Because of the variety of vegetation in the urban forest, June and July saw the return of the red-winged blackbird to the area. Its song could be heard throughout the forest as it became a nursery for a number of little red-wings. If a visitor got too close to the nests, they soon were met with much screeching as the swooping parents tried to protect their young.

Another creature that made its home in the urban forest was the monarch butterfly. Because the milkweed plants served as food for the monarch caterpillar, there was an increase in the number of monarch butterflies on the property. Not only was the urban forest aflutter with monarchs, but neighboring flower gardens were graced with their presence as well.

Ponder your experiences of homecoming ...times when you felt your oneness with all of creation ...times when you delighted in the beauty of creation...

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# From One Comes Many

How would you like to get free shrubs, bushes, perennials and annuals? It sure would be a cost savings, wouldn't it?

With this in mind, Sr. Helene Mertes (right), Sr. Mary Lou Schramer (center), and Larry Willkomm (left), the environmental coordinator at the Motherhouse, have used their prior experience in plant propagation to grow plants that will be used around the new convent, which is scheduled to open in the spring of 2019.



On September 23, 2018, they gave an informative presentation to the sisters and guests on the science of propagating plants. Larry has taken cuttings from the flowering shrubs that were planted at Clare Hall by Sr. Mary Francis Heimann (†2016), as well as from those found on the Motherhouse grounds.

The process begins with taking either hardwood or softwood cuttings of bushes and shrubs. The hardwood cutting is taken from this year's growth when the plant is dormant during the winter. A softwood cutting is taken four to six weeks after the plant starts to grow in the spring. The cutting is dipped in a rooting hormone, and then placed in damp coarse sand in a white plastic bag to form roots. Then each is placed in pots filled with a special planting medium prepared by Sr. Mary Lou.

Some of the bushes and shrubs that have been propagated for use around the new convent are Miss Kim lilacs, weigelas, nine barks, pussy willows, hydrangeas, red twig dogwood, and spireas. Some of these were selected for their winter beauty as well as for their warm weather appearance.

In addition to propagating deciduous plants, cuttings are taken from perennials and annuals that will be used in the many flower beds that will add their own special beauty to the grounds. The cutting is placed in soil after it has been dipped in a rooting hormone. Seeds taken from the plants are started indoors and cared for in the greenhouse before being planted outside in the spring.

Some of the perennials that Sr. Helene is propagating are coneflowers, coral bells, butterfly weed, multi-color yarrow, liatris, St. John's wort, gooseneck, black-eyed Susans, loosestrife, lavender, and bee balm. Among the annuals are Easter lilies, geraniums, impatiens, begonias, petunias, and coleus.

Through the loving work of Sr. Helene, Sr. Mary Lou, and Larry, there will be beautiful flowering shrubs, bushes, perennials, and annuals to welcome the sisters to their new home next spring.

**Are you interested in learning more about plant propagation? Here is a resource that you may find helpful:**  
[www.freeplants.com](http://www.freeplants.com).

# A Quiet Place to Enjoy the Beauty of Nature

Have you ever tasted homemade grape juice or grape jam? How about eating grapes freshly picked from the vines? On the west side of the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, there is a grape arbor that celebrated its 106th birthday in 2018. It was built in 1912 as part of a grounds beautification project by Mother Thecla Thren.

The arbor contained two types of grapes that the sisters used for eating and making juice, jellies and jams. On warm weather days, the grapevine-covered arbor provided a shaded walkway for prayer and meditation for the sisters.

At the end of the last century, the grape arbor and the hillside next to it were in need of attention and much repair. In 2009, Sr. Stella DeVenuta, with the help of many volunteers, began a restoration project. They held the first annual Wine & Vine event in August of that year to raise money for necessary repairs and landscaping.

During the past 10 years, the steep hillside along the eastern side has been planted with bushes and perennials. The base of the hill was excavated, and drainage pipes were installed under the arbor to prevent the long concrete base sections from caving in. The stone steps were reset and leveled. New gravel was placed on the walkway that was not concrete. The structure of the arbor was reinforced. Areas that were broken were repaired and coated with a waterproof material. The original grapevines were removed, and new grapevines were planted.

Today, the vines are beginning to provide shade for the walkway once again, and grapes can be seen hanging from the



vines in the fall. At times the birds and raccoons come to feast on grapes, before the sisters have a chance to harvest them.

People of all ages can be seen enjoying a stroll through the grape arbor. Along with the hermitage, which can be found on the north end, and the gazebo on the south end, it provides a quiet place to reflect and enjoy the beauty of creation.

# 2018 Pet Blessing

It was a crisp, sunny morning the last Saturday of September as people gathered with their beloved pets for the 10th Annual Pet Blessing. Around the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, which is on October 4, many religious organizations hold a pet blessing to honor St. Francis and the animals that share our lives.

Present to receive a blessing were many dogs, a few cats, and a rabbit. Two baskets held the petition slips sent in by donors with the names of their pets to be blessed as well.

Sr. Marcia Lunz, OSF, welcomed everyone to the home of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. Fr. Scott Wallenfelsz, SDS, (below) spoke of how St. Francis of Assisi delighted in the beauty of God's creation and had a great affection for animals. People were invited to praise God for the gift of creation. Fr. Dennis Thiessen, SDS, led a prayer for all pets that they would be treasured with care.

Each pet and its owner went up individually to receive a special blessing from Fr. Scott and Fr. Dennis (right). Sr. Richelle Ranallo, OSF, handed out a special treat for the pets and a small gift to the pet owners.



The following prayer was part of the celebration: "Loving God, we gather to honor St. Francis and the animals that share our lives. Brother Francis delighted in the beauty of the world God created, and there are many stories of his love for animals and their trust in him. He called them his brothers and sisters. We thank you for the gifts of companionship and joy which our pets bring to our lives, and ask your blessing upon them."

The gratitude expressed by those present and evident in the mail response from donors at a distance, attests to the companionship that pets provide. Pets model unconditional love, fidelity, and care of others.



# Benefits of Pets & Photos from Our Readers

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, owning a pet can have a positive affect on health. Studies have shown that people who have a pet have lower stress levels, heart rates, blood pressure, and cholesterol and triglyceride levels. They tend to be happier, have fewer feelings of loneliness, and they exercise more.

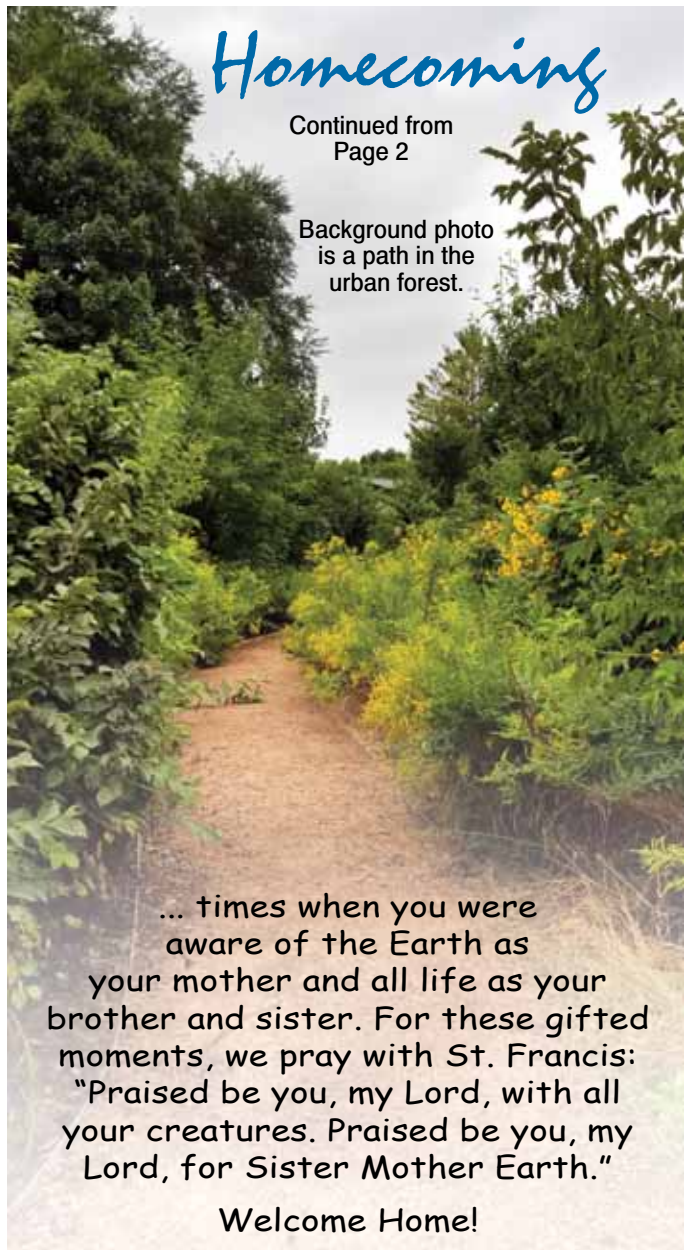


**Immy  
(Rescue Cat)**

**Lost & Found  
(Sisters)**



**Moose & Missy**



## Homecoming

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Background photo  
is a path in the  
urban forest.

... times when you were aware of the Earth as your mother and all life as your brother and sister. For these gifted moments, we pray with St. Francis: "Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures. Praised be you, my Lord, for Sister Mother Earth."

Welcome Home!

As Franciscan women who have a commitment to caring for all of creation, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi use environmentally friendly or post-consumer paper and soy ink whenever possible.



**Pet Medal**  
**Available for Donations of \$25 or more.**  
**Brushed gold. Loop to attach to a collar.**  
**Pet name can be engraved on back.**

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