

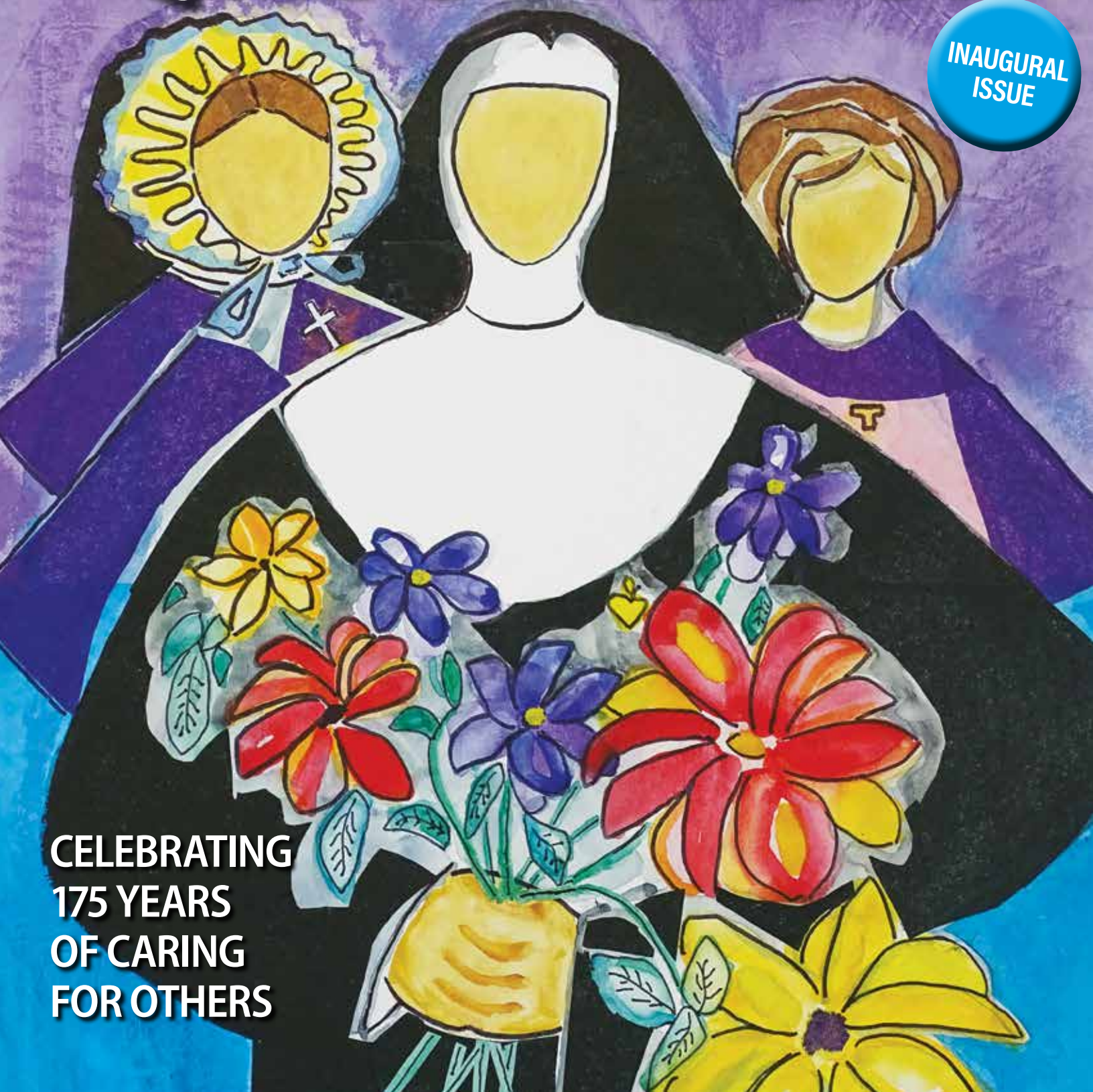
A PUBLICATION OF THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

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TROUBADOUR

INAUGURAL
ISSUE

CELEBRATING
175 YEARS
OF CARING
FOR OTHERS



TROUBADOUR

Spring/Summer 2024
Volume 1, Issue 1

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What are the servants of
God if not his troubadours,
who must move people's
hearts and lift them up
to spiritual joy?
— St. Francis of Assisi

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A New Way to Connect

On behalf of all members of The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, we welcome you to the inaugural issue of *Troubadour*! As we celebrate the 175th anniversary of our founding, this publication is a fresh new way to connect with our friends, other congregations of women and men religious, our benefactors, and all who serve in our eight corporate ministries.

We are entering a new chapter in our history, and we don't want any of you to miss out on news and events or on the special features that we will bring to you twice a year through *Troubadour*. This first issue shines the spotlight on our 175-year history of caring for others, ministering where we found need, and adapting to the changes in the church and in society through the years.

We plan to keep you updated on congregation news but will also include articles about our ministries and our donors. You will find spiritual reflections on the "Franciscan Musings" page, and a "Poets' Corner" to share work from the many Sisters among us who are gifted writers and poets. As we have done in many of our donor mailings in the past, and in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi and his care for all creation, we will feature stories about the creatures who enrich our lives on the "Pet Prints" page. And much more!

Why the name, *Troubadour*? St. Francis was known to say, "What are the servants of God if not his troubadours, who must move people's hearts and lift them up to spiritual joy?"



(l to r) Sisters Charlotte Roost, Joanne Schatzlein, and Sylvia Anne Sheldon

Our hope is that this publication will inspire you, "move your heart," and provide moments of spiritual reflection and awakening.

This is a milestone year in the history of our congregation. We are so grateful for people like you who support us and hold us in prayer, who work alongside us in our ministries, and who, like St. Francis and St. Clare, herald the good news of love for others and care for the beautiful world around us. We pray that you will enjoy many blessings in all you do. And we hope you enjoy *Troubadour*!

Peace and all good,

Sister Joanne Schatzlein, OSF

Sister Charlotte Roost, OSF

Sister Sylvia Anne Sheldon, OSF

ON THE COVER

"Love Over Time" by Sister Jeanne Carrigan, OSF. This mixed-media image was created for the 175th anniversary of the congregation and depicts The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi throughout their history. It portrays the habit worn by Foundress Sister Aemiliana Dirr in the upper left corner. The middle image is of a Sister from 1925, and the final image is of a contemporary Sister of St. Francis of Assisi. The original art was created with watercolor, paper, oil pastels, and marker.

Vision Statement

As Franciscans, living the Gospel and trusting in God's providence, we strive to practice hospitality as reflected in our care for every person and care for all creation.

- Chapter 2023

Mission

Our Mission as Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi is to further the coming of the reign of God:

- to live the Gospel;
- to be faithful to the rule of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis and the Constitutions of The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi;
- to carry forward the dependence upon the Father, prayerfulness, simplicity, and hospitality which marked the foundation of the Congregation in Milwaukee; and
- to be available in service to the Church, at home and abroad, in those areas of concern and need that call forth the corporate and personal gifts of our members.

- Call and Response
para. 19, 1984

Collaboration, Careful Discernment

Have Guided Congregation's Ministries

Throughout their 175-year history, The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi have discerned what is theirs to do, epitomizing the Franciscan charism of care for all creation, leading to transformative ministries to those in need.

By Marian Doyle



Sisters gathered for Chapter 2023 session.

1849

Two priests and 11 lay members of the Franciscan Third Order arrive from Ettenbeuren, Bavaria, and place themselves at the service of Milwaukee's Bishop John Henni.



They establish the first Franciscan community of women religious in the United States at Nojoshing, south of Milwaukee. Their intent is to educate German immigrants; instead, they find themselves clearing the forests, building dwellings, enduring extreme poverty, and heavy physical labor.

1851-54

The cholera epidemic takes the lives of the two priests. The Sisters minister to the many young boys orphaned by the epidemic. St. Aemilian's Orphan Asylum is moved to Nojoshing.



The word “discernment” is often associated with decision-making in religious life. Women and men religious put careful thought into important life choices. They prayerfully discern the choice of a ministry path and pray for guidance through an ethical dilemma. They discern, they pray deeply about something, so they might know a sign or revelation that will guide them to the right decisions.

For The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, transformative communal discernment of where to use their gifts and talents has always informed the path forward. Throughout their history, as they faced one challenge after another, especially in the early years, the Sisters found ways to serve where there was the most need.

Early on, discerning a way to be faithful to the religious life they envisioned in America led to fearless decisions of separation and courageous resistance in order to serve others.

Discernment in later years led to finding a way to care for those with developmental challenges. Pioneering leadership in special education followed.

Discernment guided the leadership of the congregation as they found ways to educate Sisters for roles in the growing number of Catholic schools in the middle 20th century.

And, in more recent decades, leadership discerned a path forward

as they navigated the new landscape of religious life after Vatican Council II. The Sisters recognized the need for expansion of their ministries as advocates for social justice, as healthcare providers, as leaders of programs for the poor and marginalized. They assumed leadership roles in parishes and schools and cared for their own aging members. All because of deep commitment to Franciscan values and guided by communal prayer and discernment.

Over and over again, deep trust in each other and in God’s Providence led the Sisters in the true spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare as they confronted obstacles and clung to their mission of care for others.

Dealing with the Realities of the Times

But more than making decisions at the time of need, the Sisters realized the need for foresight. History taught them that change will inevitably come; they knew that preparing for change was the only way forward.

Sister Joanne Meyer was the director of the congregation from 1979 to 1987. In those years, a new form of governance was created in the aftermath of Vatican II.

“Our leadership, in 1979, needed to carry forward the impetus of the Second Vatican Council. A blessing for us was a new form of governance that included a three-person leader-

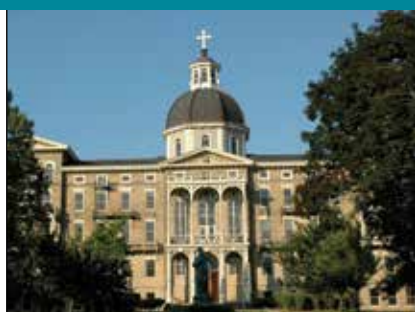


Former Congregation Directors Sisters (top, l to r) Florence Deacon, Marcia Lunz, Joanne Meyer, and Diana De Bruin

ship team which enabled consensus decision-making. We also had a yearly assembly.

“As a leadership team, we sought to discern our decisions, consciously making them from a faith perspective. Further, we encouraged discernment in all areas of life such as choice of ministry and living situations,” said Sister Joanne.

She explained that another challenge was helping Sisters to come to know and to interact with one another more dynamically, which was essential to examination of needs and awareness of the realities of the different ministries. Regional meetings of Sisters brought together teachers from all levels of education, as well as those working with developmentally challenged individuals, others who served as office personnel, and those in parish ministries. Such gatherings fostered awareness



1856

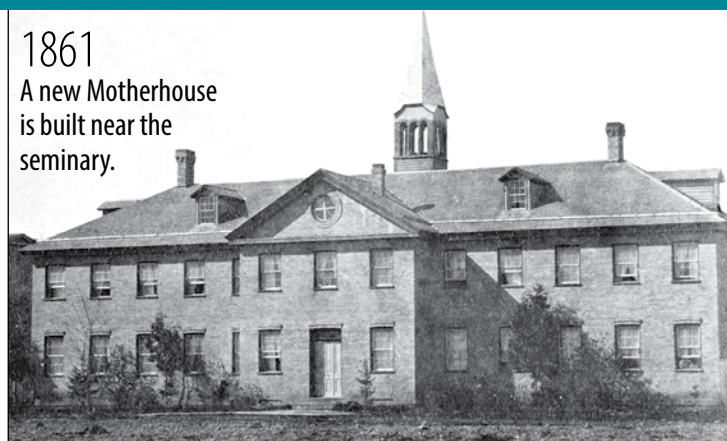
Bishop Henni builds St. Francis Seminary. The Sisters are expected to do strenuous work: farming, cooking, cleaning, sewing, laundering, and tending the altars. They sacrifice their vision of women religious in community.

1860

Deeply frustrated with their inability to fulfill their original mission and overwhelmed by physical exhaustion, the foundresses leave the community. Eleven members remain and begin to take control of their destiny.

1861

A new Motherhouse is built near the seminary.



“of broader community issues as well as sharing together on our congregational goals and mission,” according to Sister Joanne.

“The Chapter of 1979 clarified the Mission Statement and goals of the congregation. To implement these more effectively, we developed a Ministry Study both for the corporate ministries and for individual Sisters. This study highlighted key Franciscan values and enabled participants to indicate areas for further education and consideration,” she explained.

Ten years later, consideration of what to do with an empty building on convent grounds led to the birth of another ministry. Sister Charlotte Roost, current vicar and associate director of the congregation, recalled what led to that decision.

“We had a large building that was built as our infirmary in 1949. About 40 years later, the building was empty because we were using other facilities for our Sisters,” she said.

“We had an all-day meeting to discern what to do with it. The consensus was to remodel it for low-to-moderate-income seniors.” That ministry evolved into two – Canticle Court and Juniper Court – which continue to this day.

Welcoming the Unexpected

Always open to transformation and change, the Sisters found themselves the recipients of two unexpected

blessings after 1999, when the Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore approached the leadership team about the possibility of a merger.

“In June of 1999, when I began my ministry as director of the congregation, there were two calls from God that focused on extending and forming relationships in new ways,” said Sister Marcia Lunz, who was director from 1999 to 2007. “Our General Chapter the previous April had voted to accept the request from the Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore to merge with us, The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. For the next two years, we worked with them and developed ways in which the Sisters in each congregation could get to know each other, our congregational histories, and practices and customs that shape our lives. With St. Francis and St. Clare as a common thread, we learned we had a lot in common.”

The merger took place in October of 2001. It expanded the congregation’s ministries and enriched the lives of the Sisters from both communities.

The second blessing came in 1999 when the Sisters began the Common Venture initiative as part of the 150th anniversary celebration with the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in La Crosse, Wis., and the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist in Meriden, Conn. The three Franciscan communities, whose

roots go back to the 1849 founding of the order, wanted to do something together to address systemic change. The result was a relationship with the Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis in Cameroon, Africa, that continues to the present day.

Planning for Future Challenges

In the Chapter of 2010-2011, the congregation members crafted two statements that summarized their vigilant consideration of what comes next. The “Synthesis Statement” came first:

“Through communal discernment, we, Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, commit ourselves to a radical examination of our present reality, opening ourselves to transformation by the Spirit, who leads us into our future.”

The second declaration was action-oriented:

“As Franciscan women, seeking to live in right relationships with every aspect of our life, we commit ourselves to transformative communal discernment to focus our decisions and to determine our best future. To journey into this future, we will engage in comprehensive planning and action, at all times recognizing the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit among us.”

“You can’t get much more specific than that in calling for a careful discernment of our path forward,” said Sister Florence Deacon, who

1864

In a more dramatic bid for independence from the seminary, Mother Antonia moves the Motherhouse to Jefferson, Wisconsin.



1865 – 1873

New teaching opportunities open in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Ohio.

1870

The bishop and seminary officials agree to allow teacher preparation of the Sisters. Our foundresses’ original mission becomes a reality.

1871-1873

Mother Antonia builds a new Motherhouse in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and the Sisters move there from Jefferson. In 1873, Mother Antonia intends to remove all the Sisters from the seminary. The congregation is divided, with about one-third of the members remaining in Milwaukee as The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. The Sisters in La Crosse become the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration.



served as director of the congregation from 2007-2015. “We identified areas the congregation needed to address, and by working through regional gatherings, assembly, congregational committees, and outside consultants where needed, we continued to open ourselves to the spirit to determine our best future.”

One area of consideration was the declining number of Sisters serving in the 10 corporate ministries at that time.

Sister Florence explained, “We realized the need to be very explicit about the Franciscan charism, mission, and values of each ministry so that these would continue when we were no longer part of it.”

Sister Diana De Bruin served in a leadership role from 2007 to 2023 and was the director from 2015 to 2023. Her time in office came when it was even more apparent that the membership of the congregation was facing the reality of aging and loss of numbers. There were no new members entering, care for the retired Sisters took priority, and those still active carefully considered their paths forward in ministry. Again, there was a call for close examination of future needs, this time shifting not to growing the numbers of Sisters serving, but to caring for the aging population

among them and studying leadership of the congregation’s corporate ministries and congregation involvement as the number of active Sisters declined.

“We as a congregation looked at our aging Motherhouse and realized that without a sprinkler system in place, plus other needs, that we needed to deconstruct it and build a new St. Francis Convent. This was a huge undertaking! Together we discerned and agreed it was what was needed. We helped each other as we let go of what was and opened ourselves to what God was leading us into for our future,” Sister Diana said.

The leadership team also began

Sister Sylvia Anne Sheldon, current associate director of the congregation, spoke to that process.

“Our Sisters have always been pioneers with great foresight. Each shift in ministry has been approached with a fearlessness, a willingness to step out into the unknown,” she said. “Along with that, we have also known the time to leave. We have enabled lay women and men to step into our shoes and carry us forward in each of our corporate ministries, planning for when we will not be here to lead them.”

Sister Joanne Schatzlein, current director who was elected in 2023, is



The current leadership team, (l to r) Sisters Joanne Schatzlein, Charlotte Roost, and Sylvia Anne Sheldon

consideration of the future of the 10 corporate ministries at that time.

“In my last years in elected leadership we started to tackle the challenges of carrying out well our corporate ministries by passing on the reserved powers of the elected leadership to a public juridic person. This process is continuing currently.”

committed to the value of shared decision-making, made richer through prayer and participation by all members of the community. It sharpens focus and brings forth what is most important.

“We have to always be faithful to our mission. We’ve been coming together regularly as a congregation,

1877-78

“Seminary Sisters” purchase St. Coletta property in Jefferson, Wisconsin. One year later, the Motherhouse returns to its original Nojoshing location.



1886-98

Membership doubles to 128 Sisters; 1888 Motherhouse addition is built; financial independence from the seminary is realized and Sisters obtain the deed to 23.72 acres. St. Francis Chapel is built in 1895.



and there has always been internal movement of thought to be open to the times while remaining focused on the charism of the Franciscans,” she explained. “That’s how it has always been.”

Added Sister Marcia, “I am so grateful for the risk-taking that The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi have done over the years. There are high points and low points in our history, but trusting in God’s Providence, we have not only survived, we have thrived.”



Entering their 176th year of ministry, the Sisters have again exercised great vision in planning for a new phase of life for their community, embodied in the new corporate ministry named Franciscan Shore. With an increasing number of retired Sisters in their 80s and 90s who have various levels of healthcare needs, the new ministry will include a residential care apartment complex (RCAC), now open, and a planned community-based residential facility (CBRF). Franciscan Shore is housed on the grounds of the Motherhouse and the RCAC welcomed its first new residents this spring. With an eye to the future, Franciscan Shore is open to women and men from other religious communities, as well as lay women and men. As there is a declining need for rooms reserved for the congregation in the future, the space will be opened to others.

The Sisters are embracing Franciscan Shore as their newest sponsored ministry. It will be part of the rich legacy they leave behind.

Located on the very land that was nurtured by the Sisters beginning in 1849, this new ministry, along with the other seven thriving corporate ministries, will continue carrying out the mission of the congregation for years to come ... caring for others ... meeting the needs of the times. ■

The Corporate Ministries Sponsored by The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi

St. Coletta of Wisconsin, Jefferson, Wis., provides residential, day, pastoral care, and vocational programs for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities and other challenges. Founded 1904.

St. Coletta’s of Illinois, Tinley Park, Ill., provides residential, educational, vocational, medical, and pastoral care programs to children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Founded 1949.

St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care, Milwaukee, Wis., offers intergenerational day care for children and adults at two sites. Founded 1983.

Canticle Court and Juniper Court, St. Francis, Wis., are two separate ministries that provide affordable housing

and independent living for older adults. Founded 1987 and 1994.

St. Elizabeth School, Baltimore, Md., is a special needs elementary, middle, and high school serving students with intellectual, emotional, and physical disabilities. Founded 1961.

Cardinal Cushing Centers, Braintree and Hanover, Mass. provide residential, vocational, educational, day programs, and supportive care for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Founded 1947.

Franciscan Shore, St. Francis, Wis., offers assisted living residence for seniors on the grounds of St. Francis Convent along the Lake Michigan shore. Officially established in 2024.

1899 - 1904

St. Coletta Institute is founded and moves to Motherhouse property and becomes St. Mary’s Academy. The St. Coletta School for Exceptional Children opens on the Jefferson campus, marking the beginning of the congregation’s ministry to people with developmental disabilities.



1924

Constitutions approved. The Sisters become a pontifical congregation.

1929

The Sisters broaden their ministry to China, where they begin a school for girls and open a convent. They are expelled by the Communist government in 1948, with the majority of the Chinese Sisters joining the congregation in the United States.





Laudato Si' Deepens Congregation Commitment to Integral Ecology

By Jill Haberman

Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, "Laudato Si': On Caring for Our Common Home," is a letter addressed to "every living person on this planet." It calls for global dialogue about how we shape the future of our planet through our daily decisions and actions.

The encyclical opens with an Italian phrase, "Laudato Si', mi' Signore." This quote from St. Francis' canticle translates, "Praise be to you, my Lord."

With praise to God, The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi joined the Laudato Si' Action Platform in solidarity with the global community on the journey towards integral ecology. Their 2023 Vision Statement articulates this commitment:

"As Franciscans, living the Gospel and trusting in God's providence, we strive to practice hospitality as reflected in our care for every person and care for all creation.

"Open to transformation, as our Vision Statement is lived out, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi commit to a formal personal and communal response, as we are able, to a seven-year journey as part of the global Laudato Si' Action Platform."

In Year One (August 1, 2023, through July 31, 2024) with the guidance of a committee comprised of Sisters, Associates, and our justice promoters, the congregation is pursuing specific goals in each of seven areas:

- **The Cry of the Poor**
- **The Cry of the Earth**
- **Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles**
- **Ecological Education**
- **Ecological Economics**
- **Ecological Spirituality**
- **Community Resilience and Empowerment**

This is not a new commitment. Rather, it is a deepening of purpose. Convent land is sustainably used in a circular economy based on reuse and regeneration of Earth's resources. The Sisters' longstanding seed-to-soil-to-table-to-compost practice, including the gardens, beehives, orchard, and grape arbor, touches on multiple goals.

Other goals connect Sisters to people in poverty. Sisters make meals, crochet mercy mats, knit hats and scarves, and donate hygiene



and household items. Each project includes prayer.

A resident Sister group examines ways to improve sustainable living habits at the convent. Several changes have been implemented and others are under a feasibility study.

Sisters sign their names to petitions and letters calling for corporate and legislative leaders to protect the most vulnerable people and the environment.

Ecological Spirituality is nurtured through prayer outdoors when possible, and during Earth Month (April), Laudato Si' Week (May), and Seasons of Creation (September).

As Year One approaches its end in July 2024, Sisters will assess progress in each goal area, report findings to the global Laudato Si' Action Platform, and establish Year Two goals, continuing their seven-year process toward integral ecology. ■

Jill Haberman is the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation animator for The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi.

1932

St. Clare Junior College is opened in 1932. The forerunner of Cardinal Stritch University, it becomes the largest Franciscan university in the United States at the time.



1960s

Vatican II creates a crisis – and a renewal – within the entire Catholic Church. While many leave religious life, others take the opportunity to broaden their ministries.



1962

Cardinal Stritch College moves to a new campus in Fox Point, Wisconsin.



Remembering A Half-Century of Teaching

By Sister Mary Kemen, OSF

As you reflect on your elementary school education, did you have a teacher who had a profound impact on your life? For Tracie Hughes, there is no doubt that Sister Lenore Steilen was one such teacher. “She was patient, strict, and loving. She had the ability to make God come alive in the classroom. She was, for me, the epitome of a Catholic educator.”

Tracie became an educator herself and taught in Catholic elementary schools in Iowa.

In the First Rule (1852–1853), written by the Rev. Michael Heiss for The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, it stated

that one of the ministries of the Sisters was to “give Christian instruction to the young, especially through schools for children in rural areas.” Education would become the



Sister Lenore on her 100th birthday in 2023



Sister taught first grade at Sacred Heart School in Nekoosa, Wis., during the 1954-55 school year.

primary ministry of the Sisters. Sister Lenore grew up in Farmer, S.D., where she was taught by Sisters in the parish school. She recalled how “already in the primary grades I felt a desire to someday be one like them.”

In 1941, Sister Lenore entered The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi in St. Francis, Wis. At that time, the congregation had nearly 1,000 members and most of them were teachers.

It was 91 years after the First Rule was written that Sister Lenore began her teaching career in rural Nekoosa, Wis., at Sacred Heart Elementary

School. For 56 years, she taught primary grades in rural schools in Wisconsin and Iowa. For 27 of those years, in addition to full-time teaching, she was also principal.

As a young teacher, it was not uncommon for her to have classes of 40 – 50 students. Her largest class was 56 students. Behavioral problems were rare at that time. She attributes this to the fact that “parents were very appreciative and supportive of the teachers.”

Her most cherished memories from her years of teaching were



1967-75

Corporate ministries become independent; are now “sponsored” by the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. In 1968, the Sisters return to Taiwan, where they open schools and a convent.

1973

A group from the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration form a third congregation – the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist – in Meriden, Connecticut.



1979

The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi establish the Associate Relationship program, inviting lay women and men to join in a collaborative relationship.



preparing the children for the sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion.

Sister Lenore recalled how in her first years of teaching, there were many girls who went to St. Francis Convent and were trained to be teachers. "Because of this, the congregation was able to educate more students in Catholic schools. Some Sisters even taught in public schools. After a number of years however, as fewer young women joined us, it became necessary to hire lay teachers who would work along with us."

Upon her retirement, Sister Lenore volunteered for 18 years at St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care in St. Francis, Wis., where she was known for her delicious bakery.

Today, at age 100, Sister Lenore takes great joy in hearing about the successes of her students and receiving letters of appreciation for the part she played in their lives.

In July 2024, Sister Lenore will celebrate her 80th Jubilee. In reflecting on the 175th anniversary of the congregation, she shared, "It is with great pride and joy that back in 1941 I was accepted to become a member of this truly Franciscan community and gifted with the grace to persevere."

Thank you, Sister Lenore, for gracing the world with your many gifts and talents! ■



PET PRINTS

It Was Truly A Miracle!

Have you ever experienced a miracle?

Maureen Miller, one of our donors from New York, and her grandson's family have. In the early writings about St. Francis of Assisi, there are stories of times when he rescued animals from untimely death. Today, St. Francis continues to extend his love and care for God's creatures, as Maureen and her family can attest to. Let Maureen tell you, in her own words, about her experience:

"This past week, my grandson from Maryland, his wife, and their three little girls came to visit me. They brought their new black lab puppy, Porter, a joyous new addition to the family since they lost their previous pet, Piper (who was 17 years old) at the beginning of the year.

"When my grandson and his wife were moving their luggage into their rental cottage, my daughter, Alice, took the three girls and the pup to her house. When the girls were in the back of the car, Alice checked to see if all were seat-belted in and if the puppy was secure. They all answered yes. Oh, I must add the pup was wearing his collar and leash.

"When Alice started to drive, there was hysterical screaming from the back of the car. She stopped immediately to see what was wrong. Well, apparently when the oldest girl took the pup in the car, his leash was dangling outside. When the car began to move, the leash got caught in a tire and he was yanked and choked. He looked like he was dead! The girls were brought to my house screaming and in tears while their parents rushed the dog to our local vet.

"I asked the girls to hold hands with me, and we prayed to St. Francis of Assisi to please intercede for us. I have a statue of St. Francis in my bedroom and, after they calmed down, I went on my knees and begged him to please help the little dog.

"It was truly a miracle! That little pup rallied after a few hours at the vet. Everyone was amazed. I am happy to report he is completely well and happy. Thank you to St. Francis for our happy ending!" ■ –Sister Mary Kemen, OSF



The Russell family: Colin and Kristin with daughters (l to r) Adelyn, Claire, and Elizabeth, and Porter



1983

The congregation takes a corporate stand on nuclear disarmament. They profess their solidarity with the poor, oppressed, and women. The congregation becomes active in land and environmental issues.

1996

- The International Franciscan Conference calls for greater interreligious and international dialogue.
- Planning begins for the 150th jubilee of foundation.

1999

- The 150th anniversary of the congregation is jointly celebrated by The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, and the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist.
- The three congregations begin Common Venture, a companion relationship with the Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis in Cameroon, Africa.
- The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi engage in a discernment process for merger with the Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore.



Meeting Needs for 175 Years

By Sister Rose-marie Klotz, OSF

“I have done what was mine to do. May you, in Christ, do what is yours.” St. Francis spoke that final prayer to his followers as he lay dying.

When we, who have lived many decades of the 175-year history of The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, look back on that astonishing journey, one piece of the pattern of what Francis’ dying prayer wished for us seems clear. We continuously met the needs of the times as we found them. We saw what was ours to do and responded.

Any reflection on our life as a congregation calls us to place ourselves in a specific historical time. Congregations, like people, walk in a God-given historical period. The growth of the Catholic Church in America, the many women who joined religious communities and were instrumental in meeting the needs in those early years, and later, the implications of Vatican Council II – all focused the way we

“did what was ours to do.”

The decision of the founders in 1849 to form a congregation and to reach out as missionaries to the United States began the ongoing saga of consistent choices for meeting needs as they arose. No one could have foreseen how that month-long voyage across the Atlantic would evolve from its original purpose.

The cholera epidemic created the need for orphanages. Economic considerations led two of the early founders to become teachers. The rapid expansion of the number of Catholic schools required teachers. The Sisters, in true missionary spirit, moved to meet the need and began a long history of teaching in dioceses across the country.

By recognizing needs, the concept of education evolved into what became a dedicated ministry for the new congregation. It led to the unique and adventurous path of finding ways to serve individuals with developmental disabilities and other challenges. Sisters pioneered innovative educational practices for the whole spectrum of persons whose needs were not being met. The constant involvement in education and improving lives led to the founding of Cardinal Stritch Univer-

sity, whose initial mission was to educate teachers. Education remained a major ministry for the congregation, but Sisters found additional ways to “educate” in order to meet growing social needs and to be present in a variety of caring ministries.

In later years, “ours to do” expanded to more deliberate attention to global and local concerns. We saw the need to be more vocal and active regarding injustice and prejudice in broad and local arenas. With other organizations of religious women and lay constituents, we continue to engage in the wider efforts for education to preserve the environment.

Even as we list those responses of the congregation to the needs of the time, a greater sense of awe and gratitude must arise for the generations of individual Sisters through whom and by whom those ministries were able to be carried out. Through the decades and now, Sisters faithfully met the needs presented to them by a given situation.

We have done what is ours to do; we continue, in our waning years, to do what is ours to do. As we celebrate these 175 years, may we return often in wonder and joy to what we have done and been by the faithfulness of God’s Providence. ■



Sister Rose-marie Klotz

2001

Merger of Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore with The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi occurs on October 4. Corporate ministries gained are St. Elizabeth School, Franciscan Center, and the Franciscan Youth Center, all located in Baltimore, Md.



2019

A new convent is built on the former site of St. Mary’s Academy. Sisters move into the new convent in May.



2009-2014

The congregation navigates through Rome’s apostolic visitation. Sister Florence Deacon, congregation director and president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), becomes a spokesperson for women religious in the United States.



POETS' CORNER

Of Time and Tempest

My story, your story, is a
microcosm of our
Congregation in all its
175 years.

If I imagine it as a documentary,
the credits read, 'A God
Production.'

Thick walls and windows muffle
sound
of storm and wind's wild rage.
I think of how God's love
shields me
through every stage and age.

How is it that I have survived
the threats and woes of life?
How is it that I venture still
despite our daily strife?

No greatness graces who I am.
God's love is what sustains.
Within each effort on my part
God's action there remains.

– Sister Mildred Rothwell, OSF

Pilgrimage Celebrates Common Franciscan Roots

As part of the congregation's celebration of its 175th anniversary, a two-day pilgrimage for Sisters and Affiliates of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA) was held April 20-21, 2024, at sites in Jefferson and Milwaukee, Wis.

The histories of The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi and FSPAs are the same from 1849 to 1873, when both Jefferson and Milwaukee served as sites for the Motherhouse. There occurred a split in membership when Mother Antonia Herb moved the Motherhouse to La Crosse, Wis. in 1871, and the FSPAs were established there in 1873. About a third of the original membership remained in Milwaukee as The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi.

The pilgrimage sites included a visit to St. Coletta of Wisconsin, located in Jefferson, which was founded in 1904 by The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi to educate those with physical and developmental disabilities. The pilgrims visited the cemetery at St. Lawrence Church, located across from St. Coletta, where Sisters from both congregations are buried. They also visited the Cemetery in the Woods in St. Francis, near the 1849 convent location, and Calvary Cemetery in Milwaukee, where the original seven tertiaries from Bavaria are interred.

The 25 pilgrims from La Crosse also toured St. Francis Convent in St. Francis, the current Motherhouse of The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. ■



The pilgrims visited Calvary Cemetery in Milwaukee, where the seven foundresses are buried.



2020-2023

COVID-19 epidemic arrives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in March 2020.

The process of transfer of sponsorship of the corporate ministries to Public Juridic Persons is begun.

Cardinal Stritch University celebrates its final commencement in May 2023.

OSF sponsorship of the Franciscan Center in Baltimore is transferred to the Franciscan Friars Conventual of Our Lady of the Angels Province, Ellicott City, Maryland, on November 29, 2023.



2024

The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi celebrate the 175th anniversary of their founding at Nojoshing on May 28, 1849.

2024



'This is an issue that requires a response'

By Sara Woelfel

Women involved with sex trafficking find a safe, fresh start at Sisters Program South

When Milwaukee's Benedict Center saw a need for its north side "Sisters Program" to expand to the city's south side in 2015, four congregations of Catholic Sisters and a Lutheran parish responded with organizational, financial, and spiritual support. The collaboration meant that women in the sex-based street trade would now have a safe place where they could access necessary services and advocacy as they attempted to free themselves from cycles of trafficking, violence, trauma, homelessness, poverty, mental illness, addiction and incarceration.

Named the "Sisters Program" by the women themselves, the name was intended to refer to the sisterhood they felt with each other as they worked toward healing. But Jeanne Geraci, executive director of the Benedict Center, said the name now takes on an unintended double meaning with the providential involvement and essential support of the Catholic Sisters at a critical time.

"It was just another sign – like a God-wink – to say, 'Yup, you're on the right path,'" she explained.

That path started in late 2014, when those five faith-based communities came together at the invitation of Sister Linda Szocik, SSJ-TOSF, whose congregation had a vision of establishing a house of hospitality for women in Milwaukee. The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi did not

hesitate to take their seat at the table, already active in their own efforts to spread awareness and take action against human trafficking.

"This is an issue that requires a response," said Sister Celia Struck, OSF, congregation archivist, who served as secretary on the Sisters Program South advisory board from 2016 to 2022. "Throughout history, when our community encountered orphans, the developmentally handicapped and the most vulnerable in society, we didn't hesitate to jump in and help as much as we could. Human trafficking is no different."

Prior to Sister Celia, Sister Margaret Kruse, OSF, served as The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi representative, starting with that initial steering committee meeting in late 2014. Her existing connections with local anti-trafficking organizations allowed her to make immediate contributions.

"When I was part of the leadership team in 2013, Sister Ann Kelley and I started a subcommittee in our Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) committee to focus on our congregation's response to human trafficking," Sister Margaret said.

"We gathered information, watched videos, brought in speakers and then went out to parishes to educate our local community."

Beginning with the first meeting of the steering committee, the members quickly mobilized by reaching out to local organizations, researching existing services and, in that process, discovering the well-established ministry of the Benedict Center, a "nonprofit dedicated to helping women affected by the crim-

inal justice system find hope and lead safer and healthier lives."

"When the steering committee invited me to present information about the Benedict Center as part of their discernment process, there was an immediate synergy," Geraci said. "I think a lot of that has to do with our shared set of values about the unquestionable, inherent dignity and worth of every human being, and our goal of finding ways to serve women by asking them directly, 'What do you need?'"

Plans for Sisters Program South took shape over a two-year span. Major hurdles included finding a location amidst community op-



Jeanne Geraci



Sisters Margaret Kruse (left) and Celia Struck

In 2023, the Sisters Program street outreach staff connected with 316 women through more than 1,734 touchpoints. The south side drop-in center served 130 women, welcoming them during repeated visits totaling 1,253. In partnership with housing organizations, 22 women found permanent housing. And the two program centers distributed 6,033 meals and 2,362 clothing items to women.



position, funding start-up and operational costs, and garnering support from local police, businesses, government officials and neighbors. The involvement of the faith-based partners addressed all three obstacles.

“Honestly, I don’t know how long it would have taken to establish a south side presence without the involvement and commitment of this group,” Geraci said. “The start-up funds were a key factor, but so was the community engagement of the Sisters. They have a steady presence that comes out of their beliefs, their unwavering sense of justice and love, and their conviction that they are standing up for the right things.”

Established in 2017 and continuing to grow thanks to the ongoing involvement and support of The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi and their now seven collaborating partners, Sisters Program South involves street outreach and provides a neighborhood drop-in center where women can meet their basic needs while also gaining access to longer-term resources like crisis support, counseling, sexual assault advocacy, housing navigation, and case management. The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi provide additional assistance by calling upon their retired Sisters to knit hats, scarves and gloves; to bag lunches for outreach efforts; to cook warm meals; and to pray.

“What this says to me is that it doesn’t matter how old you are, you may still be able to move your hands or do advocacy or help in another way,” Sister Margaret said when interviewed about human trafficking in 2023 by the national “Nun’s Life” podcast. “It’s exciting to see the variety of things our Sisters are doing, even those at 80, 90 or 100 years old.” ■

We pray in remembrance of and thanksgiving for our Sisters who have entered eternal life.



Sister Clara Styger (August 4, 1932 – January 19, 2024)

Formerly Sister Mary Clara, Sister Clara was born in Napa, Calif. She entered The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi in 1954. Her attraction to the congregation was the result of a visit with the Sisters who served at Hanna Center for Boys in Sonoma, near Napa.

“By their cheerfulness and God’s grace, I knew this was the community God was calling me to,” she said.

Sister Clara professed final vows in 1957. She spent her years of ministry at St. Coletta School, Jefferson, Wis., St. Ann Health Center in St. Francis, Wis., and St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care, Milwaukee, where she assisted clients in restorative therapy.



Sister Rose Kordick (August 29, 1932 – January 23, 2024)

Formerly Sister Rose Clare, Sister Rose was born in Winterset, Iowa, the eighth of nine children. She was professed as a Sister of St. Francis of Assisi in 1953.

Sister Rose grew up on a farm. She was taught by our Sisters in grade school and high school.

“The joy and spirit of The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi attracted me, even though many thought I’d join the Benedictines where my sister was a member,” she recalled.

Sister Rose was a teacher who served in both grade schools and high schools in Wisconsin and Colorado. She also taught independent living skills to adult residents at St. Coletta of Wisconsin. Sister Rose served as education director at the Tucson Boys and Girls Club in Arizona and lectured at the University of Arizona. She lived in Arizona until 2021, when she moved back to Wisconsin and lived at St. Francis Convent until her death.



Sister Barbara Barry (May 14, 1934 – January 27, 2024)

Sister Barbara was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. As a teen, she felt a call to religious life, but met a man named George Barry who stole her heart. They married and together they raised five children.

Eight months after George’s death, and with the support of her children, Barbara was ready to fulfill the call she put aside after high school. In 1997, she entered the Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore. She had become acquainted with the Sisters while working at the Franciscan Center that they sponsored. In 2001, the Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore merged with The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi.

Through her years of ministry, Sister Barbara served as the development assistant and human resources/business manager at Franciscan Center. After her retirement, she served as the local treasurer at Clare Court Convent in Baltimore. She travelled to Wisconsin in 2019, when she moved to the newly opened St. Francis Convent in St. Francis.

Those who knew Sister Barbara found her to be outgoing, full of life, well-read, and generous with her time.

Realigning Our Fundraising Strategies for Sustainability and Impact

By Nancy Ketchman

For many of you, this magazine is the first time you have received news about The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi – their history, mission, and how they continue to minister to others, even in retirement. We are sending you this magazine intentionally, since many of you have been actively supporting the Sisters since 1980 when our fundraising program was first established. Your generosity funds the essential health, housing, and retirement needs of our Sisters, especially those items not covered by Medicare or Medicaid. And your prayers lift the spirits of our elderly Sisters, who continue to serve us through their prayer and presence. Thank you!



Nancy Ketchman

As you can imagine, the tools and strategies for effective fundraising and stewardship have evolved considerably to include online giving platforms, social media, and digital outreach. It is a brave new world! In spring 2024, we transitioned to a more robust donor database that makes it easier to merge duplicate records, provide our Leadership with insightful reports on contributions, and integrate online donations.

Reducing Environmental Footprint

But the most important change has been realigning our approach to reflect the congregation's commitment to environmental stewardship and care of creation. We are embracing sustainable practices such as reducing printed mailings and encouraging online giving. *Troubadour* magazine is an example of this approach. Instead of mail-


ing multiple newsletters and fundraising appeals, we are instead integrating those pieces into *Troubadour*. For the first time, all donors will have the same opportunity to read the latest news about the Sisters (with digital copies available on our website and via email). We also redesigned our website so that it is easier to navigate and has more frequent updates on the Sisters. Later this year we will roll out an e-newsletter and other digital strategies to stay connected to our donors. Other changes include:

Enhanced online giving platform that makes it easy to designate gifts in honor of friends and family, enroll loved ones in our Franciscan Eucharistic League, or become a monthly recurring donor.


Overview of **planned giving** options at lakeosfsgiving.org, including how to add the Sisters to your will or as a beneficiary and how to donate from your donor advised fund or IRA.


Giving societies that recognize our unique communities of donors, such as graduates of St. Mary's Academy and Cardinal Stritch University, recurring donors, and those who include the Sisters in their will. Learn more at lakeosfs.org/societies.


Your feedback and insights are invaluable as we navigate this evolving landscape. Reach out to me directly at nketchman@lakeosfs.org or 414-294-7329 to share your thoughts and suggestions. Together, we can honor our Sisters' legacy and ensure their retirement is filled with dignity, comfort, and love. Thank you for your unwavering support and prayers. ■



Easy Ways to Donate in Support of the Sisters








DONATE ONLINE via your credit card, PayPal, or Venmo: lakeosfs.org/donate or scan our QR code at right with your mobile phone

MAIL CHECK payable to *The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi* using the enclosed envelope or mail to: **The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi Advancement Office**
3221 S. Lake Dr.
St. Francis, WI 53235

CALL 414-744-1160



BEQUESTS With Gratitude

Between December 1, 2022, and April 1, 2024, The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi received bequests from the following generous donors:

Anonymous
Laura Guardino
Barbara Busch
James Capone Charitable Foundation
Norma Ceraolo
John J. Esser
Charles Dell
Caryl Docherty
Alice Essling
Patricia Fix
Elaine J. Goehringer
Dorothy Holtzman
Marlene Hurt
Sonia Larson
Fred Lins
J. Max Lionnet
John and Phyllis McCormick
Mary McMahan
Elizabeth Rose
Elizabeth Rould
Mary Anne Sears
Marie Somky
Mary Souza
Elizabeth Spangler
Gayle Taylor
Faith Urban
Elizabeth Whitehill

A bequest is a wonderful way to show your care and concern for our retired Sisters. Donors who include the Sisters in their will or as a beneficiary of other assets, regardless of amount, become members of the St. Francis Society.

GIVING IN ACTION 

The Simple Joy of Biking Outdoors



Sisters Ruth Gardner (left) and Jeanne Carrigan on their first trishaw ride.

This spring, a generous donor helped fund the purchase of a \$16,000 electric-assist trishaw bike that is at the center of an innovative program called “Cycling Without Age.” The trishaw comfortably seats two Sisters with a seatbelt, features a canopy to protect from sun and wind, and includes a warming blanket. A volunteer driver who is fully trained through our partnership with the Wisconsin Bike Federation will pedal Sisters around our convent park, surrounding parks, and the bike trails along the Lake Michigan shore.

Contact Nancy Ketchman at nketchman@lakeosfs.org or 414-294-7329 if you are interested in becoming a trained volunteer driver or wish to support this or other projects for the Sisters.

Thank you to our many donors who make programs like this possible!

175th Anniversary Celebration **THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!**

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DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Colleen Bartosch Ryan: A Life of Service, Compassion, and Joy

By Nancy Ketchman

When COVID-19 struck, Colleen Bartosch Ryan, a 1966 graduate of St. Mary's Academy (SMA) in Wisconsin, initiated Sunday morning Zoom video calls to keep her extended family connected.

Family means everything to Colleen. With her late husband Jim Ryan, she raised eight children. Today, alongside her second husband, Tom Merz, Colleen cherishes her adult children and 15 grandchildren.

Raising eight kids wasn't easy, but Colleen, affectionately nicknamed "Bullets" by her children, embraced the challenge with humor and resilience. "You had to be tough with eight kids," she laughs. But amidst the toughness, there was plenty of joy. Colleen and Jim instilled strong values of independence, kindness, and faith in their children, all of whom attended Catholic schools and universities, many following in Jim's footsteps at the University of Notre Dame.

Rooted in Franciscan Values

Colleen's journey began at SMA, where she and her twin sister Christy (Christine Bartosch Ralphs) attended. While Christy thrived academically, Colleen admits she was a bit of a rebel. "I did everything I wasn't supposed to do," she jokes. Yet, it was Sister Joanne Nicgorski, the Glee Club moderator, who made her feel valued despite the mischief.

After high school, Colleen



Colleen Bartosch Ryan



l to r: Colleen and Christy, 1965

worked as a stewardess for Northwest Airlines for six years before dedicating herself to caring for her growing family. Meanwhile, Christy pursued a successful career as a residential and commercial interior designer. She was one of the founders of Club Monaco and, later on, a partner in Lloyd Ralphs Design. While each followed different paths, they remained close and never forgot the Franciscan values instilled by the Sisters.

New Convent and iPads

Deeply moved by the Sisters' selfless service and sacrifice, Colleen made her first major gift in 2018 for the Sisters' new convent. Later, inspired by a conversation with Sister Ellen Carr during the pandemic, Colleen donated iPads to keep Sisters connected with

loved ones. "I couldn't imagine not being able to see my family," she reflects. "So, I wanted to help the Sisters stay in touch also."

Colleen's gesture of kindness speaks volumes about her compassionate nature.

In 2021, Christy succumbed to cancer. In Christy's last days, Sister Ellen arranged a special Mass that was livestreamed to her hospital room from St. Francis Convent. During Mass, Sisters shared their recollections of Christy in high school. As she watched, Colleen was struck by how many Sisters were in wheelchairs or using walkers. "It was a real eye-opener to the current life of these Sisters who have given so much and don't ask for anything in return."

Colleen's journey is a testament to resilience, compassion, and generosity. From nurturing her family, to supporting the Sisters and other organizations, Colleen leaves a legacy of love, faith, and joy that will endure for generations to come. ■



Sisters Mary Louise Herrmann (right) and Mary Jerome Lacy using their iPads.

Campaign Update: Sharing Our Blessings

A lifetime of low wages in active ministry, combined with rapidly rising costs and an aging congregation, are straining our Sisters' savings. They rely on these savings to help fund needed health and social programs and services, many of which are not funded by Medicare or Medicaid. Their savings also pay for spiritual programming, food, transportation, and building costs (including mortgage).

In spring 2022, the Sisters retained a third-party actuarial firm to update their financial projections to determine how much additional money is needed to ensure that the retirement and health needs of our Sisters are fully funded. The answer: \$25 million.

In October 2022, we launched *Sharing Our Blessings*, the final major campaign in support of our Sisters. The goal: raise \$25 million by 2032 to ensure that every Sister receives the compassionate care they've dedicated their lives to providing others. We are thrilled to report that to date, donors like you have helped us raise 26 percent (\$6.5 million) of our \$25 million goal. Thank you!

Each issue of *Troubadour* magazine will include an updated graphic showing the progress we have made towards reaching our \$25 million goal. **Please consider making a generous donation today to support the health and retirement needs of our Sisters.**

Thank you for your prayers and support! ■

WHO LIVES AT ST. FRANCIS CONVENT?

Average age

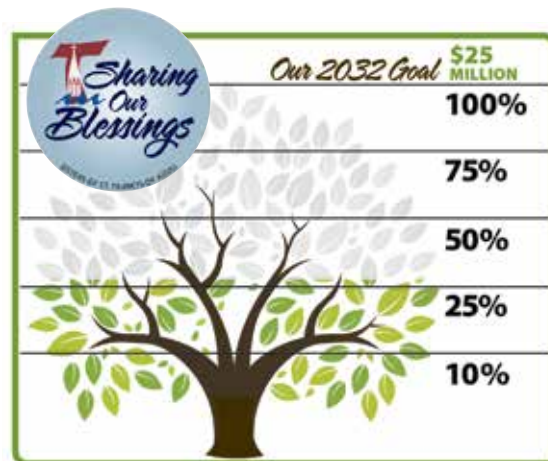
90

of Sisters living in enhanced care (Clare Circle)

30

of Sisters living in assisted living (Elizabeth Hall)

40



For questions regarding gifts from your donor advised fund, IRA, gifts of stocks, or to include the Sisters in your will, please contact Nancy Ketchman at nketchman@lakeosfs.org or call 414-294-7329.

WISH LIST

Our donors have always been very generous when it comes to supporting the health and retirement needs of our Sisters, especially equipment, treatment, and programs not covered by Medicare or Medicaid. This Wish List includes items currently in need. A more complete list can be found on our website at lakeosfs.org/needs.

- Adjustable hospital beds
- Hearing aids
- Dental care, including dentures
- Amplified phones
- Electric stairlifts, grab bars, and wheelchair ramps to help Sisters safely age in place
- Large-print books, audio books, and headphones for our library
- Geriatric therapies to relieve anxiety, pain, and muscle stiffness associated with osteoarthritis, neuropathy, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's, and dementia
- Computers with large monitors, cameras, and speakers to connect Sisters with family and friends

To donate, scan this QR code or visit lakeosfs.org/donate. All donations support items listed here, as well as other needs of our retired Sisters.



TROUBADOUR



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Celebrate With Us!

This is an image taken from the stained-glass Assisi window that currently graces the entrance lobby of St. Francis Convent and Franciscan Shore. The window dates to 1920, when it was installed in the old Motherhouse chapel in St. Francis, Wis. This “deconstructed” image by artist Sister Stella DeVenuta, OSF, signifies openness and transformation as The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi transition into a new realization of their mission 175 years past their founding. The Assisi window is also a reminder to hold space to serve the needs of society, especially the broken and disenfranchised. Symbolically, the image also represents the present congregation as a “fragment,” as the founding women were the fragment remaining on the shores of Lake Michigan after the 1860 departure of some members to La Crosse, Wis.

