Welcome to 2020!

Twenty years ago we marveled as the new century began. Here we are 20 years later at 2020.

My first experience with talking about 20-20 had to do with eyesight. No glasses required if we have perfect vision, and perfect vision is 20-20. However, it is probably safe to say the majority of people do not have perfect eyesight. A variety of conditions gives rise to lens correction to bring vision into focus.

In this greeting I would like to expand the notion of vision to our lives. For me, vision refers to the impetus that gives rise to the purpose and goals we set for ourselves. Sometimes it is called a dream. This vision can encompass our family, or our neighborhood, or our country, and even our world.

The scope of a vision might center on building or strengthening relationships close to home or at a distance, personally or as a part of a larger group. Or the vision may center on forming a habit or doing a project.

Once we embrace a vision, we embrace change in our lives. If our vision was already in place, there would be no reason to pursue it. So once we have settled on what we want to be about, commitment is a necessary ingredient to realize the vision.

Are we prepared to accept some disappointments, some occasions where it seems like two steps forward and one backward? How do we deal with resistance, criticism or lack of support?

May I suggest that a good beginning is to start with a realistic vision, no matter how small it seems. Muscles are built gradually, and the tools needed to realize any vision are patience and determination. Along the way, test out the vision to see if it is doable. If not, make some adjustments.

May God bless your efforts everyday as you pursue your vision, your dream. May your vision be clear to you, and may you find loving support along the way. The world will be a better place with every vision realized.
On the grounds of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, there are a variety of residences for creatures that give witness to the sisters’ commitment to care for God’s creation. Three of these homes were constructed by friends of the sisters for bats, bees and birds.

The bat house hangs on a small barn near the gardens. Bats can live in colonies of one hundred to several thousand. Each bat has its own place within the colony to rest. They hang upside down in order to make a quick getaway in case of danger. When the females are pregnant, they rearrange the colony to form a nursery. They will huddle together to keep the young warm and to protect them.

The beehives are located in the valley near the edge of the property. Honey bees are very social and live in colonies of thousands. Within the colony there is only one queen who can lay up to 2,000 eggs a day. Male drones’ only role is to mate with the queen. Young adult worker bees care for the larvae. Mature worker bees go out to search for pollen and bring it back to the hive where it is stored.

The gourd bird houses can be seen hanging in various trees. They provide homes for wrens, finches and sparrows. Most male and female songbirds work together constructing the nest. A mother songbird lays her clutch of three to four eggs just before or just after sunrise, but not all on the same day. The parents take turns feeding their young as often as four to 12 times an hour.

Just like their human companions on the earth, these creatures have a place of being at home where they experience care, nurturing and protection.
A Vision of Home Realized

Home has been foremost in our minds this past year as we watched our new convent come to completion and moved 80 of our sisters into their ‘new home.’ Along with all of the sisters, our entire administration and staff also moved into the new building.

We are so fortunate now to have a safe and homelike environment for our most frail sisters to live in safety and security. It is a blessing for us, and we are so grateful for the many persons who have helped us, and still are helping in bringing this endeavor to completion and ownership.

If you received one of our calendars this year, the theme we carry through the months is, “Home is where the heart is.” Our hearts figuratively signal our emotional state, and at times our physical wellbeing. It is not unheard of that significant events will trigger a heart attack.

There is a lot of advice available on how to maintain a healthy heart physically. Perhaps this is the year for each of us to experience a ‘homecoming’ in our hearts emotionally. Peace of heart relies on how we are in relationship with ourselves first, and then with those who are a significant part of our lives. Family, friends and co-workers come to mind immediately, but we can also include students, patients, staff and others as well.

We can learn a lot about homecoming from nature. How often we try to find out where a bird’s nest is, or where the squirrels scamper to as they cross our path, or wonder if the wild deer have a permanent home. These living creatures are out and about but always return to the safety and shelter of their homes.

It is not unheard of that cats and dogs return to former homes if their owners move to a new home. Many other species also make long trips, such as migrating birds and butterflies, to return to their place of origin. These living creatures have a homing instinct, but what we do not know is whether that is based solely in a place or the feeling of being at home as well.

May you be blessed in the coming year with the ability to pursue ‘homecoming’ in the ways most suited for your life. It is good to know that we always have a home in God’s heart.
Pets and people make great friends, and the relationships that are established can be priceless as well as indispensable. We think of domestic pets as dogs and cats most frequently. However, at one pet blessing, a pet snake was brought by its owner. The persons who see the potential in other animals have found pets among other species like birds, horses, pigs, gerbils, rabbits, and ducks, to name a few.

Many dogs, in addition to being wonderful pets, have proven to be very good at doing a job for a very long time. Watch dogs provide security and protection. Farmers and ranchers depend on dogs to herd other animals like cattle and sheep. We are familiar with guide dogs for the blind and police dogs. Today there are therapy dogs who visit nursing homes and hospitals, or provide relaxation for students at stressful times. All of these dogs are trained for their purpose and tasks.

A broader vision of how animals can help emotional health is taking hold and is not confined to dogs. For example, miniature horses also can provide guided sight for their owners. Llamas bring enjoyment in nursing facilities or with groups of children. Who doesn’t want to pet a llama? For those who have lost a lot in their lives, a bird, like a cockatoo, that has a long life, supplies not only assistance but assurance that it is not going to leave soon.

To explore this further, an internet search of ‘assistance animals’ provides information on the history, training and placement of animals and birds.

One of the events that the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi hold is a pet blessing in the fall near the feast of St. Francis of Assisi on October 4. Francis respected all of creation and the story told of him taming the wolf is one example of his caring nature. That event invites us to take good care of the animals around us so that we impart a feeling of belonging and respect to our pet or assistance animal.

(At left) Father Scott blessing animals during the 2018 Pet Blessing.
The Sisters of St. Francis weren’t the only ones to move to the new convent in May 2019. The bronze relief of St. Francis of Assisi that had graced the front entrance of the sisters’ Motherhouse for 60 years came along with them. His new home is against the east outside wall of St. Francis Convent in a beautiful garden setting.

In the 1950s, Mother Madeline Heimann commissioned Carl Wyland of Cologne, Germany, who specialized in architectural blacksmithing, to design and create a bronze Francis to be placed on the new front entrance of the Motherhouse (below). Along with several blacksmith assistants, they worked for 4,000 hours creating a bronze representation of Francis surrounded by birds and animals in a beautiful landscape bathed in sunlight. The piece is 16.4 feet wide, 26.25 feet long and weighs 1,800 pounds.

Before coming to Milwaukee, it was on display in at St. Michael Church in Cologne. Upon its arrival at the Motherhouse in January 1956, German hand-workers placed it on the marble façade that was waiting to receive Francis.

In the spring of 2019, Cornerstone Masonry began the tedious work of removing each piece of the relief and moving it to its new home. A grid had been made so that the pieces would be properly placed in their brick setting. It took longer than expected because of having an unusual cold spring. Consistent temperatures in the 40s were needed in order for the adhesive to stick.

From his new home (below), Francis invites the sisters to come and listen to the water in the fountain, to gaze on the beauty of the flowers and bushes, and to sit in the warmth of Brother Sun. Because he now faces Lake Drive, he also welcomes those who happen to walk or drive by, inviting them to join him in delighting in God’s creation.
Watch your mailbox for our new All Occasion cards being mailed this spring. If you would like to order cards or our lovely 2020 calendar (pictured on Page 3, please send an email request to: srmarcia@lakeosfs.org.

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.

Troubadour is a publication of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis, Wisconsin. Please send your comments and suggestions to: Editor - Troubadour
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