

FRANCISCAN CONNECTIONS

The Newsletter of the Associates of the
Hospital Sisters of St. Francis

“Sharing in a Franciscan way of life and a healing Spirit”

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Welcome New Associates

It was a joyful occasion on November 3, 2024, when the candidates signed their commitments during the Mass at St. Clare of Assisi Adoration Chapel celebrated by Father Stephen Boyle, O.Praem amid the company of the Hospital Sisters. Pictured are Sr. Maureen O’Connor, Sr. Marilyn McCormick, Kathleen Walden (Springfield), Rick Haberkorn (Springfield), Mike Sgro, and Nancy Davis ❖

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Associate Office

By Nancy Davis

The Gift

“The star that they had seen in the East went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. The wise men were overjoyed on seeing the star again.” Matthew 2:9-10

A few weeks before Christmas, I mentioned to a friend that I was feeling spiritually dry, and the response was that if I was looking for spiritual enlightenment to head straight to sacred scripture. While that was not the answer I was seeking, I took her suggestion and opened my Bible to the Gospel of Matthew. I didn’t get very far when I found the scripture regarding the wise men and the star.

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Associate Office

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Although Christmas is over, let us be mindful that the message of Christmas continues throughout the year. The passage presented the star as God's gift to the wise men as it was the thing that they needed to follow him. Even though they were Gentiles, God used that star to draw them to the child Jesus, the Messiah. The wise men represent all the peoples of non-Biblical religions and isn't it strange that the Jewish priests, chiefs of the people of God, did not receive notice of the birth of Jesus? Instead, God communicates the news to wise men in the non-Jewish world. The star was God's gift to them.

Another significant figure in the New Testament who received gifts was Joseph, the husband of Mary. His gifts were in the form of dreams in a very confusing time that led him to do God's will for himself, Mary, and Jesus. Joseph chose to follow God in the face of real challenges. His dreams were the gift. Likewise, the apostles, who were fishermen, went from catching fish to catching men – a gift.

These different gifts reminded me that God calls each of us in unique ways. I would have missed the star because that is not in my wheelhouse and because I don't pay attention to the stars (nor do I have the equipment or knowledge to grasp what the Magi saw). God gave them, along with the star, the gift of curiosity and the desire to follow it even though they had no idea where it would lead them. They followed with trust, and they hit the jackpot as they were among the first to honor Christ the King. They were indeed wise men as they were humble enough to recognize the gift, accept it, and share the gift with others.

In the 2005 movie *The Nativity Story*, a shepherd tells Joseph and Mary, outside of Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus, that we are all given gifts – something that is part of

who we are. The shepherd said his gift was the hope of waiting for the One. As a shepherd, he was among the first to greet the newborn king. That is a spectacular gift.

As we recognize the gifts in others, let us recognize the one-of-a-kind gifts God has given us. Consider a goal for 2025 to look at the gifts God has given you and use the gifts. Let God's will be done, and in doing so maybe you will consider yourself all the wiser. ❖

Address Change

Please use this address when sending mail to the Associate office or the Hospital Sisters. The Post Office Box address is no longer valid, and items will be returned to sender.

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Associate Volunteer Activities

by Nancy Davis



This year marks the 150th anniversary of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis in America. In addition, St. John's Hospital/Springfield, St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital/Effingham, St. Elizabeth's Hospital/O'Fallon, and St. Francis Hospital/Litchfield are also celebrating 150 years. The gift from the Sisters to the colleagues, physicians, and volunteers is a cookie that's packaged with the label "150th Anniversary, With joy and thanksgiving." The labeling of more than 3,000 cookies for St. John's Hospital was completed in early January by a team of Sisters and Associates in about 90 minutes.

Upcoming opportunities:

- St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital (803 cookies) - label on April 24 from 10-11:30 a.m.
- St. Francis Hospital (268 cookies) - label on October 14 from 10–11:30 a.m.
- St. Elizabeth's Hospital (1,282 cookies) – label on November 3 from 10-11:30 a.m.

More information to follow. ❖



150th Anniversary events

Save the date:

- July 6, 2025: picnic at 11:30 a.m.
- Sept. 21, 2025: concert at 4 p.m. in St. Francis of Assisi Church
- Nov. 2, 2025: All Souls' Day Service in Crucifixion Hill Cemetery (late afternoon)
- Nov. 8, 2025: Mass at 10:30 a.m. in St. Francis of Assisi Church ❖

SPIRIT MATTERS:

Gentle spirits inspire long after they leave

**By Jerrilyn Zavada
(Streator)**



A picture of my late Grandmother in a frame on the desk at my mom's house enchants me as I write today.

In this photo, she sits in her recliner, natural light shining gently on her deeply wrinkled, fair, Irish skin. She cradles my cousin's infant daughter, with deep love and tenderness in her eyes. The photo was taken mere months before Grandma died in 2014, which makes it extra special to many family members. The juxtaposition of Grandma at the end of her fully lived life, with Fiona at the beginning of hers, is truly remarkable. One of God's angels must have stepped in and snapped this shot at the perfect moment; so deeply beautiful and silently eloquent it is.

Although she was imperfect like the rest of us, Grandma was the most perfect example to me of what it means to have a gentle spirit. She spoke gently, carried herself gently, and lived gently. Grandma quietly and humbly went about her work as a farm wife and mother of seven children, and she truly loved working in her kitchen. She could whip up the most wonderful holiday feasts for our often-rowdy family, and there was always some delicious baked treat on her counter for anyone who stopped to visit on a Sunday afternoon. One of the hardest things she ever had to do in her 90s was to acknowledge she could no longer manage her kitchen as she once had and allow others to step in and help.

Though her daily life was often filled with chores, she also had a fantastically curious intellect. She was a voracious reader and volunteered at her local library. And, while she only had access to ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS, and FOX, she managed to skillfully find those programs that would whet her intellectual appetite. She challenged herself by dutifully watching "Jeopardy" and "Wheel of Fortune."

When the Chicago Tribune's Sunday edition came around, its weekly crossword puzzle was the first thing she grabbed and ultimately commanded. It was, and still is, a running joke in our family that my two aunts, both college-educated and intelligent in their own right, had to consult with Grandma if they wanted to complete the puzzle, as she had. And, in family Trivial Pursuit matches, everyone wanted Grandma on their team.

And yet, she carried herself with such humility and grace. Always. She wasn't showy about her faith, but her rosary and prayer cards were always next to her recliner on her end table, waiting to be picked up in any spare solitary moment.

One of my most prized possessions is a likeness of St. Therese of Lisieux that Grandma kept on her dresser for as long as I can remember. That image now sits on my nightstand, along with a small black-and-white picture of my two maternal great grandmothers, when they were young women. Although she has been gone for over 10 years, Grandma's gentle spirit continues to inspire us and guide us as we make our way through life's changing circumstances.

Who has been the gentlest spirit you have known? How has his or her example inspired gentleness in your life?

SPIRIT MATTERS is a weekly column that examines experiences common to the human spirit. Contact Jerrilyn Zavada Novak at jzblue33@yahoo.com to share how you engage your spirit in your life and community. ❖

Justice and Peace Connection

By Sister Mary Shaw,
ASC, D. Min



Time to Jam . . .

In April 1933, Dietrich Bonhoeffer raised the first voice for Church resistance to Hitler's persecution of Jews declaring that the Church must not simply "Bandage the victims under the wheel but jam a spoke in the wheel itself."

Pope Francis reminds us that no one can remain indifferent to the sufferings of others and that the Church is to be a field hospital. "I see clearly," the Pope states, "That the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds and you have to start from the ground up." (August 2013 America, Rome) No one is beyond redemption.

Bonhoeffer says that the "Ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children" while Pope Francis, in Laudato Si, challenges us to "Hear the inseparable cries of the earth and cries of the poor." We are called to care for our common home and ponder what we want to leave behind for the next generation. Being mindful of this requires hope and takes grace and trust in God. As Bonhoeffer says, "Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, without the cross and without Jesus Christ."

This month, may we be aware of human trafficking, social justice issues, and many other

issues so we can be a voice in the hope of righting what is wrong. Because we are in the field hospital with many wounded among us, we must share the graces of God by bandaging the wounds of injustice.

What issue grabs your attention and how will you be part of the medical team that brings healing? Remember that action springs not from thought but from a readiness for responsibility. ❖

IN LOVING MEMORY . . .

SISTER MARY LOUISE DURBIN, OSF

BORN – 03/01/1937

FIRST PROFESSION – 06/13/1957

DIED – 12/25/2024

ASSOCIATE ROBERT HORWATH

(SPRINGFIELD)

BORN – 03/20/1935

FIRST COMMITMENT – 2000

DIED – 12/20/2024

May they share with Jesus the joy and peace of heaven.

WE SUPPORT IN PRAYER . . .

- Gloria Guy (Decatur) who is being treated for medical problems
- Rick Kirchgessner (Springfield) who lost his father in December 2024
- Mary Reiser (Springfield) is in hospice care
- Pat Wright (Streator) who is being treated for medical problems
- For peace and justice in our country and for our newly elected leaders to lead with integrity and attention to justice and the common good.
- For our world and especially for peace in the Middle East and Ukraine as well as for all who suffer from homelessness locally or around the world.
- For all Associates, their families, and the Hospital Sisters ❖

Associate Advent and Christmas . . .

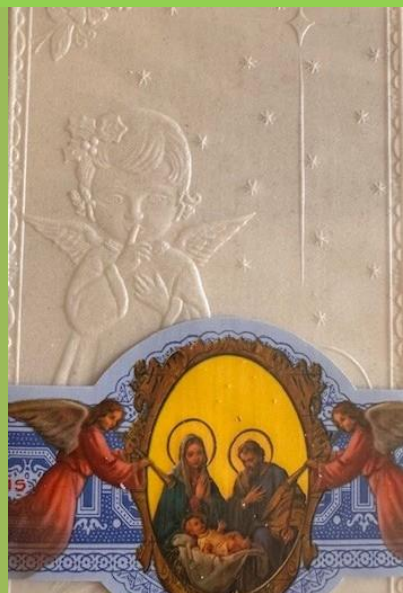
by Nancy Davis



On Thursday, December 12, 2024, the Annual Advent/Christmas Bingo Party was held in Bon Hall. Since it was the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, her image was the focus for the décor and the theme was “follow the star” in which the historical connection to Mary was shared. Mike and Margie Sgro hosted Bingo and we enjoyed an array of snacks.



There were several occasions for gatherings and celebrations with the Sisters and Associates for the holidays. On Tuesday, November 19, 2024, the Decatur Associates met for their holiday celebration at the home of Rosie Kuhlmann. There was a lovely meal of snacks and food from Rosie’s Filipino culture. ❖

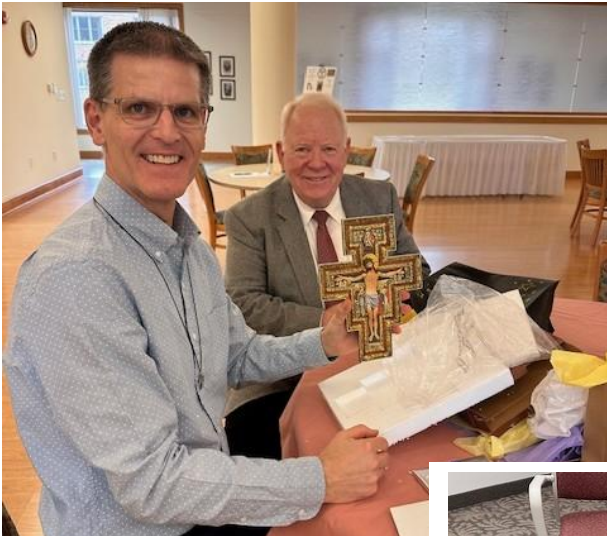


On Monday, December 16, 2024, the Streator Associates gathered at Chippers Restaurant. As in the past, Jerry Harcharik provided the group with the Slovakian Oplatky wafer (pictured left - unleavened wafers that symbolize Christ, the Bread of Life). We proceeded to take a turn giving thanks for the blessings of this year and shared what we are praying for in 2025. ❖



Candidate Commitment Retreat

On November 2-3, 2024, the Sisters welcomed two new Associates following their commitment retreat. The candidates and sponsors spent the weekend in fellowship and prayer as they discerned how they would fulfill a commitment to following the gospel in the spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare. ❖





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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Upcoming Associate Events . . .

February - On Thursday, February 20, 2025, at 6:30 p.m. in the Convent Family Room, Fr. Zach Samples will discuss the season of Lent. This presentation will also be available on Zoom. Please enter through at Convent Entrance.

March - On Thursday, March 20, 2025, at 6:30 p.m., Brian Blasco will present a summary of the American Province of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis Hospital Sisters amid their 150th anniversary. This presentation will also be available on Zoom. Please enter at Convent Entrance.

April - There will not be a meeting for the Springfield Associates due to Holy Week.

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