



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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Jubilee Celebration for 2021 Canceled

The Jubilee Celebration for 2021 has again been cancelled due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It was originally scheduled to take place on Saturday, July 31, 2021. There will be no public celebration for the Jubilarians. This fall there will be a Mass and meal celebrating the 2021 Jubilarians but attendance will be limited to the Hospital Sisters only. ❖

HAPPY 100TH



Happy belated birthday wishes to Sr. Leola Brown, who celebrated her 100th birthday on April 28, 2021. ❖

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Associate Office –
By Nancy Davis
- 3 Staying Franciscan . . .
- 4 Justice and Peace Connection –
By Sister Mary Shaw, ASC
- 5 Embracing the Brilliance of Beauty –
By Jerrilyn Zavada
- 6-7 Why I want to be an Associate . . .
- 7 Foundation Day –
By Nancy Davis

Associate Office

By Nancy Davis

More of Thee and Less of Me

Back in 2009 while I was a member of a Cursillo team, one of the speakers read these words from a very old hymn as part of her talk:

*More of Thee
And Less of Me,
Binds me closer
Lord to thee.
Burn out all Iniquity
Till there's nothing left
But Thee.*

For some reason these words touched a place

Continued on Page 2

Associate Office –

Continued from page 1

deep in my heart and since that time, I have tried to embrace this concept of "More of thee - Less of Me." The main supporting scripture for this call is John 3:30, the words of St. John the Baptist, "He must increase, I must decrease." So how do we allow God to increase in our lives? The harder question might be; how do we decrease that ego that keeps us looking out for number one? The Buddhists have a little axiom that explains more about ourselves than we would like. They say that you can understand most of what's wrong in the world and inside yourself by looking at a group-photo. Invariably you will look first at how you turned out before looking at whether or not this is a good photo of the group. "The world defines us by our ego. I am what I do. I am what I earn. I am what I own. When we let go of our ego and our resolutions, then we can become what God wants us to be. Suppose we just 'resolved' to let go and let God?" says Fr. Joseph Breighner. Basically, we assess the quality of things on the basis of how we are doing. Self-emptying to the point of "ouch" is one of life's most painful challenges. It requires radical self-surrender, courage, humility, and most of all faith. All God is asking us is that we be emptied of self and to desire only him. "The goal in maturing is not to kill the ego but rather to have a healthy ego, one that is integrated into a larger self. But this can only be achieved paradoxically: Jesus tells us that we can find life only by losing our lives. Only by denying our ego can we have a healthy ego." Fr. Ronald Rolheiser. How do you know if your ego is running your life instead of God? Here are a few clues: 1) you are easily offended; 2) you have the need to win; 3) you always want to be right; 4) you are always wanting more; or 5) you find your identity in your achievements. If any of these sound familiar, you may have some work to do. The challenge is to firstly be aware. That is the initial step to change and allowing

yourself to loosen the ego-strings a bit. If we can choose to allow our egos to run our lives, we can choose to allow God to run them instead. If we are already full of our own ideas, ways, and attitudes, our hearts become hardened and there is no room for God. We have to empty ourselves of attitudes that are foreign to the mind of Jesus, to clear out patterns that limit our worldview, to let go, as God invites us.

Here are a few techniques to learn to let go of our egos and enjoy life: practice forgiveness & letting go; practice honesty and being open; surrender your need for control; enjoy silent moments with yourself; pray; and practice gratitude. Sounds easier that it really is.

If one does practices these things, there will gradually be more of thee and less of me, however, this transformation, is a marathon and not a sprint. It involves, over and over, saying "no" to self and "yes" to God. It requires constant and ongoing conversion of heart, mind, and soul.

"The ego is a veil between humans and God." —Rumi ❖

WE SUPPORT IN PRAYER . . .

- Carol Gapsis (Effingham) whose husband, John, passed away on 7/17/21.
- Kathy Kovell (Eau Claire) who is dealing with multiple medical problems.
- Lynn Harcharik (Streator) who is recovering from surgery.
- Debbie Waitkus (Springfield) being treated for medical problems.
- All individuals suffering from the COVID-19 virus and those who are struggling emotionally, financially, and spiritually from this pandemic.
- For all our Hospital Sisters and Associates ❖

Staying Franciscan . .

Donna Schneeberger

(Green Bay)

**Year of Commitment –
1998**



My Associate journey began in 1997 after attending an informational Associate meeting at St. Vincent Hospital. It sparked my interest and I decided to pursue this relationship with the Hospital Sisters. After completing the required Associate formation meetings and spending three days at the Motherhouse in Springfield with my sponsor, Sr. Jonette Devlin, I made my commitment. I received a wooden Tau cross pin from Sr. Jonette and a peace dove silver brooch from Sr. Marybeth Culnan as a remembrance of this special occasion. These will be going with me on my final journey home.

Sr. Jonette has been not only my sponsor, but a mentor and great friend. On several occasions we drove to Springfield after work on Friday from Green Bay. We spent time with the Sisters and attended the local high school musicals directed by her sister. I got to know many of the Sisters on these little trips and was able to spend hours in the Adoration Chapel, St. Francis of Assisi Church, and walking the beautiful grounds. It is such a peaceful place.

St. Francis is my favorite saint, so it is fitting that the Franciscan Sisters I worked with or met at the Motherhouse over the last 56 years are the biggest reason I continue to be an Associate. There was always a special aura at St. Vincent Hospital when the Sisters were present there. The Sisters who have impacted my life are many and there is not room to mention them all.

As I age, I find that prayer has become more and more important in my life. It is one of the parts of our Associate commitment and usually receives the most focus in my recommitment goals to remain an Associate. I have always been the quiet one at our Associate activities, but am a

Continued on Page 4

Mary Handley

(Springfield)

**Year of Commitment –
1997**



My journey with the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis began in 1979 when my husband and I were both teaching at Stephen Decatur High School in Decatur. We're not Catholic and were not attending any church at that time. We were supportive of all our students involved in high school activities, and we attended sporting events, concerts, plays, and dances. One day, two of my students asked me if my husband and I would attend a Teens Encounter Christ (TEC), a retreat for high school students, at the Franciscan Apostolic Center (FAC) at the Motherhouse. We did. This was a life-changing retreat for both of us. We were the teachers in the classroom – but the teens afforded us the opportunity for a spiritual depth we couldn't imagine.

For 41 years I have been connected with, mentored by, and prayed for by the Franciscan Sisters. They have enriched my life through their spiritual programs. They have sustained me in prayer through trying times. They have challenged me to grow in my faith. I became an Associate as a result of my relationship with the Franciscan Sisters and their spirit. As an Associate for over 20 years, I have been a recipient of much of their spiritual wisdom that has graced my life.

I served as a Certified Catholic Chaplain at St. John's Hospital in Springfield as well as St. Mary's Hospital in Decatur. As the Director of Mission at St. Mary's, I was afforded the opportunity to take many employees to the Motherhouse to meet the Sisters and learn about their history. A number of those employees were so touched by the Sisters' stories that they, too, became Associates.

I will always be grateful for the blessings all the sisters have been to me. That first trip to the FAC was the beginning of my own spiritual journey. ❖

Justice and Peace Connection

**By Sister Mary
Shaw, ASC**



**Re- Member:
ONE FAMILY . . .**

August 23 is a day we recall and remember internationally the Slave Trade and its Abolition. This occurrence was significant this year as we recall the accounts of George Floyd, Daunte White, Adam Toledo and so many more who died horrific deaths at the hands of law enforcement. Now we have an opportunity to respond to a call from Pope Francis “For healing in our relationships with God, our neighbors, and the Earth itself. Through the Laudato Si’ Action Platform, we are walking the ‘path to renewal’ together” (LS202). Pope Francis called George Floyd by name twice, and offered support to an American bishop who knelt in prayer during a Black Lives Matter protest. (AP June 10, 2020) This too is a strong call to us to stand up and end the sin of racism. In 1619, twenty African slaves arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, the first on record in the colonies that would eventually become the United States. Slavery was seen as necessary for the economic profit of landowners in the USA and unjust structures and systems have continued to affect the freed slaves and their descendants the past 150 years plus. (Education for Justice Fact Sheet) On May 25, 2021, Pope Francis began a program to put Laudato Si’ into action throughout the Church. The program has seven goals to be achieved within a seven-year timeframe and I will mention two: Defending all life and Solidarity with Indigenous and Vulnerable Groups. If you are not sure who falls into these two goals, pause and ask yourself whom did the Coronavirus 19 impact the most? Who suffers more at the

hands of law enforcement? Pope Francis reminds us, that “there is an inseparable bond between concern for nature and, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (LS10). St. Francis of Assisi calls us to see all as brothers and sisters regardless of race, color or creed. It is time for you and me to act to help save the Earth and each other for we are inseparable. We know that there is an absence of respect for human dignity at the border and in our treatment of African Americans, Asian Americans, Indigenous and the Poor White. Pope Francis helps us to see that an “integral ecology calls for openness...that takes us to the heart of what it is to be human” (LS 11). We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family. Do we hear the cries? Let us recall Jesus’ preferential option for the poor, then let us petition our legislators to formulate just policies that seek to empower the less fortunate. Let us care for the Earth, plant a tree, grow a vegetable garden and give the abundance to the poor. Let us stand with those discriminated against and be a Good Samaritan, attending to not only their wounds, cries and pains but actively doing something positive to stop it. Choosing not to act is to act and we need to make a choice. As we remember and recall the history of slavery in this country and the enormous sufferings inflicted and the human lives destroyed, let us try to en flesh the two goals mentioned and allow this to be our opportunity of grace to enable us to take action and improve the lot of the less fortunate. Only together can we mend the garment humanity... let us encounter the other. ❖

Donna Schneeberger

Continued from page 3

good listener. Even though I have had to give up some of my parish ministries, I still do baking for church events as part of my Franciscan commitment to ministry. I also remain active in the monthly Associate gatherings. ❖

Embracing the Brilliance of Beauty . . .

By **Jerrilyn Zavada**
(Streator)



This week I began a new spiritual practice. I have formed the intention of posting an image each day on my Facebook page that celebrates the abundance of beauty around us, with the hope of inspiring others to do the same. So far, I have posted a photo of a cup of strawberry-rose iced tea and an image of the flowers on the front porch, after giving them a much longed for drink of water.

Beauty really is everywhere, often in the places we least expect. To be sure, I have always thrived on immersing myself in the beauty of the natural world. I have just never formed a concrete practice to reinforce that search.

I hope this new practice will intensify my experience and appreciation for this beauty. For those of us who have an affinity toward Saint Francis of Assisi, this love for the natural world only makes sense. A love for all of creation is one of the wonderful pillars of Franciscan spirituality. And for those of us who have been fortunate to spend any length of time at the Chiara Center in Springfield, we have seen with our own eyes – not to mention, experienced with our other senses – the overflowing love for creation the sisters have, that makes this spirituality so inviting.

After all, God is Beauty. And through the practice of Franciscan spirituality, and our appreciation and respect for, all of Creation, we come to know the heart of God in so many intimate ways. It is as though our Creator is constantly putting on a variety show for our senses, but not in a loud, “look-at-me” sort of way. Our Creator is nothing, if not humble.

Although we are in the process of emerging from a collective lockdown thanks to the Coronavirus, it is no secret that in general, the society in which we live is constantly on the go, and, worse yet,

constantly trying to distract itself from any number of things.

The problem with distracting ourselves, whether it be with electronics; numerous social engagements and obligations; long hours of work and so on, is that we miss out on the Beauty of God that is all around us – as Saint Francis said himself, it is “everywhere, everywhere, everywhere.” And this Beauty of God is the one thing that can satisfy our souls the most. Indeed, it is the primary gift we have been given to heal all illnesses of body, mind and spirit in the most profound and life-giving way.

Even though as I get a little older, the distinct, sometimes extreme nature of weather in each season gets a little more challenging to handle, I would not want to live anywhere else than where I do right now. I remember in an Earth Science class in college, my teacher pointing out that we at 40 degrees north latitude experience the seasons in their fullness, more than any other locale on the planet. Think about that for a minute.

Every day of the year, we can walk outside our doors and experience the Beauty of God in so many magnificent ways – even when it is as elemental as the green grass on which we walk or the softness of the falling snow, where we can leave, at least for a moment in time, evidence of where we have walked while on this planet.

One of my favorite writers is the late Irish poet and philosopher John O’Donohue. He died in his early 50s in 2008, but his brilliant, imaginative, lilting voice remains in our midst, both in his written works and recordings that are available around the Internet. His work is a real expression of the reality that our spirits are indeed immortal. One of his books that I highly recommend is “Beauty: The Invisible Embrace.” Like the rest of his works, this book, traditional and audio, takes the reader on an adventure of the mind, soul, spirit and heart that is all-too-rare these days.

My prayer for each of you in the coming months is that your life will be filled with a deeper awareness of the beauty that is everywhere, everywhere, everywhere in our midst. ❖

Why I want to be an Associate of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis . . .

(Formal Commitment – November 5-7)



Mary Kay DeGroot
Springfield, IL

“On July 22, 1962, I spent my first night as a freshman at St. John’s Hospital School of Nursing. I did not realize on that first night the impact the Hospital Sisters would have on my life. There was a constant Franciscan presence displayed by the Sisters in the nursing program and I saw Franciscan values actualized in the respectful care that was provided to patients. I now appreciate the opportunity to have learned from some of the best – the Sisters who provided examples of God’s love and guidance during my formative period learning nursing. After graduation, for the next 30 years, I worked in various nursing roles at St. John’s Hospital and I experienced the actualization of the core values of respect, care, competence and joy. I wish to continue to embrace the tenets of the Franciscan way of life. I want to live my religion every day – honoring Christ through loving Him and serving His people.” ❖

“I have always felt drawn to St. Francis and his life. Even as a young child, I was drawn to him. I felt drawn to his simplicity, his peaceful way of life. Once I began working at HSHS and learned more about St. Francis and the Hospital Sisters, the Franciscan way of living the Gospel and bringing Christ’s healing love to others appealed to me. It gave my life purpose. I want to be Franciscan to draw closer to Christ and to have Christ use my life to bring others to Him through the Franciscan way of life. I want to bring Christ’s healing love to others through my work, in my parish, and in my community. I want to be Franciscan to learn from the Hospital Sisters and other Associates how to better live the healing charism in my daily life. I want to carry on the Sisters’ legacy.” ❖



Melissa Marchant
Green Bay, WI



Rita Nortrup
Springfield, IL

“I graduated from St. John’s Hospital School of Nursing in 1967 and had many of the Sisters as my teachers of my various nursing studies. Upon graduation, I was employed as a staff nurse at St. John’s Hospital and I continued to work there for the next 37 years. In 1976, I was asked by Sr. Mary Kelly to develop a GI Unit which I did and managed this unit for the next 27 years. At this time, I wanted to slow down my pace and work part time so I applied for a staff nurse position at the Motherhouse in Loretto Home. I worked there for the next 14 years and advanced to a management position. It was an honor and a privilege to provide nursing care for the Sisters who had founded and operated their hospitals in Illinois and Wisconsin.

Continued on Page 7

Why I want to be an Associate (Continued)

Continued from Page 6 –

I knew about the Associates Program and not sure why I didn't pursue this path much sooner. I know I want this program to be a part of my life. I am very excited to become a Franciscan Associate. This will allow me to continue to provide service to the Sisters who have played a huge role in my life." ❖



David Wehrwein
Sheboygan, WI

"I really didn't know much about the Franciscans until 2000 when the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis built a home next door to my home for Sisters Renelle Brueggeman and Elvon Huser who served at St. Nicholas Hospital in Sheboygan. They invited my mother (who lived with me) and I over for coffee, and what initially started out to be a once-a-week event, turned into 4-5 times a week by the time they returned to Springfield in November of 2009. When I retired in 2013, with Sr. Renelle in mind, I started volunteering at St. Nicholas Hospital in the patient admitting area and attended Mass at the hospital. With Sr. Renelle as my role model, I try and greet everybody with a hello and a smile in the hallways, and to be as helpful as I can as St. Francis did during his life." ❖

What a difference another year makes!! Foundation Day post COVID . . .

The Sisters celebrated their Foundation Day on Friday, July 2, 2021 to commemorate the day that Fr. Christopher Bernsmeyer welcomed the first women who would become the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis. Mass was celebrated and the Sisters shared a meal together and they were grateful that all the Sisters were able to attend this year, as last year the Satellite Sisters were not able to enter the Motherhouse due to COVID. Mike and Margie Sgro and I shopped, on behalf of the Associates, for treats for the Sisters in recognition of their special day. It was wonderful to be able to welcome Mike and Margie back to the Motherhouse to help prepare the treat baskets. ❖





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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Upcoming Events . . .

August offering - Thursday, August 19, 2021 at 6:30 p.m., Fr. Dennis Koopman, OFM, will present a Zoom Meeting on how St. Francis changed the world in four areas of our lives. This will be a very interesting presentation and I hope you will be able to join us.

August - Small group Zoom meetings for the Illinois groups at the regular day/time, with the exception of Highland which will meet on the second Wednesday instead of the first Wednesday of the month.

September- Our Annual Sister/Associates retreat. Unfortunately, it will have to be virtual, but I hope as many of you as possible will be able to join us. Our presenter will be Sr. Maureen Irvin, OSF, who is a Franciscan Sister as well as an Associate of our Hospital Sisters. The retreat is entitled: Everything is Beautiful and she will be exploring the role of beauty in our Franciscan spirituality. The date will be Saturday, September 18 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Zoom. There will be an hour break for lunch and Since the Chiara Center has been permanently closed, any events in the remainder of the 2021 calendar year that were to take place there have been cancelled.