



# 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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## Transitus

By Nancy Davis

Like everything else in 2020, the lovely liturgical celebration of the Transitus in St. Francis of Assisi Church, looked different too. On Saturday night, October 3, 2020, the celebration was held, but the church, typically flowing with Sisters, Brothers, Associates and other guests, was sparsely filled with socially distanced Hospital Sisters and just a few other invited religious. Fr. Dennis Koopman, OFM, was the celebrant.

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### Associate Office

By Nancy Davis

#### The Vulnerability of St. Francis

I recently took an e-course about the Spirituality of St. Francis. In one of the lessons, it talked about the fact that St. Francis was comfortable with being vulnerable and living with uncertainty. “Some of us live lives filled with basic certainties. We don’t worry much about shelter, food, employment, healthcare. But all of a sudden it can change. We know that too. We tend to be grateful for the good, and keep our fingers crossed that the bad won’t come. The spirit of St. Francis suggests, instead, that we embrace — and even practice — vulnerability.” If I am truly following the Franciscan spirituality, the question was asked: What might you do today or tomorrow to be vulnerable on purpose?

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## Associate Office –

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The dictionary meaning of the word vulnerable is: *susceptible to physical or emotional attack or harm.* Initially my reaction was, who would choose that?

I don't think I ever thought about St. Francis living or practicing vulnerability per se, but he surely did, every day of his life after his conversion. He gave up the certainties of his privileged life to become poor, to become perpetually vulnerable, to trust unequivocally in the providence of God and his will in his life. This is radical. However, I have to admit that when I was asked and challenged to practice vulnerability in my own life, I frankly had to sit on this a bit. To become vulnerable on purpose means trusting. It means letting go of certainties. It means risking something of myself. It means scary and unsure. It means welcoming the critics, the ones not in the arena. It means listening for the voice of Jesus and answering it with a big "Yes, Lord!" It means surrendering, even if on a small scale. It means walking the talk, instead of just talking the talk. It means being courageous.

I think of our Hospital Sisters and the vulnerability it required to say, "yes" to their vocation or later as they set off on new mission assignments, sometimes in other parts of the world. I am sure that many of them also had to commit to this practice multiple times in their lives. I noticed in rereading the passage above, the author suggests not just practicing vulnerability but embracing it. So how does one embrace vulnerability? Might that also mean I have to embrace the suffering that could come along with it? The difference in these two things, vulnerability and suffering, at least on the surface seems to be related in a way to choice. Sufferings come uninvited...illness, death, trouble with kids or parents or grandkids, loss of a job, betrayal by a friend, but we must accept and embrace them as part of God's plan for us, just as Jesus and St. Francis willingly accepted their terrible sufferings. But do I really want to choose opening myself up to what sufferings might come if I allow myself to be vulnerable?

As I thought more about it, I realized that embracing vulnerability means first listening closely to the voice of God, and then choosing to open myself up to situations that could bring emotional risk, exposure, and uncertainty. It is placing myself in situations that could cause personal suffering and doing it anyway. It means letting go of perfectionism, which is an illusion, and taking the chance. We saw what happened when St. Francis embraced vulnerability. I wonder how different my life would be should I start choosing to be vulnerable and successfully embracing whatever outcome happens? ❖

## Being Truly Thankful

By Madisyn Taylor

Often when we practice being thankful, we go through the process of counting our blessings, acknowledging the wonderful people, things and places that make up our reality. While it is fine to be grateful for the good fortune we have accumulated, true thankfulness stems from a powerful comprehension of the gift of simply being alive, and when we feel it, we feel it regardless of our circumstances. In this deep state of gratitude, we recognize the purity of the experience of being, in and of itself, and our thankfulness is part and parcel of our awareness that we are one with this great mystery that is life.

It is difficult for most of us to access this level of consciousness as we are very caught up in the ups and downs of our individual experiences in the world. The thing to remember about the world, though, is that it ebbs and flows, expands and contracts, gives and takes, and is by its very nature somewhat unreliable. If we only feel gratitude when it serves our desires, this is not true thankfulness. No one is exempt from the twists and turns of fate, which may, at any time, take the possessions, situations, and people we love away from us. Ironically, it is sometimes this kind of loss that awakens us to a

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## Musings from Chiara

By Dan Frachey

### Reflections of Love and Mercy . . .



As disciples of Jesus Christ, who also seek a mentor and guide in Francis and Clare, I imagine you too have had those moments when Divine Love gently bids you to sit down and then holds a mirror in order for you to gaze upon the self within. Without the assurance and trust that we have in this Divine Love, we would run away and become like most of those in our country who suffer from the silent epidemic called *self-loathing*. Yes, Richard Rohr states that this disease is rampant and all too often left unchecked and thus, unhealed. Rohr also says that if we don't seek to heal the pain at the root of this self-loathing, *we'll transmit it to others*. Francis is truly like Sister Moon who reflects the blazing light of Brother Sun; allowing us to more gently see ourselves in this secondary reflection of God. What does this look like for us who are striving to be like Christ? Like Francis?

For Francis, medieval Italy was a complicated place and time with regards to church and state which were very blurred realities then. There was great enmity between the people of Assisi, who were aligned with the Imperial forces of the Holy Emperor, and their archrival neighbors in nearby Perugia who stood as a papal city. This indeed is a long story but for now, know that the 16-year-old Francis, an emerging hothead given to the political tumult of his day, was more than happy to join his fellows from Assisi to storm the papal controlled Rocca Maggiore; a papal-controlled fortress to protect the wealthiest people in Assisi during attacks. This incident, along with his seemingly chivalrous venture to go to war with Perugia, became a mirror of reality to Francis. Francis saw his own ugliness and the futility of perpetual hate, fear, and violence between fellow humans.

So when the transformed Francis hands me a mirror so that I might see my own false self, there is no judgment in him. As my face lowers from his to gaze and to confront myself in that mirror of mercy, it's as if I am in the caves at Carceri on Mount Subasio outside Assisi where Francis wrestled with his own demons. Even as I take pains to continue looking, Francis jokes with me to ease the hardship. *"Do you see these rips and tears on my habit? Well, they mirror what my inner self is like so misery loves company, ok?"* May we all continue to accept Francis and Clare's invitations to these moments because of how they help us to see our own potential and deeply inherent beauty. May we too be kind and merciful to those we dislike who are at the same time looking at their own mirrors. ❖

## Associate Coming Attractions

By Nancy Davis, Associate Coordinator

Since the Chiara Center has remained closed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the remainder of the year's Associate activities will be on Zoom. We will not be able to gather for the Christmas party celebrations in person, but I am planning to have virtual Christmas Parties for all locations. So please mark your calendar for your regularly scheduled meeting time in December and look forward to some virtual fun. This is fluid as I am exploring potential ideas for the parties. I will keep you posted via email.

I am currently working on the 2021 calendar for all locations. At present I am securing speakers that will be willing to present either virtually or in person since I just don't know what the future will bring for us regarding in-person gatherings. I am trying to arrange interesting presenters that you will be excited to hear in the new year.

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# Justice and Peace Connection

By Sister Mary Shaw, ASC



## Our Political Responsibility

By now, the election is either over or days away, depending upon publication. We hear as we approach voting day, "I am not sure for whom to vote this time." The Church has given us rich fodder upon which to ruminate and make clear choices. We are reminded that faithful citizens step up, let go of personal agenda, and work for the common good. Yes, we are called to live with our choices, and that is maturity, that is responsibility.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in their introduction to Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, say: "As Catholics, we bring the richness of our faith to the public square and draw from both faith and reason. We seek to affirm the dignity of the human person and the common good of all." "Good Catholics immerse themselves in politics by offering the best of themselves so that the leader can govern" (Pope Francis, 9/16/13).

In this season of Thanksgiving and remembering, let us re-member and re-group regardless of who is/was elected and pause, take stock of our heart and see where I am living the Beatitudes and the teachings of Jesus...especially of active non-violence. Where am I loving or refusing to love? Am I Christ centered or issue centered? If I am to be concerned about the common good, Christ must be the center of my life and my choices.

Our Catholic social teachings remind each of us that all are made in the Image of Dei... and possess an equal and inalienable worth. Thus, we (I) have a right to what I need that will enable me to live to my full potential as intended by my Creator.

As we reflected on the Season of Creation, we also made mention that there is a call here to contemplate upon the 'season of my life'...emotionally and psychologically. Am I seasoning my life with rich encounters with only those who can repay me or stroke my ego? Or am I, like St. Francis, seasoning my life with the lepers, those who can give me nothing in return. But wait! The so-called lepers just may be giving me an opportunity to be the healing presence of Christ.

Oh wonderful November that gives us time to stop, pause, and give thanks for so much. We recall those who came before us, may they rest in peace. We re-member and re-group and perhaps ponder the principles that Catholic social teaching offers us: the dignity of each person; family and community; rights and responsibilities; preferential option for the poor; the dignity of work and the rights of the worker and solidarity with the other, and the care of creation. Yes, we are called to respect all CREATION and to divest of our personal interests so as to hear the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor.

Saint Francis of Assisi left us a legacy to build on. It is a charism to heal and protect all the lepers we encounter. May this be the life-giving attitude we bring to the polling booth and the days that follow. A Happy Thanksgiving. ❖

## WE SUPPORT IN PRAYER . . .

- Mary Jo Seiz (Springfield) who is undergoing medical treatment.
- Jim Klees (Eau Claire) for his brother, Andy, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- Mike Mueller (Springfield) who lost his father, Robert.
- Rosemary Salzman (Green Bay) who has recently undergone surgery and for her sister, Rita, recovering from COVID-19.
- Denny Kirchgessner (Springfield) for his sister-in-law, Helena, who is recovering from a stroke.
- All individuals suffering from the COVID-19 virus and those who are struggling financially, emotionally, or spiritually from this pandemic.
- Our Hospital Sisters ❖

# Being Franciscan . . .

## Sheila Weber

(Highland)

Year of Commitment –  
2018



Being an Associate means that I have met new people who are like minded in their love of Christ and serving others in their own special way. Four of my fellow associates and I live in the same retirement village. I was privileged to have Sister Marilyn McCormick as my sponsor. I know Sister Marilyn from when she served at St. Joseph's Hospital in Highland.

I try to live the Franciscan way of life by seeing Christ in others, loving nature, and loving all God's creatures. I love to read, crochet, knit and cross stitch. I have belonged to my church choir for over 35 years, first as a soprano and now as an alto. I don't have a whole lot of family, mostly cousins and I never married. My household includes 4 cats. ❖

## Diane Tebrugge

(Springfield)

Year of Commitment –  
2017



I have worked with and for the Hospital Sisters since 1981. I was first hired by Sister Ritamary Brown to work in the kitchen at HSHS St. John's Hospital while pursuing my education in Radiology. Over the years, I had the opportunity to finish school and advance my career. My work continued for St. John's until I transferred to the System Service Center in 2016. A month prior to my transfer, I lost my sister-in-law, Laura, to cancer and went through a very difficult period of grieving. That summer, I learned about the Associate program and knew this was a path I not only wanted to go explore but also needed in my life. Carol Coleman was kind enough to be my sponsor. I have known Carol for over 25 years, and she offered much support during my candidate sessions. Over the years, Carol has been my friend and mentor in which she brings much joy to those who interact with her.

I am at a point in my life where I am seeking simplicity. Prior to the pandemic, I felt as if I was constantly on the go and going in many different directions. I have since slowed down and focused on what is really important in life. The Sisters have taught me the importance of self-care and the need to do this in order to serve others. This is especially important in today's world with the pandemic around us.

I share what my sister-in-law, Laura, shared with me prior to her death, "Live in such a way that those who know me but don't know God will come to know God because they know me." My hope is to be that person who is of service to others as an Associate of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis. ❖

## Christmas Party Past . .



## Christmas Party 2020 . .

#####CANCELED#####

## Reflections of My Saints . . .

By Jerrilyn Zavada  
(Streator)



Year of Commitment –  
2019

By the time you read this, another All Saints' Day will be in the books.

It is by far one of my favorite days on the Church calendar, and I personally tend to experience a special closeness to the communion of saints throughout the month of November.

I wear a chain around my neck most of the time with various saint medals on it. It is one of my most prized possessions. One of the reasons I like it so much is because saints of such diverse character and personality join together to remind me of qualities to which I aspire, or are people whom I wish to pray for me.

St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, who were close friends on this side of existence, remind me of my love for and desire to grow in contemplative prayer.

St. John Paul II and St. Teresa of Calcutta represent two people whom I have seen with my own eyes change the world by their witness to Christ.

St. Francis de Sales, patron saint of writers and journalists, always is by my side to confide my dreams and aspirations for growing as a writer.

The other, more well-known Francis, St. Francis of Assisi, reminds me of my desire to do everything with a gentle spirit, and one of simplicity at that. Not to mention my love for animals. He reminds me to care for our four-legged brothers and sisters, as they were given to us to love and protect.

And then there are the Archangels: Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, as well as my guardian angel, each charged with caring for me, guiding me and protecting me in different ways.

My most recent addition is St. Benedict, popularly known as a protection against evil, but I also am a fan of Benedictine spirituality, practiced by most monastics, so he serves two important purposes on my chain.

Finally, I have two miraculous medals, both blessed — one by Pope John Paul II on the occasion of his 25th Anniversary as pope, and another I found in the back of St. Michael the Archangel Church in Streator. They feature the likeness of our Blessed Mother, my absolute favorite saint, mentor, and friend.

I don't believe these medals hold any special powers on their own, but they are blessed sacramentals, and things just seem to go more smoothly when I wear them around my neck.

Most importantly, they remind me of how a life lived for Christ on this side of eternity can influence and be a blessing to the lives of so many others down through the centuries, long after we're gone.

All you saints, pray for us. ❖

### Associate Coming Attractions

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I am really proud of all of you for stepping up and learning the technology or being willing to call in and remain a part of our community in these most uncertain of times. A big thank you to the Hospital Sisters for supporting me in this effort and for providing the Zoom account. I also appreciate your patience with me as I have learned this new technology and have had to fly by the seat of my pants on many occasions. I welcome any feedback on how I can do this better and would entertain suggestions for topics for 2021. Thank you.

Thursday, November 19, 2020 at 6:30 p.m.

Presentation by Fr. Richard Chiola

Topic: Advent

(This will be the singular offering for all Associate groups for November) ❖

## Transitus By Nancy Davis

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If you have never attended the Transitus, I would highly recommend you put it on your 2021 calendar now as it is one of the loveliest celebrations I have ever attended. There is hauntingly beautiful period music and a solemn ceremony with a relic on display and the bells ring signaling the passing over of St. Francis's life unto death, in the darkness of the church. Traditionally, here, at the Motherhouse, bread is blessed during the service and the congregation quietly processes out following the Sisters who are carrying the bread. All gather in Bon Hall to partake of the bread and for a reception.



Just as a refresher, the Transitus of St. Francis is a celebration of the passage of the saint from his earthly life to the glory of heaven. This is celebrated by Franciscans all over the world every year on Oct. 3. Franciscan Friars, Sisters, Associates, and others gather on the vigil of the feast of St. Francis, October 4, and commemorate the death of their beloved founder and brother.

Transitus is a Latin word which means "passage" or "crossing over." In all of the accounts written about the death of St. Francis, it is always remarked that he



crossed from earthly life to eternal life with the Lord, filled with joy and having written his *Canticle of Creation*. In celebrating the Transitus, we are reminded that death is a part of life, that the final journey of our earthly existence is nothing to be feared, but to be celebrated and embraced. For it is only through death that we come to the full joy of the Lord.

I hope we will all be able to celebrate this with the Hospital Sisters in 2021. ❖

## Being Truly Thankful

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thankfulness that goes deeper than just being grateful when things go our way. Illness and near-miss accidents can also serve as wake-up calls to the deeper realization that we are truly lucky to be alive.

We do not have to wait to be shaken to experience this state of being truly thankful for our lives. Tuning in to our breath and making an effort to be fully present for a set period of time each day can do wonders for our ability to connect with true gratitude. We can also awaken ourselves with the intention to be more aware of the unconditional generosity of the life force that flows through us regardless of our circumstances. ❖



Associate Office  
Hospital Sisters of St. Francis  
P.O. Box 19431  
Springfield, IL 62794-9431

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

### Upcoming Events . . .

**Beginning January 4, 2021**– Weekly zoom gatherings called Chiara Chats at San Damiano are moving to Tuesday nights so as to avoid conflicts with Associate meetings. Check our Facebook page or our Chiara Light e-newsletter for coming programs.

**Coming in January:** Join in a reading group that will take up Pope Francis' latest encyclical letter Fratelli Tutti. Watch Chiara Light for an invitation and survey as to dates and times.

To register for any of the Chiara-sponsored events, visit the Events section of our website [www.chiaracenter.org](http://www.chiaracenter.org) or call us at 217-523-0901. 10% discount for Associates.

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