



# 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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February 2026



St. Clare of Assisi Adoration Chapel decorated for Christmas 2025. The Sisters and liturgical staff do such a beautiful job preparing the chapel to celebrate the coming of the Savior. The environment adds so much to the spirituality of the blessed season. We were able to enjoy the decorations until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on January 11, 2026. ❖

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## Associate Office

By Nancy Davis

### St. Francis – 800 Years Later

In 2026, Franciscans around the world will celebrate the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi. He died on October 3, 1226 in the Portiuncula in Assisi, Italy.

From January 10, 2026, to January 10, 2027, Pope Leo XVI proclaimed a special Jubilee Year. For the first time, the remains of Francis will be displayed for veneration from February 22 to March 26 in Assisi, Italy.

In the decree, Pope Leo hoped that every Christian would follow the example of St. Francis of Assisi,

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## Associate Office

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striving to become a model of holiness of life and a constant witness of peace. For St. Francis, the key to his ministry was peace. He tried to convey to his friars and every believer that the inner wonder of the Gospel that had come into his life was that peace is the sum of all God's gifts, a gift that comes from above. St. Francis knew that human efforts alone could never bring the peace of Christ that we are all called to, and he was inspired by the words of Jesus Christ in the upper room after the resurrection, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19), and Francis went forth to proclaim this peace. Francis did not have all the answers, but he had the authentic source of peace in his heart. Just as Jesus reversed the inclination of the human heart by becoming one with the outcast, the enemy, the leper, and those who were sick in body and spirit, St. Francis did his best to imitate that by bringing those on the margins into his circle of friendship and love. This ability to find peace is always a divine quality, but the Lord fills us with his power of love and forgiveness, thus helping us to do the same.

Like Francis, we strive for peace that has to begin in our own hearts. It is not limited to human relations but to all of God's creation. Pope Leo noted that Francis extended his desire for peace to "Brother Sun" and "Sister Moon," recognizing in every creature a reflection of divine beauty. Francis lived believing in the interconnectedness of our being with all of God's creation. Pope Leo also stated the urgency of this call for peace in today's world. Our common home is crying out in exploitation and is threatened alongside humanity.

St. Francis brings this call of universal reconciliation, and Pope Leo hopes that the Christian family will embrace this call this Jubilee Year.

Here are some practical ways to promote peace:

1. Stay in the present moment. We often give away our peace to our imagination by worrying about things that may not materialize and ruining the moment with the anxieties of the next or things of the past.
2. Try praising God for every little miracle, even as you are praying for greater things. The little things can be seemingly insignificant: a beautiful day, a patch of flowers seen on a walk, and an unexpected visit from a friend.
3. Defend your daily peace. Some of the noise of the world is inevitable, and we cannot escape it. But it's important to recognize that we are choosing some of this noise, so limit exposure to news or social media that disrupts your peace.
4. Creating peace by spending time in prayer and solitude, being merciful to others, tending carefully to the relationships in your life, and share small acts of kindness for yourself and others.
5. Living more simply and spending time in nature.
6. Coming to peace with things that can't change, whether that be on a global scale or in our own homes, by praying for these situations and asking God to help you be at peace.

Archbishop Domenico Sorrentino of Assisi, who was present at the ceremony declaring the Franciscan Jubilee Year at the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels, said, "The wish I make is to everyone and to the entire Church to rediscover this saint of ours, to rediscover Jesus, the only source of joy and peace.

This is first in a four-part series on the Jubilee Year of St. Francis. ❖

## Justice and Peace Connection

By Sister Mary Shaw,  
ASC, D. Min



### The Word . . .

In the beginning was the Word; the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning. The Word was made flesh and He lived among us. (Prologue from Gospel of St John)

God still lives among us, in the Scriptures, Eucharist, and all creation. Matthew 25 captures it: as long as you did it to the least among you, you did it to me.

As we enter a new year of grace, may we recognize the other. May we resolve to stop, listen, and engage with others. While February is heart month, perhaps we can consider this resolution to touch our hearts:

R resolve  
E engage  
S sisters/brothers  
O others  
L lavishly/lovingly  
U unique  
T treasured  
I individuals  
O One in His Image  
N numinous  
S Synodal

This resolution will transform us to be beacons of hope because the one we meet will transform us as the leper transformed St. Francis of Assisi. May our presence to one another transform us also to be His eucharistic presence to all we meet. ❖

## Future of the Associates

By Nancy Davis

As we look to our future, I am pleased to share that the Leadership Team desires that we continue, even without the Sisters leading us and participating with us. The Associate committee (four Associates and four Sisters) recommended 10 Associates with a mix of age, years of association, geography, and religious affiliation serve and the following serve on the new committee: Nancy Davis (chairperson), Brian Blasco, Mike Sgro, Mike Mueller, Vikki Warren, Chris Schmit, and John Marruffo (Springfield), Carol Gapsis (Effingham), Melissa Marchant (Green Bay) and Kris Bents (Eau Claire).

The committee met in September with many questions and few answers. Following the meeting, each member submitted a vision, and I am sharing Brian Blasco's statement: "Mindful of the 40th anniversary of its (Associate Relationship) founding in 2028, I envision an evolution of the Associates in the upcoming years. Honoring the legacy of our founders, the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis, we are inspired by their charism "to be and to bring Christ's healing presence." We embrace our Franciscan heritage through a mindfulness of being peacemakers, recognizing our calling to be servants to all people, and deepening our spirituality. We welcome Christian and non-Christian men and women who are motivated in the same manner, in hopes of taking an active role as followers of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi."

There is much work to do in order to bring forth the vision that came out of the meeting, and the committee will ask for input from all the Associates. Please pray for God's will in this matter. ❖

## **SPIRIT MATTERS:**

**There is much more to reality than what we can see**



**By Jerrilyn Zavada  
(Streator)**

At the risk of being labeled naïve and unrealistic, I am exploring in this week's column a reality I have experienced myself on many occasions.

By way of disclaimer, it is important to note that this reality is most easily experienced when one consistently practices silence and solitude. These practices pave the way for more acute receptivity to the movements of the Holy One among us.

Establishing a consistent practice of silence and solitude doesn't mean you have to become a hermit. But it does mean you must choose to step away from your daily routine and those in your orbit for a period of time each day, even if that period of time is 20 minutes in your prayer corner.

The reality about which I speak is that Love, with a capital L, is the underlying principle of all that is, and with spiritual discipline and devotion, we can occasionally experience that reality ourselves in fleeting, but deeply fulfilling moments, even while the world around us burns to the ground.

The idea for this week's exploration came from a post by Anam Cara Ministries on Thursday on Facebook. It partially reads:  
***“What would it be to trust that Love is the actual, deepest reality? That no matter how we see people treating each other—in the streets, in our homes—it is true that Love remains? That Love accompanies***

***every one of us, caring for us and inviting us into our belovedness like each moment is a Jordan-River-baptism?***

***“It's not what it looks like on the surface of things, though, is it? We grow increasingly frustrated as we watch beloved ones fighting, hurting each other, taking lives, denigrating what is precious and treating the precious as worthless.***

***“What would it look like for you to begin to take the awareness of this reality into everything? Into each interaction with a cashier or a fellow driver on the road or a family member where things feel even more complicated? Into each time you catch a glimpse of the news, into each conversation at work, into your own personal rhythms and tasks?***

***“What shifts in you—and in your sense of the world—when you see things through this lens?”***

Personally, I am most able to experience Love as the underlying reality of all things when I am outdoors. But with the weather being so cold recently, I don't spend much time outside other than when I take my dog Zeke out for a walk. And even then, when the wind stings me through my coat, I try to rush him along to finish his business so we can go back inside where it is nice and warm.

But after reading the post I shared above this week, I was mindful of its message while taking him outside Thursday evening.

It was dark, and the wind howled through the barren trees. This time I let him take his time, while I allowed myself to be present to my environment. In those few moments –

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## **SPIRIT MATTERS:**

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because of the capacity for mindful awareness that I have built through my contemplative practices – I was able, for a moment, to sense that sacred presence that is the Alpha and Omega of all things. The sacred presence that is gently unyielding to all the chaos we generate for ourselves and for each other.

This week, I shared a photo of Pope Leo XIV engaging with a young blind woman. When it is said a picture speaks a thousand words, this picture spoke more.

Pope Leo, with a gentle smile on his face, held the young woman's hand, as he drew it to his face, so she could 'see' him.

It was one of the most beautiful photographic images I have seen in a long time, as Pope Leo's genuine way of gentleness, kindness and compassion shone brilliantly, yet humbly. The caption to the photo noted how everyone in the room was moved by the display.

With all the tension surrounding us these days, it might seem impossible to find these moments where we can experience the Love that underlies all things.

But it is not impossible.

Once we intentionally seek quiet, we will recognize there are limitless opportunities in our daily lives to witness this Love in big ways and small.

And when a critical mass forms, we will create our own peaceful revolution in the heart of the world.

**SPIRIT MATTERS** is a weekly column by Jerrilyn Zavada Novak that examines experiences common to the human spirit. Contact her at [jzblue33@yahoo.com](mailto:jzblue33@yahoo.com). ❖

## **IN LOVING MEMORY . . .**

### **ASSOCIATE PATRICIA L. WRIGHT (STREATOR)**

BORN – 02/16/1952  
COMMITMENT – 2009  
DIED – 11/13/2025

### **SISTER MARY KELLY, OSF**

BORN – 07/27/1932  
FIRST VOWS – 06/13/1954  
DIED – 12/05/1925

### **ASSOCIATE MARY REISER (SPRINGFIELD)**

BORN – 09/04/1953  
COMMITMENT – 1995  
DIED – 12/10/2025

### **SISTER SHERREY MURPHY, OSF**

BORN – 06/15/1942  
FIRST VOWS – 08/22/1968  
DIED – 01/08/2026

### **SISTER PACIS BAO, OSF**

BORN – 04/08/1921  
FIRST VOWS – 09/24/1947  
DIED – 01/21/2026

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

## **WE SUPPORT IN PRAYER . . .**

- Linda Marti (Highland) who has a sister being treated for significant health issues.
- Mary Bonner (Springfield) who is being treated for medical issues
- Barb Schmidt (Springfield) who lost her husband in November
- Janet Doyle (Highland) who lost her sister in October
- Gloria Guy (Decatur) who is in rehab for medical reasons
- Kathy Kovell (Eau Claire) who is being treated for medical issues
- For all the Hospital Sisters
- For all Associates and their families
- For peace and justice in our land. ❖

## The Leftover Bowl

By Nancy Davis

Due to inclement weather, the December Advent/Christmas Bingo Party was held on January 15, 2026. The party began with the sharing of Oplatki, a Polish and Czechoslovakian tradition practiced in Streator, from the Streator Associates. Oplatki is a thin, flat piece of bread (resembling a communion host) that is embossed with a holy image. It is shared by those at the table - thanking God for the blessings of 2025 and prayers for the upcoming year.

The party was themed with the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with trivia questions about the Hospital Sisters and Associate ministries, a slide show of celebrations since 2003, and a drawing for prizes that were related to three of the Associates' current locations. ❖



Drawing winner of the "Staley" Bears Cup



Winner of the Green Bay Packers Blanket



Happy Birthday to Pat Wright



Sister Ritamary retrieving her trivia prize



## Streator Associate Christmas Party

The Streator Associates gathered at Chippers Restaurant for their Christmas Party.

# The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in November 2025 . . .

Drone Show on November 7, 2025



All Souls Day Prayer Service on November 2, 2025



Anniversary Mass on November 8, 2025





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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

### Upcoming Associate Events . . .

**February** - Thursday, February 19, 2026 at 6:30 pm in Kateri Hall. Father Chiola will discuss Lent and it will be presented on Zoom.

**March** – Thursday, March 19, 2026 at 6:30 pm in Kateri Hall. Sister Anita Cleary, OP, will discuss her mission trip to El Salvador and it will be presented on Zoom.

\*\*All gatherings will now be held in Kateri Hall, a meeting room on the ground floor of St. Francis Convent (area near the Sunroom, Receiving, and Kitchen). Please enter at Convent Entrance and guides will be available.

**Please view us on Facebook and click Like**