



# 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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**Who is that masked person?** It is hard to recognize the Sisters and staff with their masks on. See if you can guess who are behind the masks.

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## Associate Office

By Nancy Davis

### Creative Suffering

I recently had to say, “See you later...or goodbye” to a very dear friend who was literally moving to the other side of the world. No, this was not a death, but in many ways the feelings of grief at his leaving were similar. God graciously sent a book my way, (it has been in the bookcase in my office all along, but I never noticed it), by Sr. Joyce Rupp OSM, entitled, *Praying Our Goodbyes*. This little gem of a book, originally written over 40 years ago, is full of practical, prayerful, and spiritual information about dealing with any hard goodbyes including death. What is a goodbye? It is an empty place in us; any

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## **Associate Office –**

### **Continued from page 1**

situation that has created some kind of loss or incompleteness. One of the phrases that she used in the book was “creative suffering.” This particularly caught my attention because, in addition to the hard goodbye to my friend, I along with most everyone in our current world seem to be collectively suffering. Just listen to the news or read the newspaper. No one is immune. Rupp suggests that it is what we do with these goodbyes, these sufferings, that is important. She says, “When our suffering refines us in such a way that it leads to an inner change or transformation that positively affects our life or the lives of others, it becomes creative suffering. Jesus suffered creatively. His emptiness led to a radical transformation of new life. His risen presence lifted the hearts of those who met him and changed their lives.” Haven’t we all known or heard of someone that suffered greatly yet rose out of the suffering to do something they never would have done had the goodbye not occurred? Suffering can be beneficial when it causes a resurrection in us and we go on to recognize a new talent, arouse a sleeping energy, develop a keener sense of life’s purpose or develop a stronger sense of compassion. Rupp suggests a 4 step process of praying our hard goodbyes. The first step is recognition - to identify and name the loss and also the hurt it has caused. The second step is reflection - to sit with it, to look at it, and face it, even though it might grieve us. This can be hard in a culture that does not often value the quiet time it takes to complete this step. The third step is ritualization in which one uses images or symbols and/or some kind of movement in our prayer. This might mean connecting the loss of the tree as the leaves fall each year in the autumn to the loss of a season of one’s life that is painful. The final step is reorientation where praying our goodbyes connects our pain to the God of healing. It is where grief and faith meet. Maybe it means visiting the grave of a friend on a meaningful date every year or month; or identifying the sound of geese flying south as a reminder that going away is a part of life and recognizing, by this sound, that a beloved

spouse is now home with God; that transitions are part of life. No goodbye is easy, but there will come a time when it is necessary to move on, to allow new life to spring from this experience, for surrender to take place, and hope to be recovered. Love endures and the resiliency of the human spirit lives on in spite of our hard goodbyes. Rupp points out that for every goodbye there is a hello. So whether you are currently saying goodbye or actively seeking that next hello – peace on your journey ❖

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

- Mary Jo Seiz (Springfield) who is undergoing medical treatment
- Denny Kirchgiesner (Springfield) who is undergoing medical treatment and has two sisters who are being treated for breast cancer.
- Bjarne Jensen (Springfield) grateful to be recovering from a cancer diagnosis
- All individuals suffering from the COVID-19 virus and all those who are struggling financially, emotionally, or spiritually from this pandemic
- Our Hospital Sisters ❖

### ***Masked person answers . . .***

Left to right, top to bottom – Sister Marguerite, Sister Maureen, Sister Pacis, Sister Josephine, Nancy Davis, Sister Janice, Sister Christa Ann, and Sister Mary Mac. ❖

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# Being Franciscan . . .

## Brian Blasco

(Springfield)

**Year of Commitment –  
2000**



My personal and professional journey with the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis spans more than 50 years. I was born at St. Mary's Hospital, Streator, IL, in 1968, and as a child I sang with my brother and sisters at hospital events. During high school, I occasionally played the organ in the hospital chapel. Professionally, I was employed at St. Mary's from 1991-2004 and had the opportunity to work with Sisters Eleanora Marie Maurer and Catherine Wissen while also having the opportunity to visit the Motherhouse for employee pilgrimages. What an amazing gift it was to experience these sacred grounds and visit with the Sisters. I became an Associate in 2000 and Sister Catherine was my sponsor – this began a journey of discovery in my spirituality. Since 2004 I have served the Sisters at the Motherhouse in Communications and Archives and this has been a blessing. In my work, I have had the opportunity to interact with the Sisters and have learned from them: their wisdom, stories, history, and charism. This has enhanced my professional role as I have had frequent opportunities to interact with Associates, employees, HSHS colleagues, and visitors to the Chiara Center and shared information on the Sisters' history and charism, information about the Motherhouse property, the formation of HSHS, Franciscan heritage, and Mission and Values.

Learning from the Sisters has enriched my Franciscan spirituality and I consider it part of my ongoing experience of discovery and formation. Some of the most memorable words to me have been spoken by these friends/Sister-sages: "Don't worry" (Sister Gabrielis), "You are nothing...God did that (through you)" (Sister Hermogene), "Listen (to the Spirit)" (Sister Ann

## Karen Brown

(Springfield)

**Year of Commitment –  
2016**



Hello! My name is Karen Brown; I have been an Associate for four years.

My sponsor, Sister Marilyn McCormick, helped me understand and grow as a candidate. Her ability to lead by example is a true gift from God. Peace radiates from Sister Marilyn. It's no wonder she ends her emails with 'Peace and all good to you'. She is a blessing to me and I am grateful for her wisdom.

St. Francis told his followers near the end of his life - 'I have done my part. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ support and guide you to do yours'. Being an Associate encourages me 'to do my part'. Being an Associate is humbling.

When my faith was tested recently, my faith was strengthened. By reading His promises, praying, and trusting in God, I found strength, love, hope, peace, and joy. When I talked to Nancy Davis last week about my faith building, she told me - sometimes we need to be tested to grow. How true.

I will treasure the bond with the Sisters and fellow Associates.

Pray - Really BIG ! - Believe even bigger!

MATTHEW 21:22 ❖

Pitsenberger), "That was Jesus (who was a homeless man)" (Sister Patricia Ann), "We must forgive" (Sister Pacis), and last, but certainly not least, "God asks great things of us sometimes and are we willing to respond – we don't do this alone" (Sister Marciana). ❖

## Justice and Peace Connection

By Sister Mary Shaw, ASC



### Viruses and Antidotes

You may recall the refrain from “Change our Hearts” by Cooney, 1984, “Lord, this time change our hearts.” Quite fitting as the subtle virus of racism has emerged again. The cry of spilled blood, economic disparity, failed healthcare and the sanctity of life in the womb, poverty, ecological devastation and the concept of privilege has hit a tipping point and engendered demonstrations. Am I my brother’s keeper? Breathe and reflect upon this. Breathe and slow down and enter into your heart.

The Coronavirus and racism are deadly and subtle, and at times invisible. Racism is there but the privileged have learned to dance around it and pronounce it dormant. There is an antidote but perhaps it is too costly. It could cost my perceived status and protective structures. Watching the events of protest since George Floyd had the breath snuffed out of him, I shouted aloud, how long Lord? Skin color seems to determine the treatment for inappropriate choices. My white color has afforded a protection and serves as an antidote against all kinds of violence and mistreatments. Breathe and reflect upon this. Breathe and enter into your heart.

Contemplate for a few moments: “God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). Life is sacred and comes from God and returns to God. We pacify ourselves by saying all life is sacred...but take a breath...perhaps 8 minutes and 46 seconds and say as a mantra, Black lives matter. Black lives matter. Black lives

matter too. Breathe and slow down and enter into your heart.

Viruses require an antidote that follow a diagnosis that begins within self and recognizes how am I profiting from racism and privilege. It is easy to objectify the ‘other’ as lazy, not caring about property, dirty, not educated, etc. All may be true because our system of economic injustice prevents the poor and people of color from advancing. Pope Francis said in his general message to the people of the U.S.A, “We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life.” Breathe and slow down and enter into your heart.

Maybe it is time for a racial examen. Think about Jesus’ preferential option for the poor and those He protected. Do I imitate Him? How do I use my privilege? Do I remain silent so as to retain it or do I speak up, regardless the cost? For me, it is taking a deep breath, becoming aware of the breath (“God breathed into his/my nostrils”) and asking myself, have I a right to smother that breath? Taking another breath, recall that we all are equal; take another breath and slowly but surely hear the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor. Pope Francis reminds us: “The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together ... and the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet” (Laudato Si 48). Breathe, slow down, and enter into your heart.

Racism is a sin. White supremacy is a sin. Police brutality is a sin. Silence is a sin. Let us pray for a new birth of justice and accountability within our own heart and around the world. My antidote, enfleshing the Beatitudes, is with His graces to the best of my poor ability. Encountering people of another culture and being transformed by the other is a powerful antidote for many viruses. The generic term is love (as I have loved you.) Breathe, slow down, and enter into your heart. The answer is there... hear the whisper? ❖

## Musings from Chiara

By Dan Frachey

### At Prayer in our caves . . .



How is it that four of the top five books on the New York Times bestseller list are about the tumult and change brought about as we confront racism? What does this have to do with our Franciscan identity, particularly at such a peaceful place like Chiara Center? In his book *In the Footsteps of Francis and Clare* by Roch Niemier, OFM, the author notes the unlikely places where Francis sought to pray, particularly the caves of Carceri located outside Assisi on Mount Subasio. About Francis, Thomas of Celano wrote *“He would spend the night alone praying in abandoned churches and in deserted places where, with the protection of divine grace, he overcame his soul’s many fears and anxieties.”* Today, we have books like Robin DiAngelo’s *White Fragility* which for us today become a modern deserted place that Franciscan hearts are called to inhabit to do as Francis did.

In her seminal work on this topic, DiAngelo wrote, *“White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves.”* Admittedly, the term white fragility does bring up our defenses with a litany of phrases such as, “I’m not racist. I work with black people. I wasn’t around when slavery was legal...” Francis probably heard the same kinds of statements from even within his own community. “I have a family member who’s a leper” or “hating Muslims is just the way it is.” Franciscan author Fr. Murray Bodo helps us to understand Francis who he described as “making mercy” *with* the lepers. As such, there was an intentional interdependency that Francis understood in relation with those in the nearby leper colony who he depended upon to act as

formation directors for those who would follow him.

As much as I have come to love the term reconciliation, I now realize that this will not happen until we’ve first done the work of conciling or simply *seeing* others. In the caves of self-awareness, we confront our blindness and begin to understand how we inadvertently participate and maintain racist structures that prevent true justice from emerging. Even before we can actually see another person, there must be a *desire* to see them. I would like to encourage you to follow Francis’ lead and enter into the dark caves of self-understanding related to white fragility. Getting the book is almost impossible right now but a good 20 minute summary (video) can be found at <https://www.gcorr.org/video/vital-conversations-racism-dr-robin-diangelo/>. By God’s grace, may we as Franciscan hearts be known as those who make mercy with others and then create new structures that allow all peoples to abide with respect and love. ❖

### IN LOVING MEMORY . . .

#### SISTER MARY FRANCES LUTTY

BORN: 07/26/1921

FIRST PROFESSION: 10/04/1952

DIED: 05/30/2020

#### SISTER ROSE DUCHESNE NOELKE

BORN: 04/22/1920

FIRST PROFESSION: 06/13/1952

DIED: 05/30/2020

#### ASSOCIATE DOLORES FIRKUS (HIGHLAND)

BORN: 03/23/1927

COMMITMENT: 1993

DIED: 07/01/2020

#### ASSOCIATE PAULA MINWEGEN (SPRINGFIELD)

BORN: 05/12/1934

COMMITMENT: 2000

DIED: 08/01/2020

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

## **Influence of St. Francis . . .**

**By Jerrilyn Zavada  
(Streator)**

**Year of Commitment –  
2019**



Saint Francis of Assisi's reputation for being gentle, promoting peace and living in harmony with all of nature, is often why so many people – even those who consider themselves non-religious, are drawn to him.

And as we have seen, elements of his style – even some that are attributed to him, though not actually penned by him, like “The Prayer of Saint Francis,” have infiltrated themselves into our culture – or, at least, our “ideal” culture. In my own life, I have met many people, who, when presented with this prayer in word or song, say something along the lines of “That is my FAVORITE prayer!” or “I pray that every morning!” Its words certainly convey the image most people have of Francis and his followers. And aspiring to live according to its principles is without a doubt not a bad thing. Especially in these harrowing times.

Similarly, Francis is often quoted as saying “Go into the world and preach the gospel. When necessary, use words.” Personally, this is one of my favorite quotations ever, by anyone. And I am a huge quotation lover. The point is, we can go out into our own worlds, with plenty of platitudes and preaching, but if we don't live what we say we believe in, people will see right through us, and at most ignore whatever comes out of our mouths; or at the very least, write us off as hypocrites. Actions speak louder than words.

Recently, I have made more of an effort in my own life to emulate Francis' lifestyle by spending time every day outside on the deck, quietly connecting to the nature around me. Our backyard is where I grew up as a child and,

although it has seen many changes over the years, still continues to have a grounding power in my life.

In particular, I have taken to spending time each day in conversation with the red Maple tree just beyond the deck in our backyard. She is the only tree left back there, and I am learning to be quiet in her presence and listen to her as she teaches me her natural wisdom.

She speaks to me in many ways: in her strength; her sturdiness; her ability to withstand the storms of life; the way her leaves gently, playfully sway in the morning as she awakens and the sunlight falls and rests randomly through her body. And, probably most importantly, her stillness in the night.

Our world is experiencing a Dark Night of the Soul. This reality is beyond debate.

But when we submit ourselves to the intelligence that lies within the natural world around us – which was imbued in it by the Great Intelligence itself – and watch and listen to it – really watch and listen, we can learn far more about who we are, where we come from and who we are meant to be, than we ever might learn in a whole library of books.

Just as Francis did, in his great humility. ❖



# What a difference a year can make . . .

## Foundation Day By Nancy Davis

Every year, on July 2 the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis celebrate their founding. It is a time that as a community they commemorate the day that Fr. Christopher Bernsmeyer welcomed the first women who would become the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis. Generally, there are celebratory events planned at the Motherhouse on that day, but due to COVID-19, like many other events, this had to be cancelled for 2020. The Associates traditionally provide treats for the Sisters as part of the celebration and in thanksgiving for their allowing us to be part of their community. We decided that there was no reason we could not do this again this year, even if the other events were cancelled. We hoped that the treats would provide at least a glimmer of normalcy in this time of uncertainty. Mike and Margie Sgro and I shopped for the treats, as we generally do, a few days before the event. Due to the restriction of visitors to the Motherhouse, they were not able to accompany me back here to prepare the

baskets, but the mission was still accomplished. The Sisters appreciated the sweet treats as always. Below is a picture from last year's event. ❖



## Nature's Beauty

How do we find Jesus in the midst of the madness of our world today? How many of you have heard the expression, "Stop and smell the roses?" Sister Rosily has begun doing just that in this time of pandemic. She shares several of her photos of flowers and they are strikingly beautiful. Her pictures exhibit the beauty in nature that God has provided for our enjoyment. Thank you Sister Rosily for reminding us that God is nearer than we think. We all need to stop and smell the roses today. ❖





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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

### Upcoming Events at Chiara Center . . .

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

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