

INTRODUCING THE FRANCISCAN WAY OF LIFE



The Dubuque Franciscans are intentional about spreading the Franciscan Story and Spirit with employees, friends, parishioners, students, and family. This Franciscan Charism is centered in Christ and the Gospels. Some of the core Franciscan values include simple living, humility/minority, contemplation, peacemaking, care of persons who are poor, and care of the earth. We invite people to explore these values with us to discern how God is calling them to live the Franciscan way of life. It is an exciting adventure.

Basic guidelines for a group exploring the Franciscan Way of Life.

The participants will be able to:

- tell the stories of Francis and Clare and how they impacted their times
- live the values of Francis and Clare

Some possible resources to use to meet this goal:

In the Footsteps of Francis and Clare by Rock Niemier OFM

Building with Living Stones: Formation for Franciscan Life and Work

Francis: The Journey and the Dream by Murray Bodo

Clothed with Gladness: The story of St. Clare by Sister M. St. Paul, P.C.C.

Module (sessions available from the Charism team in Dubuque
(gallesm@osf.dbq.org)

Clare and Francis of Assisi with DVD
On Francis and Clare with DVD

The participants will be able to incorporate Franciscan Spirituality and Values in daily life

Some possible resources to use to meet this goal:

Living Like Francis Today Marci Blum OSF

The Franciscan journey: A discernment guide for those beginning the Journey in the Franciscan Way of Life

St Francis and the Foolishness of God by Dennis, Nangle, Moe-Lobeda, Taylor

Modules

Joy
Hospitality
Poverty of Spirit
Simplicity
Humility
Conversion
Minority/Humility

Discernment process for continuing to live the Franciscan way of life is included for use after meeting above goals.

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Discernment Process In Living a Franciscan Way of Life

For Initial Inquirers



Why a Discernment Process?

When a person expresses an interest in living a Franciscan way of life, a discernment process assists the inquirer to clarify what she/he is asking for and lays a foundational support to seek a direction in her/his life.

What is Discernment?

Discernment is listening to what God is doing in my life, to where God is leading me. We are to be “discerning listeners” before we make a decision for our lives. Discernment is integral in our turning points in life as well as an ongoing process throughout life. To “discern the spirits” (I Corinthians 12:10) is to know where the Holy Spirit is leading us.

Discernment is a process before making a decision. Discerning is choosing among several good options. When a decision is made after discerning, there is a loss or letting go of a good choice.

Wholistic Approach to Discernment

A wholistic (holistic) approach to discernment involves the whole self: mind, emotions, body, intuition, imagination, values and dreams. A wholistic approach involves the outer authority (wisdom of the faith community and the traditions) and the inner authority (experiences and experience of God) with a balance of mind, heart and intuition.

Discernment Questions in Inquiring About the Franciscan way of life

- The Gospel values of the Franciscan Charism are poverty, humility, contemplation, peace making, care of persons who are poor, and care of the earth. How do you see these Gospel values lived out in your life?
- What are you seeking?
- What are your desires? Your inclinations?
- Have you prayed alone? With others? What did you hear in prayer?
- How have you listened to the Scripture? What did you hear?
- How are you centering your life on the words and actions of Jesus?
- Name your personal experiences in discerning a decision that you called upon your faith community for assistance and support.
- How have you asked trusted friends for their guidance?
- What are your strengths and challenges for yourself in your decision?

Ways to Live a Franciscan Way of Life

To learn more about the Franciscan way of life, a number of opportunities are available:

- Converse with a person living the Franciscan way of life.
- Read books or materials on the life of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Clare of St. Assisi.
- Download information on Franciscans from the Internet.
- Go to the webpage of the Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque—www.osfdbq.org.
- Join a Franciscan faith-sharing group.

Contact the Franciscan Charism Team, Sisters of St. Francis in Dubuque, Iowa to learn of possible ways to live the Franciscan way of life. Phone: 563-583-9786, Ext. 6166.

blumm@osfdbq.org;
heldorferg@osfdbq.org
nillesq@osfdbq.org

gallesm@osfdbq.org;
kalbm@osfdbq.org

Continuing Discernment

In considering to pursue a Franciscan way of life, further discernment on the ways to live a Franciscan way of life will assist in clarifying life directions.

Franciscan Charism Team
Sisters of St. Francis
Dubuque, Iowa
Phone: 563-583-9786, Ext. 6166

The Legends of the Sisters of St. Francis¹

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A Note from the Editors: In reading all the stories we collected we discovered the theme of relationships is found in every story. As Franciscan women we can best be described as an evangelical community rather than a contemplative or apostolic community. For us this means that living the Gospel mandate of loving relationships is central to our lives - and defines us more than a particular ministry or a certain way of praying.



Go Forward Securely

Prayer

Loving God, as you bless us with a deepening desire to follow in the footsteps of your Son, Jesus, guide us with your Spirit's wisdom. Teach us and form us. Help us to walk worthy of this Gospel vocation. May our purpose be firm as Your Spirit teaches us what we are to know. We believe that the same Spirit is at work in us in ways beyond our understanding. May we, with swift pace and light step, go forward joyfully and in complete surrender to you.



Early History

The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Family by Sr. Mary Cortona Gloden, pp. 88-112.

They Have Taken Root by Sr. Mary Eunice Mousel, pp. 118, 202-203; 183-184.



¹ There are a number of stories of the life of St. Francis of Assisi which are called "Legends." For example, St. Bonaventure wrote two that are known as "The Major Legend" and "The Minor Legend." Also, "The Legend of the Three Companions" is another Franciscan writing. "Legends" come from a tradition of hagiography (writings about saints) and are not strictly biographical as we would understand biographies today.

Recent History

A Common Heart by Sr. Jordan Dahm, pp. 85-89; 148-153.

Rooted/En Route by Sr. Rebecca Rosemeyer & Sr. Dorothy Marie Hennessey, pp. 120-123; 48-50; 29-34



Totally Good

For a number of years Sr. Judy Green taught elementary grades in the congregation's parochial schools. She loved the children and filled their days with learning and fun activities. When she joined her local community in the evenings, she loved to tell stories of her day with the children.

Often Sister Judy realized that some of her young students came to school hungry and with soiled clothing. Her heart went out to these little ones. She would take them over to the convent before classes began so they could get a warm breakfast. And while they were eating, she would wrap them in a clean towel and take their clothing to the laundry. They began their school day well fed, clean and very proud of themselves. Years later when Sister Judy would meet her former students around town, she could still recall their names. Of course, many good remembrances were shared.

As told by Sr. Karla Kloft, OSF



We Pass This Way But Once

Sister Leonita Nurre was Sister Marian's aunt. She visited Marian before her final profession and shared some wisdom which made a lasting impression on Marian. She said: "You can be happy wherever you go because you take yourself with you." This is a story about one journey Marian took.

On a car trip forty years ago, four Franciscan sisters were traveling from Sioux City to Dubuque. By the time they neared Richardsville it was dark and raining. As they drove along they passed a stalled car beside the road. Turning the car around the driver said: "We pass this way but once..." When they reached the stalled car they asked the stranded woman if she needed help. The response was a grateful "Yes, if you know how to fix a flat tire." All four sisters immediately went to work. As they were halfway through the task, another car stopped and the man who was driving volunteered to finish the repairs.

As told by Sr. Marian Klostermann, OSF



A Pioneer's Footprints

In a homily given by Pope John Paul II at La Verna, the Pope said: "We stand here in Francis' footprints. Here the Poverello of Assisi walked. Here he revealed the great love burning in his heart, the love which made him resemble his Beloved, Jesus."

After her ministries at Xavier Hospital in Dubuque and on the Leadership of the community, Sister Rita Their asked God to lead her to a new work. She and her friend, Mary Ann Hopkins, found an answer to their prayers in the northern boundary land of the Dakotas.

Minot was a tent town that sprang to life when the railroads laid tracks in the area in the late 18th century. In the 1950's an Air Force base was constructed north of town and by 1970 the population was 32,000. Among the residents of the city, 12% were seniors and 9% of them lived below the poverty level. The small senior center in town was in disarray: state funding was lost, the manager left abruptly, and city codes were in violation. In January 1975 Sister Rita saw this as an opportunity to be of service. She studied the situation, introduced herself to the city government officials, and traveled to Bismarck to clarify how funding could be established. Ultimately she got funding for the small center, organized a staff, won the good will of the citizens, and attracted people to the center. In addition to a meal site, she added more services for the seniors. In a short time there was a need for a larger space and she collaborated with others to purchase and renovate a large hotel that had been empty for years. Then more services were added to the lower floors of the building: outreach for a variety of social services, delivery of meals to the homebound folks, a full transportation system, and a space for parties and dancing. A local realtor rented renovated rooms to the people on the upper levels of the hotel. It was a safe, busy and welcoming center for senior citizens. Finally, Rita determined she would not retire until all debt on the new center was completely paid.

Good administration does not always come to mind when one thinks of Franciscan values but Sister Rita in her administration gave witness to the value of prayer, attention to the needs of people, hard work, prudence, collaboration, persistence and good stewardship. She left a footprint of Francis in the Minot soil.

As told by Sr. Mary Clare O'Toole, OSF



Comings and Goings to Growth

When a woman enters The Sisters of St Francis she envisions that she will be part of the community for the rest of her life. Sometimes her path in doing God's will is transformed. Jeanne Marie Schwendinger was a member of the congregation from 1964 until 1989.

It was in a walk in the 'Umbria Hills' at Mount St. Francis in Dubuque Iowa that I promised to listen to any final messages from the Spirit before taking vows. And it was near midnight in what we then called the 'black and white' prayer room in Colette Center the night before vows that I experienced a powerful 'embrace' of love which assured me of the rightness of my decision to choose Franciscan living. And so it was done.

Having been steeped and rooted in Vatican II theology, liturgy and music, church history, the Scriptures, a simple family life, and a call to serve the poor, I served faithfully and gratefully without much understanding of where personal insights would eventually take me.

Twenty-five years later as I was reflecting in the Cathedral in Pueblo, Colorado a Scripture quote from John 10:18 surfaced within, which led me into a new direction: " I have the power to lay down my life AND the power to take it up again." Again so it was done. In subsequent days new Scriptures encouraged that experience.

John 14:18- I will not leave you orphaned. I will be with you.

John 15:9- As God has loved me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.

Psalms 121- God will guard your coming and your going, both now and forever.

Jeremiah 29:11- I know well the plans I have in mind for you, plans for good and not harm, plans to give you a future full of hope.

John 20- My peace I give to you.

Still the Spirit and friendship of the Franciscans remains rooted in my heart. The formal steps to take a new path were anguishing and insecure. But listening to the Spirit and living simply continues into my future. And as I have travelled to several countries over the years I have come to clearly see there is really no such thing as 'leaving', as separation. We are one. We never really leave anything. We just continue to live into Life wherever it takes us with the richness that has been given. And as we strive to live our lives to the full, we are not to worry too much for our Good God will guard our comings and our goings, both now and forever.

Taken from "Rooted in a Franciscan Story"---January 1, 2011

As told by former member Jeanne-Marie Schwendinger



Discussion Questions

- Which of the Franciscan values (poverty, humility, contemplation, conversion) or others are reflected in these stories?
- What is the theme that ties these stories together?
- Whom in these stories would you like to meet? Why?
- What questions would you like to ask?
- Do any of these stories remind you of an event or person in your life?



Closing Prayer:

Litany of the Saints

St. Francis....Pray for us.
St. Clare....Pray for us.
Mother Xavier....Pray for us.
Sr. Judy Green...Pray for us.
Sr. Liboria Block....Pray for us.
Sr. Leonita Nurre....Pray for us.
Sr. Rita Their....Pray for us.

(Please feel free to add your own favorite saints and deceased loved ones.)



Feedback – Please share your own stories of the Dubuque Franciscans and Associates with the archivist for the Sisters of St. Francis.

For Further Reading on the history of the Sisters of St. Francis

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The Legends of the Sisters of St. Francis²

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Beauty and Strength

Prayer

Loving God, as you bless us with a deepening desire to follow in the footsteps of your Son, Jesus, guide us with your Spirit's wisdom. Teach us and form us. Help us to walk worthy of this Gospel vocation. May our purpose be firm as Your Spirit teaches us what we are to know. We believe that the same Spirit is at work in us in ways beyond our understanding. May we, with swift pace and light step, go forward joyfully and in complete surrender to you.



Early History

Sr. Cortona Gloden, *The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Family*, pp. 70-71, 88-112
Sr. Eunice Mousel, *They Have Taken Root*, pp. 242-4, 247-8, 251-4



Recent History

Sr. Jordan Dahm, *A Common Heart*, pp. 72ff
Sr. Donalda Kehoe, *The China Story: Franciscan Ministry, 1931-1949*

² There are a number of stories of the life of St. Francis of Assisi which are called "Legends." For example, St. Bonaventure wrote two that are known as "The Major Legend" and "The Minor Legend." Also, "The Legend of the Three Companions" is another Franciscan writing. "Legends" come from a tradition of hagiography (writings about saints) and are not strictly biographical as we would understand biographies today.



Her Homeless Friends Came

Sr. Miriam Hennessey (whose name in the early days of religious life was Sr. Alcuin) was one of 14 children - three became Franciscan sisters and one a Maryknoll priest. She taught students in grade and high school for 40 years before she moved into ministry among the neglected and forgotten members of society. She once wrote of her hopes for retirement: "I'd love to listen to classical music while I peel potatoes or fold hankies. And I'd love to help young Sisters think up new ideas." Sister Miriam didn't ever retire; she died at the age of 74

Many visions fill my head when asked to talk about my big sister, Miriam Hennessey: her spiritual depth, her intelligence, her artistic talent, her strict discipline, plus much more!

- At one point when teaching eighth grade she was asked in mid-year to plunge into high school when another Sister became ill.
- Her thesis for her graduate degree in English was on e.e.cummings's "Hollow Man."
- "Man of La Mancha" was one of her favorite dramas. She would help produce it with her high school students, encouraging them "to dream the impossible dream."

Miriam was known for getting so absorbed in the task at hand that she would lose all track of time, sometimes even miss a meal. She was a quiet, very deep, social justice oriented contemplative Franciscan - a woman of beauty and strength.

After a long teaching career, Miriam shared her artistic abilities in Davenport, Iowa, living and working with the poor. She walked several blocks to work each day. One fateful morning in 1990, as she was crossing the street she was struck by a van. The hospital put her on life support for twenty-four hours. During that time the street people were allowed to enter the emergency room "like a visitation." Because her entire head was in bandages, her homeless friends would comment, "That doesn't look like our Sister Miriam."

Miriam had touched so many people's lives. The mourners were endless at the home in which she worked, at the parish funeral and at Mount St Francis. Our quiet, insightful, spirited Miriam had physically finished her part in building the Reign of God - on earth, that is!

As told by Sr. Gwen Hennessey, OSF



Now What?

Sr. Antonine Kivlahan was at St. Mary's from 1964-68. Following this assignment she went became principal in Guttenberg, IA and Portland, OR, before moving into the ministry of parish work in Texas and Georgia. She is remembered by sisters and co-workers as compassionate, gentle, and capable. She died of cancer at the relatively young age of 62.

Sister Antonine was a bit perturbed with her new mission assignment. She was to be the principal at St. Mary's in Dubuque. This was her first assignment as a principal. She had been a teacher in a classroom and knew what to do. Carefully prepared lesson plans carried the day! Now, as principal, she sat at her desk on the first day of school and mused, "What shall I do?" The telephone rang. She laughingly said, "And I was busy from that moment on!"

Sister Antonine had other challenging assignments. I asked her once how she could remain so calm and free-spirited. She said she just trusted in the Lord and plunged ahead. Indeed, a woman of beauty and strength.

As told by Sr. Denise Streng, OSF



Planting a Seed

Sister Irmina Manternach's early assignments were to teach in high school and at Briar Cliff College. She was later appointed Director of Novices, an important responsibility which involved preparing young women to live the life of a sister. Then she was elected to leadership in the community, first as Vicar General, and then in 1944 as Mother General. It was in this role that she visited the students in Cascade, and inspired at least one little girl to seriously consider life as a sister. She died in 1950, while still in office as head of the congregation.

When I was in primary grades at St. Mary's School in Cascade, Iowa, Mother Irmina Manternach visited our classroom. She inspired me as she asked students their names, one by one, affirming each person with positive remarks. When I told her my name (Clara), she said that she was a friend of my Aunt Clara who had died at a young age.

Before leaving the classroom she asked, "How many of you are going to be priests or sisters when you grow up?" Almost all of the students raised their hands. I truly believe this experience was the beginning of my vocation as a Franciscan Sister. The way that Mother Irmina paid close attention to each student conveyed to me the image of a woman of beauty and strength.

As told by Sr. Clara Streng, OSF



Baseball and Justice

Sr. Joyce Horbach taught students from kindergarten to fifth grade; she was in Portland from 1968-75. After 38 years in the classroom, she retired from teaching and moved back to Dubuque. She felt the call to be involved in work toward justice and peace, and so she responded to her nephew's invitation in 1981 to open a Nuclear Freeze office in Omaha,

Nebraska. Following her arrest and imprisonment, her peace and justice involvement has continued, up to the present day, as she spends the years of her ninetieth decade in retirement at Holy Family Hall.

When I lived with Sr. Mary Joyce Horbach at All Saints in Portland, Oregon, I would never have thought this was a valiant woman – a woman of beauty and strength. Mary Joyce, as she insisted on being called, was very quiet except when it came to baseball games. She was such an ardent baseball fan that her motivational activities in her classroom were all baseball games.

Years later, working with her nephew, a priest of the Oblate of Mary Immaculate congregation, she protested at the Strategic Arms Control base in Omaha. As a result, she ended up in a maximum security prison. I still find it hard to believe that this very quiet, baseball loving teacher had the courage and the “intestinal fortitude” to take such a peace stand. I admire her for the courage of her action and for her courage in prison. Today, in her ninetieth decade, she still is informed and informs others on the world.

As told by Sr. Margaret Mary Feldner, OSF



The Cost of Commitment

Sister Angelica Schultz, an elementary teacher, served in Chicago from 1955-64. She was one of several priests and sisters who took part in a march to promote racially integrated housing in the city. She later ministered in social services in the congregation's homes for the aged, and is presently retired at Mount St. Francis.

Many of our sisters were active in the civil rights movement in Chicago during the 1960's. I remember especially Sr. Angelica Schultz. I don't recall the details of the march – where it was and if anyone else was with her – but she was one of many who marched. Sr. Angelica always struck me as a very quiet sister when I lived with her in Melrose Park, a place not exactly in line with the civil rights movement. I was amazed when I heard that she had been struck by a rock thrown by a bystander. The rock was thrown so violently that it knocked her down. Jesse Jackson, then a young, little-known leader of the African American community in Chicago, picked her up and took her to the first aid station. Sometime later a black box arrived at the front door of the convent in Melrose Park. When I picked it up I found it was quite heavy. I called the police department to come and check it out. They wouldn't touch it. We opened the box and found it full of polished stones. In the box was the message – “Remember not all stones are bad. Some are beautiful.” I think Sr. Angelica's action made all of us with whom she lived stronger and more beautiful.

As told by Sr. Margaret Mary Feldner,



Daddy's Little Girl

“Wherever you go, go with all your heart.” (Chinese Proverb) Sr. Innocence Tsung (Huai Wei or Agnes) was born near Chowtsun, China Oct. 15, 1919. She and her sister Philomene were the only children of their parents who grew to adulthood. Dubuque Franciscans opened their China mission in 1932. Seemingly, they were God’s specific answer to Agnes’s early prayer to give her life to serve as a Sister.

I admire Sr. Innocence Tsung for her heroic attitude of detachment. She joined our congregation when we were in China as missionaries in pre- World War II days. When the congregation had to leave China because of the war, the young sisters were given a choice to stay in their country or come to the United States. Sr. Innocence chose to leave China. That was close to sixty year ago. She still loves to tell of her relationship with her father who called her “Daddy’s little girl.” Over the years the strength required for that decision gave her a great depth of understanding and compassion, shared generously with others as she ministered in the congregation’s orphanages and homes for young women.

As told by Sr. Carol Hemesath, OSF



Berry Steadfast

Sr. Ignatia Rosenbaum, in another setting, might be called “Miss Generosity” or “Queen of Unassuming Service.” As a matter of fact, one of her siblings was titled “Miss Ossian” (Ossian, Iowa, was the hometown of the family) in her young adult years. That role may have been won because of the beautiful Rosenbaum eyes and accompanying graciousness of both Miss Ossian and our Sr. Ignatia! Sister spent many days of ministry in homemaking and gardening, serving mainly in our large institutions of Sioux City and Dubuque.

Sr. Ignatia Rosenbaum is a hard worker, giving of herself willingly – a quiet example of beauty and strength. She volunteers everywhere, always with a smile on her face. Her unassuming character calls her to the raspberry patch – pruning, picking, preparing the berries for eating. Gathering and shelling black walnuts is also an undertaking which yields results in baked goods! She seems to be rewarded simply with her own conviction that she has done a task well.

As told by Sr. Bernadine Dillinger, OSF



Suzuki, Anyone?

The Schlueter family has a long and visible history in the city of Dubuque. For years Sr. Carolyn's extended family has been involved in promotion of the fine arts. When Sr. Carolyn attended a string workshop in the early 1950's offered by strings instructor Suzuki, she knew this was a point of arrival for her.

Sr. Carolyn Schlueter spent more than fifty years inviting the young to uncover God's beauty and truth in string music. Her facilitation of the popularity and growth of the Suzuki method in Dubuque was a gift to many. Numbers are not available nor are they important. Sr. Carolyn's goal was to initiate the Suzuki Strings in this area and to draw hundreds of young people and their parents to "cultivate artistic appreciation in a child, not to make a musician out of every child we teach." (Quote from Shinichi Suzuki). However, there have been many of Sr. Carolyn's students who have become extraordinary musicians, as well as gaining an appreciation of the gift of music.

As told by Sr. Carol Hemesath, OSF



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St. Clare ... Pray for us.

Mother Xavier ... Pray for us.

Sr. Miriam Hennessey... Pray for us.

Sr. Antonine Kivlahan...Pray for us.

Mother Irmina Manternach...Pray for us.

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Changes for the Good

Prayer

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Materials Needed

They Have Taken Root by Sr. Mary Eunice Mousel



Early History

They Have Taken Root by Sr. Mary Eunice Mousel, p. 128-134 & p. 163-164

³ There are a number of stories of the life of St. Francis of Assisi which are called "Legends." For example, St. Bonaventure wrote two that are known as "The Major Legend" and "The Minor Legend." Also, "The Legend of the Three Companions" is another Franciscan writing. "Legends" come from a tradition of hagiography (writings about saints) and are not strictly biographical as we would understand biographies today.

A Red Letter Day

Blessed with the privilege of suffrage, the sisters chose to be responsible citizens of their new homeland. On November 2, 1920, the Sisters of St. Francis joined women across the United States and voted for the first time.

After having sought out the advice of the Archbishop regarding the value of registering and voting, the Sisters prepared further by consulting with a lawyer; and then inviting in prepared speakers both on "The Democratic Platform" and a few days later, "The Republican Platform." Special provisions were made for the housebound, postulants who were old enough, and/or whose homes were out-of-state.

On a lighthearted note, the community's history records the following:

It was very amusing to see the Sisters cross the muddy road sinking in the mud and clay to their shoe tops. Some of the Sisters walked about a quarter of a mile because their chauffeurs feared to drive through the deep mud....A few of the Sisters fell into the mud much to the amusement of the others. At the polls, the Sisters were treated with due respect.

From the *Community Annals*
Submitted by Sr. Elvira Kelley, OSF



Recent History

The Vision Keeper

Religious life changed significantly after Vatican II, which was a major church council that took place in the early 1960s. Before Vatican II the Sisters of St. Francis lived the monastic life in many ways, though the monastic life was not their calling. Vatican II encouraged the Sisters to return to their roots and respond to the needs to the times. This led to greater freedom in religious life. These changes did not happen over night. Sr. Margaret Clare Dreckman was the last of the Sisters in leadership to be known as a superior general. She served in this role in 1972-1980.

Sr. Kathy Lentsch, who shares this story, transferred from another community to the Sisters of St. Francis in 1978.

Sr. Margaret Clare Dreckman was the vision keeper and guardian of my vocation story as I was discerning transfer from one religious congregation to another. Our first face to face meeting held significance for me that has stood the test of time and also reflects the spirit of

the Dubuque Franciscans. Her ability to listen with a compassionate heart and deep wisdom ushered me into a relationship with the Dubuque Franciscans. In the formal setting of her Presidential office Margaret Clare invited me to share my story. Shortly after beginning I found myself bursting into tears. I feared my vulnerability would be seen as unhealthy and I would not be accepted or taken seriously. To my surprise she rose from behind her desk to sit beside me and while cupping my hand said, "Take as long as you need to tell your story." She saw through my tears into the depths of my heart and my longing for a community in which to live the Gospel and fulfill my vows.

At the end of our time together, she laughed while she dusted off some canonical book. "We don't use this much but we will meander through this together." I instinctively knew she held the spirit of the law and not the letter of the law. I knew I was in the presence of someone safe. I felt psychologically freed. In that moment she gave me spiritual breath and hope.

There were all kinds of freedoms experienced in that first meeting. Emotional chains fell and windows were opened! Most of all I knew I was valued and my story was recognized. I was heard. I was accepted. I left that day already in relationship with the Sisters of St. Francis.

I would say it was not only their justice stance but the fact that they loved being in relationship with each other that influenced my choice of congregations. The relational side of the sisters would keep playing itself throughout the following years. It is in being in relationship with these women that I have grown and know conversion on many levels.

To this very day I get a lump in my throat when we sing the words: "We go onward down the path you will create for us with a new song of hope in our hearts. You are joy for the way, you are bread for the day. On our journey you're the friend who is waiting at ev'ry bend, and will STAY until the end. We go on." (Song by Carol Hoverman, OSF)

As told by Sr. Kathy Lensch, OSF



Ten Feet Tall

The Sisters of St. Francis served at St. Mary's in Waterloo, Iowa, from 1899-1990s. This story took place in 1934. Sr. Donalda later joined the Sisters of St. Francis in 1945.

The fourth grade classroom was a corner basement room at St. Mary's school in Waterloo, IA, where sand from the playground blew in the windows. Across the hall was the bowling alley with perpetual stale smoke lingering. I was in fourth grade (when) one of my ungracious acts was noticed by the sixth grade teacher, Sr. Thomas Aquinas (later Sr. Sylvia Nennig) who ordered me to come to the sixth grade classroom after school, and bring my spelling book with me.

Being summoned to an upper grade classroom was punishment enough. But my spelling book was homemade with a cardboard cover. My brother Donald and I were in the same grade. And to save the price of a second book, my mother asked my sister to copy the information needed in a book for me.

I was embarrassed and ashamed as I stood before Sister and held out my spelling book. She asked about its origin. By the time I finished my explanation I was in tears.

Sister in kindly words said to me, "Your sister must love you very much to do that for you." I walked away from that "punishment" feeling ten feet tall.

As told by Sr. Donalda Kehoe, OSF



All Are Welcome

In the 1970s the Bishops of Appalachia wrote a pastoral: "This Land is Home to Me," inviting religious communities to tithe some of their members for ministry among the poor in the south. Our community responded. At this time in our community there were many Sisters in their early 40s. Some were sent to the area.

In the early 1980's, Sr. Veronica Bagenstos, Sr. Ruth Fagan, and Sr. Lené Rubly took up residence in Hiawassee, GA. They shared a 900 sq. foot bungalow with a cat and a parakeet. The Sisters ministered in Union and Towns Counties, GA, and Hayesville and Murphy, NC. Some years earlier a sign was posted in a neighboring town which read: "If you are white, native, and Protestant you are welcome here." However, it didn't take long for the three of us Franciscans to feel welcome. One native said: "Those Catholic nuns aren't so bad. They pray a lot and help a lot."

As told by Sr. Lené Rubly, OSF



A Lasting Impression

Sr. Ruth Elsbernd was a teacher in Davenport, Iowa, in the late 1960s. Sister Ruth shared a story of a rejuvenated relationship with a student after 42 years. Let's call the student "Jane." Sr. Ruth keeps a picture of Jane in a place of honor on the desk in her room.

As my student in high school, Jane had been overwhelmed with sadness when her brother was blinded in war. Often as a teacher, I'd write encouraging comments on returned student papers as I witnessed to our Franciscan spirit and charism. My loving empathy had helped this student through her trauma. Through all these forty-two years Jane saved the paper and treasured my kindness and compassion. As a teacher herself now, she tries to practice this Franciscan charism toward her students... Now she wants to meet me. How many fruits of Franciscan teachers are uncovered?"

As told by Sr. Ruth Elsbernd, OSF



Models of Inspiration

Donna Bauerly, an alumna of Immaculate Conception Academy '52 and former member of the congregation, expresses generously her appreciation of the Dubuque OSFs. She is a retired professor of English at Loras College, Dubuque. Donna reflects on some of her teachers who introduced her to giants of the world of literature and social activism.

Who introduced me to Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton? How did I begin to learn of missionaries in other lands? Who taught me to be an activist? Of course, Sister Mary Robert, later Sr. Dorothy Marie Hennessey! I was known to be a mischievous student, but in my junior year, when I first really encountered Sister Dorothy Marie, she gave me a brand new start and treated me as though I was close to angelic. That was the beginning of my trying to live up to better expectations. She herself knew how to take a stand in a wider world, and it could get her and anyone who tried to be like her, in lots of trouble. I, at her suggestion, began reading books way over my head. I remember my mom saying to me, "Donna, I think you should take back Thomas Merton's Seeds of Contemplation since I don't think you know what you are reading." She was right, but I kept reading and thinking about social activism and learned to stand up for what a true liberal did.

Another Franciscan whom I admired greatly was Sister Mary Bridget (later known as Sr. Frances Conry). When I was a senior in her social studies class, I clearly remember the weekly maps of "world news" with gaily colored articles and loads of in-depth information. Not only did we read about world events; we discussed them, and learned how to incorporate Christian ideals into our lives.

Sister Robert was fiery and Sister Bridget was gentle and quiet, but both had an immense impact on a young teenager who needed to use her energy in far more profitable ways than bringing goats into the school store! These women were the "Dorothy Days" of my ICA world.

As told by Donna Bauerly



Discussion Questions

- Which of the Franciscan values (poverty, humility, contemplation, conversion) or others are reflected in these stories?
- What is the theme that ties these stories together?
- Whom in these stories would you like to meet? Why?
- What question would you like to ask?
- Do any of these stories remind you of an event or person in your life?



Closing Prayer ~

Litany of the Saints

St. Francis....Pray for us.
St. Clare....Pray for us.
Mother Xavier...Pray for us.
Sr. Mary Oda Bolling...Pray for us.
Sr. Matilda Adams...Pray for us.
Sr. Margaret Clare Dreckman...Pray for us.
Sr. Sylvia Nennig...Pray for us.
Dorothy Day...Pray for us.
Thomas Merton...Pray for us.
Sr. Dorothy Marie Hennessey...Pray for us.
Sr. Frances Conry...Pray for us.

(Please feel free to add your own favorite saints and deceased loved ones.)



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For Further Reading on the history of the Sisters of St. Francis

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They Have Taken Root by Sr. Mary Eunice Mousel

Rooted/En Route by Sr. Rebecca Rosemeyer & Sr. Dorothy Marie Hennessey

A Common Heart by Sr. Jordan Dahm

The Legends of the Sisters of St. Francis⁴

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Nourishing Hearts

Prayer

Loving God, as you bless us with a deepening desire to follow in the footsteps of your Son Jesus, guide us with your Spirit's wisdom. Teach us and form us. Help us to walk worthy of this Gospel vocation. May our purpose be firm as Your Spirit teaches us what we are to know. We believe that same Spirit is at work in us in ways beyond our understanding. May we, with swift pace and light step, go forward joyfully and in complete surrender to you.



Materials Needed

They Have Taken Root by Sr. Mary Eunice Mousel

The Sisters of St Francis of the Holy Family by Sr. Mary Cortona Gloden



Early History

They Have Taken Root by Sr. Mary Eunice Mousel, p. 79-80, p. 150, p. 167-168, p. 183-184

The Sisters of St Francis of the Holy Family by Sr. Mary Cortona Gloden, p. 88-112

⁴ There are a number of stories of the life of St. Francis of Assisi which are called "Legends." For example, St. Bonaventure wrote two that are known as "The Major Legend" and "The Minor Legend." Also, "The Legend of the Three Companions" is another Franciscan writing. "Legends" come from a tradition of hagiography (writings about saints) and are not strictly biographical as we would understand biographies today.



Recent History

Beggars at the Door

St. Christopher's, Midlothian, Illinois, was a large grade school in the 1940's. Gracing the convent population was Sr. Sabina Hochhausen, the housekeeper and cookie baker.

As a music student at Midlothian, I always dragged my feet past Sr. Sabina's kitchen door. She always had a cookie for me, and I suppose, quite a few of the music students. Her gentleness and generosity to all of us beggars is not forgotten.

As told by Sr. Margaret Feldner, OSF



Cooking 101

Sr. Lila Hellman entered the congregation 1952. After she began teaching, she had little experience with cooking because, in those days, there was usually a Sister at each mission assigned the task of homemaking.

The first time Sr. Lila attempted baking a tuna casserole for her group of Sisters, the garbage disposal was the recipient of her dish! Because Sweetened Condensed Milk and Evaporated Milk both come in cans, Lila assumed the two milks were interchangeable! In this instance, someone quickly came to her rescue and the Sisters found an adequate substitute for their evening supper!

As told by Sr. Lila Hellman, OSF



Guess Who's Coming to Dinner!

In the late 1960s and later, schools were being merged and local communities of Sisters were being clustered. Bode is a small town in central Iowa and St. Joe is a smaller unincorporated town just a few miles away. The mailing address for residents of St. Joe was St. Joe, Bode. There were a few residential homes, a couple of businesses, and the parish plant of St. Joe, which included a large, relatively new convent.

Once upon a time, seven of us Sisters lived in St. Joe, Bode: Srs. Irmina Manternach, Lila Hellman, Rita Goedken, Janet Taphorn, Kay Gaul, Nancy Meyerhofer, and Frances Nosbisch. We were all teachers, but in four different sites. Our time of sharing was during supper and game playing afterward. Laughter and surprisingly deep sharing were often a part of our meal and recreation. Monday nights were reserved for a Mass with the pastor and associate, followed by a good meal made by one of us. Once in a while a guest priest would be invited. These Masses and meals were appreciated and the word spread! We later heard that many priests in the area waited for THEIR invitation!

As told by Sr. Nancy Meyerhofer, OSF



A Guardian Angel

Sr. Consuelo Lesch OSF served at Heelan High School Convent while Sr. Mary Clare spent her student years there 1948-1952.

My mother died suddenly at the beginning of my sophomore year at Heelan High School. My father was a traveling salesman for Fitzgibbons Religious Goods and was away from our home during the week. Following my mother's funeral, my brother and I convinced our dad that we did not need a housekeeper to supervise us during his absence. Although I cannot verify this because those Sisters are all deceased, I think the Franciscan Sisters who were teaching at Heelan decided to be our guardians. I share one story.

Sr. Mary Consuelo, the homemaker at the convent, was especially kind to me. Each Friday she would have a loaf of freshly baked wheat bread for me to take home and share with Dad when he returned. She made her bread in old coffee cans so the shape of the loaves was memorable to me. At other times she invited me into the kitchen and shared some cooking tips with me and sent samples along when I left. One of her specialties was lemon pie and I asked her to teach me how to make it because our dad loved pies. I had no experience with the art of crusts, fillings, and meringues but I practiced what I learned and we often had pie for our Sunday evening meals.

As I reflect on this story, it seems the Sisters had a special care for two "orphans." Later I was to learn of Mother Xavier's love of such children and of the basis for Franciscan ministries with children.

As told by Sr. Mary Clare O'Toole, OSF



Discussion Questions

- Which of the Franciscan values (poverty, humility, contemplation, conversion) or others are reflected in these stories?
- What is the theme that ties these stories together?
 - Whom in these stories would you like to meet? Why?
 - What question would you like to ask?
 - Do any of these stories remind you of an event or person in your life?



Closing Prayer ~

Litany of the Saints

St. Francis...Pray for us.

St. Clare...Pray for us.

Mother Xavier...Pray for us.

Sr. Cortona Gloden...Pray for us.

Sr. Eunice Mousel...Pray for us.

Sr. Sabina Hochhausen...Pray for us.

Sr. Irmina Manternach...Pray for us.

Sr. Consuelo Lesch...Pray for us.

Clare O'Toole...Pray for us.

Joseph O'Toole...Pray for us.

Joseph O'Toole, Jr....Pray for us.

(Please feel free to add your own favorite saints and deceased loved ones.)



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The Legends of the Sisters of St. Francis⁵

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A Day in the Life

Prayer

Loving God, as you bless us with a deepening desire to follow in the footsteps of your Son, Jesus, guide us with your Spirit's wisdom. Teach us and form us. Help us to walk worthy of this Gospel vocation. May our purpose be firm as Your Spirit teaches us what we are to know. We believe that the same Spirit is at work in us in ways beyond our understanding. May we, with swift pace and light step, go forward joyfully and in complete surrender to you.



Early History

Mousel, Sr. Mary Eunice: *They Have Taken Root* p. 90, pp. 243-244, 254-255, 265-266, 331-347



Recent History

Rosemeyer, Sr. Rebecca and Hennessey, Sr. Dorothy Marie : *Rooted/En Route* pp. 43-47, 112-114, 118-119, 120-122

⁵There are a number of stories of the life of St. Francis of Assisi which are called "Legends." For example, St. Bonaventure wrote two that are known as "The Major Legend" and "The Minor Legend." Also, "The Legend of the Three Companions" is another Franciscan writing. "Legends" come from a tradition of hagiography (writings about saints) and are not strictly biographical as we would understand biographies today.



Lovely Aprons

Sister Petronella spent 51 years in Iowa parochial schools the Sisters staffed; she was principal for 33 of these years. From 1953-57 she was at Granville St. Joseph's, a Grade 1-12 school until its merger with Catholic schools in Alton and Hospers in 1962. The scapular referred to here was a straight piece of the same fabric used in the habit (dress) of the Sisters, shoulder-width and full length. Unlike an apron, it made for a "finished look" in the Sister's appearance.

In 1953, Sister Antoine (Marie) Bohr and I were sent to Granville, our first mission. Our Superior was Sister Petronella Sudtelgte, a very kind and loving woman. One of the "duties" Sister Petronella assigned to Sister Antoine and me was to walk to the post office after school for the mail. Since we had such shiny new black aprons, we would come home, take off our scapulars, put on the aprons and set off down the street. One day, Sister Petronella called us into the office and gently suggested that we wear our scapulars when in public.

Another memory of Sister Petronella was her love of the card game canasta. It was all the rage at this time. Sister did not have any qualms about extending the Sunday night recreation hour for a little longer game of cards!

As told by Sister Elvira Kelley, OSF



Precious Soup

Sr. Donna Carr learned to care for people in need from her parents, who raised eight children in tough financial times while also offering hospitality to less fortunate people. She was the homemaker at many of the congregations' convent homes, and served as homemaker at St. William's School, Alta Vista, Iowa, from 1955-1961. Sr. Carol Hemesath (Caedmon) taught music there 1958-1961. The superior, Sr. Monica Hatz, approved Sr. Donna's response to "the cry of the poor" but sent Sr. Carol to be her companion, as was the tradition at that time.

Sr. Donna loved the Jesus of the Gospels and the way of Francis long before our deepened study of the original sources: Sacred Scripture and our Rule. She discovered an extremely poor and lonely gentleman whose legs would no longer carry his weight. She and I would go to his home, help him weekly to bring chopped wood up from his basement, and leave a jar of soup, cookies, and often some homemade bread. Her face would be totally aglow after we had spent such precious time with him!

As told by Sister Carol Hemesath, OSF



Humor All Around

Sr. LaSalle was at home in the big kitchens of Briar Cliff College and two hospitals, as well as more homelike convent kitchens. Following her years in Emporia (1963-85) she worked in home health in Cortez, CO, for a number of years. She is currently retired at Holy Family Hall Infirmary.

I lived with Sr. LaSalle Nanneman in Emporia, Kansas at St. Mary's Hospital, where she worked in food service providing numerous diets for the many patients, and in addition saw to it that the sisters always had tasty and nourishing food. I recall her "ribbon" sandwiches that looked so elegant and would have won a blue ribbon at any state fair and put Hell's Kitchen to shame. She had a unique laugh and saw humor all around. She never complained about her failing eyesight as she aged gracefully.

As told by Sr. Carol Ann Berte, OSF



Mission Impossible

Mother Dominica Wieneke, whose leadership as Major Superior spanned 1920-1932, hoped passionately to establish a college for the sake of broadening the education of women post-high school. Bishop Edmond Heelan, favorable to her plan, donated a parcel of sixty-eight acres north of Sioux City, in July, 1928. Dedication occurred September 18, 1930. The years of service provided by the librarians noted below were: Sr. Annette 1942-64, Sr. Kilian 1944-63, Sr. Joanice 1962-92 and Sr. Helen 1969-78.

At the heart of every school is its library. It enriches and supports all other components of learning for the students and the faculty. The Franciscan Sisters who taught at Briar Cliff College fully endorsed this fact and so funds were made available to build a collection that was useful and enriching to all. As a student and later as a faculty member, I recall that four Sisters were especially vigilant in the early management of the library and its expansion over the years: Sisters Annette Renger, Kilian Rankin, Joanice Theobald, and Helen Larsen. There are many stories to tell but I write of one.

The Bishop Mueller Library held about 20,000 volumes in the late 1960's and the books were catalogued according to the Dewey Decimal System. Sisters Joalice and Helen made the decision to change to the Library of Congress system. At the time no small college in Iowa had made such a decision. However, it would provide more specific details about the content of a book and be useful to students and faculty. Only a professional librarian can appreciate fully all the work that such a decision would require. The Sisters were good stewards of the college's resources and so decided they would do the work required to make the conversion. I remember how many "off duty" extra hours over the three years were spent on the task. It was an example to me of dedication to providing the best education.

As told by Sr. Mary Clare O'Toole, OSF



A Dedicated Life

Sister Julie Manternach enjoyed family life in Cascade, Iowa. After high school she entered the Mount St. Francis congregation where she pursued nursing education along with her preparation to become a Sister of St. Francis. She ministered as a nurse for 18 years in various staff and management roles before becoming a health care chaplain in the 1990's. At present she is a chaplain and the director of the Pastoral Care Department at St. John's Hospital in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Sister Julie Manternach has dedicated her entire religious life to the healing ministry of Jesus. Julie is out of the house at 6:00 a.m. from Monday through Friday as she treads her way to the hospital to take care of business before she attends daily Mass at the hospital chapel and then ministers to the sick in her care. She is highly respected by the doctors, nurses and employees for her knowledge of medical ethics, critical care and palliative care patients. Her ability to work with other members of the care team to provide for the needs of patients and families is recognized and appreciated.

On one occasion a doctor called me for advice about a certain ethical situation and as I didn't quite know how to address the situation, I called Sr. Julie who immediately was able to take care of the problem, because of her knowledge, her experience, and her good relationship with the doctors.

As told by Sr. Carol Ann Berte, OSF



We Do Not Live on Bread Alone

Sr. Bertha has ministered as a homemaker, mainly in the congregation's institutions, since 1963. Her love of life made the students at Briar Cliff love to be around her. She has worked in the kitchen at Mount St. Francis since 1978.

Sister Bertha Kruse is a woman who demonstrates that the way to a person's heart is through the stomach! She has worked in food service her whole Franciscan life with enthusiasm, and always with a smile on her face. While her focus is to provide nutritious and delicious food for the sisters, and she does this with graciousness and love, her gift for nurturing life goes far beyond food. It would be a difficult task to find any celebration that she has not been involved in conceiving and creating! Her love of others and of her Franciscan community is evident.

As told by Sr. Carol Ann Berte, OSF



Discussion Questions

- Which of the Franciscan values (poverty, humility, contemplation, conversion) or others are reflected in these stories?
- Is there anyone in these stories you would like to meet? Why?
- What questions would you like to ask?
- These stories feature sisters in a variety of work situations. How is your own work influenced by your spiritual beliefs?
- What work situation you've experienced made you feel most fulfilled? Why?
- Do any of these stories remind you of an event or person in your life?



Closing Prayer

Litany of the Saints

St. Francis...Pray for us.
St. Clare...Pray for us.
Mother Xavier...Pray for us.
Mother Dominica Wieneke...Pray for us.
Sr. Petronella Sudtelgte...Pray for us.
Sr. Donna Carr...Pray for us.
Sr. Monica Hatz...Pray for us.
Sr. Annette Renger...Pray for us.
Sr. Kilian Rankin...Pray for us.
Sr. Joanice Theobald...Pray for us.
Sr. Helen Larsen...Pray for us.

(Please feel free to add your own favorite saints and deceased loved ones.)



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A Common Heart by Sr. Jordan Dahm

The Original Legend of the Sisters of St. Francis

Instructions: This history and timeline may be taken as the content for a small group reflection. Opening and closing prayer and discussion questions are provided for this purpose. If this module is used by individuals, it is recommended that a journal is kept for the discussion questions.

A Note from the Editors: In reading all the stories we collected we discovered the theme of relationships is found in every story, including our written history. As Franciscan women we can best be described as an evangelical community rather than a contemplative or apostolic community. For us this means that living the Gospel mandate of loving relationships is central to our lives – and defines us more than a particular ministry or a certain way of praying.



Prayer

Loving God, as you bless us with a deepening desire to follow in the footsteps of your Son, Jesus, guide us with your Spirit's wisdom. Teach us and form us. Help us to walk worthy of this Gospel vocation. May our purpose be firm as Your Spirit teaches us what we are to know. We believe that the same Spirit is at work in us in ways beyond our understanding. May we, with swift pace and light step, go forward joyfully and in complete surrender to you.



The Ongoing History of the Sisters of St. Francis

Our congregation originated in Herford, Germany in 1864 where the needs of many homeless and hungry children touched the heart and conscience of our Foundress, Mother Xavier Termehr. Soon other young women asked to join her in this work of compassion and our community was born. With the encouragement of the local pastor and bishop, we ran an orphanage and went to homes of the elderly who needed nursing care. We ministered on the battlefields of the Austro-Prussian and Franco Prussian wars for which in 1871 we received the Iron Cross.

In 1875 a new law ordered religious communities not involved in hospital work to either disband or emigrate. We were a community of 29 members at the time, and all 29 desired to remain a religious community, even though this meant exile from their native land. Fortunately a priest from Iowa had visited the sisters and through this contact they were invited to Iowa City, arriving September 8, 1875. In Iowa City they established the first Catholic orphanage in the state. They also nursed the sick in their homes, and took English lessons. Bishop Hennessey of Dubuque happened to meet Mother Xavier. He told her of his intent to open a German Catholic Orphan Asylum, and his wish that the sisters take over this work. So again Mother and her community uprooted themselves, and moved to Dubuque in December of 1878.

From the very beginning our Sisters experienced difficulties in providing for the orphans. They and the priest of Herford needed to beg to provide for the orphans. This did not change when they arrived in the United States. Our history books tell us that Sisters went on "collecting tours" to as far away as Chicago and St. Louis, armed with a circular letter from Mother Xavier introducing them to the pastors of the parishes they visited. An unexpected gift of these tours was that some young women decided to enter our congregation after they met our "begging Sisters."

Once the Sisters became proficient in speaking English, their services as teachers were requested by an ever-growing number of pastors and bishops. From two schools in 1876, by 1915 they taught in forty-four schools throughout Iowa, in addition to staffing a home for the aged, a boarding house for working women, the domestic service department of the Dubuque seminary, and a second orphan home in Sioux City. By the 1920's we were serving in a number of states in addition to Iowa.

The 1930's were a period of continued growth and outreach, with the establishment of Briar Cliff College (now University) in Sioux City, the opening of Corpus Christi School for African American children in Chicago, and the first of our foreign missions in Chowtsun, China. The flourishing Chinese mission, which grew to include a Novitiate for local women wishing to become Sisters, was forced to close after nineteen years because of the political situation. The Sisters were asked to come home, but they did not come alone: four native Chinese Sisters who, like Mother Xavier and her German Sisters, chose to go into exile rather than abandon their vocation, came too, and have enriched our communal life.

Other foreign missions followed: 25 years in Chile, and shorter periods in Guatemala, El Salvador, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. We currently serve in Honduras, the island of St. Lucia, Canada, and fifteen U.S. states, including several sites in rural Mississippi.

We pray to stay faithful to the vision of service and compassion to the most needy which led to the founding of our congregation so long ago. Believing that justice is a sign of the reign of God, we currently minister in a variety of social and human services and church settings in addition to education and healthcare. We are conscious of the many blessings we have received both as a congregation and as individuals, and we remember Mother Xavier's words: "One beggar must help another. Good people share with us, and we must share with the poor."

(See separate attachment for timeline)



Discussion Questions

- Which of the Franciscan values (poverty, humility, contemplation, conversion) or others are reflected in these stories?
- What is the theme that ties these stories together?
- Whom in these stories would you like to meet? Why?
- What question would you like to ask?
- Do any of these stories remind you of an event or person in your life?



Closing Prayer -

Litany of the Saints

St. Francis ... Pray for us.

St. Clare ... Pray for us.

Mother Xavier ... Pray for us.

Sr. Cortona Gloden... Pray for us.

Sr. Eunice Mousel ... Pray for us.

Sr. Dorothy Marie Hennessey ... Pray for us.

Sr. Jordan Dahm... Pray for us.

(Please feel free to add your own favorite saints and deceased loved ones.)



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Faithful in God's Work

Prayer

⁶ There are a number of stories of the life of St. Francis of Assisi which are called “Legends.” For example, St. Bonaventure wrote two that are known as “The Major Legend” and “The Minor Legend.” Also, “The Legend of the Three Companions” is another Franciscan writing. “Legends” come from a tradition of hagiography (writings about saints) and are not strictly biographical as we would understand biographies today.

Loving God, as you bless us with a deepening desire to follow in the footsteps of your Son, Jesus, guide us with your Spirit's wisdom. Teach us and form us. Help us to walk worthy of this Gospel vocation. May our purpose be firm as Your Spirit teaches us what we are to know. We believe that the same Spirit is at work in us in ways beyond our understanding. May we, with swift pace and light step, go forward joyfully and in complete surrender to you.



Early History

The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Family by Sr. Cortona Gloden, pp. 181-84

They Have Taken Root by Sr. Eunice Mousel, pp. 302-306



Recent History

Rooted/En Route by Sr. Rebecca Rosemeyer & Sr. Dorothy Marie Hennessey, pp. 124-145

A Common Heart by Sr. Jordan Dahm, pp. 16-17, 105



Remnant of God

From the early days of our community, the care of elderly people has been a strong commitment for our sisters. (Began in 1905, St. Francis Home for the Elderly was succeeded by Stonehill Care Center in 1978. Stonehill continues to the present.) In addition to caring for the physical needs of the residents, the sisters wanted to provide a comfortable home that fostered the dignity and value of each person.

Sister Emilana Meissen cared for the residents at Stonehill Care Center from 1978-1993. Much of her time was spent in the kitchen where she prepared tasty, nourishing, and attractive meals. Her cinnamon rolls were a special treat for residents and were often shared with friends who came to help with board work or fund raising. Upon “retirement” from kitchen duties, Sister Emilana decided to continue her devotion to the chapel services. Every Sunday for many years, she would walk to Stonehill. Rain, snow, cold winds or sunshine did not stop her. She would assist in preparing for the Liturgy and sometimes lead the group in singing. During the weekdays she now spends her days cutting and sewing remnants of all kinds into quilts for the poor. When asked how many she has made, she will say she doesn’t know exactly but probably hundreds. Her only wish is to be remembered as a “Remnant of God.”

As told by Sr. Helen Huewe, OSF



Stretched

When our sisters taught in small rural high schools they would often be assigned to teach many different classes. At the time the students did not realize what this entailed but upon reflection as adults they were often amazed. Sister Frances Nosbisch was a student in North Washington, Iowa in the early 1960's.

Sister Malachy (Bernadine Cashen) was the principal of St. Mary's High School. She also taught math, science and social studies for all four levels. I never thought much about how 'stretched' she and our other teachers were at this small school. What I knew was that this is just the way it was and that I generally thrived at school. In Sister Bernadine's later years at Holy Family Hall, she once asked me a very touching question: "Now that you have been a teacher for quite a number of years, how do you think I did at North Washington, especially teaching those subjects that were not my majors?" I had never considered that she was less than confident. In reflection, I knew she had done a very good job and happily told her so. The humility to be "stretched" to teach all those subjects and the humility to later ask for assessment of how she had done speaks to me of our Franciscan Charism."

As told by Sr. Frances Nosbisch, OSF



A Befriended Cane

Before polio vaccines were available, many children suffered from the disease and became crippled for life. If they were highly motivated, many overcame the challenges that life presented as they strove to meet their personal goals. One such woman was our Sister Elise Arnts.

Polio left Sister Elise with weakened legs and a need to wear leg braces when she walked. But her walk was a side to side rock. All her life she dreamed of being a teacher. When she entered Mt. St. Francis in 1949, her handicap kept this dream from becoming a reality. Her first assignment was to the congregation's print shop.

The death of a sister at St. Mary's School left a classroom without a teacher. Sister Sixtus Leibfried, education supervisor for the community, called Sister Elise and asked her to consider filling in temporarily but perhaps she should use a cane. Needless to say this request upset and humiliated Sister Elise, yet she took up the challenge. Her teaching dream was realized and after some years she stated, "My cane is now a faithful friend." She continued to be a beloved teacher until her death in 1997.

As told by Sr. Lila Helman, OSF & Sr. Kay Gaul, OSF



A Strong and Gentle Woman

Our congregation's Constitutions state that "We are called to live the Gospel simply and joyfully." Sister Matilda Adams was a Gospel woman who exemplified our Franciscan charism in many different ways. Sister Gertrude Ann Brown was in the novitiate with Sister Matilda and later they served on the faculty and in administrative roles at Briar Cliff College(1955-1962) and on the congregation's Leadership Team(1968-72).

I knew Sister Matilda well. She lived simply, embracing the spirit of poverty in her everyday life. Helping the poor was a real concern of hers. For example, as Briar Cliff president, she was instrumental in providing a college education free of charge for some students who otherwise would have been unable to attend. Closely related to simplicity and the spirit of poverty is the virtue of humility. Sister Matilda was a very intelligent and well-educated woman. She knew that any gifts she had were from God to be used in serving others. When extra help was needed and she was free, she would help in the kitchen or with house cleaning. Sister was a joyful person and had a quiet sense of humor. I recall my consternation when I was asked to be academic dean at Briar Cliff. When Sister Matilda saw me crying, she gave me a hug and said, "I'm the one who should be crying. They made me the President!"

The late 1960s and 1970s were the years following Vatican Council II. Religious communities were asked to renew their way of life. Sister's leadership qualities were recognized by the congregation when she was elected Major Superior during these changing times. Some members of the community felt that we were moving too fast and others thought we were not moving fast enough. Patience and understanding were needed, along with wisdom and foresight. Sister Matilda's prayerfulness guided her and the community through these difficult years.

It was also a time when many Sisters were asking for dispensation from their vows. In her discussions with these women, she learned that some of them were in need of professional counseling. She encouraged them to remain in the congregation long enough to get that kind of help because they would be unable to afford it once they had left. This concern prompted Sister Matilda to open a personal renewal center for Sisters in St. Cloud, Minnesota after she had completed her term as president.

As told by Sr. Gertrude Ann Brown, OSF



Discussion Questions

- Which of the Franciscan values (poverty, humility, contemplation, conversion) or others are reflected in these stories?
- What is the theme that ties these stories together?
- Whom in these stories would you like to meet? Why?
- What questions would you like to ask?
- Do any of these stories remind you of an event or person in your life?



Closing Prayer

Litany of the Saints

St. Francis...Pray for us.
St. Clare...Pray for us.
Mother Xavier...Pray for us.
Sr. Bernadine Cashen...Pray for us.
Sr. Elise Arnts...Pray for us.
Sister Sixtus Leibfried...Pray for u.
Sister Matilda Adams...Pray for us.

(Please feel free to add your own favorite saints and deceased loved ones.)



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The Legends of the Sisters of St. Francis⁷

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A Note from the Editors: In reading all the stories we collected we discovered the theme of relationships is found in every story. As Franciscan women we can best be described as an evangelical community rather than a contemplative or apostolic community. For us this means that living the Gospel mandate of loving relationships is central to our lives – and defines us more than a particular ministry or a certain way of praying.

✧ ✧ ✧ Caring for Each Other and Others

Prayer

Loving God, as you bless us with a deepening desire to follow in the footsteps of your Son, Jesus, guide us with your Spirit's wisdom. Teach us and form us. Help us to walk worthy of this Gospel vocation. May our purpose be firm as Your Spirit teaches us what we are to know. We believe that the same Spirit is at work in us in ways beyond our understanding. May we, with swift pace and light step, go forward joyfully and in complete surrender to you.

✧ ✧ ✧ Early History

Sister Mary Cortona Gloden, *The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Family*, pp. 113-35.

Sister Mary Eunice Mousel, *They Have Taken Root*, pp. 167-8.

⁷ There are a number of stories of the life of St. Francis of Assisi which are called “Legends.” For example, St. Bonaventure wrote two that are known as “The Major Legend” and “The Minor Legend.” Also, “The Legend of the Three Companions” is another Franciscan writing. “Legends” come from a tradition of hagiography (writings about saints) and are not strictly biographical as we would understand biographies today.

Recent History

There for Each Other Until the End

The Sisters of St. Francis have always ministered to the needs of the people of God. Sisters Phyllis Reding and Margaret Lodder were strong and capable teachers and principals throughout their lives. As they advanced in years, they found themselves together and even though they were showing signs of cognitive diminishment, they continued their ministry - this time to each other.

Sister Alda Thiltges recalled how Sr. Phyllis and Sr. Margaret became companions in their later years at Holy Family Hall. They spent endless hours walking hand in hand, up and down the corridors, totally present to each other. And they always seemed to be happy. Because Margaret was inclined to wander outside, even in cold or rainy weather, a sign was placed on the outside door which read, "Sister Margaret, do not go out this door." Sr. Phyllis, with her hand clasped in Sr. Margaret's, would read the sign aloud and say, "That doesn't say me. Let's go!" Coincidental or not, the funeral liturgy of each Sister included the song, "Let Us Walk in the Light of the Lord."

As told by Sr. Alda Thiltges OSF



Sharing Christmas Joy

The sisters ministered at Sacred Heart Parish in Dubuque, Iowa from 1881-1993. The school was one of the largest grade schools in Iowa for many years. Consequently, many Sisters lived in the large convent. Because one of the long-time pastors loved good music and the sisters had good musical training in their formation, caring for each other and others often expressed itself in singing.

A lovely tradition in the late 1960's at Sacred Heart Convent, Dubuque, was singing Christmas carols for the neighbors located near the convent on Queen Street. During the Christmas season we would go from one home to another, spreading Christmas joy in our simple Franciscan style. We brought many smiles, both to the shut-ins as well as to the choristers.

As told by Sr. Maureen Smith OSF



Holistic Development

The sisters ministered at St. Edward's Parish in Waterloo, Iowa from 1945-2006. In 1949-1950, among those who lived in the convent were: Sisters Clotilde Weirich, Mary John (Loretta) Bauer, Margaret Bunkers, Anacleto (Mary) Thill, and Romuald Schaefers. Following the evening meal it was customary for sisters to gather for a time of "recreation" during which many took care of tasks such as preparing classroom bulletin boards or darning the long black stockings that they wore.

Sr. Anacleto, the convent housekeeper, loved caring for not only our physical, but also our social needs. With great thoughtfulness, she would inspect our black stockings that came through the laundry. Then she would repair them for us so that during the time we gathered for "recreation" we could enjoy the new card game: Canasta. Lots and lots of laughter lifted our spirits as we learned the complexities of this game! And our stockings were already mended! Thank you, dear Sister!

As told by Sr. Edna Ginder OSF



Looking Back: God's Care Is Evident

Sister Mary Helen Seivert's ministry was one-of-a-kind among the Dubuque Franciscans. When she joined the congregation in the 1950's, she was an expert in sign language because both of her parents were totally deaf. After ministering for a time in schools, she became involved full-time in ministry to the deaf in the diocese of Des Moines. She received the ministry of others as she resided at Holy Family Hall and received dialysis three times each week.

I have known God's kindness and love in so many ways as sisters have visited me and accompanied me for medical reasons over the past years. The joy and deep emotions I have felt have enriched my life. This experience has also made me aware of how God has cared for me. I should have died on November 21, 2003 when I was struck down by an aortic aneurism while signing a mass at Pocahontas, Iowa. As I look back, there are many signs of God's providential care. There were Sisters of St. Francis at Pocahontas, in Sioux City, and at Rochester, MN as I was transported to various hospitals those days. Their presence was a gift. Because I was ministering away from my regular place of work in Council Bluffs, IA, I was spared the experience of a murder that occurred in the very apartment building in which I lived. God has been with me - guiding through events and the presence of my sisters.

As told by Sr. Mary Helen Seivert, OSF



Discussion Questions

- Which of the Franciscan values (poverty, humility, contemplation, conversion) or others are reflected in these stories?
- What is the theme that ties these stories together?
- Whom in these stories would you like to meet? Why?
- What questions would you like to ask?
- Do any of these stories remind you of an event or person in your life?

Closing Prayer



Litany of the Saints

St. Francis ... Pray for us.

St. Clare ... Pray for us.

Mother Xavier ... Pray for us.

Sr. Margaret Lodder ... Pray for us.

Sr. Phyllis Reding ... Pray for us.

Sr. Mary Thill ... Pray for us.

Sr. Clotilde Weirich ... Pray for us.

Sr. Loretta Bauer ... Pray for us.

Sr. Romuald Schaefer ... Pray for us.

Sr. Mary Helen Seivert...Pray for us.

(Please feel free to add your own favorite saints and deceased loved ones.)



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Healing Touch

Prayer

Loving God, as you bless us with a deepening desire to follow in the footsteps of your Son, Jesus, guide us with your Spirit's wisdom. Teach us and form us. Help us to walk worthy of this Gospel vocation. May our purpose be firm as Your Spirit teaches us what we are to know. We believe that the same Spirit is at work in us in ways beyond our understanding. May we, with swift pace and light step, go forward joyfully and in complete surrender to you.



Early History

Sr. Mary Cortona Gloden *The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Family* pp.113-135
Sr. Mary Eunice Mousel *They Have Taken Root* pp.163-166, 275-279



Recent History

Sr. Rebecca Rosemeyer & Sr. Dorothy Marie Hennessey *Rooted/En Route* , pp. 120-123

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A Time for Everything

Sr. Agnesine Rosonke taught on the grade school level in many of the Congregation's schools, along with serving as principal in many of these same schools. She was at Melrose Park, IL, setting for these two stories, from 1951-56. Love for travel allowed her to vacation from East coast to West, along with serving as an educator for 57 years! She died in rich fullness of life in 2009 at the age of 94.

Sister Agnesine Rosonke exemplified for me about every Franciscan virtue one could name. Sister was my first superior and principal. Fresh from the Novitiate, I was not prepared to teach 48 seventh graders who seemed to know more than I did of the workings of the world. Some days I could get pretty tense. Sister knew precisely when it was time for me to put studies aside and take a brisk walk outside, where we would relax and tell the funniest stories. And she knew how to make people laugh! Time with Sister Agnesine was more refreshing and healing than any therapy or medication. I would nominate Sister for sainthood any day.

As told by Sr. Bernice Schuetz, OSF



Bringing Out The Best

Sister Agnesine Rosonke taught me in 8th grade in 1953-54 at Sacred Heart School in Melrose Park. I was a very shy, insecure girl. Today I may be diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder. She brought the best out in me by highlighting and emphasizing my writing talents; *her pride in me sent me over the moon when I obtained the highest grade on a test.* She instilled in me a love of learning and a self-confidence which are still with me. I credit her, along with my parents with my love for our Catholic faith and family.

As told by Katherine Dolan



Moments of Grace

Sr. Rosalima Wingert taught kindergarten in Dubuque and at Corpus Christi school for African American students in Chicago, and served at a pre-school nursery which offered interracial programs in Portland, Oregon. A tribute at her death remembered her thus: "a stabilizing influence wherever she went, carrying within her an atmosphere of peace and serenity."

When I worked at Holy Family Hall Infirmary in the late 80's, Sr. Rosalima was a patient. Although she often had excruciating pain, she was always deeply gracious and affirming of others. Anyone who went into her room - nurse, aide, cleaner - left feeling valuable and cherished. Spending time with her was truly an occasion of grace.

As told by Sr. Veronica Bagenstos, OSF



Discussion Questions

- Which of the Franciscan values (poverty, humility, contemplation, conversion) or other values are reflected in these stories?
- What is the theme that ties these stories together?
- Is there one of these stories that especially touches you? If so, why do you think this is?
- Whom in these stories would you like to meet? Why? What questions would you like to ask?
- Do any of these stories remind you of a person in your life?



Closing Prayer

Litany of the Saints

St. Francis ... Pray for us.
St. Clare ... Pray for us.
Mother Xavier ... Pray for us.
Sr. Agnesine Rosonke... Pray for us.
Sr. Rosalima Wingert...Pray for us.
Sr. Lorena Ruden...Pray for us.
Sr. Petrine Friedman...Pray for us.

(Please feel free to add your own favorite saints and deceased loved ones.)



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Women of Prayer

Prayer

Loving God, as you bless us with a deepening desire to follow in the footsteps of your Son, Jesus, guide us with your Spirit's wisdom. Teach us and form us. Help us to walk worthy of this Gospel vocation. May our purpose be firm as Your Spirit teaches us what we are to know. We believe that the same Spirit is at work in us in ways beyond our understanding. May we, with swift pace and light step, go forward joyfully and in complete surrender to you.



Early History

Sister Mary Cortona Gloden, *The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Family*, pp 74, 34, 38,
Sister Mary Eunice Mousel, *They Have Taken Root*, pp. 100, 260



Recent History

Sisters Rebecca Rosemeyer and Dorothy Marie Hennessey; *Rooted/En Route*. P. 104-07.
Sr. Jordan Dahm, *A Common Heart*, pp. 91-104

⁹ There are a number of stories of the life of St. Francis of Assisi which are called "Legends." For example, St. Bonaventure wrote two that are known as "The Major Legend" and "The Minor Legend." Also, "The Legend of the Three Companions" is another Franciscan writing. "Legends" come from a tradition of hagiography (writings about saints) and are not strictly biographical as we would understand biographies today.



Drip, Drip, Drop

Sister Hiltrude Harig developed a loyal following among her primary students in several of the congregation's schools. Her years on earth ended in 1962, but those who taught with her have fond memories of how her relationship with God spilled over in her teaching.

In the early 1950's I was teaching fifth grade at Remsen, Iowa. On the first day it rained the children excitedly raised their hands. "Do you know what Sister Hiltrude - the second grade teacher - taught us to pray when it rains?" "No," I replied, "what did she teach you to pray when it rains?" "Every little raindrop, praise God for me!" was the happy, earnest response. Surely the Franciscan call to contemplation - to pray always, to bless God - bore fruit in many lives touched by sisters. It is something I still remember each time it rains or snows.

As told by Sr. Ruth Elsbernd, OSF



Absolutely the Best Storyteller

Sister Emily Goedken was one of six daughters from the same family who became members of the Dubuque Franciscans between the years of 1891 and 1909. She spent several years in the early 1940's at St. Christopher's in Midlothian, IL, the congregation's first mission in Chicago. Sister Emily died in 1954. In 1955, Margaret Mary Feldner who had been one of Sister Emily's students entered the congregation. When she received the habit she took another name which was customary in those days to indicate a "new" life. She chose the name "Sister Emily," which was hers until she returned to her baptismal in the late 1960's.

Sister Emily was the best storyteller. As a second grader, the best part of any day was going to Sister Emily's classroom in Midlothian. I think Sister Emily was close to one hundred and one at the time or at least she seemed so to all of us second graders. Twice a day we were allowed to go to her classroom: for spelling and for bible stories. She enthralled us with the detailed descriptions as she conveyed familiar stories. She told how Jesus as a little boy in Joseph's workshop made birds out of clay and they came alive when he tossed them into the air. She described the vicious Egyptians pursuing Moses and the Israelites in such vivid colors and words that we were speechless and never misbehaved in her class. More than anyone else she inspired an awe of scripture in my life.

As told by Sr. Margaret Mary Feldner, OSF



A Woman Committed

Sister Marianne Schmitz was one of ten children, three of whom became Dubuque Franciscans. During her years of active ministry she taught in many of the Catholic high schools staffed by the Franciscans, among them Visitation High School in Stacyville, Iowa, from 1949-59. One of her students, Esther Hemann, (now Sr. Camilla) entered the congregation in 1958. A tribute at her death in 2005 reads: "Sister Marianne will be remembered for her winning smile and enthusiasm for God and all God's creatures."

I first knew Sister Marianne Schmitz when she taught at Visitation High School when I was a student. She taught general science and physics in addition to general math, geometry, and algebra. I recall being impressed with her at that time. It was apparent to everyone that she enjoyed being teacher. She was very accepting of each student. Indeed, students loved her as their teacher. But that wasn't the whole picture. Students also saw her as a woman of prayer. I remember the day she said that she prayed each day asking God to help her persevere in her vocation and in her faith. I was shocked and remember saying, "Certainly you have it made". "Oh no" she said. "Faith and my vocation are total gifts from God and they could be taken away at anytime." That line has remained with me over the years. I saw her as a woman committed to whatever she was about - even to jogging in her tennis shoes, until she could jog no more. To me and to my classmates, she was a "holy woman of God." Her life of commitment - to God, to prayer, and to her students - had a lasting impact on all of us.

As told by Sr. Camilla Hemann, OSF



Ask and You Shall Receive

Sister Helen Farrell spent much of her life as a nanny, work she loved. In mid-life she found herself asking some basic questions about life, including "Who is God? What don't I have a closer feeling about Him?" Her search, and the answers she found, led her to join the Sisters of St. Francis in 1979 when she was 65 years old. Sister Veronica Bagenstos, who was working at the sisters' infirmary, recalls that even in her years of diminishment Sister Helen was close to the God she had found.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's I was working at Holy Family Hall, the infirmary for our frail and elderly sisters. There was an acute shortage of nurses which went on for many months. In spite of intense advertising there were no applicants and vacant positions remained un-filled. One day I was talking to the administrator, Deb Albert, about the situation. Sr. Helen Farrell, who was suffering from dementia by that time, walked by. Deb, who was excellent at preserving the dignity of those who were marginalized, said, "Sr. Helen, we are talking about the big problem we have finding nurses. Would you please pray for us, that we find some nurses soon?" Sister Helen agreed to do so. The next afternoon Sue Cooley and Heather Hartman, newly graduated from nursing school walked in the door and asked if we were hiring. I know it was the prayer of that deeply humble and faithful sister that led those two nurses to our door.

As told by Sr. Veronica Bagenstos, OSF



Look at Him

Sister Barbara Tobin entered the congregation in 1879 at the age of fifteen. She worked initially at the newly-opened orphanage in Dubuque and then as a homemaker in many convents. She cared for the sisters in the infirmary at Mount St. Francis and died at the age of 94.

When I was in the novitiate, Sister Barbara, an older sister, would be wheeled into the chapel from the infirmary, which was located right next to the chapel. When Sr. Helen Marie, the directress of novices, asked her about her prayer, she said, “I look at God and God looks at me.” What a simple and profound definition of contemplation.

As told by Sr. Margaret Mary Feldner, OSF



A Christmas Lullaby

Sister Gratian Wolfe lived from 1909-1965, many of those years as a Franciscan Sister. She was admired for her appreciation of natural beauty, especially as it was revealed in God’s creation and in music. Sister Gratian had a kind, gentle disposition and a simple, child-like faith. This story took place toward the end her life.

For many years Sister Gratian Wolfe was a familiar sight at Mount St. Francis and Holy Family Hall as a gardener and domestic worker. She worked with Sister Cornelia Henrich in the spacious gardens and orchards. Both of them wore big rhubarb leaves over their veils to keep cool in the summertime.

At Christmas, when the crèche was set up in the Mount St. Francis chapel, Sister Gratian’s fervor and love for Christ burned anew in her heart. With a simple, child-like faith she would go into chapel when she thought no one else was there. Standing in front of the crèche, she pulled out her worn harmonica and played “Silent Night” for the Christ Child. The melodious gift she presented to the Savior sounded softly and peacefully in the chapel and echoed in the star-lit skies.

As told by Sr. Rita Goedken, OSF



Discussion Questions

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- What is the theme that ties these stories together?
- Whom in these stories would you like to meet? Why?
- What questions would you like to ask?
- Do any of these stories remind you of an event or person in your life?



Closing Prayer

Litany of the Saints

St. Francis ... Pray for us.

St. Clare ... Pray for us.

Mother Xavier ... Pray for us.

Sr. Hiltrude Harig ... Pray for us.

Sr. Emily Goedken...Pray for us.

Sr. Marianne Schmitz...Pray for us.

Sr. Helen Farrell...Pray for us.

Sr. Barbara Tobin...Pray for us.

Sr. Helen Marie Taylor ...Pray for us.

Sr. Gratian Wolfe...Pray for us.

Sr. Cornelia Henrich...Pray for us.

(Please feel free to add your own favorite saints and deceased loved ones.)



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