



# Franciscan CONNECTIONS

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## Sisters Learn about Life in the Marshall Islands

By Sr. Dorothy Schwendinger, OSF

Nearly 100 Sisters and Associates gathered April 9, 2016, at Mount St. Francis to learn more about the peoples of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The Chapter Circle, which focuses on the Franciscan mission to stand with people who are poor, felt that it was vital that the congregation learn more about the Marshallese people.



Marsha Sampson, Rev. Stan Sampson, Sister Helen Huewe, and Irene Ernest at Mount St. Francis.

After all, more than 20 Mount St. Francis Center employees call this island country their original homeland.

Ten years ago in the development of Crescent Community Health Center in Dubuque, **Sister Helen Huewe** met **Rev. Stan Sampson**, Pastor of Dubuque Paradise Church. She recently became reacquainted with him while at a meeting discussing the area Marshallese population's health needs. Also present at that meeting was **Dr. Neil MacNaughton**, a professor in the Department of Nursing at the University of Dubuque, and **Irene Ernest**, a Marshallese woman active in the Dubuque community. The three of them graciously agreed to serve on a panel to tell us about the life in the Marshall Islands and what life was like for them here in the United States.

The Marshall Islands are located in the Western Pacific just north of the equator. Made

up of 5 single islands and 29 atolls the islands came under a Trust Territory of the U.S. after World War II and eventually became an independent republic in 1979. The U.S. conducted nuclear testing on the Island of Bikini for many years and since precautions were not taken to sufficiently protect the nearby residents, radiation fallout left many of the people with serious health conditions. A covenant signed with the U.S. in 1986, granted the Marshallese the right to come to the U.S. and live and work here without the need of a "green card." They remain, however, citizens of the Republic of Marshall Islands.

Dr. Neil explained that he had served in the Peace Corp in Micro Indonesia where he learned so much about these warm and hospitable peoples. Since then he has traveled to the Marshall Islands with students and friends.

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Dr. Neil noted that because of the radiation, the Marshall Islands are still a dangerous place to live. Additionally, rising salt water floods have left the arable land, previously used for agriculture, unproductive. With climate changes, the very existence of their homeland is threatened to be washed away. There are few viable opportunities for education and employment. Thus large numbers of the Marshallese people have come to the U.S. looking for a better life. Over 400 of the Marshallese live in Dubuque. Many suffer from the effects of exposure to radiation and show symptoms of tuberculosis, diabetes, cancer, and other illnesses.

“I learned so much about another culture,” said **Sister Mary Colleen Hoversten**, a resident of Clare House. “Such gifted people. The crafts they showed us were beautiful. Every day our care-givers at Clare House work so hard for our benefit and now I appreciate them that much more. But I was distressed to learn that though they pay for Social Security taxes, they are denied benefits. That is not right.”

**Kathy McDonnell**, Director of Nursing at Mount St. Francis Center, also attended the meeting. She said it expanded her appreciation of all that the Marshallese people have suffered at our nation’s hands yet she said she now knows they came from a most beautiful country and settle here in “such a humble and forgiving way.”

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*“After the presentation, those in attendance completed advocacy letters to Congress. ... In particular, legislators were asked to do all they can to open both Medicare and Medicaid to the Marshallese people. They pay taxes, work diligently, and enrich America in many ways. Since the U.S. bombing created so many hazards, justice demands that the U.S. meet its obligations to assist the Marshallese people.”*

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The handicrafts made by the Marshallese people, as Irene Ernest (center) shows sisters here, are carefully crafted at home from split and bleached coconut leaves and other natural plants and shells. Wall designs, elegant fans, headbands (made by weaving in flowers and Cowie shells), and jewelry incorporating turtle shells, bones, and Cat’s Eyes graced the tables at MSF. Coils and plaiting skills handed down from mother to daughter keep these amazing skills alive and testify to the cultural and artistic aptitude of the people and their heritage. Photos by Jessi Russo.

After the presentation, those in attendance completed advocacy letters to Congress which pointed to the urgent need these permanent residents have for available and affordable health care. In particular, legislators were asked to do all they can to open both Medicare and Medicaid to the Marshallese people. They pay taxes, work diligently, and enrich America in many ways. Since the U.S. bombing created so many hazards, justice demands that the U.S. meet its obligations to assist the Marshallese people. ■

## Sisters, Lay People Fighting Modern Day Slavery *by Rhonda Miska*

**W**hile slavery may be something that many imagine happening in the past in distant lands, in truth, modern day slavery exists in the form of human trafficking: the selling of men, women, and children for commercial sex or forced labor. An estimated 30 million men, women, and children are trafficked in the world today, though women and girls are disproportionately affected. The U.S. State Department estimates that 14,500 -17,500 people are trafficked into the U.S. annually. Trafficking is a \$9.8 billion industry in this country.

At a 2014 meeting in England, Pope Francis called human trafficking, “an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ. It is a crime against humanity.” In 2012, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) committed to “collaborate to abolish human trafficking.”

Dubuque Sisters from several communities are working to raise awareness of human trafficking around the Archdiocese of Dubuque. The Coalition Against Human Trafficking in the Tri-State Area is “a collaborative, faith-based network that engages in education and advocacy in an effort to eradicate human trafficking. The Coalition collaborates with other area groups who are also working to spread awareness of this modern day slavery.”

**Sister Lou Ann Kilburg, OSF** said there are many misconceptions about trafficking, including that, “it’s only in the big cities, or...in foreign countries, not the U.S.”

**Sister Mary Lechtenberg, OSF** agreed, saying that “even though people think certainly human



*The Coalition Against Human Trafficking in the Tri-State Area includes sisters and lay people. The group meets in Dubuque once a month. Contributed photo.*

trafficking is not in Iowa” there have been cases reported in various parts of the state, including Fredricksburg, Sioux City, Decorah, Dubuque, Des Moines, and Cedar Rapids.

The Coalition encourages people to know the signs of trafficking. Persons who are trafficked may be accompanied by a controlling person or boss, may have lack of control over their schedule and travel documents, may not have an ability to leave their job, and may show signs of physical abuse like bruises. Presentation **Sister Sheila Dougherty, PBVM** recommended the acronym SOAR – “stop, observe, ask, respond” – as a tool for how to react if you suspect you encounter someone who has been trafficked.

Parishes or community groups interested in the Coalition’s educational presentations can contact **Franciscan Associate Lisa Schmidt** via email at [schmidtl@osfdbq.org](mailto:schmidtl@osfdbq.org). ■

*This article first appeared in The Witness.*

### Praying for the Living and the Dead

By Sister Cathy (Kate) Katoski, OSF

**S**ome years ago one of our benefactors wrote and suggested I write about the option of making donations to the Sisters of St. Francis as memorial gifts when friends and family have passed into eternal life.

We’ve heard a lot about mercy during this past year declared by Pope Francis as a Year of Mercy. The seventh and last “spiritual work of mercy” is to pray for the living and the dead. Making a “memorial donation” to the Sisters of St. Francis or any favorite charity at the time that a friend or loved one dies is both a way to honor the deceased person, but also a way to make active your prayer. You can make a memorial donation in many ways – our donation envelope, on our website

([www.osfdbq.org](http://www.osfdbq.org)), or in a separate mailing of your choice. If you give us the appropriate information, we will notify the family of the deceased of your donation in their memory.

Whether it be the Corporal or the Spiritual Works of Mercy, this quote from Theresa of Avila says so well why these works are critical to our lived life:

“Christ has no body on earth now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which this Christ is to bless all people.”

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#### Mission Statement of the Dubuque Franciscans

*Rooted in the Gospel and in the spirit of Francis and Clare, the Sisters of St. Francis live in right relationship with all creation.*



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## Sisters Experience All-Ability Cycles at MSF

By Jessi Russo

“I don’t think I’m going to be able to do it, it’s been so long,” said **Sister Verna Gaul** as she stepped outside with her walker to the bicycling event at Mount St. Francis on Friday, April 29. Waiting to show Sister Verna otherwise were **John and Celia Brunow** of All Ability Cycles from Jefferson, Iowa.

All Ability Cycles sells and services bicycles and tricycles for individuals with special needs. “We believe everyone can ride. We call it inclusive cycle,” reads the tagline on All Ability Cycles’ Twitter page.

One after another, the sisters took turns on All Ability Cycles’ bikes. The sounds of laughter and bicycle bells intermingled outside of the Franciscan motherhouse. Although the weather was cool, most sisters stayed after their ride to watch and cheer on the others, waving them off as they pedaled away.

**Val Lucas**, activities director for the Dubuque Franciscan Sisters, wasn’t sure what kind of turnout there would be for the event due to the weather but was pleasantly surprised at the 31 sisters who participated.

“To see those smiles—it was so joy-filled,” said Val.

**Sister Inez Turnmeyer** also noted the happiness she saw in her fellow sisters while on the bikes.

“There is no age limit that anyone can enjoy something like that,” she said. “It brought back a lot of memories and good feelings for everyone.”



*Sister Jeanne Wickham with John Brunow.*

To help combat the chilly temperatures, Mount St. Francis staff tucked blankets around **Sister Antonita Soppe** before she set off with John around the convent.

At 102 years of age, she was not only his oldest passenger of the day, but of all time. “How was your ride, Sister?” asked the staff when she returned. Her response captured the feelings of everyone at Mount St. Francis that afternoon.

“It was perfect,” she replied. ■