



Franciscan CONNECTIONS

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Ministry in a Time of Pandemic

by Jessi Russo

On March 8, 2020, the first cases of COVID-19 in Iowa were announced. Shortly after, the Dubuque Franciscans' Director of Nursing and Administrator made the decision for sisters to "stay home" at Mount St. Francis Center. But even though sisters found themselves "locked down" they would still find ways to meet the needs of others. Here are just some of the ways the sisters both near and far have continued to minister in recent months.



Sister Nancy Schreck talks with Teresita Amador as they work on birdhouses at Excel, Inc. in Okolona, Mississippi in June 2020. Photo by Adam Robison/Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal.

some who are alone--to connect with a wider world that's meaningful," said Sister Sarah. "It's a way I can share my scripture background with a larger audience and help meet a need right now."

Sister Sarah said that a range of people have joined the free sessions offered weekly over Zoom--including a handful of her students from Wartburg.

"I'm enjoying exploring the biblical text through the perspective of disruption. By considering the context in which the biblical text was written and the upheaval we are experiencing now, we engage both our minds and hearts. I am delighting in seeing people share and encounter the Bible in new ways."

For **Sister Norma Jean Holthaus**, her ministry as a spiritual director has moved from being in person to talking by telephone.

"I cannot meet with my directees as I had before so now they phone me and we have a spiritual direction time via the phone," she said. "It certainly is not the same, but it is helpful and we can stay in touch that way."

Sister Norma Jean has used this time to connect with friends and family by phone also.

"I call just to see how they are doing. I am especially mindful of parents with small children who have been unable to be out and about! Phone ministry works!" she said.

The Liturgy Team of **Sisters Camilla Hemann and Marge Staudt** have been working through a

Ministry Inside of Mount St. Francis

A few weeks prior to the lockdown a sister suggested to **Sister Sarah Kohles** that she consider offering some virtual sessions at Shalom Spirituality Center. At that time Sister Sarah was teaching 70 first year Lutheran seminary students an introductory course on the gospels at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque. But when Shalom had to close its doors due to the virus, Sister Sarah knew the time was now.

"We couldn't just close Shalom," she said. So she brainstormed what she could offer. What has transpired are Shalom's first virtual sessions: a faith sharing group on Sunday afternoons and a more structured session titled, "Scripture in Times of Disruption" on Wednesday evenings.

"It's been a way for people who are at a distance--

Continued on the next page

myriad of challenges to their ministry.

“On March 19, 2020 we learned we would not be able to have Mass until further notice,” said Sister Camilla. Sisters are allowed to gather in chapel for daily morning and evening prayer while maintaining the appropriate social distancing.

“We’ve also have had a Service of the Word on Sunday and Wednesday with several Sisters presiding. Some enjoy preparing their own reflections of the Word,” said Sister Marge Staudt, who also serves on the Liturgy Team. “On all other days we are gifted with a homily sent by Father Bob Beck, whose perspective we continue to appreciate.”

Both Sisters Marge and Camilla noted how recent months have made them grateful for community prayer.

“What we have learned through this is how much we appreciate community coming together in prayer,” said Sister Camilla. “Although we are confined, we pray daily for an end of this virus and ‘that all remain calm and confident in God’s wisdom, power, goodness and care.’”

Sisters at Mount St. Francis Center were also able to work together offering service to the Dubuque Food Pantry by preparing free bag lunches for area children in April.

“More than one sister commented that she was grateful that we could do something to be of help during the coronavirus situation,” said **Sister Rita Goedken**.

Sisters made sandwiches and then packed brown paper bags full of fruit and other goodies. The Food Pantry then picked up the kids’ lunch bags each day and delivered them to Operation New View where they were distributed.

Ministry Outside of Mount St. Francis

Sister Kay Gaul continued teaching religion to students at Wahlert Catholic High School via Zoom from April 13 to June 2.

“It was a new challenge, but learning for both students and myself happened,” she said.

“I was very proud of my students and the respect and care shown and desire to learn even distantly. I hope to be teaching in the fall.”

In Melrose Park, Illinois, **Sisters Nila Meyerhofer and Jan Hrubes**, also transitioned their ministry with the Franciscan Resource Center online.

“Zoom is our way to participate in area agency meetings where we keep up with the area needs and client resources available,” said Jan.

“Also Zoom meetings help our Franciscan Community Group to continue to communicate with each other,” said Sister Nila. “Life here has changed with the spread of the virus and developing other ways of communicating with others.”

In Waterloo, Iowa, **Sister Carole Freking’s** ministry with Bridges Out of Poverty has gone through many adaptations since the pandemic began.

“We were starting a new group for our Bridges Out of Poverty program the next week after the shut-downs began and immediately postponed classes until fall,” she said. “But when we all were encouraged to ‘stay home’ in March, I thought of the many people who live alone and wouldn’t see another human day after day. So I invited a former co-teacher to join me in a new ministry: to daily send these people an email to remind them that they are thought about and prayed for, as well as to give them something inspirational or to elicit a smile that day.”

International Ministries

In Honduras, the country locked down on March 16, said **Sister Nancy Meyerhofer**.

“Only banks, pharmacies and supermarkets have been open and one can only go out on the day of one’s ‘number’--the last digit of your ID card. This is about once every two weeks,” said Sister Nancy.

Sister Nancy’s ministry with San Antonio De Padua Parish in La Entrada cannot be done from home, but at the beginning of May she was asked to do a TV program with the local Catholic station.

“Originally its target audience were the catechists, since I usually met with them every two weeks, but then I realized that others were also tuning in even beyond the parish,” she said. “So I have made the weekly themes more general, but always some kind of formation is given.”

Topics of the TV programs Sister Nancy has offered have included Mary, effects of living under quarantine and how to handle them, “where is God in all this,” stories of solidarity in COVID-19 times, and liturgical celebrations such as Pentecost.

Sister Frances Nosbisch’s ministry came to a sudden halt in St. Lucia when the country closed down due to COVID-19.

“I quickly moved to the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center just prior to travel between north and south of the country being closed,” she said.

While living at the center on her own, she worked on a small number of painting, varnishing and cleaning projects to help enhance the building upon reopening.

“Our staff has been furloughed and the only ones who have come in to do any work have done so on a volunteer basis as we have no funds to pay them. Just last week we were able to get some food items to give to them,” she said.

She has recently been able to resume in-person spiritual direction with strict guidelines in place.

“We go forward in trust!” said Sister Frances. ■

DBQ Franciscans Create Grants with Stimulus Funds

by Sister Maureen Leach and Jessi Russo

Like the rest of the nation, the Sisters of Saint Francis each received a stimulus check from the government.

Immediately the sisters decided that they would use the \$1,200 each sister received to set up grants to support people who needed help quickly due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“When a crisis unfolds, the Dubuque Franciscan Sisters want to help,” said **Sister Kathy Knipper**, president of the congregation. “When the Finance Office informed the Leadership Team that each sister would receive an Economic Input Payment for each member of the congregation, we thought we could use those funds to care for those who were in need due to the pandemic.”

The sisters created a very simple grant application and an ad hoc committee was formed. **Sisters Virginia Jennings, Edith Gottsacker, Ruth Kleitsch and Kathy Knipper** met to consider applications. All grant requests had to be initiated by a sister and organizations had to have a history of collaborating with other groups/entities. The funds were used to address immediate needs around food, health, and safety related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The money was distributed within days of approval. Forty-five non-profit organizations in Iowa, Mississippi, Texas, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Washington, DC, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Honduras received anywhere from \$1,000 to \$5,000 each, for a total of \$200,000.

Sister Nancy Schreck applied for a grant for Excel, Inc. in Okolona, Mississippi.

“We sought funds in order to be able to assist people with food, and with utilities and rent especially for those whose employment was affected by the virus,” said Sister Nancy. “There was a small portion in the grant to provide for transportation to get the food delivered to people living out in rural areas, not able to get to Excel.”

Sister Nancy said the greatest demand for the grant was for food for those in need. She along with Dubuque Franciscan **Sisters Reyna Helen Badillo,**



Sister Mary Beth Goldsmith delivers food in Mississippi. Photo by Sister Nancy Schreck.

and Mary Beth Goldsmith recognized that many area immigrants in Mississippi didn't qualify for services of area agencies. The sisters made a weekly shopping trip of 50 miles round trip to nearby Tupelo to purchase groceries and other supplies and then delivered them to people's homes.

“The deliveries were made using appropriate social distancing and masks--so waves of gratitude and a blown kiss of thanks were a great reward,” said Sister Nancy. “I just hope that the members of the congregation realize the significance of the gift these COVID grants are to God's people in need.”

In Honduras, **Sister Nancy Meyerhofer** sought help for 200 families in the parish she ministers at in LaEntrada, Copan.

“The money received helped with people who are hungry because they have no income due to the COVID-19 crisis,” she said. With the grant, food was purchased and parishioners helped to package and deliver it to the homes of those in need.

“We have been in very strict lockdown here since Monday, March 16, 2020,” said Sister Nancy. “This is a real hardship for the majority of our parishioners in town who are day workers and live from day to day. The social ministry of our parish has been working to help families suffering from hunger in this extended lockdown.”

The sisters who were on lockdown in Dubuque were happy to provide this gift, especially since they have not been able to go out to perform the services that they typically do in the community.

“It was a great privilege to share our stimulus monies with so many in need,” said **Sister Edith Gottsacker**, who served on the grant committee.

“These grants helped give expression to the living out of the congregation's constitutional commitments to bear witness to God's extravagant love, to respond to the needs of the times, and to further the reign of God in human life and social structures,” said Leadership Team member **Sister Maureen Leach**, quoting the constitutions of the congregation. ■

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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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Make a Tax-Free Gift with an IRA

by Sister Cathy (Kate) Katoski, OSF

Recently a friend asked me about her brother making a donation from his IRA. If you have an IRA (an “Individual Retirement Account”) and are 70½ years old or older, you can take advantage of this simple way to benefit charities and receive tax benefits in return.

You can give any amount, from \$100 up to \$100,000 per year from your IRA directly to a qualified charity without having to pay income taxes on the money. This popular gift option is commonly called the “IRA charitable rollover or a “qualified charitable distribution.”

There are a number of advantages for you to make a gift in this fashion:

- The transfer generates neither taxable income nor a tax deduction, so you benefit even if you do not itemize your deductions.
- You can use your gift to satisfy all or part of your required minimum distribution (RMD). (Note: The RMD requirement has been waived for 2020, per the CARES Act signed into law on March 27, 2020.)
- Since the gift doesn’t count as income to you, it can reduce your annual income level. This may help lower your Medicare premiums and decrease

the amount of Social Security that is subject to tax.

- Contact your IRA custodian to complete the gift. It is also wise to consult with your tax professionals or legal advisor if you are contemplating a charitable gift of a sizeable nature.

- This can be a wonderful win-win for people who would rather gift to charity than pay taxes. Experts estimate that heirs receive less than 25% of most IRA assets that pass through estates. Direct gifts to a qualified charity can be made only from an IRA. Under certain circumstances, however, you may be able to roll assets from a pension, profit sharing, 401(k) or 403(b) plan into an IRA and then make the transfer from the IRA directly to your favorite charities.

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Federal tax ID number: Please contact Sister Cathy Katoski at (563) 564-9411 for our federal tax ID number.