What we can learn from Autumn

Pat Flicker, FCV Director

As I sat out on my patio this morning with a cup of coffee thinking about what to write in this article, a leaf fell from the big old oak tree in my backyard and gently swayed back and forth in the breeze until it landed on the ground. It was so peaceful and graceful...

What can we learn from this season of autumn? We watch the leaves change color, fall gracefully to the ground only to lay dormant until spring when they become the nutrients to help the trees continue to grow...

This reminds me of the cycles of life we all encounter. There is a season of letting go and releasing things out of our control. Honoring that God has a plan, and at times, we need to step aside and trust in that plan. Just as that leaf lets go of the tree, we are all called to let go of different things throughout our life.

The volunteers have to do this when they arrive at FCV. Many of them express “nervousness” and “fear” of what is to come. What amazes me is their strength and courage that they listened to God’s call and signed up for a year of volunteering. It can’t be easy to leave behind what is known, “let go” and trust in God’s plan.

When we let go and trust God, we move into a space of vulnerability and growth. It is so easy to build walls and comfortable spaces, yet those same walls can hold us back. My challenge to all of you is to take a look at your life and “let go” of something this fall that you need to. Let it fall to the ground gracefully. Trust God to help you keep learning, growing, and knowing that everything is okay, no matter what happens. It is part of God’s plan for us.

9th Annual
Franciscan Community Volunteers
and Franciscan Welcoming House
Christmas Open House

Sunday, December 4, 2016
2-4 pm

Franciscan Welcoming House
1600 11th Ave S. - St. Cloud, MN 56301

Questions? 320-229-0307 or 320-240-6184

Thanksgiving Is....

Thanksgiving is a time of gratitude to God, our Creator and Provider, whose guidance and care go before us... and whose love is with us forever.

Thanksgiving is a time to reflect on the changes, to remember that we, too, grow and change from one season of life to another.

Thanksgiving is a time of changing seasons, when leaves turn golden in Autumn’s wake and apples are crisp in the first chill breezes of fall.

Let us remember the true meaning of Thanksgiving. As we see the beauty of Autumn, let us acknowledge the many blessings which are ours... let us think of our families and friends... and let us give thanks in our hearts.
‘May Christ teach you what you are to do’

By Laura Shrode, FCV Program Assistant

As Francis was preparing to meet Sister Death, he reflected to his brothers, “There was no one to tell me what I should do, but the Most High himself made it clear to me that I must live the life of the Gospel. I have done what was mine to do; may Christ teach you what you are to do” (Celano, Second Life, 214).

“I have done what was mine to do; may Christ teach you what you are to do.” My heart has been pondering this phrase for the past few days. What am I to do? How am I called to live a Gospel life? How can I assist the volunteers in listening to what Christ is teaching them to do?

At a recent Monday afternoon FCV reflection, Pat introduced to the group and shared about the Transitus of Saint Francis, which is where the opening quote is from. She had discovered more about it in the Engaging Franciscan Spirituality class the previous weekend.

Among many things, we learned that the Transitus describes the time of one’s passage from death to eternal life. During our reflection, we heard stories of what the Transitus of Saint Francis had been like. We heard about how Francis had an attitude of rejoicing, even amidst the pain and struggles of his illness. We heard that from his death bed, he was still a mediator and bringer of peace to his community, through his interactions with the bishop and the podestà [mayor or governor] of Assisi.

One of the experiences of Francis that stood out to me the most, however, involved his encounter with the doctor. While Francis was quite ill, his doctor told him that all would be ok. Francis, seemingly knowing this was not the truth, questioned the doctor. Francis shared, “Do not be afraid, for by the grace of God, I am not a coward who fears death. For with the grace and help of the Holy Spirit, I am so united and joined with my Lord that I am equally as happy to die as I am to live” (Francis of Assisi: The Prophet, Volume III, 369-372). Upon hearing that, the doctor told Francis that there was no cure to his illness and that Francis would die relatively soon.

I was struck by this encounter. It reminded me of my chaplain ministry at the hospital. I thought about how hard it can be for doctors to break bad news to patients. I reflected too on what it has been like to sit with a patient as they hear that they have an incurable disease, with only a few months left to live. Or what it was like to talk with a gentleman who had just been told his cancer had metastasized, leaving him with only a few hours before he would die. These words are heavy and difficult, whether one is the bringer or receiver of the news. And yet, Francis wanted to know the truth. He wanted to know how much time he had left. Upon hearing this, he responded quite eloquently. While I have never heard a patient use those same words that Francis spoke, I have encountered patients who are so in tune with their faith, that they do not fear death. Rather, like Francis, they exude peace for they are excited about the upcoming face-to-face encounter with God. How beautiful!

Once again my heart is left pondering what Francis shared, “I have done what was mine to do; may Christ teach you what you are to do.” I feel that this year I have been learning more about what I am to do with my life and how I am to live out the Gospel. For now, I feel that I am growing into the answer through my work with FCV and at the hospital. As I walk with the volunteers this year and hear about their service experiences, I am often reminded of my encounters at the hospital as a chaplain. It is almost as if my chaplaincy work is my service site for the year. When the group gathers to reflect at our Thursday Sharing of the Heart, my reflections frequently revolve around my experiences at the hospital. Though scheduling is difficult at times, I am finding that my two part-time ministry jobs beautifully complement each other.

Franciscan spirituality seems to be a nice bridge between the two. Our reflection on the Transitus is just one example of how I have found that Francis connects my two forms of ministry. I pray that I may continue to find these connections and that I may continue to listen for what Christ is teaching me. I pray that you too may listen to the words of Francis and continue to be open to what Christ is teaching you.
Learning to trust God
By Jenny Wonsever, FCV

For the months prior to my arrival in St. Cloud, it was hard to fully comprehend what I was about to do. The fact that I was about to start a year of service with the Franciscan Community Volunteers seemed more like a dream than a reality. Once I started to pack up my belongings, it suddenly felt too real. Was I really about to leave all my friends and family to move a thousand miles away to live with strangers for a year? Nervous is an understatement. I tried to convince my parents to come with me to St. Cloud, under the guise of wanting them to meet Pat and the sisters. In reality, I did not want to go to this new place all alone.

Surprisingly, I felt completely unafraid as I settled into the Welcoming House. Pat and the sisters were kinder than I could have imagined (and I imagined them very kind)! While I unpacked and explored the house, I felt a deep sense of peace about my decision to participate in this program.

The other volunteers are wonderful and their presence brings me incredible joy. I have four new, amazing friends and it feels like I have known them my whole life. Every Thursday, all of the volunteers gather for Sharing from the Heart, where we reflect upon spiritual questions through the lens of our own unique experiences here and in our past. Sharing the intimacy of our own thoughtful reflections would naturally invoke nervousness and fear. Unexpectedly, I did not feel as afraid as I expected to feel. This community makes me feel so safe and comfortable that I did not even realize how personal of a story I shared one night until I finished talking. I could spend ages talking about how much I love all of my community – Pat, the sisters, and the volunteers.

Though I’m sure all of you would love to hear me ramble on for years about my community, I wanted to leave you with one final thought. When God brings together people with willing and open hearts, He can create beautiful connections that you could never expect. So trust in the Lord, and allow Him to change your life like He is changing mine.

Alumni Updates

Elias McCulloh, FCV 2010-11: Bonjour soti nan peyi a bèl nan Ayiti (Greetings from the beautiful country of Haiti). I’m living in Tabarre (Port-au-Prince) for a month-long immersion experience with one of my HM sisters. I’ve been volunteering at a school for handicap children and the "abandon" room at St. Damien’s Children’s Hospital. I’m also visiting different villages (Fondwa, Kenscoff) and observing at clinics.

Ian Peoples, FCV 2013-14: I started my second year of novitiate in August and am thoroughly enjoying life in the Jesuits. I pray for the FCV daily and am grateful for the wonderful experiences I had in the program.
1600 11th Avenue South  
St. Cloud, MN  56301

Contact FCV:  
Pat Flicker  
FCV Director  
info@fcvonline.org  
Office Phone: 320.229.0307  
www.FCVonline.org

You can support FCV
- Partner with us financially-help us support the poor/marginalized.  
- Check us out on the internet... Let other people know about our program by liking, sharing and commenting on our posts!

Looking ahead
Oct 28 to Oct 30  
Fall retreat at Motherhouse with David Leidl. Please keep us in prayer.

Nov 9 to 11  
Pat & Laura going to Natl. Catholic Volunteer Conf.

YOU ARE INVITED:  
ANNUAL CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE  
Sunday, Dec 4, 2016 from 2- 4 p.m.

SAVE THE DATE:  5-1-2017  
Taste of St. Cloud

Franciscan Community Volunteers is based on three pillars: service, community living and Franciscan spirituality. Volunteers make a year-long commitment to work full time in local nonprofit agencies that serve the needs of those who are poor and marginalized while accepting the challenge of living simply and in accordance with Gospel values.

Did you know you can receive this newsletter electronically?  
If you would like to save some trees, go to www.fcvonline.org. Enter your name and e-mail at the bottom of the page.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, producing varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.  
Francis of Assisi