

# Our Journey

Fall 2017 • Vol. 36 No. 1



Matchie,  
Michelle  
Christian  
PEACE 1956



**FRANCISCAN SISTERS**  
OF LITTLE FALLS, MINNESOTA

# Franciscan Federation honors Sister Karen Niedzielski

This year's Franciscan Federation honorees were selected based on their commitment and contributions to education and developing servant-leaders. Sister Karen Niedzielski, an educator for 50 years, has taught students of all ages, from kindergarten to seminary. Her goal: create a learning environment that allows each student to develop their own talent, intelligence and curiosity. She wants every child to discover their own creativity, recognizing that each child, whether truly gifted or not, is a genius in her or his own right.

Sister Karen works to develop the whole child—to see them happy, because a happy child is able to give to the world from their own gifts. Looking back, her greatest gift as a Franciscan educator has been the freedom to use her own creativity.

Congratulations, Sister Karen!



## Sister Joel Bieniek turns 100!



Friends and family joined with Sister Joel Bieniek to celebrate her 100th birthday. Sister Joel was born on a farm southeast of Holdingford on August 10, 1917. Along with turning 100, she also celebrates 80 years as a Franciscan Sister.

Sister Joel ministered as a registered dietitian, instructor and consultant. She served at St. Gabriel's Hospital and St. Gabriel's School of Nursing, Little Falls, St. Francis Hospital and St. Francis School of Nursing, Breckenridge, and St. Michael's Hospital, Sauk Centre. As a consulting dietitian, she served at various nursing homes and hospitals in central Minnesota from 1967-1990, including the cities of Perham, Onamia, Long Prairie, Princeton, Pierz, Pine River, Moorhead, Walker, Park Rapids, Browerville, Clarissa, Bertha, Menahga, Little Falls and Brainerd.

From 1989 until recently, Sister Joel ministered as a sacristan at St. Francis Convent, using her expertise in arranging flowers and enhancing the environment for liturgies in Sacred Heart Chapel.

# Our Journey

FALL 2017 • VOL. 36 No. 1

*Our Journey* is published three times a year by the Community Relations Department of the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, for donors, associates, friends, relatives and employees. This publication shares the journeys of our sisters and associates as they work in joyful service in the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare.

### Editorial Team:

Elizabeth Mahoney Rydeen, editor,  
Jan Roering, editorial assistant  
Amanda Frieler, graphic designer  
Julie Hanson, direct mail specialist  
Sister Rose Margaret Schneider  
Sister Elise Saggau  
Sister Carmen Barsody  
Associate Geri Dietz

Printed by: Spectrum Marketing Services, Little Falls, MN

To receive this publication, please contact:

Community Relations Dept.  
Franciscan Sisters  
of Little Falls, Minnesota  
116 8th Avenue SE  
Little Falls, MN 56345  
Phone: 320-632-2981  
info@fslf.org • www.fslf.org

Cover: Photo by Sister Cordy Korkowski

### Our Mission:

We, Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, are a community of women religious whose members are called to live the Gospel joyfully and to reverence the earth and all of God's creation. In the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare, we embody a life of prayer, simple living and service to those in need.

We are committed to nonviolence as we recognize the need for healing in ourselves and in our world. We seek to build communities of peace and justice wherever we are called to serve.

© September 2017  
Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls,  
Minnesota

*Dear Friends,*

Francis of Assisi was a person who drew from a playful, creative and courageous heart throughout his lifetime. His humanity was first expressed in his life as the playboy son of a rich merchant. God took Francis where he was and invited him to follow Jesus. He responded wholeheartedly to that call and was transformed into a holy and loving person, embracing all people from rich to poor, noble to peasant. The genius of Francis was that in his life he joined together an intense life of prayer and loving presence in the midst of his society. His life expressed the values of simplicity, poverty, prayer and a continual turning toward God, the other and all of creation.

We who call ourselves Franciscan, whether vowed religious, associate, Third Order Secular, neighbor or friend down the street, live the Franciscan values day by day, sometimes consciously and sometimes so naturally that they are simply part of who we are. We grow up in our families and communities learning these values through the witness of our parents, fellow parishioners, teachers and mentors. Whether in prayer, caring for a sick parent or child, feeding the hungry, sharing the joy of another or advocating for peace, we are all living a Franciscan life.

In this issue, you will see many expressions of Franciscan love and service fostered by our sisters, our friends and students, and by those who participate in various events and programs, both here in the United States and in Latin America.

I hope you recognize and celebrate how you have “grown up Franciscan.” We see it in you and, seeing it, we see the face of Jesus alive and present in our world.

Thank you! And thank you for all the ways you support and enable us to expand our Franciscan community in love and service.

Peace and all good,

*Sister Beatrice Eichten*

Sister Beatrice Eichten  
Community Minister/President



## On the cover: St. Francis High School Gathering

Sisters Renee Christian '67, Jeanie Thiesen '63 and Michelle Matchie '55 enjoyed two days of pure joy. “Our parents sent us to St. Francis because five of our aunts had gone there; four were my mother’s sisters and one was my dad’s. And Father Trobec in Elk River encouraged it!” said Michelle.

“Not only did we visit with our classmates and school friends, we connected with many of the sisters who influenced our lives in such meaningful ways. Staying in the dorm was great fun. There were many giggles remembering our days there. And the dorm rec room provided the class celebrating their 50th a wonderful place to visit late into the night,” remarked Renee.



# A view from the other side

*Pastor Tom Mundahl*

Recently, a friend, who is a 1967 graduate of St. Francis High School mentioned her 50th class reunion. She was surprised that I had been awarded an honorary SFHS diploma in 1966, earned by making great sacrifices acting and singing in school plays. As I thought about this fading blue-purple “diploma,” it became clear that even though I am a graduate of Little Falls Senior High, St. Francis has made almost as important an impact on my life.

I was born just across the street at St. Gabriel’s Hospital and, as a Lutheran, did not quite know what to make of a community of Franciscan sisters that we simply called “nuns”—a term containing both mystery and fear. Yet experiences with the sisters, who offered soothing ice cream after a tonsillectomy when I was five and later cared for me after an appendectomy, convinced me there was nothing to be afraid of. Their flowing white habits spoke nothing but healing care to me. Luther League trips to Glenwood to see a film about “escaped nuns” had no credibility for me. In fact, they increased my interest in the “religious life.”

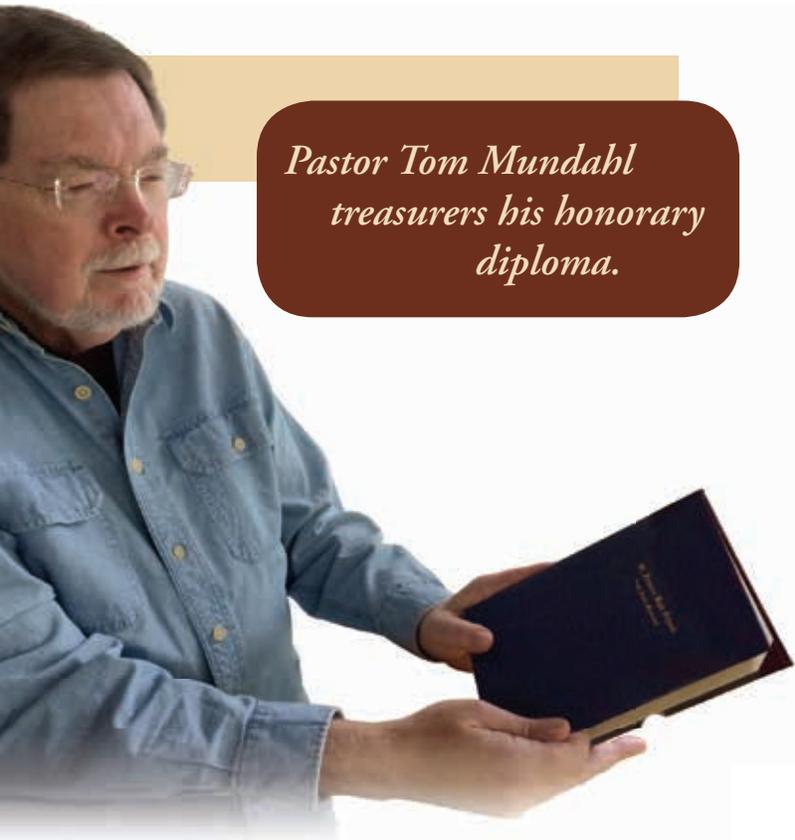
But the truth is that I never had reason to enter St.

Francis Convent until I was 14 and took part in the Red Cross lifeguard training held at the St. Francis pool. Led by Ron Kavadas, the football coach at LFSHS, it was the perfect place for this important training. I was a pretty good swimmer and, in a pool that small, swimming was almost optional. When we warmed up, a good push off and two strokes were enough to reach the other side. To “bob” for ten minutes was just as easy since even in the deep end the bottom was close. A good share of the lifeguards in the area were trained in that pool. I still remember Coach Kavadas making very clear that when we entered the building, we went down to the pool. The rest of the building was “off limits,” which made me wonder: what happened in the forbidden part of that building?

A few years later, I would find out. In the meantime, I found myself attending parties given by local St. Francis students where I learned to dance and began to discover some of the basics of mid-teen social life. At first I assumed that young women from St. Francis were just naturally gregarious and perhaps took classes on “party-giving.” Only later did it occur to me that this might be a way of compensating for attending what we called in the early ’60s an “all-girls school.” Whatever the explanation, I took full advantage of these opportunities and throughout high school only dated St. Francis students. (Of course, “dating” carries a much more intense meaning today.) Soon students from both high schools were part of the mix at local dances, the KLTF auditorium, the Little Falls Roller Rink and the notorious Pierz Fun House.

Still, there are mysteries I will never understand. One of them is “sodality.” I remember once, I suggested to a St. Francis student that we get together on a Wednesday night. She couldn’t because she had “sodality” on her calendar. I asked what that was and did not get an answer I could understand. But I did generously offer to pick her up in my green 1955 Chevrolet and give her a ride home. Somehow I thought that the fusion of human affection and divine love provided great opportunity. Not only was I wrong, I still do not know what a “sodality” is.

So how did I ever find my way as an invited guest into St. Francis High School proper? During my senior year, our choir director John Polisenio took me aside after rehearsal to share a request from Sister Sarto (Carol Schmit). She needed three guys, at least one of whom



*Pastor Tom Mundahl  
treasurers his honorary  
diploma.*

could sing, to act in a musical at St. Francis. To say that I had been waiting for this invitation is an understatement. Of course I agreed and found two friends to share the delight. The musical was “So This is Paris,” a story about an American “girl” who comes to Paris and falls in love with Paul, a romantic Parisian played by me. It was a lot of fun and done pretty well. Later in the year my friends and I were once again called on to take roles in a drama where I remember playing Joe the plumber. Who says “typecasting” is dead?

During this time, I received an invitation from one of the sisters to attend a Saturday retreat. Now I knew I was really in! I was amazed at how well this retreat was programmed, centered on the 1962 “art film,” *David and Lisa*, chronicling the new friendship between troubled teens in a psychiatric hospital. Of course, the message was pure Franciscan: welcome everyone. Friendships develop among people in strange ways and they are to be nurtured. The Lutherans I knew at the time did not do any of this. Not only did this retreat fully embody the best of Saint Francis and the spirit of Vatican II,

it probably changed my life. When I received my “honorary degree” from St. Francis, I had not even begun to realize the debt I owed.

My working life has revolved around college teaching—Luther College, the University of Iowa, Mount Mercy—and parish ministry in several Lutheran congregations. No matter where I have lived, I have been influenced by the Franciscan spirit of hospitality, service and care of creation. Seeking church unity, especially with my Roman Catholic sisters and brothers, has always been primary. We have stood together to keep the Ku Klux Klan out of Dubuque, Iowa, and to protect the soil on Midwestern farms. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has always been observed so that it might become a daily goal. And I have been privileged to preach in three Trappist monasteries around the world.

Where did this come from? Not from a typical teenager trying to craft a social life. Clearly from something deeper. It should be enough to have one high school of origin. How amazing to have two! How rich St. Francis High School has made me.

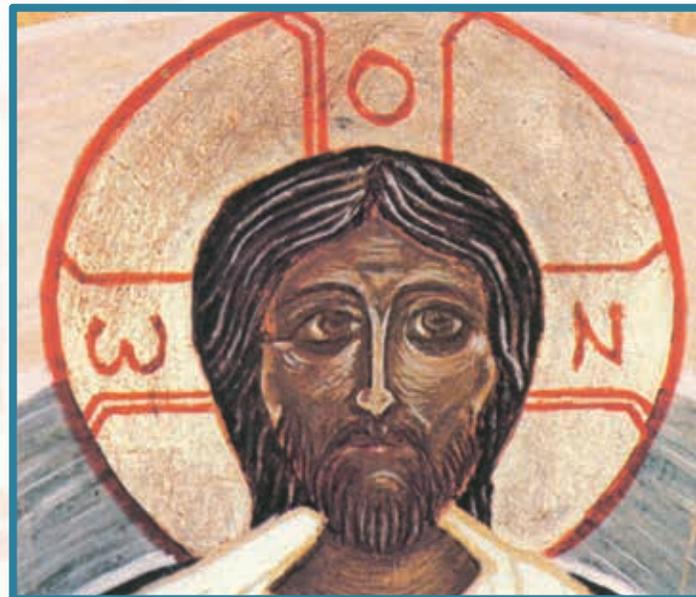
---

## The icon: The Transfiguration of Jesus

*Sister Joan Tuberty*

The transfiguration of Jesus is sometimes called the cosmic liturgy. In this event, the light and energy of the Divinity burst forth from Jesus with such power and radiance that all creation was penetrated with God’s glory. The apostles’ senses were overcome; they were dazzled, so to speak, by the Divine. How did this happen? “As he prayed . . . his face was changed!” Haven’t we all seen this transparency in the profoundly prayerful person? In Him, there was no darkness! Oh, God, illumine the darkness of my heart and mind!

When my sister-in-law Frances drowned on August 4, 1978, two days prior to the Feast of the Transfiguration, all was darkness. When I heard this Gospel, it changed to light. As countless persons came to comfort my brother and family, it was clearly seen that her life had burned like a light and that it had a wonderful radiance. This mystery of transfiguration sustained me through her tragic death, and I painted it in love and memory of her.



*“As he prayed . . . his face was changed!” -Luke 9:29*

# give TO THE MAX

## NOV. 16, 2017

Last year, over 160 donors helped the Franciscan Sisters raise more than \$51,000 through Give to the Max Day. How wonderful! The funds were used to support the sisters' ministries and outreach efforts to people on the margins.

We were blessed with such great success in 2016—and we're participating again this year. We're grateful for the generous support from so many of our donors. Thank you!

Please, on November 16, visit [GiveMN.org](http://GiveMN.org) to make a donation to support the mission and ministries of the Franciscan Sisters. **Matching funds double your donation.** Together, we can do God's work. Thank you!

- St. Francis Music Center
- Missions
- St. Francis Health and Wellness
- Franciscan Community Volunteers
- Outreach to immigrant and migrant communities
- Franciscan Girls Camp
- Green Fair Folk Festival
- Garden-to-Cafeteria Project
- Franciscan Life Center



 St. FRANCIS  
MUSIC CENTER



 St. Francis  
Health & Wellness



 FRANCISCAN  
COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

## Donate online at [giveMN.org](http://giveMN.org)

Online donations *and* those sent directly to the Development Office (116 8th Ave SE, Little Falls, MN) are eligible for matching funds.

# Se entrega! She gives her all!

Sister Carmen Barsody

The cinder-block building is alive with the symphony of voices and the vibrant minds of children. “*Tu valor no se mide en cosas materiales.*” “Your wealth is not measured in material things.” This is a primary message Heidi Meza seeks to instill in the students of St. Francis of Assisi School in Nicaragua. The school is in a marginalized barrio on the edge of Managua. Heidi founded the school in 1999 with a handful of children; today the classrooms are filled with more than 230 students from pre-school to sixth grade.

Heidi Francis Meza, (born on October 4, the Feast of St. Francis) and her husband Máximo Jerez, are Franciscan Associates. During my most recent visit to Nicaragua, I asked Heidi how it is she seeks to instill Franciscan/gospel values within the everyday lives of the children. Most of the children come from homes where material poverty is a harsh reality. To be rooted in

the truth that one’s worth is not measured by material wealth is basic and invaluable.

“By your fruits they know YOU,” arose in my mind as Heidi and I talked. She, like Jesus and Saint Francis, gives witness to the values with her very life. It does not take long to see that Heidi’s commitment to providing the children with a strong educational and value-based foundation is what compels her to assure that the teachers teach and the parents are engaged with their child’s learning. She lives a few doors down from the school, and at all hours of the day and into the evening she is called upon by students, parents or other staff. The teachings don’t only happen in the classroom but in how she works with conflicts that arise or how she responds when someone is experiencing hardship.

Continuous creativity is one of the evident fruits. If there is a spare piece of earth, Heidi sees it as an

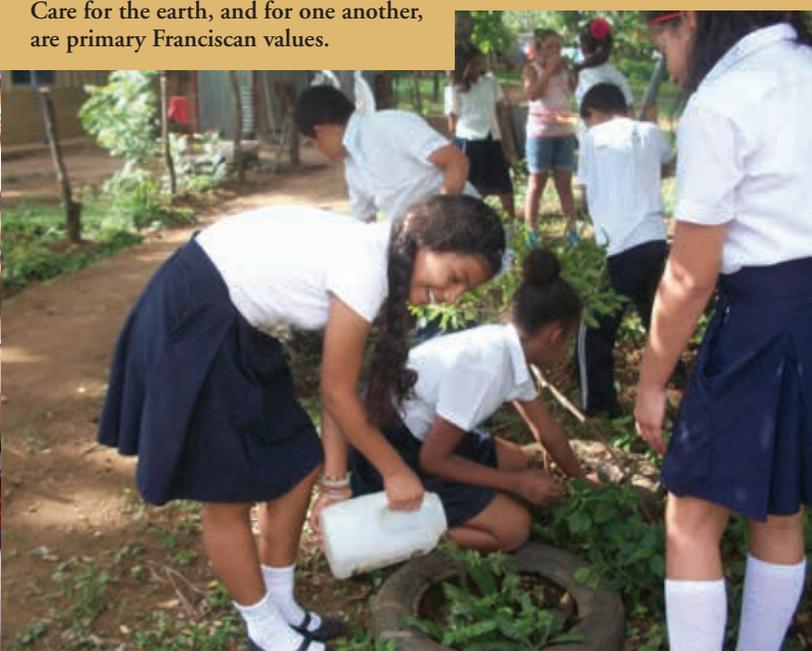
opportunity for children to learn about planting and nurturing seeds. In honor of historic and cultural holidays, she loves to provide the chance for children to learn folklore dancing and find joy in learning the poetry and songs of their people. Banners throughout the school name the values that everyone—students, teachers, parents, visitors and neighbors—is challenged to embody. **Respect. Love. Honesty. Mutuality. Peace. Self Esteem. Responsibility. Joy. Perseverance.** The words are there for all to see and practice in our everyday lives.

If you are interested in visiting or volunteering at the school in Nicaragua, please contact Sister Carmen Barsody at [cbarsody@fslf.org](mailto:cbarsody@fslf.org).



To know our worth by the values we embody and not by the things we possess give meaning to Heidi’s work and life. *Se entrega! She gives her all!*

Care for the earth, and for one another, are primary Franciscan values.



# They knew it was the right thing to do

Elizabeth Rydeen

*Too often young girls in Mexico hear from their fathers, "You don't need to study. You're going to get married." That is, until they hear of other options for their lives.*

The mission in San Rafael, Mexico, makes it possible for teenage girls, who have no transportation or money, to participate in high school studies. Living in community with the sisters at Casa Franciscana, these young women, from very poor families, experience the Franciscan values and grow in so many ways.

In 2003, Franciscan Sisters Rose Mae Rausch, Colette Toenies, Pat Forster and Janice Wiechman started the mission to provide pastoral care and develop a lay leadership training program. As they went from village to village, they were surprised by the number of teenage girls who were out and about and not in school. When the sisters questioned this, they were told that there were no high schools in the villages and transportation and safety issues kept them from traveling to San Rafael.

"I remember so clearly standing together with the other sisters, and we were all thinking the same thing: the girls could live here with us and go to school. We didn't even have to discuss it. We knew it was the right thing to do," recalls Sister Rose Mae Rausch. The current team of sisters includes Mary Dumonceaux, ministering since 2008, and also Janice Wiechman and Ange Mayers who came in September 2016.

As the sisters spend time ministering in the villages, they get to know the families and identify the girls with potential. They meet the parents and explain about the study program. If there is any hesitation on the part of the parents or the young girl, they return and explain it again. "It doesn't take long for the concept of Franciscan hospitality to take root. All are welcome to our home and routine," said Sister Mary.

Fabiola, one of the first students to live with the sisters, graduated from high school and went on to study business at the university. She received her degree, married and has a child (maybe two by now). On the weekends, she and her husband travel from Saltillo back to her home town where they prepare children for First Communion and minister to the youth. "Did she learn something about the importance of sharing her faith with others from living with us at Casa Franciscana? I hope

that at the least her faith, values and willingness to share them were strengthened while she lived with us," Sister Janice said.

Two others, Dulce and Rocio, learned to play the guitar here at Casa Franciscana and have joined the choir in their town. In the past they regularly went to Mass when Father came to the town, but they did not go to the Celebrations of the Word. Now, however, they both attend all the liturgies as part of the choir which plays and leads the singing at both events. And beyond that, listening to the Scripture readings has become more important, more significant. "At evening prayer, we read the Gospel of the day and then reflect on it. This they say has helped them to value listening to Scripture more.

*-Continued, Page 9*



Students Diana, Dulce and Rocio learn to read music and take guitar lessons, skills they take back to share in their villages.

They feel more able to apply it to their lives,” said Sister Janice.

The sisters and the girls come together for daily prayer and participate in Mass each Sunday. In doing so, the students learn to proclaim the Word in the liturgy. When the girls are ready, they join a sister in visiting homes where they proclaim the Scriptures house by house.

Parents, through their children, witness the Franciscan way of life and participate in sessions on the

values of parenting from a Catholic perspective, care for the earth, prayer and life in collaboration with others.

When the girls leave three years later, they have indeed grown up Franciscan. The sisters see positive changes: an interest in continued studies, a Bible sitting on the bed for easy access, gratitude and, most important, their growth in the grace of Jesus and the ways of Francis and Clare.

---

## God is the best communicator

*Isaac Vacheresse, FCV (2016-2017)*

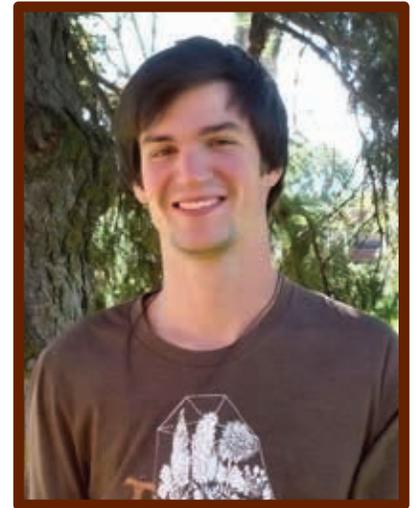
When I arrived at the Welcoming House in January 2016, I was on guard for whatever would come up against my way of thinking and believing. At that time I was discerning the priesthood and trying to “find” God’s will for my life. I was caught up in structured forms of prayer. I believed God was watching over me and judging my thoughts and desires, even the good ones, and I felt that I had to ignore what I wanted and sacrifice all for His will. This would be the only way to please God and live in His grace.

Looking back, the only time that I was silent and listening was when I was waiting for God to confirm or deny my vocation to the priesthood. Once I let go of being in the state of constant “discernment,” I began to live as I felt called to. I became more open to listening to God and trusting the interior inspirations and guidance I felt since I wasn’t following a set path anymore. This created the opportunity to take risks and live with uncertainty, instead of feeling confined and secure in a certain way of thinking and acting.

With time I learned that God is the best communicator. He speaks intimately with each person and is a constant voice in our lives. As I have broadened my perspective on vocation, I have become aware that I am a co-creator in my vocation, and that I’m living it every moment. I have discovered that God respects me and the paths I walk. He loves me into existence. As Richard Rohr says, “God loves THAT you are, not WHAT you are.”

This freed me from the constricting walls of my own mind, and I opened myself for the Christ-like ability of the sisters and Pat [Pat Flicker, director of FCV] to meet each individual where they are in their life journey, but not leave them there. I have integrated the Franciscan worldview into my daily life, which says that everything belongs and that the present moment is where we encounter God.

This gift of the present moment allows us to live each small act and interaction with great love, because we are able to give full attention to the people or tasks within it. This has, and still is, transforming my life every day. The people and children I have worked with throughout my time with FCV hold a place in my heart that will be carried into eternity. The volunteers I have had the pleasure of knowing have influenced me to become the best version of myself. The Franciscan Sisters’ spirit and simple way of living has inspired me to go deeper and learn more about faith as a way of life.





Gerry (Korroll) Wotzka, Sisters Adela Gross and Olga Neft, Mary Ann (Evans) Justin, Sisters Audrey Jean Loher and Donna Zetah celebrate their 70th class reunion.

## SFHS graduates gather and celebrate!

*Sister Elise Saggau*

In July, about 120 St. Francis High School graduates, former students, faculty and staff enjoyed a delightful day at St. Francis Convent, celebrating the fourth annual gathering. The goal of this event is to keep alive the relationships formed at St. Francis and to nurture and promote the Franciscan spirit instilled during those special high school years. Anniversary classes of 1947, 1957, 1967 and 1977 were honored. The class of 1977 has the distinction of being the last to graduate from the school.

The class of 1947, marking 70 years, was larger than most. The members referred to themselves as the 57 of '47. Sister Beata Lorsung was their favorite teacher. "We were a postwar class. We grew up during the war and matured early. We made our life choices young," said Sister Adela Gross. They were a class with many vocations: 10 became Franciscan Sisters; another three or four joined other religious communities. Sister Audrey Jean Loher remembers, "If I wasn't accepted into the convent, I was going to join the WAVES, the women's branch of the Navy." The war was over and the men were coming home. Many married right after graduation. The class dispersed quickly into their chosen professions or to start families.

After Mass everyone enjoyed a simple lunch and an afternoon of intense visiting. They were able to view a range of memorabilia and a DVD offering highlights of the school's history. Another DVD commemorated the life of Sister Tonie (Karen) Rausch, a beloved and highly respected former teacher of history and art, who had recently died.

The St. Francis High School Gathering takes place each year on the third Sunday of July. Next year's event on July 15 will be advertised early in 2018 in *Our Journey*, on the FSLF website, and in some local newspapers. Notices will also be sent out in March via email.

## ADVENT DAY OF REFLECTION

**Topic: Mary in our Christian life:  
How much does she matter?**

*Presenter: Sister Elise Saggau*

**Saturday, December 2, 2017 9AM–3PM**

**St. Francis Hall, St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, Minn.**

Register by November 22  
by calling (320)632-0668 or email: [franciscanlife@fslf.org](mailto:franciscanlife@fslf.org).

## Planned Giving

Please let us know if you would like more information on remembering the Franciscan Sisters in your will and estate planning.

Contact: **Sister Bernice Ebner**

116 8th Avenue SE

Little Falls, Minnesota 56345

(320)632-0699 • [bebner@fslf.org](mailto:bebner@fslf.org)

# Children's Home holds memories

*Elizabeth Rydeen*

Caring for orphans was one of Franciscan Sisters' first ministries. In August 1893, 33 children arrived by train in Little Falls. Eventually, the sisters were caring for 150 children. The Little Falls community took them to heart and helped to house and care for them. By all accounts, St. Otto's Orphanage was a comfortable and happy place.

In 1924, the orphans were transferred to St. Cloud, and 27 Franciscan Sisters moved with them and continued to oversee their care and education. This move caused much pain to those Little Falls people who had so generously supported the orphans.

The St. Cloud Orphanage employed a new concept in child care called the cottage plan. Designed to resemble a family home, each of the six cottages housed children of various ages with caretakers in charge who served as "parents." Passageways connected the cottages with a central administration building, a chapel, a kitchen, a laundry and classrooms. In 1953, the facility was renamed the St. Cloud Children's Home.

By the early 1960s, however, the focus was no longer on orphans, but on the care and treatment of emotionally disturbed children ranging in age from 12 to 18. This made it necessary to retrain staff and thus gave sisters an opportunity to receive some fine in-service training. The change also decreased the number of sisters who were able to serve there. Over time, the Franciscans withdrew from the Children's Home. After 1977, only Sister Ida Bursch, who had begun to serve in the laundry in 1968, remained. She retired in 2008.

Sister Therese Lenz ministered at the St. Cloud Children's Home from 1947-1949 in Cottage 1. She remembers the Eichstadt children, especially the youngest, Shielia, who came with her two older siblings when she was three years old. "Oh, how that little Shielia was on my mind over the years. I often wondered what became of her." Shielia Perrault-Conrad, now 73, remembers the day she and her siblings arrived at the St. Cloud Orphanage. "I can still see the three of us walking

up those steps," she recalls.

Forty-five years passed. Shielia and her husband had moved to Little Falls, and she became a volunteer at St. Francis Convent. While visiting with Sister Lerose Popp, who also cared for orphans in St. Cloud, Shielia learned of the sisters' history with the Children's Home. But it wasn't until Shielia was featured in the local newspaper and Sister Therese recognized her that the two were reunited.

Shielia was very sad at the orphanage. "I cried all the time; I was a depressed three-year-old. I can remember Sister Therese as a young nun in a habit. She was pretty. It was from the sisters that I first learned about Jesus and was baptized. Two years later I was adopted and moved to Cold Spring. I went to parochial schools all my life."

Shielia believes that God had her whole life planned for her—from the orphanage, to being adopted and raised Catholic, to moving to Little Falls and finding Sister Therese. They have become fast friends and are in touch at least weekly. "Sister Therese is like another mother to me," said Shielia.



Joy Lou Robinson, Sister Therese Lenz and Shielia Perrault-Conrad. Shielia was adopted in 1949; her sister Joy Lou and older brother were adopted together a couple years later. The siblings were reunited in summer 1968.

# Girls Camp: a perfect stage for leadership development

Elizabeth Rydeen

Sister Ange Mayers met Ixayana Gonzales at St. Joseph's Church in Waite Park back in 2012. It was the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and she and Sister Ange ended up at the same table. Ixayana was aware of the Franciscan Girls Camp but was too old to participate herself, yet she had a keen interest. At Sister Ange's invitation, Ixayana joined the staff of the Girls Camp in 2013. Now a college senior, studying social working and organizational development, she said, "I was more than excited to help out."

The camp is designed for middle school students and is an opportunity for girls to learn about Saints Francis and Clare and spend time in nature and with the Franciscan Sisters. Tenting in Assisi Park with meals cooked over a camp fire are definitely highlights. But the favorite part of the three days is the one-on-one time spent with a Franciscan Sister. The camp is so popular that about three quarters of the girls come for a second year, a few come all three years. Often the girls ask to be paired with the same sister when they come the following year. It's common to have over 25 sisters involved in the camp in various ways each year. Their dedication to vocations fuels their eagerness to spend time with the girls.

Ixayana believes that the camp is something different, something out of the norm for these girls who may find themselves at a tough age. "It's the perfect stage for leadership development." She's surprised at how timid the girls are at first, even those that come with a friend. After introductions and an ice-breaker and the blessings of the tents, the girls head to Breezy Inn to design and paint their T-shirts. This creative activity

calms the girls as they interact and get to know each other.

Alondra Hernandez, who is Ixayana's sister, gives a presentation on self-esteem. "She's experienced hard times growing up and found her voice through poetry," said Ixayana. As a young adult, Alondra relates well with the girls, especially the Latinas. Her message: learn to love yourself first.

Over time, the staff has realized that the girls want to be active. Instead of listening to the stories of Saint Francis, they want to act them out. Drama and role playing are very popular. The girls find themselves in awe of Sacred Heart Chapel and have the chance to participate in Mass, another opportunity for growth. The sisters are delighted to have them take an active role in the liturgy and value the spirit and the contributions that young people bring to Church.



Sister Ange Mayers: "I am grateful for the assistance of these young women in living out the Franciscan values." Front row: Lesly Gonzalez, Alondra Hernandez, Sister Ange, Ixayana Gonzales; back row: Sister Maurita Bernet, Mary Donnell, Sister Carolyn Law.



Saint Francis (played by Sister Karen Niedzielski) meets potential followers.

**DONATE**

## Prefer to donate online?

It's easy and convenient. Visit [www.fslf.org](http://www.fslf.org) to learn more. We would appreciate your email address and your cell phone number. Thank you!

# Growing up at the Music Center

*Robyn Gray*

There is nothing sweeter than the look on the face of a 5-year-old violin student when he gets his first violin or a 3-year-old dancer with a new tutu! Each one dreams of making beautiful music and showing off new talents. Little do they know that their first lesson may lead to a lifetime of music!

At St. Francis Music Center, we are blessed watching these musicians grow and flourish. Lesson after lesson, recital after recital, every year they grow a little taller and gain more confidence and musical skills. Lessons become a family affair. Music books get passed down from sibling to sibling and sometimes from cousin to cousin, each child ready to take their place in our Music Center family.

In the 38-year history of the Music Center, literally thousands of youth have grown up here, knowing they belong and are part of something wonderful. They feel pride in their place in the convent and know they are welcome.

Each learns so much more than music, and each carries those life lessons with them into their future. Some students have come back as teachers, some become church musicians, many bring their own children here for lessons years later.

Hannah Miller was interested in learning the violin, so her mother signed her up for lessons at the Music Center. A year later she started piano. “It’s been 10 years since I started taking lessons at the Music Center. I’ve known the staff for almost as long as I can remember,” said Hannah. Now, she’s the concertmaster of the St. Francis Concert Orchestra. She continues her lessons with Bobbi French and has begun to teach herself. “I enjoy passing on the knowledge that my teachers gave and are giving me—and not just the knowledge, but a love of music, which I think is one of the greatest gifts one can bestow.”

They may not call themselves “Franciscan,” but our students understand the concept and the values because they feel surrounded by what it means to be Franciscan and—as all children do—they absorb that feeling and carry it with them. We hope their lives follow that same model.



Hannah Miller

## First Impression

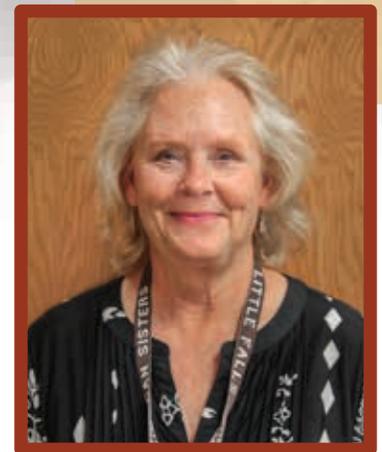
*Trudi Amundson*

Sometimes it is hard to put into words “first impression.” You can only have one, and there is no “do over” or “try again” allowed. In May I began a position with the Franciscan Sisters to restructure St. Francis Music Center and St. Francis Health and Wellness Center.

What do I know about music, you might ask? Well, not much, except that music has always been part of my daily life. What was my first impression? St. Francis Music Center is awesome and alive with passion. Robyn Gray, who has been at the center almost 25 years, continues to exude passion and love for the music, the mission and, most of all, the students. Music is universal and appeals to everyone worldwide in ways that are difficult to fully describe. Music has the ability to change us in profound ways. Music is permanent.

The Music Center, topnotch in every way, offers lessons and a variety of enrichment programs. The staff, humble yet incredibly gifted, are awe-inspiring. They share the core value of making music and the arts accessible to everyone who wants to participate. Everyone is welcome, everyone is valued.

So, my first impression is that the Little Falls community is beyond-words-lucky to have the Music Center in its backyard. The center has changed the lives of hundreds of people, and my impression is that we must continue to do that now and in the future.



# I count the sisters as friends

Father Bob Kieffer

I was born in Ellensburg, Wash., in 1943; my brother Jim was born the next year in Kittitas. My two older sisters were born in Morris, Minn. My parents, Robert and Margaret, took their two little girls west when the United States entered the war. While my father did electrical work in civil defense installations, my mother cared for the home and looked after the growing family. When the war ended, we were packed up and brought back home to Morris. We became a large Catholic family with ten children. One after the other we were enrolled in St. Mary's School where we met the Franciscan Sisters.

Sister Virgil, the principal, taught first and second grade. She was the first sister students encountered. Her good friend Sister Agatha taught third and fourth graders across the hall. They enjoyed each other, and often enough came into the other's classroom telling a story in German which made them both howl. We didn't understand what they said, but we knew it was a story about one of us. Already in

our tender years we acted in any number of plays and skits and were reciting poems and telling stories to an audience, sometimes only our classmates. And there was Sister Jeanette's rhythm band. The music teachers deserve a purple heart.

When I finished first grade, my parents for a mysterious reason moved us all to Long Prairie, their hometown, to a farm where my dad grew up; for me, my every day was a new adventure. For over a year the Kieffer kids attended District 48. Mrs. Wisher was our teacher, the same woman who had taught our mother. It was a hard winter; even in second grade I thought the snow was piled too high. By the next Christmas we were all back at St. Mary's, and I was in Sister Agatha's third grade. She liked to teach about Native American Indians. She taped a long stretch of paper on the blackboard in the back of the room. Creating a frieze was the fourth graders' project. It was also a new word. The next year, I had a turn at drawing and coloring the pictures.

It was in third grade, sitting in Sister Agatha's classroom, that I first began thinking about becoming a priest. During those years, I followed my sisters and began taking piano lessons. I was no virtuoso, despite the efforts of Sisters Cecelia and Hugh. The thing is you really have to practice piano, and I wasn't very diligent.

Sister Augusta taught fifth and sixth grade. She had a reputation for liking the boys better than the girls. It was probably true. We all liked her. She was comforting and, in her old age, was still very warm



Sister Betty Berger was best friends with Father Bob's sister Anita. Together, they all grew up Franciscan.

and easy to talk to. When she died, I celebrated her funeral mass.

In the beginning of sixth grade, I started getting sick with acute chorea, a nerve disorder that destroyed my coordination and kept me out of school until late spring. I was assured over and over that the sisters were praying for me. And I got better, but my sports career was over before it started. Sisters Bede, Priscilla and Carletta taught seventh and eighth grade. The teachers passed in the hall instead of the students, a smart move.

There were three focal points to life during my school days: family, church and school. The sisters were bound to be influential. After eighth grade, I went to Crosier Seminary in Onamia. Later at St. John's, I joined the Third Order of Saint Francis. I was chaplain at the motherhouse in Little Falls for a brief stint, and these days I am pleased to celebrate mass there once a month. I count the sisters as friends of mine. They are compassionate and loving people, never pretentious. I count them a blessing in my life and am glad to maintain my connections.



Geography class with Sister Priscilla Malley. From 1943-2003, 66 Franciscan Sisters taught at St. Mary's School in Morris.

# From one generation to the next

*Sister Cordy Korkowski, director of Donor Relations*

People often say to me, “We just need to count our blessings.” Well, I have been doing just that this summer as I celebrated my 60 years as a Franciscan Sister. One of the ways that God’s love has shone forth these years is the wonderful people who’ve entered my life.

Gregg and Teri Barbeln and their family are shining examples. I first met Gregg when he served on the Development Advisory Council from 1995-1998. I was impressed by his openness to partner with us and share his ideas. It was clear to me that he enjoyed his time spent with the sisters and other members of the council. Greg stated, “As part of the group, I was introduced to many wonderful sisters. Serving on the council brought me and my family up to Little Falls on many occasions. My boys were blessed to be around such a beautiful group of people, and they would tell you the food was wonderful too.”

Gregg had a head start in growing up Franciscan as he interacted with his aunt, Sister Marguerite Barbeln, who shared her loving and kind demeanor with the family until her death in 2011 at the age of 86. And Gregg’s wife, Teri, knows the Franciscan community well. She attended St. Andrew’s School in Elk River and had Sister Loretta Denfeld as her second grade teacher. Teri recalls how sad she and her classmates were when Sister Loretta was transferred in November of that year. Visits to Little Falls have allowed Teri to reconnect with Sister Loretta and other sisters who taught at St. Andrew’s. She recognized her former principal, Sister Rose Margaret Schneider, just by hearing her voice again. The Barbeln children, Brian and Nathan, followed in their mother’s footsteps at St. Andrew’s. “The Franciscans have been a big part of our family and attending Catholic schools has brought many blessings,” Teri said.

Over the years, we would see the Barbelns at donor appreciation and memorial events and Christmas Eve Mass, which has been made more special with the addition of Maegan, Nate’s wife, a few years ago. Gregg said, “I love coming to the convent. Seeing the sisters always makes me feel good!”

Gregg and Teri, donors since 1990, say they are honored to share their blessings to support the Franciscan Sisters. Gregg said, “Promoting the love of our Lord Jesus Christ is a great thing, and the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls do this extremely well.”

Yes, the Franciscan spirit lives on and, together, we are all growing in the Gospel way. Thank you, Gregg, Teri, Brian, Nathan and Maegan. We surely count you among our many blessings.



The Barbeln family share their blessings in many ways.

## ***Donating to the Franciscan Sisters:***

Please, feel free to express any wishes you may have for your gift. However, be advised that in order to ensure that donors will be entitled to a federal income tax deduction, Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, is required by Internal Revenue Service rulings to retain full authority over the assets granted to it and cannot accept gifts that are required by the donor to be paid, or to be used, only to further the work of a specific individual or that are required to be used in another country by FSLF or another foreign charity or religious institute.

# Who would choose to be a refugee?

*Sister Adela Gross*

When I listen these days to the never ending discussions about banning, restricting or admitting refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants into our country, most of the descriptions of these groups do not fit with any in my experience of working with people on the move. Not one of the families or individuals from many parts of our world, whom I encountered over the years, chose to be in the situation of having to ask someone, some group or some government to give them a place of safety, security and possibly even welcome. The refugee journey is most often long, difficult and dangerous. It is never undertaken lightly, but as a last resort for survival for oneself and one's family.

I carry many stories of refugees and immigrants whom I have encountered over the years, many stemming from my ministry at the Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C. There, I was on the staff of Immigration and Refugee Services. Specifically, I worked with people on the move across our country, including migrant farmworkers, Gypsies and circus and carnival workers. But occasionally the dividing lines became blurred, and we also dealt with refugee issues. One such incident occurred in the early 90s when a group of over 200 Chinese men and women sought to escape the restrictive one-child family practices in China. Smuggled aboard a freighter bound for New York, they made the difficult journey of several weeks, only to have the ship run aground when attempting to dock in New York Harbor. Immigration authorities immediately detained most of the Chinese, although a few escaped, probably to be swallowed up in the narrow streets of Chinatown. So one long journey ended on American soil, but in federal prisons, most of the men in Pennsylvania and the women transported to Bakersfield, Calif. Because of the fact that their asylum appeal was based upon complaints of enforced abortion and strict contraception practices, the plight of these refugees came to the attention of many church groups, including the Catholic Church. Lawyers representing the refugee service of the Bishops Conference immediately sought to secure asylum for the imprisoned Chinese, however, the U.S. government adamantly refused to consider



Sister Adela with two young clowns at circus camp, St. John's University, Collegeville

these cases. Many pro-life groups and even members of Congress lobbied on their behalf, but to no avail. The only choice was to find a country willing to accept these refugees.

In a chance meeting at the Vatican, the Ecuadorian ambassador heard the story of the imprisoned Chinese and immediately offered the services of the Ecuadorian bishops to resettle those who would want to come. I was asked to locate someone in Bakersfield, who could visit the women in prison and begin Spanish classes with those who wished to accept the offer to go to Ecuador. Fortunately, my contact there in California was with Sister Evelyn, a Mercy Sister with whom I have worked in Peru, who was both bilingual and a dedicated pastoral worker. She immediately accepted the challenge of visiting the women and starting some rudimentary Spanish classes. At the same time, I made contact with the Scalabrinian Sisters who staffed the refugee service of the Ecuadorian Bishops Conference. Sister Rosa immediately set about working on possibilities for lodging, more Spanish classes and possible employment. When the time came for the journey to Quito, Sister Evelyn and several immigration officials accompanied 11 women on this leg of the journey. Several others were refused release at the last moment for unknown reasons.

Officials of the Ecuadorian Bishops Conference, the sisters and several bilingual Chinese volunteers took on the task of orienting and assisting the women in this transition. During all this time, my efforts had been restricted to phone calls, emails, letters and meetings. Approximately six months after their journey to Ecuador

*-Continued, Page 17*

in fall of 1994, I journeyed to Quito accompanied by a pro bono lawyer, who had offered his services to the women while in prison in California. He helped with much of the paperwork that eventually resulted in their release. Richard was also a Baptist pastor and very dedicated to the plight of refugees and migrants.

It was truly amazing to meet the women and to see their resilience and efforts to begin a new life. Escorted by Sister Amelia, who had done so much to help the women, we found them in four different areas of Quito. One group of three had already opened a flourishing *chifa* or Chinese restaurant near the airport in Quito. They invited us for a delicious Chinese meal, one of the best I have ever had. Another group of three had found the locale to open a restaurant, but were still in the process of acquiring the needed items. Richard had brought funds from several of his churches, which were used at the market to purchase a stove, dishes and other items for the new venture. Another young woman was running a tea room in a small building next to a rectory, where an elderly pastor and his sister had given help and lodging to this young woman. She seemed very happy in her new surroundings. Two more of the women were still in the difficult process of deciding which

“*The refugee journey is most often long, difficult and dangerous. It is never undertaken lightly, but as a last resort for survival for oneself and one’s family.*”

steps to take. For many of the group, as I learned later, Ecuador was only another stop on the refugee journey.

I wish I could tell you the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey used to say. I do know that many of those Chinese remained imprisoned in the United States for several years. Subsequently, some chose to return to

China, some were given asylum in Canada and other countries. On a trip to Quito about six years later to visit Sister Joan Gerads, a longtime missionary in Ecuador,

Sister Clara Stang and I attempted to find the original Chinese refugees. New staff at the Bishops Conference had not kept track of their whereabouts, but were able to tell us that several of the *chifas* were still in operation, one woman had joined her husband who had gone to Brazil on release from prison here, and several had gone to Canada to join their husbands. I often wonder what their lives are like and pray that they have found security, happiness and reunification with their families left behind in China, especially their children.

Who would choose to be a refugee? No one chooses this journey. But we can all make life a little more pleasant and happy for those whom we meet on this journey, extending a hand of welcome and hospitality. “I was a stranger and you welcomed me!”

## Seed library succeeds

In 2016 Elise Carey, proposed a seed library for St. Clare Library, St. Francis Convent, where folks could offer seeds after the garden harvest. An old card catalogue was the perfect place to house and store the seeds until spring. Now, a year later and with 24 seed library patrons, she considers the experiment a success. Last fall, a variety of vegetable seeds were received—tomatoes, peas, melons, peppers and beans as well as flowers. This spring people “borrowed” seeds for planting, and as patrons return seeds from this year’s harvest, the volume of seeds will grow and be available next spring. Fantastic!

St. Clare Library is open to the public Tuesday-Thursday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., for books and seeds.



Librarian Elise Carey: “I’ve had success in my own garden. I borrowed and planted a few varieties of tomatoes, as well as peas and bush beans from the seed library, and all have done well. It’s my pleasure to return some of my seeds to the library.”



# In loving memory

**Sister Mary Adella Blonigen**, 90, died June 27, 2017, at St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, Minn.

Hildegard Anna Blonigen was born August 31, 1926, the fifth of 10 children of Christopher and Anna (Rausch) Blonigen, in Spring Hill. She grew up during the difficult days of the Depression. Her father came home from World War I with some physical disabilities. During her childhood, the Blonigen family moved to a farm near St. Martin. Hildegard learned many of her home-making skills from her mother who was an avid seamstress, cook and gardener. Family prayer was an important part of the Blonigen family life.

With three Franciscan aunts, Sisters Hildegard, Crescentia and Alexius, it was not surprising that Hildegard entered St. Francis Convent on January 7, 1948. She was accepted into the Franciscan Community on August 12, 1948, and received the name Sister Mary Adella. She made her final vows on August 12, 1953.

Throughout her life, Sister Mary Adella had varied ministries. In her earlier life as a sister, she was a baker, housekeeper and home visitor. Her time at the bishop's residence in Duluth held special memories. It was there that Bishop Anderson taught her how to roast a turkey with dressing for Thanksgiving and a lamb for Holy Thursday. For almost 25 years, Sister Mary Adella made and cut the hosts which would become the Body of Christ in the Eucharist. Her days in the Altar Bread Room were filled with contemplation as she often prayed for the person who would receive the host. She loved parish ministry and endeared herself to many people in areas in which she worked.

A favorite pastime for Sister Mary Adella was the making of thousands of rosaries over a span of more than 50 years. Sister Mary Adella also collected religious articles to send to prisoners. She appreciated the opportunity for daily Mass, Holy Communion, prayers in common with her sisters and living in community. She loved visits with family and friends, particularly with her nephew, Brother Albert Becker, OSC.



# In loving memory

**Associate Naomi Engel**, 78, passed away July 1, 2017. Naomi, originally from Hunter, N. Dak., loved music and would occasionally share a favorite song with Geri Dietz, minister for Associates. A Franciscan Associate for five years, Naomi was a "people person" and a woman of great joy, energy and grace. One of Naomi's favorite Bible verses was when Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it to the full." She recognized Jesus' gift and did indeed live a full life.

Naomi graduated from Mayville State Teacher's College in 1959 and was married later that summer. She taught fourth grade in Lehr, N. Dak. for one and one half years and then was a busy stay-at-home mom while her children were young. The Engels moved to Little Falls in 1970, and Naomi worked as a paraprofessional with the Little Falls School District for several years; then, at age 45, she graduated from St. Cloud State University with honors. She taught kindergarten for 15 years. Naomi was an active member of First Lutheran Church in Little Falls and Stephen Ministry. She also attended classes at Luther Seminary and was confirmed an associate pastor.

More recently, she worked for Comfort Keepers, sharing her tender heart with many people. Naomi devoted her life to serving others and will always be remembered for her joyful spirit and deep faith in Jesus Christ.

# In loving memory



**Sister Margaret Antonia (Tonie) Rausch**, 84, died June 17, 2017 at St. Gabriel's Hospital, Little Falls, Minn.

Margaret Antonia was born April 16, 1933, in Ortonville. From her earliest days she was known as Tonie. She was the eleventh of 14 children born to Val and Katherine (Holthaus) Rausch. Tonie grew up near Big Stone Lake in South Dakota and attended public school where most of her classmates were Protestant. From that experience, Tonie learned to be open and respectful toward all religions. It was through her close relationship with her younger sister, Betty Ann, afflicted with Down syndrome, that she learned to relate with sensitivity to the less fortunate.

Tonie attended St. Francis High School in Little Falls. After graduation in 1951, she was accepted as a Franciscan Sister and given the name Sister Mary Karen. Her teaching experience began in local diocesan grade schools, followed by quality years teaching American history and art at St. Francis High School. When the school closed, she, with much enthusiasm, opened the Office for Justice and Peace for the Franciscan Sisters. Moving on to a new mission in west Tennessee, Sister Tonie became a community organizer in the six counties in which she served and taught literacy as a Vista volunteer.

In 1986, Sister Tonie was missioned to Tanzania in East Africa, where she established programs at Chanjale Seminary in Samé Diocese, Cheju Preparatory School on Zanzibar Island and Enkigarett School in a Maasai village north of Arusha. Living in this wide variety of cultures, Sister Tonie witnessed the many ways in which people follow the gospel message.

In 2003, Sister Tonie returned to St. Cloud ready to utilize her experiences in new ministries. The growth in immigrants and refugees coming to central Minnesota, many from distressed African countries, provided an outlet for her creative energies. She began teaching ESL classes and then co-founded Hands Across the World with Brianda Cediel. They developed a unique program offering instruction in many fields, according to the needs of the students. The school continues to flourish with 60-100 adult students attending a variety of classes.

Sister Tonie was a down-to-earth person who had a reverent love for all of God's people, especially the poor and oppressed. She served in many different capacities and spent much energy searching for ways to create a more livable and peaceful environment for all creation, fulfilling her prophetic commitment on her entrance to the Franciscan Sisters, "I want to make the world a better place!"

## Feast of Saint Francis

### Transitus

Tuesday, October 3  
7 p.m.

### Eucharist

Wednesday, October 4  
11 a.m.

### St. Francis Convent

116 8th Avenue SE  
Little Falls, MN

*All are welcome!*



## Blessing of Animals

**Sunday, October 8, 2017**

Washington Park, 113 NE 4th Street, Little Falls, MN

- F R A N C I S C A N -

# Harvest Supper

**November 11, 2017**  
**4:30–7 PM - St. Francis Convent**

Chicken, sausage, garden vegetables, coleslaw, breadsticks, homemade bars and beverages will be served.

**Adults \$10 • Children (5-12 years ) \$5 • Children under 5 years - Free**  
Tickets available at the door or by calling: (320) 632-2981  
Monday - Saturday

*Proceeds from the Franciscan Harvest Supper benefit St. Francis Health and Wellness Center and St. Francis Music Center, Little Falls. For more information, contact (320)632-2981 or [info@fslf.org](mailto:info@fslf.org); [www.fslf.org](http://www.fslf.org).*

**Our Journey**  
FALL 2017 • VOL. 36 No. 1

- Please change my address.  
(attach old label)
- Please add the name(s) indicated  
below.
- Please remove my name from  
*Our Journey* mailing list.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip+4 \_\_\_\_\_



**FRANCISCAN SISTERS**  
OF LITTLE FALLS, MINNESOTA

116 8th Avenue SE  
Little Falls, MN 56345

Phone: 320-632-2981  
Fax: 320-632-1714  
E-mail: [info@fslf.org](mailto:info@fslf.org)  
Web Site: [www.fslf.org](http://www.fslf.org)

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Permit No. 64  
Little Falls, MN



*Our Journey is printed using environmentally friendly soy ink. Please don't throw this issue away. Pass it on to a friend or recycle it.*