

# Communigram

FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY

## Sisters Participate in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

*Sister Marsaia Kaster and Sister Veronica Schad are certified catechists participating in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program in the Roncalli Elementary School in Manitowoc, Wisconsin.*

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd does not take place in the classroom. In this approach there are special rooms prepared for the children in what use to be the convent for the parish on Waldo Blvd. Every object in the room is a help to knowing God and is intended to be appropriate to the ages and sizes of the children who gather there. It is a very simple, orderly, and prayerful place called an atrium. Here the child comes in contact with Scripture, the liturgy and in the atrium for the older child, the whole of salvation history.

Sister Marsaia shared: “*The Good Shepherd and the Child: The Joyful Journey* is a beautiful book written by several women who helped to create the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd in the mid-twentieth century, in Italy. These women, influenced by the philosophy and methods of Dr. Maria Montessori, became fascinated with the ‘religious potential’ of children from their earliest years.

“In the book’s forward, Archbishop Marcel A. Gervais from Canada wrote: “The catechesis presented in this book asks us to learn from the children, to be guided by them and to provide for their needs. Parents, teachers, and volunteers are challenged to ‘become as little children.’ The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is led by the child.”

The approach is not one of teaching as such but of living with the children in the atrium—growing closer to the Lord by offering wondering and pondering questions.

How did they become interested in the Catechesis?

SM: In 2001, a grandnephew was born in our family. Over the next few years I was able to share various moments with him. One day when Nolan was probably three years old: after sharing a picture with him, I asked if he might want to close his eyes and look at Jesus in his heart. After trying, he said “I can’t see Jesus. I want to see Jesus.” For me, that was the beginning. At Christmas I brought him a Nativity set. Together we explored the figures as he asked questions and made remarks. His Mom looked on. (She said I would have to come back more often to



*Catechists l to r: Sister Marsaia Kaster, Dianne Vadney and Sister Veronica Schad.*

answer his questions.) So, it was largely Nolan’s openness and responses that piqued my curiosity. Conversing with Dianne Vadney, the catechist Mom of six children, she had heard of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. So, we both began to explore it; she very actively, and she longed to begin the Catechesis in Manitowoc’s Saint Francis parish ASAP, so that at least some of her own children could benefit first-hand from the experience of the “Joyful” Catechesis.

SV: When I first heard Dianne and Sister Marsaia talk about the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, I was skeptical. I didn’t think it would work. After experiencing the children in the atrium setting, I am



*The centerpiece of the atrium for young children is a wooden sheepfold with painted figures of Jesus the Good Shepherd and his sheep.*

# Sisters Join March to Restore Asylum Protection



In the spirit and on the eve of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, the **Kino Border Initiative** and **Save Asylum coalition** invited faith leaders (both vowed religious and lay) throughout the U.S. to travel to Nogales, Arizona/Sonora to participate in a migrant-led public action to restore asylum protections Saturday, September 25.

Sister Carla Riach and I joined Sister Marlita Henseler along with the Kino Border Initiative staff, Bishop Edward Weisenburger and most importantly some 400+ migrant and refugee families in a March to bring attention to the Title 42 expulsion policy which has effectively closed the U.S. border to nearly all asylum seekers based on the misapplication of an obscure, 75-year-old public health law though U.S. law gives **asylum seekers the right to seek asylum upon arrival in the United States**, even if they arrive without inspection or prior authorization.

In the Catholic Social Justice course I teach we learn about Catholic Social Teaching regarding Migration/Immigration from Pope John XXIII.

*Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence with the confines of his own state. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and to take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor the citizenship in that universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of women and men.*"Pacem in Terris" ("Peace on Earth"), Pope John XXIII, 1963, #25.

*Among man's personal rights, we must include his right to enter a country in which he hopes to be able to provide more fittingly for himself and his dependents. It is therefore the duty of the state officials to accept immigrants and—so far as the good of their own community,*

*rightly understood permits, to further the aims of those who may wish to become members of a new society.*"Pacem in Terris" ("Peace on Earth"), Pope John XXIII, 1963, #106

Part of the Rally was a litany praying for parents, children, single moms and dads by name with the response in Spanish "Derecho Nacido" "We are born with Rights." We heard stories from asylum seekers such as Paula:

We come from our country trying to find a response to our worries that people will harm my family--a response upon seeing us threatened with violence against us and my children upon seeing the lack of concern from our authorities. Because we didn't have enough money and because we didn't agree to what we were forced to do, our material things and our children's and family's security were stolen from us.

We arrived here not knowing anything, neither where to go or where to be since it was early in the morning. We stayed in unsafe hotels thinking we would be safe and have a roof over our heads overnight, but we were unfortunately wrong—it was the opposite. In order to rent the room you have to leave your ID with all your personal information. With our information they try to scam us saying that our relatives are outside or that they're looking for us. Seeing these situations our only solution is to ask for support from the authorities in the U.S. and the only thing we get in response is a resounding NO and a rejection, or worse still, mockery from the guards when they see us start to cry. When we ask them for asylum, they don't even want to listen to us. They deny us help. I don't know if they really don't understand us or if they just pretend not

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## Sisters' Road Trip to Arise Milwaukee 10th Anniversary

*Manitowoc, Wisconsin*—Some Sisters from Holy Family Convent took a recent road trip to Arise Milwaukee's 10th anniversary celebration at Holy Family Parish, Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin. We were among families and people of all ages coming together for Eucharistic Adoration.



Talia Westerby, co-founder of Arise Milwaukee, welcomed those who came to pray and adore sharing about the journey of organization the last ten years. “In 2011, a group of young adults got together to plan an event of Eucharistic Adoration with praise and worship music called “Arise.” The hope was to gather about 50 people. With Bishop Donald Hying presiding, 250+ people of all ages came and encountered Christ in a powerful way! It seemed like a good idea to plan another one, which snowballed into a

full ministry providing multiple opportunities for people to encounter Christ through the sacramental life of the Church.” Today, Arise Milwaukee seeks to serve the Archdiocese of Milwaukee as non-profit (501c3) Catholic ministry devoted to helping people encounter Jesus in a powerful way. Current chaplain is Father Enrique Hernandez, pastor of St. Robert's, Shorewood.



As the guest presider, Father Luke Strand, Vice-Rector of St. Francis De Sales Seminary, proclaimed the Scripture reading of the call of Matthew. He encouraged the congregation with the words of St. Philip Neri: “The great thing is to become saints”. In the 1600's Philip was not alone in seeking God. God raised up other saints like St. Ignatius of Loyola and artists like Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. Father Luke's message then focused on the *Calling of Saint Matthew* masterpiece by Caravaggio, depicting the moment at which Jesus Christ inspires Matthew to follow him.

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to understand us to avoid us and yell at us. They run us out of the area complaining that if we stay there too long, we'll die of hunger and tell us to get out of the way since we're blocking the way for their people from their country. They run us off with rude words and tell us to go sleep on the benches outside, exposing our children further. We go back and ask for help because of the lack of safety when exposed outside, but we get the same response from them or worse, they threaten to send us back to our country of origin to which we can't return.

Giving up with those kinds of responses, we tried to settle along the border so that our children could have something to eat, but everything is too hard for us because they want to put both men and boys to work doing illegal jobs or they want to get to cross illegally for a high price or they might scam your relatives. They force us women not to want to go outside for work because of harassment and persecution. We are all in danger because of a lot of risks from people who take advantage of us knowing that we are vulnerable.

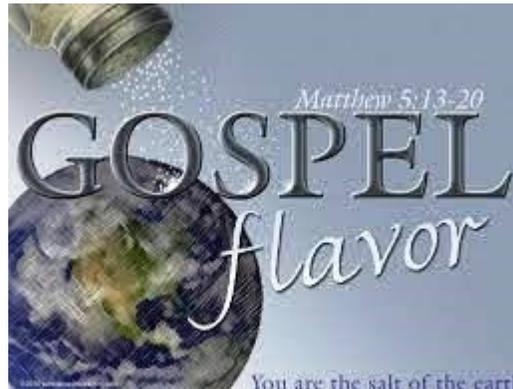
—Sister Mary Ann Spanjers

With the arrival of October, we are mindful of the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. Judging from the shelves in stores, most of the rest of our country seems to be very mindful of Halloween. Other calendars proclaim this as National Vegetarian Month, Squirrel Awareness Month and National Cookie Month. While all of these may hold greater or lesser importance for each of us, the Holy Father's intention calls us to an important challenge in our life of faith and in the life of the Church. He asks us to pray *that every baptized person may be engaged in evangelization, available to the mission, by being witnesses of a life that has the flavor of the Gospel.*

Let's consider the first call on its own. This is the call that each baptized person may be engaged in evangelization. As St. Francis proclaimed, we can do this by, "Preaching and using words when necessary." Often our actions hold a much more potent message than our verbiage. The word *evangelization* comes from the Greek *euangelion* which means *glad tidings*. Thus, our use of the words Good News. The Good News is the gospel message known as the kerygma which is also Greek and translates as *proclamation*. So, our first challenge is to boldly proclaim this Good News to everyone.

The second challenge in Pope Francis' intention is *that every baptized person may be available to the mission*. What mission? "The most central mission of the Catholic Church and her deepest identity is this evangelization, the calling of every intentional disciple of Christ." (Light of the World Evangelization Ministries, Imprimatur was granted from Bishop Thomas G. Doran on April 13, 2005.) Availability for the mission implies an openness to the working of the Holy Spirit. We are not merely asked to consider evangelizing when it is convenient or when we feel inspired. We are asked to be available to proclaim the Good News, as St. Paul urges, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and exhort, with great patience and instruction. (2 Tim. 4:2)

Finally, the Holy Father asks us to be witnesses of a life that has the flavor of the Gospel. What is that fla-



*Gospel Flavor - Gospel Flavor added a new photo. (facebook.com)*

vor? It is surely not a taste of bitterness born of anger, nor should this life leave a cloyingly sweet aftertaste of self-righteousness. The flavor of the Gospel, Jesus tells us should be that of salt, for we are to be salt for the earth. We are to act as salt does; it merely enhances the flavors that are already present. The Gospel provides the sustenance and our proclamation in word and action shows our world how Jesus' message fits into today's context.

Thus, we are to be engaged, available and witnessing. Perhaps one context in which we can actively live out this intention of Pope Francis is to remember that October is also Respect Life Month. This designation dates back to 1972, when the U.S. bishops started a respect life program in October, in anticipation of the Roe vs. Wade decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in January 1973. The message of reverence for life is truly a Gospel message and may be a word that we can speak clearly during these upcoming weeks as we recall the challenge at the end of Matthew's Gospel, "Before ascending to the Father, Jesus commissioned the disciples to preach the gospel to every person on earth."



Sister Marlita Henseler received her yellow apron that identifies all staff and volunteers at the Kino Center, Mexico. She wrote: "Guess I will stay awhile. We are looking at possibly starting English classes in the afternoons as soon as I can get some books. Will see if it works out. Otherwise I will be a floater for a while in the mornings to help wherever needed. I like the variety."

# Venit, Vidit, Mansit: He came, he saw, he stayed.

*Reflections on our time with Moses/Furbo/Kitty-Boy*

*“For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility [...] in hope that creation itself would [...] share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.” (Rom 8. 19-21)*

This summer, many of you had the joy of getting to know the barn cat who lived with us for just about a year. Because the coming winter will pose challenges to caring properly for him, we (the “cat team”) decided that it would be best to adopt him out. We think we found a good new home for him and on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September, took him to his new home. He’ll have spacious property and an old barn to enjoy along with many other cats and some lovely humans who will care for him.



## Meeting Moses

He was first noticed by several of our employees in late Summer / early Fall of 2020. They were out on their lunchtime walk and saw him coming out of the tall grass near the lake. This is the origin of the name “Moses,” but he had many other names: Kitty, Kitty Boy, Furbo (Italian for “sly”).

## His Home in the Barn

In the beginning, we provided Moses with a small box lined with paper and a small blanket in which to sleep.

This box was placed in the barn (bottom) just inside the first set of doors where the sand is kept for the winter. He would sit looking out the doors from this small perch, greeting everyone who came. Gradually, a couple of chairs were set up near his box so that we could sit with him. Moses ended up spending far more time in the chairs than in his box, even sleeping in one of the chairs.



Eventually his box was replaced with a small suitcase turned into a bed for him. This bed was then placed in a sunny spot so that, during the winter, he had some warmth. When the temperatures dropped below 10 (especially below zero), we dressed warmly and spent some extra time with him helping him stay warm. People from the area who heard that we were taking care of this cat sent all kinds of supplies, including a heated water bowl for the winter.

Our experience of sitting with him in a filthy barn led us to eventually clean the barn, for him and for us. One of the Sisters, the most zealous about cleaning the barn, took advantage of the College closing to obtain a sturdy chair for his many visitors and a large industrial rug that he used as a ‘clawing tree.’ By the time summer rolled around, there were three chairs set up for visitors and, more often, for ‘himself.’

## His Routine

Early each morning, he would come right out to greet the bearer of his breakfast! Later in the morning, it was pleasant to call him with a loud MEOW and have him come cantering down the road from the path in the woods. He loved a morning hug!



*Sister Mary Jerome Wensel visited Moses.  
Photo by Nicole Missner*

All day long he received visitors from the Infirmary, St. Francis Convent and the Motherhouse. Several employees would spend their lunch time with him!

Before we had him neutered, he would often wander off at night and, at time, be gone for a few days. He would return pretty beat up and in need of antibiotics. We also needed to keep his wounds clean at times. Thanks to the kindness of several vets in town and a generous benefactor, he always received the care he needed, and he trusted us to handle him. Never once did he claw or fight against the care that we needed to show him, even when it must have hurt.

Once he was neutered, he stayed on our property and no longer looked

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# Venit, Vidit, Mansit: He came, he saw, he stayed.

*Reflections on our time with Moses/Furbo/Kitty-Boy*

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for fights. However, because fights found him, we would corral him into the barn at night and close it up so that he would be safe from other cats on the prowl.

## His Characteristics

Without a doubt, his signature was the way he would throw himself down at our feet and roll over for a belly-rub. It can happen that a cat will show you their belly as a way of saying “I trust you,” but most often they will become hostile when you actually rub their belly. Not Moses!! Even the Vets and the vet techs remarked how gentle and trustful he was! He was the talk of the town at the Vet!

Furbo welcomed everyone who visited with him. One day, when Furbo was walking with me he spotted other Sisters coming toward us from the opposite direction. He took off with a sprint to run to them. About halfway between myself and them, he stopped dead in his tracks, turned around and looked at me as if to ask “Is it ok if I welcome them also?” He had a smile for everyone and showed no partiality. If two Sisters were down visiting, he would spend time first with one, and then with the other. When it was hot, he spent all his time on the concrete where it was cool.

We enjoyed bringing him toys and small treats. His favorite toy was a big soft fish that would crinkle, but he also enjoyed playing with small toy mice that had been laced with cat nip. He loved our spacious outdoors and big barn. At times he would dart around in the barn, running through the tubes that are on the floor and surprising us when he popped out at our feet!



He shared the barn with the swallows and an occasional raccoon. There were a few, but not too many, fatalities among the swallows. In addition to hunting birds, he stalked rabbits, squirrels, mice and other rodents. One day he returned triumphantly from the path carrying a rather large snake in his mouth. He ate the whole thing. Unforgettable was the time I saw him catch a chipmunk in mid-leap. The poor chipmunk thought he could make a get-away, but Furbo was lightning fast.

If we sat down in one of the chairs while he ate, after he ate, Furbo would be on our lap with one graceful leap, staring us straight in the eye before nestling down for a comfortable little snooze and some loving strokes. However, his ears were on constant alert for any unfamiliar sound.

He had a really good sense of who needed to be cheered up or comforted in some way. One morning in particular, I had gone down to give him his breakfast. Because I was beginning a migraine, I sat down in one of the chairs, holding my head in my hands until I felt well enough to make the walk back up to the Convent. After he ate, he came over, jumped up on the chair next to me, and, unusually, *insisted* on work-

ing his way into my lap. This ability to comfort others was seen repeatedly in his interacting with the Sisters from St. Rita's. He would spend time with each one, moving from one lap to the other. Furbo seemed to bond in a special way with Sister Michaela Melko, the first Sister from St. Rita's taken down to visit with Moses. He sat on her lap for about a half hour perfectly content. Sister Michaela spent most of the time brushing Moses (which he loved) and often asked him: “Where did you come from, Moses? I know that you did not come from the Nile.”

## Our Reflections

Because both infants and animals are helpless, our attitude toward them reveals us to ourselves in surprising ways. Are we as tolerant as we believe ourselves to be? Befriending an animal makes us more human, as the animal comes to tolerate our humanity and befriends us. Some of the lessons we gleaned from our Kitty Kat are: be aware of others; try to recognize their feelings; do not be afraid; do what you can to make another smile.

There were spiritual lessons as well. Sitting with him in the chilly barn in December, saying the rosary in his company, was good Advent preparation for the Lord who was born in a (dirty) stable surrounded by animals.

Bonaventure famously taught that God reveals Himself by way of *two* books, creation being the first book, and the Scriptures being the second. This little article is our way of praising God for revealing himself to so many of us through



*Sister Marie Kolbe Zamora took a selfie with Furbo.*

# Venit, Vidit, Mansit: He came, he saw, he stayed.

Reflections on our time with Moses/Furbo/Kitty-Boy

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*Sister Catherine Gillis enjoys the cat's gentle spirit and willingness to just be for awhile.*



*Kitty Boy walks with Sister Anna Maar.*

*Photo by Nicole Meissner Sunday, Nov 29, 2020.*

Moses/Furbo/Kitty Boy. He was a beautiful cat, fulfilling his nature as God made him: lithe, handsome and affectionate. When he was seriously ill and wounded, he persisted in being his best self, if with less energy. In this way, he offered me an example of how to live the Paschal Mystery. How often I complain about the slightest inconvenience. Alt-

hough our little buddy was in danger of losing his life at one point, he never complained. He kept trusting us. Moses was truly special cat for his persistent display of confidence in relationship to us, a constant reminder of the confidence the Lord invites us to show Him.

One of the ways cats are a vestige of the living God is that it is impossible to choose a cat unless and until they first choose us. Furbo showed up on our property and with gentle courtesy begged care and

help, which we provided with joy, especially at a time when we were in enforced isolation because of COVID. In the words of one of his "frequent flyer" visitors, "He brought God closer to me."

*Submitted by: Sisters Francis Mason, Catherine Gilles, Anna Maar, Dora Lee Monian, Marie Kolbe Zamora, Karen Subr, Marsaia Kaster*

## Fishing with special people on a Special Journey



About six months ago, the Omaha directors of the Midwest *Special Journeys* invited me to act as a guardian for people with special needs—wonderful people who can only tour and travel if they have helper-companions to journey with them. The only trip that fit into my schedule was a fishing trip to Mille Lacs Lake in northern Minnesota (Sept 20 - Sept 25). And now that I have returned from the five-day experience, I can testify that those who were entrusted to my care—from left to right, John, Diann, Ken and Renee—TAUGHT ME AND HELPED ME MUCH MORE THAN THE REVERSE. These special people are forever etched on my heart. And now I can say that, yes, once in my life I went fishing—with some very special people.

*—Sister Renée Mirkes*

## Sisters Join Lasallian/Franciscan Pilgrimage



It is such a blessing to be back with the students in person at San Miguel! We had our annual Lasallian/Franciscan Pilgrimage beginning at San Xavier Mission walking the four miles to San Miguel high school. Sister Hannah Johncheck, Sister Carla Riach, and Sister Rosalyn Muraski joined Sister Mary Ann Spanjers, other San Miguel teachers, and their students in the opening prayer. Brother Bob Brady, OFM participated in the sendoff prayer focusing on the pilgrim shell image and the beauty of the walk. Upon arrival at San Miguel the students made sandwiches, packing lunches for refugees and residents in homeless shelters. "Live Jesus in our hearts."

*—Sister Mary Ann Spanjers*

## Sisters Participate in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Continued from p. 1.

amazed to see how each child's spiritual life does grow. The atrium is quiet and the children are reverent. It's inspiring to see them using the prayer table or how the various works they do makes a difference.

Sister Veronica explained: "In an atrium there are a variety of 'works' to develop the religious potential of a child. For example: In the 3-5-year level there are practical life activities—polishing, pouring, transferring and putting away the material they used—to help them prepare for greater works as they move to the next level where they will work to set the altar and pour the wine.

"Other works involve the model altar; liturgical gestures, calendars and colors; parables of the Good Shepherd, mustard seed, and the hidden treasure.

"The story of the leaven that we did earlier this week is one of their favorites. After read-

ing the scripture text and mixing flour, yeast and water together—observing that it has risen in the warmth of the window. They are invited to meditate on the pondering questions: I wonder what Jesus meant? And, how could that tiny bit of yeast make dough get bigger?

"The adults who take the Catechesis courses for certification feel they learn so much and often say they wish their children would have had this when they were younger. Those who have very young children are excited about the atrium. One four-year-old child asked his mom when he could make his First Communion. (He was truly ready.) Another child told a priest he didn't hold the epiclesis long enough."

Sister Veronica also uses some of the atrium materials with her 3rd and 4th graders at St. Gregory in St. Nazianz and in the 2nd grade Faith Formation program in Manitowoc.



*Sister Veronica demonstrates rolling out a work mat on which the child will place the item from the shelf (below) to do her work.*

