

Communigram

FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY

Celebrating Consecrated Religious Women A Light for the World

*Were not our hearts burning inside
us as he talked to us . . .*

Manitowoc, Wisconsin—So many hearts were uplifted and renewed as 80 Sisters from 11 congregations in the Diocese of Green Bay gathered in the Generose Center on the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity Motherhouse grounds on May 13 for a day of spiritual renewal.

Fr. John Burns from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, whose assignment is to promote women's religious vocations and consecrated life, was the guest speaker.

"I came away being very much appreciated and affirmed," said Sister Sue Ann Hall. Sister Marcolette Madden said it this way: "I left the Generose Center on May 13th with a spring in my steps, because Father Burns' emphasis on the essential role of consecrated women in the Church was presented with such compelling clarity and ardor. The affirmation renewed my striving to be an authentic Franciscan Sister of Christian Charity—a visible sign of God's Presence in the world. He reminded us: Your primary value lies in WHO you are as women consecrated to God, more than the work you do. The Church needs you, your presence, your God-given feminine traits, your quality of heart.

It's important to intentionally keep this thought in mind each time I enter Roncalli Catholic Elementary School to serve as an Instructional Coach for new teachers. It's my presence and witness, more than anything else, that touch hearts and minds. Consecrated life empowers women religious to bear fruit within their Communities, the Church, and the world."

Fr. John Burns is an excellent speaker. He was clear, inspiring and thoughtful in his delivery and content, said Sister Laura Wolf. A quote that I especially liked was: "Nothing can stop a woman who knows who she is and that she is loved."

"Father John's presentations were indeed a positive, hopeful message about women in the Church. In spite of the many challenges that face us—fewer numbers, aging membership and the current concerns in society, there is much hope and a great need for the commitment of women religious. Our ministries are important but of greater importance is our consecration, our love for God. Celibacy is a gift of God. It is important that we let God love us," Sister Adrianna Schouten said.

With a thought-provoking analogy—extermination and reintroduction of wolves from Yellowstone National Park—Fr. Burns spoke on the current

lack of women religious and its effect on the rest of the Church. By 1926 the wolves were exterminated from Yellowstone National Park. Sister Lorita Gaffney summarizes: "A productive ecosystem is maintained by a healthy balance between the predators and their prey interacting in that given area. If the top-level predators are removed (such as removing the wolves from Yellowstone National Park), the prey species (elk, rodents, etc.) quickly degrade and overrun the habitat. As resources become scarce, these populations become malnourished, sick, and either die or move." The wolves were finally reintroduced to bring balance.

Likewise, the situation with women religious, said Fr. Burns. Sister Lorita summarizes the analogy: "Since the late 1800's until more recent years, women religious in this country have assumed top leadership roles in catechesis and education in parishes, schools and higher education. Their numbers have drastically diminished since Vatican II. The Church has scrambled to replace them with other good Catholic men and women who can 'get the job done.' But the whole Church is suffering the loss of religious witness, dedication and support that only women religious bring to it by who they are" a visible sign of God's Presence in the world.

Graduation Breakfast Comments

Honoring Sister Beatrice and Sister Maria Guadalupe



Good morning on this special day of celebration! At this special breakfast we honor Sister Beatrice on earning her Master's Degree in Business Management and Sister Maria Guadalupe a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education.

You have reached a mile-stone in your educational pursuits. You had much support along the way, not only from your professors, classmates and friends, but also from Community members from the Congregations of Franciscan Sisters of Saint Anna, Kenya and the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, Manitowoc.

We pray in gratitude for all those who are known and those who are unknown. I want to acknowledge in a special way and thank those Sisters who supported you through endless hours of scheduling, driving you to and from school. A special thank you to the Food Service Staff for saving meals for late arrivals home. The list could go on and on!



Sister Maria Guadalupe. You have graduated; however, your learning and formation continues this next semester during your time of practicum. The prayers of your Sisters in Community are with you. We bid Sister Beatrice God-speed as she leaves us today. You take our Franciscan spirit with you and your Franciscan spirit will remain with us. We will pray for you and for all who will share in the fruit of your education. **God bless you, Sister Maria Guadalupe and Sister Beatrice.**

May 14, 2023

by Sister Natalie Bimversie



There's a Joy in Watching Former Students Succeed

I had the joy of being at the University of Arizona graduation for some of my former San Miguel high school students! Both Diomara and Cristina graduated with honors in International Studies and Behavioral Science! I am so proud of these young women! Join us in prayer for them as they continue to discover God's direction in their lives!

Sister Mary Ann Spanjers





Manitowoc, Wisconsin—Holy Family Convent was one of the selected locations for the recent St. Francis Xavier High School, Appleton, Wisconsin, All School Retreat Day. Teacher Mrs. Katie Heimerl and young women arrived at 9 a.m. Sister Pam Biehl led the retreatants in the theme: “The Secret to Being Holy and Happy....”

After introductions and a talk to set the focus of the day, a morning liturgy was planned. Fr. Placid Stroik, OFM, was the presider and Sister Marsaia Kaster led the music. Sister Pam invited the group to reflect on 3 parts of the Mass as they prepared to enter the chapel.

- Were there any words in the Opening and Closing Song that caught your attention?
- What words or phrases struck you in the two readings?
- What is your ‘takeaway’ from the Scripture and the homily today?
- Listen for a word or phrase that stays with you during the Eucharistic prayer.

Xavier High School Retreat at Holy Family Convent

After the Eucharistic celebration was ended, students were able to greet the other Sisters that were also in attendance. A discussion on their responses to the questions posed above followed in the Patio Lounge.

Next came lunch in the convent cafeteria followed with a talk on the ‘happy’ part of the theme. Important to being happy was prayer. Sister Pam reviewed the meaning of prayer and gave students time to pray. She gave them helps on how they could make this a daily practice of their own.

To close the retreat day, Sister Elaine Turba invited the students to help with a quilting project for Africa.

Here’s a message from teacher Mrs. Heimerl on the day—
 “We had a fantastic day at Holy Family Convent. I was so proud of our students! They were polite and respectful and participated in Sister Pam’s discussions with enthusiasm. They helped finish three quilts that will be sent to Africa. The visit gave the girls a glimpse into the lives of the sisters. We could see that they are real human beings with parents and siblings, iPhones, and cars, who watch TV, craft, and maybe bend a rule or two (just a bit...and they have lots of confessionals available). It took away some of the mystery surrounding religious life. Sister Pam is very down to earth and easy to talk to. My favorite take away from the day was that we don’t have to be serious and somber to be holy...just be nice to the people we see each day, even when it’s not easy to be.”



San Miguel Cristo Rey high school in Tucson celebrated the graduation events of the senior class of 2023! The characteristic that best describes this class is communal! They were a wonderful group of teenagers to have in theology class! They enjoyed learning, got along well with each other, had a depth of faith which they shared as the year progressed. These young people are a light for the Church in the world.



Sister Mary Ann Spanjers

Franciscan Sisters at Our Lady of Champion Walk to Mary

During this month honoring mothers and on the first Saturday of May, Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity participated in The Walk to Mary, an annual pilgrimage to the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, Champion, Wisconsin. This only U.S. approved Marian apparition site is where the Blessed Mother appeared to Adele Brise here in 1859. Sister Carol Seidl, Sister Carolee Vanness, Sister Theresa Feldkamp, Sister Maria Guadalupe Martinez Lopez and Sister Julie Ann Sheahan walked with many others of all ages remembering the intentions of all those in need. Here's some reflections from three of our Sisters who made this journey for the first time.

Sister Carolee Vanness (Hometown Algoma, Wisconsin, who met others of her own family on the way) commented: "What an exhilarating experience of belonging to the Church - so many families, so many nationalities, so many good people seeking Mary's intercession. There was time for silent prayer, prayers together, cheers, singing and chatting with other pilgrims. It was so well planned and numerous volunteers were so helpful. I look forward to participating next year."

Sister Theresa Feldkamp (who grew up in Wrightstown, Wisconsin, and greeted friends of family on the walk): "Everything was so well organized, and everyone was so friendly and helpful. There was such a positive spirit. It was such a blessing to be part of something so peaceful and hopeful in a world so in need of peace and hope. As I prayed the rosary I thought of the line "pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death," and how many times that was repeated. There is no doubt Mary heard all of those prayers and that many blessings will come to all who participated in the Walk and to their loved ones."

Sister Carol Seidl (who hails from Luxemburg, Wisconsin, not far from the Shrine): "It was an awesome experience to see so many families. It was said that people came from 47 states. To me, this shows that families still pray and want to teach their children to pray."

May we walk with our Mother Mary always on our life's journey.



May Crowning Sister Cabrini Schmidt carried the crown and Postulant Michelle crowned the statue of Mary during a prayer service at the Motherhouse.



Jennifer Pelot, a participant in the Mentorship Program at Roncalli Catholic Elementary School in Manitowoc, is pictured talking with Sister Marcolette Madden during a classroom observation post-conference. The pilot program, which was initiated and co-created by the Principal, Mrs. Adrienne Lundy, and Sister Marcolette Madden, began in August, 2022. Sister Marcolette's role is that of an Instructional Coach for new teachers.

When the Diocesan Accreditation Team visited Roncalli Catholic Elementary School in April, they interviewed all 25 teachers. The Team wrote these comments in the Final Report: "The visiting team com-

Green Bay Diocesan Accreditation Team Commends Mentorship

mends the school for its robust new teacher onboarding and pilot mentorship program. New and veteran teachers commented on what a blessing this support is to the school. The team recommends developing plans and committing resources to continue the mentorship program throughout the schools that is being piloted at the elementary school with Sister Marcolette."

The purpose of the program is to collaborate with and support the principal in her role of evaluating teacher and staff performance. While the principal has the authority to formally rate teacher performance, the role of the Instructional Coach is to focus on teacher strengths and areas for growth in a non-evaluative way (no formal ratings). The Instructional Coach's feedback to teachers centers on lesson/curriculum planning, classroom environment, instruction and assessment.

Teachers in the Mentorship Program at Roncalli Catholic Elementary shared the following comments:

"I didn't realize I was so good at ask-

ing higher level questions until we had the post-conference. Now I feel really motivated to build on that strength."

"This program has helped me reflect on my teaching. The feedback during the conferences and in the reports helps me set specific goals."

"I enjoyed working with Sister Marcolette and my grade level colleagues. We were encouraged to design a common assessment tool for the math measurement unit. Analyzing that data has guided our team in planning the next steps in instruction."

"It was great to have the chance to observe a teacher who's known for being an expert in teaching writing skills. I appreciate Sister covering my class so I could do that."

I'm so grateful to our Community for the many educational opportunities I've had, and the chance to share what I've learned by serving as an Instructional Coach. Our legacy in Education has enduring value.

Sister Marcolette Madden



May Crowning Third grade students prayed the rosary, crowned Mary, and enjoyed root beer floats at St. Agnes Convent, Green Bay.

JUST Gospel!

By Sister Kathleen Murphy

June, month of the Sacred Heart leads us to consider the words of our morning prayer which say ...*His passion is recalled...* The Sacred Heart of Jesus is open and wounded before us. It is open in order to pour out His great love. He does this each time we recall that great act of love present in His passion and again in the Eucharist. At each altar the same sacrifice is borne out for us personally. Again, He gives Himself completely—for me! He who is the unfathomable God enters that thin bit of bread so that He can enter into me, dwell with me and become part of me. What wondrous love is this!

At times we prefer to dwell on the great gift of love that comes to us in Jesus and we prefer to put aside the remembrance of His suffering. We prefer to put aside an awareness of His suffering in His Mystical Body today. Pope Francis helps us to avoid that with his intention which states: *“That the international community may commit in a concrete way to ensuring the abolition of torture and guarantee support to victims and their families.”*

This concept of torture seems far removed from our day-to-day living, yet the universal Church knows the need to weigh this sad reality. As far as Catholic values are concerned, the position regarding torture is quite clear. *The Catholic Catechism* considers and condemns torture under the broader rubric of "You Shall Love Your Neighbor as Yourself" and the 5th Commandment "You shall not kill". Section 2297 of the Catechism states explicitly that "Torture which uses physical or moral violence to extract confessions, punish the guilty, frighten opponents, or satisfy hatred is contrary to respect for the person and for human dignity."

So, that is what we are to hold and believe regarding torture. How might we see this teaching in human terms? Sister Dianna Ortiz, an Ursuline Sister endured such evils in Guatemala in 1989. She survived and became an advocate for victims of torture around the world. In her book, *The Blindfold's Eyes*, she writes: "But no one ever fully recovers—not the one who is tortured, and not the one who tortures. Every time he tortures, the torturer reinforces the idea that we cannot trust one another, and that

we cannot trust the world we live in.

The lessons of my torture didn't stick; I was supposed to have learned that I am powerless, that nothing I say or do can stop the torture. I was supposed to have learned despair. But I can't help hoping. I have faith in the unexpected, the miraculous, the power of people working together and of God working through us. I have to offer all I have and believe and hope it's enough. And I do."

On Sister Dianna's return to the United States, she spent time at a recovery center. About this she says, "As time passed, I forgave God for not working some dramatic miracle undoing my past. I learned that God was indeed working a quiet unobtrusive miracle, healing me through other people—through small gestures, smiles, hugs, and kind words. These began to counteract the power of the torturers' smirks and punches."

May our prayers be that presence of a healing heart of God to those who suffer from this evil in our world.



The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist was celebrated at Christ Our Light Parish in Cambridge, Ohio on Sunday, May 7, 2023. The celebrant was the Pastor, Fr. Paul Hrezo. Sister Carol Juckem and Andrew Vannorsdall led the music. The director of Religious Education is Traci Mitchell and Sister Mariadele Jacobs prepared the students.

Sister Sharon Paul

Nuns and Religious Sisters Gather for CMSWR Formators Workshop

Nearly 100 Sisters attended the Council of Major Superiors Women Religious Formators Workshop at the Malvern Retreat Center, Malvern, Pennsylvania. Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity Sister Theresa Feldkamp, Sister Kathleen Murphy and Sister Julie Ann Sheahan were among the participants. Each year, the CMSWR Formators Workshop brings together vocation and formation directresses to discuss the best practices for accompanying young women as they discern their vocation and enter religious life. By collaborating with their peers and listening to presentations by guest speakers, directresses can learn new insights, ask questions, and share their experiences.

This year's topics included: Evaluat-

ing the Candidate in Her Totality: Determining a Woman's Physical, Emotional, Psychological and Spiritual Capacity for Interdependent Communal Religious Life. Keynote speaker was Sister Mary Patrice Ahearn, R.S.M., Psy.D. Other Presenters included Frank J. Moncher, PhD, a psychologist and consultant serving the Diocese of Arlington and Catholic Charities licensed in Virginia and Washington, D.C., as well as John Flanagan, Laboure Society. Panelists from various communities also shared best practices.

The CMSWR Formators Workshop helps ensure that future generations of religious sisters will flourish in their vocation as brides of Christ and faithful servants of the Church.



Sisters Visit College Mary Statue in Lindsay, Nebraska

Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity responded to an invitation from Eagle Scout Seth Wiese from Holy Family Parish, Lindsay, Nebraska. Seth recently created a Shrine to Our Lady near Holy Family Church using a Mary statue that once stood at Holy Family College, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, for his Eagle Scout Project. He finished the project one day before his eighteenth birthday. He said, "Please let me know when any of the Sisters are coming to Lindsay for a personal tour! I hope to have a blessing and dedication sometime in May!"

Thus, it came to be, that on Tuesday, April 25 Sister Myra Jean Sweigart, Sister Leonette Kochan and Sister Jane Kinata arrived in Lindsay. They planned on participating in the morning liturgy with the Holy Family Elementary School children. Seth, meanwhile, met them there, along with his parents. The Sisters were able to affirm Seth's work in person.

Once the dedication date is set, our Sisters in West Point, Nebraska hope to attend. There are already plans to add a cathedral like wire top to the brown divider wall behind Mary to help accentuate the statue that is very similar in color to the brick of the church.



Sister Myra Jean posed with the statue of Mary in Lindsay.

**FRANCISCAN SISTERS
OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY**

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ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

Holy Family Convent Hosts St. Thomas the Apostle Quinceañera Retreat



Manitowoc, Wisconsin—Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity hosted young women preparing for their Quinceañera through St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, Newton, Wisconsin. Sister Maria Guadalupe Martinez Lopez, Sister Catherine Peter Logan and Postulant Michelle Ozuna were involved in presenting talks for the retreat along with members of the Parish’s Hispanic Community. Alina DeWitt organized the day.

Sister Maria Guadalupe comments: “We really enjoyed having the Quinceañera retreat at our Motherhouse. This

was such a joy. Hearing the talks of the volunteers from St Thomas and St Francis Parishes and listening to the young women’s answers was a refreshing experience. I particularly enjoyed eating together and talking about how God can use us to spread his Gospel even if we feel unworthy. Just like St. Paul and St. Augustin we can be witnesses of hope in Jesus. We hope that our efforts bear fruit in the lives of these young women.”

Left to right: Sisters Myra Jean Sweigart, Jane Kinate, Natalie Bimversie, Leonette Kochan and Theresa Feldkamp send blessings while visiting the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

