

Communigram

FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY

Community Crib Holy Family Convent

Christmas 2023 marks the 800th commemoration of St. Francis' enactment of the Incarnation in the remote fortified village of Greccio, Italy.

Three years before his death, St. Francis of Assisi was in Greccio near Christmas time. He was dismayed at the townsfolk's apathy for the mystery of salvation. Fifteen days before Christmas, Francis called his friend Giovanni and entrusted him with the preparations. "If you desire to celebrate the coming feast of the Lord together at Greccio, hurry before me and carefully make ready the things I tell you. For I wish to enact the memory of that babe who was born in Bethlehem, to see with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay."

Every year about this time someone asks about our Nativity set or has memories of when . . . So this month, reprinting much of the December 2014 Heritage Happenings, we look at our crib over the years. We begin with the history as written by Sr. Teresita Kittell during the winter of 1974: "Our Christmas Crib was made by a wood carver from Germany in the early 1890's. The man who carved the crib was Mr. John Climicus Falbissoner. The focal point is the Christ Child with Mary and Joseph in a realistic rocky cave, but rising in the background are the towers and domes of Jerusalem ablaze with lights. One can almost hear the "sound of revelry by night" as the colored lights gleam through the darkness. The contrast is strong—the poverty of the Christ Child and the world He came to save. Or if your contemplation leads you that way, you might imagine these lighted towers shining through the night to be a symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem which the Infant has recently left and toward which He will lead us all."

When first completed, this crib was found to be so large



A photo of the original hand crafted crib dating to the 1890's.

that the first two pews on the left side of St. Francis Chapel had to be removed each year and the side door closed to accommodate it.

Eventually the crib was moved to the landing outside St. Francis chapel at the foot of the farther stairway. Sisters remember the trees going "all the way up the stairs!"



Fifteen porcelain angels, all made in Germany, hang from tiny nails located around the entrance to the cave. Each is carrying a heart. Here's a closeup of one.



Sister Davidica Beschta painted a backdrop of the mid-night sky and the stairway was closed off. It made a most beautiful setting! These two photos show the inside of the "cave" before the statues go in.

For many years, this huge complex

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Annual Founder's Program Highlights

Our Constant: Gods' call and our YES!

In preparation for the 2023 Founders' Day program, I was honored to delve into our rich history. To be honest, the act of trying to capsule our very rich and expansive heritage into one little program seemed daunting. I began with looking at the archives of what had been done in the past. Of course, the crowds were much bigger then, still I thought a play might be a nice way to honor the tradition of many of the programs.

In hopeful exploration of the archives, I found the prayer of Mother Gabriel to the Community from the 40th anniversary of our founding. I was very excited to find her words so poignantly written, I wonder if she imagined the legacy, she'd be leaving for us all these years later. I had recently, during the Necrology, discovered that Mother Gabriel's death anniversary fell on my birthday. At that moment I decided to focus on our first Mother Superiors.

I was given a copy of Refining His Silver, and the book on the Charisms written during Sister Henrieldas' term and I found within the archives a previous program, Portraits of Hope. In researching the archives of past programs and looking at the legacy of musical talent of previous performances I was then directed to music written by our Sisters. I came across the Vocation song and before hearing the tune, the lyrics spoke to me.

One of my original thoughts was to have the Mothers at a card table; we all know how popular cards are in the convent. However, I played scrabble

during one of the socials and was reminded how scrabble is a communal and building game, it is competitive but you have to think about community by building a good foundation for everyone to play off of. A true successful scrabble game allows for the most possibilities of high scoring words for all players. Part of the fun is looking at the finished board and reveling in the great words built.



In addition to recreation, another part of our culture is to faithfully ask for prayerful intercession from all our departed Sisters, which is a daily reminder of our communion with our saints interceding for us each day. I imagine they would be interceding through all our needs not just limited to vocations. They are journeying through our navigation of the times and needs of the church and our response in our living and sharing of our charisms.



It was great to present a snippet of our heritage in a fun and meaningful way. It was brought to life by all those participating in the play on and off stage at the many steps of development. I was moved by the generosity of everyone helping and their joyful YES. It was a true building of Community...a true triple-word-score! Thank you all for attending and sharing in celebration of our culture and history! Thank you all for your kind words and most importantly, for your YES!



Motherhouse Crib

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filled the entire left side of St. Mary's Chapel. Sometimes ornaments, representing Jesse Tree symbols were hung on the trees flocking the crib. Notice all the Bethlehem city buildings.

Over the years the crib went from "huge" down to "much smaller"—notice less buildings in the right, present day version.

Sister Teresita Kittell in 1974: "Now, of course, the crib



has followed the Community Christmas celebration into St. Mary's Chapel. Something would be wanting if this crib, so dear to all of us, were not there to tell the story it has told for so many years to so many Sisters."

Sister Caritas Strodthoff in 2014: "In the last few years the crib has been relocated to the right side of chapel making it easier for Lector and Priest to walk around on left side. Isn't it beautiful!!"

Tucson's 'Cycling Sister' Was Back for 2023 El Tour de Tucson Ride



Sister Mary Ann Spanjers at the finish line of El Tour De Tucson on Saturday November 18. Pictured with her are the Sisters she lives with at San Xavier Mission, Tucson. Left to right: Sisters Carla Riach, Marlita Henseler and Rosalyn Muraski.

Sister Mary Ann was interviewed by John Gold special to the Arizona Daily Sun, November 17th issue.

And, from [San Miguel High School - Tucson](#) | [Tucson AZ](#) | [Facebook](#) we read:

"Huge shout-out to our Theology teacher (and Department Chair) Sister Mary Ann Spanjers! She will be competing again this year in the 40th Annual El Tour de Tucson!

We are so grateful for her commitment to our students, their education, and their spiritual and personal growth.

Students learn through observing as much as what we tell them. And as



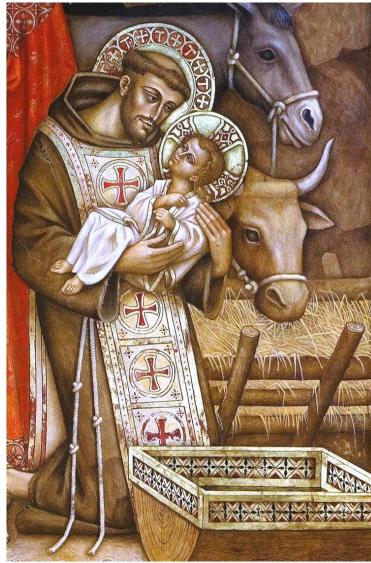
such, we are also grateful for her commitment to her health as this is a powerful example for our students.

She is a mentor to many, and we are thankful to her as she continues to be a wonderful guide to all who cross her path in the classroom, and beyond."

St. Francis and Greccio

1223 – 2023

As Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity we profess, collectively and personally, our commitment to life in Community. This year we are preparing to celebrate the great mystery of the Incarnation in communion with St. Francis' incarnational observance at Greccio 800 years ago. Perhaps we might consider an observance of our communion with each other in prayer through a simple adaptation of Las Posadas as planned this year here at the Mother-house.



This year's Posadas will combine the journey to Bethlehem with the *O Antiphons*. Beginning on December 17 and continuing through December 23, the journey to Bethlehem will be observed with the Posadas prayer ending with the action of placing a figure of the Nativity story in the empty Crib.

This placing of the figures will be as follows:

- O Wisdom - angels and star
- O Lord of Israel – hay, ox and ass
- O Root of Jesse – sheep
- O Key of David – Mary and Joseph
- O Rising Dawn – Shepherds
- O King of Nations – Magi
- O Emmanuel – Baby Jesus

Each of the historical human persons in the Nativity event took a risk in following the call of faith, facing an unknown future. But, they were rooted in the call of faith and community. They placed their trust in the example of Jesus as he answered his Father's call to communion with the human family. Their gift of faith prompted them to act boldly, willing to share the blessings of their gift of faith. May these bold actions, historically, over 2000 years ago, and of St. Francis, 800 years ago, give us the courage and inspiration to share into the future the fruits of our gifts as Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity.

Perhaps this Posadas experience can be shared in our various ministry settings. The script, as written by Sister Kathleen, can be shared with all.

Sister Leonette Kochan



Sisters Convent Hosts Yuma Catholic High School Etiquette Dinner

Sister Mary Teresa Bettag's speech class participated in a special meal to practice social skills such as use of correct tableware, conversation with people you normally don't sit with, how to make a toast and other good and proper manners for social interaction.

Sister Mary Teresa explains: "Every year, I bring my public speaking class to the convent just before Thanksgiving for an etiquette dinner. In the weeks prior, we study etiquette and table talk, and each of the sisters helps me to get it ready. Sister Janet Rose and I move the tables, Sister Ann Mary Hart has all the fancy table settings ready, and Sister Mary Beth Kornely ensures their place cards are as random as possible. This year we had the dinner over lunch on Thursday, November 16th. The meal from a local Italian restaurant was paid for by a donor. I served them the meal, and they had a chance to eat it in courses, and we concluded with each student making a toast. The best one was a student toasting our dining room clock which chimes a portion of the Ave Maria every 15 minutes, 'I'd like to toast the clock for all the good times we've shared. This was *hands down* the best etiquette lunch I've ever had.'"



"The kids are fun. It was a great day, so hopefully they're all set for a wonderful Thanksgiving!"



Yuma Catholic High National Vocation Awareness Week Panel

The Diocese of Tucson's Yuma Catholic High School had a vocation panel to launch National Vocation Awareness Week. Mr. DeDecker, representing marriage (he has a beautiful story), our chaplain, Fr. Luis Pablo Ochoa representing priesthood, and Franciscan Sister of Christian Charity Sister Mary Teresa Bettag was the repre-

sentative of religious life.

Two of the school's theology teachers (who are brothers, incidentally) were the MCs for the event. Stories were told and the panel answered prepared and spontaneous questions. It was thought to be a meaningful discernment moment for the students.



Celebrating a Former Handbell Ringer

The Conservatory Handbell Ringers presented a concert on Sunday, November 19, at the Franciscan Center for Music Education and Performance. Sister Elizabeth arranged for some of the St. Rita Sisters to come to this performance. Sister Marcus eagerly entered the Atrium to see all her handbell ringer friends having been a member of the ringer group in the past. What a

blessing to see Sister Marcus so appreciated and celebrated by Sandra Eithun, Director of the Conservatory Handbell Ringers, and some of the members who came over to specially greet Sister. In some ways, it was a double-header performance for the St. Norbert Handbell Ringers performed at the beginning of the program.

God bless Sandra Eithun, Dr. Philip Klickman and all the handbell ringers!

St. Rita Sister Team

Sisters to Take Part in St. Gregory/St. Nazianz Religious Education Families Prayer Service

During the Advent Season Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity are invited to gather with St. Gregory, St. Nazianz Religious Education families for a December 13, 2023 prayer, dinner and social. As part of the prayer, our Sisters are bringing an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe that we received in December 2019 from Agustin Lopez Ramirez, uncle of Sister Maria Guadalupe Martinez Lopez. The gift had been blessed by St. John Paul II. Sister's uncle received this image from a friend, Fr. Juvenal Garnica, who was a missionary priest from the town of Degollado in the State of Jalisco from the order of Our Lady of Guadalupe headquartered in the Basilica of Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. Father had been a missionary in Japan for some time. At one point in his life, he traveled to Rome taking with him several images of Our Lady of Guadalupe so that Pope John Paul II could bless them. This is one of those images. It is a digital copy of the original image found in the Basilica. The so called "Guadalupe Happening," refers to when the image of Mary was embodied on the tilma of St. Juan Diego when Our Lady appeared to him.

As part of the prayer service, the families are invited to bring a rose (flower) to place before the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The flowers will be later located in church near Mary's altar and some will be given to The Crossing of Manitowoc County, a non-profit, Christian-based organization with a mission to provide emotional, educational, material, and spiritual support to clients, empowering them to become strong and resilient families. Other donated items from the organization's wish list will also accompany the flowers.



JUST Gospel!

By Sister Kathleen Murphy

December certainly makes us mindful of Advent and the coming of Christmas. How many of the season's touching stories or movies contain the trials of a child or neglected adult who is lame or blind or slow to understand? Yet our hearts can't be opened to such plights merely one month out of the year. Pope Francis focuses his intention this month on those with disabilities challenging us as follows:

Let us pray that people with disabilities may be at the center of attention in society, and that institutions may offer inclusion programs that value their active participation.



Young Ohio boy's wish to meet Pope Francis comes true - Archdiocese of Baltimore (archbalt.org)

In December of 2022, Pope Francis said: *Supporting inclusive communities means eliminating all discrimination and concretely satisfying the need of every person to feel recognized and to feel part of a group. This implies not only guaranteeing people with disabilities access to buildings and meeting places, making languages accessible and overcoming physical barriers and prejudices, but also promoting "a spirituality of communion, so that everyone feels part of a body, with its unrepeatable personality.*

This is a challenge that we don't often consider. We look to provide for those structural or educational changes that will be of help to those with special needs, but we often fail to see how despite the ramp we've built or the mentors we've provided, we have failed to see this part of the human family as brother or sister. We see their differences and often justify various ways of setting them apart.

The Holy Father goes on to say: *All of us, as the Apostle Paul would say, hold the treasure of life in earthen vessels. Everyone, apart from any merit or distinction, has received the Gospel in its entirety and, with this, the joyful task of proclaiming it. All of us are called to offer others an explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord, who despite our imperfections offers us his closeness, his word and his strength, and gives meaning to our lives. Sharing the Gospel,*

in fact, is not a duty entrusted only to some, but an absolute necessity for all those who have encountered Jesus and enjoyed his friendship. We may think that those with special needs are not capable of evangelizing, that they need others to take that role for them. This is not operating out an inclusive mindset. Years ago I was blessed with the opportunity to help Sister Mary Bodwin's sister, Dorothy with a retreat day for special needs children preparing for their First Communion. She was especially gifted in the way she related to those children and when I expressed this she said, *I believe that God created every person for a purpose. These children's purpose is to teach the rest of us how to love.* I've never forgotten those words spoken from a faith-full heart. Dorothy surely lived the Pope's message!

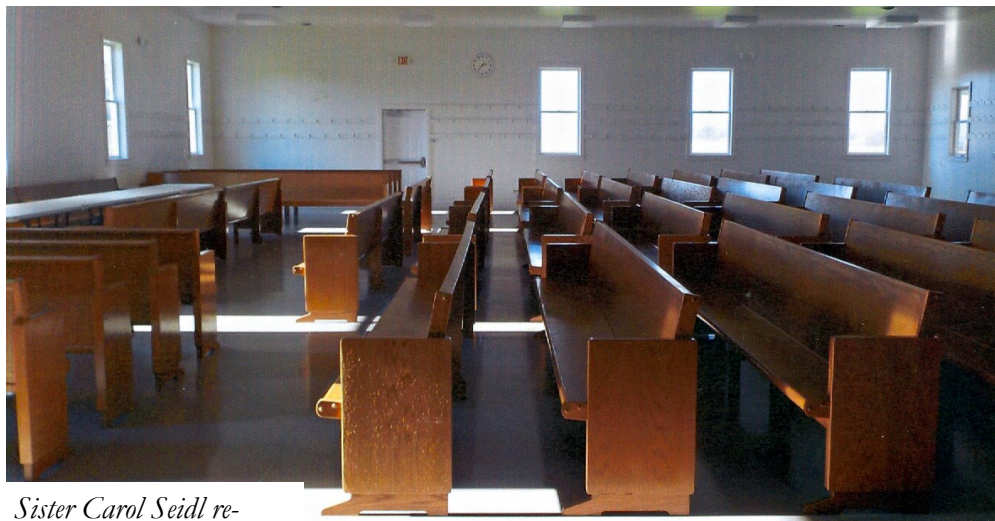
In an article entitled *Overcome: Keeping Faith With a Disability*, Sarah Bailey, who suffers from cerebral palsy and a spinal cord injury writes, *If you are a faithful Catholic person with a disability, you may experience heartbreak. You may find it difficult to hear the Gospel stories about healing and think why can't I have that healing in my life. A person's sympathetic touch as they pass you in the communion line may make you angry. You just want to be treated like everyone else. If the hymn book is beyond your reach, you may not be able to sing along at Mass. Yet people who are disabled want to participate in their life of faith fully. I have learned we are fearfully and wonderfully made. God has a plan and purpose for us that encompasses the call to holiness.* There is much for us to consider in hearing such an honest portrayal of the Church experience of one whose life carries disabilities.

As we daily pray for Pope Francis' intention during December, let us also be mindful of the fact that International Day of Persons with Disabilities is celebrated on December 3. This might be a good day to check out the website given below to read some stories of faithful Catholics who live with challenges every day. Their stories may inspire us to honor them for their courage and to support them with our acceptance and prayer.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD), which is celebrated on December 3.

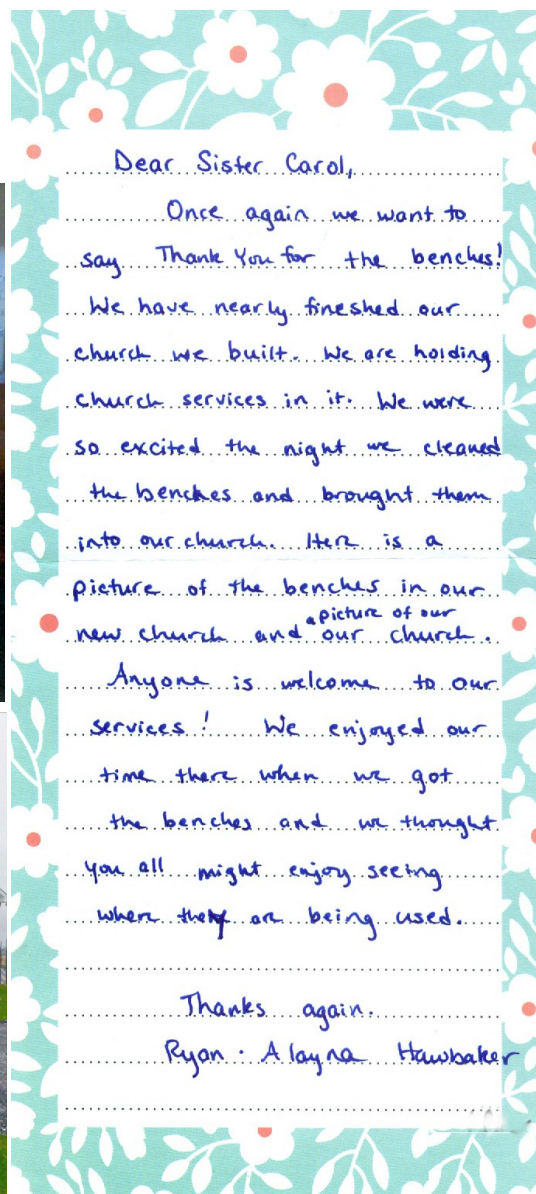
[Catholics with disabilities vital to the life of the Church - Arkansas Catholic - July 14, 2018 \(arkansas-catholic.org\)](https://www.arkansas-catholic.org/catholics-with-disabilities-vital-to-the-life-of-the-church-arkansas-catholic-july-14-2018/)

Holy Family College Chapel Pews in Their New Home



Sister Carol Seidl received this note and these pictures from the Baptist Amish family who oversaw the removal of the pews from our College Chapel.

The pictures are a testimony of the pews going to a place of worship—their new church in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. The message shares their deep gratitude.



Convent Open House Encourages Vocation Awareness

Yuma, Arizona—Sisters Mary Beth Kornely, Ann Mary Hart, Janet Rose, and Mary Teresa Bettag have been busy with inviting various groups to their convent home for an open house including a tour, ice cream, cookies and a drink. The faculties and staff from Immaculate Conception School, St. Francis School and Yuma Catholic High School came over on their respective Friday to get a glimpse into how the Sisters live.

Also invited over on a Sunday afternoon were parishioners from the three parishes in the area. With the heavy emphasis placed on vocation awareness by the Tucson Diocese this year, this was an opportune time to bring more awareness to key groups of people on our life as religious.

Several Yuma Catholic High School students came for the parish open house and stayed the whole time, spending some of the time playing games in the living room, even when all the Sisters were busy with giving tours and visiting with others. It was so nice having them there.





*“The Lord is great
and exceedingly to be
praised.*

*The Lord is little
and exceeding to be
loved.”*

Christmas Novena
by Mother Generose, OSF

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

FRANCISCAN SISTERS
of Christian Charity