

Communigram

FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY

Initial Formation Weekend: Community United in God's Love



Novice Sister Michelle Marie Ozuna reflects on a recent Formation Weekend held at the Motherhouse for those in Initial Formation. Photos by: Temporary Professed Sister Concepcion Medina.

Community: United in God's Love was our theme for the 2024 Formation Weekend, February 9-11. It was easy for Sr. Concepcion Medina, Sr. Maria Guadalupe Martinez-Lopez, Sr. Catherine Peter Logan, Jennifer Bourque and I to see the unifying power of God's love through community, in the care and preparation expressed in the thoughtful planning and execution of the weekend by our directresses, Sr. Theresa Feldkamp and Sr. Kathleen Murphy, and the prayerful intercession of all of our Sisters.

Formation weekend started out with the screening of a decadent film titled, *Sweet Inspirations*. The film was great in that it had many implications to life in community that led to great discussion. The movie expressed how we are given different gifts or graces to be shared on behalf of the community. However, when we are not at peace internally or do not have a strong prayer life, it seeps out into our relationships and can cause division within community. We can accomplish much more together than alone. The first day concluded with a special Night Prayer focused on love, unity, peace and grace.

The second day of formation weekend started with Morn-

ing Prayer together, followed by Mass in St. Francis Chapel. It is always a blessing to celebrate Mass in St. Francis Chapel against the back drop of the statue of St. Francis reaching and embracing Christ on the Crucifix. In prayer I often place myself with Francis reaching and embracing Christ from the cross. It was special to celebrate Mass with initial formation and it helps to build up our formation community within our larger Community as Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity.

Father Brendan Creeden OSB, led very inspiring and enlightening talks for us in initial formation as we took time to reflect on how we are rooted in scripture and the characteristics of a healthy community. The first talk was titled *Community-Rooted in Scriptures*. Father paralleled reading scripture to an archeological dig he was blessed to participate in as a high school student in which he touched an artifact from 4,000 years ago. When we delve into scripture, we are joining our much larger community, we are placing ourselves back in time, taking part in an ancient conversation. The echoes of scripture are present and we need to listen for them. The model of community life in the scriptures can be summed up in Acts 4:32, "*Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.*"

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Formation Weekend

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In his second talk titled, *Characteristics of a Healthy Community*, Fr. Creeden left us with much to reflect upon and tools to implement in each of our lives now. As Father Creeden explained, a healthy community is one that reanimates and evangelizes itself. This immediately made me think of what St. Francis said, “preach the gospel and if necessary, use words.” A healthy community creates a space that enables ongoing conversion in life. A call from Christ is a personal conversion that leads to holiness. This ongoing conversion is not meant to be comfortable; we can encounter Christ hanging with Him upon the cross or standing with the crucifiers.

Before we can act as a healthy community we have to listen; receptivity comes before action as Fr. Creeden said it. The talk ended with four practical tips for living within community and in formation. (1) Things take time; practice patience and a level of docility, there are stages of growth in the spiritual life. (2) Things are not what they seem; we tend to see things as “we are” or how “we want.” (3) Things must be done together; surrender for the sake of another. (4) Thought drives out thought; the battle for virtue starts with recognition of our thoughts. We should be combatting our thoughts in a virtuous way and that starts with self-awareness.

After both talks, we took a little break to enjoy some treats and fellowship in community with Father and our Direc-



tresses. This was immediately followed by a Holy Hour in Eucharistic Adoration in St. Francis Chapel. We praised Christ with songs and also were provided scripture verses for contemplation which led to a deeper time in prayer. The peace felt in the presence of the Lord and

in our formation community was palpable and comforting. This was a great way to end the second day as we continued to listen to how the Holy Spirit was moving us throughout the day and as we processed all we had learned and the blessings we experienced over the weekend.



After our Holy Hour we prayed Evening Prayer with our larger Community of Sisters. Next, we had a fun-filled night of recreation and a special Franciscan Night Prayer.



Recreation started with the five of us preparing a “breakfast for supper” meal together. It was sweet to see how we all just jumped in and helped to prepare something special for all of us to enjoy.

It mirrored a video Fr. Creeden had shared with us earlier in the day of five men playing one single cello beautifully and harmoniously. Our meal harmoniously led to meaningful discussion which opened up to a special Night Prayer where we read from “The Words of Admonition of our Holy Father St. Francis.”

The next morning our Formation Weekend concluded with Holy Mass celebrated by Father Brendan Creeden, and a delightful breakfast with Sister Natalie Binversie where we discussed the blessings of our weekend and shared the many joys of Community life. With thankful and grateful hearts, we continue to unwrap all the spiritual gifts and graces we were nourished with over the weekend.

Chapel at National Shrine Updates

Among the updates to the chapel at National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion is the Communion rail which will look like hand crafted wood matching the back altar. In actuality laser scans were taken of the carvings of the altar and printed on a 3-D printer. Sister Caritas Marie Le Claire painted all 40+ pillars of the new Communion rail so that it would match the back altar. The updates are scheduled to be completed by Saturday, March 2, when Bishop David Ricken will consecrate the new altar at 11 a.m. Mass.



National Shrine Photo

Novices Share SEEK 2024 Experience

Sister Michelle Marie

I was a second-year attendee of SEEK this year. The conference is facilitated by FOCUS, (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) and returned to the St. Louis America's Center for the 2nd year. I remember thinking aloud, "Great, I am a seasoned veteran," as the administrative and managerial side of me started making plans while recalling what worked last year when I navigated the conference with 17,000 people. Then you get to SEEK and it is overwhelming in the absolutely best way possible.

I was overwhelmed by the fellowship of over 20,000 of your sisters and brothers in Christ all seeking Him. I was overwhelmed by the nourishing words that you never knew you needed to hear from the numerous speakers, laity and Religious alike. I was overwhelmed by the hundreds of priests processing every mass and the silence of 20,000 souls worshipping Christ each day as they participate in the sacrifice of the Mass. I was overwhelmed by the sea of joyous smiles that unites us all knowing we are so loved. I was overwhelmed of the ability to have intimate communion with Christ in Eucharistic adoration amongst an ocean of others all seeking Christ in the silence of their hearts as well. There is something so profoundly beautiful in allowing yourself to be immersed in Christ and looking over at your neighbor and seeing Christ so alive within them as they too are overwhelmed in love of Christ. The theme of SEEK this year was "Be the Light!" As we absorbed the light of God's truth of infinite love and mercy, we are called to reflect that light back unto others especially those living in darkness, where we each are.



Sister Catherine Peter

Sister Michelle Marie, Jenn, and I traveled with Sisters Linda, Sister Jacqueline and the Yooper crew again this year which was three buses with over 160 people to SEEK 2024 in St. Louis. How amazing to see the excitement as we traveled with the students, religious, priests, and seminarians. Once we arrived at the Dome in St. Louis we were joined with thousands as we checked in for the event. The message came across through the week that we are called to be a light in a world of beauty but to know it is a world also faced with many challenges. As we read in John 1:4-5 "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Each daily Mass began with a procession of about 500 priests and 44 bishops according to FOCUS. And on the night of adoration over 3000 confessions in 2 hours were heard along with daily confessions readily available. José Sánchez del Río was our young SEEK patron Saint for the week. He is an inspiration to all of us as one who loved the Eucharist, the Lord, and entrusted himself to Mary and was a Martyr at the young age of 14. Throughout the week the energy and spirit filled the air as 20,000 college students, focus missionaries, priests, deacons, religious,

and lay people soaked in the graces being received in this place filled with hope. It was wonderful to see so many more religious sisters and religious brothers and priests this year from many different Orders.

We spent time in daily adoration surrounded by relics of Saints, listened to the wisdom of numerous speakers, enjoyed Christian music, walked mission way filled with priests, religious, seminarians, focus missionaries, Catholic programs and missions, merchandise, live podcasts, games, and plenty of conversations. Shout out to Christ in the City and Spiritus! It was a chance to meet up with friends and make new ones. Unexpected experiences came up like joining a pushup challenge with Spiritus to raise money. Also had opportunities to play some cornhole and pickle ball with seminarians (Colorado Springs Diocese and Marquette Diocese) and students. Great times to have some friendly competition which led to great conversations and so much more.

It was inspiring to see the tender moments of parents bringing their young children forward in adoration to see Jesus up close or lifting them up in morning prayer for a better view. And to see young people having transformative experiences throughout the week. So much touched the heart and is hard to put into words. Seeds were planted and fires were lit. A great take away from the week is stated wonderfully in a message from Curtis Martin, "The more we come to know Jesus—the more we pray, dwell with His word and receive Him in the sacraments—the more we will be filled with His light, which can light the way for others to come home to Him." Thank you to all who made this week possible.

News from the Arizona Missions

Yuma, Arizona—Sister Mary Beth Kornely shares the latest activities at Immaculate Conception Convent including the 25th anniversary of Santo Nino.

The last weekend of January was really busy. There was the Yuma Marathon that Sister Mary Teresa Bettag participated in and did her best yet in finishing (7th overall and top three female category). We had an open house for the third through fifth grade students and families from St. Francis School after the Sunday Mass for Catholic Schools Week. The three teachers had done a unit on vocations the week before. I had also visited them in their

classrooms to answer their questions. Sister Mary Teresa and I gave them a grand tour while Sister Janet and Sister Ann Mary were taking part in an open house for Immaculate Conception School for their Catholic School kick-off. In the convent students spotted some good hiding places for hide and seek.

Nine Fridays before the 25th anniversary of Santo Nino the Filipino community celebrated with a novena including the rosary, prayers, music and a meal usually held at different homes. It concluded with a Mass and big celebration of food and traditional dances. Sis-



ter Mary Teresa attended most of the Friday nights. The rest of us were present for the last Friday night, and we all were there for the Saturday celebration.



Tucson, Arizona—The Sisters at San Xavier convent hosted six of Sister Mary Ann Spanjers's San Miguel high school senior young women interested in Religious life! They joined us for Evening Prayer, supper and wonderful conversation about our lives as Sisters! Their faith and joy are inspiring!



Bapchule, Arizona—Students from the University of Wisconsin Madison – St Paul Catholic Student Center made a Service Trip to St Peter Indian Mission Catholic School.



Tucson, Arizona—Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity hosted a winter Eucharistic Day of Discernment at San Xavier Mission on January 20, 2024. Six women responded to the call to go deeper in their understanding of Eucharist and discernment. Together, Sister Mary Ann Spanjers, Sister Marlita Henseler, Sister Carla Riach and Sister Rosalyn Muraski led the event that began with Mass at the Mission chapel and moved to San Xavier Convent.

The Knights of Nebraskans Embracing Life

The house was packed with folks of all ages who supported a myriad of pro-life organizations in Nebraska. I was called on to represent Nebraskans Embracing Life to briefly explain who they are; what they do. Originally, I thought of using PowerPoint, but scrapped that idea and went with a large standup cardboard cutout of a medieval knight for my visual aid (purchased from Amazon and decorated with silver glitter paper). I began my presentation standing next to the knight wearing a white surplice, suggesting a medieval bell ringer, and began my expo with two loud rings of the bell to accompany the opening words:

Hear Ye! Hear Ye! All men and women of goodwill. Long ago we sang the praises of the Knights of the Round Table. Tonight, we spotlight the Knights of Nebraskans Embracing Life. An exceptional group of people—holy warriors indeed—male

and female (think: St. Joan of Arc), *undyingly* committed to protecting the unborn and their mothers.

These Nebraskan knights are battling on many fronts, following a code of virtues comprising what has come to be known as chivalry. As such, they wear the helmet of **solitude**, praying alone before God for the strength and wisdom to fight the good fight as Jesus did. They wear the breastplate of **courage**, believing and acting that God can do the impossible through them. They wear the sword of **justice**, a two-edged sword—bringing about the good of life for the most vulnerable in our society and, at the same time, bringing about the death of the new pro-abortion ballot measure that's obtaining signatures as we speak to pass a constitutional amendment *eliminating* the Nebraskan state law that protects babies in the womb after 12 weeks.



Hear Ye! Hear Ye! The Knights of Nebraskans Embracing Life need your prayerful support and your monetary endorsement. Be generous, men and women of goodwill. Be generous, my dear friends, always remembering as *you* give, it will be given *to you*: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap.

Sister Renee Mirkes

Celebrating 80 years of Caring

Kaukauna, Wisconsin—*Celebrating 80 years of Caring*, St. Paul Elder Services held their annual meeting at Van Abel's of Hollandtown on February 13th. Members of the board, our General Administration and organization leaders were present. Photos: Sister Natalie Binversie, Community Director, addressed those present. Sister Charleen Acker and the Board President. Bookmark made from Door County Oak and hand crafted by members of the Johnson family.

Sister Delores Wisnicky



JUST Gospel!

By Sister Kathleen Murphy

During these days of March, we find special days and times to recall and celebrate the Paschal Mystery of Jesus. As we know so well, Jesus' suffering did not end on Calvary over 2000 years ago. He still suffers in His Body, the Church. Pope Francis calls this to mind in his intention for the month. He asks us to pray *that those who risk their lives for the Gospel in various parts of the world inflame the Church with their courage and missionary enthusiasm.*

This intention gives us an opportunity to consider the reality of present-day martyrdom not just for Catholics, but for many Christian believers. Pope Francis recalled in his September 25, 2019, General Audience, *There are more martyrs today than there were at the beginning of the life of the Church, Martyrs are everywhere.* He went on to cite the Church Father Tertullian, who wrote, *The blood of Christians is seed, and ensures the growth and fruitfulness of the People of God.*

The sacrifice of martyrs calls down grace which benefits the Church. One manifestation of such grace lies in the fact that the witness of martyrs convinces non-believers and inspires believers. Some statistics from Nigeria certainly bear out this point. 94% of self-identified Catholics surveyed said they attend weekly or daily Mass while 89% of Christians killed throughout the world are located in Nigeria. The blood of the faithful seems to be growing the faith.

Middle Eastern and Asian nations were also the site of many martyrdoms throughout the 21st century. At a Eucharistic Congress in Italy before he died in 2007, Iraqi priest Father Ragheed Ganni said, *When I hold the Host in my hands, it is really he who is holding me and all of us, challenging the terrorists and keeping us united in his boundless love.*

The iconic 21st century martyrdom might be the 21 Coptic Christians beheaded on video by ISIS in Libya in 2015. They were migrant workers from an Egyptian village and were very poor. Mathew Ayairga, a Black man from Chad killed with the group, was reportedly not a Christian. Yet, when he was asked *Do you reject Christ?* He indicated the beheaded men around him and said, *Their God is my God,* and so he was killed, too. His story is the story of what happens when martyrs witnesses to Christ. Their faith attracts others. We all need to repeat his words again and again: *Their God is my God. Their faith is my faith; their hope is my hope.*

Religious freedom is shrinking globally, according to a report from the watchdog group Open Doors. They found that the persecution of Christians is at its highest point in three decades and that some of the worst locations for Christians were North Korea, Somalia, Yemen, Eritrea, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, Sudan, and India. Below are four prime examples of countries where Christians faced vicious persecution in 2023 as reported by Tyler Arnold for the Catholic News Agency.

Nigeria

Over the Christmas weekend, nearly 200 Christians were killed in a terrorist attack in the Nigerian state of Plateau. Just three months prior terrorists kidnapped a Protestant pastor and more than 80 other Christians in attacks on two separate churches. More than 5,000 Christians were killed in attacks in Nigeria throughout 2021 and the first three months of 2022, but complete numbers for those killed in 2023 are not yet available.

Libya

Preaching Christianity in Libya, particularly encouraging Muslims to convert to Christianity, can still land Christians in jail in Libya and many other Muslim-majority countries. In April, six Libyans, two Americans, and one Pakistani were arrested in Libya for preaching Christianity.

Mozambique

Reports from Mozambique found that Islamic State Fighters have been enslaving Christian women as sex slaves and forcing them to convert to Islam. Terrorists are also killing some who refuse to convert to Islam.

Nicaragua

The dictatorship of President Daniel Ortega has systematically persecuted the Catholic Church by shutting down Catholic schools and Catholic media outlets. The regime has also arrested members of the clergy. Just after Christmas the government arrested four Catholic priests. Altogether, the dictatorship has arrested more than a dozen priests, including Bishop Rolando José Álvarez, who is still imprisoned.

We see that this is a concern near to the heart of Pope Francis. He has created the Commission for New Mar-

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All Work and No Play . . .

Makes for dull surgeons. And, of course, we can't have that! So, here at the Saint Paul VI Institute we punctuate our Theology of the Body/ethics seminar with celebrations every chance we can imagine. In the photo (left to right) of Dr. Kathleen Carlson, Dr. Briana Franklin and Dr. Helen Ejioogu, the three Saint Paul VI JPPII 2023 - 2024 fellows, want to show you the cake I made to celebrate Dr. Briana's feastday and birthday. The yellow cake frosted with chocolate icing and fresh raspberries bore the signature of PERSON-AS-GIFT, one of the succinct ways St. John Paul II defines the human person. Each of us is a gift from God who is meant to give oneself away and to receive the other as gift. In short, we, just like the seed that falls into the ground, find ourselves—become everything God intended us to be—by dying to self and living for God and others.

I know I say this every year, but these three fellows are my favorite class of OB/Gyns who are developing into amazing philosopher-physicians. Praise God!

Sister Renee Mirkes



Nine second graders from St. Benedict's School made their First Reconciliation on Saturday, February 17. Sister Mariadele Jacobs prepared the children for the sacrament. Fr. Nicholas Ginnetti heard their confessions. The children will receive First Eucharist on May 7.

Sister Sharon Paul

JUST Gospel!

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tyrs: Witnesses of the Faith. In a letter announcing the commission on July 5, he wrote, *Martyrs are bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, lay people and families, who in the different countries of the world, with the gift of their lives, have offered the supreme proof of charity.* He added that his new committee would try to document not just Catholic martyrs, but those from “all Christian confessions.”

Let us join the Holy Father in praying for those who will be threatened or killed for their faith. Let us ask that their sacrifice and their example of Christ-like forgiveness will truly bear fruit in the growth of faith everywhere.



Sweetheart Luncheon

The Director of Mission and Spiritual Care at St. Paul Elder Services, Kaukauna, Wisconsin, Sister Delores Wisnicky, shares: We had a sweetheart luncheon for 20 couples on February 13th. The love, commitment, and willingness to sacrifice is so evident as spouses come every day to be with their loved ones. We honored them today. I gave a prayer...

Lord, your love is amazing and today we thank you for the love you have given to these couples.

*Their commitment is so strong and real,
Their love we see and feel...*

*You have blessed them so much,
Their sacrifices have a holy touch...*

*You, Lord, lead them, guide them, hold them
With a love so great and true...*

Lord, bless them, bless the food and hold them close...

*We pray for all who worked to prepare this day for them.
We celebrate how Good You are Lord...*

We ask all this in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Revitalizing a Labor of Love

West Point, Nebraska—It all began about eight years ago when Sister Joy Rose was assisting a family in need at the Franciscan Healthcare food pantry when they asked if they had any clothing available. This request had come up a few times causing Sister Joy to begin considering what can be done to address this need. She approached Sister Elizabeth Ann Miller about developing someplace where people in need could have access to clothing. The two began to put their heads together to figure out where they could set up a shop. Because the hospital had no available space they looked at the old convent. With the pastor's approval, the basement pantry room below the kitchen would be home to this new adventure.

With the help of the GACC high school students and one of the mothers, they tackled the room and transformed its dark grey cinderblock walls to a bright white and blue. Next, the school held a clothing drive to fill the shelves. With the extra money from Sr. Elizabeth Ann's

snack shack, totes were purchased to store the clothing. Eventually, the school and hospital collected money to donate for further fixing up the room and purchasing more items.

Over the years the clothing closet has grown with the addition of more shelves and better lighting. With the help of Sr. Joy's sister and brother-in-law, who were visiting in October, shelves were moved from the upstairs bedrooms to the shop for increased storage space.



Folding clothing for one of the bins, are from left, Sister Joy, Jill Hakel, Olivia Walker and Sister Elizabeth Ann. Photos by West Point News

Recently two Franciscan Healthcare employees, Jill Hakle and Olivia Walker, took upon themselves the clothes closet as their mission awareness project to organize and sort the clothing. They were God sent because the Sisters and some students couldn't keep up with a few hours a month to sort the many clothes dropped off. So, these two **highly organized** ladies were able to turn this shop into a beautiful boutique space. The finishing touch was a stenciled rug on the floor and a solid oak round table. This transformation over the years has created a place of beauty and dignity for those economically challenged (the items are free) and seeking assistance.

Sister Elizabeth Ann Miller

