

Communigram

FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY

Go Rebuild the Church Today

This article - one of three - was written by Sister Mariella Erdmann for the Franciscan Schools of Australia to appear in their Franciscan Voices Newsletter. It is appropriate for this time of Lent in the Jubilee Year.

To answer the question, “Does our Church need re-



Sister Victoria Masil, OSF

building today?” we just need to look at our Post-Christian era to discover the answer. Our world today is torn by divisions, war, lack of faith and an era which is bent on destroying Christianity. Values are turned upside-down. People are confused and looking for meaning in life, but often in the form of self-interest, sex, drugs, power, control, etc. Protection of the unborn is being scrutinized and assisted suicide is being promoted more and more. Many choose to hate and thus destroy those they cannot forgive rather than try to reconcile.

I believe that this has happened because many people do not know Christ or have lost their relationship with Him and which leads to broken relationships with others. Pope Francis states well, “So I ask you: Are you looking for empty thrills in life, or do you want to feel a power that can give you a lasting sense of life and fulfillment? Empty thrills or the power of Grace? To find fulfillment, to gain new strength, there is a way. It is not a thing or an object, but a person, and he is alive. His name is Jesus Christ.”

The Church needs to counter our post-Christian era with a sense of deep hope and evangelization in order to bring the reality of Christ down to earth as Francis did, after his

conversion, by reaffirming the Incarnation, the Passion and Death of Christ and the Trinity. Christ became one of us in flesh and blood in order to show God’s love for all people, to suffer and die to save us and to share His body and blood in the Eucharist.

We have to experience Christ anew in our lives just like St. Francis did. We need to rebuild our Church today. As Franciscans, let each of us do our part to be reawakened to the truth of our Faith and share it with others by our deep love for God and love for our neighbor. Let us become “Pilgrims of Hope” spreading the Gospel message to our world.

There are several ways to start during the Jubilee Year.

1 Prayer

We can start by being open to God’s will in all things even if it seems to take us where we do not want to go. Praying Francis’ prayer daily, “Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart. Give me true faith, certain hope, perfect charity, and profound humility with wisdom and perception, so that I may carry out Your holy and true command.”, is a way to focus on God’s will in our lives rather than our own. Imagine each of us living this prayer and becoming instruments of peace and reconciliation in our broken world.

2 Humility

St. Francis tells us that, “Here is one of the best means to acquire humility; fix well in mind this maxim: One is as



Sister Victoria Masil, OSF

Continued on page 4.

Serving on the Board of a Sponsored Ministry



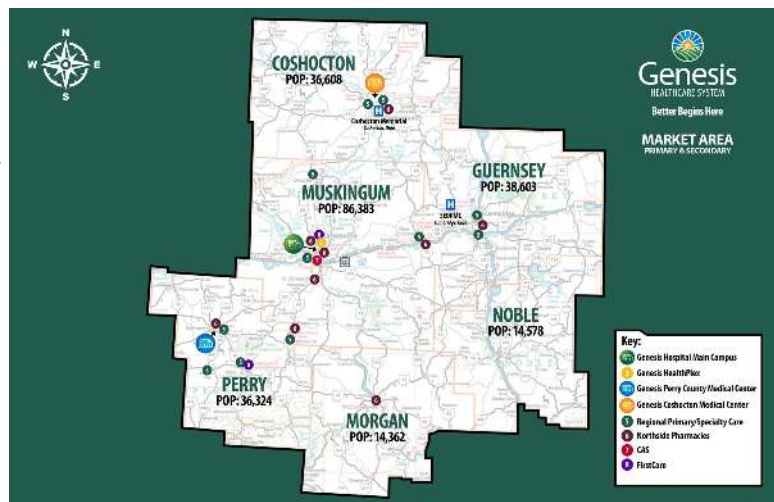
Sister Maureen Anne Shepard serves on the board of Genesis Healthcare System, Zanesville, Ohio—another of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity's sponsored ministries. She shares her experience.

Being on the Genesis HealthCare System Board of Trustees is a rewarding experience for me! I am in the third year of a first term on the 15-member Board. (One of the Board members is a former student of mine when I taught at Bishop Rosecrans High School.) After serving 15 years as the Genesis Director of Mission and volunteering now in the Genesis Archives, I find membership on the Board to be a unique way to see how the FSCC legacy of the Sisters who have gone before us, our current Sponsorship of Genesis, and the Genesis mission and values are integrated in Board decisions regarding patients, personnel, and programs.

Board meetings begin with prayer offered by members on a rotating basis. Then all members read the Genesis mission statement. Afterwards there is a sharing of a Mission Moment. The Mission Moments are stories from patients, families of patients, and employees that recognize and express appreciation for individuals and/or department(s) for going above and beyond in living the Genesis mission and values.

In the business portion of the meeting decisions are made regarding patients, personnel, programs, and policies. I find that the discussions and decisions incorporate the spirit of Catholic social principles, specifically respect for the life and dignity of each person, the common good, subsidiarity, dignity of work and workers, and caring for the poor.

Caring for the poor has been a hallmark of health care in Zanesville from the beginning when our first Sisters came



on May 1, 1900, to care for the sick, especially the poor, to the formation of Genesis in 1997, to Board approval of financial and program policies today. Genesis serves six counties including some of the poorest counties in Ohio. Genesis collaborates with other health and social agencies in addressing the needs of the poor. Every three years a community needs assessment is conducted by Genesis and community partners and decides which entity can best address the needs of the various populations. The most recent community needs assessment can be found on the Genesis website.

Dignity of work and workers is fostered through Board approval of training and wellness programs and construction of workspaces and purchase of technology and salaries for employees. The Board is informed of annual satisfaction surveys of employees and actions initiated to provide better working environment and the results of these actions.

Working for the common good requires creativity and innovation because of limited financial and personnel resources. Financial decisions made by the Board provide funds to subsidize programs such as both inpatient and outpatient behavioral health (mental health) services because "it is the right thing to do". It is our Genesis mission.

I am grateful for the experience of being a Genesis board member because of the expertise and dedication of other Board members and the spirit of

Catholic social teachings permeating the work of the Genesis Board that provide accessible, affordable, quality health services to the people in our six-county community!



Genesis - St. Francis Chapel



Sister Receives Diocese of Tucson St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Award



Sister Mary Teresa Bettag, Yuma Catholic High School Theology teacher, campus ministry, cross-country coach, and mentor has been selected to receive the Diocese of Tucson's 2024-25 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Award. We thank God for her personal gifts of time and love given to her students.

Sister Mary Teresa was honored at the Diocese's annual Mass and dinner event. The annual St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Award honors someone who exemplifies service, support, and leadership within the Diocese of Tucson Catholic Schools. She received a blessing from Bishop Weisenburger at the Mass at the Cathedral.

L.A. Religious Education Congress Adult Days Keynote: Sister Marie Kolbe Zamora



Sister Marie-Kolbe Zamora was the Adult Days Keynote Speaker at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress February 20-23, 2025 on the topic : *Living Jesus' Compassion in the Church and in the World*. Using the Mark's Gospel account of the rich young man she opens up for us that we receive Jesus' compassionate embrace only when we remember that we are poor. Jesus embraces us in and by the poor.



Sister Marie Kolbe also stood in for John L. Allen, editor of the *Crux*, for a congress workshop. There she spoke on the *Jubilee Journey: The Today and Tomorrow of the Francis Papacy*. Using the Holy Father's Writings, she expertly reflected on the legacy of Francis' Papacy as being that of mercy and compassion. She hopes in the future to study this theme in his gestures.

Go Rebuild the Church Today *Continued from page 1.*

much as he is in the sight of God, and no more.” With an open mind and heart and a little reflection on this maxim, we are bound to be moved to reality.

God created us to be in a relationship of love with Him. Every time we humbly approach the Eucharist let us allow the partaking in the Body and Blood of Christ transform us more into His likeness. Our transformed lives are meant to be shared with others. Christ became poor, lowly, and despised out of love for us and he poured out His life for our salvation. As followers of Christ, we are to, also, pour out our lives for others.

Christ tells us through Scripture how to become like him. In Luke 17:3 it says, “He taught us how to be lowly in nature so that we could forgive those who persecute us.” In Philip-pians 2:3 we are told to, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.”

3 Reconciliation and Harmony

Let us turn to *The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis 1982/Revision, 1997, Ch vii 24*. “If discord caused by word or deed should occur among them, they should immediately (Mt 18:35) and humbly ask forgiveness of one another even before offering their gift of prayer before God (cf. Mt 5:24). If anyone seriously neglects the form of life all profess, the minister, or others who may know of it, are to admonish that person. Those giving the admonition should neither embarrass nor speak evil of the other, but show great kindness (cf. EpMin 15). Let all be carefully attentive not to become angry or upset because of another’s sin (cf. RegCl 9:3-4). For anger and disturbance impede love in themselves and in others (RegB 7:3)” This statement in the Rule is so sensitively stated. We are all sinners and make mistakes. To be admonished with such compassion, acceptance, kindness and love is in the end more life-giving than anger and speaking critically of another.

4 Revitalize the Arts



Sister Mariella Erdmann, OSF

The Church needs art. The past 50-60 years has seen another subtle iconoclastic movement in the Catholic Church. Many new churches have become devoid of all sacred imagery. In an attempt to make the altar and the Mass central to all worship which is a correct move, some have interpreted this as stripping the churches of all statues and paintings of any kind.

Pope John Paul II in his “*Letter to Artists*” states in section 16, “Beauty is a key to the mystery and a call to transcendence. Artists of the world, may your many different paths all lead to that infinite Ocean of beauty where wonder becomes awe, exhilaration, unspeakable joy. May you be guided and inspired by the mystery of the Risen Christ, whom the Church in these days contemplates with joy.”

Can any Franciscan imagine the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi without the Giotto paintings, or the Portiuncula and the Church of San Damiano without the San Damiano crucifix along with other beautiful paintings or sculptures, or Santa Chiara void of all sacred images?

The only way to rebuild the Church is in the posture of prayer, humility, reconciliation, and harmony as illustrated by the life of St. Francis. By incorporating sacred art, we can lead people to the good, true, and beautiful, the source of which is Jesus Christ himself.



Sister Mariella Erdmann, OSF

Holy Family Conservatory of Music to Mark 100th Anniversary

Holy Family Conservatory of Music, sponsored by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity and founded to provide music instruction and performance, will mark its 100th anniversary on Dec. 10, 2025.

In September 1925, Sisters Davidica Beschta, Benjamin Eriksen and Celerine Diekemper were sent to live at Saint Boniface Convent to generate musical interest among the students in the school. So many children expressed interest in music lessons that a separate building just for teaching music lessons was urgently needed.



After a search to purchase a new place to teach, the previously mentioned Sisters as well as Cecilia Marie Kalous moved into a large brick home on South 11th Street in the downtown Manitowoc area. Furniture was sparse, but lessons began with just three pianos at the new Holy Family Conservatory of Music. The Sisters used piano benches as tables to eat their meals. In the early year's music, painting and dance were also taught at the Conservatory.



On Aug. 15, 2013, Holy Family Conservatory moved into

the newly-constructed Franciscan Center for Music Education and Performance, located at 6751 Calumet Avenue.

Over the years, more than 13,000 students ages 3-80+ have studied at the Conservatory. Currently, about 150 including children and adults are enrolled at the Conservatory. Musical instruments taught currently and, in the past, include guitar, ukulele, voice, piano, organ, strings, brass, woodwind, percussion, harp, accordion and handbells. Two other special programs offered are Music for Tots™ for children ages 1-5 and Children's Choir ages 7-13 as well as annual summer Music Camp held in July.

For more information about the Conservatory, visit www.hfconservatory.org or call 920-645-6564.

Wesley Teple Award

Holy Family Conservatory of Music was given the Wesley Teple Community Service Award in the Arts by the Lakeshore Wind Ensemble Association for "their contribution to the arts these past 100 years."



The award was presented to Sister Carol Ann Gambsky and Dr. Stanislava Varshavski, on behalf of the organization, at the Lakeshore Wind Ensemble "Winds of March: The Best of the Best" concert at the Capitol Civic Centre March 1, 2025.

On winning the award Sister Carol Ann said: "We at Holy Family Conservatory of Music are honored to be a contributing organization among the countless number of other people and organizations who support and appreciate the arts in so many various ways."

JUST Gospel!

By Sister Kathleen Murphy

In Psalm 147:3 the psalmist speaks in tones of hope and healing saying: God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. This promise speaks to Pope Francis' intention for March which reads: *Let us pray that broken families might discover the cure for their wounds through forgiveness, rediscovering each other's gifts even in their differences.*

St. Paul joins the psalmist in speaking of hope as he writes in Romans 5:5: Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. Far from being a simple wish for the future with no guarantee that it will come about, Christian hope is the presence of divine love in person, the Holy Spirit, a current of life that carries us even through times of difficulty and pain.

Our special remembrance of broken families is such a need in our world today. It can lead us to consider the whole area of brokenness evident not just in families but in whole societies as well as in individual hearts and lives. The Japanese culture looks at such fragmentation of lives in an art called kintsugi wherein the artist repairs broken pottery with gold, rendering a new piece that is more exquisite than it was before the break. Jay Wolf, in his book *Suffer Strong* writes:

"Instead of throwing away the broken beloved pottery, we'll fix it in a way that doesn't pretend it hasn't been broken but honors the breaking—and more so, the surviving—by highlighting those repaired seams with gold lacquer. Now the object is functional once again and dignified, not discarded. It's stronger and even more valuable because of its reinforced, golden scars."

The process is layered and time-consuming, which along with mending it with gold, all contribute to its value. And surprisingly, it becomes more resilient after it has been mended by kintsugi, even stronger than it was before. We

can think of God as being the ultimate kintsugi master who skillfully and tenderly puts the broken pieces of our lives and the lives of families back together. So often we see that God's healing handiwork leaves people and situations stronger and more beautiful because of the suffering endured.

We also know that such healing and mending of brokenness requires forgiveness on deep and lasting levels. St. Francis includes in the *Canticum* the phrase: Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation. Rev. David Hacker writes in his *Reflections on St. Francis' Canticum of the Creatures*:

"We stand at a threshold. We are always standing at a threshold. A gateway, just as St. Francis stood



<https://www.lifegate.com/kintsugi>

at the gate of Assisi, leaving behind his earthly father's world to embrace a new vision of the community of creation. At this threshold we catch a glimpse of the world, not as an endless battle of opposites pitted against each other. Instead, we see an eternal dance in which all the diversity of creation is united. Creation does go round and round and yet there

is somewhere, deep down at the core, at the center, a point, a singularity around which everything revolves. A still point of the turning world to which we are called to return."

We can pray that this becomes the stance of family members facing broken relationships. May they stand at that threshold where they begin to see their family life as that eternal dance in which all diversity and all differences can become a united, a reunited whole. For this we pray!

Reflections on Saint Francis's Canticum of the Creatures Episcopal Networks Collaborative/Rev. David Hacker, p.17.

Franciscan Sisters' Vocation Sojourn with Young Adults: Diocese of Wichita and Diocese of Fort Worth



God's timing for a Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity Vocation Sojourn continues to be fueled by our Community of Sisters' prayers. Sister Mary Ann Spanjers and Sister Julie Ann Sheahan escaped snow and windstorms after driving just hours ahead of winter weather on their way south. First stop was Wichita, Kansas.

How fitting on the eve of the Super Bowl to be in the state of Kansas! (Philadelphia may have been another place to watch the game, but regardless, the journey is ever the dream according to St. Francis.) Keeping our focus on Catholic Young Adults, we drove to the Saturday Evening Mass at the St. Paul University Parish. On entering the Campus Ministry Center, we walked in with Joan, grandmother of Father Zachary Galante, one of nine priests ordained in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee in 2024.

This was during the week that an article on U.S. dioceses having priestly ordinations above the replacement

rate of retired priests over a 10-year observation period hit the news. Diocese of Wichita priest chaplain and Assistant Vocation Director Father Andrew Hoffman commented on the article. During the homily, he recognized his own diocese being at a 255% rate of replacing priests. He pointed to the stewardship of the people in the parishes as being responsible for this high record.



Indeed, the friendliness of the congregation was evident. 'Fr. Drew' gave us a special Franciscan blessing for the journey after we caught up with him after Mass. He also promised to display one of our vocation posters.

In the morning, we met with a young woman in discernment at Coffee Daze. It was a popular Sunday hang out. We gave up our chairs to others looking for a place to sit as we bid farewell and continued our Vocation Sojourn to Fort Worth, Texas.



St. Andrew Parish, Fort Worth, TX is a parish served by Franciscan Friars of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis Sacred Heart Province. Father Dan Patee, TOR, pastor of St. Andrew Parish, teamed up with Sister Mary Ann to share the presentation *The Eucharist from Adoration to Action*



that evening in the parish center. Friars, Father Johnathon and Father Matthew also were in the audience. It was a good experiment. Over 30 people showed up despite the Super Bowl event. Father Dan suggested taping the game and enjoying it later. It was smart to make the event an open invitation. The Eucharist topic drew parish members of all ages.

On the next day, we were on our way to Houston. Watch for more on the Sojourning Sisters in the days ahead.



**FRANCISCAN SISTERS
OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY**

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ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED



Trustee Forum 2025

Trustee Forum 2025 via Zoom had seventy participants, including three watch parties, across four states on Thursday, February 20. The Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity Sponsored Ministries mission area hosted the one and half hour online education session for all trustees in the system. Laying a Foundation for Effective Decision-Discernment was the theme of the event. Dr. Dennis Gonzales, senior director of mission innovation and integration from the Catholic Health Association, presented the keynote entitled Leadership and Ministry Identity.

A special part of the evening was the announcement of the Sister Ritarose Stahl Award by Sister Natalie Binversie and presentation by Sondra Norder to trustee Trevor Frank at St. Paul Elder Services, Kaukauna. Serving his third term on the board and second term as chair, Trevor is a second-generation board member as his mother, Carol, served on the same board from 2006-2016. Well-connected to the Kaukauna community, he is a strong advocate for St. Paul Elder Services.

Submitted by Sister Kay Klackner, OSF,
Vice President of Mission
for FSCCM Sponsored Ministries.



St. Paul Elder Services Trustee, Trevor Frank received the Sister Ritarose Stahl Award.