Check out:

- Working with others for the Common Good
- Our new Rose Campaign to celebrate 120 years
- Honoring Earth Day with new Membership Cards
- A look back through the photo archives
- Zoom events

Compassion is God's nature. Justice is God's passion.

www.fsolph.org  314-965-3700
The Franciscan Spirit is a free, monthly digital newsletter with print editions twice a year published in Kirkwood, MO, by the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. To be added to the distribution list, email info@fsolph.org or call (314) 965-3700 with your choice of email and/or print mail. Back issues of the printed magazine can be viewed on our website at www.fsolph.org/newsletter.

OUR CHARISM: The Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help strive to be prayerful women of faith, prophetic vision and courage. Discerning the will of God within the Church, we dedicate ourselves to witnessing the Gospel compassionately and joyfully.

OUR FRANCISCAN MISSION: To be a transforming presence in society through witnessing Gospel values. Faithful to our charism in the mission of the Church, we prophetically respond to the needs of contemporary society. As compassionate women alive in the spirit, we enable and empower others to live the Gospel with hope and joy.

It’s been busy at Tau Center, despite being closed to the public for more than 12 months. The pandemic did shutter our doors to all for several months in support of local safety policies, but most of the past year we have been using our offices. We are blessed to have an enclosed space for each staff member and adequate ventilation in the building to minimize transmission risk. We look forward to the day that we can once again welcome you and yours, and share our Franciscan hospitality.

We are also blessed to have you — our supporters, friends, coworkers, neighbors and family members. It’s been a tough year for everyone. We get that. For the most part, we made it through. We pray for those who did not, and those left to deal with the medical, emotional, social, spiritual and financial hardships the virus has created.

We faced many difficult decisions over the past year, and we know that you did too. Disappointments were many. Several of our Sisters and their loved ones dealt with the reality of contracting Covid 19. Our Community members in care facilities faced the same four walls with no visitors for months on end. We were unable to gather last June for our Leadership discernment and elections. Our dear 2020 Jubilarians chose to postpone the annual Jubilee, and instead held an online “virtual” celebration. Disappointments were many. Several of our Sisters and their loved ones dealt with the reality of contracting Covid 19. Our Community members in care facilities faced the same four walls with no visitors for months on end. We were unable to gather last June for our Leadership discernment and elections. Our dear 2020 Jubilarians chose to postpone the annual Jubilee, and instead held an online “virtual” celebration.

The decisions to cancel our live events that were already underway such as the Annual Sunshine Gala, our Come & Be retreats, our Visio Divina program, and our benefit Nativity Display, to name a few, were tough. Transitioning our Faveling Paths gatherings and Franciscans For Earth Eco-Serries events to Zoom has been both a challenge and a blessing. We can now provide more events to many, and distance is no obstacle.

Throughout this difficult year you have continued to surprise us with your concern, your participation, your prayers, and your support. We value our relationships, and hope to continue broadening those, and building new ones in the years to come. Thank you for your concern. Thank you for participating in our Zoom events. Thank you for your prayers and for trusting us to pray with you for your intentions. And thank you for your generous donations that allow us to continue living and sharing our mission.

Thank you!”

Sister Stories: Supporting Marian Middle School for more than 20 years

The Franciscan Sisters have always been educators with a real passion for empowering young people to embrace and share their gifts. This passion has taken them into classrooms across the United States. In the late 1990’s, the Franciscan Sisters were among several communities of women religious concerned about the education of at-risk girls in St. Louis. This concern led to the collaborative establishment of Marian Middle School, a school providing a holistic and faith-based education for girls grades 5-8 with high potential but limited means.

The Franciscan Sisters have invested and involved in Marian Middle School since our Sister Monica Laws was one of the early planners who helped bring the Marian vision to life. Sister Regina Strassburger served as President of the Marian Board when it opened in 2000. She also served on the Members Board from 2005-2010. Sister Rosalie Winniewski was principal at Marian from 2002–2007. During that time she developed a strong after-school enrichment program to provide the girls with opportunities for self-discovery, leadership development, and career exploration. Sister Mary Anne Eckstein volunteered each week in this program teaching Math, and Sister Rose Marie Przybylowicz taught sewing. Sister Pauline Schwandt served on the Members Board from 2010–2015. Currently Sister Rosalie is Chair of the Members Board, and Sister Monica has come full circle now tutoring young women at Marian through the English Tutoring program. Each year the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help commit considerable funds which support Marian’s enrichment programs.

In 2021, Marian Middle School celebrates its 20th anniversary as a highly acclaimed school with incredible success stories. Their motto “Educating Girls for Life” means they prepare students to succeed at high-performing high schools through innovative, holistic and faith-based education. The school is committed to breaking the cycle of poverty through education by providing graduate support through high school, college and beyond. Alumnae return to give back to Marian because, “Once a Marian Girl, always a Marian Girl.”

We are proud to be one of the “Founding Members” of Marian Middle School, a place where transformative educational change helps the lives of young women. Beautiful, young Noelle, pictured on the front of this issue, is a testimony to Marian Middle School. You can learn more about this incredible school which we helped birth at mariannmiddleschool.org.

Marian Middle President Mary Elizabeth Grimes shares, “Seeing the remarkable success of Marian students demonstrates the power of a transformative education with a focus on more than academics. Marian Girls deserve a chance to succeed and given the right support, their opportunities are endless. We are thankful to those who are part of this journey, including the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.”

Pre-pandemic, “Marian Girls” gathering for the camera.
Chapter Planning & Elections

We Sisters ask your prayers this June as we gather via Zoom for our canonical General Chapter. The Chapter is a mandated time to consider our state of affairs, to listen to where the Spirit is calling us, and to elect the Sisters who will serve as the Leadership Team of the congregation for the next five years. All Sisters participate in this gathering at some level.

Our Chapter theme, “Tending the Heart of the World, Prayerfully, Prophetically, Courageously” speaks of the deep significance of this Chapter in such a challenging time. We have deliberately chosen to begin this historic meeting on June 27, the Feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

In March, we joined Catholic Sisters from 24 congregations representing four states in launching a yearlong, live-streamed conversation series on the leading social justice issues of our time. Each episode is free and open to the public.

Titled “Exploring Intersections: Catholic Sisters on Racism, Migration and Climate,” each month this series will focus on a different social issue in a thought-provoking and engaging conversation. Three panelists, including Catholic Sisters, will bring unique perspectives to each session.

“This series is intended to provide a forum for constructive conversation on the big issues of our day, and how each intersects with the major themes of racism, migration and climate,” says Sister Anna Marie Reha, SSND. “We’re looking forward to lively, nuanced conversations among our panelists and to hearing what our audience members have to say on these topics.”

Topics include gender equity, human trafficking, gun violence, economic justice, food security, restorative justice, affordable housing, educational justice, equitable access to health care and more. The conversations will be held as free, public Zoom webinars and streamed on YouTube at 3pm the second Wednesday of each month. For those who want to watch or listen on their own schedule, the recordings of the episodes will be available on YouTube and as a podcast.

For information on how to register to participate in “Exploring Intersections” and a list of monthly topics, go to www.exploringintersections.org.

“Exploring Intersections” is a project of Region X of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR).

No place too far. No service too humble. No person too lowly.

Words of our three Founding Sisters in 1901

SIGN & SYMBOLS OF THE SISTERS WITH SISTER REGINA, ARCHIVIST

Through the years a fire has burned in the hearts of the Franciscan Sisters. It’s the fire of justice, the fire of peace, the fire of relationship. God’s compassion expressed in justice is the prophetic call of women religious. This compassion springs from a deep contemplative spirit. Truly what good is action if it does not spring from an enlightened heart of prayer?

While each Sister is missioned to a particular place and a particular ministry (job), she extends herself and gives her time to so much more. She gives her time to enabling and empowering others to live the Gospel with hope and joy. Look at just a small listing of how the Sisters have fostered what is good and placed themselves at its service through the years.

- When a special presence was needed at St Mary of Nativity School in Salinas, CA in 1954 to serve migrants in the “lettuce capital,” we were there.
- When Mother Teresa was establishing a convent and ministry in St Louis for her Missionaries of Charity, we were there supporting and providing the necessary food and shelter.
- In the height of the AIDS epidemic, we were part of establishing a Franciscan Inter-Community, Project Lazarus, to serve people with AIDS. We maintained a presence there for 16 years.
- When chaplains in Missouri prisons needed leaders for REIC (Residents Encounter Christ), a special retreat program for incarcerated persons, two Sisters quickly became leaders.
- When ITEST (Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology) was begun by Fr Robert Brungs, SJ, our Sister served as secretary and helped organize the annual conference.
- Sisters have often shared art as a sign of peace through presence and beauty at Good Shepherd Art Center in Ferguson, MO.
- When neighborhoods struggling with poverty form Business Associations to improve socio-economic development, Sisters are often there.
- When hospitality workers in hotels need training to identify victims of human trafficking, we make it happen.
- The national Tekawitha Conference, which is the voice, presence and identity of Indigenous Catholics in North America, has been blest with active leadership from our Sisters.
- Nia Kuambo, an African American Center of women spirituality, books are balanced because of a generous Sister volunteer.
- In 2008 we led a vigorous campaign to get Quick Trip to recycle trash.
- We continually knocked on the doors of the St Louis Lambert International Airport until they put recycling bins at all the departure gates.
- When Sisters were invited to be a hopeful presence and healing voice as educators, bringing integration to northeast Louisiana, our Sisters volunteered.
- When mission sites in Arizona, on the border of Mexico, and in the heart of New Mexico were established we were there.
- For 26 weeks we stood on the steps of Francis Xavier Church in St Louis in silent protest and prayer in support of Black Lives Matter.
- We have been key leaders in an Intercommunity Ecological Council.
- Our Sisters in El Paso, TX, began Centric Mujeres de la Esperanza, Women’s Center of Hope, which provides referrals, counseling, home visits, values clarification, HIV/AIDS ministry, and advocacy for women. Our joyful service has always looked to the face of the poor, touched their spirit, suffered with them, spoken for them and been enriched by them as they reveal the face of Christ.

No place too far. No service too humble. No person too lowly.
Always on making the most of the present and spreading hope for the future, it's not often our Sisters get to look back! In celebration of 120 years, we take this opportunity to share just a few captured moments taken over the years.

Sister Xavier Fik conducting a rhythm band of Senior Sisters at the Motherhouse in Ferguson, MO

Sisters Gabriel, Barbara May, Berchmans Niedbalski, Elizabeth Ann, Corinne & Anthony Marie celebrating Memorial Day in Green Springs, OH, in 1957

Sisters Leo Sadus & Blanche Wisniewski

Portulants (left to right) Cecillia Mozdzinska, Emiliana Siniaka, Baptista Tylicka, Pauline Pietrusiewicz, and Wioleta Stec in 1914

Brides of Christ, Sisters Marcia, Margaret Ann, Giovani Banning, Mary Philip Pati & Consilia entering the Novitiate in 1950

Sisters Celine Pietrzak, Patricia Ann, Rebecca, & Kathleen Lander on the National Mall in Washington, DC

Sisters Norbert & Bernard Lukić

Sisters Carolyn & Margaret Ann celebrating their Polish heritage

Sisters François & Therese teaching music at St Pius X in St Louis, MO, in 1987

Sister Angela teaching music at St Pius X in St Louis, MO, in 1997

Mother Paula Rudzinska & Sister Bernardine Bonczek at St Francis of Assisi in Gallup, NM, in 1982

Mother Constance Arczynska, Mother Genevieve (Illuminata) Janota, & Sister Marian Smolenski at Marian Home nursing facility in Fort Dodge, IA

Sister Evelyn Kaminski in the 1940s at Our Lady of Mankind in St Michael, PA

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Sisters Barbara, Carol, Patricia Higgins, Estelle Lemek, Geraldine Wales, and Mary Penza, celebrating the end of Communist rule in Poland, at Our Lady of Guadalupe in Ferguson, MO, in 1989

Sister Marilyn Smolenski, a 1,000 words

Sisters Barbara, Carol, Patricia Higgins, Estelle Lemek, Geraldine Wales, and Mary Penza, celebrating the end of Communist rule in Poland, at Our Lady of Guadalupe in Ferguson, MO, in 1989

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It’s not news that this past year was tough for lots of people. Symbolic though it may be, I’ve never been so happy to recycle my old baseball cap and hang up a new one! I’ve always been an optimist—a glass half-full person. Perhaps that’s partially why this last year—with the pandemic and all its fallout, the political and social upheaval in the US and more—has been so immensely difficult. I thought I could always count on an interior sense of “All will be well” to carry me through any troubles. But 2020 has shaken my hopefulness more than I would have thought possible. I’ve felt dislocated, challenged by family responsibilities and disconnected from the people, places and activities that anchor me. Maybe you can relate to this feeling and you’re wondering, like I have, what can ultimately make you rise back from this spiritual setback? How do we let go of the past, celebrate the present and look forward to the future? How do we grab hold of the Christian virtue of hope again and let it grab hold of us? Fortunately, there are powerful, well-worn paths that we can follow. I’d like to share four practices that I’m using that can give rise to hope within you.

#1 Make a gratitude list. It’s simple and somewhat cliché, but it has both scientific and biblical roots. Numerous studies have shown that grateful people are happier and more hopeful, and for the scriptural evidence, see St Paul’s letter to the Romans among MANY other examples. Being thankful shines a light on God’s graces large and small, which naturally leads to hopefulness. I’m writing to 5 things that I am thankful for in normal, each morning—things like the first sip of morning coffee, the good laugh I shared with my niece yesterday, and that for once my cat got sick on a weekend so that I didn’t have to pay for a trip to the emergency vet over the weekend (she’s doing fine now, thanks!). It gets you in the right frame of heart and mind for the day. Thinking about what brought you joy or made you smile during the day just before going to sleep is a good approach, too.

#2 Look at God’s creation. Although we may not hope FOR what is seen (see St Paul in Romans again 8:24-25)—we can FIND hope in what is visible. The promise of the changing seasons, the love and provision of our Lord made manifest in wrens, wildflowers and wheat—thens hope lies, my friend. Where I live, we’ve had temperatures in the 20s and several days of dense fog. The two combine to cover everything in rime and hoarfrost. It’s indescribably beautiful, and we were grateful. When I scap away from the sled on the ground, there is dark-green grass under-the-snow. How can we fail to hope in the face of such a nimmer of grace? As Pope Francis has said, “If the events of our life, with all its bitterness, at times risks sucking the gift of faith out of us, and we may feel that our hope threatens to contemorate a stary sky, a sunset, a flower, to resignate the spark of thanksgiving.” (General Audience, May 2020). And as we have seen, one fruit of thanksgiving is hope.

#3 Do a random act of kindness. Another bumper-sticker cliché, I know, but it really works, especially if it is unexpected, done for someone who can’t repay the favor or is completely anonymous (remember—keep your left hand in the dark about what the right is doing for the full blessing! See Matthew 6:3). When you spend time looking for a way to brighten someone else’s day and do it, not only makes them feel good but it ultimately makes you feel good and leads you to be more hopeful.

#4 Finally, let the faith of others inspire you and give you the courage to hope. The Hemmingsway railway was completed in the 1890s high in the Austrian mountains. The gradient was so steep and the tightness of the curves so extreme that a locomotive had never even been built yet! But the designers, engineers, builders and financiers had faith that it could be done and it sooin paid off. This is a powerful reminder that the incredible scenery today, countless artists and laborers who worked on great churches like the amazing Sagrada Familia in Barcelona knowing that they wouldn’t live to see its completion. But they believed in what they were doing for God and for people. Already their efforts have sent human spirits soaring at the marvel of it all, and one day it will be finished. Look to these and other stories to find hope in the goodness of people, in the arc of history, in yourself and most of all, in God. “Hope is the thing with feathers – That perches in the soul – And sings the tune without the words – And never – stops at all –” And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard – Yet – never – in Extremity, - it asked a crumb – of me –

Emily Dickinson

Hope is the Thing with Feathers
A Franciscan Reflection by Jack Zimmerman

Pope Francis has expressed a hope “for growth in communion between members of different Institutes” calling us to “step out more courageously from the confines of our respective institutes and to work together, at the local and global levels.” This he says “would make for a more effective prophetic witness.”

Volunteer Spotlight
Our Sister Marie Angele volunteers as facilitator for a monthly “contemplative creativity course” through Eremos, A Center of Contemplative Life in Austin, TX. (see eremos.org). She offers a Soul Support Group where participants follow the call to contemplation by engaging in a creative process to awaken senses, focus minds, open hearts, and grow in community.

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Earth Day is April 22, but we like to celebrate April as Earth Month! The theme for 2021 is “Restore Our Earth.” Watch our Facebook page for our Earth Month posts throughout the month of April!

This month of April

Upcoming Events via Zoom

Tue, May 11, 7pm Central Time
Upcoming Events via Zoom

Tue, Sept 14, 7pm Central Time
Upcoming Events via Zoom

Tue, Oct 12, 7pm Central Time
Upcoming Events via Zoom

Tuesdays, Sept 14 & Oct 12, 7pm Central Time
Upcoming Events via Zoom

The month of April

EARTH MONTH: Restore!

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Help us further our Gospel Mission:

1. Contact us with your latest email address. Sister Connie is working to update our mailing and email lists.

Sister Connie is working to update our mailing and email lists. Each time you shop, Amazon will donate 0.5% of your purchase price to the Sisters.

3. In lieu of funeral flowers, send a Perpetual Membership of Prayer. Members share in the graces of a monthly Eucharist Celebration, and in the daily prayers and good works of each of our Sisters. For this $25 donation, a family member will receive a beautiful gold presentation booklet with a personalized certificate inside.

4. Use our Annual Membership of Prayer program in place of special occasion cards. For a suggested donation of just $5, your loved one will be added to our Sisters’ prayer list for one year, plus they will be sent the acknowledgment card of your choice!

5. Leave a Legacy — remember the Sisters in your will. Directly name the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Kirkwood, MO, in your will, and let us know! To thank you, you will automatically be added to our Perpetual prayer list.

6. Donate Stock for a possible tax break. Gifting securities or annuities to the Franciscan Sisters may provide tax advantages over donating cash. Ask your financial planner.

7. Give “In Honor,” or “In Memory” of a loved one or “In Celebration” of a special event. Need a gift for someone who has everything? Celebrate their birthday or anniversary, promotion or retirement, by donating to the Sisters in their name. Want to memorialize a loved one in a special way? Let us know and we can send the acknowledgment to family members and include them in prayer. You may even be able to deduct the gift from your taxes. (Consult your financial advisor.)

For more information, contact Sister Connie at (314) 965-3700, ext 109, or srcennie@fsolph.org.

In her biography, which she wrote upon becoming a Franciscan Sister of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, she indicated that she admired persons who were “sweet, sincere, humble, understanding, and kind.” What she admired, she became. Her Sisters in community knew her as gentle, peace-filled, genuine, helpful, appreciative, kind, grateful, and filled with quiet beauty.

She wanted to become a Franciscan Sister so she could “teach little children to love Jesus.” She did just that for many years as she taught in the primary grades in St Louis, MO; Fairborn, OH; and Oak Creek, WI. In her later years, her gracious, gentle temperament came through as she served as receptionist at the skilled care and assisted living facilities of Cardinal Ritter Senior Services in St Louis.

Her sweet spirit touched the lives of so many people. We know that God welcomed her home with an immense THANK YOU for a life lived so generously, so graciously.

A private burial service was held September 9 at Resurrection Cemetery in St Louis. Memorial gifts in honor of Sister Kathy may be made at www.fsolph.com to help the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help continue to provide for the health care needs of the Sisters. Call (314) 965-3700, ext 109, with questions or to share a story of how Sister Kathy helped to influence your life.

Foundation Day Roses
We appreciate that although you may have the desire, many of you cannot make it to the beautiful resting place of your favorite Sister to pay your respects. And many of those who can travel to St Louis, have not been able due to Covid travel restrictions and safety precautions.

We invite you all to join us symbolically as we celebrate the lives of our deceased Sisters. May 29th is the 120th Anniversary of our founding in St Louis, MO. We usually celebrate Foundation Day by gathering with all of our local sisters at the senior care facility. This year, our Sisters who are able will gather outdoors at our Cemetery to pray, sing, and remember. If you would like, we can purchase a fresh rose on your behalf. We will place it on your Sister’s grave marker for you during this Community Celebration.

We ask only for a donation to offset the cost. We have placed a form on our website, or you can call Tau Center at (314)-965-3700 and leave a message for Sister Connie with your contact information. She will get back to you to make arrangements.
We love our Sisters.

We understand that our Sisters are also your daughters, sisters, cousins, aunts, coworkers, caregivers, teachers and friends. We thank you for sharing their time on earth, their many talents and gifts, and their compassion and joy, with us and with the world.

When a Sister passes on to her eternal life with God, we join you in your grief. We continue to celebrate each Sister’s life and legacy, as we include her in special Community prayer every year on the anniversary of her death.

We know that many who are nearby visit your Special Sister annually at our Community’s final resting place — Resurrection Cemetery in St Louis County, Missouri. We also understand that the Coronavirus has canceled many of these visits over the past year.

With this in mind, we are offering a way to honor your special Sister on the Anniversary of our Founding, May 29. Several Sisters will safely gather in prayer at the cemetery that day. We would love to place a rose at your Special Sister’s grave marker on your behalf.

Do you have a Special Sister among the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help?

Honor Her on Foundation Day

On May 29, we will place a fresh rose at the grave marker of your Special Sister/s (on your behalf), during a Community prayer service at Resurrection Cemetery. All we ask is a donation to offset the cost of the flowers.

To register, go to our website at www.fsolph.org, or leave a voicemail for Sister Connie at (314) 965-3700, and she will get back to you during regular business hours.

Thank you!