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Bend Toward Our Wounded World...

Illustration by Sr. Mary Francis Lewandowski

Capturing St. Francis' radical commitment to Christ-like healing, peace and love, this is a visual hymn reminding us that our highest calling is to bend toward our wounded world with open, compassionate hearts.

At the foot of the Cross of San Damiano, Francis' journey truly caught fire. In the crumbling ruins of a small chapel, he looked upon this cross and heard a voice command him to rebuild. He later understood that he was not to patch up a single brick-and-mortar structure, but to radically renew the Body of Christ, the Church, through humility and love.

Assisi evokes the sacred architecture of an awakening vocation and the beginning of a lifelong pilgrimage. It is Francis' spiritual cradle. In a world that rewards pride and turns away from discomfort, Francis bends low. His posture of deep humility and active compassion reveals that true grace is found in meeting suffering exactly where it is.

The tree radiating light offers sanctuary, shelter, unending grace, and a fierce, unyielding hope against the darkness, bearing the fruit of Divine Providence.

Recalling the renowned reconciliation at Gubbio, the wolf embodies true and lasting peace. It is a powerful testament to harmony, proving that reconciliation is possible among all people and with creation.

The mosaic urges us to look beyond our own small, isolated corner of the world and embrace the larger, cosmic responsibility to care for the poor and the suffering, as well as the fragile earth we share.

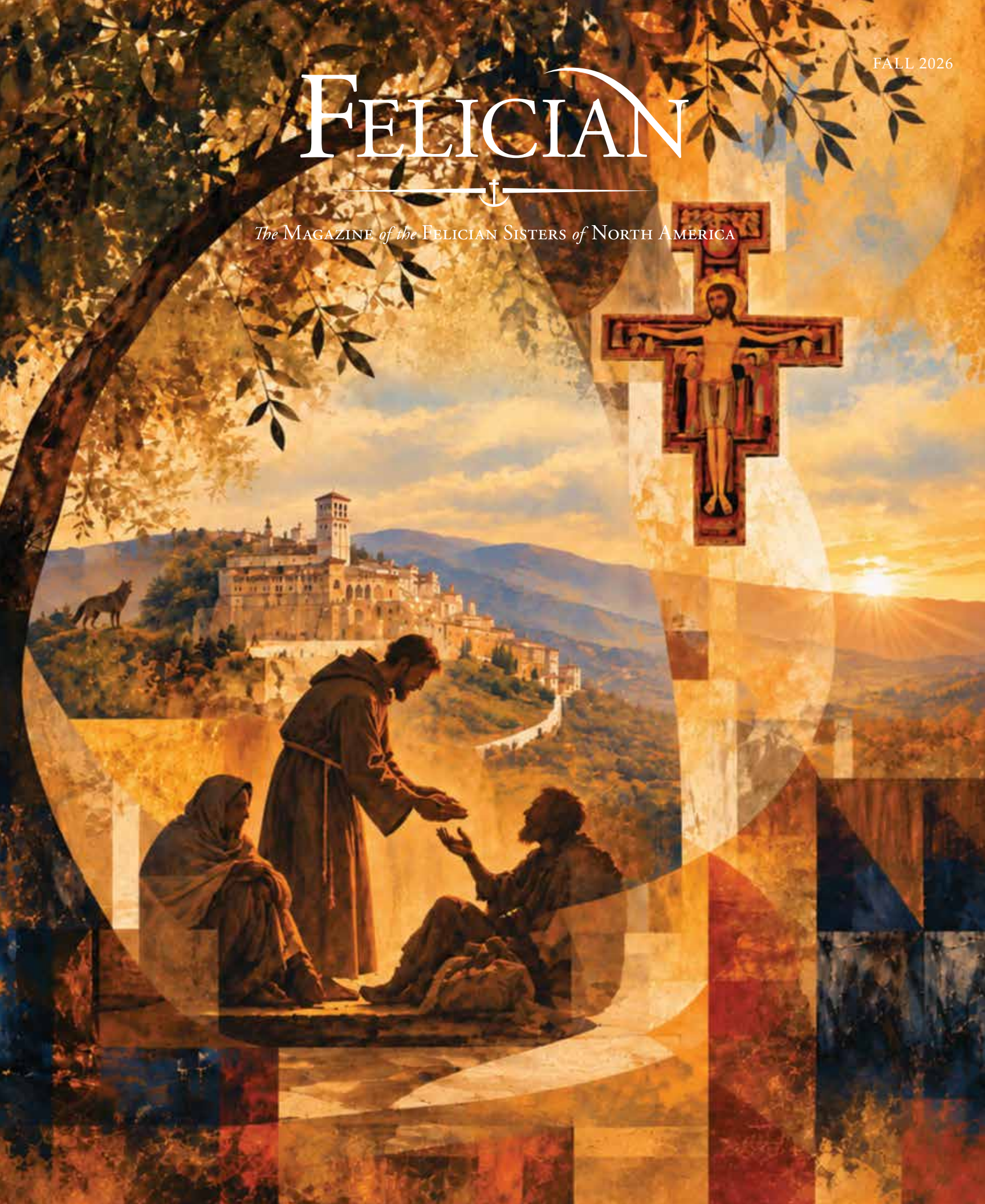
The artwork itself serves as a metaphor for our own lives and our world—reminding us that our individual brokenness can be gathered up by grace and meticulously pieced back together into something breathtakingly beautiful.



FALL 2026

FELICIAN

The MAGAZINE *of the* FELICIAN SISTERS *of* NORTH AMERICA





FELICIAN SISTERS
OF NORTH AMERICA

OUR MISSION

We cooperate with Christ in the spiritual renewal of the world.
We empower one another to live our sacred calling to serve.

2021-2027 PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

Elected by the sisters to oversee the lives of the sisters, ministries and governance of Our Lady of Hope Province:

Sr. Judith Marie Kubicki
Provincial Minister

Sr. Janet Marie Adamczyk
Provincial Vicar/1st Councilor

Sr. Suzanne Marie Kush
2nd Councilor

Sr. Mary Rosita Brennan
3rd Councilor

Sr. Mary Sharon Iacobucci
4th Councilor

Sr. Nancy Marie Piecewicz
5th Councilor

Sr. Mary Catherine Ryzewicz
Provincial Treasurer

OUR LADY OF HOPE PROVINCE

Founded in Poland in 1855, the Felician Sisters are a congregation of women religious inspired by the spiritual ideals of their foundress, Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska and Saints Francis of Assisi, Clare of Assisi and Felix of Cantalice. The first Felician Sisters arrived in North America in 1874. They established eight provinces across the United States and Canada and in 2009 united into one: Our Lady of Hope Province.

Pioneers of social services, the Felician Sisters of North America founded and continue to sponsor or minister in more than 50 ministries throughout North America and Haiti. Constantly evolving their ministries to meet the needs of the time, the sisters continue to follow God's will and Blessed Mary Angela's directive to "serve where you are needed."



This oil on canvas painting by †Sr. Mary Colette Michniewicz depicts the Felician Franciscan heritage. 1950's, Holy Name of Mary Province–Toronto



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Stained glass created by Sr. Colette Michniewicz

FELICIAN

The MAGAZINE *of the* FELICIAN SISTERS *of* NORTH AMERICA

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Cover

Sr. Mary Francis Lewandowski, CSSF, has shared her creativity through communications and publication design for the Felician Sisters for more than 30 years. She became a Felician Sister in 1984 and graduated from Madonna University in Livonia, MI. She later earned a Master of Arts and Master of Fine Arts from Wayne State University's College of Fine, Performing and Communication Arts in Detroit. She currently serves as director of Felician Publications & Studio Arts in Livonia.





Dear Friends,

Some people make a big difference while they live among us.

The impact of others continues long after they leave us. The influence of still others grows and deepens as the years, decades and even centuries pass. This is the case with the poor man of Assisi, St. Francis! This year we celebrate the 800th anniversary of his death. Time has served to broaden and deepen the power of his message and his vision. Certainly, his impact is evident throughout Our Lady of Hope Province.

The stories in this fall 2026 issue of *Felician* magazine witness to the Franciscan spirit that flourishes among us. Whether it is Felician Community Services in Buffalo reaching out to assist children in need or sisters advocating against human trafficking in Washington, D.C., groups continue to keep alive the Franciscan-inspired Felician values of compassion, respect for human dignity, transformation, solidarity with those in need and justice and peace. These values are evident in many of the stories shared in these pages: events that connect with young people and families in joyful summer celebrations in Detroit to breaking ground for a new affordable housing project in Enfield; from the outreach of the Mother Angela Clinic in Haiti to ecumenical and interfaith gatherings at Madonna University; from visits that express care for all God's creatures at the Passaic Animal Shelter in New Jersey to reducing paper waste in Chicago and renewed efforts to reduce plastic waste, to conserve water and to promote solar energy.

Be sure to read the article on five ways to be a peacemaker today! Inspired by the peace prayer of St. Francis, the reflection expresses a commitment to advocacy, justice and peace that we hope will be contagious! Don't miss the heartwarming story of Edwina's journey to achieve an education after the earthquake that devastated Haiti.

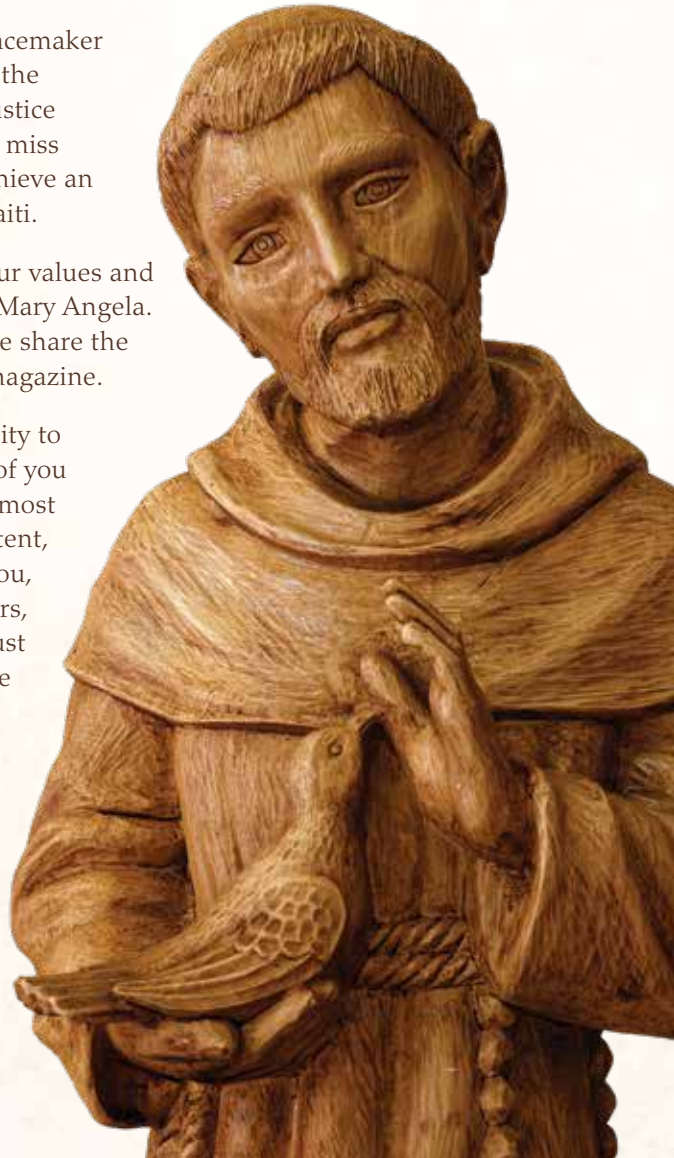
A spirit of joy and gratitude impels us all to live our values and to follow the example of Francis, Clare, Felix and Mary Angela. It is in that same spirit of joy and gratitude that we share the stories that are offered in this latest issue of our magazine.

Furthermore, this anniversary year is an opportunity to celebrate the fact that Francis' spirit is alive in all of you who support our work and our outreach to those most in need. As we continue our efforts to widen our tent, we are profoundly aware of the essential role of you, our associates, our lay partners and our benefactors, in promoting our charism and our mission. We trust that you will recognize your own good work in the pages that follow!

Peace and all good things!

Sr. Judith M. Kubicki

Sr. Judith Marie Kubicki, CSSF
Provincial Minister, Felician Sisters of North America
Our Lady of Hope Province



Dear Felician Sisters...



A Faith That Began at St. Hedwig's

I am in formation for the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, NY. I graduated from St. Hedwig's School in Floral Park, NY in 1990.

For many years, I discerned a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, well into adulthood and the beginning of my career. I attribute much of that discernment to my time at St. Hedwig's.





I remember your sisters very fondly. †Sr. Mary Magdalen Pytelewski was the stern but friendly and holy principal. I also remember †Sr. Mary Anselma Smolenska, who told us that she wore the habit as a witness to Christ and for our sins. And I remember †Sr. Mary Joanne Wasilewski, who once gave me a dollar at a parish festival and told me to put it on the number 7 because it was "the perfect number." I won something and 7 has been my lucky number ever since.

My childhood home was next to the convent and I spent a great deal of time around the church and with the sisters. That environment fostered my vocation and strengthened my faith.

I am now married to Deborah and we have two sons. I have been a police officer in Floral Park for nearly 28 years and am also an attorney. Throughout it all, I have tried to apply the lessons your sisters taught me.

I am scheduled to be ordained on May 22, 2027. If you would kindly keep me in your prayers, I would be most grateful. I promise to pray for you as well.

- William

Carrying the Felician Mission Forward

I graduated from Felician University in 2012 with degrees in Psychology and Religious Studies. After graduate school, I returned to Felician as an adjunct professor and later served with the BMA Institute, eventually becoming Executive Director of Mission Integration.

My work in psychology eventually led me to re-entry case management with a county jail population in California. Today, I serve as the Executive Director of a residential treatment, detox and transition center for individuals on probation or parole.

Recently, I mentored a man who had been convicted of murder, helping him with coping skills, compassion and hope for change. He comes from a Catholic background and, after noticing the ashes on my forehead on Ash Wednesday, gave me a small bag to keep a rosary in.

I share this because I wanted you to know how the Franciscan and Felician values have stayed with me and continue to permeate the work I do. I consider myself a servant leader. In every leadership role I have held, I have tried to serve my team, my clients and, ultimately, God.

- Ingrid

The Joy of Sister Melanie



We wish to express our deep gratitude and thanksgiving for Sr. Mary Melanie Jaworski at our beloved parish, the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Syracuse, NY.

Sr. Melanie has poured out her devotion, guidance and love for our Lordand Redeemer to our parish and community and it surely shows. Our children just love her so much, as we all do!

God bless Sr. Melanie and the Felician Order. With all of our love and prayers,

- Mark and Stephanie

A Mission That Inspires Others

Felician Mission: Haiti

A few weeks ago, I was privileged to view the film about *Felician Mission: Haiti*. The dedication and love given so freely to people in such great need touched my heart.



Many years ago, when I worked with our youth group, I remember meeting Sr. Marilyn Marie Minter. Her joy was truly contagious. I recently shared the Haiti mission and video with our Rosarians so they could see the work being done in the name of our Lord. They were deeply moved by the sisters' work and wanted to help.

The people of Haiti deserve to know that we care for them.

- Judith

SEND YOUR THOUGHTS, MEMORIES AND PICTURES to *FelicianMagazine@FelicianSisters.org* or via mail to: *Felician* magazine, Felician Sisters of North America, Office of Mission Advancement, 871 Mercer Road, Beaver Falls, PA 15010-6815.



A Day of Unity at Madonna University

In May, the **Welcome Center at Madonna University** in **Livonia, MI** hosted the second annual Livonia Bridging Hearts Day of Prayer and Unity, bringing together ten faith traditions for an evening of prayer, music and shared reflection.

Information tables lined the hall, highlighting Native/Indigenous, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Bahá'í, Sikh and Pagan faith traditions. The evening's centerpiece was a Sacred Interfaith Prayer Circle, where leaders offered prayers in their native languages followed by English translations. Music and cultural performances rounded out the program and guests closed the night by adding their own messages to a Unity Mural.

Now in its second year, Livonia Bridging Hearts continues to grow into one of the region's most meaningful interfaith gatherings—a fitting reflection of Madonna University's founding mission and the Felician Sisters' commitment to welcoming people of all faiths and building community.





A Papal Audience to Remember

Sisters Mary Johnna Ciezobka and Mary Susanne Dziedzic had the extraordinary privilege of a private meeting and blessing with Pope Leo XIV. Catholic Extension gifted them this pilgrimage to Rome as 2012 Lumen Christi Awardees. When they introduced themselves as Felician Sisters, he immediately recognized the address, 3800 W. Peterson Avenue, home of the Mother of Good Counsel Convent in Chicago! They presented him with prayer intentions gathered from sisters, families and friends and he promised, "I can do that for you."

Despite flight delays, reroutes and four days without luggage, the sisters also visited St. Mary Major to honor Pope Francis, attended a private Mass with Cardinal Cupich, toured the Vatican Museums and Sistine Chapel and shared lunch with sisters at the Felician generalate in Rome. They returned home with renewed gratitude and a deeper commitment to their ministries and the Felician mission. What a grace-filled journey!





Mother Angela Clinic Serves Where Needed

Through ***Felician Mission: Haiti***, the Mother Angela Mobile Clinic took a road less traveled in June to Gwo Tyron in Decouze, Haiti answering an invitation received a month earlier from a community in need of medical care.

The people of Gwo Tyron were waiting, grateful the team arrived safely. Many had walked miles to reach the clinic. Sr. Marilyn Marie Minter shared the story of Blessed Mary Angela with those gathered and by day's end, 75 men, women and children had been served.



The community was deeply thankful for the care provided by the nurse, doctors and pharmacist and is looking forward to the next visit.

The Mother Angela Mobile Clinic continues to bring medical care, spiritual accompaniment and education to communities with no other access to care.





Pilgrims Walk 100 Miles to Pray for Vocations

Sr. Catherine Marie-Elizabeth Rotterman was among about 200 pilgrims who walked 100 miles to the Santuario de Chimayó, praying for more vocations to religious life and the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

The week-long pilgrimage began June 7 and ended June 13. Sr. Catherine walked with a group of 50 women, known as Guadalupanas, who set out before dawn on June 8 from St. Patrick's Church in Chama. Male participants, called Peregrinos, walked separate routes. Organizers offer five routes each year, with Sr. Catherine's group taking the westernmost route.

Over six days, the group passed through Cebolla, Canjilón, Abiquiú and the Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo before reaching Santa Cruz and Santuario de Chimayó, stopping at churches and moradas—small prayer chapels—along the way. Pilgrims slept in local high schools and event centers and carried prayer petitions collected from each community.

Sr. Catherine said singing and fellowship helped ease the trip's toll of blisters and sore feet. She also loved taking in the landscape of northern New Mexico—its rivers, hills and red rocks—and meeting people who call the region home.

Sr. Mary Edna Pearl Esquibel joined the group for a closing Mass on June 13 at the Santuario de Chimayó, a historic pilgrimage site known for its tradition of healing.



Angela Gardens Breaks Ground in Enfield

Big news for **Enfield, CT!** In June, Felician Sisters celebrated the groundbreaking of **Angela Gardens**, a project that will transform the historic St. Felix Novitiate House building on the Enfield campus into 45 units of affordable senior housing—41 one-bedroom apartments and 4 studios, reserved for residents age 62 and older earning at or below 50% of the area median income.



Bishop Juan Miguel Betancourt, SEMV, joined the celebration alongside project partners and community leaders. The campus, once home to hundreds of Felician Sisters, now enters a new era and Sr. Nancy Marie Piecewicz sees the project as a way of carrying the legacy forward. **"This land can continue to serve," she said. "We are preserving what is sacred, while allowing new life to grow."**

Named for Blessed Mary Angela, Foundress of the Felician Sisters, Angela Gardens will continue the commitment to care for our common home, inspired by *Laudato Si'*, while being built to modern, eco-friendly standards. The first residents are expected to move in during the summer of 2027.

Shelter Visit Rooted in Franciscan Compassion





Care for all of God's creatures is at the heart of the Franciscan charism. On a Friday morning in June, Sr. Marie Alexander Siegel and several Felician Associates visited the Passaic Animal Shelter as part of the Lodi Felician Associate Outreach Program, bringing donated blankets, pillows and sheets for the dogs.

The donations came from cleaning out rooms of the Mother Angela Wing at the convent. Rather than let the soft bedding go to waste, the group gathered it up to share with the shelter's animals, arriving with arms full and glad for the chance to make their time there a little more comfortable.

The shelter gave them a warm welcome and a tour and the morning included conversations with staff about animal welfare and the importance of community support. The Passaic Animal Shelter expressed gratitude for the donations and the group's support, noting how much community involvement like this means to their work.

Sisters Advocate Against Human Trafficking in D.C.



Sisters Maryann Agnes Mueller and Melanie Marie Bajorek, along with Jeanne Jacobson, VP of Ministry Development for Felician Services, Inc. (FSI), traveled to Washington, D.C. for Capitol Advocacy Day, co-sponsored by the Alliance to End Human Trafficking and the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, July 13–15.

Nearly 50 advocates called for passage of two key bills protecting victims of human trafficking and children online, meeting with congressional staff to advocate for co-sponsorship. The sisters returned home better informed about these issues and encouraged by the opportunity to share their message with congressional staff.







A Summer of Faith and Fellowship

Rising from the Ashes Revival (July 22) – More than 5,200 people gathered in **Detroit, MI** for a day of worship, speakers, music, fellowship and a historic Eucharistic procession. Felician Sisters joined the Ministry Fair alongside **Felician Sisters Child Care Centers, Volunteers in Mission (VIM), Maryville Retreat Center, Madonna University, Felician Sisters Heritage Center and Archives** and **Deo Gratias Ministries Detroit**.

The FEST (August 15) – Felician Sisters joined thousands of attendees in **Avon, OH** for live music, family activities, a closing Mass and fireworks. Sisters chatted with attendees about vocations and religious life, while Maryville Retreat Center staff shared news of their retreat space in Holly, MI. Summer volunteers ran the prize wheel and Plinko, talking with visitors about VIM opportunities between activities and enjoying the day alongside fellow attendees.



Looking ahead, Felician Sisters and ministries will continue connecting with young people, families and communities at Catholic events throughout the year.

Join us for an upcoming Catholic conference!

NCYC (National Catholic Youth Conference)
November 20–21, 2026 — Long Beach, CA

SEEK (FOCUS National Conference)
January 1–5, 2027 — Columbus, OH and San Antonio, TX



Stepping Into the School Year

Felician Community Services in **Buffalo, NY** a new program of **Hopebound Ministries**, held its first Back-to-School Sneaker Event in August, providing 197 children with new sneakers and socks. The event was made possible by sponsors Trusted Gives, Uniland Development Company and New AME Zion Church, along with dedicated volunteers.

One mother shared: **"I was opting out of new sneakers this school season because of budget constraints and your event made it possible for my two kids to receive brand new sneakers."**

Since then, Felician Community Services has helped 35 additional children get new sneakers—bringing the total to 232 children and helping local kids step into the school year with confidence.

Felician Community Services also now includes the **Sister Mary Josette Food Pantry** and **Villa Maria Youth Programs**, expanding its reach to children and families throughout the Buffalo community.





Sister Judith Marie Kubicki Honored

Sr. Judith Marie Kubicki, Provincial Minister, was honored as one of three recipients of the Catholic Seminary Alumni Association Award at the 34th Annual Dinner and Awards Celebration in **Blasdell, NY** on August 20. Rev. Walter Szczesny introduced her, highlighting her accomplishments in theology, English and music, including three books she has authored and lectures she has given across the U.S., Canada, Australia and Europe—though he especially noted the personal influence she brings to those she encounters.

In her remarks, Sr. Judith reflected on her years as director of music and academic dean at Christ the King Seminary, describing them as a time of personal formation and growth that helped her become a "better musician, teacher and administrator." Drawing on that experience, she compared her role as provincial minister to that of a conductor—guiding sisters, associates and ministry partners toward a shared harmony and purpose so that together they may serve where they are most needed.

5th Annual Care for Our Common Home Retreat

Sr. Mary Jacqueline Keefe and Br. Bill Carothers, CFC, led the 5th Annual Care for Our Common Home Retreat at **Jericho House** in **Wainfleet, ON** a retreat center co-sponsored by the Felician Sisters. Held in an interfaith spirit, the retreat brought together 18 participants for reflection on local and global environmental issues.

Group discussions were balanced with quiet moments for reflection, one-on-one conversations and walks through Jericho's gardens and forest. Guests were also introduced to Christian and Buddhist meditation practices and gathered in the forest for a Summer Solstice celebration.



Lodi's Holy House of Hospitality!

The people of Poland have a beautiful saying: ***"A guest in the house is God in the house."*** Immaculate Conception Conventin **Lodi, NJ** has lived this spirit of hospitality for generations. Even Saint John Paul II spent a night at the convent before becoming pope!

Since Sr. Mary Juanita Arnister began her term as local minister on July 1, 2026, the convent has welcomed sisters from ***around the world***. Among the visitors were sisters from Poland; two congregational leaders from the Dominican Sisters of Go Vap, Vietnam; two general councilors from Rome; and two congregational leaders from Brazil. These guests joined our two Felician Sisters from Kenya who live in our community this year as they study at Felician University.Welcoming so many guests brought challenges, especially with limited space and fewer helping hands during the summer. Still, the sisters made room for prayer, fellowship and time together, strengthening the bonds of our international Felician family.

The complete story, along with photos, will appear in the spring 2027 issue of Felician magazine!











Welcoming New Felician Associates

On August 30, the sisters of **Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Convent** in **Coraopolis, PA** and Coraopolis Felician Associates welcomed four new associates during a Commitment Service at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Chapel.

The new associates and their sister companions look forward to growing together in faith and sharing in the Felician mission of proclaiming Christ's love and mercy. Through prayer, formation and service, Felician Associates seek to live out the spirit of Blessed Mary Angela and carry the Felician mission into their daily lives and communities.

New Associate Rachel Wallover reflected on what becoming an associate means to her: "Blessed Mary Angela once said, 'I wish I could multiply myself a thousand times and travel to all parts of the world, bringing God's love and mercy to all people.' Becoming a Felician associate feels like we are helping to fulfill this wish. I feel very privileged and honored to work with the sisters to further their mission and spread Christ's love."



To learn more about the Felician Associates, visit Felician.org/Associates.



FELICIAN UNIVERSITY
The Franciscan University of New Jersey

Felician University Named Among *TIME's* Best Colleges

Felician University has been recognized in *TIME's* inaugural *America's Best Colleges 2026–2027*, produced with research from Statista Inc. Published on Time.com, the ranking honors 500 U.S. institutions chosen from thousands nationwide based on factors including graduation rates, post-graduate outcomes and academic support.



"Felician's recognition in *TIME Magazine's America's Best Colleges 2026–2027* reflects our mission-driven commitment to student success and the transformative outcomes our graduates achieve. As we embrace the theme of 'Transformation' this academic year, we remain focused on expanding innovative programs, experiential learning and career-connected opportunities, while ensuring a high-quality education remains affordable, accessible and centered on the needs of every student. This honor affirms the impact of a Felician education across New Jersey and beyond and we are proud to be part of *TIME*'s inaugural class of Best Colleges," said Dr. Mildred Mihlon, president of Felician University.

Felician University Awarded $3 Million Federal Grant for Student Success

A $3 million Title III Strengthening Institutions Program grant has been awarded to Felician University by the U.S. Department of Education. Over five years, the funding will strengthen institutional capacity, expand career pathways, support workforce Pell programs, advance artificial intelligence (AI) in education and assist rural-serving institutions.



"This investment represents a transformative opportunity for the Felician community, particularly for our students," said Dr. Jeff Blanchard, Dean of Student Success, Retention and Advancement.

Initiatives include embedding AI literacy in general education, developing predictive student-success and agentic AI infrastructure, creating an AI Lab for Teaching and Learning, renovating the "Falcon Commons" student success center on Rutherford campus and implementing tutoring in gateway courses.

"We are grateful to be the recipient of this grant," said Dr. Mildred Mihlon, President of Felician University.

Felician University is committed to using AI responsibly, with learning and academic integrity remaining at the center.

Before the Halo:
The Young Francis of Assisi

*The story of St. Francis is not only about the **saint he became.***
*It is also about **the person he once was**—and the remarkable transformation that followed.*

When we picture St. Francis of Assisi, we may imagine the gentle saint surrounded by birds and animals, embracing a life of simplicity, caring for creation and reaching out to those living on the margins.

But Francis was not always that person.

Before he became one of Christianity's best-known saints, Francis was a young man with very different dreams.

Born in Assisi around 1181 into a wealthy family, Francis was the son of Pietro Bernardone, a successful cloth merchant. He grew up with opportunities, comfortable circumstances and an appreciation for beautiful clothing and the finer things in life. He was outgoing, charismatic and popular among his friends. He enjoyed parties and celebrations and dreamed of becoming a knight, gaining honor and glory through military achievement.

Francis was simply a young man trying to discover who he wanted to be.

And then his carefully imagined future began to unravel.

Francis went to war and was captured, spending roughly a year as a prisoner. His father eventually ransomed him from the foreign prison, effectively paying for his release. Afterward, Francis became seriously ill. The experiences changed him. The ambitions that had once seemed so important began to lose their appeal, and he found himself searching for something deeper.

His conversion did not happen all at once.

After hearing Christ speak to him from the crucifix at the dilapidated church of San Damiano, telling him to "repair my church," Francis began to turn away from his former life of wealth and status. He eventually renounced his inheritance, stripped off his fine clothes before the bishop and embraced a life of poverty and service to the poor.

One encounter in particular became a profound turning point. Francis had previously found people suffering from leprosy repulsive and frightening. Yet when he encountered a person affected by leprosy on the road, he chose to overcome his fear. As St. Bonaventure recounts in the Major Legend of St. Francis, Francis "dismounted from his horse and ran to kiss him… he then gave the man money and a kiss."

Francis later reflected on this transformation in his Testament: "When I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter was changed into sweetness of soul and body."

Little by little, his understanding of greatness changed. What once repelled him became an encounter with Christ—and a call to see the dignity of the person before him.

The young man who once dreamed of becoming a celebrated knight began to recognize Christ in people who were poor, sick and forgotten. He became less concerned with what the world considered important and increasingly attentive to the Gospel's call to humility, compassion and service.

Eventually, Francis gave away much of his wealth and embraced a life of radical simplicity. Others were drawn to his example and what began as one person's conversion grew into a movement that would become the Franciscan tradition.

The transformation is remarkable—but perhaps the most remarkable thing is that Francis' earlier life did not disappear from his story.

The young man who loved beautiful things became someone who saw beauty in simplicity. The man who wanted worldly glory discovered another kind of greatness. The person who had once avoided people who suffered from leprosy learned to embrace those whom society rejected. His natural energy and charisma, once directed toward parties and personal ambition, became energy for the Gospel.

Francis did not become holy because *he had always been perfect*. He became holy because *he allowed God to change him*.

That may be one of the most important parts of his story for us today.

We sometimes imagine saints as people who were somehow different from the beginning—people who naturally possessed extraordinary faith, patience, courage or compassion. But the lives of the saints tell a different story. They struggled. They made mistakes. They had ambitions that did not always reflect God's plan. They experienced disappointment, uncertainty and fear.

Francis' story reminds us that holiness is not necessarily a straight line.

Sometimes transformation begins with a disappointment. Sometimes it begins when something we once wanted no longer satisfies us. Sometimes it begins with an encounter with another person that changes the way we see the world. And sometimes it begins simply by becoming willing to listen.

Francis spent much of his early life seeking greatness. In the end, he discovered that true greatness was not about being admired. It was about becoming smaller so that there was more room for God and for others.

That is perhaps why Francis remains so compelling more than 800 years after his death.

His story gives us permission to believe that we are never finished becoming who God calls us to be.

The young man who dreamed of glory became the friar who saw all of God's creation as kin—calling the sun "Brother Sun," the moon "Sister Moon" and even death "Sister Death." The wealthy merchant's son became a servant of the poor. The party-loving young man became a man of prayer and peace. And the person who once struggled to see Christ in those who were different from him became a model of compassion, humility and reverence for all of God's creation for generations to come.

Francis was not born a saint.

He became one through a lifetime of choosing, changing, listening and responding to God.

And perhaps that is the Francis we most need to remember—not only the saint with the halo, but the young man who was still becoming, learning to see God's presence in the poor, the outcast, the birds of the air and all of creation.

Because we are still becoming, too.



Chronology of Saint Francis of Assisi

St. Francis was born Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone in 1181 or 1182 in Assisi, Italy.

1202, November
Battle of Collestrada in which Assisi lost to Perugia and Francis was taken prisoner

1206
Francis' trial before Bishop Guido of Assisi

1208
Francis heard a Gospel that gave his life new direction; Bernard of Quintavalle was the first to join and remain with Francis

1209/1210
Pope Innocent III approved
The Primitive Rule

1215
The Fourth Lateran Council

1217
Chapters began and the order was divided into provinces

1219, November 5
Battle of Damietta in Egypt

1223, November 29
Pope Honorius III approved
The Later Rule

1223
Christmas at Greccio

1224, August 15 - September 29
Francis' religious experience (stigmata) at La Verna

1226, October 3
Francis died

1226, October 4
Francis was buried at San Giorgio in Assisi

1228, July 16
Pope Gregory IX canonized Francis in Assisi

GOOD READS

Books have a special way of guiding us—inviting reflection, sparking conversation and offering hope. Whether through parish book clubs, personal devotion or historical research, Felician Sisters continue to find inspiration in reading. In this edition of "Good Reads," several sisters share the titles on their shelves and explain why these works hold meaning for them.

"The Practice of the Presence of God"

by Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection

The word "Presence" holds special meaning for Felician Sisters as we seek to recognize God's presence in every aspect of our lives.

In this classic spiritual work, Brother Lawrence, a simple French monk, shares how to find God in the ordinary moments of daily life and experience His peace whether at work, at home or in prayer. Inspired by the words of the psalmist, "In Thy Presence is fullness of joy," he reminds us that God is always near.

Though small in size, this book offers profound wisdom. I first read it many years ago and it continues to inspire my spiritual journey. I often share it with Jubilarians and others as a meaningful companion in faith.



Sr. Janice Marie Gaudette
Providence, RI

"Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants"

by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Indigenous botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer uses short stories to describe the journey of the virgin lands within her tribal region from healthy, fruitful land to "superfund sites." She then explores nature's hints of restoration once modern humans move on from the lands they damaged.

"Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents"

by Isabel Wilkerson

Isabel Wilkerson explores how systems of hierarchy and social division have been experienced in India, Europe and North America. Through historical research and personal stories, she examines how "caste" behaviors shape societies and influence the way people view and treat one another.

This is a timely and thought-provoking book. During the recent inauguration of the Obama Presidential Library in Chicago, the virtual tour highlighted that "Caste" was among the personal books from President Obama's collection donated to the library. I found it to be an especially informative and meaningful read.



Sr. Dorothy Ann Mary Moczygemba
Enfield, CT

"Making Peace with Cancer: A Franciscan Journey"

by Fr. Robert M. Stewart, OFM

In this Year of St. Francis, "Making Peace with Cancer" offers a heartfelt reflection on faith, suffering and hope. Drawing from his own experience with cancer, Fr. Robert M. Stewart connects his journey to the life and spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi, reminding readers that even life's darkest moments can reveal God's presence and prepare us for our final encounter with "Sister Death." A comforting and inspiring read for anyone facing illness or accompanying a loved one on that journey.



Sr. Mary Therese Chmura
Buffalo, NY

Book images courtesy of Amazon.com



Five Ways to Be a Peacemaker *Today*

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

These familiar words associated with St. Francis of Assisi continue to inspire us in a world marked by conflict and division. Francis understood that peace begins with ordinary people making daily choices rooted in compassion, humility and love.

As we celebrate the Jubilee Year of St. Francis and the 800th anniversary of his death, we are reminded that each of us can be a peacemaker. Here are five simple ways to bring peace to our families, workplaces, communities and world.

1. *Listen* Before You *Respond*

"Help me to understand, rather than to be understood."

Much conflict begins with misunderstanding. Being a peacemaker means truly listening — not simply waiting to speak, but seeking to understand another person's perspective. In our diverse and multicultural world, listening opens the door to dialogue across generations, cultures and faiths and can build bridges where walls once existed.

2. *Choose Kindness* in *Small Moments*

"Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console."

Peace is not created only through grand gestures. It often begins with a smile, a word of encouragement, a patient response or an offer to help. St. Francis believed every person was a beloved child of God. When we treat others with kindness and dignity, we help create a culture of peace. The Felician Sisters' corporate stand, From Othering to Reverencing All, calls us to approach all people and creation with compassion and respect.

3. *Care* for Creation

"Make me an instrument of your peace."

For St. Francis, peace extends beyond human relationships to all of God's creation. His "Canticle of the Creatures" celebrates the beauty and interconnectedness of our common home. Today, caring for creation can be an act of peacemaking. Conserving resources, reducing waste or simply spending time in nature can deepen our gratitude for God's gifts and commitment to our common home.

4. Practice *Forgiveness*

"It is in pardoning, that we are pardoned."

Forgiveness is difficult, but it can open the door to healing and reconciliation. It does not mean ignoring hurt or pretending wrongdoing did not happen. It means choosing not to let resentment control our hearts. Sometimes peace begins with an apology. Other times, it means extending grace to someone who has disappointed us. Both require humility and courage.

5. Be a *Source* of *Hope*

"Where there is despair, let me sow hope."

Peacemakers bring hope wherever they go. They encourage rather than discourage, seek solutions rather than blame and remind others that goodness is still possible, even in difficult times.

For more than 170 years, the Felician Sisters have carried this spirit of faith into communities around the world through service, education, care for the vulnerable and witness to God's love.

Each of us can be a peacemaker. By choosing compassion over judgment, understanding over division and hope over despair, we become instruments of peace right where we are.





Chapter of Mats

The word "chapter" when referring to a religious congregation often refers to a legislative gathering of the members to review laws or to elect new leadership. A Chapter of Mats is very different. ***It is a gathering of members to pray, reflect on their lives and to celebrate together.*** This gathering from our Franciscan heritage recalls an event when St. Francis of Assisi called the brothers together.

Francis called that first gathering of the Chapter of Mats in 1219 at the Portiuncula in Assisi. He realized how easy it was for the brothers to lose their original fervor. He gathered them around the Gospel. He encouraged them, celebrated them, listened to them and discerned how God was leading them forward. The gathering was about renewing their common life and remembering who they were. It was a time to seek God together. The same spirit and intent of St. Francis were at the heart of the Chapter convened this past summer.

The Chapter of Mats was held August 6-9, in Buffalo, NY. Approximately 200 Felician Sisters and associates participated in this historic event for the Province. It took place during the year commemorating the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi. This was the first Chapter of Mats in which the Felician Associates were invited. It was also an international experience with representatives from the three Polish Provinces, the Vice-Province of Our Lady of Africa and the entire Generalate Team. The Chapter was livestreamed, creating an opportunity for more sisters and associates, including sisters of the various provinces of the Congregation, to participate. While the attendees did not sleep on mats as they did during the time of Francis, each participant created a mat before arriving that expressed where they were on their journey—what grounded them, what they were carrying into the Chapter experience or what they were offering to the community. ***Together, these mats created a wall of artwork expressing our unity.***

The theme was *Being People of the Way*. This theme was chosen for the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi. He lived a life based on the Gospel. As Franciscans we walk in the footprints of Christ as exemplified by Francis. We are challenged by the Gospel message to respond to existing systems of social and economic disparity. Being a follower of Jesus calls us to a transformation of our heart, mind and actions to reflect Jesus' example.

In the spirit of the Chapter of Mats participants were invited to be on pilgrimage. As pilgrims they were invited to encounter Christ and Christ's message. They were asked to let go of any set agenda, to put aside their concerns and enter this experience. Trusting their companions during discussions, meals and break times was also a part of the experience. The invitation to pilgrimage created space for participants to listen deeply—to God, to one another and to where the Spirit might be leading the community.





Each day of the Chapter the participants gathered in prayer, inspired by stories from the life of St. Francis and engaged in communal sharing. Each day had a specific theme which was portrayed by individuals who took on the persona of St. Francis, St. Clare, Lady Jacoba, friars and pilgrims. Themes of Franciscan life such as our Franciscan calling, relationships, letting go, lament and what is ours to do were reflected during the days of the Chapter.

The dramatic storytelling of selected accounts from the life of Francis led the participants to a deeper reflection upon their lives in living our vocational calling. Each scenario was followed by a time of reflection and table sharing and a ritual. There were several poignant rituals during the Chapter. Perhaps the most moving was when each table shared a communal lament and wrote it on a band aid and placed it on the cross. The ritual was followed by an anointing of healing. ***Through these moments, participants were reminded that lament, healing and hope are all part of the journey of faith and community.***

The death of St. Francis was celebrated with the Transitus Prayer. With the tolling of the bells Francis was brought in and placed reverently in front of the altar. The friars kept vigil as the sisters and associates recalled through readings and song the final moments of St. Francis' earthly life and his entrance into new life.

The evening offered another reminder that joy and celebration are essential parts of Franciscan community life.

The Chapter of Mats was also a time of celebration with a Friday evening "Birthday Bash" remembering the 250th birthday of the United States as well as the birthdays of all the participants. The spirit and the international flavor of celebration came through during the entire evening in song and dance.

All the participants were sent forth with transformed spirits and stronger bonds of community. The Chapter of Mats was more than a gathering; it was an opportunity to pause, listen and remember our Franciscan roots and renew our commitment to walking together as people of the Gospel. The Chapter of Mats concluded with the words of Francis, offered to the participants as a mandate: ***"I have done what was mine to do, may you do what is yours."***



Sr. Mary Nicolette Wichrowski and Sr. Jane Mary Gawlik display their mats.

Caring for Our Common Home: Small Acts, Shared Commitment

"The beauty of creation is a reflection of the Creator's love."

Across the Felician Sisters of North America, caring for creation is not simply an idea—*it is a way of living*. In convents and ministries across North America Province including Haiti, sisters are finding practical and meaningful ways to honor God's gift of creation *through everyday choices*.

Their efforts may look different from one community to another, but together they reflect a shared commitment to living more simply, reducing waste, conserving resources and appreciating the beauty of the world around us.



Simple Choices Make a Difference

For many sisters, caring for the earth begins with small choices *made every day*.

Recycling is one of the most common practices reported by sisters. Communities recycle paper, cardboard, glass, aluminum, plastic bottles and containers, batteries and other materials according to local guidelines. Some sisters, such as Sr. Marcia Mary Polchlopek in Enfield, CT have found creative ways to give materials a second life, such as reusing clean paper, repurposing packaging materials and transforming old greeting cards into new ones.

Others are reducing their reliance on single-use plastics. Sr. Melanie Marie Bajorek, in Coraopolis, PA reported using refillable water bottles, washable travel mugs, reusable dishes and glass containers rather than disposable products. Some have replaced liquid laundry detergent in plastic jugs with detergent sheets and have chosen bar shampoo and soap instead of products packaged in plastic bottles.

"At Immaculate Conception Convent in Lodi, NJ the sisters have made a simple but significant change: replacing disposable paper plates and bowls with reusable dishes," says Sr. Mary Virginia Tomasiak. In Las Cruces, NM Sr. Juanella Maria Pereyra reports they are expanding their efforts beyond recycling to conserve water, gas and electricity in both their convent and ministries.

Sometimes it begins with asking, *Can I use less? Can I reuse this? Can I choose a more sustainable option?*

Growing and Giving Back

Sisters in several communities are planting vegetables, herbs and flowers. Tomatoes, cucumbers and other vegetables are being grown for convent meals, while flower gardens provide beauty and peaceful places for prayer and reflection.

At the Immaculate Heart of Mary Convent in Buffalo, NY sisters enjoy a courtyard garden where they can pray, read and spend time outdoors. Butterfly plants attract pollinators, while a herb garden supplies the convent kitchen and tomatoes offer fresh produce for the sisters. For Sr. Mary Elizabeth Mackowiak, tending a summer flower garden has become a spiritual practice. Planting, weeding, watering and caring for the garden provide time to reflect on God's love and mercy.

"It is very much like taking care of our mother," she shared.

"At Our Lady of Hope Convent in Beaver Falls, PA composting returns kitchen scraps to the soil, helping nourish gardens that produce fresh food," says Sr. Mary Catherine Ryzewicz. In another part of the convent, an area of the inner courtyard that had been covered with a tarp was transformed into green space with forsythia, miniature lilacs and sod.

Welcoming Our Wild Neighbors

Caring for creation also means *making room* for the creatures who *share our world*.

Sisters across North America are feeding birds and squirrels, providing fresh water during hot summer days and creating spaces where wildlife can flourish.

At Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Convent in Livonia, MI sisters have a special opportunity to witness the life cycle of the monarch butterfly. Sr. Nancy Marie Jamroz helps the community observe the butterflies through their transformation from chrysalis to their emergence as beautiful winged creatures. Sr. Mary Andrew Budinski described the experience as an opportunity to appreciate the mystery and beauty of creation.

In Spotswood, NJ Sr. Marie Teresa Soltys has also responded when wildlife is in distress, helping injured animals receive care and assisting swans in need, while other communities make an effort to protect and care for animals in their neighborhoods.

Caring for Creation in Haiti

The commitment to care for our common home *extends across borders*.

At *Felician Mission: Haiti* in Jacmel, Haiti Srs. Marilyn Marie Minter, Mary Inga Borko and Maria Julitta Kurek work diligently to reduce the use of Styrofoam and paper products. The mission property is maintained with the help of children and neighbors from the surrounding community.

The mission also operates using solar energy, demonstrating how renewable energy can support the sisters' ministry while reducing reliance on traditional energy sources.

Their efforts are a powerful reminder that environmental stewardship and community life can go hand in hand.

Reducing Waste—Including Unwanted Mail

Sometimes caring for creation means looking at something as *ordinary* as the mail we receive.

At Mother of Good Counsel in Chicago, IL Sr. Mary Dorothy Young has developed an organized effort to reduce unnecessary mailings sent to sisters who have died or are no longer able to receive communications.

Since arriving at the convent in 2024, Sr. Dorothy has created a database of more than 200 organizations, documenting contacts and requests to remove sisters' names from mailing lists. By helping organizations update their records, she is reducing the amount of unwanted mail that ultimately ends up in the recycling bin.

Her project offers an idea that other convents could easily adopt: paying attention not only to what we recycle, but also to how much unnecessary material enters our homes in the first place.

A Spiritual Practice

Perhaps the most important theme in the sisters' commitment to caring for creation is that it is ultimately *rooted in gratitude*.

Sisters described enjoying walks, gardens, sunsets, mountains, flowers, birds and open skies. In New Mexico, Sr. Rosemarie Goins spoke of the joy of seeing the Sandia Mountains, brilliant blue skies, sunrises and sunsets. In Livonia, MI sisters enjoy the expansive grounds surrounding their convent.

Sr. Felicity Marie Madigan of St. Felix Convent in Chicago, IL described ecological care through four simple words: reuse, recycle, reduce and refuse. She also emphasized ecological education—learning about environmental issues and sharing what we discover with others—as well as ecological spirituality: spending time outdoors, using our senses to experience nature and examining how our choices affect people and the earth.

This perspective reflects the spirit of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical on care for our common home, which calls us to recognize our interconnectedness and our responsibility to care for one another and the earth.

One Felician Family, One Common Home

Sr. Mary Melanie Jaworski in Syracuse, NY conserves water by not leaving the faucet running while brushing her teeth or washing dishes. Other sisters turn off lights and unplug electronics when they are not needed. Some combine errands, avoid unnecessary purchases, reduce food waste or choose products with less packaging. Others share clothing and household goods with those in need, care for wildlife or participate in environmental and justice initiatives.

Sr. MaryAnne Olekszyk in Mississauga, ON shared efforts led by a creation-care committee to reduce plastic wrap and packaging, reuse paper, compost food scraps, use reusable bags and keep fats out of water systems. The community also donates sturdy boxes to Canadian Food for Children (CFFC), a charity serving communities in need. At Jericho House in Wainfleet, ON Sr. Mary Jacqueline Keefe has incorporated *Laudato Si'* into the ministry's programming and offered a session for associates; Jericho House has also been recognized as a Blue Community for its commitment to protecting water.

The Felician commitment to caring for creation is expressed not only through large initiatives, but through the countless daily decisions made by sisters who recognize the earth as God's gift.

As Sr. Mary Sharon Iacobucci in Beaver Falls, PA reflected, "We all try our best to care for the planet as well as give praise and thanks to our Creator God for all the beauty and bounteous gifts!"

That *spirit of gratitude*—and the willingness to act upon it—is at the *heart of our shared call* to care for our common home.

FRANCIS AND THE NEXT GENERATIONS

How Felician Education Continues the Legacy of St. Francis

More than 800 years after St. Francis of Assisi walked the hills of Italy, his spirit continues to shape the hearts of young people across North America. While today's students may not wear sandals or preach to birds, they are discovering that the values Francis embraced—peace, compassion, simplicity, respect for creation, joyful service and care for those on the margins—are as relevant today as they were in the 13th century.

That is the enduring gift of a Felician education.

Inspired by Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska, who rooted the Felician Sisters' mission in the spirituality of St. Francis, every Felician-sponsored school seeks to educate the whole person—mind, body and spirit. Academic excellence is important, but equally essential is forming students who recognize the dignity of every person and are prepared to make a positive difference in the world.

Across our ministries, students are learning that Franciscan values are not simply lessons taught in religion class.

They are lived every day.

LEARNING THROUGH SERVICE

Whether collecting food for families in need, organizing clothing drives, visiting nursing homes, participating in environmental clean-up projects or raising funds for a Felician ministry, students discover that service is more than volunteering. It is an expression of love.

Like St. Francis, they learn to see Christ in every person they encounter.

These experiences help students understand that even small acts of kindness can transform lives. They also cultivate empathy, gratitude and a lifelong commitment to serving others.

CARING FOR OUR COMMON HOME

Long before environmental stewardship became a global conversation, St. Francis celebrated all creation as God's gift.

That same appreciation for creation is reflected throughout Felician schools today. Students participate in



recycling initiatives, school gardens, Earth Day projects, conservation efforts and outdoor learning experiences that encourage them to become responsible caretakers of the planet.

These activities reinforce that caring for the earth is not simply an environmental responsibility—it is a spiritual one.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF PEACE

St. Francis is remembered as a peacemaker. His example continues to inspire students to build welcoming communities where every individual is respected and valued.

In classrooms, on athletic fields and throughout school communities, students are encouraged to practice forgiveness, resolve conflicts with compassion, include those who may feel left out and celebrate the unique gifts each person brings.

These daily moments of kindness help create communities rooted in the Franciscan belief that peace begins with each of us.

FORMING LEADERS FOR TOMORROW

The Felician educational ministry spans every stage of learning.

At our elementary schools, children encounter the joy of faith, friendship and service through age-appropriate opportunities to care for others.

Our high schools challenge young women and men to become servant leaders, combining academic achievement with compassion, integrity and social responsibility.

At the university level, students prepare for careers while discerning how their gifts can serve the common good. Through academic programs, service-learning opportunities, mission trips, campus ministry and leadership experiences, they are encouraged to live lives of purpose grounded in Franciscan values.

LIVING THE FRANCISCAN STORY

Today's students face challenges that St. Francis could never have imagined—rapid technological change, social division, environmental concerns and an increasingly complex world.

Yet the answer offered by Francis remains remarkably simple.

Choose peace.
Care for creation.
Welcome everyone.
Serve those most in need.
Live with joy.

These timeless values continue to guide generations of Felician students as they become teachers, healthcare professionals, business leaders, scientists, artists, parents, religious sisters and community volunteers. Wherever life leads them, they carry with them the Franciscan spirit they first encountered in a Felician classroom.

The story of St. Francis is not confined to history books. It is written every day in classrooms, campuses, playgrounds, chapels and communities where young people choose compassion over indifference, generosity over self-interest and hope over fear.

In every generation, the Franciscan story continues—and through Felician education, the next chapter is already being written.



FELICIAN EDUCATION CAMPUSES

CHILD CARE

Enfield Montessori School
Enfield, CT

Felician Children's Center
Jackson, MI

Sister Celeste Child Development Centre
Tulita, NWT, Canada

St. Joseph Child Care Center
Pontiac, MI

St. Mary Child Care Center
Livonia, MI

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Montessori Center of Our Lady
Livonia, MI

St. Joseph Academy
Milwaukee, WI

K-12 EDUCATION

Enfield Montessori School & Chiaravalle Academy
Enfield, CT

Montessori Center of Our Lady
Livonia, MI

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart High School
Coraopolis, PA

St. Joseph Academy
Milwaukee, WI

HIGHER EDUCATION

Felician University
Rutherford, NJ

Madonna University
Livonia, MI

Villa Maria College
Buffalo, NY

Against All Odds



Edwina Dieudonné realized as a 10-year-old that it was going to be up to her to make something of her life. That's exactly what she did.

For many people around the world, finding their way in life comes relatively easily. The key starting point? Being born in the right place—a rich, stable, industrialized country, for example.

A place with a modern economy, high standard of living, low unemployment and a government based on laws that protect the rights of the individual. No, these conditions don't guarantee success—a person still has to make it happen—but they're a great place to start.

For Edwina, now 26, the successful life she enjoys was extremely hard won. She did it through force of will, a helping hand from *Felician Mission: Haiti* and, as always with these things, a large dose of luck.

Today she is a supervisor at Unitransfer, a bank specializing in money transfers among the Haitian diaspora. She lives with and supports her mother and sister, both of whom are currently unemployed but looking for work.

Edwina's story is the stuff of Hollywood, but it happened in real life in the city of Jacmel, in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

A difficult start

"I was born in 2000 as the youngest of five children—I have three sisters and a brother," says Edwina. **"But my father left us just before I was born. I didn't see him again until I was 10."**

Life was hard for Edwina and her family. She remembers going to school many times without food or school supplies.

In 2010, two things happened that would change Edwina's life forever—one very bad and one very good.

The first was the catastrophic earthquake centered in southern Haiti (near her city of Jacmel) that hit on January 12 and ended up killing at least 150,000 people. In very real ways, Haiti is still recovering from that tragic event.

But out of that tragedy came something that proved to be a blessing for Edwina. *Felician Mission: Haiti* came into being and would eventually be headquartered in Jacmel.

Established to help bring relief to the devastated country, the mission's initial goal was to help people stay alive by providing food and water.

Edwina remembers meeting the sisters when she was not much more than 10. She and her friends would go to the mission gate looking for food.

"The sisters were always very generous," she says. **"But they didn't speak Creole and we didn't speak English. We would say 'Mwen grangou (pronounced "mwen gron goo")' which means 'I am hungry.'"**

A light goes on

"I was quite young—probably around 11—when I started to think about what I wanted from life and what I didn't want," Edwina says.

"My mother was very important to me in that way. She always said that education was the key. Even as a young girl, I believed in that and wanted to learn, grow and provide opportunities for my family."

"I also saw what happened to one of my sisters," says Edwina. **"She got pregnant early, then the father of the child left her. My mother had to help raise that child. I didn't want that to happen to me."**

"They gave me belief"

Along the way, Edwina stayed in touch with the sisters at the mission and grew close to each of them, especially Sr. Marilyn. They helped her and her family by donating shoes, clothes and food and helped to pay for her schooling.



She learned to sew at the mission's sewing school that still operates today. **"I made school uniforms for the other children,"** she says.

"I can't explain in an hour or even a day what the sisters and their assistants have done for me and my family. They supported my mom when she was sick and my father too."

"Through all of those hard times, the sisters always encouraged me to stay focused on my future," says Edwina. **"They taught me discipline, perseverance and compassion. And they helped me learn English!"**

Pushing ahead with her education

Determined to make something of herself and her family, Edwina continued to excel in her studies. After graduating from high school, she enrolled at the University of Notre Dame of Haiti.

Then came her big break. The sisters helped guide her through the process of transferring to Madonna University's remote bachelor's degree program through the Haitian Education Leadership Program (H.E.L.P.). The experience was challenging and exciting for Edwina and required every ounce of her resourcefulness. All the courses were taught in English and although she had gained some proficiency in it, the classes were difficult.

Maddeningly faulty internet connections

"The Zoom connection was my lifeline to Madonna, but the internet is bad in Haiti," says Edwina. **"For important classes or tests, sometimes I would come to the mission, but the connection there isn't good either!"**



The worst moment for Edwina came during an important exam in her senior year. **"In the middle of the exam, I totally lost the connection and couldn't get back online,"** she remembers. **"They [at Madonna] wouldn't have known what happened. For all I knew, they thought I couldn't do the exam and had quit. I was so worried. I didn't know what to do."**

With Sr. Marilyn's help, Edwina was able to email her professor to explain the internet outage. Everything worked out. She retook the exam, passed the class and graduated in 2025 with a bachelor's degree in business administration.

"Part of my dream was taken away"

Remote graduates at Madonna often get to travel to Livonia, MI to take part in the graduation ceremony. Edwina had never been to the U.S. and had been looking forward to her graduation from day one.

It didn't happen. Because of the Trump administration's policies targeting Haitians and others, Edwina's travel visa request was denied.

"I should've been there," she says. **"I got my education at Madonna, I fulfilled all of my requirements and I should've been there. I really wanted that."**

"After all the challenges I overcame here, President Trump said no. I cried so much. I asked the sisters what happened, but there was nothing we could do. I feel like I got my diploma, but I lost something, too."

"One day, I will go to my university in the U.S. Maybe I can do the ceremony then."

The college degree pays off

Edwina endured a lot of job interviews that came to nothing, but last year she finally landed an entry-level position as a cashier at Unitransfer bank.

"It's very hard to find a job here, especially for young people," she says. "Employers kept saying 'you need four years of experience or five years or ten years.' I applied to many jobs and got so many rejections."

"Finally I got the job at Unitransfer. Then, when a supervisor job opened up earlier this year, I went for it. A lot of people said I was too young for it, but they chose me. I'm the youngest supervisor there."

"I've been blessed in so many ways. I got a good education, I've always loved management and I'm good with numbers. I tell myself: This job is mine. This is what I can do. I earned it."

The position allows her to help her mom and sister and they are slowly making repairs to their house.

Edwina doesn't get to visit Sr. Marilyn and the others as much now that she's working full time, but she gets over to the mission when she can.

"I feel such gratitude for them, for what they did for me and my family all those years," she says. **"They have helped so many others as well. Sr. Marilyn has been my mentor, my advisor and my constant source of encouragement. She's my bestie!"**

"I really want to thank the Felician Sisters and everyone who supports their mission," says Edwina. **"Your generosity changes lives. I know this because mine is one of those lives. My story is proof that when someone believes in a child, supports them and invests in their education, it helps transform that child's entire future and their family's future as well."**

Learn more about the work of *Felician Mission: Haiti* by visiting **Felician.org/Haiti**.

A Legacy of *Love* and *Compassion* for Others

Mary Lacalle spent much of her childhood in a Felician orphanage. We caught up with her recently in Sacramento, California, where she has lived for 50+ years.

Back in the day—this would've been in the 1940s, 50s and 60s—the Felician Sisters ran an orphanage in downtown Detroit called the Guardian Angel Home.

The children who lived at the orphanage spent their summers at the Guardian Angel Summer Camp—now the Maryville Retreat Center—in the peaceful Michigan countryside.

One of those children was Mary Lacalle (née Harrigan), who at age 75 is a practicing minister in a Unity church in the Sacramento area.

We spoke with Mary and asked her about her time at the orphanage and summer camp. She remains profoundly grateful for the love, support and life skills the sisters provided her. She was at Guardian Angel Home in Detroit from age 8 to 18, apart from two relatively brief stays with foster families.

Mary was completely open and happy to talk about those early days, difficult though they were for her at times. "The sisters were always, always there for me," she says. "I owe them everything."

Saved from a tough situation

Mary remembers it vividly: "In 1959, a couple of Detroit female police officers came to our house and removed the four of us children, ages 3 to 12, from our home, she says. "They brought us to the downtown Detention Center, where we stayed for approximately one month.

"While at the Detention Center, my sister Patty (age 12) and I (age 8) were visited by a social worker, who told us, 'You're going to the Guardian Angel Home.' We didn't know what that was. She assured us it was a lovely place, with nuns who would care for us. It was still scary when we got there."

"As I began 8th grade, my oldest sister took me into her home."

"That was back when bakery trucks would make home deliveries," she remembers. "One day, I saw the truck outside the house and ran away from home by crawling into the back when the driver was making a delivery."

"When he parked the truck back at his house at the end of the workday, his wife found me and made me call my sister and tell her I had run away."

"Upset with me for running away (rightfully so), my sister sent me to live with an aunt I didn't know. I grew to love Aunt Fran, and I spent all of 9th grade with her, until she lost her only son to drowning that summer. She contacted a social worker, who picked me up that afternoon."

"I was dropped off at a foster home where three other foster children were also living. Fortunately, it didn't work out, which was okay with me, because I was back at the orphanage, with the nuns. The nuns instilled a good work ethic in us, which I appreciate, to this day."

Movie nights, holy cards and acting in Polish plays

Mary remembers the nuns being strict, but never mean and she appreciates the discipline and the needed structure they provided.

"They had to be strict, otherwise, with all those children in their care, it would've been chaos," she says. "I think I understood that even then."

"But we had a lot of fun, too."

"In the opposite wing from us in the Guardian Angel Home were the aspirants who were training to be nuns," Mary remembers. "It was such a treat when we went over there to watch movies."



Mary at the Guardian Angel Home on St. Aubin with Sr. Angelica on the day of her First Holy Communion.



Mary (Left) attending a dance at Angelus Hall.



Mary standing with a group of girls at Angelus Hall, admiring the Nativity scene in the chapel.



Mary Lacalle holding her niece Julie on the summer camp grounds, 1961.



Guardian Angel Summer Camp's Mess Hall and Chapel, 1963.



Mary Lacalle (left) and Sr. Noel Marie Gabriel (right) ready for their boat ride on Lake Elliott.



Lake Elliott, 1963, where Mary learned to swim in the 1960s.

"I especially loved trading Holy Cards," she says. "They were like baseball cards, but with an image of Jesus, Mary or a saint on the front and usually a Bible verse on the back, in Polish. It was fun collecting them. I even traded with the sisters a few times! To this day, whenever I attend a Catholic funeral service, I eagerly embrace the Holy Card and remember how valuable and sacred I found them to be, growing up."

"At St. Albertus School (the oldest Polish parish in Detroit) we would put on plays, most of them in Polish, since many of the sisters had come from Poland, as well as most of the congregation. One of my favorite Christmas songs, to this day, is: *Dzisiaj w Betlejem!*"

Summer camp!

St. Albertus School was across the street from the Home and when school let out for the summer, Mary and the other children would spend several weeks 60 miles to the northwest at the Guardian Angel Summer Camp. Mary went every summer from 1960 to 1963, at the end of her 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grades.

She returned to the camp, now Maryville Retreat Center, for the first time in decades last year and the cabin where she stayed with the other children her age is still there. "The grounds are just as beautiful as I remember them," she said. "Sr. Noel and the groundskeeper took me out on Lake Elliott, in their small boat (something I've always wanted to do)!"

"As with the Home, there was a lot of structure at camp," Mary says. "We had plenty of free time, as well. For our chores, we'd shuck corn, crack nuts, sweep out the bunk bed area, help with the dishes, etc."

"One thing I remember well is the swim lessons down at the lake," she says. "When I first got there at 9 years old, I'd never been to a pool and couldn't swim. For the first few weeks, I was immensely afraid of the water!"

"At the end of the summer, our wonderful swim instructor would hand out cards and medals at a special ceremony: Beginner Swimmer, Advanced Swimmer, etc. By my third summer there, I got one for being the first to swim a mile. I was proud of myself for overcoming my fear of the water."

"We'd play outside games, hike around the lake, do a lot of drawing and other kinds of art," she remembers. "It meant so much to me whenever the sisters displayed my drawings. That made me so proud."

"My time there was good for the soul."

Mary learned about loving others, about compassion and what was important in life from the sisters who ran the Home.

"I was very religious as a child," she says. "I would put a towel around my head and pretend to be a nun with the younger children."

"There were some special moments that ended up being big lessons for me," says Mary. One of those was the Christmas parties sponsored by the Knights of Columbus. We would board a bus and show up, ready to party!"

"We would get cookies and other goodies; listen to Christmas songs; receive a gift from Santa, himself," she says. "It was never foo-foo stuff. Boots or gloves or a coat. Practical things. Necessary things.

Paying it forward through her ministry

"So much of what I learned and so much of who I am, comes from my time with the Felician Sisters," Mary says.

"Their example eventually led me to teaching elementary school and caring deeply about the well-being of children."

"And they certainly influenced my decision to become a Unity minister."

"For years, first as a teacher and now as a minister, I have raised money for the Sacramento Children's Home and other organizations that are important causes for me."

"The Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services continues their traditional Thanksgiving Day Run to Feed the Hungry. I walk with deep gratitude for the ability to serve others because others had served me."

"I always get teary when I'm in the 10K race," says Mary. "I often think of the sisters in those moments and feel very grateful for all they had done for me, in order for me to have a full, healthy life. I thank them through my services, today. Because of them, I will never not do charitable work."

"They gave me a purposeful life in God—worth living. God bless them!"



An Exceptional Leader of an Exceptional School

After **55 YEARS** of educating and nurturing hundreds of children, Sr. Rose Marie Smiglewski still has work to do.

When asked if she had plans to retire anytime soon from her position as executive director of the Felician School for Exceptional Children (FSEC) in Lodi, NJ, Sr. Rose Marie Smiglewski, 89, was noncommittal yet entirely Felician with her response.

"I'm not sure yet, because for me, it's not really the position I'll be leaving, it's the service," she says. "That has been my primary role: serving the needs of our students. It's what I have loved and will miss the most."

Indeed, Sr. Rose Marie has been serving in various capacities at the special needs school since its founding in 1971.

God had OTHER PLANS for her

Born in Camden, on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River from Philadelphia, Sr. Rose Marie was the third of six children born into a loving, devout Catholic family of Russian and German ancestry.

Sr. Rose Marie attended St. Joseph Grammar School in Camden, which was staffed by the Felician Sisters.

As she reached high school age, Sr. Rose Marie had already decided on the Felician path and entered the order in 1953. Her plan was to go into the field of nursing as did her mom, but God and the Felician leadership had other plans.

She received her bachelor's degree in education from Seton Hall University in South Orange, NJ followed by a master's degree in special education from Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee in 1965.

After teaching in schools in New Jersey and Maryland and taking courses in accounting, she began teaching and acting as financial director at the newly opened FSEC alongside founders Sr. Mary Ramona Borkowski and her sibling Sr. Mary Loretta Borkowski.

"Sister Mona, as she was fondly called, was a pioneer in the field of special education and was well known in the Archdiocese of Newark as a school principal for differently abled students," says Sr. Rose Marie. "She wrote a curriculum to address the transition of students at 14 years of age to enter a job skills program."

"We see MIRACLES every day"

More than a half-century later, the school continues to thrive. Enrollment remains steady at just under 100 students from pre-K to age 21.

"We have a very diverse student body," says Sr. Rose Marie. "Many have multiple challenges such as autism, Down syndrome, learning disabilities and behavioral issues."

"These students and their families have had to deal with a lot," she says.

"Our staff give quality time to the students and focus on their abilities, not their disabilities. We identify what they can do–versus what they cannot do–and we build on that."

"With a lot of love, care, education and skills training, the students exhibit amazing progress," says Sr. Rose Marie. "They're able to reach their potential, whatever that is for them. Some go on to live independently and others do well in group homes. Even the ones who live with their parents often do much more than anyone thought possible."



As if the school wasn't ENOUGH WORK

"Fifteen years ago, parents of our graduates pleaded for us to open an adult program for their sons and daughters, as this was a great need," says Sr. Rose Marie. "Following Mother Angela's directive to serve where you are needed, we opened a 21 and over program under the direction of Dana Regan."

"Two years ago, due to limited space at the Boys and Girls Club, we started a second adult program at the former Immaculate Conception High School on the Felician Sisters campus. The program was named IMPACT and placed under the direction of Danielle Savastano. Soon after, the two programs were consolidated and at this point, we serve 109 clients with a waiting list."

"Yes, it's a lot of work for us and sometimes I become frazzled from sleepless nights," says Sr. Rose Marie. "But I love the ministry and I wouldn't have it any other way."

"Though I will miss this work very much," she says, "I know I will leave the school and the adult program in extremely capable hands. We are here for each other in good times and bad. We are family."

Infused with the FRANCISCAN SPIRIT

When asked what makes this ministry distinctly Franciscan, Sr. Rose Marie zeroed in on the staff doing so much more than educating, as vital as that is. If the children need food, they get an extra meal at school. If they need clothing, they receive that, too.

"We take the Franciscan approach of helping others achieve," she says. "We prepare our students to work, to live, to be as independent as possible. As St. Francis did, we assist these students and adults, meeting them at their level. As a result, they live happier, more fulfilling lives."

Role reversal: Students BECOME TEACHERS as well

Felician students have taught Sr. Rose Marie many profound things over the decades. One of the most important: when dealing with another human being, always look past the label to the real person.

"The reality is often quite different," says Sr. Rose Marie. "Sometimes it's a matter of parents doing everything for a son or daughter so they never learn how to make their bed, prepare their own lunch, take care of their own needs, the list goes on."

"I'm sympathetic to all that," she says. "I know how hard it is to be a teacher or parent of a differently abled child. But it's so important to look past the labels and limitations placed on these students. Quite often they're capable of a lot more and it's our job to bring that out and celebrate it."

"We believe in raising the bar and when parents witness the progress their child has made, they often cry and we cry along with them."

It's about SO MUCH MORE than skill building

Sr. Rose Marie knows how important it is for the students and clients in the adult program to feel loved and accepted. That's the basis and framework that makes everything else possible.

"Many of these young people don't get a lot of joy in their lives," she says. "It's a hard road for them. Some rarely get the chance to feel a sense of accomplishment—and the joy and pride that come along with that."

"Here, they get the chance to strive for and accomplish things. The experience of that and the feeling of it, is what we want our students and adults to take with them when they leave us each day and when they graduate."



IF ST. FRANCIS CAME for a school walk-through...

As a thought experiment, we asked Sr. Rose Marie what St. Francis would be struck by if she gave him a tour of the FSEC.

"St. Francis would feel the peaceful environment," she says without hesitating. "He'd see the students treated with respect. And he would see us striving to be with them and see them as children of God."

NO CONCERNS whatsoever about the future

"The Felician School for Exceptional Children is a place where love abides, where human hearts are present and I pray that will never change," says Sr. Rose Marie. "Visitors often comment on the peace and love that permeates the school when they visit."

"For many years twelve Felician Sisters ministered at the school," says Sr. Rose Marie. "Now there are two—Sr. Mary David Malczynski and me."

When asked if she is afraid about the future of the school and program, Sr. Rose Marie quickly responded, "I'm not worried one bit about either program. We have a great team in place to carry on this important ministry. They are more than ready to continue the legacy left by †Sr. Mary Ramona Borkowski and †Sr. Mary Loretta Borkowski."

"God has been good to me," she says. "He's been my hope and my strength. I couldn't have done any of this without Him. For that, I humbly say: FOR ALL THAT WAS, FOR ALL THAT IS and FOR ALL THAT WILL BE, DEO GRATIAS!"



Felician Village:

A Legacy of *Compassion*, A Future of *Innovation*

Earlier this year, Felician Village resident Dick planted tomato seeds in his room, carefully nurturing them as they began to grow. Before he could see the full fruit of his labor, Dick passed away in June. His tomato plants, however, kept growing. They were replanted in raised garden beds on the patio, where Dick's friend and fellow resident, Terry, made sure they got plenty of water, pruning and, most importantly, a little extra love.



"I wanted to make sure they were taken care of, because Dick was my best friend," Terry shared.

As the plants grew and began producing tomatoes, they became more than just a garden. They became a living reminder of Dick.

For nearly 140 years, Felician Village has been a beacon of compassionate care in Manitowoc, WI. Its story began in 1887, when three Felician Sisters traveled from Detroit to serve those who were poor, orphaned and elderly. Today, that same spirit continues as Felician Village carries forward the healing ministry of Jesus, providing exceptional care while honoring the dignity of every person.

Guided by the Felician values of respect for human dignity, compassion, transformation, solidarity with those in need and justice and peace, Felician Village has grown into Manitowoc County's only full-life plan senior living community.



"For residents and their families, that commitment means having choices and support as needs progress or change," says Megan Bruckschen, chief marketing & strategy officer.

Residents benefit from a continuum of care that includes independent living, assisted living, skilled nursing, rehabilitation, transportation and the innovative Felician Village at Home program, which helps older adults remain safely and independently in their own homes.

Innovation is also an important part of how Felician Village lives its mission.

A few months ago, Glen joined Felician Village at Home after his vision had progressively worsened, leaving him legally blind and without local family nearby to assist him. Through the membership program, Glen was matched with a volunteer who provides light housekeeping and organization assistance while also offering something equally important: companionship and social connection. Glen has also begun using Felician Village at Home's transportation service, Felician Village on the Go, to attend appointments and participate in community events. For Glen, these services are about more than convenience. They help him maintain something he deeply values: his independence.

Felician Village has also become a leader in dementia care, earning Dementia Care Specific Certification through LeadingAge Wisconsin.

At the heart of Felician Village is its dedicated team of employees and volunteers. Since the transition of the last three Felician Sisters serving on campus in 2025, staff have embraced the responsibility of carrying the sisters' mission forward.

"During times of doubt, †Sr. Mary Michaeleen Pardowsky, one of the last sisters to serve on campus, would quietly listen and ask if I had prayed for direction and done my best. Then she would say, 'My dear friend, now let it go. God has already provided the answer and knows the outcome. It's up to you to faithfully wait on His provision.' Her words brought such relief and have stayed with me ever since," said Renee Thompson, donor development manager.



"The best part of Felician Village is the wonderful caregivers, praying in the Blessed Angela Chapel with my wife and all the fun activities." said Joe, a resident at Felician Village.

Rooted in the enduring mission of the Felician Sisters, Felician Village continues to blend faith, innovation and compassionate care—creating a future where every person is welcomed with dignity, every life is valued and the Felician spirit can flourish for generations to come.

Sometimes, a legacy is something as simple as what we plant, nurture and leave behind for others to carry forward.

An Extraordinary Life, A Living Legacy



In the spring issue of *Felician* magazine, I wrote of my hope to promote the book "An Ordinary Life Lived in an Extraordinary Way", written by Reverend Jan D. Szczurek. The book offers a reflection on Mother Angela's letters to the sisters. In this issue, I would like to begin with Father Szczurek's reflections on Chapters 1, "Love of God," and 2, "Love of Neighbor." In addition to these chapters, I would like to incorporate my thoughts on the 800th anniversary of the death of our beloved St. Francis of Assisi.

How many can remember where they were when they heard the news on November 22, 1963, that President John F. Kennedy had been shot in Dallas, Texas? How many can remember January 28, 1986 and the explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger? How many can remember September 11, 2001 and the Twin Towers coming down?

These were men and women we never met and yet we felt the pain of their loss. Eight hundred years ago, the world lost St. Francis to Sister Death. None of us knew of this event. We didn't see it on the internet or the evening news because this medium did not exist. But Francis did exist and for 800 years Franciscans have gathered to share the story through the celebration of Transitus.

We remember St. Francis of Assisi and Blessed Mary Angela and the lasting influence their lives and teachings continue to have on us and on those we serve, including our lay partners in ministry. We continue to *"Widen the Tent"* each time we put their values and principles into practice in our lives and ministries.

Mother Angela was a faithful daughter of St. Francis when she wrote about the love of God and the desire to follow the Gospel teaching: **"the world must know that I love the Father and do as the Father commanded me" (Jn 14:31).** Father Szczurek writes: **"the truth about God's love for us and our love for God is the most valuable of truths proclaimed by the Church"[1]. To this very day, Felician followers are reminded of Mother's call: "To love is to give."** To this end, we must continue to be a witness to this call.

In Chapter 2, Father Szczurek's reflection on Mother's letter (SW 1, 106) reminds her sisters that **"the love of neighbor is inseparably connected with the commandment of love of God" [2].**

In St. John's letter, he teaches that ***"whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 Jn 4:21).***

In this teaching, we are reminded of St. Francis and his embrace of the people affected by leprosy and the profound transformation that caused him to see Christ in a person with leprosy. For Mother Angela, she embraced the children and those most in need. She set up centers in the countryside for her sisters to empower the people. **"Many of the people lived in abject misery with no means for education... The activities at these Centers were like a balsam for human wounds" [3].**

The world of St. Francis and Mother Angela is no different from the world we currently live in. You and I are alive today in 2026. Francis and Mother created communities that were very new for that time. They were bold in their desire to follow the Gospel teachings: love God and love your neighbor; carry your Cross daily; widen your tent to be open to all people; and finally, serve where you are needed. We, the daughters of St. Francis and Mother Angela and our lay partners in ministry, ***are called to live this legacy today.***

Reverend Jan D. Szczurek, An Ordinary Life Lived in an Extraordinary Way, p. 3, Szczurek, An Ordinary Life Lived in an Extraordinary Way, p. 7., Szczurek, An Ordinary Life Lived in an Extraordinary Way, p. 11.

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For those interested in Blessed Mary Angela devotional materials, please contact the regional coordinator nearest you. A free-will offering is appreciated.

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The Joy That Attracts

How Joy Continues to Draw Women to Religious Life

In a world often marked by uncertainty, division and anxiety, one might wonder what continues to attract women to religious life. The answer may be simpler than many expect: joy.

Not a fleeting happiness dependent on circumstances, but a deep and abiding joy rooted in meaning, community, faith and the certainty of God's love.

For more than 800 years, women have been drawn to the Franciscan way of life. From the time of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, the Franciscan charism has offered a path centered on simplicity, compassion, service and joyful trust in God's providence. Today, that same spirit continues to resonate with women seeking a life of meaning and impact.

JOY THAT CAN BE SEEN

When speaking with women religious, people often take note of the joy they witness. It is present in their laughter, their relationships, their ministry and their unwavering commitment to those in need.

This joy is not the absence of hardship. Religious women experience the same challenges, losses and uncertainties as everyone else. Yet their lives are grounded in something deeper—a relationship with Christ that provides strength, hope and peace.



Sr. Christina Marie Conroy believes the true joy of being a Felician Sister comes from this order of priorities:

Jesus as number one in my life. He is the center of my life. That is perfect joy.

Others—sisters, family, friends, neighbors and everyone we meet—as a close second. We love, serve and care for them by giving of ourselves fully. That is the gift of perfect joy.

Yourself as last—when we look beyond ourselves and our own self-importance to make way for others. With God's help and love, we live in perfect joy.

Pope Francis frequently reminded religious communities that authentic joy is one of the greatest forms of evangelization. People are naturally drawn to lives that radiate hope and purpose. Joy becomes a witness that God is alive and active in the world.

A GENERATION SEEKING MEANING

Many young adults today are searching for something more than career success or material achievement. They long for meaningful relationships, opportunities to make a difference and a sense of belonging.



Sr. Catherine Marie-Elizabeth Rotterman reflects, "My initial discernment with the Felician Sisters came from a place of desire. I wanted something more than what I was living. I needed to be a part of something bigger than myself. As I continue my discernment and grow in understanding what this call means, I can see how my life and my presence can become a gift for the Church and the world. That gift is multiplied by the presence of my sisters and their example and encouragement on my own journey."

CALLED TO SOMETHING MORE

Women who explore vocations often discover a community where they can grow spiritually, serve others and use their gifts in ways that transform lives. They find companions who share their values and a mission larger than themselves.

For the Felician Sisters, that mission includes "cooperating with Christ in the spiritual renewal of the world" while living the Gospel through our core values of respect for human dignity, compassion, transformation, solidarity with those in need and justice and peace.

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

One of the most attractive aspects of religious life remains community itself.

In an age where loneliness has become increasingly common, women religious model a different way of living—one built on prayer, shared mission, mutual support and authentic relationships.

Community life teaches patience, forgiveness, generosity and love. It offers a place where individuals are known, valued and encouraged to become the people God created them to be.



"Having experienced the deaths of three of our sisters within a very short period of time, I found myself grieving their passing while also feeling an overwhelming sense of joy and gratitude for having been blessed to be part of their lives. The memories of our shared initial formation, ministries, jubilee celbrations and simple—and sometimes challenging—day-to-day community experiences created an unbreakable bond that continues to keep joy in my heart and a smile on my face," says Sr. Mary Francesca Buczkowski.



Sr. Nancy Marie Jamroz reflects on the deeper gift that community offers: "The gift of community is more than being together. It is living with people who see us, giving us opportunities that call forth our best selves and providing a shared sense of belonging that gives meaning to our lives and hope to our world. It is an authentic way to follow in the footsteps of Christ, the heart of genuine community."

The joy that emerges from community is often what visitors notice first. It is visible in the way sisters care for one another, celebrate milestones and work together in ministry.

JOY IN SERVICE

The Felician Sisters have always found joy in serving others.

Whether educating children, caring for the sick, accompanying those experiencing poverty, advocating for justice, welcoming retreatants or preserving the rich history of the congregation, the sisters' ministries reflect the Franciscan belief that every person is created in the image of God.

Service brings purpose. Purpose brings fulfillment. Fulfillment nurtures joy.



"The purpose of religious life is to draw closer to God—to come to know, love and serve Him more deeply. That love is manifested in the way we love, serve and treat everyone we encounter, whatever the circumstances. When our lives are rooted in God and centered on love, there will always be a purpose for religious life," says Sr. Grace Marie Spera.

Young women who spend time with religious communities often discover that serving others is not a sacrifice of happiness but a pathway to it.

THE INVITATION REMAINS

As the Church marks the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis, the invitation that inspired St. Francis continues to echo through the centuries: follow Christ, serve others and live the Gospel with joy.

Religious life may look different today than it did generations ago, but its essence remains unchanged. Women continue to respond because they encounter something authentic—**a life centered on God, enriched by community and filled with purpose.**

And perhaps that is why joy continues to attract.

In a world searching for hope, joyful witnesses still shine brightly, inviting others to discover the abundant life that God desires for all.



COULD GOD BE STIRRING SOMETHING IN YOUR HEART?

If you feel drawn to explore life as a Felician Sister, Sr. Felicity Marie Madigan, vocation outreach director and Sr. Judith Marie Blizzard and Sr. Margaret Marie Padilla, vocation outreach ministers, would be happy to accompany you, answer your questions and support you as you discern where God may be calling you.

For additional information, visit Felician.org/Vocation.





One Heart, One Spirit:

Kenyan Tertians Reflect on Their Felician Journey

"We may come from different countries, but we are one family."

Tertianship is a time of renewal for a Felician Sister—a time of prayer, reflection and formation in which she deepens her understanding of witnessing the Gospel and renews her commitment to service. It is also a time to deepen her relationship with the charism, mission and vision of foundress Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska, rooted in the Franciscan tradition.

The 2026 tertianship experience was unique. Taking place across two continents, it brought together Sisters of Our Lady of Hope Province and the Vice-Province of Our Lady of Africa in an international experience of prayer, renewal, culture and community.

In April, five sisters from North America traveled to Embu, Kenya to share in the life, renewal program and culture of the Kenyan community. Then, in July, eleven Kenyan sisters traveled to Maryville Retreat Center in Holly, MI continuing the experience of renewal and sharing in the life of the North American community.

Together, the sisters discovered in new ways what it means to be one Felician family.

As Sr. Grace Marie Del Priore reflected, **"The experience of an intercultural sisterhood has changed what being a Felician Sister means; it has deepened and made more heartfelt what it means to be an international congregation."**

Sr. Maria Bakhita Waweru expressed a similar transformation: **"What once felt like two separate realities became one lived experience."**

Some interviews simply gather information. Others become conversations that leave a lasting impression. Sitting with the Kenyan Felician Sisters during their tertianship in North America was one of those moments. Their openness, joy and deep love for their vocation filled the room. Although each sister's story was unique, a common thread quickly emerged—one heart, one spirit and one mission rooted in the charism of Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska.

When asked to recall one moment in their Felician journey they would never forget, nearly every sister pointed to the beginning of her vocation. For some, it was the day they entered the congregation. Others remembered their novitiate or the day of perpetual vows.

For Sr. Mary Stella Gatiri Njogu, one memory stands above all others:

"When I joined all the sisters in prayer, the Spirit was there."

For Sr. Mary Angelina Mukui Mwania, the defining moment came with her profession of perpetual vows.

"It was the day I surrendered my life to God."

Their responses reflected not only cherished memories but also a profound awareness that religious life is an intentional response to God's call.

When asked what they wish people better understood about religious life today, the sisters spoke candidly about commitment and purpose.

"It is not an alternative life," shared Sr. Mary Aniceta Kagendo Kanake. "It is an intentional choice."

Others described religious life as "a life of richness," "a life of service to God," and a complete surrender of oneself in response to God's invitation.

United Across Cultures

One of the greatest gifts of tertianship has been living and learning alongside Felician Sisters from many countries.

Again and again, the sisters returned to the same message: diversity does not divide—it enriches.

"There is no division," one sister reflected. "We laugh together."

"We are different," another added, *"but we are one."*

Whether speaking about shared prayer, conversation or ministry, the sisters emphasized that every culture brings unique gifts while strengthening the congregation's shared identity.

"We all have one spirit and one heart for the same mission," said Sr. Mary Anisia Kaimuri David.

Living the Felician Values

When asked which Felician Core Value speaks most deeply to them, compassion emerged as the most common response.

The sisters described compassion as seeing the needs of others, walking beside those who suffer and extending God's mercy in a world that desperately needs it.

Sr. Mary Millicent Wawira Njeru offered a reflection that resonated with everyone in the room:

"Compassion and mercy are what human beings are hungry for because the world is so noisy."

Others found their deepest connection with respect for human dignity, transformation, solidarity with those in need and justice and peace, reminding us that the Felician mission is lived through many expressions of love and service.

Deepening Their Call

Throughout tertianship, the sisters said their understanding of vocation has grown through relationships with one another and a deeper appreciation of Blessed Mary Angela's vision.

Several spoke about discovering greater self-knowledge, learning from sisters of different ages and cultures and seeing the many ministries of the Felician Sisters throughout North America.

"We are one family from different countries," reflected Sr. Stella, "all going in the same direction with the same charism."

For Sr. Millicent, the experience has broadened both heart and perspective.

"We share different experiences of life, live Blessed Mary Angela's values and allow them to change our way of thinking. We are diverse and we all have different gifts."

Hope for the Future

Hope was another theme woven throughout every conversation.

The sisters spoke of hope found in future generations, new vocations, the enduring charism of Blessed Mary Angela and the unity of the congregation.

"The next generation of Felician Sisters gives me hope," one sister shared.

Another simply said:

"We are one family."

When asked what gifts Kenyan sisters bring to the North American province, their answers were filled with gratitude rather than self-focus.

They spoke about joy, hope, openness, cooperation in ministry, shared laughter, diversity and building relationships across cultures.

One response beautifully captured the spirit of the entire interview:

"We are like seeds of hope—planting a seed with every person we meet and serving where we are needed."

It is a reminder that the Felician mission continues to grow wherever sisters faithfully answer God's call.

As the conversation came to a close, the sisters gathered together and, without hesitation, sang a blessing, offering a beautiful moment of prayer and connection.

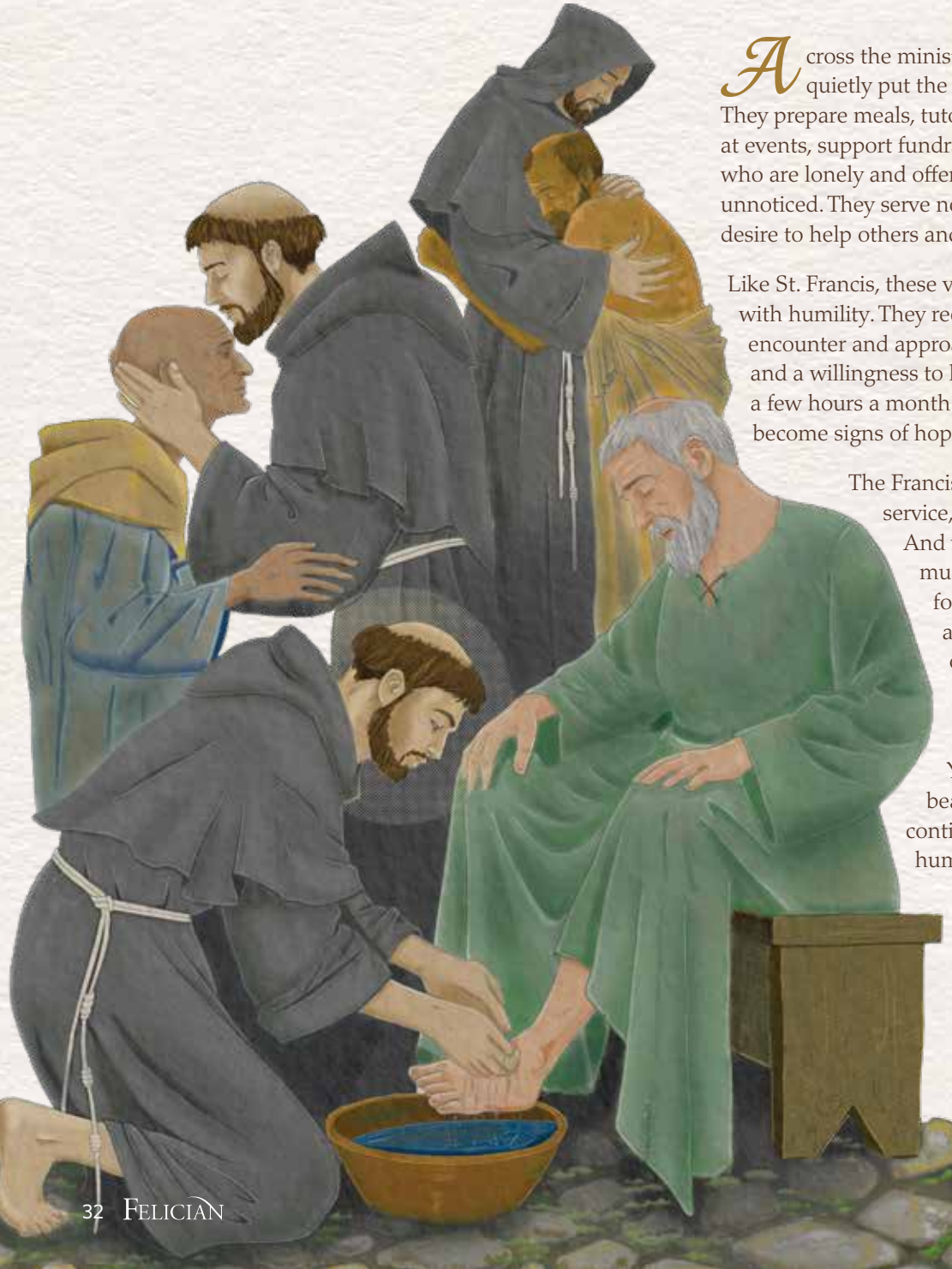
Their voices filled the room with gratitude, joy and faith.

It was a fitting conclusion to an afternoon that was never simply an interview. It was a glimpse into the living legacy of Blessed Mary Angela—a family of sisters from many cultures, united by one charism, one mission and one enduring hope.

The hope expressed by the Felician Tertians of 2026 is that this experience will be the beginning of many more opportunities for sisters from across the congregation to share their lives, cultures and experiences. In doing so, they will continue to strengthen the bonds of sisterhood and deepen the reality of being one family.

Serving Like Francis

Humility and Compassion Continue to Change Lives



Across the ministries of the Felician Sisters, volunteers quietly put the Franciscan spirit into action every day. They prepare meals, tutor children, welcome retreat guests, assist at events, support fundraising efforts, organize supplies, visit those who are lonely and offer countless acts of kindness that often go unnoticed. They serve not for recognition or reward, but from a desire to help others and respond to God's call to love their neighbor.

Like St. Francis, these volunteers understand that service begins with humility. They recognize the dignity of each person they encounter and approach their work with compassion, respect and a willingness to listen and be present. Whether serving for a few hours a month or dedicating years to a ministry, they become signs of hope in their communities.

The Franciscan tradition teaches that every act of service, no matter how small, can make a difference. And volunteers often discover that they receive as much as they give. Through relationships formed and stories shared, they come to appreciate more deeply our connection to one another and the importance of caring for our neighbors.

As the Felician Sisters celebrate the Jubilee Year of St. Francis, these volunteers offer a beautiful reminder that the spirit of St. Francis continues to live through those who serve. In their humility, compassion and willingness to help, they carry forward a legacy of peace, joy and love—**one small act of kindness at a time**.

Living the Franciscan *Spirit* – from Coast to Coast!

For many volunteers, serving others becomes more than an opportunity to give back—it becomes a way to build community, share their gifts and live out the values of St. Francis in everyday life. A few lay partners at St. Anne's Family Services, Enfield Montessori School and Chiaravalle Academy share their own stories of service, community and the joy they find in giving their time and talents to others.

St. Anne's Family Services
Los Angeles, CA

Jennifer Eldridge



"What began as a weekly call to action in the food pantry has evolved into a yearly hygiene drive that I personally lead for St. Anne's families. I see firsthand the importance of dedicated service and commitment to families throughout Los Angeles. I know how difficult it can be to keep a kitchen and bathroom fully stocked with everyday necessities. My hope is that these small gestures provide a little ease, comfort and dignity to families in need."

Veronica Ortega



"Serving others is a privilege because it allows me to give back to the community and to plant hope where once it was planted in me."

Debbie Pattillo



"Serving others has always been an important part of my life, inspired by my parents and my Catholic faith. After seeing how St. Anne's helped a schoolmate, I became involved and have had the privilege of volunteering as a board member of St. Anne's Family Services for more than 20 years. Volunteering gives me a sense of purpose and fulfillment, while allowing me to share my time, relationships and resources to support children and families."

Karen Vicente



"Serving my community has helped me discover my purpose beyond motherhood. Volunteering gives me the opportunity to support other parents, give back and bring hope to families. For me, serving others is about gratitude, resilience and a passion for helping my community."

Enfield Montessori School & Chiaravalle Academy
Enfield, CT

Erica Caginalp



"Growing and nurturing community is a core value that I try to put into everything I do. Volunteering with staff, parents and students alike makes our community more interconnected. With my skills as an art teacher and ceramic artist, I am able to volunteer in all parts of our school—from professional development with the staff and running community art projects during special events to working directly with the students. Art has been a life-long passion of mine and it is made deeper when shared with others."

Steven Wilcox



"I have been an Enfield Montessori School volunteer since 2010. Yes, I consider myself a professional volunteer, but I have plenty of help from other volunteer-pros who love the school's community environment as much as I do. I get to make new friends, see all the kids come back a little taller each time and get plenty of thanks. Yes, I will grill at the next event."

His advice to anyone considering volunteering?
"You won't regret it."

Kimberly Bergeron



"Being a part of the Enfield Montessori community is truly a privilege. One of my favorite traditions each year is returning to the school to host an event where I get to watch the children make their own apple pies and proudly take them home. There's something so special about sharing these moments with the children and their parents—seeing their excitement, creativity and joy makes this one of my favorite traditions each year. I'm so grateful to be part of such a wonderful community and to help create these special memories together."

Tending to Their Neighbors as St. Francis Would Have Done

Established in Detroit by Sr. Felicity Marie Madigan and Sr. Shelley Marie Jeffrey in 2018, Deo Gratias serves vulnerable, economically disadvantaged and socially marginalized people, mostly from the city's Regent Park neighborhood.

The no-cost services include a community garden, food pantry, Deo Gratias Café, English-language and cooking classes, wellness and exercise activities and tutoring for children.

Through the Felician Sisters of North America's Volunteers in Mission (VIM) program, volunteers share their time and talents in service to the Deo Gratias community. The five volunteers profiled here reflect the spirit of this service and the mutual enrichment that comes from giving of oneself.

Serving Where They are Needed—and *Benefiting* in Return

As the Prayer for Peace reminds us, "For it is in giving that we receive." In our conversations with the five volunteers profiled here, that theme came up repeatedly.

People come to volunteering for many different reasons—perhaps to try something new, meet people, share their time and talents or simply find a meaningful way to stay engaged. Following are highlights from these volunteers' experiences of giving and receiving at Deo Gratias.



Elizabeth Beckley (Top) and Caitlynn Brotzman (Bottom)

Elizabeth Beckley, 21
Scotch Plains, NJ

Q: St. Francis believed service was grounded in faithful presence. Does this resonate for you?

"Very much so—as a volunteer and as a human being. When I'm serving at the café, I always try to be someone the guests can depend on. To me, it's about showing up, being there and being a friend."

"I think some people who would like to volunteer here or anywhere really, hold back because they think they have to prepare for it in some way. Or be trained. Or somehow be equipped first, in order to do the work."

"The Lord is going to call you for this when *you are willing*. That's all you need. The only criteria is that you can share, give your time and effort and be present."

Q: What has been a memorable moment for you so far?

"I love walking through the pantry and talking to the guests one-on-one. We've shared a lot of laughter. People have some very funny stories."

Q: What is the most important service you provide?

"I think the steady, daily consistency is the most meaningful thing to our guests who come to the café."

"It's so important that they know they have a place to go each day—a calm, happy, positive-energy place—where they can get a meal."

Caitlynn Brotzman, 22
Cuba City, WI

Q: St. Francis believed service was grounded in faithful presence. Does this resonate for you?

"Oh yes. It's funny, back when I first thought about volunteering here, I didn't know what my real task would be."

"Once I was here, I realized that so much of it is about presence. Many of our guests don't get a lot of that in their daily lives."

"We don't make assumptions about their lives and we're not here to judge. We just want them to know that *they are loved and appreciated for being who they are*."

Q: What is the most important service you provide?

"Providing our guests a safe, stable, welcoming space."

"Yes, the meals are important, of course they are, but many guests are in a lot of mental pain, which can be harder to deal with than physical pain. In those cases, sometimes the best thing you can do is listen."

Q: Has there been a moment that really sticks out to you?

"Yes. There is a bubbly young woman who comes in a lot. This one day, she was very quiet. I could tell she was having a hard day."

"I went over and sat next to her and she told me about some of the challenges she was facing at home, including a family member with mental health issues."

"I was able to hold her when she started crying."

Chase Philpott, 28
Cedar Rapids, IA

Q: St. Francis believed service was grounded in faithful presence, not grand gestures. Does this resonate for you?

"Yes, faithful presence is very much how it is at Deo Gratias. The mission with its café, the food pantry, the garden—they're all part of the community here. It's a consistent presence in the lives of the guests. For many of them, coming here is part of their daily routine."

"The café itself is not flashy. Rather, it's a small, unassuming place where people can get a feeling that Christ is present. The guests aren't expecting or looking for anything grand."

Q: What is the most important service you provide?

"I try to contribute to creating a Christian environment. I try to behave in a way that is *joyful, obedient, self-giving and prayerful*."

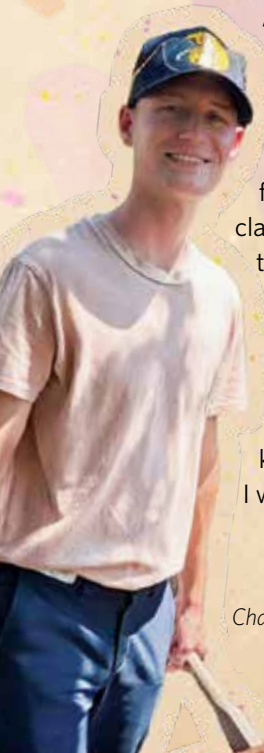
"In a way, it matters less what specific activity I'm doing. It's more about letting Christ's life-changing spirit guide the work I'm doing."

Q: What has been a takeaway from your volunteering at Deo Gratias?

"That I am where I'm supposed to be."

"Each day I wake up, pray and help people. I feel such simplicity and clarity of purpose when I am there. For me personally there is less anxiety, less worry, less noise."

"At the end of every day, when it's time for bed, I know I've done exactly what I was supposed to do that day."



Chase Philpott (Left)

Paula Milan, 21
North Bergen, NJ

Q: St. Francis believed service was grounded in faithful presence, not grand gestures. Does that resonate for you?

"Yes, that's it exactly. There's nothing grand about serving food and cleaning up afterwards. But helping out in that way makes a difference."

"For me, *it's not just helping the guests, but also the sisters*. I'm so glad to be able to do that for them. It's hard work."

Q: Has there been a memorable moment for you at Deo Gratias?

"Maybe a feeling more than a moment, yes. I used to work in a café near my apartment in New Jersey and I got pretty good with the coffee machine and the other tasks there."

"Here, though, learning how to use the coffee machine, serving the food and drinks, getting into that server zone, it's just so much more meaningful. It's very motivating."

Q: What is the most important service you provide?

"Kindness and encouragement. Obviously, it's a blessing for our guests that they receive hot meals here or a blanket or a cup of coffee. But if I'm not being kind, and I'm not doing it from the heart, it's going to mean less to them."

"I am not going to go through the motions here."

Gabriela (Briella) Alvarado, 25
Santa Clarita, CA

Q: St. Francis believed service was grounded in faithful presence. Does this resonate for you?

"Honestly I was worried when I first got here; I was nervous. I wanted to work hard to help our guests, but I wasn't always sure how to do that at first."

"But I quickly came to realize it's about being present, as St. Francis says. If you can do that, everything else takes care of itself."

Q: What's been the most memorable moment for you as a volunteer?

"The love and support I have felt from my fellow volunteers and from Julie Darocha, coordinator/manager and the sisters. They've become family to me."

"Both of my parents are unwell right now. While I was here, my father had his first round of chemo for cancer. Everyone has been praying for him and for my mom and me and that has been so helpful and appreciated."

Q: What's the most important service you are providing?

"Just being here for our guests and enjoying each other's company. I try to get them to smile every day. *I'm trying to create joy here*."

"I had a really hard childhood. There was a lot of pain and I see that pain in our guests sometimes. Seeing that and sensing that, really makes me want to be here for them."



Paula Milan (Left) and Gabriela Alvarado (Far Right)

For additional information, visit Felician.org/VIM.

Where Our *Values* Meet the World

With our partners and in all we do, we strive to uphold the core values that are hallmarks of our Felician identity:

Respect for Human Dignity

Every person bears the image of God and deserves to be treated with reverence and respect. We affirm the sacred worth of each individual by honoring their voice, protecting their rights and responding with love in all that we do.

How are we affirming the sacred worth of every person we encounter?

Compassion

Compassion begins with truly seeing—pausing long enough to recognize another's pain, dignity and story. Rooted in the Gospel and the Felician charism, we are called to accompany one another with tenderness and courage, *responding not out of obligation, but out of love.*

Where are we being called to see, accompany and respond with love?

Solidarity with Those in Need

Solidarity moves us beyond sympathy to *shared commitment*. It calls us to stand with those on the margins, to listen deeply and to walk together toward hope. In community, we discover that no one is meant to journey alone.

Who are we standing with—and how are we walking together toward hope?

Transformation

Transformation is both personal and communal—a continual invitation to become more fully who God calls us to be. Through prayer, service and relationship, hearts are changed, systems are renewed and hope takes deeper root.

How is God inviting us to be changed?

Justice and Peace

The pursuit of justice and peace challenges us to name injustice and respond with faithful action. Guided by Catholic social teaching, we work to heal what is broken and to build communities rooted in fairness, reconciliation and peace.

What injustices are we being asked to confront and how are we building peace through action?



These Values are More Than Words—They are a Way of Life.

Learn how the Felician Sisters of North America live these values every day by visiting **Felician.org**.

Explore our ministries, stories and ways to walk with us.

A Legacy of *Generosity* and *Hope*

More than 800 years ago, St. Francis of Assisi heard God's call to "repair my church." He responded not with wealth, influence or power, but with faith, humility and a willingness to serve. Francis understood that every gift comes from God and is meant to be shared. He embraced those on the margins, cared for creation and inspired others to live lives rooted in compassion and generosity.

Today, that same Franciscan spirit continues throughout our Felician Family—through the sisters, ministries, associates, staff, volunteers and donors.

Whether providing education to children, accompanying immigrants and refugees, supporting women and families, caring for our common home or offering spiritual nourishment through retreat and prayer, the sisters carry forward the mission entrusted to them by Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska—a mission deeply grounded in the values of St. Francis.

This work is not accomplished by the sisters alone.

Each of you who partners with us is keeping the Franciscan charism alive and vibrant through your work, prayers, volunteering, donations and service. You help the Felician Sisters ensure that those who are struggling find hope, those who are searching find guidance and those who are vulnerable experience the dignity and compassion they deserve.

Like St. Francis, we recognize that true wealth is measured not by what we keep, but by what we share.

Every gift—whether of time, talent or treasure—becomes an act of faith. It provides scholarships for students, food and shelter for those in need, spiritual support for those seeking God's presence and opportunities for future generations to encounter the healing and transformative ministry of the Felician Sisters.

Generosity is more than a charitable act; it is a way of living. It is a response to God's abundant blessings and an expression of our shared responsibility to care for one another.

The challenges facing our world today can seem overwhelming. Yet St. Francis teaches us that meaningful change often begins with simple acts of love and kindness. A prayer. A helping hand. *A gift that supports a mission larger than ourselves.*

Together, the Franciscan charism continues to flourish through the many people who make the Felician Sisters' ministry of presence, compassion and service possible in communities across North America and beyond.

Together, we are rebuilding hope, strengthening communities and sharing God's love—one person, one family and one ministry at a time.

The familiar prayer for peace begins, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

Thank you to all in our Felician family for being instruments of peace, hope and healing.

Help Carry the Franciscan Spirit Forward

If you haven't given before, consider being part of this living Franciscan legacy. Your support will help the Felician Sisters share God's love and compassion with those who need it most.

We invite you to support our work by using the QR code or enclosed envelope, or by visiting **Felician.org/WaysToGive**.



St. Francis' Messages Shared Through Music at Oratorio Debut

Julie Ferraro, National Catholic Reporter, Oct. 3, 2026, updated for Nov. 2026

As global observances of the Jubilee Year of St. Francis declared by Pope Leo XIV continue, the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi was celebrated in a very special way in October: with an original Franciscan oratorio.

When "Francis: An Oratorio in Nine Scenes" was performed Oct. 10 and 11 by the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and a 120-voice chorus, it brought together classically styled music and the words of St. Francis to share a message of hope that speaks to the challenges of the 21st century.

The commission for the oratorio was funded by multiple Franciscan congregations, including the Felician Sisters of North America, and provinces, generous donors and the Swan Foundation of Buffalo, NY.



"This is a wonderful way to promote St. Francis' message through music," Sr. Judith Marie Kubicki, provincial minister of the Felician Sisters of North America, told the *National Catholic Reporter*. Herself a musician, Kubicki was pleased by the enthusiasm among her community for supporting the oratorio.

Kubicki saw joining with numerous other communities to bring the oratorio to the stage a **"good investment of our resources,"** and a way to share the Franciscan message with a broader audience through a unique work of art.

Differing from an opera, an oratorio is a presentation of sacred texts set to music. The performance typically features soloists and chorus on stage in formal dress, without acting, costumes or full staging. "Francis," however, was performed with special lighting, minimalistic costumes and a narrating angel who connected aspects of the saint's story for the audience.



Richard Danielpour composed the 75-minute oratorio, bringing his love of music and its creation to this singular subject.

"The music chooses you," he said of what he clearly sees as his calling. **"It is so overwhelming an art form."**

Danielpour is a distinguished professor of the Herb Alpert School of Music at UCLA, and a Grammy-award winning composer, whose previous works include the opera "Margaret Garner," created in conjunction with Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison, and "The Passion of Yeshua," written in Hebrew and English as a dramatic meditation of Jesus' last day.

Much of the sound of the oratorio was inspired by Danielpour's 2021 visit to Assisi, Italy, where Francis, the founder of the Franciscans, was born. Danielpour recalls finding the hillside city **"unbelievably strong in its gentleness,"** which helped him create a musical score that reflects both the struggles and joys of a saint who was profoundly human.

Danielpour asked Franciscan Sr. Margaret Carney, OSF to write the libretto for the oratorio.



Carney's reaction included a healthy dose of humor. She saw development of the project as a **"very accidental coming together of events,"** originating in conversations with Danielpour about Pope Francis, to whom the oratorio is dedicated.

Carney is a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities and lives in Pittsburgh, PA. The first woman to receive a doctoral degree from the Franciscan University in Rome. Carney served as president of St. Bonaventure University's Franciscan Institute from 2004-2016.

"Richard was very insistent that I had the knowledge base to do it," Carney said about the project.

She relied upon the advice of a mutual friend, JoAnn Falletta, music director for the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, who served as conductor for the October performances.



"Richard realized that the only person who could write the libretto was Margaret," Falletta said. **"We were not going to allow this [anniversary] to happen and pass by without making something that people can look to as an example."**

Falletta continued, **"Francis is someone who emerges as a figure of hope. He is someone who eschewed the riches of the world and empowered women. He loved animals. He loved the earth. He was a pacifist.**

In the same way Danielpour saw Carney as the only person to write the libretto, he sees Falletta as the right person to present the oratorio on stage. **"She's such a pure artist,"** he said. **"I'm just very happy that she's brought this to life."**

Themes that dominate the oratorio are Francis' commitment to peace, solidarity with the poor, and protection of our planet and all creation, according to Carney.

Three soloists conveyed these themes, portraying St. Francis, St. Clare and the angel-narrator, which is a speaking role. Actress Claudia Christian linked the scenes together, grateful she wasn't required to sing, though coordinating her timing with the music was a huge part of the performance.



"This is a project that's filled with deep, deep love," Christian said. When she listened to a workshop performance of the oratorio in early June, she noted, **"I was gobsmacked with how beautiful it was."** Hearing Danielpour's music come to life, and seeing Carney's reaction, increased her enthusiasm.

"There's a lot of Franciscan genetics going into this libretto," Christian said of the deep knowledge Carney brought to the oratorio. **"This is a way to honor her gift to society and the Franciscan world."**

The performances will be recorded for release on the Naxos label, another aspect of the project that Carney finds important. **"I'll need to listen to it many times after the live performance to fully take in the message and the music,"** she said.

Carney said the recording will make the oratorio more widely available for those who could not be present for the Buffalo performances, and for those who seek to deepen their understanding of the message of both St. Francis and Pope Francis.

Treasures of the Franciscan Spirit: Celebrating 800 Years of St. Francis' Legacy



Near the end of his life, St. Francis of Assisi composed the "Canticle of the Creatures," a joyful prayer praising God through creation. The Canticle reflects the gratitude, humility and reverence for creation at the heart of his spirituality.

This same Franciscan spirit has guided the Felician Sisters for more than 150 years and continues to shape their mission today. The sisters' story is shared at the Felician Sisters of North America Heritage Center & Archives, which preserves photographs, letters, religious artifacts and personal belongings that reveal much about their journey. Their greatest value lies not in their age, but in what they reveal about a living legacy of faith and service.

Throughout the Heritage Center, visitors encounter reminders of the Felician Franciscan spirit—a sister's well-worn prayer book, photographs documenting ministries serving children, immigrants, older adults and people experiencing poverty, and handwritten letters that tell stories of faith, compassion and service.

These treasures reflect the legacy of Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska, who founded the Felician Sisters in 1855. Inspired by the Franciscan tradition, she called the sisters to serve where needed, trusting in God's providence and honoring the dignity of every person.

This anniversary also invites us to consider what Francis might treasure today: a community gathered in prayer, a volunteer serving a neighbor, a teacher encouraging a child, a caregiver offering comfort or a sister faithfully living her vocation. Though ordinary in appearance, these acts reveal God's presence in the world.

As visitors explore the Heritage Center, they discover more than historical artifacts—they encounter a living Franciscan legacy expressed through lives of faith and service.

Eight centuries after Francis composed the "Canticle of the Creatures," his call to recognize God's presence in creation and in one another continues to inspire. At the Heritage Center, that spirit lives on through the stories, artifacts and people who carry the Felician legacy forward.



Felician Sisters of North America

Heritage Center & Archives

Madonna University Welcome Center
36700 Schoolcraft Road • Livonia, MI 48150

FelicianHeritage.org
Facebook: @FelicianSistersHeritageCenterArchives
Instagram: @FelicianHeritageCenter

Bring Your Group to the Heritage Center

History comes alive when we experience it together!

The Heritage Center invites school groups, parish groups, organizations, families and community groups to discover the remarkable story of the Felician Sisters. Through exhibits, artifacts, photographs and stories, visitors can explore the people, places and ministries that have shaped our shared history and continue to inspire the Felician mission today.

Guided tours and special experiences can be arranged to meet the interests and needs of your group.

Gather your group and discover the people and stories behind the Felician Sisters. Come experience a story worth sharing—and take a piece of that history with you.

To learn more or schedule a visit, contact Chelsea Gholston, Marketing & Special Events Coordinator at (734) 793-5444 or Cgholston@feliciansisters.org.

Poland Pilgrimage of Heritage and Discovery!

May 11–21, 2028

Led by Sr. Mary Inga Borko, this pilgrimage blends prayer, culture, history and the rich heritage of the Felician Sisters and Blessed Mary Angela, the Felician Foundress. Experience the places, traditions and spirituality that shaped the Felician Sisters. Group meals provide opportunities for fellowship and community, while independent meals offer time for rest, personal reflection and exploration.

Kraków

Thursday, May 11
Welcome gathering and group dinner

Friday, May 12

Mass and prayer at St. Faustina's shrine and Divine Mercy Sanctuary

Group lunch

Tour Felician Motherhouse and Blessed Mary Angela's tomb

Dinner on your own

Saturday, May 13

Tour Kalwaria Zebrzydowska and Tyniec Abbey

Lunch and afternoon on your own

Group dinner

Sunday, May 14

Tour Zakopane, Morskie Oko and Chochołów

Group lunch

Afternoon and dinner on your own

Gdańsk/Sopot

Monday, May 15

Mass at Jasna Góra Monastery and visit the Black Madonna shrine

Transfer to Gdańsk/Sopot region

Group lunch and dinner on your own

Tuesday, May 16

Tour European Solidarity Centre

Lunch and afternoon on your own

Group dinner

Wednesday, May 17

Tour Malbork Castle/Teutonic Knights castle

Group lunch

Visit and tour Sopot Pier

Dinner on your own

Warsaw

Thursday, May 18

Mass at St. Felix of Cantalice Church

Felician Heritage Experience tour (Koscielna Street and Mostowa Street)

Group lunch

Tour the Church of the Holy Cross, Church of the Visitants (Church of the Protection of St. Joseph – Sisters of the Visitation), Church of the Transfiguration and Daniłowiczowska Street

Dinner on your own

Friday, May 19

Walking tour in Old Town Lublin
Tour State Museum at Majdanek

Group lunch

Afternoon and dinner on your own

Saturday, May 20

Visit Łazienki Park, the Royal Castle and Old Town Market Square

Optional: Warsaw Uprising Museum

Lunch and afternoon on your own

Group Farewell Dinner

Sunday, May 21

Depart to airport(s)

Tour costs: 11 days/10 nights

$4,668 ***per person***, double room
$6,249 ***per person***, single room

An initial deposit of **$1,000** ***per person*** is required to hold your reservation. A second payment of **$1,000** ***per person*** is due by **June 18, 2027**, with the remaining balance due by **December 31, 2027**. ***Airfare is not included in the pilgrimage cost.***

Cost includes:

- Accommodations in 5-star hotels
- Breakfast daily, 6 lunches, 4 dinners
- Air-conditioned motor coach with restroom for transportation throughout the tour
- Sightseeing tours with local guides
- English-speaking tour escort
- All entrance fees
- Hotel charges and taxes

Travel Arrangements
Pilgrims must arrive at Kraków-Balice Int. Airport (KRK) by 5 p.m. on Thursday, May 11, 2028. Transportation from Kraków Airport to the hotel is available for an additional fee. The pilgrimage concludes in Warsaw on Sunday, May 21, 2028. Pilgrims may arrange their departure from Warsaw by train, car or air (flights from Warsaw Chopin Airport (WAW) or Kraków-Balice International Airport (KRK)). Return transportation to Kraków Airport is not included.

Physical Requirements
This is an active pilgrimage. Pilgrims should be able to walk at least 4 miles per day, including uphill/downhill terrain and uneven surfaces, and be comfortable walking and standing for extended periods.

The final itinerary is subject to change before the tour begins.

Register at **Felician.org/Poland2028**. Deposit instructions will be sent once your registration is accepted.

For additional information, contact Julie Kresge at 724-480-5756 or kresge@feliciansisters.org.

Space is limited, and reservations will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.