

Franciscan Gleanings



Volume XX, No. 1

Newsletter of the Williamsville Franciscans

Spring 2006

Nurturing the Children

“I love these little people; and it is not a slight thing when they, who are so fresh from God, love us.” — Dickens

One of God’s greatest blessings to us has always been the children. They are so very easy to love, and no matter how much time we spend nurturing them, they always seem to nurture us back so much more.

Nurturing and caring for children has long been an important ministry of our sisters. Whether in Western New York, or literally around the world, we have always worked to create a comfort zone for children, a warm and caring environment where they feel welcomed and loved.

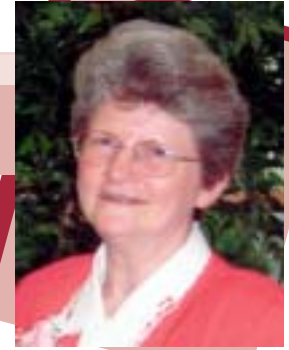
The spirit of children is a beautiful gift, and it is a spirit our sisters continue to foster. The result of our efforts is a legacy we leave to those who follow in our footsteps. Please join with us as we celebrate our relationships and ministries with

children. It is an unbelievable journey that spans countless generations, and involves not only the young, but also the young at heart.



Whether in a classroom or a center for refugees, earning community service hours or attending special events –children from all walks of life, and from all around the world, know they are welcomed and loved by the Sisters of St. Francis.

Forever Young



“
**Let the
 children
 come to me
 for of
 such is the
 kingdom
 of God.** ”

Mk. 10: 14



Dear Friends,

There is an old quote attributed to George Bernard Shaw that “youth is wasted on the young.” This was actually a shortened form of his belief that “youth is a wonderful thing”. His meaning was that were it not for youth, we would never know how to be “forever young” and it takes the wisdom of experience to appreciate youthfulness.

This issue of Gleanings is dedicated to “the young” – whether the chronologically young or the young at heart and soul. Most would agree that age is relative, and the articles that follow in this issue attest to that belief. Youth, and on-going life, continue to be the focus of our ministries as Franciscan women. We remain “Women at the Service of Life.”

Education of youth continues to be a major focus of our ministries. The article on the upcoming St. Nicholas/O’Hern High Schools reunion is a reminder that our educational endeavors are on-going; we never forget the young people whose lives we have helped to form.

Our efforts at the Center for Joy in Niagara Falls are testimony to the spirit of youth. It is interesting to note that the teenagers themselves requested a program where they could not only feel supported, but be contributing members of the community. We, as a congregation of women religious, are happy to be part of the funding necessary to make their

programs possible. Your contributions to us make those efforts a reality.

The young at heart can be found in the articles about Sr. Chris Steigerwald who, though in her mid years, has chosen to walk with us in that eternal search of “like-minded women journeying together toward the same goals.” Sisters Joan Hupp and Dolores Wittmann are remembered as the epitome of “always young educators”, willing to serve children at all ages and in all places, whether here in the USA or abroad in the missions.

Also featured in this issue are members of the Gentile family, the organizers of our Spaghetti Dinner. Who else but the young at heart could produce that much pasta and have so much fun doing it?!

And, we remember with fondness our good friend Luiz Kahl, a man of eternal youth, whose friendship and support of our ministries are cause for reflection and gratitude.

As Jesus tells us: “Let the children come to me for of such is the kingdom of God.”(Mk.10:14). For all of you who are our companions on this journey of service to youth, we thank you and we bless you.

Peace & goodness to you all,

Sr. Marian Rose Mansius, OSF

Sr. Marian Rose Mansius
 Regional Councilor

Center for Joy Programs Focus on Youth

Changing lives

*“one individual –
one household at a time”*

by Sr. Beth Niederpruem

The Center For Joy in Niagara Falls, NY recently received a \$25,000 grant from the New York State Power Authority, and a matching grant from the Sisters of St. Francis, to begin an extensive program called the **“Connections Network”**. These grants will provide start up money for six modules developed to enhance the community education programs that are already offered at the Center For Joy. These programs will refocus the staff’s energies on the educational needs of the surrounding neighborhood families through the use of a mentoring model of learning.

The grants have allowed the Center for Joy Executive Director, Sister Beth Niederpruem, LMSW, and the Board of Directors, to institute a community education model of “mentoring” as a means of changing lives “one person – one household at a time”. This helps to stabilize a much-needed information, referral and support service for this inner city neighborhood.

Some of the modules address the needs of the teenagers who have participated in previous activities at the Center. These teens requested programs that will help prepare them for the future through job readiness and college prep skills training. Two groups have formed to begin this process of education:



Sister Beth shows the children the \$25,000 check received from the New York State Power Authority

“1117” YOUTH GROUP

The “1117” teen program at the Center For Joy brings together teens, ages 13-18, each Thursday from 6-9 p.m. Designed and coordinated by Ms. Bennie Hamilton, Assistant Manager of the Center, this program was requested by teens who had actually worked for the summer day camp at the Center during the past year. Wanting to continue their association in a positive and productive manner, the teens meet to eat, socialize and, most importantly, use their creative energy for projects that will compliment their talents and develop their skills.

SUCCESS CONNECTION

The “Success Connection” is a module developed by Susan Pfeifer, PhD, Program Director, as an integral part of the Center’s refocusing process on the community education needs of the neighborhood. This program

emphasizes work force readiness for girls, ages 14-18, in conjunction with a professional women’s group, LINKS. Each young lady is paired with a specific woman. These pairs then participate in a 15-week workshop where topics are discussed, insights shared and camaraderie is built. The last six weeks are directed toward job readiness skills. The incentive for this program is for each of the girls to gain access to some type of work for the summer months.

Funded partly through a grant from the “Mercy Circle of Friends”, this pilot project has brought mentors and youth together to develop personal and professional life skills. It will also be used for a boys mentoring program that will begin this spring. Through the help of the NY Power Authority’s grant and personnel, mentors will lead boys, ages 14-18, through the same areas of learning as the girls.

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Finally Home

by Cynthia Munchauer, Development Director

When asked how she was called to religious life, Sister Christine Steigerwald explains, “You feel it more than anything else. It’s something I’ve known I’ve wanted to do since I was in 10th grade, and was in the ‘Aspirant Program’ for one year in Chicago, but I was pulled in many different directions.”

Sister Chris was indeed pulled in many directions. Her father was in the military and every three years or so she moved, having lived in Mississippi, Brazil, Germany, Virginia and many other locations around the world. She worked as a Registered Nurse, and earned Bachelors and Masters Degrees in German. While living in Virginia, she adopted two children – Jan Marie and Jerry, and once they were grown, she made the decision to finally enter religious life.

Now a 2nd Year Novice, Sister Chris always knew she was a Franciscan. “The Franciscan charism just resonates!” she recently explained. “Making the decision to join, was much like making a decision to marry. The attraction to God was there, and it was definitely the right fit. These women are so energetic and looking towards the future with

so much enthusiasm. I now feel like I am finally home!”

Sister Chris entered the Sisters of St. Francis in September 2003 in Syracuse, when she was 53. She had tried to join other communities when she was in her 40’s, but was told that she was too old. Finally she found the right fit.

“Now is the right time for me”, she explained. “What I like most about religious life is the sense of community – like-minded women journeying together toward the same goals.”

“There has to be a reason that our age group is being called to religious life. We have a lot of life experience that we bring to our ministries. We are no longer just working in “our” hospitals and “our” schools. We are now meeting the needs of changing times and reaching far out into the community to meet and serve others in their special places. It was a big decision for me, but one that has been coming for a long, long time.”

Sister Chris has spent several months, while in the Buffalo area, working at VIVE, a world organization for refugees where our sisters minister in Buffalo. Growing up in the military, she feels very comfortable with refugees and with their cultural diversity.



Sister Chris spends quality time with two young children at VIVE.

“VIVE is how the world should be – all people, all races, all cultures, all languages and all religions working together. I don’t think I do that much here, and yet I’ve never received more hugs and more thank you’s. It’s a safe place for these refugees to be in, when the world outside is so full of turmoil and despair. Talking and laughing with the refugees, and just being here for them, makes all the difference.”

Sister Chris has spent a great deal of her time working in VIVE’s library, which has some computers. “The adults here just flock to the computers. I help them use them to check their emails from Ethiopia, Chad, Zimbabwe, or wherever. I also help them to learn the English language.” In addition to the adults, she also spends time with the children in the playroom, who flock to her, but for her hugs and smiles, not the computers.



Sister Chris and Sister Maureen comfort a patient at Mount St. Mary’s Hospital in Lewiston.

Sister Chris hopes to profess her Temporary Vows at the end of this year. Prior to VIVE, she worked as a Chaplain Intern at Mount St. Mary’s Hospital in Lewiston for three months. Next she will be working in Manhattan at the Nazareth Nursery, a Montessori

School. When asked why she’s working in so many different kinds of environments, she explained, “I want to experience as much as I can, so that I can really learn what work I am truly being called to do.”

God works in mysterious ways.

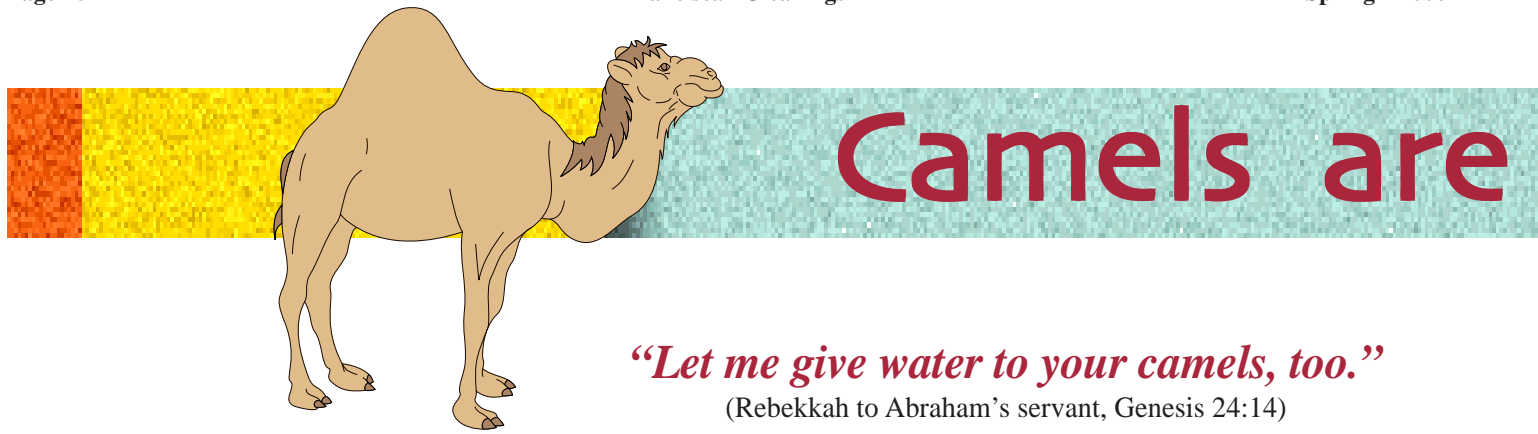
Center for Joy Programs *continued from page 3*



Susan Pfeifer, Sister Beth and Bennie Hamilton make plans for the “Connections Network.”

The challenge for Sister Beth is to find adult mentors for these young people, plus businesses, that are willing to hire these young men and women. The teens are high energy, creative and willing to learn, and it is the goal of this program to facilitate placing these potential responsible citizens in jobs where they can begin their careers and continue to learn about life and themselves.

The Center for Joy staff continues to connect with the surrounding agencies and the business community to support their work. By bringing all the partners together, they will help build each of these programs with the ultimate goal of changing lives “one person – one household at a time”. For more information, contact Sister Beth Niederpruem at (716) 282-7588 or niederpruem@yahoo.com or Center for Joy, 117 Michigan Street, Niagara Falls, NY 14305.



“Let me give water to your camels, too.”

(Rebekkah to Abraham’s servant, Genesis 24:14)

By Sister Fran Gangloff, OSF

So, you may ask who cares about the camels when people are dying, children are dying, babies are dying? When the sheep and goats die, people go hungry. When the cattle die, the children start to die. But when the camels die, everyone dies.

These hardy beasts generally survive drought conditions. They can go for three or four months without water as long as they have some green vegetation to feed on. With no rain, there is no green vegetation. This drought and related famine have dragged on in Kenya since 2004 and things have moved into disaster mode.

Malnutrition has worsened to disaster stage in northern Kenya. The rains have not come for months, for years. Drought and famine affect every living thing – plants, animals, and humans.



In Kenya, things have moved into disaster mode.

Timau Mission in Kenya

Sister Joanne Gangloff, OSF in Timau in Central Kenya told how the rationing of water has affected the mission and the surrounding village.

“The drought is the most severe in 30 years,” she wrote on January 6, 2006. She has been there these past 30 years and knows of what she speaks. “The famine is really biting and getting worse. Our water is being strictly rationed. The children and old people have been left back down in the scrubland to fend for themselves, as others move their cattle up the mountains for water. We are going to distribute maize and beans.”

By writing and applying for a grant from the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging (CFCA), Sister Joanne secured funds to buy the extra maize (corn meal) and beans to distribute in January. CFCA said that they will not be able to provide grants for the upcoming months, however, because their funds have run low. They have all they can do to keep up with the sponsored children and aged persons.

Sister Laurine McDonald, OSF and Carol Riniolo, a lay friend who arrived in late January, have gone with

Dying in Africa



Sister Laurine, Sister Joanne, mother and child and Carol Riniola work together for the sake of the future of the child.

Sister Joanne to outlying villages to distribute food.

Global concern

The World Food Program has been begging for the past several months on behalf of 1.2 million children under the age of 5 in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia. These children face famine and starvation due to a long-term drought. The number will rise rapidly toward 3 million if the world community does not respond soon.

Hundreds of children have already been treated for malnutrition and related diseases and at least 40 have died in the northeastern parts of Kenya. Additionally, hungry children often miss school or can't learn if they do come. All this comes on top of the reality that many children in Kenya never get the chance to go to school and that many children in Kenya have lost parents to AIDS or other misfortunes.

In her February 2nd email, Sister Joanne emphasized the importance of keeping the children in school.

"I think the immediate band-aid help that is needed now is not only food distributions, but getting kids into schools. When they're in schools, they get food. So many of the pastoralists released their young sons from helping with the cattle to go back to school. We have some of these sons in our program and pay for them to be in a boarding high school and thus they get fed. In so many parts of the country kids are dropping out of schools because they can't pay. We feel the best we can do for ours is to get them into schools."

UNICEF has expressed its fear about an outbreak of measles due to lack of measles vaccination and children's poor health from lack of food. Other world aid and relief agencies, including the

International Red Cross, have assessed the situation as an emergency on the brink of humanitarian disaster. Others have called the current situation a "tipping point" beyond emergency.

Yes, the Kenyan government needs to respond to the situation. Yes, Britain and others have sent help. To dismay and shock for most, New Zealand offered to send 42 tons of dog food for Kenya's starving children. The Kenyan government refused the dog food powder and does not want their children equated with dogs.

"One very pertinent point," Sister Joanne wrote, "is that food or any dry powder requires water, and water is so hard to get here. If they mix the powder with dirty water, they're endangering themselves that way."

While the Catholic bishops and other religious leaders in Kenya have appealed to the government to respond, they also appeal to people of goodwill everywhere to contribute toward food, medicine and other basic needs. As many as 2.5 million people in Kenya need immediate assistance or they will weaken, sicken, and die.

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Sister Francis Marie Vallone

Holy Family Home

A place closed, but a new ministry begun

by Sister Jean M. Thompson

On September 12, 2005, the official announcement regarding the closure of Holy Family Home, an adult care facility operated at 410 Mill St. since 1962, was made by Sr. Marian Rose Mansius, Regional Councilor for the Sisters of St. Francis. The decision was not made easily, as the ministry to the elderly in the Buffalo area by the Sisters has had a history of more than 100 years.

Sister Francis Marie Vallone, and several Sisters who resided in the Convent at Holy Family, generously offered their time during the last several weeks before closure, in assisting residents through the spiritual and emotional adjustments they encountered in preparing to leave Holy Family Home. This important work, however, did not end when the last residents were placed at other facilities by October 12, 2005.

In the months to follow, members of the St. Clare Guild (including several Sisters from Holy Family Convent) and Sr. Francis Marie followed most of the residents to their new homes, bearing cards, gifts and greetings in the months that followed. By February 2006, the visits were continuing on a regular basis and Sr. Francis Marie had found a way to expand the Sisters' ministry to the elderly. She began arranging Eucharistic

Services, rosary recitation, and personal visits to other residents in Western New York Assisted Living and Skilled Nursing Facilities prompted by contact with former residents from Holy Family Home. Currently, at least nine facilities that care for the elderly are receiving regular visits and spiritual care services by the Sisters of St. Francis. Seven of these facilities have no religious sponsorship.

Also heartening is the fact that a multitude of charitable organizations have been able to utilize the furnishings from our Holy Family Home. Our Sisters in Syracuse, six Western New York parishes, three facilities that serve the elderly, have also received some of the items. Most of the bedroom furniture was given to furnish a Retreat House in Nicaragua, and much of the bedding and parlor furnishings were given to VIVE, an organization which cares for Refugees from all over the world. The Catholic Charities Resettlement Program also delivered furnishings directly to refugee families in the Buffalo area. Harvest House, well known for serving poor mothers and families in the Buffalo area, was also given office furnishings, pictures, and Chapel supplies, and St. Luke's Mission of Mercy was able to carry

off a carload of needed supplies.

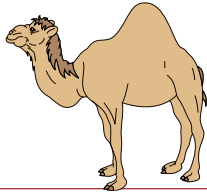
Despite the painful task of ending our formal sponsorship of Holy Family Home for the elderly, our ministry to the elderly and the poor is continuing in a new way. Our residents have comfortable new homes and continuing spiritual care by the Sisters of St. Francis. The furnishings of the Home have been distributed to those in need and many new contacts have been made in the process.

On January 18, 2006, the official sale of the building and property to Acquest Development was completed. Before the official signing of the official closure document, however, the new owner asked if the Crucifix was still in the Library. After checking, I found this small simple religious symbol still in place above a bookcase. I asked if he wanted it removed and he replied, "No, I want to be sure it was going to stay there."



Mary Scholtes, 103, received a visit from Sister Francis Marie.

Camels



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The Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, on January 15, 2006, reported on its front page the "humanitarian catastrophe" currently in place in the Horn of Africa countries. They give 5.5 million as the number of people who need help to avoid death from lack of food and water in these countries. The newspaper made a plea to the global community to come to the rescue of these people.

At their local level in Timau, our sisters are focusing on feeding programs as part of the school day, and are thinking of giving each child a daily vitamin.

The Camels

Camels – ah yes, the camels. In northeastern Kenya, camel libraries bring books to the remote villages. Camels can go where motor vehicles can't. In northern Kenya, a missionary priest has set up the breeding of camels to provide milk for the Pokot tribe. It's a long-term solution, but it holds great promise for the nutritional needs of babies and children.

In the desert areas of Kenya, the camel offers hope. When it dies, the hope of the people die with it.

Challenged by news stories of the drought and famine in Africa, the Sisters of St. Francis are focusing on relief efforts. Individual sisters and local convents throughout the congregation are sacrificing money to be sent to our mission in Timau, Kenya, to help toward food relief. Others who wish to help may do so by using the envelope included in this issue of *Gleanings*. Please earmark your donation for Kenya. Thank you and God bless you!

St. Nicholas/O'Hern Reunion Being Planned



Members of the Bishop O'Hern Class of '56 meet to make preparations for their reunion.

Last summer we hosted a Neumann High School Reunion, and over 500 people from around the country attended. This summer we want to host a reunion for the alumni of St. Nicholas and Bishop O'Hern High Schools. The Williamsville Sisters of St. Francis have shared a warm and rich history with both of these schools, and have many fond memories of our years spent there. Our sisters served as teachers, principals, as well as students, and we consider our years spent at the schools as a gift and a blessing.

On **Saturday, July 29, 2006**, the Sisters of St. Francis will host a special **Mass & Reunion** in celebration of the many years we were associated with St. Nicholas and Bishop O'Hern High Schools. The Mass will take place at our Motherhouse, St. Mary of the Angels, at 201 Reist Street in Williamsville, NY at **11:00 a.m.**, and a reception will immediately follow in our beautiful

community room. Many of our sisters are anxious to visit with former students and fellow classmates.

We are trying to locate and recruit anyone and everyone who was ever associated with the schools. Help us locate all of those who should be invited to this special renewal of friendships. Please send us the names, addresses and phone numbers of those people you might know who attended St. Nicholas and/or Bishop O'Hern High Schools, and be sure to mark your calendars for **July 29th**.

It's going to be a very memorable event, so we hope you'll want to be a part of it in some special way. We really look forward to hearing from you, and will keep you informed as the exciting plans for the reunion progress. For more information, please call 716-632-2155 x-685, or send us an email at: ehamilton@osfwmsv.org. Thank you!

We Remember



Sister Joan Hupp

Sister Joan Hupp, a former teacher and principal, embraced Sister Death on July 19, 2005. She was an exemplary religious woman, a professional and a very dedicated educator. She served on the congregational leadership team in numerous roles, as well on the Boards of Gerard Place, Holy Family Home, St. Mary's, Lancaster, and others.

Sister Joan was born into this world on November 29, 1935, the Feast of All Franciscan Saints. She was the only child of Dorothy Barber, herself an only child, and Tom Hupp, and was loving, communicative and generous.

Sister Joan entered the congregation of the Sisters of St. Francis in 1953. Her teaching/principal assignments included Archbishop Carroll High School, Buffalo; St. Mary's High School, Lancaster; St. Francis High School, Athol Springs and Ss. Peter & Paul, Williamsville until 1997, when she was elected to the congregational leadership team.

The recipient of numerous awards, Sister Joan was loved people, and will always be warmly remembered by everyone who was fortunate enough to have known and been touched by her. Her motto might well have been "Carpe Diem!" because she seized each day and encouraged others to do the same.

On the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, (December 12, 2005), **Sister Dolores Wittmann** went to her eternal reward in a quiet, peaceful manner, quite in keeping with her gentle, lifelong demeanor. Among her ancestors were her grandparents who came to Orchard Park, NY in the 1890's when there was so much bigotry that a Catholic carpenter could not get work. Her grandparents were among the pioneers in the founding of Nativity Parish with the help of Msgr. Nelson Baker.

Born on January 12, 1926, Sister Dolores entered the Sisters of St. Francis in Williamsville in 1944 and finally professed in 1950. For a time in her religious life, she was known as Sister Helen Marie. Gardening and nature, murder mysteries, biographies and travel books, and collecting cartoons were among her hobbies, and she became an accomplished cook during her mission experiences.



Sister Dolores Wittmann

Sister Dolores served at St. James, St. Mary's, Swormville, St. Gerard's, St. Mary's, Lancaster, St. John Neumann, Archbishop Carroll High School, Timau Secondary School in Kenya, East Africa, as well as at St. Anslem and St. Stanislaus in Chicago. She also ministered at St. Francis, Turner/Carroll

High School, and St. Aloysius, Springville.

Sister Dolores had a quick sense of humor and a great zest for life.



Louiz F. Kahl

Luiz F. Kahl, an active member of our Development Advisory Council for many years, died on November 4, 2005, following a valiant battle with cancer. Luiz, Chairman of the Board of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA), will be remembered by our sisters and associates as a giant-hearted man, filled with compassion and devotion.

Considered a champion in bringing high-quality, low-cost air service to the Buffalo Niagara International Airport, Luiz went out of his way each year to acquire roundtrip airline tickets on JetBlue Airways for our Annual Food & Wine Tasting. He and his wife, Sonia, also attended and helped to orchestrate many of our special events. They were wonderful supporters, and also participated in our Adopt A Sister program.


A long-time friend of the sisters, Luiz will be sorely missed. He was 69.

3rd Annual Spaghetti Dinner a Big Hit!

Jerry Gentile (*far right*), along with countless family members and friends, made sure everything ran smoothly during our Spaghetti Dinner, held on November 6, 2005. Despite bad weather, the event raised almost \$10,000 for our important ministries. Over 1,000 spaghetti dinners were served and greatly enjoyed by young and old.



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Quiet Moments with Francis

by Sr. Marcella Nachreiner

a mini meditation

The heart sees what the eyes cannot. I believe our holy father Francis learned that lesson very well, and was willing to let God flip his world upside down. Francis understood he had a need for an ongoing change of heart, an ongoing change of perspective that allowed him to see the way God saw. It was his willingness to be grasped by God that made him unique.

Francis saw God in the tensions and conflicting forces within himself. He accepted his own complexity, and created something new and fresh for himself. He responded to the Christ he saw in everyone by living a life of service to others. But he also paid attention to his need for solitude by finding a time and place for withdrawal so he could enter fully into contemplative prayer. He went in and he went out; living a life of prayer and service. Francis found the unity for his life by imitating the life of Christ.

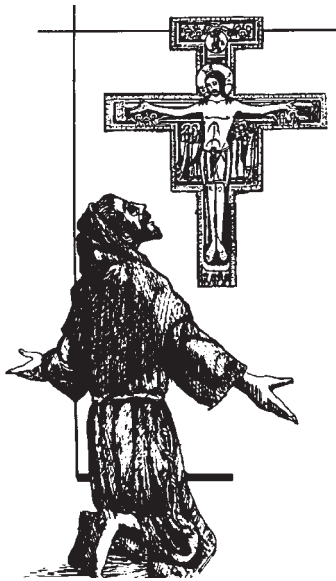
Near the end of his life Saint Francis said "I have done what was mine to do; may Christ teach you what you are to do." I don't believe Francis was interested in people becoming carbon copies of himself. He knew each person was an individual, a unique creation loved by God as an individual.

No other person can tell us exactly how to live our life. No one has ever lived our life before. We ourselves must learn to live and love with integrity.

There are hundreds of right ways to travel the spiritual path and thousands of spiritual paths to travel. Each one has to do with the next step we take, the words we speak, the ways we touch one another. That which we seek and long for is present in the moment that our heart and our eyes are open to it.

Please do not misunderstand me. Imitating Christ should, I believe, be the goal of every Christian. For me the problem is how. It often seems to me to be like a task doomed to failure. There are days when I do not even feel like following Christ, let alone imitating him.

May we, like our holy father Francis, look with the eyes and listen with the ears of our heart. May we, too, change our perspective so that we might see the way God would want us to see.



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