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Dear Family and Friends,

Weather-wise, March came in like a lion this year. We hope it leaves like a lamb!

In one sense, it will: the last day of March is Holy Saturday, the day Jesus, *the Lamb of God*, "rested" in the tomb after paying the eternal price for our sins.

It seems that all of us have had a cross to bear at different times in our lives. Yet, it is apparent that we grow stronger because of the sacrifices we make.

During this Lenten season, we reflect on the spirits of three Franciscan Sisters. Each made sacrifices in their lives to serve God and others; and each embodies a certain strength of character because of their life of service.

Again, a special 'thank you' to **Sister Therese Jilk** for interviewing these Sisters and sharing their stories.

Kathy Gatliff

Editor

Director of Communications

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Retired? It Depends on Your Definition!

Even though **Sister Merici Maher** says she's retired, we continue to see her involved in many activities to help others: she accompanies Sisters going to clinic or dental care; is a communion minister at daily liturgies, and serves her local Rochester Franciscan Community in many other ways that may be less visible, but very important on a one-to-one level.

Caring for others has always been her gift. Merici was a Surgical Nurse at Saint Mary's Hospital for 20 years, served in Community Nursing, and taught at DePaul University in Chicago for 40 years.

What led her to the nursing ministry? Her "Novice Mistress said nurses were needed and I



should be one." Probably even then, Merici's gift of compassion and ability to listen were evident and sustained by her prayer life.

When asked what brought her great joy and/or sense of accomplishment in her life, Merici says "every day I was in surgery was a great joy and all of my ministries gave me a sense of accomplishment." Long ago, her mother said "Live each day like it was your last and you will be OK!" What a fine, strong foundation! Sister Merici counts all of Henri Nouwen's spiritual books as her favorites, and also enjoys reading historical writings, in particular, those of the Civil War and World War II.

As Sister Merici looks back on her long Franciscan life, she sees how faithfully her life was formed by the spirit of obedience, in which she found guidance and growth. Connections with other Franciscan Sisters in Community modeled the Gospel Life she was called to some 70 years ago. Although changes over the years have posed challenges, no doubt she would choose to be challenged anyway.

Thank you, Sister Merici!

Attention to God's Work

Though it was the last question of my interview, **Sister Mary Ann Snyder's** explanation of our work as Rochester Franciscans, seems a good place to start. "We try to be available to God and God's work by the way we live, wherever we are, and not give up!"



Mother Teresa is a favorite author; her writings serve as an example to Sister Mary Ann. And, the advice she received from Sister Chrysostom is still worth following: "Don't be a worry wart!"

Not surprisingly, Mary Ann knows her greatest gift to be simplicity: trying to be simple (though it's hard when you're impatient); not having many material things, trusting in God, and desiring to be cheerful about what you have to do.

Mary Ann easily highlighted experiences which brought her special joy and a deep sense of accomplishment: being able to teach where she chose because she saw a great need; Sister Gretchen Berg's gift of the Pastoral Weekends; and more recently, in her time in Ohio and having a personal visit from Sister Marilyn Geiger.

Mary Ann chose to minister to and with the poor. About the time that we were all eager to follow the "fresh air" of Vatican II, a letter in the *National Catholic Reporter* appeared from Father George Clemens, a black pastor at Holy Angels parish in Chicago, asking for more white Sisters. Sisters Mary Ann and Mary Ruth Hart requested Sister Mira and the Personnel Board respond to Father Clemens indicating their willingness to serve. Sister Mira was aware that Sisters Jonella Grimm, Kathleen Kirby and Phyllis Sellner were also interested. And so began their teaching mission at Holy Angels School!

Retiring from teaching after 25 years, Mary Ann desired to be closer to her family, so she engaged in social work in Columbus, Ohio, for 20 years. From there, Sister Mary Ann came to Assisi Heights, where her ministry now is getting to know Sisters, especially sharing table conversations, and making it a priority to visit certain Sisters, such as Sisters Lorna and Parma.

We're really glad you are among us here at Assisi Heights, Mary Ann. It's wonderful to get reacquainted with you. Your simplicity shines through with grateful joy!

Becoming Her Name

Reading through the pieces of **Sister Faith Huppler's** writing, what comes through most to me is that her very living is a rich story of becoming her name, *Faith!* I suspect that the best piece of advice she was given has a lot to do with her remarkable resilience. Her father said, "If a horse bucks you off, get right back on it!" Obviously, Sister Faith had specific reasons to get back on the horse [of life] no matter how difficult, from her childhood, living in a family environment in which no one was comforting to anyone.



Sister Faith's life in ministry is impressive. She served as a registered nurse, a parish team member/counselor and a professional psychotherapist. In each of those positions, as she gleaned the fruits of helping others which enriched her own personal journey. Sister Faith counts the Holy Scriptures and poetry of Jessica Powers as favorite sources of daily nourishment. Her greatest gift? "Being able to hold peoples' pain in a 'therapeutic container,' thereby affirming its reality." This is so evident in the personal stories she shares from her years of ministry. Sister Faith's view of our work as Franciscan Sisters is closely related to her greatest gift. "We are in solidarity with the poor and the disenfranchised. We advocate for them and for Mother Earth."

Most telling of all, Sister Faith has written several stories of how her life experiences weave together. The first story she wrote took place in the mid-1970s in Ames, Iowa, where she experienced God's healing while serving in parish ministry. "It made me a believer!" Faith sat near a woman who was chronically suicidal, triggered by her stepfather's sexual abuse. The woman was sitting on the edge of the bed with a shotgun between her knees, and wanted to take her own life. The woman gradually responded to Faith's presence and prayer. Feeling God's presence, the woman surrendered and exclaimed, "I feel like Jesus just came to me!" The woman started praising and thanking God. Sister Faith's comforting presence and prayer saved that woman's life.

The next story is her remarkable personal journey. Following a life-changing car accident on June 8, 1966, which resulted in the amputation of her leg, Sister Faith fell into a deep depression. Her own need for healing was met at Madonna House, in Ontario, Canada. What strikes me in this story is the *faith*-filled persistence with which Sister Faith was inspired to act on her own behalf, despite the obstacles. The title of her story, "The Heart That Didn't Sing," expresses her three-month experience at Madonna House. She ends the tale through the eyes of her sister, who "looked at me on crutches, my stockings full of runs, a missing front tooth and wanted to know what happened! How do you explain that [despite my outward appearance] the beginning of inner healing has already made my heart sing?"

Sister Faith experienced a long and painful journey to become her very name; yet, to this day, she keeps on growing and giving of herself at Assisi Heights.

Last Blast of Winter? A Scene from Assisi Heights



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