



# *interchange*

*acting courageously*

**Volume 18, No. 1 - Winter**

**March 2013**

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## **Dear Friends and Family,**

In the summer of 2011, the Rochester Franciscans gathered for a meeting. This was a time to discern and reflect on issues important to the Congregation as a whole, and set the direction and focus for the upcoming six years. As a result, the Chapter Directional Statement was written to direct that focus and represent the common goals of all.

As you can see below, these are the words the Sisters have chosen to live by. The articles that follow give a glimpse of some examples on how those words are being lived out today.

*Kathy Gatliff*

Editor

Director of Communications

Sisters of Saint Francis - Rochester, MN

## **Words to Live By: Our Chapter Directional Statement**

We, the Sisters of Saint Francis, rooted in Gospel and Franciscan values, and steeped in contemplation, are impelled to speak respectfully and **act courageously** on issues of oppression and marginalization of women in our church and society:

- by studying, analyzing, and acting on issues that lead to systemic change,
- by sharing our human and material resources,
- by collaborating with others, and
- by becoming more inclusive in our relationships.

Along with many other issues of injustice, our focus includes efforts to overcome human trafficking and destruction of Mother Earth, as well as efforts to promote the empowerment of women and the engagement with persons of various religions and cultures. We continue to embrace our efforts related to Immigration, Ecology, and Inter-religious Dialogue.



*...our focus includes efforts to overcome destruction of Mother Earth*

"Peace on earth and goodwill to all" is a seasonal statement heard often during Christmas; but how does that sentiment carry forward throughout the rest of year? Extending goodwill to all inhabitants of planet earth is important not only for social justice and human rights issues, but also for ecological issues!

An example of this is found in a microcosm of life at Assisi Heights. We approach our care for this slice of earth, which we call home, as a peaceful coexistence. We are organic. We tend bees, gardens, prairies, trees and grass in a way that allows them to exist with natural predators, diseases and mites with a very limited use of chemicals.

However, sadly, it was not always that way! Since the early days of the apple orchard, tiny pollinator bees have held residence at Assisi Heights. In the 1990s, armed with new equipment, we were determined to "stay clean" and not use pesticides or other chemicals. But then, three M's came for a visit: mites, moths, and mice! They invaded our hives. Aggressively, we wanted the enemy OUT! The war was on! So off to market to see what was available: Pollinator meets Exterminator! Yes, we drugged the pests those first two years. Then, we discovered its secret: it was a pesticide derived from a poison nerve gas used in WWII. Corporations began manufacturing poisons and explosives to kill the foliage, and people, in wars on others' soil. As they succeeded, they transferred their business into producing agrichemicals. With such offensive tactics, we decided it was too militaristic for our piece of the earth and banished it from our midst.



Tending the bees at Assisi Heights.

Notice I said the "war" was on. Using the terms war and enemies says something about my acculturated vocabulary. I remember the *War on Poverty*, *War on Drugs*, and *War on Crime*. Our war mentality and militaristic language has become so intertwined with our modern culture that we hardly recognize how we have bought into it. It is a far cry from "peace on earth and good will to all!"

So then, how did we come to accept these enemies who armor themselves to be persistent resistors? We found that those toxic chemicals not only poisoned the foe, but created a polluted environment. To stay ahead, poisons needed to be applied successively in greater and greater lethal doses. These chemicals only killed off the weakest, and the survivors became stronger. It was a vicious cycle.

We, along with other beekeepers, sought to reverse this course of action and shifted to a more peaceful, earth-friendly, less violent approach to undesirable pests. Dr. Marla Spivek, from the University of Minnesota, suggests that we "get bees off the chemical treadmill and back on their six feet!" In seeking ways to live with our moths, mice, and mites, we found it is best to let the bees themselves adapt and cope with the enemy. Bees are now developing internal hairs so as not to allow the mite to invade the trachea. Bees have learned to clip the legs of the Varroa mite. There is evidence that worker bees are herding, corralling and "jailing" the Hive Beetle so they are not able to lay eggs. And, if found, the worker bees carry the eggs out! If we allow nature to take its course, without excessive intervention, the bees will become stronger on their own.

Responsible stewardship of the earth and its inhabitants is now a fast-growing organic movement. The concept of "peace on earth and goodwill to all" needs to grow organic both in our language and how we live with one another. And let it begin with me!

### **Human Trafficking Awareness** by Sister Monique Schwartz

*...our focus includes efforts to overcome human trafficking*

*...we are impelled to speak respectfully and act courageously on issues of oppression and marginalization of women*

One often wonders where inspiration or incentives come from, stirring within, calling us to further information and action. For each of us, our parents planted the first seed. That seed continues to germinate as we mature and age. Some of my energy can be attributed to my mother, Victoria Radosevich Schwartz. As a sophomore in high school, she verbalized a desire to work with immigrants. On her own initiative, she pursued a degree in social work in the 1920s and began working with immigrants in Northern Minnesota (the "Range" area). Those were the years when immigrants were European with white skin and welcomed into the labor force in the United States.

Today, immigration is another picture. Many of our immigrants are of another color and, not unlike our European ancestors, come to this country seeking a better life with freedom from oppression and poverty. Over the last few years, I have participated in an Immigration Working Group. We have shared experiences and kept up-to-date on legislation and action related to a comprehensive immigration plan. Progress has been too slow for those waiting for Congress to act on this issue. There are other issues related to immigration, such as the conditions of the prisons for persons waiting for deportation, and the fate of those enslaved by human trafficking, lured under the guise of opening the door to a better life.

On January 11-12, 2013, I attended a conference on Human Trafficking in Rochester, Minnesota. The Rochester Franciscan Justice and Peace group was one of the important sponsors of the conference. Human Trafficking is defined as people taken against their will, bought and sold, and enslaved for sexual exploitation, sweat shops, forced begging, sale of human organs, farm labor, and domestic servitude. One of the astounding pieces of information that came from this conference is that human

trafficking is alive in the city of Rochester! I also learned that the Twin Cities is one of the nation's 13 largest centers for child prostitution. There is a conservative estimate that 100,000 children are exploited each year for prostitution in the United States.



*Scenes from the January 2013 Human Trafficking Awareness Events*

Police and other law enforcement personnel are just beginning to understand the severity of the issue and how to pursue investigations that will deal with the criminal and the victim. Information was shared by members of a panel, which included a pediatrician, County Attorney, representative from the Minnesota House of Representatives, Street Crimes Investigators, and other members of the Sheriff and Police departments. Other panelists included Stephanie Holt, founder of Mission 21, a local organization to assist victims of trafficking, and a representatives from the organization Breaking Free.

Statistics are one step in raising awareness of the problem, but encountering persons who have been victims of trafficking sends an even more powerful message. Survivors of trafficking, Stacy Jewell Lewis and Shamere McKenzie, told their stories of living as victims of sexual exploitation and recovery from the experience. Their presence put a face on the reality of this issue.

We are just beginning to address the problem of Human Trafficking. With increased community awareness, the criminals will have less power and control. The Federal Government passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act in 2000, and it was reauthorized in 2003, 2005, and 2008. In July 2011, Minnesota passed the Safe Harbor Act to respond to child victims of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking.

Please join the Rochester Franciscans for the next program, Breaking the Chains: Part 2, Saturday, May 18, 2013, from 9 AM-Noon at Assisi Heights. We must continue to share these messages and monitor this issue.

For additional information, check out these websites:

[www.stopenslavement.org](http://www.stopenslavement.org)  
[www.MNgirlsnotforsale.org](http://www.MNgirlsnotforsale.org)

*...by studying, analyzing and acting on issues that lead to systemic change.*

The local Franciscans International (FI) group at Assisi Heights proves to be a prime example of studying, analyzing and acting on issues that lead to systemic change.

Our group is connected to a larger Franciscans International NGO at the United Nations, which has a General Consultative status under The Economic and Social Council. This permits us to highlight a wide range of justice issues on behalf of the Franciscan Family.

FI has three main focuses: concern for the poor; care of the earth and peacemaking. For over two decades, meetings have been held monthly with an active membership of about 15 Sisters, with others involved by support and prayer.

Information is constantly being gathered, studied and analyzed as we search the internet, films, newspapers, television, books, etc. Our famous "big envelopes" go from member to member quite often. Numerous organizations stimulate us with ideas and actions: Bread for the World, Land Stewardship Project, National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Southeastern MN Alliance of Peacemakers, Sierra Club, School of Americas (SOA) Watch, Food and Water Watch, Corporate Accountability International and others.

Actions are taken by observing days selected by the UN such as: World Food Day, International Day of Peace, UN Day, Human Rights Day, etc. Every year we prepare Bread for the World's Offering of Letters to our Congresspersons on behalf of poor people. Elected officials receive telephone calls, emails, resolutions and petitions about a variety of issues, such as Immigration, Fracking, Human Trafficking, Water, Military Spending, Human Rights, Global Warming/Climate Change, and others.



Sister Janel with display created for the Chapter Directional Statement....

We have hosted conferences open to the public on Water, Immigration and other issues pertaining to the common good. Monitoring of government agencies, such as the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), also moves us to action.

We also participate in public events and rallies, such as the yearly SOA protest march at Fort Benning, Georgia. We visit state legislators offices and attend the annual Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC) at the Minnesota State Capitol. Locally, some FI members attended the recent Minnesota Environmental Quality Board Meeting Hearings on Water, Energy, Solar, etc., in Rochester.

We consistently watch for how our actions have led to systemic change at the local, state and federal levels. An example is how our Assisi Heights Community has become conscious of the use and pollution of water. That moved us to follow through at every level. Through education with our employees and Sisters, we removed bottled water and plastic pop containers from our vending machines.

Our FI group, as well as our entire Community, encourages and supports each other in our passion to make the world a better place for all people.



... and examples of FI activities that fit into the Directional Statement goals.

### Reforestation Project in Cambodia *by Sister Marlys Jax*

*...by sharing our human and material resources.*

Viewing photos from anywhere on this planet cannot adequately describe the incredible beauty and exquisite glimpses of the Creator's imagination. Natural life is featured in the forest every day. It is a perfect climate for colonnades of giant trees scraping the sky, draped with exotic florals, tailored to shade the tendrils interlocking with other biological greenery. Life sprouts everywhere! The forest floor is lush with 60 million years of "debris" covering living fossils.

Though these images can be captured with any camera lens, Sister Joseen and I were eyewitnesses to the devastation, as well as the hope, all in one snapshot, when we visited the Monks Community Forest (MCF) in northwest Cambodia. This reforestation project seeks to address needs of the greater good for future generations. We, Sisters of Saint Francis, together with the Interfaith Power and Light's Carbon Covenant Program, support the Buddhist monks in safeguarding Cambodia's largest community forest. At one time Cambodia was 70% forested, today it is only 20%!



Venerable Bunly Saluth, the monks, and nearby villagers living on the cusp of this forest, assist each other in protecting and conserving the biodiversity of this 18,261 hectares (45,105 acres). Villagers use the forest for collecting edibles such as roots, honey and sap used as glue for their fishing boats, while poachers and retaliatory illegal's have stripped and destroyed what they left behind. Work is slow, but steady, as the villagers and monks collect snares and traps, and spend time replanting damaged seedlings. These are hopeful signs; yet, environmental successes seem snail-like and temporary, while failures are quick and permanent!

Monks and volunteers continue to patrol the forest, educate, raise awareness and invite participation of local rural folks. The monks designed a special service "to ordain" the oldest and largest trees in the forest in order to sanctify them and ensure protection. They shared that the karmic results of touching or hurting a monk are so serious that it has proven to an effective deterrent to save the trees!

I was blessed to silently walk the burnt forest floor with Venerable Bunly Saluth. The forest spoke for itself. No translator needed.



## Evergreen Optimism by Sister Cabrini Walch

*...we continue to embrace our efforts related to ecology*

Faithful grove of evergreens outside my window,  
you continually offer me changeable but reassuring delight.

I ask myself - what is it?

Each time something new about you intrigues me;  
for one thing, you are always there.

As I look out my window today,  
you are drinking in the sun.  
Just last week your branches were blanketed in snow,  
almost too heavily burdened to be upbeat.

Come spring, your needles will sparkle  
after being dusted off by the rain.  
In summer, your beauty will be enhanced  
by the radiant sunsets.  
In autumn, you will hang on to your needles  
when all the other trees are giving up their leaves.  
Mother Nature gifts you with pronounced variations.

Take, for example, the effect of wind on you, whatever the season.  
Frequently, it makes you playful, hilariously funny, riding high, or line dancing.  
At other times, you seem totally confused,  
with winds coming at you in four different directions,  
and it seems your roots will snap.

Evergreens, the most lasting lesson you teach me  
is the dignity of your branches as you approach your pinnacle.  
Your beauty keeps tapering upward to reach that elegant summit, that majestic crown.  
Thank you for continually offering me your evergreen optimism.



## We Thank You...

### For Your Presence in Our Lives!

In our history of service to the people of God, we have always striven to be good stewards of the gifts that God has given to us, both monetarily and in our lives. Your presence in our lives is precious--we are so grateful when you come to pray with us in the Chapel of Our Lady of Lourdes at Assisi Heights, at Saint Marys Hospital and in our homes. You welcome us as we minister with you in the parishes, the Community Food Bank, Gift of Life House, parish schools, and so many other places. Thank you!

In the early years of our Community, many Sisters served in ministries without retirement benefits. Today, your donations are gratefully received to assist in our living, in our ministries, as well as providing for our Sisters in their later years. You, our donors are remembered in our prayers each day. The fragile state of our current economy only makes your donations and offerings all the more precious to us.

If you have any questions on how you can provide a gift to the  
**Sisters of Saint Francis** through your Will or via a special bequest, contact me:

S. Eleanor Granger, Director of Development  
1001 14th Street NW, Rochester, MN 55901 | 507-282-7441 x 536



***We are here for you.***

We have created a peaceful atmosphere, conducive to open dialogue, prayer, idea exchange and contemplation. The serenity of our surroundings will embrace you and lift your spirits. Come explore the possibilities for your next retreat, meeting, or special event.

Contact: Angie Grimm, Event Coordinator  
Assisi Heights Spirituality Center  
507-280-2195 or [ahsc@rochesterfranciscan.org](mailto:ahsc@rochesterfranciscan.org)



Sisters of Saint Francis | 1001 14th Avenue NW | Rochester | MN | 55901