



interchange compassion

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Dear YOUR NAME HERE,

As noted in the Mission statement, "we, Rochester Franciscan Sisters and Cojourners ***commit ourselves to be a compassionate presence*** for peace in our world, striving for justice and reverence for all of creation."

I asked several Sisters to share their stories of compassion as it relates to their ministries. Their reflections follow.

An act of compassion takes just a moment of your time...and, as you'll learn from reading these stories, it comes quite naturally to Rochester Franciscans!

Kathy Gatliff

Editor

Director of Communications

Sisters of Saint Francis - Rochester, MN

What is Compassion?

by Sister Mary Eliot Crowley

Compassion: a virtue; a way of thinking, feeling and acting that calls one to right action without internal battles; a value inherent to Mayo Clinic personnel, inspired by the founders, Mother Alfred Moes and Dr. W.W. Mayo.

Compassion is the response to the question, "How would a person *ideally* respond in this particular situation?"

In the healthcare environment, particularly at Saint Marys Hospital and the Mayo Clinic, the virtue of compassion is a lived experience for persons in all job classifications--from administration to those in direct healthcare service, who have been touched by the heart of another. In my current position, I've listened to the stories of a colleague who has lost a loved one, another who is working through foreclosure, and yet another who is seeking a change of job. I am present with the one who is suffering. I become vulnerable while remaining whole in the presence of the suffering of the other. Through my compassionate and listening stance, I am able to respond professionally. Being compassionate and being professional are not mutually exclusive behaviors. I have been with families in a very professional setting, and, yet, was perceived by them as showing compassion

through my words, eye contact, and other nonverbal gestures.

Being a compassionate person is expressed through your actions, thoughts and really, by your entire being...it resonates as part of you and becomes who you are. You express it in your voice, your words, and your touch.

Compassion is shown when you have to care for the ninety-two-year-old who cannot communicate on their own; or for the fifty-year-old who has been in a motor vehicle accident and is paralyzed from the waist down; or being with a mother as she watches over her child in need of a serious operation. And it is meeting a family member in the hallway who just starts telling his/her story while you are racing to a meeting that "business" suddenly becomes unimportant. You stop, look them gently in the eyes and listen. A compassionate response will come forth.

As I have observed from the board room to the operating Room; from the housekeeper to the nurse at the bedside, compassion is shown in all areas of the medical profession. It is inbred, a way of life, a part of our being one with another, while remaining whole. It is about trusting in God, whose infinite compassion surrounds us.

Being a Visible Presence

by Sister Tierney Trueman

The grounds are beautifully landscaped, home to a variety of songbirds, frisky squirrels, and the perennial Canadian Geese. The atmosphere is one of relative quiet and peacefulness. Casting one's eyes upward however, reveals the ominous sign of incarceration: high walls topped with deadly serpentine wire. Some 900 inmates share life in this enclave. While the majority are receiving treatment for serious medical conditions, others are responsible for maintaining the daily operations of the prison.

My ministry is primarily to the inmates who are Spanish-speaking. Friday evenings and Sunday mornings offer the opportunity for the celebration of the Eucharist, or a para-liturgy that is a celebration of the Word, followed by the reception of the Eucharist when no priest is available.

We gather in the library. A long table wears a simple white sheet to serve as an altar cloth. A crucifix stands between two small vigil lights, and a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe leans against the crucifix. Each inmate signs the attendance sheet - name and prison number, a process that punctuates their daily lives. And we begin.

Jesus says to us, "If two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of you." Pained expressions ask, "Here?" "Yes, here, even in these prison walls." And we remember that each of us is truly a child of God. "See what love the Father has bestowed on us in letting us be called children of God! Yet that is what we are! Dearly beloved, you (Juan, Tomas, Carlos, Ruben . . .)* you are God's children *now!*" (1 John 3:1-2)

In the Latin cultures, the utter sense of shame is extremely painful, especially for men. It is almost inconceivable for them to believe that God forgives them and still loves them, no matter their offense. Sometimes there are tears, mumbled expressions of guilt, heads held low, unable to look into the eyes of another. Prayers of petition most often are for the women in their lives - mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, as they reflect their great devotion to Mary, *Madre Mia*.

I think of one in particular... He was pale, thin, sickly in appearance, but he never missed coming to pray. Little-by-little, his body showed a gain of weight and color returned to his face. After many months, he told me that he had never made his First Communion. So, on Holy Thursday, celebrating the Lord's last supper with his disciples, we celebrated a solemn "First Communion" for him. Precious money earned with minimal pay for jobs in the prison bought a picture of this unforgettable moment in his life.

What do I bring to these brothers? Humbly, I am able to assure them of God's overwhelming love

for each of them; able to assure them that their sins are forgiven. In song and prayer, I lead them in praise of God, in gratitude for the many gifts that they have received, remind them of the faith community they form - brother to brother. And I challenge them to go out into the prison world that is currently home to them, and bring the light of God into the darkness that fills the lives of so many.

What do they give to me? The gift of reading the Word of God, the Scriptures, through the lens of a prisoner. Assuring them that they are precious to God and loved by God. I remember again, that I, too, am precious to God and loved by God. Assuring them that God is rebuilding their broken lives (Jeremiah).

Francis heard that call, too: "Go and rebuild my house, for it is falling in ruins."

I remember that my life, too, is also being continuously rebuilt.

**Names are fictional. but represent those incarcerated.*

Staying in Community

by Sister Mary Kay Mahowald

When I began a four-month sabbatical at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio during August of 2011, I wasn't sure what would follow. I sensed a call from God to the southern border of the USA to witness to/for peace. The details were not clear, however.

While in San Antonio, I communicated with Joan McCoy, a School Sister of Saint Francis, with whom I had worked in Peru. Sister Joan now serves in El Paso, Texas, and lives with Sisters who work in a variety of ministries. She encouraged me to speak with one of the Sisters regarding an opening at Bienvivir Senior Health Services of El Paso.

The objective of Bienvivir is to "empower low income frail elderly persons to remain independent and to reside in their own homes and communities for as long as it is desired and feasible." The participants are treated with compassion and kindness. The position was in Chaplaincy and requires Spanish fluency and experience in pastoral ministry. I met both requirements.

Bienvivir uses a team model with participants at the center and the nurses, therapists, physicians and social workers complete the circle. As the words of our Constitutions:

In ministering with and to others we learn as we educate, we are healed as we heal, and we are converted as we pray and act with compassion. (36)

This mission with the frail and elderly relates with our Constitutions:

*This life-long process brings us at last to the final choice of living for the Lord: **death**. We therefore can await death not as diminishment, but as fullness in Jesus.*

I thank God for leading me to El Paso to be part of the mission of Bienvivir.

Caption with photo:

Among the participants are sisters Belen and Remedios Perez; they no longer able to live in their own home. They are pictured engaged in an activity at Bienvivir.

In Times of Sickness...

by S. Clara Schotzko

Times of illness can be very difficult, strange and have many unknowns. It may feel like everything is beyond our control...and often is. These are important but scary times.

It is the chaplain's job to listen to those fears, concerns, the "what ifs." We need to be reminded that we are not alone. We need someone to be with us-listening and paying attention to what and who is important to us. The medical team is also present doing all the necessary things. We also need someone paying very close attention to our inner spirit, helping us to remain "peace-filled" in spite of all these unknowns.

Since 1984, I have served as a chaplain at Lourdes hospital in Paducah, Kentucky. My ministry involves being with patients and their families in many different ways:

- Helping to recall our inner strengths and what has been helpful in the past to get through tough times
- Calling families and pastors, and making connections with local resources
- Facilitating and bringing peace in whatever way possible
- Celebrating and sharing happy times
- Sharing tears of joy and sorrow and loneliness
- Listening to life stories or life reviews
- Blessing people and helping them to pray when it seems impossible
- Sitting quietly at a bedside
- Giving comfort and strength and a smile to those who need it
- To get out of the way and let "God be God"

My goal is not only to demonstrate our core values, but to BE and LIVE those core values of Compassion, Excellence, Human Dignity, Justice, Sacredness of Life, and Service. This is both my privilege and my mission.

In Hospice: Compassion, Dignity and Mercy

by Sister Elizabeth Gillis

My first ministry awareness of compassionate presence goes back to my days as a nurse aide and nursing student at Saint Marys. For two years, I listened and watched as Sisters cared for patients and families with knowledge, competence, and dedication. But it was their compassionate presence that inspired me most to listen to God's call to become a Rochester Franciscan.

Now, more than sixty years later, as I ponder my various ministries, I realize that the compassionate presence of others has always inspired and blessed me: caring for *patients*, teaching *nursing students*, serving our *Sisters* in health care, nursing *refugees* in Chiapas, working with *campesinos* in Peru, advocating health care for the *undocumented* in Chicago, serving as a chaplain for *senior residents*, and volunteering with *persons in hospice*.

I want to highlight two formative ministry experiences that fill my heart with gratitude.

In the early 1960's, I met a patient at Saint Marys, Joe S., who, in the course of the next seven years had five open heart surgeries. Each time, as he laid down his life on the operating table, he was motivated by great love for his wife and two daughters, and great faith and trust in God and the surgical team. Joe died about one year after the fifth surgery, surrounded by his family and friends celebrating his 25th wedding anniversary.

Through on-going communication with family, I know his memory lives on in the love and vitality of his wife and his daughters, and in the grandchildren and great grandchildren he never knew.

During this past year, my brother, Jack, died at his home surrounded by his wife, Rosemary, their

six children and spouses, and seventeen grandchildren. Near his hospice bed in the living room, was a plaque I had given my dairy farmer brother 30 years earlier. It read, "*Who plants a seed beneath the sod and waits to see, believes in God.*" Two days before Jack's death in a sacred moment alone with him and in the midst of incredible suffering, he said to me, "I've had a wonderful life." Through tears, I was able to affirm that indeed he had lived a wonderful life; as son, brother, husband, father, grandfather, friend, and neighbor.

Through the living and dying of Joe and Jack, and countless others, I have been taught some aspects of being a compassionate presence with persons as they wait in joyful hope at the threshold of the gate of heaven. Each was tested through suffering in surrendering to Sister Death with grace and dignity. Each had done the holy work of remembering and giving thanks for the gift of life. Each lived with the conviction that the dying person is living, not dead. Each expected honesty from others and was honest in sharing needs, fears, decisions, hope, faith and love. Each was surrounded in life and death by persons with whom they shared life and love. Each was confident of beholding God face-to-face and trusted that God's face would be turned toward those grieving their deaths. Each was a compassionate presence to me. Each one was a lesson confirming my commitment to be a compassionate presence for peace.

"If you want peace, work for justice." - Pope Paul VI, 1972

by Sister Mary Kay Flanigan

In 1991, I was doing daily pay work while in discernment of what would come next after 30 years of direct service in social work. A conviction came that gave a path, "What would I rather do with the rest of my life than work for justice?"

That wish was fulfilled, thanks, in part to S. Elizabeth Gillis, who initiated our Community's relationship with 8th Day Center in the mid-1980's. I am thankful our congregation became a supporting member, so I could join the staff. The 8th Day Center, founded and supported by religious congregations, is now in its 37th year as a multi-issue justice center located in Chicago, Illinois. Through social analysis, action strategies, and working with many coalition partners, we work on systemic change through nonviolent means.

"Compassion is a beautiful flower born of understanding," says Thich Nhat Hahn. This theme is laced throughout our work. Since the events of 9/11 in 2001, 8th Day Center and coalition partners, have held a vigil outside of the Federal Building in Chicago from 8 to 9 am every Tuesday. We hold signs and pass out 500 flyers from alternative press calling for justice and peace, not war. Flyers are taken to Senators offices; and friendships and mutual respect has developed with Federal Officers that serve there.

Annually, we sponsor a much anticipated event: the Good Friday Walk for Justice. The Stations of the Cross are paired with contemporary justice issues, and our coalition partners present prayers of the stations as we stop at appropriate places around the Loop.

Our Future? We have long mentored young lay interns from various Universities and religious communities' volunteer programs. A number of them have joined our staff full time as representatives of religious congregations. We are passing on the torch of justice work. It is wonderful to see ones passion turn into expressions of compassion.

For more information: www.8thdaycenter.org

Compassion is Action

by Sister Alice Thraen

- What do you do on a Friday night in Rochester?
- What do you do when restaurants and bakeries have a surplus of food?
- What do you do when the "working poor" need food?

You try to make a difference by bringing them all together! That is just what a group of Sisters of Saint Francis do when they leave the hill one Friday night each month to help distribute food to the "working poor" of Rochester. Care and concern for others in living the mission of being a "compassionate presence" brings the Sisters to Bethel Lutheran Church the third Friday of each month to help distribute food to those in need.

The Sisters are involved in the Community Food Response (CFR) program which is a local, volunteer, non-profit, interfaith networking project to bring surplus food to those in need. The organization works closely with State and County Health Departments, coordinating the distribution of surplus food from restaurants, cafeterias, businesses, hospitals and supermarkets. This food, which would normally be thrown away, is distributed to the needy.

CFR began in 1993 by James Landers, Ph.D., his wife, Lianne Walker, and Joe Powers with the purpose to provide food for the needy of Rochester. There are 18-20 volunteer organizations involved in food packaging, transportation and distribution. During a 12 month period of 2010-2011, over 214,000 pounds of food was distributed to the needy persons in the area.

Volunteers are the heart of CFR. The first team of Sisters involved in the project were Sisters Alcantara, Marcianne, Severina, Irene Kelly, Monique and Tressa. Later that year, Sisters Jutta, Elise, Ernan, Bernadette Servaty, Alice Thraen, Joy and Genevieve made up another team. Others soon joined and Sisters Jeanette, Iria, Pat Himmer, Janel, Valerie Kilian, Claren, Ann Redig and Renata have remained involved over the years.

"Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

Living a Compassionate Life: Come and See!

A **COME AND SEE!** overnight program is being planned for Saturday, March 31, beginning at 9:00 am, through Palm Sunday, April 1, ending at 1:00 pm. This is a time for young women, ages 18-35, to come to know us as Sisters of Saint Francis and also have time for reflection and discernment as they move into their life choice/response to call.

If you desire to serve God in religious life, or know of a young woman between the ages of 18-35 who does, please consider the Sisters of Saint Francis of Rochester, MN. Call Sister Ann at 507-282-7441 x206 or email: sisterann@rochesterfranciscan.org.

We are ready to walk with you.

Assisi Heights Spirituality Center

Day of Quiet and Prayer: A Personal Retreat. We welcome you for a day spent in prayer and quiet. Please arrive at the reception desk between 8:30-9:00 am. You will have a private room, lunch and access to Lourdes Chapel and the Assisi Heights Life Library, as well as acres of outside beauty to explore. If desired, the opportunity to meet with a spiritual companion during the day is available for \$20. Preregistration is recommended a week in advance. Register by e-mail: [click here](#) or call: 507-280-2195. Suggested donation: \$25

To view upcoming events: [click here](#).

To learn more about spiritual direction: [click here](#).

To request a prayer: [click here](#).

To inquire about hosting your retreat or meeting at our facilities, call 507-280-2195 or email: ahsc@rochesterfranciscan.org.

Thank You for YOUR Compassion...

We wish to thank and recognize those who have supported
the Sisters of Saint Francis along the way!

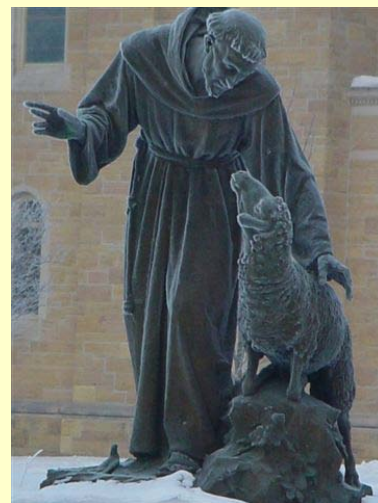
If you have any questions on how you can provide a gift to the Sisters of Saint Francis or to the Academy of Our Lady of Lourdes through your will or a special bequest, please contact:

S. Eleanor Granger, Director of Benefactor Relations
1001 14th Street NW, Rochester, MN 55901
eleanor.granger@myclearwave.net
or 507-282-7441 x 536

SAVE THE DATE!

RDW TRIO: In Concert

Lourdes Chapel, Assisi Heights
Friday, March 9, 2012 - 7 PM



Enjoy the sounds of this Jazz Trio from Luxembourg - birthplace of our Foundress, Mother Alfred Moes. Sponsored, in part, by the Sisters of Saint Francis and the Luxembourg American Cultural Society.