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Dear Friends,

Like you at home and at the workplace, St. Francis Community has been adjusting and changing schedules and methods of doing our work during the COVID-19 crisis these past months. Obstacles do have a way of unleashing creativity. Throughout these times, we remain dedicated to those we serve: families who are in need, children seeking to learn and recreate in nature, and those seeking healing and renewal, stressed by the pressures of the pandemic. In this magazine you will see that we will not rest until we achieve our mission, often in new, creative ways.

Thank You for your faithful support. Even in times of crisis, we must come together to support the greater good, though that may mean coming together virtually. We thank you, our amazing partners in mission! You help us to continue to build and grow with your unwavering support.

Our call in these times includes working to see the deeper invitation that the pandemic is providing. May we joyfully journey forward together, listening to God’s call to resurrection – a call to a new way of being that is infinitely more than we could ask for or imagine.

Peace all good things to you!

Sister Sara Aldridge
Community Minister
Little did Sister Veronica Nowakowski know that her background in education and music would lead her to a life centered around her love of teaching and entertaining others. On August 21, 2020, she will be 90-years-old, and at the end of that month, she plans to officially retire.

Sister Veronica has spent much of her life working on the St. Francis Campus. Until the recent lock down orders were in place this past March, she had been working in the Life Enrichment Activities at St. Francis Home. She has been a St. Francis Senior Ministries employee since 1980 serving as assistant activities instructor and life enrichment assistant. Her favorite activity is leading sing-a-longs or playing an instrument for residents, and she always does it with a smile on her face.

Sister Veronica is always willing to lend her helping hands whenever she is asked to work. “She always has a smile on her face and that smile is contagious. She is a true representation of someone who has been called to serve others,” said Anne Luzader, supervisor.

In 1948, Sister Veronica took her vows to become a Franciscan sister. She graduated from Notre Dame University in 1969, majoring in education and minoring in voice. She became a teacher and served for many years in the primary grades, as a principal and kindergarten teacher throughout Ohio, and as principal at St. Joseph School in Waynesville, North Carolina. She enjoyed school musicals and eventually taught at St. Francis High School, teaching senior girls English and music for five years until the school closed in 1978.

The music school continued to operate in what is now referred to as the Elizabeth Schaefer Apartments, but the School of Music later moved to the current St. Francis Spirituality Center. When she retired from teaching, she went to the activities department at St. Francis Home. “It was just like teaching. And, I was still teaching music,” she said.

Over the years, her other responsibilities have included transporting residents for appointments and shopping trips and the Talking Books program at St. Francis Home. She organized craft projects, took residents on day trips, and made “welcome” signs for new residents. “I take care of the birds and the fish, pass out newspapers sometimes, and do one-on-one for people who cannot get out to enjoy activities.

“If I ever needed someone within an hour or two, Sister Veronica would change her plans and come over to St. Francis Home to work or just to volunteer and was so excited,” explained Darlene Bloom, Volunteer Coordinator and Activities Aide. “You can always count on her. And, she loves the residents so much as if they were part of her family. I have a special place in my heart for Sister Veronica. She was a vocalist for my wedding 37 years ago and every year since she has sent me an anniversary card without missing a year. She truly cares about people,” added Darlene.

As a result of her musical knowledge and experience playing drums during her high school years, Sister Veronica joined a unique washboard band called Washboard Players in Tiffin. On several occasions, she enjoyed playing solo to entertain residents at St. Francis Home.

Sister Veronica also enjoys giving hand massages to residents. “Everything I know about giving hand massages, I learned from Sister Emily Fox. She had a background in massage and would share tips that I still use today,” said Sister Veronica.

She has also been a familiar face at the FISH Food Pantry in Tiffin. Until recently, she would volunteer a few hours a week with Sister Stella Magers. “I hope that we will be able to go back soon,” she added. Additionally, Sister Veronica has been involved with the Retired Teachers of Seneca County since 1980, and through that organization, she also volunteers at the local Soup Kitchen at St. Paul’s Church in Tiffin as well as the Sharing Kitchen in nearby Fostoria.

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- Anne Luzader

“Sister Veronica put her heart and soul into that place (St. Francis Home) for so many years,” explained Sister Stella. “And, she was always ‘willing and able’ whenever they would call her. The phone would ring and without any hesitation, she would say, ‘I’ll be right over!’ She was always happy to go to work and never complained. Even when she was working contingently, she answered so pleasantly when she was asked to work, even if it was at the last minute,” added Sister Stella.
As more and more people participate in programs offered through Zoom Internet meetings due to stay-at-home orders related to the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Francis Spirituality Center has been “Zooming” its ongoing “Conversations about Faith” sessions since mid-March.

Zoom video events take place using a computer, mobile or electronic device where one person can host up to 300 participants. The convener can share hosting responsibilities with participants, each able to share documents or pictures on their screen.

The conversations began in late 2015 and are guided by Sister Edna Michel, OSF, M.A. Theology. Over the last five years, twenty 4-8 week sessions have been offered with over 30 people participating.

“[I] started these conversations during the Year of Mercy called by Pope Francis. It opened on December 8, 2015, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Pope Francis wanted to reach out to all who were struggling with their faith, who felt alienated from the Church or God, or who simply desired some compassionate attention from the Church. I wanted to give people a venue to talk through their issues, concerns, hurts, doubts and questions, so I scheduled the first Mercy Listens series during Lent of 2016,” explained Sister Edna. “The next series was held in June 2016, and again in September. The Year of Mercy came to a close on the Feast of Christ the King, the last Sunday in November 2016. The people who were taking part in Mercy Listens wanted to continue. So in January-February 2017, we changed the name, initially to No Hopes Barred: Conversations About Faith, then shortened it to just Conversations About Faith,” added Sister Edna.

Some participants have been “regulars” since 2015. Others come and go as their interests and schedules allow. Typically, about 12 people attend every session which, until March 2020, have been held in St. Francis Spirituality Center’s comfortable lounge. As one regular participant remarked when we announced the need to discontinue meeting due to COVID-19, “Gosh, I’m going to miss you guys; you’ve become like family to me.” Two weeks later, the group resumed meeting, but now by Zoom. Since geographical distance doesn’t deter participation, a former member who moved to North Carolina is now able to join the Conversations again. The program continues to grow as more participants beyond the Tiffin area log in to take part, and now they do not even have to drive to Tiffin to participate!

In mid-April, Sr. Edna Michel, Director at St. Francis Spirituality Center offered a similar program entitled Conversations about Coping through COVID-19. “It was the success of Conversations about Faith that inspired me to offer this discussion/peer support format,” said Sister Edna.

“This online discussion group was created to help participants maneuver more gently through the emotional and spiritual challenges of this pandemic. Articles about coping with fear and stress can be found in both printed and online forms, yet peer support remains one of the best ways of handling crises as we share ‘how we’re doing’ in a more personal setting. People can check out if our reactions are normal, where to get additional assistance, and how we’ve been able to help others.”

Sister Edna facilitates these conversations each Wednesday from 7:00-8:00pm. While not a professional counselor, she has had nearly 40 years’ experience listening to people’s life stories and helping them walk through tough times.

“When I witnessed the generosity of so many individuals and corporations in our community and across our country offering help, I believed that facilitating these conversations could be the gift we bring to lighten the burden that so many are shouldering right now.”

The first one-hour session included 12 men and women of all ages and life experiences from Tiffin, Toledo, Fremont, and Dayton, Ohio.
It was calming and enjoyable for me to be part of a group that was down-to-earth and ready to share. It was helpful for me to relate with others who were also hopeful that our future will continue to progress favorably. I was surprised how easy it was to come together, share with people that I did not know and have the ability to see and hear one another. There are all types of possibilities available for us.

Sister Ritamarie Miller

This group is especially meaningful to me because of the common bond which comes, even though we did not know or meet each other before on a regular basis. And, in fact, for some of us, we’ve never met—we have come together as friends united in heart and spirit, truly one in the Body of Christ! We share a common concern and want to learn more from each other. In doing so, we share and support each other.

Sister Pat Meyer

St. Francis Spirituality Center is currently offering more opportunities via Zoom during this pandemic: individual spiritual direction and a group discussion based on A Course in Miracles. For more information regarding spiritual direction, contact Jennifer at 419-443-1485 or peace@franciscanretreats.org. For more information or to register for A Course in Miracles, contact Diane Siesel at 419-448-0493 or email teacherville@gmail.com.

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Sister Ritamarie Miller

“It’s just nice to hear from other like-minded people at a time like this. A welcome break from the same old, same old is precious these days also. It is good to hear that I am not the only one more concerned about people rather than the economy. It is also nice to meet new friends, and it gives me a sense of fellowship that I did not get anywhere else.”

Don Hoover

“The slogan, ‘We’re in this together,’ has taken on flesh for me through these chats. The conversations have helped me to be more gentle with my own thoughts and fears.”

Sister Janice Rospert

“We are enriched by some variety in the backgrounds and experiences of our group members, and yet there is a commonality among us. We are aware of the need to take care of all who come into our lives. That underlines what Governor DeWine and Doctor Amy Adkins remind us of so often, ‘We are in this together.’”

Sister Toni Rode

--- and as far away as North Carolina. The program currently has no end date. “We will continue this program as long as there is a need,” said Sister Edna.

If interested in participating in Conversations about Coping through COVID-19, please register with Sr. Edna Michel directly at 567.230.0061 or Jennifer at 419-443-1485 or email peace@franciscanretreats.org. Directions will be given for the free Zoom download for computer, iPad, tablet or smart phone plus the code required to join in this FREE online conversation. It is also possible to participate by phone only.

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“I have found that connecting with others for the ‘intentional purpose’ of discussing the pandemic has allowed me the opportunity to honestly share what I’m thinking and feeling in a safe and non-judgmental space. I noticed early on that most of the conversations I was having about covid-19 were (1) initiated by others and (2) reactive in nature, either to something about the disease itself or to the change of lifestyle caused by the pandemic. While this is perfectly alright, I realized that I was not allowing myself to think through how the pandemic was affecting me personally.”

Marilyn Coney
SAVE THE DATE
Day of Giving to Support FELC ~ Friday, August 14, 2020

13th Annual Summer Harvest Gourmet Gala

Participate and support the Franciscan Earth Literacy Center (FELC) on two days in two different ways!

FELC will be holding their first Day of Giving on Friday, August 14th. In addition, the Center is excited to offer a different sort of Gala experience with a gourmet meal on Friday, August 14th and a virtual event/auction on Saturday, August 15th.

The Gala format and platform will be different than years past, but all of the proceeds will still benefit children who attend FELC classes and camps virtually or in person. The Pioneer Mill of Tiffin will be preparing a gourmet dinner plus a wine grab option at the St. Francis Campus on Friday night, August 14th or offering a gift certificate to be used at a later date of the buyer’s choice. The pick-up dinner and wine grab will be available by appointment on the St. Francis Campus every 15 minutes from 4:30-7:00 pm. The virtual event/auction will take place on Saturday evening, August 15th at 7:00 pm. This will include a special “live” raffle drawing for $500, gift card tree raffle and music by Char Pope. Honorary Co-Chairs are Dan and Nikki Reineke.

Early bird tickets cost $65 before July 1st or $75 on or after July 1st. Visit www.felctiffin.org to purchase tickets online. The deadline for tickets (includes dinner, auction and raffles) is Friday, August 7th.

To join in with the August 15th auction, visit www.419auctions.com anytime before August 15th to set up an account and to preview items. Additional items will be added during June, July and August, so keep checking back. Follow us on Facebook at FRANCISCAN EARTH LITERACY CENTER for daily auction features starting August 1st.

After much discussion and contemplation with regard to holding the regularly scheduled summer camps, the Franciscan Earth Literacy Center has made the decision not to offer in-person camps during the summer months due to safety concerns for our staff, children attending and our campus residents. However, the staff at the Franciscan Earth Literacy Center has been trying to “think outside of the box” when it comes to keeping kids busy and connected to the outdoors this summer. As a result, they are offering “Camp in a Box," so if you cannot get the kids out to camp this year, you can try a mini camp in a box!

A series of themed boxes have been designed to keep kids, ages 5-11 years old, engaged in outdoor activities during the summer while promoting active learning. Themes: Dig in and Plant, Kitchen Chemistry, Amazing Animals, Mad Scientist, Nature Chef, and I Will Survive. Boxes contain a variety of activities and all the materials necessary (with the exception of liquids) to complete each of the activities at an individual pace. One box is recommended per child. Each box costs $40 and free pick-up is available. Shipping is additional.

Visit http://felctiffin.org/camp-in-a-box/ for Scholarship Information, Box Descriptions, Frequently Asked Questions, and/or to Purchase a Box. For questions, call 419.448.7485 or email sbusack@felctiffin.org. Scholarships are available. There is a limit of two scholarships per child.

Day of Giving
Friday, August 14, 2020
12:00 am - 11:59 pm

Donate online or by phone
Sponsor a child or children’s program
Contribute to the FELC wish list
Become a Friend of FELC

Cash, Credit Card, Check or Online Donations Accepted

Your gift will be doubled, matched by area businesses.

More details coming soon at www.felctiffin.org
Celebrate Earth Day

Due to COVID-19, local organizations were not able to join together in person for the annual community-wide Earth Day. The Franciscan Earth Literacy, however, was able to partner with a local business and offer something unique.

To show appreciation for their 300 employees, Arm & Hammer gifted all of their employees with a live plant and a “quarantine bag” on Earth Day. Employees received board games, a deck of cards, snacks from Ballreich’s Potato Chips, soap, disposable face masks, washable masks for their family members, and either a flower or vegetable plant from the FELC greenhouse.

According to April Russell, Plant Administrator at Arm & Hammer, the Old Fort plant is celebrating their 40th Anniversary this year and continues to grow in many ways.

Any business or anyone who would like to partner with FELC next year for starter plants, contact Sister Shirley Shafranek at 419.448.7485.

Anyone can make a planned gift

No matter if your estate is worth $100 or one million dollars, gifts of all sizes make a difference at St. Francis Community. In fact, you may even be able to make a bigger impact than you thought possible when you make a planned gift. For more information, contact Sister Joanne Lammers at 419.447.0435 or email jlammers@tiffinfranciscans.org.

Unique Garden Attracts Many

In May, the Franciscan Earth Literacy Center began planting a butterfly garden. Phase 1, also referred to as the Monarch Waystation, will promote the growth of monarch populations in Seneca County, as well as provide a habitat for other types of butterflies, insects and other pollinators. Once the garden has become a bit more established, it will serve as an educational tool for Science Days and afterschool programs.

“I want to use the garden to teach kids about healthy soils, butterfly and insect life cycles and migration, all about pollinators, and how kids can create an “attractive” (attractive to pollinators) spot in their gardens or yards,” said Samantha Busack, Environmental Educator, “We will eventually have butterfly feeding and puddling stations, bee baths, and maybe even little toad houses,” added Samantha. “Additionally, a variety of plants were donated for the garden from Friends of FELC.”
Sr. Rita Wienken has not stopped planting or growing thousands of plants for Community Gardeners at the Toledo GROWS greenhouse during the pandemic. The plants were given away in a neighborhood in downtown Toledo where many people cannot afford to purchase plants. Many schools and some churches have community gardens with Toledo GROWS. Some of the gardens also provide veggies for area local food pantries.

Sister Roberta Doneth has made about 180 masks so far. She started making them for a local JOANN Fabrics and Crafts Store in the Canton area who distributed them to hospital and nursing home caretakers. She also made them for all the Sisters on the St. Francis Campus in Tiffin. Additionally, she has given them to her local parish staff and other parish leaders, mailed them to friends and family and even made them for area business owners and their employees.

Throughout the Easter season and leading up to Pentecost Sunday, Sister Jane Frances Omlor created an unfolding story in the pottery shop windows that face the back of the convent. Each Wednesday, another image was added to the windows which allowed the sisters living in the convent to view some beautiful and cheerful artwork during the pandemic.

Many of the families at Cuernavaca Children’s Mission have seen their income drop down to zero because of the coronavirus pandemic. “We have told our families to contact us if they need food and we will find a way to get them groceries. Thanks to our benefactors, none of our children are going hungry these days!” - Sister Margaret Slowick

Sisters Dionne and Francine Sartor visit their blood sister Elaine Jesberger through the glass at the main entrance at St. Francis Home.