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140th Anniversary
1869-2009

Special Historical Issue
Greetings

From the Community Minister

Dear Family and Friends,

The Sisters of St. Francis invite you to rejoice with us as we begin the 140th anniversary celebration of our beginnings as St. Francis Home and as a religious congregation. It was on the feast of the Sacred Heart, June 4, 1869, that the Sisters of St. Francis came into being. This issue of our magazine is dedicated to telling the story of our founding and a brief glimpse of our early days.

We have all heard the saying, “If walls could talk!” Sometimes it is said with a sigh of relief that walls cannot talk and reveal things that are better kept secret, and other times it is said with a bit of nostalgia, wishing we really could learn more about what happened within these walls. The latter is my sentiment about the section of our buildings we call Holy Family Hall.

The Holy Family Hall includes the first building constructed by our founders and is often referred to as the “cradle of the community.” Holy Family was built in 1870 with bricks made of the clay soil on our property, fashioned and fired in a kiln near the site chosen for the building.

Holy Family originally served as hearth and home for the Sisters, the orphans, and the elderly. Can you imagine the combination of joys and sorrows, laughter and tears, love and compassion, prayer and hard work witnessed by these walls? The good times and bad times were all experienced as one large extended family. Holy Family was an appropriate name given to these walls.

When St. Joseph Hall was built in 1931, the elderly men moved into the new building. After the orphanage closed in 1936, the Sisters, elderly women, and high school girls were left to share the living quarters in Holy Family. The elderly women did not move out until St. Francis Home opened in 1961.

Fast forward to today. The Holy Family section now serves as the administration wing, along with a residence for some of our Sisters. Almost 140 years later, these walls still witness joys and sorrows, laughter and tears, love and compassion, prayer and hard work.

Walking the main hallway of Holy Family is like taking a walk down memory lane. The hallway is lined with pictures of those who have served as “Mother Superior,” beginning with our co-founder, Mother Francis Schaefer. I pray to these wise women of deep faith for guidance. It is they who have helped to bring us to where we are today.

We are blessed with a solid foundation as we look to the next 140 years with hope and enthusiasm, with great joy in the relationships that we have with people like you, and with confidence in God who is ever our refuge and our strength. Thanks for being a part of our story!

With loving gratitude,

Sister Jacquelyn Doepker, OSF
Community Minister

On the Cover: Front of the original St. Francis Home, 1893.
Beginnings:

The First Family of St. Francis

St. Francis Home and the Sisters of St. Francis of Tiffin, Ohio, were born of the promptings of the Holy Spirit through a dream of Rev. Joseph Bihn and the generously graced response of Mrs. Elizabeth Schaefer and her family. Together they formed, as it were, the First Family of St. Francis. The members of this family are: Rev. Joseph Bihn, Mrs. Elizabeth Schaefer, John Greiveldinger, Mary Ann Schaefer, Josephine Schaefer, and Peter Wiot. They were tenacious in their humble trust of God remembering always: God is our refuge and our strength. But, let's take a moment to listen to them.

Joseph:

“Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me” (Mt. 25:40). These words have been hauntingly alive in my heart for a long time and now, in 1867, they prompt me to do something.

Allow me to introduce myself. I am Rev. Joseph Bihn, an immigrant from Bavaria, Germany. Currently I serve as pastor of St. Joseph Church in Tiffin, Ohio. Daily I am overwhelmed with the plight of children and older folks, men and women, who are left without financial or family support following the devastating years of the Civil War. I MUST act! I work and pray! I am using the means I have to purchase a 58-acre farm at the edge of Tiffin. It has a few buildings. That is a start!

On Sunday morning at Mass I will tell the parishioners of my dream to provide a home for orphaned children and aged women and men. I beg the Holy Spirit to move the hearts of these good people. I will ask if there is anyone willing to help.

Elizabeth:

Ever since my husband, John, died and I have the care of the girls, the farm, my dad, and Peter, an orphan boy, my heart has been searching and is sometimes restless. I pray, “God, I need your help to do what is mine to do. I know you hold us all in your own divine heart. I sense there is something more I can do. Show me the way.”

I am Elizabeth Greiveldinger Schaefer. My father was a brickmaker by trade. I grew up in Remich, Luxemburg along the Moselle River. After immigrating to the United States, I married John Schaefer when I was 25. Our first daughter, Mary Ann, was born two years later. John owned the 84-acre farm near New Riegel, Ohio, where we have lived. We had a busy and happy life. In 1852 at the end of the cholera epidemic, John died suddenly. I was pregnant with our second daughter, Josephine, who was born in September. We continued to make our living by working the farm.

At Mass one Sunday morning in 1867, our pastor spoke of his dream of providing a home for children and older folks and asked if anyone was willing and able to help. My heart stirred within me. My maternal heart feels deep compassion for children and older people. In an indescribable way, I knew I was being given a response to my own prayer.

Remembering God’s gentle stirring of my heart that day when Father Bihn made his plea for help, I could only say yes. He asked me only once.

John:

After my son-in-law’s untimely death, my daughter and I worked hard on the farm to provide for the family. Elizabeth had a tender and compassionate heart and we welcomed Peter Wiot, an orphan boy, into our family. Peter was still a little child and we knew the farm would be a good place for him. When the girls were old enough, I wanted them to work on the farm. Elizabeth had other plans for her daughters. She enrolled them in the newly-established Ursuline Academy in Tiffin.

Little did I know that other dreams were stirring her heart and that Peter and I would have the distinction of being the first child and the first aged man in a brand new venture!

Mary Ann:

I enjoyed our family life on the farm and liked school. I had just graduated and I was full of plans and dreams for my future. You can only imagine the surprise and the excitement and the fear we all felt when Mother said we should seriously think about responding to our pastor’s call for

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October 4, 1906

Last Thursday, October 4th was a day long to be remembered by the Sisters of St. Francis, Tiffin, Ohio. Besides being the Patronal Feast of the Institution, it marked the dedication of the new convent and the reception and profession of new members to the community.

The new convent consists of four stories including basement and attic, and is finished throughout in oak, with hard wood floors, baths, toilets and every convenience known to the modern builder. The basement consists of the kitchen, large halls and a dining room. Tiled floors and wainscoting and ground glass windows make the dining room most attractive.

On the first floor are the chapels, the postulants’ room, the novitiate, a reception room for strangers and the superior’s room. Dormitories, bedrooms and large halls, all handsomely finished and fitted with every convenience, make up the third story. Each room is well lighted and airy and from every side one has a beautiful view of the surrounding country.

The ceremonies incident to the dedication were conducted by the Rt. Rev. Mgr. G.F. Houck, assisted by Revs. Francis Hultgen, Thos. F. Conlon, M. Dechant, and Jos. R. Waechter of Tiffin, Ohio, Rev. J.F. Haupert, Berwick, and Rev. B. Mueller of St. Patrick’s Settlement.


The community is in a flourishing condition. Besides sheltering over 115 orphans it is a place where many old people find a quiet and pleasant home during the evening of their life. Rev. M. Dechant is the chaplain and his piety and devotion, no doubt, contribute much to the peace and contentment that reigns there.

Rev. Jos. R. Waechter

If These Walls Could Talk

October 4, 1906

The original building, a frame house, burns to the ground.

Six children die from a diphtheria outbreak in the orphanage.

Property for a second home for elderly women and men, St. Joseph Institute, is purchased in Lorain, Ohio.

The Brothers move into their new home on April 3, Easter Monday.

Father Bihn, 71, dies of a heart ailment after a short illness on August 17. He is buried in St. Francis Cemetery.

Mother Francis, 71, dies of cancer after a prolonged illness on November 18. She is buried in St. Francis Cemetery.

Beginnings...

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help. I liked being involved in many different things, yet never could I have imagined the future that my life would hold!

Josephine:
When Mother called us all together to tell us what she felt God was asking of her – and maybe of all of us, I was still in school. She told us she believed God was inviting us to help take care of children and aged persons in Tiffin. We would move from our farm to a new place.

Mother assured me that she wanted me to finish school. Everything was a very big risk! But if we were all going to do it together, I was ready and excited even though I was scared!

Peter:
Mrs. Schaefer and her father took me in, a little boy in need of a home. Mary Ann and Josephine became my big sisters. I was only eight or nine years old when the family decided to take a new direction. I wondered what in the world that would mean for me.

As I think about it now, I was the first child and “Grandpa” was the first older man of the new home. I will never forget the love and care I continued to receive. I hate to admit it, but I was probably given preference at times and was held more accountable than others at other times! When I was old enough, I went to Chicago to find work. My life was not long and in 1917 I was dying. My last request was simply to take me home and bury me at St. Francis Home in Tiffin, Ohio.

On March 1, 1868, Elizabeth Schaefer and her family moved from their farm in New Riegel to their new home in Tiffin and St. Francis Home was born. A year later, on June 4, the feast of the Sacred Heart, the congregation of the Sisters of St. Francis came into being. Elizabeth Schaefer became Mother Francis d’Assisi, the first superior of the new community, and Mary Ann Schaefer became a novice and was given the name Sister Sacred Heart of Jesus (later changed to Sr. M. Alacoque).

She was actively involved in the founding of many new and expanding mission efforts. Josephine Schaefer joined the community and became Sister M. Bonaventure. She was the third superior of the Sisters of St. Francis following in her mother’s leadership footsteps. John Greiveldinger died in 1874. He was the first of the family to enter eternal life.

With a retrospective glance over the past 140 years, the entire St. Francis Community utters a grateful thank you to our founding family whose dream to serve God as “our refuge and our strength” never wavered.
One hundred forty years ago, a small group of women took a bold leap of faith and a brave step into the unknown when they became the first members of the Sisters of St. Francis. Elizabeth Schaefer, and her daughter, Mary Ann, were joined by Elizabeth’s sister-in-law, Mary Schaefer, and another St. Joseph parishioner, Cunigunda Schmidt.

From its beginnings, the Sisters have followed the Rule of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis. With Father Bihn and Elizabeth and Mary Schaefer being long-time Third Order Secular Franciscans, it was natural for the new religious congregation to be Franciscan. Hard work, poverty, and hardship were no strangers especially to the early Sisters, who had to feed and clothe, at times, up to 215 children, elderly persons, and themselves. Father Bihn wanted the new institution to support itself. Not all the Sisters came from a farm background, but of necessity, they had to work in the gardens and fields. The years of the Depression were especially difficult years for the institution.

Throughout its history, the community has seen many changes, to name a few: German was the common language at the beginning, then prayers were said in Latin, then in English; from different habits, then modified habits, to no habits worn; updated Rules, from the one of 1521, to 1927’s, to 1982’s; Constitutions, from Father Bihn’s handwritten Rule of Life, rewritten from time to time, to the Constitution recently approved by Rome.

Through all the difficulties, the natural disasters, and the changes, the Sisters were guided by strong leaders; for the first 25 years, by Mother Francis Schaefer, then by Mother Clara Bork. The current community minister, Sister Jacquelyn Doepker, is the 17th Sister in 140 years to serve in congregational leadership.

One of the always important responsibilities of leadership is the education and training of the Sisters. In the early years, the orphans needed teachers. Pastors requested teachers for their parish schools. The Sisters then and now need to be formed in religious life, as well as in academic excellence. From 1934 to 1970, teens answering the call to religious life as Sisters of St. Francis, received their early formation at St. Francis High School. Summer school was the common way to complete degrees.

Fewer women are entering religious life now, but they hear and answer the same call to which Elizabeth, Mary Ann, and Mary Schaefer, and Cunigunda Schmidt responded by dedicating their lives 140 years ago. While never large, the community of the Sisters of St. Francis has been the destination of many over these years. Why did Mary and Cunigunda come? Why did those who joined them come? Why have women over the years come? Why do they come today? The answers are found in present day Sisters who offer words of testimony. Sister Pat Froning found her heart “drawn to a love and goodness that was God loving me and everybody else.” Sister Marie Reinhart has “a burning love to bring Jesus’ healing, comfort, affirmation, and a deepening in holiness to those suffering physically, mentally, psychologically, and spiritually.” In Sister Virginia Welsh is a “longing to love God and contribute to making a better world.” These few words articulate for many the essence of why they have committed their lives to God, to following the Gospel after St. Francis and St. Clare.

From four women in 1869 to 108 today, the Sisters of St. Francis continue to respond to the needs of the Church, to live in a spirit of hospitality, simplicity, and joy, and to celebrate their dependence on God, who is ever “our refuge and our strength.”

The Sisters
“God is our Refuge and our Strength”
Little did Father Joseph Bihn know, when requesting help from his St. Joseph parishioners to care for children in need, that 140 years later, the mission would still be strong. The seed he planted in 1867 has continued to bear fruit through so many who have responded to the call to serve God as Sisters of St. Francis and Associates.

The first children to be cared for, Peter and Nicholas Wiot and Julia Stover, were admitted on May 4, 1869, to St. Francis Home which soon after became legally incorporated as the The Citizens Hospital and Orphan Asylum. From 1869 to 1936 when the final two children, Steve Jasiak and Joe Kuzma, left St. Francis, the Sisters had cared for more than 1700 children.

The Social Security Act in September 1935 that enabled widows to keep their children at home, meant a significant decrease everywhere in numbers of dependent children needing an institutional home. The consequent decision by the Diocese of Toledo to sponsor only one orphanage brought an end to the Tiffin orphanage at St. Francis. It did not bring an end, however, to the work of the Sisters with children in need.

The Sisters of St. Francis took over St. Anthony’s Orphanage in Toledo, Ohio, from the Grey Nuns in 1951. The name was changed to St. Anthony Villa in 1957 and the Sisters continued caring for children there until the mid 1980’s.

Work with children continues. Today Angel Academy, a daycare center for children, is a ministry of St. Francis Senior Ministries and is located within St. Francis Home. Associate Amber Herbert is an adoptive mother. She and Associate Linda Woodland are also foster parents. Associate Jean Underfer-Babalis works with teens, single moms, and drug abusers in the Maumee, Ohio, area. Associate Judy Washbush is director of Kiji School in Madison, Wisconsin, working with children and teens in an after-school program. Sister Diana Klem is the regional director for Family Connections, The Twelve, a social service agency in Toledo, Ohio, that focuses on helping young people in need and their families.

Sister Kateri Kaufman, currently assistant director of Munchkin Land Day Care in Paducah, Kentucky, notes, “The Lord said, ‘Let the little ones come to me.’ As I care for the little children every day, I marvel how much I am a partner in raising them. I realize the weight on my shoulders because they are like sponges that soak in everything and I must always help them in knowing right from wrong, sharing and learning what life is about.”

The compassion of Father Bihn and Mother Francis for needy children continues today to nurture children in need.
The first resident of St. Francis Home for the Aged in 1868 was John B. Greiveldinger, the father of Elizabeth Schaefer. Over the next several decades, the Home continued to grow and the elderly kept arriving in steady numbers. By the late 1920s, applications had increased so greatly that the building, known as Holy Family Hall, was filled to capacity with a long waiting list. Because of the volume of elderly wanting to come to St. Francis, a new building for elderly men was erected in 1930 and dedicated as St. Joseph Hall on October 3, 1931.

After the transfer of the men to the new building and the subsequent closing of the Home for children in 1934, the vacated areas were opened to aspirants to the congregation. The elderly women remained in Holy Family Hall, in expanded apartments. Father Bihn had specified that the aged were to pay a nominal fee to help defray the expenses of the Home. Some paid an annuity, others an agreed sum per month while a few who could not pay were always accepted. Many were able-bodied and helped with the actual work of running the building. The men did shoemaking, carpentry, and lawn work while the women did sewing, food preparation, and kitchen work.

Mother Francis was devoted to the elderly residents and would visit them daily. To each, she would listen to their troubles and share words of kindness in the hope that they would not feel lonely or neglected.

Over the years, the number of people who made St. Francis their home continued to grow. In March 1960, ground was broken west of St. Joseph Hall for a new building to house all the elderly. Seventy nine residents moved from the old facility to the newly completed St. Francis Home on December 5, 1961. The building was designed to serve up to 112 residents. Sixteen Sisters were assigned to the Home and were assisted by 17 full-time lay employees and nine part-time lay employees. One wing of the building was designated for Sisters working at the Home.

The new St. Francis Home required that residents walk into the building and demonstrate their ability to care for themselves. It also provided rooms for married couples. Mr. and Mrs. Effinger Hartline were the first residents as well as the first husband and wife to be admitted. Mr. Hartline was a retired naval commander. He and his wife are buried in the convent cemetery.

A construction project undertaken in 1994 added 40 nursing beds and 15 residential beds to St. Francis Home. The project also enlarged the food service department, main dining room, added two elevators, a childcare center, covered front entry and entry ramp, and parking at the front of the building. In 2000, another renovation took place and the Chiara Center was created, a secure, special care area for residents with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementia.

As the need for more independent living for seniors grew, a decision was made to remodel Elizabeth Schaefer Hall into apartments. The building, which had been constructed on the St. Francis campus in 1968 to accommodate a high school, a school...
In January 1870, very soon after the beginning of St. Francis Home, Michael Boos of Thompson, Ohio, offered his services in this new undertaking. He became Brother Anthony in the foundation of the Brothers of the Third Order of St. Francis.

A letter from Father Bihn to the Sisters in May 1893 notes that the Brothers moved into the new Brothers’ Home on Easter Monday. Brother Anthony was the cook for the brothers and the older boys. Brother Cornelius, who had been a Brother for 17 years, was his helper.

A number of other men were also attracted to the work of St. Francis Home and the brotherhood grew modestly. Theirs was a simple Franciscan way of life according to the rule Father Bihn wrote for them. It could be summarized as “Pray and Work.” The work was mostly manual work: blacksmithing, farming, ditching, shoemaking and repair, broom making, milking, butchering, baking, caring for the older boys, and teaching them some of these same trades.

Brothers Lorenz, Dionysius, Ivo, Fidelis, Leo, Pius, and Francis came, but left again. Others came, continued the work, and lived out their lives as Brothers of St. Francis. They were Brothers Anthony Boos, Cornelius Stroesser, Aloysius Hofer, Felix Murphy, Gregory Beckman, and Benedict Wickenhauser. Their later years were spent in quiet and prayer and lighter work. These six are buried in St. Francis Cemetery. The last brother, Brother Benedict, died on December 8, 1925.
A lthough the congregation was founded to care for elderly persons and orphans, a call came already in 1871 requesting teachers for the new St. Nicholas School in Frenchtown, Ohio. Father Bihn granted this request by sending the two Sisters he considered the best-trained, Sisters Alacoque and Bonaventure, both daughters of Elizabeth Schaefer. An additional two teachers were sent the next year to teach at St. Patrick Settlement near Bascom, Ohio.

By the end of 1882, the community had 14 teachers in six schools in what is now the Diocese of Toledo. They continued to staff schools in rural areas, following the wishes of Father Bihn, who specified teaching “especially in poorer congregations and in the country.” All teaching was at the elementary level until September 1930, when Sister M. Baptista Wingerling was assigned to Central Catholic High School in Toledo, Ohio.

Forty years later, Tiffin Franciscans were teaching in five high schools and 20 elementary schools.

In 1965, plans for a scholastic building to be named Elizabeth Schaefer Hall began to take shape. The building was designed to house classrooms for Sister-students enrolled in college-level courses, aspirants who attended St. Francis Convent School, and adult-education classes. The St. Francis School of Music was to be located there as well. In May, 1968, the new building was blessed and dedicated.

The years after the Second Vatican Council saw a decline in vocations and enrollment in the school dropped. By the early 1970s, St. Francis High School agreed to accept girls whose intention was not necessarily to enter religious life. By 1972, the school was coeducational. The school’s philosophy was based on freedom, simplicity, justice, and love. The school closed in 1978 after consultation with diocesan officials who felt an alternative model school was not in the best interest of the educational needs of the Tiffin community.

Over the years, new forms of ministry in education have evolved, and teaching has become more diversified. While currently one Sister and five Associates are classroom teachers and a Sister is a high school librarian, others teach in other ways. These include directing parish religious education programs and RCIA sessions and leading Bible study at a jail. One Sister manages an educational sponsorship program in Cuernavaca, Mexico, while yet another has created an inner-city tutoring program. One Sister teaches pottery classes at a studio on the motherhouse campus and others are teaching peace-making, servant leadership, parish organization, and yoga. In addition, Sisters are giving music lessons and directing choirs, working with elementary and adult ESL (English as a second language) students, teaching Spanish as a foreign language, and helping students get their GED diplomas. The ways are many.
These words of St. Francis from his “Canticle of Brother Sun” have shaped Franciscan attitudes and love for the land for nearly eight centuries. “Care of the earth” is one of four major goals by which the Sisters of St. Francis are guided in their lives, their decisions, and their choices of ministry as they “go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.” Mark 16:15.

The 58-acre farm purchased by Father Joseph Bihn in 1868 provided for the sustenance of all who lived at St. Francis Home during the crucial beginning years. As the numbers of boys and girls, older women and men, Sisters and Brothers increased, additional land was purchased and, at the death of Father Bihn in 1893, numbered 551.48 acres. The Brothers of St. Francis, although few in number, did the farm work with the older boys. Their responsibilities included ditching, clearing land, draining swamp areas, planting and harvesting the crops, butchering, feeding the animals, and milking the cows.

Throughout the 140 years, the farm has always remained a viable working farm. Donald and Mary Ellen Derr and their family lived on and farmed the land beginning in 1957. In 1986 they purchased the farm buildings and some adjacent land.

Founded in 1994 as a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of St. Francis, the Franciscan Earth Literacy Center is an environmental education center and a demonstration facility designed to promote the appreciation of nature and to encourage sustainable...
living practices. The Center provides a place to work together and to learn how to live well on the earth. Seeds of Hope Farm, which began in 2005, is a small diversified farm dedicated to the production of quality, chemical-free vegetables, herbs, flowers, and eggs, and is part of the Franciscan Earth Literacy Center.

After ten years of research, study, dialogue, and prayer, the Sisters of St. Francis chose to place 300 plus acres of the farm land in a land conservancy, preserving it as green space for the future. In 2007, they signed a contract with the Black Swamp Conservancy, an organization dedicated to the conservation of land and water resources in northwest Ohio.

For all who live and walk on this land today, “the farm” embodies a spirit of living history and of forward movement in caring for the earth. From the earliest beginnings of St. Francis Home to today’s exciting adventure of building a passive straw bale house, the Sisters of St. Francis and their many partners continue to sing, “Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth.”

Continuing the Legacy of Caring for the Earth

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) at Seeds of Hope Farm in its fifth year.

CSA is a partnership of mutual commitment between a farm and a community of supporters which provides a direct link between the production and consumption of food. Supporters help cover a farm’s yearly operating budget by purchasing a share of the season’s harvest. Shares are either working or non-working.

Becoming a member creates a responsible relationship between people and the food they eat, the land on which it is grown and those who grow it.

In 2009, over 100 families and individuals are CSA members at Seeds of Hope Farm. The same land that provided food and sustenance over 140 years ago continues to bring people together to work and care for the earth while fostering a sense of community and an appreciation for the environment.
Spirituality and Peacemaking

St. Joseph Hall

To meet the expanding need of caring for the elderly, the Sisters of St. Francis erected St. Joseph Hall in 1930. It served as the home for retired men from 1931-1961. Following the move of the residents to the new St. Francis Home in 1961, St. Joseph Hall became the residence hall for the girls attending St. Francis High School.

During the years 1975-1982, the building was renovated and provided offices, meeting space, and retreat opportunities for the Sisters.

With the decision in 1982 to focus on the retreat ministry, St. Joseph Hall became St. Joseph Renewal Center and opened to the public for private and group retreats.

In 1985 the St. Francis School of Music also moved into the building.

In 2002 fire caused extensive damage to the building. No one was injured. Renamed St. Francis Spirituality Center after the fire, the retreat ministry actively continues today, offering both programs and hosting groups. It is open to persons of all faiths.

Spirituality and peacemaking have marked the life of the Sisters of St. Francis from the very beginning. Through the difficult times of fire, tornadoes, epidemics, and ridicule; through the times of financial insecurity and need to beg for assistance to continue their work; through the times of growth and expansion; and through the times of rejection and great doubt about their future, the Sisters held carefully to the call and trust that was theirs: “God is our Refuge and our Strength.”

In their daily lives, the Sisters emulated the characteristic which most endeared Mother Francis to her spiritual children, “the kindness she was accustomed to show them at all times.” They nurtured peace, prayed for it, practiced it, and, by example, taught the children the ways of peace.

It has been those in need who have always called forth the prayer and peace-making efforts of the Sisters of St. Francis. In the 1960s, through a program called Operation Love, they reached out to the 27 migrant camps north of Tiffin through weekly visits, offering both social and spiritual support. This outreach led to a gradual change of direction and brought the congregation to deeper involvement with immigrants and refugees.

Around this same time, the Sisters were working in prison reform, and were represented on the Diocese of Toledo Prison Reform Task Force.

Sisters Elizabeth Jean Siebenaler, Annette Langenderfer, Roberta McKinnon, Agnes Siebenaler, shown with Bishop Samuel Ruiz of Chiapas, Mexico, the first foreign mission, 1970
After the Second Vatican Council, the Church asked congregations of religious women to consider ministering to the poor in Latin America. Two Sisters, Elizabeth Jean Siebenaler and Annette Langenderfer, accepted the challenge and began doing missionary work in Chiapas, Mexico, one of the poorest states in Mexico. The Sisters have maintained a presence there for 40 years and it continues to this day.

Many Sisters and Associates recalled the pain and feelings of helplessness they experienced as they awakened to the injustice of the wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua. They prayed. They protested. They marched, and they continue to insist on the closure of the School of Americas (S.O.A.) in Fort Benning, Georgia. The School is a combat training school for Latin American soldiers. In 2001, it was renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.

In the 1980s, the Sisters established the St. Joseph Renewal Center, a peaceful place for contemplation, prayer, and active learning. The Center, which was renamed the St. Francis Spirituality Center in 2002, is rooted in promoting Franciscan spirituality, engaging participants in the renewal of their lives, and fostering a love for creation and earth and her inhabitants.

Also during this same time period, Sisters engaged in issues involving hunger, energy, the arms race, migrants, human rights, and housing.

In the General Assembly of 1994, the Sisters claimed contemplation-action and peacemaking as two of four major goals to guide the life and the ministry of the congregation.

Today, Sisters and Associates are working in a wide variety of ministries which continue to involve them in peace and social justice issues: with children in need, with the poor, with immigrants, with the incarcerated, with women caught in human trafficking, and in the Middle East as a Christian Peacemaker Team member in Palestine.

The Spirit is alive and the work of the Sisters of St. Francis and Associates is ever the same and always new.
In 1892, Father Joseph Bihn purchased and remodeled a large house in Lorain, Ohio with the intention of converting it into an orphanage and home for the elderly. Sisters Ludmilla Schmidt and Antonia Adams began the work of caring for the first seven residents in the new St. Joseph Institute. Because there was no permanent chaplain and the nearest church was nearly a mile away, none of the residents remained very long. At the same time the doctors of the area recognized the need for a hospital and began to send patients to the Sisters for care. St. Joseph Hospital was born. The Sisters remained there until 1927 when they were recalled to work in the Diocese of Toledo.

Mother Bonaventure was the superior in 1911, when at the request of the Bishop of Bismarck, North Dakota, she sent four Sisters for one year to staff the county hospital in Minot, North Dakota. The Sisters placed their new work under the patronage of St. Joseph. The need was great and the hospital was too small. Not being in a position to build or take on a large hospital, it was turned over to the charge of the Sisters of St. Francis of Buffalo, New York in 1927.

The Sisters were approached again to return to North Dakota and to staff the Linton Memorial Hospital in 1953. Sent by Mother Euphrasia, eight Sisters responded to the call and began their work of caring for the sick and injured. For nine years to the end of the lease in 1962, they continued their hospital ministry and managed the lay staff in the midst of great financial difficulty and of great blessing.

It was on September 19, 1959, that Riverside Hospital, in Paducah, Kentucky, became Lourdes Hospital under the auspices of the Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky. On this day, Sister Eleanor Rahrig became the administrator. Sisters Gerard (Helen) Linder, Luke (Helen) Schill, Aquinas Makin, Leo (Elizabeth Jean) Siebenaler, Marilyn Keller, and Malachy Kux became the first Sister staff members. The Sisters ventured into Southern Bible Belt territory where Roman Catholics were and remain very much in the minority.

Over the years, the hospital has moved through various stages of ownership: from the Diocese of Owensboro to the Sisters of St. Francis to the Diocese of Owensboro to Mercy Health System to Catholic Health Partners. Legislation changed the face of healthcare especially through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Medicare Act of 1965. Throughout all those changes the Sisters of St. Francis have continued to minister there.

Now, 50 years later, Sisters Lucy Bonifas and Margaret Ann Seasly continue to serve in Lourdes Hospital. They have a combined total of 79 years of ministry and often get questions and comments from people who remember the Sisters who worked there: Is Sister... still living? or Where is Sister...? I remember you when you cared for my father in 1972. You just bring a sense of peace into my room. There is something different about this hospital. God shows.

The Sisters of St. Francis participate in the filming of a documentary on Women Religious in the Toledo Diocese entitled “Hearts Afire.” It airs on WGTE, channel 30.

A ten-year (plus) study concludes with the signing of a Land Easement contract. The Sisters of St. Francis publicly declare their commitment to live in harmony with creation and preserving 346 acres of the farm as green space.

June 26 marks the celebration of the 135th anniversary of the congregation with the dedication of the new Sacred Heart Statue and the surrounding court.

The Mission Advancement Office for the St. Francis Community opens.

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The Sisters of St. Francis continue today to serve others in a spirit of hospitality, simplicity, and joy. Their ministries are guided by the Franciscan values of care for creation, a special love for those who are poor, peacemaking, and a deep contemplative life.

The Sisters’ mission extends to seven U.S. states, Cuernavaca and Chiapas, Mexico, and a companion community in El Salvador. The Sisters and Associates can be found:

- educating the poorest children in Mexico
- standing in solidarity with single mothers in crisis and victims of trafficking
- advocating for the rights of immigrants
- caring for the sick and elderly
- offering assistance to the poor in Appalachia
- promoting sustainable environmental practices
- providing outreach to inner city ministries

- empowering lay people to teach faith formation in their communities in Mexico
- consulting with parishes on new and dynamic leadership models
- visiting the imprisoned and offering worship opportunities
- witnessing for peace in the midst of violence
- serving in parishes in various roles as teachers, administrators and volunteers
- organizing emergency services to those in need wherever they serve
- comforting the hurting through hospital chaplaincy
- guiding others on their spiritual journey
- cultivating the arts through music education and pottery classes
- praying daily for the needs of the world and the special intentions of friends and family members

2008
Perkins Eastman, an architectural consulting firm, is hired to assist in preparing a long range campus master plan for the St. Francis Community.

2009
The Sisters of St. Francis acquire Friedman Village from Tiffin University. The property is named “Friedman Village at St. Francis.”

St. Francis Senior Ministries manages the village.

Lourdes Toribio is received as the congregation’s first candidate for membership from Mexico.

The congregation celebrates the 140th anniversary of its founding and the 40th anniversary of ministry in Chiapas, Mexico.
The Untold Story

Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America is a traveling exhibition depicting the innovative, action-oriented and altruistic women whose passion for justice helped shape our nation's social and cultural landscape. Since first arriving in America nearly 300 years ago, sisters built schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, homeless shelters, and many other enduring social institutions. As nurses, teachers, and social workers, sisters entered professional ranks decades earlier than most other women and established landmark institutions that continue to serve millions of Americans from all walks of life. The untold story of these unsung heroes is now recounted, documenting a vital and significant perspective of American history.

Sponsored by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the exhibit will tour multiple cities over the next few years. Currently, it is on display at the Cincinnati Museum Center until August 30, 2009. For information, call 1-800-733-2077 or visit www.cincymuseum.org. To learn more about the exhibit, visit www.womenandspirit.org.