God is our Refuge and our Strength
1869-2019

150 Years
Dear Friends,

It’s hard to believe….the Sisters of St. Francis are observing the 150th anniversary of our founding. If the walls could talk, we’d hear voices of orphans and elders who came to live and be cared for at St. Francis Home in 1867 by Fr. Joseph Bihn, Elizabeth Schaefer (who became Mother Francis) and volunteers in the aftermath of the Civil War. As the number of dedicated volunteers continued to grow, the Sisters of St. Francis became a religious order in 1869. Concern for the poor, care of creation and peacemaking, all grounded in prayer and Gospel living have grounded the life and ministries of the Sisters throughout the years.

Not just one, but two more anniversaries this year! Fifty years ago the Sisters of St. Francis began ministering in Chiapas, Mexico at the request of Bishop Samuel Ruiz. And 25 years ago, the Franciscan Earth Literacy Center was born. It’s a time of gratitude, remembering stories of the past and sharing ministry stories of the present like those shared in this issue of our magazine. But no matter if we recall past ministries or those of our present day, we are indebted to you, our friends and benefactors, who have joined in and supported these good works, truly making miracles in the lives of those in need.

As we celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving for all that has been and will be on this June 28th feast of the Sacred Heart, we thank God for you, generous hearts, who keep Gospel compassion alive.

In gratitude,

Sister Sara Aldridge
Community Minister

In 2019, we are celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Franciscan Earth Literacy Center (page 3), 50th Anniversary of Serving in Chiapas Mexico (pages 4-5) and 150th Anniversary of the Sisters of St. Francis (pages 10-11).
The Franciscan Earth Literacy Center’s 12th Annual Summer Harvest Gourmet Gala has been scheduled for Friday, August 9, from 6:00 - 9:30 pm. This annual fundraiser, held on the beautiful grounds on the St. Francis Campus, will be an event you won’t want to miss. Attendees will again be delighted with this year’s event as they are wined, dined and entertained under the large tent. The evening will begin with gourmet hors d’oeuvres made by the Canticle Café and the serving of local wines and micro-brew beers. While enjoying the musical entertainment by Mimi Lange Johnston, guests will be served a gourmet meal prepared by Carolyn’s Personalized Catering of Millbury, Ohio followed by an array of delicious desserts. There will be an opportunity to participate in a wine grab, raffle, silent auction, and live auction. What a delightful way to spend an evening as the summer sun fades away and you are surrounded by friends, family, delicious foods and music. Funds raised at the Summer Harvest Gourmet Gala directly support the Franciscan Earth Literacy Center’s environmental programs for children.

Tickets: $50 each or table of 8 for $400.00 if purchased before July 1st in celebration of the 25th Anniversary of FELC. On or after July 1st, $75 each or $520 per table of 8. Reservations are required no later than August 2nd. To reserve tickets, call Linda Bell in the Mission Advancement Office at 419-447-0435 or by emailing lbell@tiffinfranciscans.org. You can also purchase tickets by visiting www.felctiffin.org and/or click on Purchase Online Tickets.

We sincerely apologize to the following donors who were omitted from the 2018 Annual Report.

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We strive for accuracy

We have tried to include an accurate listing of contributors in each Annual Report magazine; however, some of our donors were omitted in our 2018 Annual Report. Please accept our deepest apologies if we omitted your name, and be sure to inform us of any errors at mission@tiffinfranciscans.org or by calling 419-447-0435, extension 131.
**Answering a Long Distance Call**

**50 Years in Chiapas**

“The Sisters of St. Francis began ministry in Chiapas, Mexico in response to a call from Pope John XXIII to religious communities in North America to send members to minister in Latin America. In 1968, our General Chapter gave approval to send two sisters to a Third World Spanish-speaking people. Sister Annette Langenderfer and I were chosen to prepare to carry out this ministry,” recounts Sister Elizabeth Jean (“Sister Libby”) Siebenaler. These two sisters were in New York at a conference to help prepare for missionary work. While waiting in line for breakfast one day, they had a “chance” encounter with Bishop Samuel Ruiz of the Diocese of San Cristobal, Chiapas. The Bishop was looking for sisters to work in his diocese. Mother Euphrasia Wallenhorst and her council decided that San Cristobal, Chiapas was the right match for the Tiffin Franciscan missioners. Soon Sister Annette and Sister Libby found themselves bound for Chiapas on a beautiful fall day in 1969, with a true Franciscan send-off from the sisters in Tiffin.

Sisters Annette and Libby settled in an adobe house with no indoor plumbing in Villa Las Rosas during the first years of ministry —working as a team with 5 priests and 2 native Sisters to carry out their principal goal – living the option for the poor. Two years later, Sister Marge Eilerman joined them. “We traveled from colony to colony by van (‘el camionero’) and also by horseback to some rough mountainous areas that had no roads,” recalls Sister Libby.

“We stayed in the colonies anywhere from a week to a month, visiting homes of people to determine their needs. Our goal was to evangelize the whole person, including faith instruction and education on principles of better health practices. This was carried out through talks, discussions and home visits. When the priests gave talks to the people, they would emphasize the dignity of the person and their right to speak up since they lived in an oppressive government regime.”

At the end of the week the ministry team would conduct programs, inviting families as units, and each one of the team would address a topic such as the importance of boiling and purifying water or how to build a latrine to spare children from dying from disease. The people they served were peasants who worked available farm acreage. Because of the work of the sisters, the people had better housing, more nutritious food and education for their children. Most of the people were too poor to pay for their children to get an education.

Christian Base Communities were formed to follow the path of Christianity, with Christ being the center of their lives. Sister Annette said, “I can still hear the question asked many times: ‘What would Jesus do?’”

Gradually, more Tiffin Sisters served in Chiapas through the years, moving to villages where they were most needed. Sister Lucille “Lucy” Schmitmeyer shared how they did pastoral

“We are called to understand and live the Gospel through the eyes of the poor, with a goal of transforming unjust structures of society that oppress people. I learned many things. However, the most important were to be content with whatever you have, have an everyday faith life and an attitude of gratitude.”

- Sr. Lucy

“The people of Chiapas touched me with their deep faith that God is present in their everyday life – ‘Dios Quiere’ – if God wants it. Their spirit of hospitality moved my heart. They were so willing to share what little they had. (One woman wanted to give us sisters the only egg she had.) If I could speak to the people of Chiapas today, I would say ‘We are so proud of you!’”

- Sr. Libby

**Author of Little Less Than the Angels, Sr. Annette Langenderfer thanks the people of Chiapas:**

“I would love to be with you yet. You strengthened my faith in God and in people and confirmed my life in religious community.”
work and trained community animators to guide Gospel reflection groups, catechize children in various villages and train adults to be catechists of children.

“I actually served in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas for two time periods: The first time in 1977-1988 when I served with the Southern Team in Nicolás Ruiz and Villa Las Rosas and again in 2006 to the present working with the Southeast Team in La Trinitaria,” said Sister Linda Scheckelhoff.

“My call to serve the Mexican people springs from my experience as a young sister visiting migrant camps in the Tiffin area through Operation Love. Those encounters with the Mexican people planted a desire in me to care for them, and that desire grew until I joined Sister Andrea Inkrott in Chiapas in 1977.”

Today the San Cristobal Diocese organizes ministries in “Areas” that strengthen faith and the whole person. Presently, Sister Linda serves in her parish and diocese in the Area of Women which focuses on enabling women to discover their dignity and value through weekly reflection on the Gospel, especially passages where Jesus relates with women. “Each week, women in groups of 8-15 reflect on the Gospel through the eyes, mind and heart of a woman. We also explore the rights of women and gender equality. This can be somewhat challenging since machismo is so prevalent in our patriarchal society,” explained Sister Linda.

Sister Linda also serves in the Area of Health which is just being initiated in her parish. This Area promotes the use of medicinal plants and herbs and other natural therapies to cure common illnesses. The health promoters also learn how to diagnose illness and prescribe remedies. “In both the Areas of Women and Health, I strive to enable the people to see how it affects their everyday life as God calls them to better their lives now and then to continue working for justice to end situations of oppression, thus helping to build His Kingdom,” said Sister Linda.

Sister Lourdes Toribio moved to Chiapas in 2012 where she began her novitiate and also did some parish visiting. Today she accompanies 16 youth groups in different communities and walks with the Base Christian Communities. “I tell them that they are my teachers, as I have learned so much about their culture and their relationship with God. Their simplicity has been a big lesson for me. I often hear them say, ‘God is first!’” said Sister Lourdes.

Sister Linda says, “Today I find myself not so much doing ministry, but rather being a presence, accompanying the people in their struggles in this society so riddled by corruption, impunity, violence, drug trafficking, organized crime and trafficking of women and migrants. Yet celebrations of life and faith continue: children are baptized, over 500 youth and adults are confirmed, young girls celebrate their 15th birthday (quinceañera), people get married, religious feasts are observed – each with a special fiesta. The Paschal Mystery continues to be lived in the lives, hearts and minds of the people and society. My greatest yearning is to be a small spark of HOPE for them in this seeming chaos of life and death.”

Today the sisters use public transportation available in some communities, but use a truck donated by a U.S. benefactor to go places where there is not public transportation. How do they help people? They accompany them on their spiritual journey and, with the support of benefactors, assist them with their material needs. When a Mexican family member dies, they often don’t have the finances to bury their loved one. Especially watching out for single mothers, the sisters share food and assist them when they need medical help.

To read more about this story and to learn more about our Chiapas ministry, visit http://tiffinfranciscans.org/mexico-ministries/chiapas/

Sisters who served in Chiapas, Mexico:

- **Sister Elizabeth Jean “Libby” Siebenaler** (1969-1973)
- **Sister Margaret Ann “Marge” Eilerman** (1971-1974)
- **Sister Karen Lindenberger** (1972, 1973-1974)
- **Sister Andrea Inkrott** (1975-1982)
- **Sister Linda Scheckelhoff** (1977-1988, 2006 & currently serving in Trinitaria)
- **Sister Lucille “Lucy” Schmitmeyer** (1977-1988, 2006 & currently serving in Trinitaria)
The 2019 Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist (OCVN) program was held February 9 - March 23 on Tuesday evenings and every other Saturday. The class fostered many partnerships, not only between program hosts Seneca County Parks District (SCPD) and Franciscan Earth Literacy Center (FELC) in collaboration with The Ohio State University Extension, but also between the participants. The course was also a great way to learn about and explore new volunteer opportunities. Thirteen people with various backgrounds and experience completed the course. The introductory class took place at the FELC and sequential classes were held at nature-based facilities in Seneca County.

According to Sister Shirley Shafranek, FELC educator and OCVN instructor, the program was a great opportunity to collaborate with other local agencies and learn from experts on each subject. Throughout the program, participants studied different topics. These included eco-concepts, plants, watersheds and aquatics, forests and birds, insects, geology and soils, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. In addition to Seneca County Park District and FELC, course instruction was led by Rem Confesor and Ken Baker of Heidelberg University, Sandusky River Bee Keepers Association, Seneca Conservation District, ODNR Division of Wildlife, Hancock County Park District, Josh Dyer of Crawford County Park District and Linda Haas.

After finishing the program, Bill McAllister of Fostoria said, “I’m gearing up to get more involved in leading groups in outdoor activities and doing more to protect the environment.”

“I am interested in providing hiking, nature and history programs for adults. Seneca County and Northwest Ohio have so many hidden gems that people don’t know about, so I’m setting up an educational hiking series to highlight those places and topics,” said Vicki Johnson of McClure.

Participants learned how to be good stewards of the land and natural resources. Lois Fey of Tiffin explained how “the class” made me more aware of all the impacts things and people have on nature and how we can do our part to protect it and educate others to protect what we have.”

Education was definitely the backbone of OCVN. In order to teach others and volunteer, one must have knowledge and be able to...
SAVE THE DATE
12th Annual Summer Harvest Gourmet Gala ~ Friday, August 9, 2019

apply it. Classes ranged from lecture style to hands-on learning and games. “We learned a wide variety of topics ranging from the integrity and the mission of a volunteer naturalist, to habitats and exact species taxonomy and conservation, and protection and maintenance of natural resources like watersheds and prairies,” explained Amanda. “We also learned general skills that would help us with our volunteer work, such as team building and organizing different types of activities and games. At the end of the class, each student presented a different topic based on what he or she had learned or on something relative to being a naturalist. It was interesting to see how the class had impacted each person.” Dan White of Bloomville reflected on his plan to complete his volunteer work: “The need is great, the workers are few and volunteer opportunities are quite plentiful both on a county and state-wide perspective. Every opportunity to engage is a learning opportunity, as well.”

Tyler Heslet and his wife Audrey of Tiffin completed the program together. In addition, they did their final presentation jointly, which showed just how much their passion for nature would influence their volunteer service. Tyler is particularly inclined to focus his attention on ecology and stewardship and considers how that will affect his volunteer work. “Every time I dwell in nature, it is an opportunity to learn and affirm what I am learning. Volunteering to assist in maintaining our parks and preserves reinforces the OCVN course study and allows me to apply the curriculum to the field. Watersheds and water quality will also direct my interests. Beginning to become connected with others in the various local organizations, I believe, will foster continued involvement and fuel passion,” explained Tyler.

The diversity of participants also made the class unique. There was an age range of sixty years from youngest to oldest, making their collective knowledge and experiences a valuable melting pot for the group. Each individual brought their unique perspectives as well as their motivation for enrolling in the class in the first place. For many people, their love of being in or around nature was the driving force. The different class settings, educators from SCPD, guest speakers and personal presentations made the program a success for participants and partners.

“The locations of classrooms to the subject matter enhanced my interest and attentiveness. I wholeheartedly support the continued development of onsite resource buildings in our natural areas,” said Tyler, describing the different classroom settings.

Dan also enjoyed the diversity of the classrooms used in the entire program and reflected on his favorites: “When you are outdoors, the teaching (both passive and active) never stops since one or more of a person’s senses are engaged. If you are using ‘classroom’ in the traditional sense, then [the education building at Garlo Nature Preserve] was most hands-on friendly. She brought the ‘outside inside,’ and it was a visually rustic setting. The Fostoria Learning Center was the most high-tech, offering a wealth of instructional formats, digital and other, in a well-lit and comfortably furnished and climate-controlled setting.”

The class was an investment to positively impact our eco-system, costing participants $200 and two months of time, in return for the educational benefits and ongoing volunteer opportunities.

“I thought the class was very good. I learned a lot from all the topics discussed. It is always good to bring in the experts and share information. I also liked the way we were able to visit several Seneca County parks and FELC to learn what is happening at each site,” said Sister Shirley. She continued, “There are so many ways class participants can volunteer. Whether it is with Seneca County Park District or FELC, we all need volunteers to help carry on the mission and continue educating people about our environment and nature.”

The consensus from participants was that learning in the field is the best way to learn. “There is only so much you can learn about being a naturalist by sitting in a classroom, so being able to get outside and learn firsthand on the trails was a real treat,” Amanda added.

The next OCVN course will be offered in 2021. Call FELC at 419.448.7485 if you are interested in participating. For more information, visit https://ocvn.osu.edu/home.

A Night of Pampering Just for Women

Sister Marie Reinhart, Sister Edna Michel and Sister Jane Frances Omlor represented St. Francis Spirituality Center (SFSC) at the 2nd Annual Ladies Night Out - Pamper Yourself for a Cause, a United Way fundraiser on April 26th. Two hundred women attended the event which was held at The Chandelier Event Center in downtown Tiffin and was a night designed with women in mind, encouraging them to take care of themselves. Local pop up shops featured items for purchase.

Sister Edna shared information on upcoming spring and summer programs offered at SFSC, A Place of Healing, Reconciliation and Renewal and encouraged women to take time for themselves, whether they try yoga, a meditation class or one-day retreat. Sister Marie, LMT at SFSC offered free hand massages. Sister Jane Frances sold items from SpiritSpace Gift Shop.
A Franciscan heritage retreat entitled “My God and My All!” was offered this spring in the St. Francis Home Chapel and led by Sister Patricia Ann Froning, Sister Roberta Marie Doneth and Sister Edna Michel. The retreat included six specific topics: Jesus, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Clare, Father Bihn, Mother Francis and The Tiffin Franciscans Today.

According to Sister Roberta, this unique retreat was designed with the Sisters’ 150th Anniversary in mind. It focused on Jesus’ call to live the Gospel, Francis and Clare’s response, how that was lived out by Father Bihn and Mother Francis in their day, and how the Franciscan Sisters and Associates live out the Gospel in our day and time.

Sister Patricia explained, “Scripture is what wove it all together, which also weaves through our heritage.” It includes quotes specifically associated with the Sisters’ founding:

*Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me.*
(Matthew 25:40)

*God is our refuge and our strength.*
(Psalm 45:46)

Sister Edna Ricker described the retreat as “most meaningful, because it was so deep.” In fact, she said that she could sit through it all over again. “As soon as I heard about this retreat I remember saying, ‘I really want to go to this one.’ At age 96, I have participated in a lot of retreats, but never one quite like this. Sister Edna Michel gave a deep talk about the heart of Jesus, which is not a very common topic today. She explained what He must have been thinking and feeling during the Passion. I have never heard any of this before,” said Sister Ricker. She added, “It was so quiet you could hear a pin drop.”

“It is a time for people to step aside and be more attentive to what God is doing in their life,” Sister Patricia said as she explained why people make a retreat. Participants were encouraged to attend daily Mass, followed by a conference. Later in the afternoon there was a second conference plus time to share reflections with one another.

Sister Ginny (Virginia) Gase appreciated how Sister Patricia explained the German roots of the Sisters of St. Francis, thanks to Father Joseph Bihn, the founder who immigrated from Germany. It was a refresher course for many of the Sisters. “It was also good to review our history and learn some new things, too,” said Sister Ginny.

“To think that our community has been in existence for 150 years… it is the work of the Lord and work of the Spirit, knowing that all I do leads me into the future with trust and hope,” reflected Sister Lucy Schmitmeyer. “I hope for joy in being present to God’s Presence in my last hours. My lifelong friend, Sister Bea Koerper’s last message to me was: It’s been a long Journey. I’m grateful we made it this far. And, the Best is yet to come.”

To learn about upcoming retreats, visit www.franciscanretreats.org

Retreats are offered to Sisters and campus residents and are open to the public.

**Having a Plan For The Future is Important - No Matter Your Age**

An estate plan makes your wishes known and provides your loved ones with peace of mind. Request a free copy of *Your Family’s Guide* from Sr. Joanne Lammers: Phone 419-447-0435, email jlammers@tiffinfranciscans.org.

**SAVE THE DATE**

“The Resilient Warrior” Program ~ September 13-15, 2019

For all Veterans and Active Duty Service Members
The planning committee began meeting in August of 2018 to begin the planning of the 150th Anniversary of the Sisters of St. Francis.

Committee members met this spring to prepare various mailings for the 150th Anniversary!

Sister Carolette Grote wrote the 150th Anniversary song that will be used throughout 2019. Committee members have been busy practicing the song at each planning meeting and teaching the other Sisters.

Sister Pat Froning gave the 150th Anniversary Committee a special treat at a meeting. She made cookies using the original cookie cutters that the Religious Brothers made and baked cookies with a recipe from the 1890’s. The cookies will be made for one of the upcoming events.

Committee members met this spring to prepare various mailings for the 150th Anniversary!

Visit our new website at www.tiffinfranciscans.org to watch a special video created for our anniversary and to listen to the Sisters sing the anniversary song.
Opening Retreat to Kick off the 150th Anniversary

Sisters and Associates gathered together for a special retreat. “Making Home: the Heart of it All” began in the convent hallway and ended in the chapel. Sister Rozanne Swope gave the opening address and everyone processed into chapel and gathered in front of the Water Fountain where there was a ritual and prayer. The first of the 10 members of the Franciscan family were represented by candles on the fountain including: Father Joseph L. Bihn, Mother Francis d’Assisi, Sister Nativity, Sister Sacred Heart of Jesus, Sister Blessed Sacrament, Mr. J.B. Greiveldinger (elder), Josephine Schaefer (daughter), Peter Wiot (orphan), Nicholas Wiot (orphan) and Julia Stover (orphan). A presentation and a time for contemplation was followed by the singing of the anniversary song, and in the evening there was a meal followed by a celebration party to bring in the new year.

150th Anniversary Prayer

God of time and eternity, we pray with gratitude and joy for granting us Tiffin Franciscans these 150 years to praise you with our lives and our ministry.

We glorify you for inspiring Father Bihn and Mother Francis to establish this community of Sisters, Brothers, and Associates, and to lead us to follow the Gospel and profess always that You, God, are our refuge and our strength.

We thank You for the Gospel mission, “Whatsoever You do to the least of my people, You do to Me”, and for our Franciscan charism, continuing conversion, urging us to serve our brothers and sisters in their needs and weaknesses.

We pray with Francis and Clare, through Jesus Christ, who lives and loves eternally.

Amen.

SAVE THE DATE

150th Anniversary Mass at St. Joseph Church in Tiffin – Friday, June 28, 2019

All are welcome
The 2nd Annual Home and Garden Show was held on the St. Francis Campus in May. This event included a live plant and flower sale and also featured unique items by local artists, including wood-carvings, Ikebana and Posey pots and there were art demonstrations by local artists. There were also tours of the St. Francis Convent and grounds in celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Sisters of St. Francis. Sabaidee Coffee and Crepes was offering some delicious treats. The event was sponsored by St. Francis SpiritSpace Gallery & Gifts.