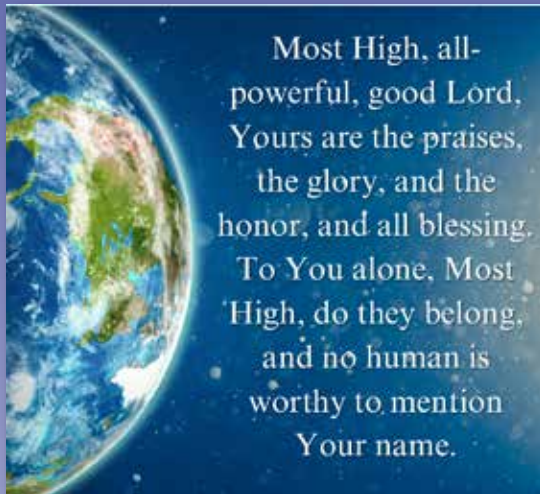


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The Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God



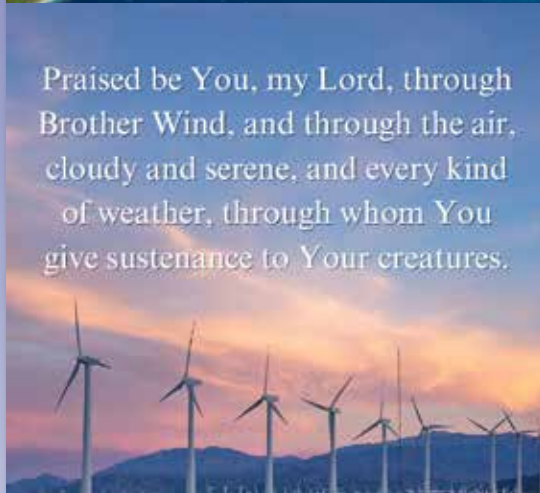
Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.



Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.



Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.



Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.



Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and elaste.



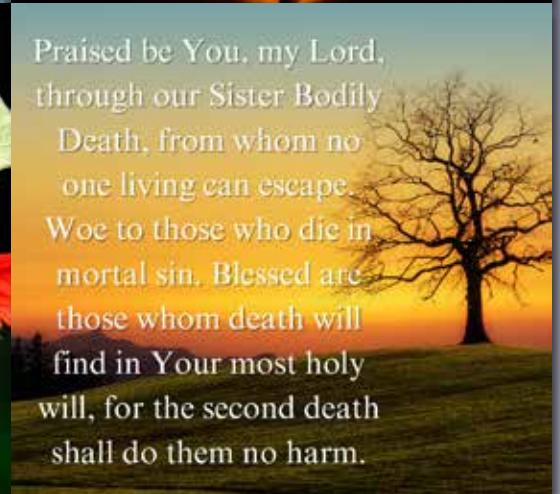
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.



Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.



Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.



Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin. Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm.

PRAISE AND BLESS MY LORD AND GIVE HIM THANKS AND SERVE HIM WITH GREAT HUMILITY.

St. Francis of Assisi's Canticle of Creatures

Mission Statement

We, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God, commit ourselves to the evangelical life of continuous conversion in the tradition of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis according to the example of our founding Sisters.

Called together by a good and provident God, we cultivate an intimacy with God that is nourished by Sacred Scripture, by the Eucharist, by our gift of self to others and in reverence for all creation.

Faithful to our Charism, we go to those to whom Providence sends us and conscious of our mission in the Church, we assume the commitment of evangelization and liberation, especially with the poor and oppressed. We witness to God's overflowing love by our lives and service, promoting justice, peace and reconciliation among all.

In simplicity and joy, we are signs of hope, for we believe that Jesus Christ is with us in the power of His Resurrection.

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A Time to Pray and Act

A Message from the Catholic Sisters of Western PA

Catholic Sisters across Western Pennsylvania have been called to action by their faith to minister to and on behalf of immigrants and refugees, especially in our country's current political climate. God's people — no matter their circumstances — are always in our prayers. Right now, we must pair prayer with urgent action and impress upon you to do the same. Christians cannot sit by idly as the poor and vulnerable are targeted. We must be a voice for migrants and advocate for merciful, common-sense immigration policies that align with our faith.

Scripture reminds us that Jesus, himself, was a refugee and urges us to "welcome the stranger." These words cannot be ones we leave in the pews on Sundays. Our faith as Christians requires us — all of us — to live these words. Driven by our vows to serve all of God's people and our immense sense of mercy, we are impassioned in our efforts to preserve the well-being of all. Whether it be with our sleeves rolled up on the front lines or through the simple power of prayer, we are responding with compassion and care.

- We staff and support ministries that provide housing and support services to migrants.
- We engage with our local, state and national leaders to advocate for policies and actions that align with our faith and our basic morality.
- We make our voices heard through statements like this one and other public reminders of what our faith teaches about human dignity.
- We provide opportunities for spiritual growth among Spanish-speaking migrants, assist refugees from the war in Ukraine, and support the pastoral needs of all.
- We teach ESL classes, serve at the border, assist migrants through the legal process, and, in some cases, help even just one family at a time along their journey to citizenship.
- We collect clothing and household goods for families in need and make financial donations, as we are able, to those doing God's good work for all people.

Now that we have told you about some of the actions we are taking to meet the moment, we ask, "What are you doing?" We encourage you, too, to put idle hands to task and raise your voice on behalf of those who seek shelter and safety.

Listen & Learn: We live in a time when information — and misinformation — are delivered to us at the pace and pressure of a firehose. We urge you to turn off your television, log off from social media, and educate yourself on matters regarding immigration. You might be surprised to learn how much migrants contribute to the workforce and economy. Or that most are not criminals at all, but rather simply seeking the dignity, safety and opportunity that we take for granted.

Volunteer & Donate: Regardless of your physical or financial limitations, there are ways you can act. If you are able, consider volunteering with local agencies that assist with resettlement efforts for migrants and refugees. If you cannot physically engage, please consider making a monetary donation to an organization that supports migrants. If you have no money to spare, perhaps you have unused clothing or extra housewares that such agencies can repurpose for families who arrive with nothing.

Use Your Voice: Please contact your local, state and national leaders by email or phone. Or sit down and write a good, old-fashioned letter to let them know where you stand on the issues and what you expect from them. They have been elected to represent you, and your voice matters.

Always Include Prayer: Prayer is integral to each day for us as women religious. Join us by including migrants and refugees in your prayers. Remember to include prayers of guidance for the agencies and Good Samaritans who work on their behalf. Raise your voice in prayer, as well, for the political leaders who hold the fate of the less-fortunate in their hands.

Now is not the time to simply shake our heads or wrench our hands at the goings-on in our world. We have a responsibility as Christians to speak what's in our hearts and to act according to our collective consciousness. It is, indeed, time to practice what we preach.

Will you join us in prayer and action? Visit sistersofwpa.org/a-time-to-pray-and-act for the full statement and links to prayers and resources to act now to care for God's people.

Franciscan Journeys in Brazil Blessed by Providence

On World Day for Consecrated Life, our Congregation was especially blessed to witness two wonderful young women take important steps forward on their journey into religious life.

Sister Deise Santana renewed her temporary vows in the Paz e Bem Chapel on February 2, 2025. This same blessed day, aspirant Ana Claudia officially entered the Postulancy, faithfully stepping forward on her formation journey.

Sister Deise is serving for the first time outside São Paulo in Itinga with Sisters Amélia Corsina de Oliveira and Vandete Barbosa de Oliveira. Ana Claudia lives at the St. Clare Novitiate House in Vila Alpina with Sisters Maria Goretti Avanzi, Adriana Aparecida Duarte and Juliana da Silva Aires.

Our Sisters and Associates offer our continued prayers and support to Sister Deise and Ana Claudia as they confidently, joyfully, go forward on their formation journey with our Congregation.

As One Mission Concludes, Another Begins in Brazil

Blessed to have served almost a decade in the remote Amazonian state of Pará, in the city of Óbidos, our Congregation concluded its mission there this past September with a parish celebration of Thanksgiving. Providence has called our Community to establish a mission closer to home with better access to health resources needed by our Sisters serving in active ministry. In December 2024, our Congregation established a community at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish where our Sisters will serve Jardim Rodolfo Pirani, part of the Belém Episcopal Region in São Paulo. Sisters Carmem Lúcia de Almeida and Adelmá de Sá Gomes have begun to serve in the mission through pastoral and parish ministries, including mentoring parish lay leadership and offering prayer services with communion in neighborhood chapels. May this new mission bring blessings to all we serve!



Sister Deise Santana, General Minister Rute Almeida Guimarães and Ana Claudia.

Celebrating Dave Domostoy



Sister Janet Gardner, Michelle Domostoy, Sister Joanne Brazinski, Sister Eliana da Silva and Dave Domostoy at his 40th anniversary Celebration in December 2024.

Profoundly blessing our Sisters with his Franciscan heart, positive attitude and strong work ethic, our maintenance director Dave Domostoy has faithfully served our Sisters and ministries for over 40 years, more than any other layperson. In 1984, Sister Mary Louis Kvederis hired Dave to be part of her maintenance crew, and he worked his way up to supervisor, then Department Director. He has been with us through many changes, major renovations, and moves. Dave was also responsible for the care of buildings and grounds of our former 30-acre campus that included our Franciscan Spirit and Life Center and Franciscan Child Day Care Center, where he was lovingly known as “Mr. Dave” to staff and children. No one better knew the needs and quirks of our former St. Francis Academy Building. In 2023, when Elizabeth Seton Center Child Care Program took over our former day care center’s space in the building, they asked if they could “share” Dave. Gratuitously, he agreed to split his time.

Dave's efforts in maintaining our cars, computers and spaces have greatly blessed our Sisters and mission. He also works tirelessly to help fix any problems that arise. Looking back, there seems to be no problem Dave can't solve. When we upgraded our design software and needed a new computer, he built one to meet our needs that has worked for over a decade. When our day care center needed new changing tables on a tight budget, he built them for us. When a Sister was having trouble judging how far to drive into the garage, he hung a tennis ball from the ceiling as a guide. When our food drive organizer couldn't fit all the donations in her car, he showed up and helped deliver items. On multiple occasions, he rescued information from crashed computers and rebuilt the hard drives. It would take at least 100 newsletters to continue to list all the times Dave has gone above and beyond for our Sisters, staff and ministries. Thank you, Dave, for taking care of our Sisters and never giving up until a problem is solved. We are also grateful for your loving wife, Michelle, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who have shared you with us for all these years.

Celebrating Our 2025 Jubilarians!

Each year, we celebrate the Jubilees of our Sisters who have been shaped by God's hand into women full of grace with a clear vision and deep faith. In a Franciscan community, Jubilee celebrations commemorate the passage of years in which a Sister has lived her vowed religious life and Franciscan Charism with faithfulness and fidelity. The following articles offer just a glimpse of the faithful lives of our 2025 Jubilarians, and we give thanks to our Provident God for each Sister's Franciscan presence that continues to inspire us as we confidently, joyfully, go forward as sowers of peace and hope.

70th Jubilee

Sister Elise Mora



Sister Elise Mora came to our Congregation from Our Lady of Sorrows Parish in Las Vegas, NM. She first served as an elementary teacher at Holy Trinity School in Moon Run and St. Valentine and St. Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin schools in Pittsburgh. In the 1960s, she taught Spanish at St. Francis Academy and served as head of the language department for 12 years. In 1981, Sister Elise served as a patient advocate at Our Lady of Mercy Hospital in the Bronx, New York City for seven years, where her fluency in Spanish was an asset. Then she served as an Immigration Counselor in Manhattan and a Pastoral Associate in Chicago. In 1996, she was elected to the General Council and returned to Pittsburgh, where she also served as Liturgy Director and Justice, Peace and Environment Coordinator. During her time in leadership, she also served as an adjunct instructor at St. Vincent College in Latrobe.

In 2006, Sister Elise moved to Olean, NY, and served as an adjunct professor in Languages teaching Spanish at St. Bonaventure University for a decade. Returning to Pittsburgh in 2016, she volunteered as a Spanish teacher at St. Thomas More School and continued efforts to care for the environment and immigrants, including visiting Spanish-speaking inmates at the state prison in Greensburg, PA and teaching English to Cuban refugees at Ft. Indiantown Gap, PA. In 2020, Sister Elise embraced a full-time ministry of Franciscan presence and prayer. Sister Elise holds a B.A. from Carlow University and a Master's in Spanish from Millersville University. She also earned her M.A. in Religious Studies from Loyola University in Chicago.

Sister Yolanda de Jesus Marcelino



Sister Yolanda Maria de Jesus Marcelino was born in Poços de Caldas, a city in the south of Minas Gerais in southeastern Brazil. She joined the Congregation in 1952, professed her first vows in 1957, and earned degrees in Literature and Pedagogy (study of teaching methods and practices). Much of Sister's ministry has been dedicated to Education in our Congregation's schools, with most of her ministry spent at Pius XII Franciscan School in São Paulo. She also taught adult literacy programs and co-founded our Saint Clare and Saint Francis of Assisi Social Center in 1993.

Sister Yolanda served in leadership and spent time in the United States while serving on the General Council from 2004-2012. She also served in Formation ministry in Brazil. Fluent in Portuguese and English, Sister Yolanda presently resides at our Generalate in São Paulo, where she assists with translations and administrative support. She also continues to serve as an advisor to our Pius XII Franciscan School.

**PRAISE AND BLESS MY LORD AND GIVE HIM THANKS
AND SERVE HIM WITH GREAT HUMILITY.**

St. Francis of Assisi's Canticle of Creatures

65th Jubilee

Sister Hilária de Oliveira



Sister Hilária de Oliveira entered the Congregation in Brazil at age 15 and made her final profession in 1962. She has a Bachelor's Degree in psychology. For three decades, Sister Hilária served at our schools in São Paulo as a teacher, treasurer, and guidance counselor, as well as principal at Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Pius XII Franciscan School.

In 1991, Sister Hilária came to the United States to study at Duquesne University. She was missioned to St. James Church in Kearney, NJ where she served in pastoral and liturgical ministry. She then served as a caregiver at our Franciscan Child Day Care Center before returning to Brazil to attend the Center of Franciscan Studies. In 1997, Sister Hilária returned to the United States and was missioned to serve in the Newark Diocese which had a large population of Brazilian immigrants. Parishes she served included St. James Parish in Newark and Sts. Peter and Paul, Blessed Sacrament, and Catherine of Siena in Elizabeth, where she engaged in pastoral and liturgical ministries that included preparing Masses in Portuguese and assisting with religious education and other needs of Portuguese-speaking

parishioners. In 2013, she returned to the Franciscan Child Day Care Center where she served as a caregiver until it closed in 2022. Presently, Sister Hilária serves as a child caregiver at St. Elizabeth Seton Center Child Care in Whitehall.

60th Jubilee

Sister Joanne Brazinski



Sister Joanne Brazinski, a native of Elizabeth, NJ, attended Saints Peter and Paul School before enrolling at St. Francis Academy. After graduation in 1965, she entered the congregation. Sister Joanne served as an educator at Holy Trinity in Moon Run, St. Valentine in Bethel Park and Mt. St. Peter in New Kensington, she then served as Formation Director for women entering the congregation in the USA. In 1983, she was missioned to serve in Boca da Mata, Alagoas, the rural northeast region of Brazil.

In 1988 she was elected to serve in General Leadership, first as General Council, then as Assistant General Superior and afterwards served as General Superior of the congregation from 1996 - 2000, a time of congregational restructuring. During this same period, she also served for three years on the Board of the Franciscan Federation, serving as president from 1999-2000. In 2000, she was elected as General Minister of the newly restructured congregation. After a brief sabbatical in 2004, she served as a spiritual director and facilitator. In 2012, Sister Joanne was elected to serve once again as General Minister of the congregation,

during this period the Generalate was transferred from Pittsburgh, PA to São Paulo, Brazil. During this period in leadership, she also served for four years as Councilor of the International Franciscan Conference. In 2021, Sister Joanne had some sabbatical time and now serves in various support ministries.

50th Jubilee

Sister Marlene Aparecida Avansi



Sister Marlene Aparecida Avansi was born in Vila Industrial, Brazil and joined the Community as a postulant in 1975 and made her final profession in 1982. In 1986, Sister Marlene earned her medical degree at the Faculdade de Medicina da Fundação in Santo André, São Paulo, and specialized in surgery at the Hospital St. Marcelina. At the invitation of the Marceline Sisters, she was missioned to serve persons suffering from leprosy in Porto Velho, Rondônia and continued to serve the region from 1996 to 2014 at our Congregation's mission in Guajará-Mirim, Rondônia. Then she served at Good Samaritan Hospital in Bolivia, which included caring for leprosy patients and indigenous persons. In 2015 Sister Marlene was missioned to Haiti as part of the Intercongregational Community Mission of the Conference of Religious of Brazil. In 2017, she was missioned to Óbidos, in the State of Pará, where she served as a medical doctor at Santa Casa. In 2020 Sr. Marlene returned to São Paulo, at Recanto Paz e Bem where she continues to assist in the care of our elderly and infirm Sisters.

Our Franciscan Journey - Michigan & Wisconsin

Our Franciscan Journey” is an ongoing article series telling the story of our Congregation through the places Providence has called us to serve. The people and ministries of these places left an indelible mark on our hearts, and we cherish the friendships that continue to this day.

If you seek a pleasant peninsula, look about you.” Michigan’s state motto holds true for the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God. Since our Congregation’s founding, our Sisters have been deeply connected to the beautiful tapestry of cities, suburbs, and rural communities of this glove-shaped peninsula bordered by three Great Lakes - Michigan, Huron, and Erie. Providence called our Sisters to serve parishes and Schools in Detroit, Grand Rapids and Coopersville, as well as nearby Kenosha, WI. Many women from these parishes were called to become Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God.

Sisters in the Motor City

The providential timing of our Congregation’s founding in 1922, aligned with the need for Lithuanian Sisters to serve St. George Lithuanian-Catholic Parish in Detroit. Still under the sponsorship and training of the Sisters of St. Francis in Millvale (now the Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities), four of our founding Sisters set up a mission at St. George Parish under the supervision of Millvale Franciscan Sister M. Alacoque. In 1924, feeling our Sisters were ready, the Millvale Franciscans withdrew from the mission and Rev. Joseph Cizauskas invited our Congregation to staff the newly built school. Our

Sisters taught at St. George School until it closed in 1946.

In 1930, Rev. Ignatius Boreisis invited our Congregation to take over St. Anthony School, located in the same building as the Parish, which was the heart of the Lithuanian-Catholic Community in Detroit for many years. Many parishioners worked in Detroit’s booming automobile industry. During the 1930s, postulant Mary Vaskevicius (former Sister M. Dolores Vask) drove her car from Detroit to Pittsburgh. When she joined the Community, so did her car and she served as one of the first Sister-drivers for the Congregation.

St. Anthony was the home parish of Sisters M. Giles Bendrick, M. Francita Platukas, M. Assisi Yurgelaitis, M. Monica Belskas and M. Juliana Rebak. Our Sisters served St. Anthony School until it closed in 1971 as Lithuanian-Catholic families gradually moved to the suburbs due to a myriad of reasons that included the declining automobile industry and escalating racial tensions.

Across the Great Lake

In 1924, the Sisters of St. Francis of Millvale assisted our founding Sisters in setting up a mission at St. Peter Parish in Kenosha, WI on the shores of Lake Michigan. Our Sisters first served in the original Parish in the city’s center. In the 1960s a new church and school were built in on the outskirts of the city. The parish bought a nearby house for our Sisters, notably next to a field of cabbages. Responding to the needs of the deaf and hearing-impaired



St. George Parish, Detroit MI 1923

members of the Parish, Sr. Frances Gri-bus started a Mass with sign language in 1976. Our Sisters were blessed to serve St. Peter Parish and School for 57 years until 1981.

Franciscans in Grand Rapids

In 1928, our Sisters were missioned closer to Lake Michigan to serve Saints Peter and Paul School and Parish in Grand Rapids. Our Congregation served the school until 1991, but our Sisters continued serving in pastoral ministries until 2003.

While pastor at Saints Peter and Paul, Rev. Lasislaus Jude enthusiastically encouraged young women interested in religious life to visit our motherhouse and St. Francis Academy, often driving students from Grand Rapids to Pittsburgh himself. Many choose to enter our preparatory program and attend the Academy. Saints Peter and Paul was the home parish of Sisters M. Ester Taber, M. Rosanne Kavalaszkas, M. Gregoria Bernott, and M. Francine McDonald. Two of Sister Gregoria’s brothers were priests who supported our Community. Rev. Albert Bernott served as pastor of Saints Peter and Paul, as well as St. Michael’s in Coopersville.

“The people were very good to us and generous,” said Sister Ann Marie Lostoski, who taught 1st grade at Saints Peter and Paul in the 1960s.

“We had an ice rink in our backyard,” said Sister Ann Marie recalling a small pond near the convent that would freeze in the winter. With a little help from Fa-



Saints. Peter and Paul School, Grand Rapids, MI in 1928.

ther Bernott, she and Sister Marianne Walters received permission to skate on the pond with skates given to them by parishioners.

“This was back when we had the long habits, so we had to hike up the bottoms to skate,” said Sister Ann Marie. “Lucky for us, the pond was behind a fence, so no one saw.”

While Sister Ann Marie was teaching at Saints Peter and Paul, teachers had to pack up their classrooms every Friday afternoon because of epic Bingo fundraisers that took over the parish and school. She and Sister Marianne would often visit our Sisters in nearby Coopersville for the weekend for a break from the crowds and a respite from city life.

A Small Town with a Big Heart

In 1962, Rev. Charles Salataka invited our Congregation to staff the newly built St. Michael’s School in Coopersville, a rural farming community about 20 miles west of Grand Rapids. At the time, Sister Althea Anne Spencer was in 3rd Grade and the oldest of 9 children from a Catholic family who were all taught by our Sisters. She was also taught catechism by Sisters Assisi Yugelaitis and Marietta Zvirblis. Catholics were among the minority and most of the residents were Dutch Reformed. Resistant to other religions, the town fought the construction of the Catholic school, but the parishioners persisted until the “little country school” on 80 acres of land became a reality. All our Sisters taught double-grades with over 50 students per classroom.

Part of the first group of Sisters missioned to St. Michael’s, Sister Mary Ann



Sister Loretta Keserauskis and her students welcome a furry visitor to class at St. Michael School in Coopersville, MI.

Lostoski (Timothy) was just 21 years old. This was her second teaching assignment.

“I felt so close to God in Michigan,” said Sister Mary Ann. “I was awestruck by the beauty – the sunsets, the fields.” A native of Cleveland, OH Sister Mary Ann was used to living in cities and suburban communities.

“They were not a rich community, but they were the most generous,” said Sister Mary Ann adding that parishioners generously shared fresh and canned fruits and vegetables, as well as meat, eggs, and dairy items. Even the Dutch Reformer farmers across the street welcomed the Sisters, inviting them to pick whatever fruits and vegetables they needed.

“Mary Ann would always pack up fruits and vegetables for us,” said Sister Ann Marie recalling returning to Grand Rapids with a car full of fresh food to share with the Sisters at Saints Peter and Paul.

In 1965, Sister Mary Ann was assigned to a different school, but Coopersville maintained a special place in her heart.

“I fell in love with Coopersville,” said Sister Mary Ann. “I always said that I would do anything to go back.” A decade later, in 1973 she was given the opportunity to serve as principal at St. Michaels. But, not only would this be her

first assignment as a principal, she would also have to teach a double grade.

“I was as scared as can be,” she said. Yet, she said ‘yes’ without hesitation. “I did say that I would do anything to go back.”

During this time, Sister Althea was in college and her first years of teaching. Despite a good relationship and experiences with the Sisters, Sister Althea was not interested in religious life during her school years.

“I was going to get married and have 6 kids,”



Sisters Mary Ann Lostoski and Francine McDonald at recess with students during their second assignment to St. Michael School in Coopersville, MI in the 1970s.

she said adding that she even had most of her wedding planned.

While in college a spark ignited in her heart and she began to think about religious life. While teaching in the inner city, she attended the “Yes, Lord Retreat” hosted by the Grand Rapids Dominicans, who she was seriously considering because she hoped to teach at the college level and the Sisters wore slacks.

During the retreat, she read “Francis: The Journey and the Dream” by Murray Bodo O.F.M. given to her by Sister Mary Ann, who knew she was discerning religious life and prayed she would be called to be Franciscan. One night while struggling with her decision, Sister Althea had a providential experience precipitated when she picked up a prayer card of the “Peace Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi.” She then knew for certain that she would be a Franciscan Sister.

Our Community withdrew from St. Michael school in 1980, but our Sisters maintained friendships with students and families who blessed our time there.

Our connections to Michigan and the Great Lakes region remain strong. Those we taught and served with are among our most faithful friends and supporters. The Providential blessings of our time on the peninsula are also evident at our Nativity Convent in Pittsburgh, PA, which is home to Sister Althea Anne from Coopersville, her 3rd and 4th grade teacher Sister Mary Ann, and her 5th and 6th grade teacher Sister Francine, who is also a Michigander from Saints Peter and Paul Parish. Sister Ann Marie, Sister Mary Ann’s twin, taught Sister Francine’s niece at Saints Peter and Paul School.

A Friendship Forged by Providence

In January 1952 a young woman from Connecticut and a Midwestern farm girl entered the convent to become Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God. Guided by the hand of Providence, Sister Francine McDonald and Trudy Comba forged a friendship that endured more than seven decades.

“Since we had entered a few days apart, we were partnered for all the work we were assigned,” said Trudy, whose religious name was Sister Catherine. “We rarely spoke as we adhered to many days of silence.”

Neither was afraid of hard work, and their strengths complemented each other well as they persistently performed the many unforgiving tasks assigned to novices.

“She was stronger than I was, which was helpful at wringing out the large towels for the container of hosts to keep them moist for cutting,” said Trudy. Sister Francine credits her much-needed hand strength to growing up on a farm as the youngest of 10 and only daughter.

Novices needed to be the first to wake up to ring the bell to awaken all the Sisters at the motherhouse. “(We) stayed up most of the night when I dropped the alarm clock to wake the Sisters for prayer and the handle was stuck on ten after the hour.”

“Somehow, she was always getting in trouble,” said Sister Francine. “But she is very intelligent and passionate about education. She was an excellent teacher - and friend.”

Several years later, Providence called Trudy to leave religious life. “When I left the convent, I never wrote to her. In those days, nuns were not encouraged to receive mail from the outside world so not to be distracted from their religious life.”

Trudy remained a dedicated educator taking teaching positions in Okinawa, Japan, Alaska, and other remote areas in need of teachers. She also earned her Bachelor’s degree at Duquesne University, Master’s degree from the University of Arizona and Ph.D in special education at the University of Oregon. Her teaching travels took her to Montana, where she met her husband. They eventually settled in Boise, Idaho and raised three daughters, Ann Margaret, Kathryn and Michelle.

Trudy taught at Boise State University for 10 years, where she established their early education program and wrote the kindergarten curriculum for Idaho. . In 1980, she opened A Small World Creative Center for Creativity in Boise to promote fun and holistic education for young children that incorporated child development, fine arts, foreign languages, karate and computers. She would eventually open four more pre-schools throughout the city. In recognition of her impact on educating young children, Boise proclaimed August 8, 2014 “Dr. Trudy Comba Day.”

“She always told me, ‘Francine, educate them and they can care for themselves.’”

Sister Francine’s ministry as a Sister of St. Francis of the Providence of God was also devoted to education. She served 44 years as an elementary school teacher in Cleveland, OH, Coopersville, MI, Elizabeth, NJ and Moon Run, Homestead, West Mifflin and Pittsburgh, PA.

With time and reflection, rules forbidding contact between Sisters and former members changed. Rekindling relationships with those who once served with us, many became our most cherished friends and faithful supporters. In the 1990s, Pittsburgh Auxiliary co-founder Mary Weinert, a former member



Sister Francine McDonald (left) and Trudy Comba (right) in 2024. Pictured below some of their group who entered in 1952: Sisters Luke (Mary Weinert), Rachel (withdrew), Edward, Catherine (Trudy) and Francine.

who entered with Sister Francine and Trudy, organized a reunion of former Sisters with the blessing of the Community’s leadership.

Sister Francine, who was teaching at Holy Trinity School in Moon Run extended an invitation to Trudy to stay at their convent, which she enthusiastically accepted. They were able to pick up where they left off decades earlier.

“Our friendship was renewed. We were allowed to write and send packages. I send packages of magazines, nuts, candy and salmon that she likes, and she sends me candy and cookies on special occasions,” said Trudy.

“Her generosity knows no bounds,” said Sister Francine adding that in addition to countless thoughtful acts for family and friends, Trudy continues to support numerous charitable organizations and endeavors.

Trudy is also a dear friend to our Community, generously supporting the needs of our Sisters, ministries, and outreach without hesitation for which she was honored with the San Damiano award at our 2016 Autumn Gala. In recent years, she generously gave the remaining funds needed to complete St. Jude Thaddeus Chapel in Itinga, Brazil. Through another series of providential connections, she recently set up a fund entrusted to our Community to assist an aspiring Franciscan Associate’s efforts to build and set up a school in the Democratic Republic

Continued on Page 10

Going Forward as Pilgrims of Hope

By Sister Janice Campbell, OSF

This year, 2025, marks a Jubilee year for the Catholic Church, and millions of pilgrims are expected in Rome. But, while the Catholic Church has been celebrating Jubilee Years since 1300, their roots are much, much older.

We find the roots of a Jubilee Year in the Bible. In Leviticus 25, God commanded the Israelites to observe a “sabbatical year” every seventh year. It would be a year without sowing seed or harvesting or pruning. It would be a year that even the land was given a sabbath. After celebrating seven sabbatical years, the 50th year would be a Year of Jubilee - a year of celebration and rest, dedicated to the Lord. It is one of the greatest examples of social and communal mercy in the Old Testament. Debts were forgiven, slaves were freed, and property was returned. The people were to learn mercy by giving mercy.

This year of Jubilee, this year of restoration, was a physical reminder of the even greater mercy God wanted to shower upon his people in His Kingdom to come. In Isaiah 61, the prophets speak of a future Jubilee Year for Israel. Isaiah prophesied of a time when God would release them from their slavery and debt.

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus quotes this prophecy to announce exactly what he’s going to do:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed, go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

(Luke 4: 18-19)

Within the Catholic Church, the establishment of Jubilees began with the proclamation by Pope Boniface VIII in the year 1300. One of the basic benefits of Jubilee was to encourage “tourism” to Rome, the seat of the Roman Catholic Church. In the year 1343, Clement VI began the practice of having Jubilee celebrated every 50 years, thus echoing the biblical reference number of years set as 50. In 1389, Pope Urban VI reduced that frequency to 33 years in tribute to the years of Christ’s life.

In 1470, Pope Paul II fixed the frequency at 25 years and it remains every 25 years unless an extraordinary Jubilee year is proclaimed. Modern Jubilee years continue to emphasize pilgrimage to Rome and the passage through the Holy Door in Rome.

During the 2000 Jubilee year, Pope John Paul II emphasized that to walk through the Holy Door “means to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” Thus, you would be walking into the heart of Jesus, by entering a church through the Holy Door. The door used was actually sealed prior to the opening as a Holy Door.

In 2015 an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy was proclaimed by Pope Francis from December 8, 2015 to November 20, 2016. The theme was focused on forgiveness and mercy. Unlike ordinary jubilees, pilgrimages were not limited to Rome, and there are designated “holy doors” within each diocese. In the United States, these doors are generally within the main cathedral (the Bishop’s church).

With the 2025 Jubilee, Pope Francis returns to the custom of Jubilee celebrations every 25 years. The Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica opened on the evening of December 24, 2024 and will close on January 6, 2026 - the Feast of the Epiphany. In the Pittsburgh Diocese, Bishop Zubik has designated specific churches, one within each county, to have a Holy Door for pilgrims to be able to visit without having to do a pilgrimage to Rome—“these are sites where one makes a pious visit to obtain the Jubilee Year indulgence without going to Rome,” according to the Diocesan Jubilee page.

With the convenience of travel for so many in these modern years, many will choose to go to Rome on pilgrimage. Those who cannot make the journey due to age, finances, health or other reasons are encouraged to participate in alternate ways, including visiting one of these designated Churches, attending special Masses and services, and contemplative prayer.

Jubilee is a time to renew our relationship with Jesus. The 2025 Jubilee theme is “Pilgrims of Hope.” The official Jubilee logo—which various churches



have made visible to the people of God, shows four Pilgrims in waters of turbulence. They cling to one another led by the red Pilgrim, who grasps the cross of faith—which bends and flows into an anchor into the waters. The four Pilgrims represent the four corners of the world—representing each of us — and are signs of hope, mercy and fraternity.

There is a song called “One Spirit, One Church” by Kevin Keil that includes the beautiful lyrics:

*We are a pilgrim people;
we are the Church of God.*

*A family of believers;
disciples of the Lord.*

*United in one spirit; ignited by the fire.
Still burning through the ages;
still present in our lives.*

This particular song is a powerful mantra not only for the 2025 Jubilee, but it also fits very well with the theme of our 24th General Chapter as Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Providence of God—to be:

Sowers of Peace and Hope

This Jubilee year, as our Congregation holds our General Chapter in São Paulo Brazil from May 25 - June 4, we ask all of our friends, readers and supporters to pray with us:

*Inspire us with the light of your Holy Spirit to listen to your word so that we may be Sowers of Peace and Hope.
Amen.*

Article References: Pittsburgh Catholic Magazine, Nov/Dec 2024 Issue; Wikipedia; Rome Tourism by Tripwizy; & Verso Ministries.

A Canticle of Grateful Praise and Hope

St. Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Creatures* (aka *Canticle of the Sun*) appears on the cover of this issue of the Whitehall Franciscan. What is so special about this poem? 800 years ago, St. Francis of Assisi wrote the Canticle, near the end of his life, during a time of great physical and mental suffering. Yet, it is filled with joy and gratitude to God for the gifts of all creation while expressing profound faith and humility rooted in the love of Christ.

This work still inspires many who share Franciscan values rooted in the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching. In 2015, Pope Francis used the *Canticle* as inspiration for the ground-breaking encyclical *Laudato Si'* that challenges us to heal our relationship with all creation and take action to care for each other and our common home. The encyclical begins:



“LAUDATO SI’, mi’ Signore” – “Praise be to you, my Lord”. In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs”.

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.”

The Canticle remains the poetic embodiment of our Franciscan faith and spirituality. It calls us all to be beacons of hope that cannot be extinguished. Modern society is full of distractions. Grabbing our attention with the beauty of our relationship with God and all creation, the Canticle refocuses our attention on embracing our faith and living our Franciscan values, especially caring for our common home and each other.

A Friendship Forged in Providence (continued from page 8)

of the Congo, where she also serves as a foster mother. Trudy has also reviewed plans for the school and fundraising efforts, sharing helpful insights and strategies.

“Trudy loves to travel,” said Sister Francine. “It’s one of the reasons she took teaching positions in so many different places.”

Over the last three decades Trudy invited Sister Francine to join her on various adventures to the Holy Land, Ireland, Alaska and Canada. She also welcomed Sister Francine and Sister Joan of Arc Urban, who in her late 90s at the time, to visit her at her home in Hawaii on several occasions. All expenses were generously gifted by Trudy.

“She and Joanie were like two peas in a pod,” said Sister Francine of their visits with Trudy. “Each morning, they’d wake up at 5:00 am, make coffee, and help welcome the sun.”

At age 94, Sister Francine says she is done with traveling but enjoys following Trudy’s ongoing adventures which recently took her to Egypt.

“I call her ‘hot wheels,’ because she never slows down,” said Sister Francine.

Another thing not slowing in their elder years is their friendship. Trudy and Sister Francine continue to regularly text. Trudy also makes sure to add Pittsburgh to her travels. Her most recent visit was this past December when Trudy and her daughter, Kathryn Metcalf, stayed at our Nativity convent for a couple of joyful days that included an excursion downtown for dinner and a visit to the Pittsburgh Crèche.

“She is my oldest and dearest friend,” said Trudy. “The only one who knows what I was like in my youth and in my old age.”

“We’ve been friends for over 72 years!” said Sister Francine. “God is good!”



Sister Ann Marie Lostoski, Sister Mary Ann Lostoski, Sister Francine McDonald, Trudy Comba, Kathryn Metcalf and Sister Althea Anne Spencer visited the life-size Pittsburgh Crèche in December 2024.

A Gathering of Franciscan Hearts



Franciscan Fest 2024 blessed us with the opportunity to celebrate with Sisters, Associates and friends with Franciscan hearts. Gathered at the beautiful St. Thomas More Family Center in Pittsburgh on Sunday, October 13, 2024, over 125 guests enjoyed each other's presence, shared a delicious meal, and took chances on the many baskets, 50/50, duck pond and cash raffle prizes. Our only major fundraiser in the United States, the event raised over \$27,900 for our ministries, outreach and care of our senior Sisters. Our Sisters are grateful to our dedicated Franciscan Fest Planning Committee, all who joined us as guests and sponsors, Resurrection Parish and staff, and the many who offered support from afar through prayers, donations, and participation in our raffles. We are also grateful to the Knights of Lithuania who surprised us at Franciscan Fest with a generous gift for the care of our senior Sisters in Pittsburgh. May God bless you all as we confidently, joyfully, go forward together on our Franciscan journey.

THANK YOU, FRANCISCAN FEST SPONSORS!

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Franciscan Fest 2025

Save the date for Franciscan Fest 2025 on Saturday, October 11 in Pittsburgh (more information on back cover.) As we prepare, we are grateful for donations of gift cards and other items to fill our prize baskets. For more information about the event and how you can support our Franciscan Fest efforts, please contact Robyn Moeller at rmoeller@osfprov.org or 412-885-7232.

ST. FRANCIS ACADEMY ALUMNAE EVENTS

24TH ANNUAL TULIP LUNCHEON
April 27, 2024 at South Hills Country Club

34TH ANNUAL MASS FOR ALUMNAE, FAMILY & FRIENDS
September 14, 2025 at South Hills Country Club

For more information and events
visit saintfrancisacademyalumnaeandsisters.com



Sisters of Saint Francis of the Providence of God

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FRIENDSHIP

BUFFET LUNCHEON

BASKET RAFFLE

COOKIE TABLE

CASH RAFFLE



benefitting the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God

Saturday, October 11, 2025

St. Thomas More Church Family Life Center
126 Fort Couch Road ♦ Pittsburgh, PA 15241

Festivities Begin @ 1:00 PM

(Doors open at conclusion of 11:30 Mass, which all are welcome to attend)

RSVP or Questions: 412-885-7232 or info@osfprov.org

OCTOBER CASH RAFFLE

*Drawing Based on the
3 Digit Evening PA Lottery*

\$10 per Chance

\$70 Winners Every Day in October
EXCEPT:

\$500 ST. FRANCIS DAY GRAND PRIZE
on October 4, 2025

\$200 Every Sunday in October
and

\$100 Every Saturday in October

DAILY BONUS: \$20 paid to Number
Before, Number After and Reverse

*Example: If 243 was drawn on a weekday,
243 would win \$70
and 242, 244 and 342 would each win \$20.

**For more information:
Sister Mary Ann at 412-477-4321**