

CHRISTMAS NEWSLETTER - December 2013, January, February, 2014

Advent began with a two-fold memorable day for us! December 1, we had a delightful visit from Auxiliary Bishop Daniel E. Thomas who celebrated Mass for us, and is now the newly installed bishop of Toledo, Ohio. Afterwards, we enjoyed light refreshments and a lively conversation with the Bishop, our Chaplain, Monsignor William O'Donnell, and Brother Larry Hilferty, TOR.

Our second blessing this day was the arrival of our two Poor Clare Sisters from Tanzania, Africa, to assist us – Sister Mary Tereza Stephano and Sister Mary Holy Spirit Rwelengera! They are lovely Sisters, and it is a blessing and joy to have them with us. Coming from a tropical climate, they found the cold winter temperatures and the soft descent of snowflakes making everything white a new experience. As we celebrated Mary's Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, on December 8, we were happy to learn that she is patroness of our two countries – BOTH the United States of America and Tanzania.

Among the many marvelous gifts God has given to humanity is the realization of how wonderful yet intricately God has made the human body. Three days after our Sister Mary Alfred's 84th birthday in early December, she was admitted to St. Mary's Hospital for a day procedure to replace her pacemaker battery. Sister did very well, and we still enjoy her beautiful smile!

Each year we look forward to receiving the "Men of Harmony" choral group as they journey to bring the joyful Christmas message in song to many schools and nursing homes.

During the Christmas Octave, we also appreciate having priest friends come to celebrate Mass for us. It is a wonderful opportunity to see them and to 'reconnect' once again.

On Epiphany, Sister Mary Francis selected the cupcake containing the bean which hailed her as the new king for the Year 2014. Part of our monastic tradition, is to process in song to the various manger scenes displayed throughout the monastery. To make the procession easier for some senior sisters, we provided 'wheelchair service'. This was a new experience for Sister Mary Francis. As we were making preparations to begin down in chapel we could hear her exclaiming up on the first floor "Hello – where is everyone?" We did not anticipate her uneasiness in waiting – and so we quickly made our way up to her.

In early January 2014, Sister Evelyn had the pleasure of being with the TOR Franciscan Friars in formation in Loretto, PA and spoke to them about St. Clare's letters, testament, and rule. During Sister Evelyn's absence, we also experienced another 'absence' – we 'lost' Sr. Mary Francis one morning after Mass. A Sister was sent to search for her but could not find her. Fortunately another Sister spotted her enjoying a peaceful rest in a bed that did not belong to our Goldilocks, alias Sister Mary Francis. We then called off the 'search party' and enjoyed a hearty laugh.

Our senior Sister, Sister Mary Constance, raked up another marvelous year this January. Sister is 94 years young and still has her prayerful spirit, her sense of humor and her willingness to do or help whenever she is able. We thank God for His goodness to her and the gift that she has been to us.

During the quiet winter months, we employed the services of a landscaping firm to clear a plot of land in the back of our enclosure premises. Over the years, it became a site for the accumulation of dead tree limbs and brush, thus, making it a very inviting place for some unusual wildlife to find a nestling place.

In February, Sister Carolina returned to her monastery in Mexico after spending almost two years assisting us. We are most grateful to her and her community for their kindness to us. We continue to keep all of them in our prayers.

March, April, May, 2014

We take advantage of the excellent documentaries, scientific and historical programs offered on television by taping them and viewing them at a time convenient for us. We enjoyed watching a documentary on the snow monkeys in Japan and were delighted with the photography, the description of their life and behaviors. The “troop” is a real community, traveling together and watching out for each other. The care the mother shows for her young was touching. The young ones cling to the mother’s stomach or ride on top of her back. We admired their need for reconciliation after disagreement as we viewed one monkey “groom” another to restore a right relationship. Of course, EWTN also has many wonderful programs that we tape and watch, and the Now You Know Media has excellent Franciscan and spiritual programs on tapes, both CD and DVD. God has certainly blessed us with an abundance of resources.

In March and in April we celebrated first birthdays for our Sisters from Tanzania. In their country they do not have our traditions. Thus we did have a birthday party for Sister Mary Holy Spirit in March and an Easter/birthday party for Sr. Mary Tereza in April. Also in March both Sisters got their Social Security Cards and their photo ID’s.

Perhaps it has become so common for us that we need not even mention that one of our refrigerators went on the blink. An owner of the repair company suggested that we buy a used refrigerator that he had for a much cheaper price. Of course there could be no warranty, etc. Shhh! It is still working many months after the purchase.

Our Holy Week Triduum was beautiful. You can see a picture of the ‘lighting of the new fire’ on our Christmas card. Monsignor O’Donnell celebrated the ceremonies for us, minus the Baptisms and Confirmations on Holy Saturday, with the able assistance of our Brother Larry Hilferty, TOR. This was the first year that our Sister Anne sang the Exsultet on Holy Saturday. Good job, Sister Anne. The people who joined us for all the ceremonies were a wonderful help, and we kept all of you in our prayers as we always do.

Father Bob Hiltz, TOR was good enough to celebrate Mass for us when he was in the area to attend a Charismatic conference at Malvern.

On Divine Mercy Sunday, the Sunday after Easter, we taped the Canonization Mass of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II - a beautiful Mass. It was a special treat to see Pope Benedict XVI, emeritus. We tried to study the Bishop attendees for our own Philadelphia Auxiliary Bishop John J. McIntyre who was there. We could not find him, but we knew he was there, and we were happy that he had the opportunity to be present at the special occasion.

“Up, anyone?” The elevator that we have for our ‘in need’ Sisters decided that it would give them a ride up and down without stopping at the ‘up’. So, it would go up to the second floor, almost stop, and then come right down again. After a few trips of up and down, the Sisters left the elevator where they entered on the first floor and walked up the steps to the second floor. When we could not find the cause, Sister Jean Therese called the elevator repair person. He came the next day, found a little glitch and had the Sisters safely arriving on the second floor when they pressed the “2”.

Saint Bonaventure Fraternity is now having meetings in our Padua Room. We are very happy to have them with us. We join our prayers with theirs during their meetings, their Mass and their Christmas tree angels for the poor project.

June, July, August, 2014

Summer of this year was full of God's many blessings. First of all, except for a few days, the weather was refreshingly cool all summer, with just the right amount of rain and sun. This may be one reason that nature provided such a generous bounty of produce: several bushels of zucchini, green beans and tomatoes. Besides, we discovered we have skilled gardeners, Sisters Mary Tereza and Mary Holy Spirit, who did wonders with seeds provided by Sister Patricia Anne. In addition, many of our friends brought us their extra produce, for which we were very grateful. We learned many new recipes! Toward the end of the season, our apple trees provided us with almost 100 apples, which were used for applesauce, salads, and other dishes. There is something special – reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, perhaps – about getting one's food "directly from God"!

Nature has a sad side though as we learned with the deaths of our two dogs, Trinny and Kioko. Trinny developed cancer earlier in the year, and after undergoing some treatment was initially responding very well. However, after a few months, the cancer returned; and she died July 18. Kioko was suffering severe arthritis and had trouble walking, besides experiencing skin infections and other related difficulties. Soon it was clear that it was her time to go, so we made that final trip to the vet, and she died on August 18. We were all saying that Trinny was lonely for her dog companion in pet heaven and so asked her to come on her 1-month anniversary! Yes, we are all sad and miss our special friends very much. Yet, we are so grateful for all the laughter and joy they gave us during their 12 years of life.

We made some new friends, among them Mr. Edward Lawrence from Archbishop Ryan High School. He came to speak with us regarding his cyber prayer network, a way of allowing those with prayer requests to submit them directly to monasteries and other prayer groups around the world. When this is up and running, we will let you know.

From a spiritual point of view, God provided many rich experiences. In early June, the OFS Poverello fraternity made their annual visit. We enjoyed worshipping with them at Mass and speaking with them afterwards in the parlor. June 22 was the Solemnity of Corpus Christi. Our procession with the Blessed Sacrament, carried by Monsignor O'Donnell, was made all the more joyful by the beautiful weather that God provided, as well as the additional company of our friend, Brother Larry, TOR. The Solemnity of the Sacred Heart was celebrated on June 27, with extra opportunity for Eucharistic Adoration because of the Feast. On July 27 Father Jason Buck, newly ordained came to celebrate Mass for us. He is assigned to our nearby parish of Saint Andrew's. It was a joy to meet and speak with him at the beginning of his ministerial journey.

The liturgical and spiritual highlight of the season was the St. Clare Triduum and Mass, August 8 to 11. Father Chris Dobson, TOR presided and preached. A great many friends joined us for each of the three nights of prayer. At the celebration of the Transitus of St. Clare on August 10 there were three OFM brothers and Father Chris and some TOR novices with us in the enclosure, and Third Order Sisters and Secular Franciscans. It allowed us to show part of the fullness of the Franciscan Order!

At the Mass on August 11, the feast itself, Fr. Chris was accompanied by Monsignor O'Donnell, Father Joe Markalonis, TOR, Father Fidelis Weber, TOR and Father Cletus Watson, TOR. Father Chris' 'hook' for his homily came from the reading from Hosea 2:14 for the Mass. "I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart." Father described the "hook" as the connection between scripture readings and our own lives. We don't always understand the depths of allurements and the transformation that has to take place as we deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ. God allured Clare, and has allured us. Father left us with the questions: "How does God allure me and pull me in? How do I stay connected to the vine and bear fruit?" (Jn 15:4-10 Gospel for the Mass) We enjoyed celebrating and meeting many of our friends after the celebration.

September, October, November, 2014

In early September Sister Mary Tereza and Sister Holy Spirit harvested what remained in the vegetable garden. They finally picked the carrots, and we could only call them “cute carrots” and laugh at their unusual shapes! The soil is very hard at the end of the garden where they were planted and it stunted their growth. It was challenging to peel them, but they tasted fine. Their single row of corn matured and turned a beautiful yellow color when cooked. The beets were delicious, and we enjoyed their greens as well. The green peppers were hardy, quite profuse and were the last to be picked. We have enjoyed Sr. Mary Tereza’s special dish using tomatoes, peppers, onions and milk on several occasions. We have named them “Teresinian Peppers!” The Sisters’ “farming” skills have amazed us, and we have thoroughly enjoyed the fruits of their labors!

Our new lights in our refectory were installed on Saturday, September 6. A gentleman from the electric supply company who assisted us in replacing many of our lights for energy efficient LED’s and got a rebate from our electric company volunteered to come with a friend to install them. The lights are bright compared to our old flood lights because the old fixtures swallowed part of the light. Can you imagine the name of the fixture? They are “clouds”. We think of angel clouds or heavenly clouds.

September 8 was a solemnity for us as it marked the 37th anniversary of the dedication of our chapel. Our many gardens provided lovely pink zinnias, sedum and plumes to decorate the altar. The chosen readings and Monsignor O’Donnell’s homily both focused on what a gift this sanctuary of presence, prayer and peace is for us and for all our friends and benefactors. Klondike Ice Cream, a special dessert from a benefactor for our dinner, was enjoyed by all.

Our faithful TOR friar/priest, Father Fidelis TOR, celebrated the Transitus and the Feast Day Mass of Saint Francis for us this year. We were pleased to have quite a few people in attendance; Sisters from St. Mary’s Hospital and Secular Franciscans from the area. October 4 was also the 60th anniversary celebration of the founding of Our Lady of the Angels monastery in Mwanza, Tanzania. This was home to Sister Mary Tereza and Sister Holy Spirit before they came to join us. Their Sisters in Tanzania had a huge celebration and sent us two DVD’s of the dancing, singing and the celebration of the Jubilee Mass.

On October 23 fifty-five 7th and 8th grade girls from Nativity of Our Lord School in Warminster PA filled our Padua Room for the experience of learning about Sisters. Sister Jean gave them a short talk about St. Clare and answered their questions. They had some adoration time in our chapel before the Mass which was celebrated by their pastor, Father Citino. The girls enjoyed a bag lunch in our Padua Room, and we went down to greet them and answer any more questions that they had about our life in the monastery.

Another of the highlights of our Fall was the arrival of our two new dogs, Lady and Snickers on November 1. We adopted them through TracysDogs.com, a group from Texas that finds homes for stray dogs. Lady is about 2 years old and her tan fur almost matches the color of our habits. Snickers is her daughter and is a lovely mix of black with highlights of tan around her eyes and on her body and a patch of white on her tummy. Sister Anne has been trying to training them with help from Sisters Joan, Eden, Isabel, Mary Tereza and Holy Spirit. Lady appears to have had some previous training. Snickers is a true puppy, chewing on everything and highly excitable, but learning fast to sit if she wants a treat! Sister Jean discovered they know how to “fetch”.

On November 17, the Feast of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, we welcomed Maria Ramonita Sison as a postulant. She comes to us from California. Her sister Faye, and Anna, a very good friend of her sister, brought her to the monastery for her entrance day. Maria is looking forward to her formation journey, and we are very happy to have her with us! Her entrance into our community added to the many gifts we are thankful for this Thanksgiving!