

WINTER 2014-2015



The Winter of 2014-2015 was a very cold one. We had a few snowstorms leaving several inches of snow at a time. Amidst all this weather, quite a few memorable events stand out.

December 1 had us celebrating the one-year anniversary of the arrival of Sister Mary Tereza Stephano and Sister Mary Holy Spirit Rwelengera from Tanzania. It has been a joy having them with us in community. We have all learned much from and about each other over the past year.

The next day was Sister Mary Alfred's 85th birthday. We know now that it was to be her last birthday with us, but then we were just happy to have Sister with us and to sing to her and see her beautiful smile.

Our new dogs, Snickers and Lady, seemed to enjoy what we think is their first experience of snow, running and making new designs in the white fluff as they played together or went after an animal. Their fur coats appeared to keep them very warm when they were outside. We are so grateful for our new little friends; they provide a lot of laughter and funny stories for the community.

We had several visits from friends over the winter. On December 15 Fr. Tom Hartle, OFM our federation's religious assistant, came to give us a spiritual conference. We enjoyed having him with us, and he has agreed to return next year to give us our community retreat.

December 20 saw the Saint Bonaventure Fraternity holding their Christmas dinner and Nativity skit here at the Monastery. Their newest members performed the skit in our chapel, a reenactment of the Nativity without dialogue, set to music. It was very poetic and inspiring.

On December 23, the Men of Harmony came to give their annual Christmas concert. We do love their singing and look forward to this gift of a live performance every year. Thanks so much for your dedication and talent!

Christmas brought us our annual celebration of Midnight Mass, presided over this year by Father Frank Berna, our late Sr. Mary Regina Berna's nephew. It was so good to see him again and hear his inspiring words about the Nativity of our Lord. The Christmas Octave Masses were celebrated by many of our good friends: Monsignor Joseph McLoone; Father Patrick Whittle, TOR; Monsignor Gregory Parlante – who came with two seminarians and concelebrated with Sister Mary Holy Spirit's cousin Father Speratus Kamanzi and Father Richard O'Nyamwaro; Father Brian Kean; Monsignor John Miller; Bishop Michael Fitzgerald and our own chaplain, Monsignor William O'Donnell.

After having Exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament with adoration at 11:30 PM, we brought in the New Year by the Sisters taking turns pulling the cord of our big monastery bell at midnight. This was followed by the praying of the Office of Readings, and then by some slumber. On January 4 in celebration of Epiphany, we passed around cupcakes after dinner, one of which contained the bean designating the "King" for the New Year. Our postulant Maria won! As "King" she carried the Infant Jesus statue at the end of our Epiphany procession, and she is also the grateful recipient of many special prayers throughout the year.

January 15 was a very special day as Sister Mary Constance celebrated being 95 years young! We are blessed with her continued presence and hope the Lord has many more years in store for her. A month later we celebrated our Forty Hours Solemn Annual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, concluding with Mass on Tuesday. Mardi Gras was then celebrated before we began Ash Wednesday and Lent. *We do enjoy celebrations.*

Spring, 2015



March 18 saw us renew our vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and enclosure during our Midmorning Prayer. We do this every year in remembrance of Saint Clare pronouncing her vows on Palm Sunday in 1212. We were especially conscious of our commitment to the Lord in light of the celebration of the Year of Consecrated Life given us by Pope Francis.

Two days later we welcomed spring with a continuous snow fall. The very next day, we met Francesco Papini and his father, Giuliano, who came from Perugia, Italy to discuss their automated altar bread stoves, cutters and humidifiers. Giuliano is the head of the company, and his son, Francesco, speaks English. With a name like “Francesco” who can blame us for mentioning him first. We have been in contact with them since 2012. Our altar bread equipment is rather old. The Sisters, our electricians and our maintenance man, Jeff, do their best to keep everything working. Our cutters and humidifiers are still from Girard Avenue in Philadelphia. The stoves are a little newer, and that could make them just close to forty years old. With a five day a week work out, they are coming apart in different places, although everyone tries to keep them together and working at their best. During the Papini visit, we decided to invest in some of their new equipment. Now we have to have our altar bread room equipped with 220 volts of electricity and make some other adjustments for the new equipment. The equipment is due in June or later in 2016. Please keep us and this new venture in your good prayers.

Sister Mary Francis celebrated her 88th birthday on March 26. Sister always has a kind of slogan for each of her birthdays. This year it was “88 and feeling Great!”. Yes, Sister is as cute and lively as ever most of the time.

All went beautifully with our Holy Week Masses and services. It was a little windy for the Easter fire in our Sacred Garden during the vigil. We really had to watch any sparks that flew around. Easter with its truly overwhelming meaning for all of us was beyond words. Is it possible to ever thank God sufficiently for all He has done for us, and for living and loving in and through us and the whole world!

May 1 saw our usual crowning of Our Blessed Mother’s statue. This year Sister Evelyn’s name was picked to have the honor of crowning the statue. Later in the month we celebrated our 38th year in Langhorne, PA. We shared this date with four of the priests we know who were ordained on May 21: Fr. Fidelis Weber, TOR (60 years this year), Monsignor Joseph McLoone, Father James Oliver and Father Dennis Gill.

It was during Mary’s month of May that we had the joy of hosting a Mass for the 50th Jubilee of the Queen of the Universe Fraternity. Father Richard Davis, TOR came to offer the Mass and his congratulations to all the wonderful members of this Third Order of Saint Francis Fraternity.

On Memorial Day, after helping with our picnic dinner preparations, most of the Sisters gathered to play badminton and shoot a few basketball hoops. Sister Mary Francis and Sister Mary Alfred, in her wheel chair, enjoyed watching the Sisters in the cool of the shade outside. That evening we ventured out on our deck to take our collation, or light supper. We usually tape the Memorial Day Concert from Washington and try watch it the next few days at a time that is convenient for us. We find it very inspiring, and appreciate how much our service people have done for us.

Our veterinarian suggested that a wading pool might help Snickers who is mostly black handle the summer heat. We purchased a child’s size pool for just \$10.00. It was cheaper than getting her fur cut, but neither Lady nor Snickers knew what to make of it. They thought it was a gigantic ‘water bowl’! It took several attempts of coaxing to encourage Snickers to wade through the cool water. When she began to experience the refreshment, she would gladly lay in the shallow waters for a few seconds.

Summer, 2015



We enjoyed some very good programs on DVDs. The series of “Peter, Cornerstone of Catholicism” by Tim Gray was given to us by Lighthouse Publications. We thought it would be all right and educational, but it turned out to be very, very good. We truly enjoyed the lectures and learned much from them. The second series that captivated us was an older one “Contemplation” by Father Thomas Dubay. Again an excellent course of study. We had the older tapes on VHS. When we tried to retape them onto DVDs, the retapes were not that good. It proved more profitable for us to buy the DVDs and use them. Later on in the summer we listened to now ‘Bishop’ Robert Barron on “Priest, Prophet, King”. Again, we felt that God had blessed us with such good teachers!

We brought in our electricians to check our generator for the yearly inspection. They worked on a problem we have had. If all the electricity goes out, the generator automatically turns on. But when one part of the electric system goes out, which happened in a storm, the generator does not function automatically. Our electricians, Don and Greg and Andy gave Sister Patricia and Sister Jean information to remedy any further complications. With the help of Jeff MacKay, our maintenance man who tests all our emergency lighting, the men who inspect our fire extinguishers, our stove hood, our sprinkler system and the water company who inspects and tests our fire hydrants, we - for the first time - passed the fire inspection without any violations or suggestions!!!

The Poverello Fraternity of the Secular Franciscans and Father Rene Barczak, OFM came to celebrate their annual Mass with us and meet the Sisters afterward in our parlor.

On July 1, our ever-faithful Chaplain, Monsignor William O’Donnell, marked his 10th anniversary with us! He celebrated by bringing over his favorite ‘frozen treat’ package for us! We are very blessed by his presence and friendship, his inspiring daily reflections and homilies, and his tending to our spiritual needs!

Just a couple days before St. Clare’s Triduum, our new sign was installed at the entrance of our parking lot (at the end of Dogwood Street) to greet all who come to our monastery and to assure them that this is the Monastery of Saint Clare. The Triduum and Feast of Saint Clare were well attended. Father Jonathan Saint Andre, TOR used the theme of Clare’s perseverance as the beautiful thread that tied his reflections together and helped us understand perseverance in our own lives. We were happy that he brought his two novices with him, Brother Joseph Marie and Brother Andrew Joseph. At the Mass on Saint Clare Day Brother Gregory Pine OP, a deacon to be ordained this coming May 21, served as the deacon, and Brother Larry, TOR kept all going smoothly as he served the Mass. We were very happy to have Monsignor O’Donnell and Father Fidelis, TOR be with us for this Solemnity of Saint Clare. It was a beautiful Feast of Saint Clare, and we thank her for all the blessings that she obtains for you and for us.

In anticipation of Pope Francis’ visit to Philadelphia in September, and our making 100,000 communion breads for the Masses he would be celebrating in our Archdiocese, we were contacted by several different news mediae to explain the processes involved in the production of altar breads. The first story came out in one of our secular papers since the Philadelphia Archdiocese no longer has its own Catholic paper. We were very happy to see a large picture of our Sister Marie Eden at our big mixing machine that is used to mix the flour and water for the altar breads. Then came Sister Anne on a number of short spots on TV explaining how the process works. Sister Isabel was also seen on our short TV spots with her beautiful smile, as she and the other Sisters worked in our altar bread room.

Fall 2015



In the beginning of September our retreat gave us a respite from the preparations for the Holy Father. We had Father Albert Haas, OFM from Texas. Father used the “Our Father” for his main theme. What better theme could we have than the prayer Our Lord himself taught us! After the retreat Sister Joan Marie gave us a delicious meal for our Labor Day picnic which was truly enjoyed by all.

The month of September brought the full anticipation of Pope Francis’ visit to our city, both in the news media and right here in our own monastery. It seemed that we were always reading where people would and would not be allowed to go, what trains would go into the city, what transits would be stopped. And our quiet monastic life was sometimes placed in a minor spotlight as the media continued to cover our altar bread making.

Pope Francis offered two Masses in Philadelphia. The first was on Saturday in the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul. Representatives from many of our parishes and active religious communities were invited as well as all the priests of the Archdiocese. Our faithful TOR brother, Larry Hilferty, was invited to greet the Pope at the door as a representative of the religious brothers in the archdiocese. We watched a taped version of that Mass. It was good to see so many faces of priests and seminarians that we know. Our Archbishop Chaput’s birthday was on September 26, and we watched as the seminarians sang to him and to Pope Francis on the steps of Saint Charles Seminary, where the Pope stayed while in Philadelphia. One permanent deacon, who is part of a group who come here for Benediction on Sunday night, serves as chaplain at the prison where the Pope spent quite some time visiting with the inmates and the other people there.

All four of the contemplative communities in our archdiocese were invited to the Closing Mass for the World Meeting of Families that was held on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway on Sunday, September 27. With permission from our Vicar for Consecrated Life, Monsignor Joseph Anderlonis, seven of our Sisters were able to attend and enjoy the wonderful experience of the Pope’s Mass. The Sisters had to leave quite early, 5:00 AM, to drive to the Mann Music Center to pick up the 7:00 AM shuttle which took them to the location of the 4 PM Mass in the afternoon. They then had to go through security which was very tight around the perimeter of the event. Their tickets were for seats, but they were far enough back that they used the jumbotron, a new word for some of us, to watch the Mass. It was a most memorable day for the Sisters! They returned home to the monastery at 10:15 PM, very tired but very happy!

In September, Sister Mary Alfred began to experience more physical difficulty. By Friday, October 16, it appeared that she was beginning her journey home to the arms of our Loving Father. Monsignor O’Donnell anointed her directly after Mass with all the Sisters standing around her bed. Early Saturday morning, October 17, our beloved Sister breathed her last on earth and entered into the bliss of eternal life. For her Funeral Mass and burial, October 22, the weather was beautiful. Her sister, Anne, and her family were able to attend and several of the family served as pallbearers. Monsignor O’Donnell was the main celebrant for the Mass. He was joined by several priests who concelebrated including three Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales who had known Sister or her brothers, Father John and Father Joe who were also Oblates. We were very happy to have our Father Fidelis, TOR with us as well as Father Michael Olivere, and Brother Larry, TOR who helped all go smoothly. Father Ronald Gionnone, OFM from the Ministry of Caring in Wilmington DE, a long time friend of Sister, concelebrated and preached the touching homily. Monsignor James Beisel, another friend of the community, concelebrated and officiated at the grave side prayers. We will miss our “Sister of the Beautiful Smile”, but we are happy knowing that she is now smiling in the presence of God. A little more about Sister Mary Alfred is on the write-up that is being sent with this little newsletter. We want to express our appreciation for all that the hospice nurse, Arthur, and the aids from Immediate Home Care did for Sister Mary Alfred and for us.

We are now into the blessed season of **Advent**. As we anticipate this remembrance of God’s coming to save humankind, let us allow God’s love to fill us to overflowing and onto all who need His and our love.