



December 2018, January, February 2019

We begin our annual newsletter with ‘winter past’. The first snowfall came relatively early, November 15. It was a beautifully quiet, gentle snowfall, yet wet and slippery. With this in mind - whenever our chapel bells ring Lady, our dog, usually scampers down the outside pathway to get a treat from one of the Sisters, probably Sister Evelyn, who is going by for prayers. This day, Lady didn’t realize how slippery it was because of the snowfall, and she just slid past her begging place at the passageway doors. She was a bit surprised, but fortunately did not hurt herself as she surveyed the fresh snow and went back to get her treat.

In mid-November, Philadelphia-born Saint Katharine Drexel’s sacred remains were solemnly relocated at a side chapel in the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The community she founded, Blessed Sacrament Sisters, sold their property in Bensalem where she had been buried. For this special occasion Father Dennis Gill, composed lyrics to a hymn which we sang as the closing hymn for that Sunday Mass. Thus we were able to unite ourselves in spirit with Saint Katharine’s community and the entire Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Every year as we draw close to Christmas, we have the wonderful gift of hearing the beautiful harmonic voices of the Men of Harmony. They stop by our chapel to present us with a small concert as they bring the Christmas message in song to many schools and nursing homes throughout the season. This year was no exception.

It was a special delight to have Bishop Michael Fitzgerald come and celebrate Mass for us on December 31. He spoke with us afterwards and requested our prayers for various episcopal gatherings in the upcoming new year. We still have his list on the wall in our refectory until the last event is finished.

Traditionally as we celebrate Epiphany a “King” is born among us by the finding of the bean. We have mentioned in our previous newsletters that over the years this ‘bean’ had sometimes been placed in a cake, or a cupcake, and recently in a cookie. In jest, one of our good friends expressed his concerns that even we would find it difficult to hide it in a ‘cracker’! We laughed at his comment!! This year our Abbess, Sister Patricia, found the bean in her cupcake, which designated her as our “King” with our special prayers.

During our Sunday Mass on February 17, Sister Maria Ramonita, received special prayers and blessings when she was installed as a Mass Lector for our community. It is a marvelous privilege to share the Good News by proclaiming the Word of the Lord!

Our Sister Maria Eden was in charge of our altar bread work when Sister Anne, who serves as President of our Poor Clare Holy Name Federation, made some sisterly visits to our monasteries. She traveled to our Florida houses in February, and shared insights about the new *Cor Orans* document that Pope Francis issued during the past year for all contemplative communities.

The firm that helps us with landscaping came at the end of February to cut down a couple of trees whose limbs had fallen onto fences during the windy days this winter. They also uprooted and removed some stumps and other brush leaving our outside much more peaceful and clean looking.

During these winter months we especially enjoyed listening to two informational DVD’s as part of our on-going formation. One was video talks presented by Father Dominic Monti, OFM at a Poor Clare gathering on “The History of the Poor Clares”. Another was through the “Now You Know Media” with Sister Dianne Bergant, C.S.A., Ph.D. on “The Psalms: The Prayer of the Church”. The Sisters found both very interesting and helpful.



March, April, May of 2019

Our Forty Hours Devotion of Adoration to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament began with the closing of our Sunday Mass on March 3 and continued until Mass on Tuesday. This beautiful devotion begun by Saint John Neumann in April of 1853 was initiated during a strong anti-Catholic sentiment in Philadelphia where two Catholic churches had been burned. In this Archdiocese, different churches have different times for this beautiful devotion. Many years ago our monastery was given the time from the Sunday before Ash Wednesday until Shrove Tuesday also known as Mardi Gras. You can always join us in spirit if you cannot be with us in person.

Sister Joan Marie was busy during this time making shrouds for our Secular Franciscans. They are what the name implies burial shrouds. Not all of the OSF's use them at burial, but some still do. They can be clothed in them and or have them put in the casket with them.

March 26 saw our Sister Mary Francis celebrating her birthday with Italian decorations. Our tiny 92 year old whose mom and dad were born in Sicily enjoyed every minute of it, especially the ice cream with cherry or strawberry syrup. Sister is no longer able to speak at will even though words do come out at unexpected times.

Our days of Holy Week and Easter day were blessed in many ways, especially with the help of a number of our good priests. We ask God to bless them all for their generosity and goodness to us. We continue to remember those hundreds who were killed or injured in the suicide bombings around Sri Lanka on Easter Day.

The first of May was witness to the annual May Crowning of our Blessed Mother's statue in our chapel. As per usual, the Sisters put their names into a container and one name is picked to Crown our Lady. This year Sister Isabel had the honor of crowning our Blessed Mother while the rest of the community sang hymns to our Blessed Virgin.

The rest of May saw many varied people from refrigerator repair men and lock repair men to our annual fire inspectors. Yes, every year, we have to go through a fire inspection of the whole monastery. They check to make sure we do not have a triple outlet plugged into another triple outlet (which we once did), or any other little "fancy" anomalies that the Sisters may have concocted. All the fire extinguishers are checked so that they are up to date. The doors are checked so that we might get out quickly in any emergency. No fire hazards are allowed! Then if all goes well, we will get our Middletown Fire Prevention Permit which is hung by the entrance door. If it did not go well, tsk tsk, we must follow their recommendations to keep us safe and let them know when their recommendations have been integrated AND THEN we will get our permit.

On May 21 Monsignor Beisel came to celebrate the Eucharist with us. It was the 42nd anniversary of our coming to Langhorne, Pennsylvania. Every year we thank God for His goodness in giving us this beautiful monastery with so many ways in which we can praise Him and pray for individuals and for the world.

Who saw the turkey? Towards the end of May, a wild turkey came into our Sacred Garden before our 8:00 A.M. Mass. We think it was a she and she was a large turkey! She ambled around and tried the birdseed that was laid out on the flat rocks that we have. Then she pranced around the length of the garden a few times, walked over to the gate and looked out. After a few moments she spread her wings at the gate and flew what seemed like vertically. She perched on top of the gate for a few seconds and flew away, perhaps to tell her compatriots that it was interesting, but not much good as far as food supply goes. Not the End! A few days later, the same or another turkey was spotted. Then about a week later Sister Patricia was walking outside on one of our trails and a turkey walked across her path some feet away. They eye-balled each other and the turkey wandered off into the vegetation. No new sighting as of the writing of this newsletter.

June, July, August, 2019

The Summer of 2019 was one of experiencing both God's Providence and God's Presence. Directly preceding the beginning of summer, in May, we had a period of torrential rain, a vivid reminder of God's presence in nature. This led to the discovery that we needed some extensive roof repair! Thanks to God's Providence we were able to complete the repairs by mid-June.



Around this time our dog, Lady who always shows us such affection and playfulness, injured a disc in her neck, probably while trying to catch one of the small creatures on our property. For several weeks she was confined to her Kennel while Sister Anne walked her several times daily with a special harness, which she was clever enough to twist out of one day while being walked by Sister Jean. Then, a few weeks later, Sister Anne accidentally cut her while giving her a small fur trim. We were greatly relieved when Barbara Cullen, a vet friend of ours, took a quick look and pronounced her safe and healthy. All in all, God provided much patience and excellent care for our ailing "puppy"! Thanks be to God, she seems completely healed.

Throughout the summer we knew God's presence in a special way through our priest friends. We met two newly-ordained, Father Alexander Pancoast and Father Anthony Raymundo, each of whom celebrated Mass for us, one on June 10, the other on August 1. What joy it is to see the zeal of young men in their priestly lives.

We experience delight in the presence of our "retired" (not really) priest chaplains who are so faithful to us. We welcomed a new member to our chaplain team. Father Edward Windhaus has replaced Father Thomas Duffy, now at Saint Joseph's Villa in Darby. Father Windhaus has generously agreed to celebrate Mass for us not only every Friday, but also on the first and third Sundays of every month, for which we are very grateful.

We also are happy that we can keep in touch with our priest friends who have moved, as we get periodic updates on their lives at Saint Joseph's Villa. We were able to celebrate in spirit, complete with a homemade card by Sister Joan, with our former chaplain of many years, Monsignor William O'Donnell. He celebrated his 91st birthday on August 12!

God's presence was especially palpable in the special events and celebrations we shared this summer. On June 23, we celebrated the Feast of Corpus Christi including a procession, in which Father John Bednarik, OFM Cap, carried the Blessed Sacrament. We also had some new young people in the procession as cross and candle-bearers.

Then, in the middle of July we had a special treat from Sister Christa Marie Thompson, OSF. She shared with us her experiences in Prague, visiting the sites made holy by Saint Agnes of Prague, who was a close friend and correspondent of Saint Clare. It was a very enriching presentation and helped us to know our Holy Mother Saint Clare and Saint Agnes even better. Thank you for all your sharing with us, Sister Christa!

August brought us two very special Franciscan Feasts. August 2 was the feast of the Portiuncula Indulgence, an important gift of pardon from the Church for which we are always grateful. August 8 to 11 brought us the Triduum and Mass of Saint Clare, celebrated by Father John Petrikovic, OFM Cap. The Triduum as some of you know, includes a healing service and the celebration of Saint Clare going to heaven. At the healing service, we were delighted to have with us the pastor of our parish, Monsignor Michael Picard and Father Mark Capizzi, one of his vicars. They were surprised to see their former parish confreres also attending: Father David O'Brien and Father Patrick Muka. We had a mini-reunion of Saint Andrew's parish priests! Throughout the Triduum, we were very inspired by Father Petrikovic's homilies and devotion to Saint Clare and filled with renewed zeal for our life of community and contemplation. We hold all of you in our hearts and minds as we continue in our daily following of Christ as lived by Saint Clare.

September, October, November, 2019



Our matriarch, Sister Mary Francis, has moved into the age of technology. She and her one living sister, Lucy, “Skyped” each other (with the help of Lucy’s son, and two of our Sisters). Sister Mary Francis does not speak much so it was a delight for the two sisters to see each other!

September 8 is the anniversary of the dedication of our chapel. Forty-two years ago, in 1977, Cardinal Krol celebrated Mass on this festive day. Fortunately, this year it fell on the second Sunday of the month when a priest from our parish of Saint Andrew comes for Mass. Our pastor, Monsignor Michael Picard, was scheduled for that Sunday and was delighted to be able to celebrate our anniversary with us. Transitional Deacon Kevin Okafor came with him as he is serving his deacon year at Saint Andrew’s. It was a pleasure to meet another one of our seminarians whom we keep in all of our prayers.

Our Capuchin confessor, Father John Paul Kuzma offered to anoint Sister Mary Francis when he came for the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the middle of September. We try to provide the Sacrament of the Sick for her and our other older Sisters.

Finally, in late September work began on the drainage problem we have been experiencing in the Sacred Garden. The wood at the bottom of our floor to ceiling windows was deteriorating due to a build up of water. Since the contractor was not sure what was under the slate and the concrete, there was some question as to how they would proceed. Fortunately, there was a solid slab of concrete already in place under the small layer that held the slate. A stone mason contractor came in to lay “BLUESTONE” in a lovely design on the concrete slab that is very pleasing to the eye. A metal lip was placed at the base of the windows and then capped with another lip to keep the water out. At this writing are looking forward to the completion of this project, hopefully before Christmas!

At the end of September our large kitchen refrigerator died. The compressor stopped working. The refrigerator was a second hand one and it had served us for 7 years. Since the cost of the new compressor was high, we researched a commercial “True” energy star model. In the meantime, we needed to re-locate food into other very small units that we have in the monastery. It was challenging to be the cook and to locate the items that you needed to prepare your meal!

Sister Maria Ramonita’s Vow Day was the Feast of the Archangels, September 29, which fell on a Sunday this year. Her profession candle burned on the altar throughout the day as we remembered her commitment to God and the Church.

Our friend, Father Frank Berna, came to celebrate the Transitus of Saint Francis with us on the evening of October 3. We were blessed to have some OFS Seculars and OSF Sisters join us for the evening. October 4 is the Solemnity of Saint Francis. This year it was also the entrance day for Kelly Neale as a postulant. Her mother, Joy, drove her up from Maryland and she entered after Mid-day prayer. We are happy to have her with us as she discerns her vocation to our contemplative life.

Both on All Souls Day and All Souls of the Seraphic Order Day, we pray the Little Hours of the Divine Office in our cemetery. Our large granite crucifix has the names of the Sisters who died in Philadelphia and are buried in there. After the prayers, we sprinkle the graves of the Sisters who are buried here, and then the names of those on the granite crucifix with holy water. It is a grace to remember those who went before us in prayer and know that they pray for us, their religious Sisters and for all of you.

We are all looking forward to Thanksgiving. We have a free turkey certificate from our local grocery store so we will enjoy an authentic Thanksgiving meal this year with a “real” turkey!

Prayers for a Blessed and Grace filled Christmas and New Year for each of you!