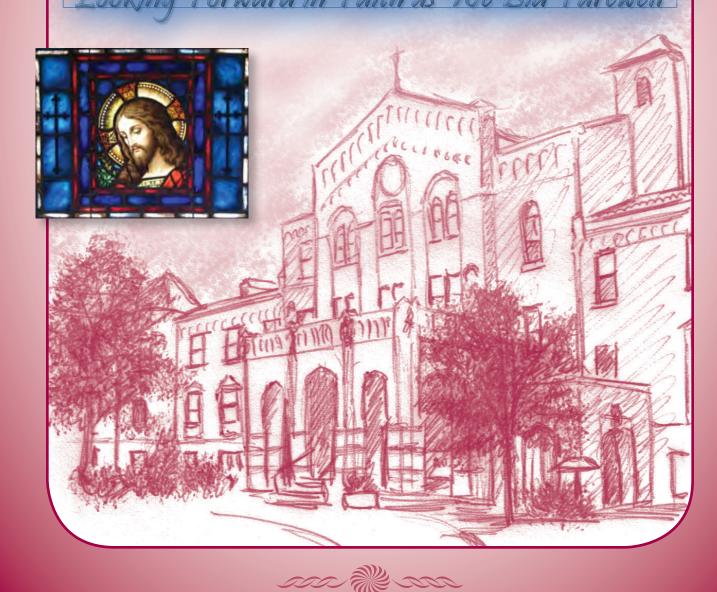




# Continuing Courageously Looking Forward in Faith as We Bid Farewell



Founded in 1872, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary is a religious congregation of women within the Roman Catholic Church. Committed to standing with the poor and marginalized, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary sponsor the ministries Almost Home, SSM Health Care, and Woman's Place, and collaborate with four other religious congregations of women in The Sarah Community.

### **President:**

Rose Mary Dowling, FSM

### **Councilors**:

Marita Anne Marrah, FSM Susan Scholl, FSM Sandra Jean Schwartz, FSM

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*FSM Magazine* is published twice yearly by the Public Relations and Development Department. To obtain more information or make a correction to our mailing list, please contact us at (314) 768-1824 or e-mail us at info@fsmonline.org.

**Editor, Writer:** Sandra A. Ashby

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Photos of the convent and grounds were contributed by Cecilia Lackman, FSM; Mary Joan Meyer, FSM; Susan Scholl, FSM; and Sandy Ashby. Thanks also to Sr. Marylu Stueber, FSM archivist, for photos from the FSM Archives.

Photograph of the chapel on page 4 courtesy of Lisa Johnston of the *St. Louis Review*.

### Message from Rose Dowling, FSM, President Franciscan Sisters of Mary



### Standing on the Threshold

Welcome to the fall 2010 issue of FSM Magazine! In this issue we share with you the ending of one era for us Franciscan Sisters of Mary and the beginning of a new one.

Our lives mirror the lives of many of our family, friends, and benefactors. They too are being asked—because of the aging process, the economic times, or for other reasons—to rethink and recommit to what is truly important in life.

Sometimes we choose the changes in our lives. But at times these

simply happen for reasons we don't understand. *How* we respond, however, is always our choice. We need to make thoughtful choices about our lives based on what we TRULY value.

Perhaps we see ourselves limited in ways we haven't experienced before. This doesn't mean we are less or have less. In our spiritual lives we are wealthy—if we choose to consciously connect with our spiritual life and live from there.

God invites me, invites you to give out of what we perceive we don't have ourselves, but what we know, in faith, God has and gives through us.

Our constitution tells every Franciscan Sister of Mary that each one of us has been given a gift for service and a power for healing. But this is just as true of *you* as you read this magazine. What gift do you have for service? What power do you have for bringing healing into your own life or the life of another? What keeps you from claiming that gift or from using it?

Circumstances change all the time. But the constant is God working in and through us. That never changes, no matter where we live, how much material wealth we have or don't have, how young or how old we are.

As each of us stands on the threshold of God's new call, let's discover and use our gifts for service and our powers for healing.

Some May A cuting, 7.5. M.



From the beginning these words of their foundress, Mother Mary Odilia Berger, have inspired the Franciscan Sisters of Mary to move forward bravely into whatever future God has planned for them, whether it has involved nursing victims of raging epidemics far from home, blazing a trail into the heart of the Amazon, opening a new hospital on the wings of a prayer, or exploring new vistas in medical research, nursing, or midwifery.

Always God has asked them to move forward in trust, whether or not the vision was clear. And the FSM have listened to that call—the still, silent voice in their hearts—and they have followed in faith.

In fall 2008, the FSM Leadership Team discerned a new call. A difficult call, one that, for some at least, would call forth the greatest reserves of faith and courage they possessed.

It was time, in short, for the Franciscan Sisters of Mary to bid farewell to their motherhouse, St. Mary of the Angels Convent.

### Leaving Home

The call was not totally out of the blue, of course.

More than ten years earlier, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary had joined with the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND), the Daughters of Charity (DC), the Sisters of Loretto (SL), and the Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ) to found The Sarah Community to create a home where their retired sisters could live.

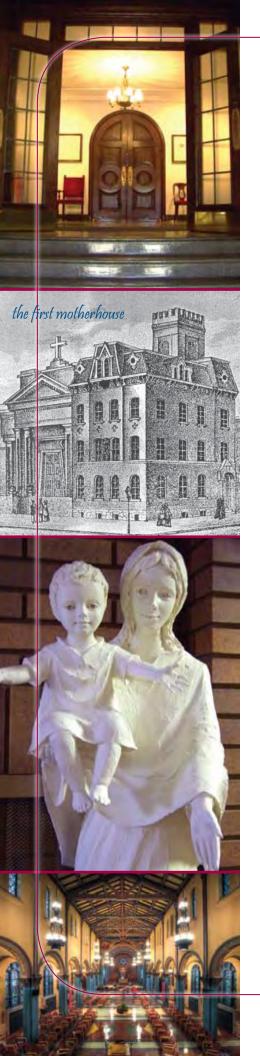
One of the goals of the Leadership Team that took office in September 2007 was to evaluate the present and future of St. Mary of the Angels. They found that, while it might be possible to redesign and update the beautiful convent to accommodate the needs of its elder sisters, staying in the motherhouse no longer would reflect the best stewardship of FSM resources. It was time to move on.

But it was not an easy decision by any means.

Since November 1929—more than eighty years ago— St. Mary of the Angels has been the anchor and the heart of the FSM community. Most sisters entered here, progressed through postulancy and novitiate, and professed their vows in the lovely chapel. During their ministry the motherhouse remained a place of safety, a haven for rest, recuperation, regeneration. Sisters returned to attend retreats, to celebrate jubilees and the gatherings of the community. It was a sacred place, rich with memories, growth, laughter, and tears.

For some FSM, St. Mary of the Angels has been their *second* motherhouse. When the Sisters of St. Francis (OSF), who had left the community in 1894 to follow a new call, reunited with the Sisters of St. Mary (SSM) in 1987 to become the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, they closed and sold their beloved motherhouse, Mount Alverno Convent in Maryville, Missouri. They've already





known the sorrow of parting with such a sacred space. Now they face leaving yet another.

Closing this convent is much more than simply moving from one house to another. For the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, the spiritual and emotional bonds run deep.

### A Sacred Place

From its beginnings St. Mary of the Angels was the fulfillment of a dream.

After the Sisters of St. Mary moved from their first motherhouse in 1888, the community lived without a motherhouse for decades. The sisters lived where they worked, first at St. Mary's Infirmary and later at St. Mary's Hospital.

Mother Mary Concordia Puppendahl recognized the need for a motherhouse, and on August 21, 1928, ground was broken south of St. Mary's Hospital for the new convent.

In 1926 Mother Concordia had visited Assisi for the commemoration of the 700th anniversary of the death of

St. Francis, patron of the congregation. She loved the beautiful, monastic simplicity of the architecture she found in Assisi, and she determined to design the new motherhouse

"...this venerable structure has served as silent witness to innumerable moments of grace..."

along those graceful lines. Both the motherhouse as a whole and its stunning chapel reflect the design and the décor of the basilica of San Francesco, where the body of St. Francis lies. Mother Concordia named the convent for the mother church of all Franciscans, St. Mary of the Angels.

One of the amenities designed into the complex was an underground tunnel connecting the convent to St. Mary's so that the sisters could easily travel to the hospital, even in bad weather or at night. Legend has it the contractor told Mother Concordia that such a tunnel just wasn't possible. She simply responded, "Do it anyway."

And so, after dinner on Wednesday, November 27, 1929, the sisters met in the chapel of St. Mary's Hospital and walked in procession through the underground tunnel to their new motherhouse, singing hymns of gratitude.

Over the years this venerable structure has served as silent witness to innumerable moments of grace-the arrivals of aspirants, professions of vows, assignments to ministry, visits from distinguished dignitaries, celebrations of jubilees-even of the centennial of the congregation-and of funerals. Its open doors welcomed those sisters who arrived from Maryville, Missouri, in 1987. Through its many years the convent and its wooded grounds provided a safe space for these brave women to encounter change, growth, and mission; to seek and cast a new vision that reaches out to care even more profoundly for poor and marginalized sisters and brothers in our world-human or otherwise. Even the convent itself faced change as the sisters strove to make its design and operation more ecologically sound and to reduce their impact on the environment.

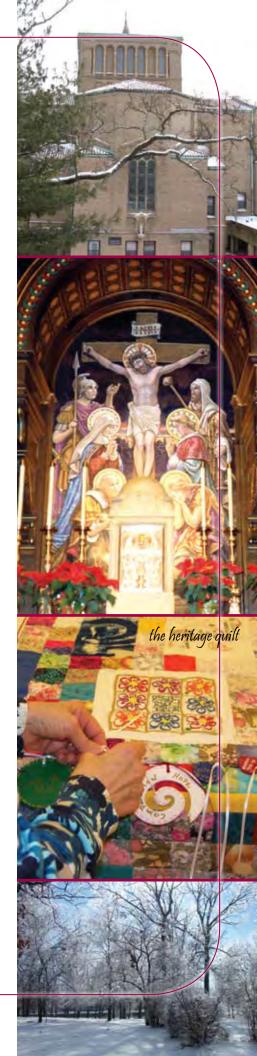
Ultimately, it would be this concern for good stewardship of God's resources that led the Leadership Team and the entire community to the decision to close the convent.

An easy decision? Never. The right decision? Yes—for this time and this place.

### A Time to Say Farewell

The first sisters left St. Mary of the Angels for The Sarah Community in May 2010.

On the weekend before these pioneers embarked on this new adventure, almost every member of the congregation gathered at the convent for three days to explore their feelings, cherish their memories, reflect on what this move would mean for them, envision a future beyond





the physical space of St. Mary of the Angels, celebrate the FSM community, which transcends the boundaries of time and space, and rejoice in the faithfulness of the God who provides good things for us all.

Three days of stories, reminiscing, laughter, music, food, flowers, celebration, and planning.

But they didn't focus only on the need for the FSM to say good-bye to the convent. On that Saturday afternoon the FSM took time out to host nearly 400 friends, family members, former sisters and associates, neighbors, and employees past and present, who all came to say farewell to this place that for so many years has meant so much to so many—and to renew friendships that will endure far beyond the boundaries of time and place.

### **Truly Franciscan**

For more than eighty years St. Mary of the Angels has been a home to the Franciscan Sisters of Mary. During their farewell weekend the sisters reverenced the space that had been consecrated over those years by the many experiences of God's grace they had known in that setting.

But Franciscans also have a call also to itinerancy, to the journey. St. Francis of Assisi renounced his earthly possessions and lived a life of voluntary poverty.

During that May weekend, the sisters opened themselves to the journey to which God is inviting them, calling them to hold lightly the possessions of this world and to value treasures beyond price and beyond decay. After considering carefully what gifts and values she holds dear and hopes to carry forward into the future, each sister inscribed one value or hope onto a colorful wooden medallion—a heart, a star, a spiral, etc.—and in a special ceremony attached it to the heritage quilt, the symbol of the unity and the legacy of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary. After the Mass of Farewell to the convent that Sunday afternoon, six sisters carried the quilt down the driveway, out the gates, and out of sight—a powerful image of the community's willingness to trust in God and follow the call into the unknown and the unseen.

### What Is to Come

Over the months since the farewell weekend sisters have continued to make the move to The Sarah Community as places have become available. The mood is positive, forwardlooking; the sisters are open to the new experiences, to this new version of the FSM call "to be the presence of the loving, serving, compassionate, and healing Jesus" to the new sisters and brothers, both religious and lay, that they encounter there. The transition has opened new

The FSM "look forward in faith to the new ways they are called to minister and to serve." opportunities for ministry, for gratitude, for grace.

What will become of the convent and its

furnishings? The future is uncertain and won't completely be decided until all the sisters have left the convent.

Are there regrets? Of course. The lovely chapel, for instance, remains close to the hearts of all the sisters who have cherished communion with God in that holy place. We always miss the sites and scenes that stir our memories and bring us home to God, wherever they are. They are our sacred spaces.

But, as the sisters know, God does not dwell only in the physical spaces where we have once encountered the divine. Each place, each creature bears in itself the potential for encounter. Just as God consecrated this convent, making it holy ground, God will be present to all of us in new places, new people.

And so, as they bid farewell to their beautiful and cherished convent, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary also look forward in faith to the new ways they are called to minister and to serve.



# **An Exceptional Caregiver Retires**

In her initial interview with Mother M. Concordia Puppendahl upon entering the Sisters of St. Mary in December 1933, Sr. Mary Noreen McGowan emphatically made it clear she



wasn't interested in being a nurse.

"When I was a postulant, though, they put me in a hospital and I fell in love with it," Sr. Noreen said. "I enjoyed the people. One of my instructors told me, 'You'll make a *good* nurse."

Truer words were never spoken.

Now, 77 years after that day she entered the order, Sr. Noreen, 96, can reflect on a long and fulfilling career of caring for others—and her special love, caring for children.

When SSM Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center opened on South Grand in July 1956, Sr. Noreen was there, as director of Nursing Service.

On October 1, 2010—more than 54 years later, Sr. Noreen

celebrated her final day of service at Cardinal Glennon. It was a bittersweet day—she will

miss being there each day. "It will feel empty for a while," she said.

The hospital hosted a special Mass on Thursday, September 30—"standing room only"—and a reception following. On her final day, Friday, October 1, Sr. Noreen attended Cardinal Glennon's 2010 Sister Noreen McGowan Pediatric Nursing Conference, where attendees celebrated her many years as pediatric nurse, supervisor, nursing instructor, and patient representative.

### Making a Difference for Children and Parents



As director of Nursing Service, one of the first changes she brought about was a much more liberal visitation policy than the one hour per day allowed families during her years in pediatrics at St. Mary's Hospital. More open visitation made a huge difference in the well-being of the little patients. "Children got better faster, slept better, ate better," Sr. Noreen observed. "When children are sick or hurt, they want their mothers." Freer visiting hours reassured parents as well as their little ones.

Besides caring for the children—and their parents, Sr. Noreen taught pediatrics at Saint Louis University School of Nursing (1962–1986), helping her students catch the vision for this special ministry. Many nurses at SSM Cardinal Glennon are her former students.

"It's a wonderful hospital, and I've had wonderful experiences there," Sr. Noreen said. "I saw children get better, I had the opportunity to support the parents. When I began, it was hard—I just felt that children shouldn't get sick."

She loved teaching pediatric nursing students. She loved being a compassionate presence to parents—"The parents need more help than the children do," she said. And she



loved the opportunity to provide hands-on care for the children. "It allows you to use your imagination," she said. "I enjoyed nursing of any kind but especially pediatrics."

She often found herself torn between the need to observe closely what her students were doing—and the need to listen to parents who wanted to talk about their sick child. Often she'd return in the evening to talk to and be with anxious parents.

After retiring from active nursing and teaching, she served in the surgery waiting room, greeting worried families, listening to their concerns, reassuring them and praying with them—a calming pres-

ence for those who just needed someone to listen or to be there.

### The Path Ahead?

Sr. Noreen, an avid reader, looks forward to having a bit more time to explore authors as diverse as the metaphysical poets (George Herbert, John Donne) and Tom Brokaw (*The Greatest Generation*, her current "read").

But she hopes to find new ways to minister as well. As ever, she remains open to where God is calling her next.

## *Congratulations* to Our 2010 Franciscan Sisters of Mary Jubilarians







### Sr. Mary Francine Burkert

October 31, 1922 - July 16, 2010

For eight years (1969–1977) Sr. Francine served as superior general of the Sisters of St. Mary, a deeply beloved and compassionate leader who guided the congregation surely through the bewildering changes sparked by Vatican II—and yet never lost sight of the impact on her sisters: "Only God understands all the heartaches that went into those changes."

Although her leadership skills were honed by her service as secretary general (1952–1969) under two outstanding superiors general—Mother Mary Concordia Puppendahl and Mother Mary Josetta Witte—Sr. Francine brought her own grace, vision, and gentleness to the role. Her stories dwell on the happy memories of growing up in a loving family she never realized was poor, or of the close-knit band of novices who wore corsets on Reception Day to look their tiniest, who rode the laundry carts through the tunnel and brought cream puffs home to eat in their rooms. For her, even the hard work was enjoyable—"It just seemed that every day was a fresh day full of new excitement."

Born Mary Jane Burkert on Halloween, 1922, in St. Louis, she was second of six children—four girls, two boys—born to Leo and Regina C. Burkert. She attended Holy Family Parish School and St. Elizabeth Academy. She entered the Sisters of St. Mary on December 5, 1942, receiving the name Sr. Mary Francine, and she professed final vows on June 5, 1948. While she'd planned to be a nurse, she agreed to change course and in 1951 graduated from Saint Louis University with a major in philosophy and a minor in English.

After her years as superior general, Sr. Francine provided pastoral care at St. Mary on the Mount

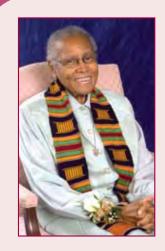


for five years, then served (1982–1987) as vice president of the Board of Directors of SSM St. Mary's Health Center. As corporate director for mission values (1987–1992) she compiled the stories and wrote many of the reflections that comprise the inspirational book *Making a Difference*. After retiring in 1993, she served as a volunteer at Villa Marie Senior Center in Jefferson City, Missouri, until moving back to St. Louis in 2006.

Her grace, wisdom and sense of humor endured even when her memory began to fail. She was called home on Friday, July 16, 2010.

"For all things I give thanks and praise."

Sisters in the Spotlight



Antona Ebo, FSM, had the opportunity March 10 to meet President Obama, shake his hand, and give him a hug when she gave the invocation at a special fundraising dinner on behalf of Senator

Claire McCaskill. At that time exactly 45 years earlier, she and other religious were returning to St. Louis from the march in Selma, Alabama, in protest of "Bloody Sunday" a few days earlier.

On May 15, Saint Louis University conferred on Sr. Antona the degree of Doctor of Humanities, *honoris causa*, "in recognition of her contributions to the causes of

civil rights and social justice for all, for her exemplary courage in the face of racism and prejudice, and for her



commitment to compassionate health care."

Antona Ebo, FSM, and Thelma Mitchell, FSM, attended the annual meeting of the National Black Sisters' Conference (August 9–11) and the triennial Gathering of Black Catholic Women

(August 13–15) in Charlotte, North Carolina. This year's NBSC theme was *Baptized in the Jordan and Fired Up for Commitment.* Sr. Antona helped found the National Black Sisters' Conference in 1968.



**Irma Kennebeck, FSM,** received an award at the Franciscan Federation



Banquet in Buffalo, New York, July 30 for "passionately embracing Gospel living" in her role as director of Woman's Place, a safe haven for women suffering domestic abuse.

### Mary Inez Kennedy, FSM, and Geralyn Marie Schneider, FSM, were honored as founding members of the

Hearing I ciation of

Hearing Loss Association of Greater St.

Louis at its 25th anniversary celebration Saturday, August 14, at

Helen Fitzgerald's. Sr. Inez has served on the governing committee almost consecutively for all 25 years, and Sr. Geralyn served two years (1987–88) as vicepresident and two years (1989–90) as president of the organization.

On August 5, SSM St. Joseph's Health Center in St. Charles also honored Sr. Inez with a retirement party for her thirty years of dedication and faithful service there.

Mary Ellen Lewis, FSM, was interviewed May 29 from 10 to 11 a.m. on the Pete and Bo Show in Madison, Wisconsin (Midwest Family Broadcasting, WDTY 1670 AM) on the topic of forgiveness—what it is and is not, the process of

forgiving, how to ask for forgiveness, and how to forgive oneself. Sr. Mary Ellen was a founding member of the International Forgiveness Institute, which began in 1996.

Sr. Mary Ellen has also been selected to receive the Leadership Award at the 2010 Catholic Charities 15th Annual Awards Dinner on November 9 in Madison, Wisconsin, "for consistently living and incorporating the Catholic values in your leadership and in the process affecting the lives of many; for working to fill a need in your community; and through your leadership, taking action for a better future and serving as an example to others."

### **Charism of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary**

To be the presence of the loving, serving, compassionate and healing Jesus

Sisters in the Spotlight

Sr. Mary Ellen, along with **Priscilla Weber, FSM,** moved from Madison to St. Louis late in October. On October 8, SSM St. Mary's Hospital in Madison held a farewell celebration for them, honoring



the century of compassionate healing ministry the FSM have provided to the Madison community as well as the two sisters' individual contributions.

The hospital dedicated the historic reconstructed archway in the new gardens to the many Franciscan Sisters of Mary who served at SSM St. Mary's over these hundred years. Sr. Mary Ellen Lewis and Sr. Priscilla Weber represent the final two FSM serving in Madison. The healing gardens are a monument to St. Mary's roots and a reminder to all that the mission of the sisters continues to grow through the service of those who carry on their ministry of compassionate care. Mary Noreen McGowan, FSM, was honored September 30 for her many years of faithful service at SSM Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center. A nurse and pediatric nurse practitioner, Sr. Noreen



has served at Cardinal Glennon since it opened in 1956. The 2010 Sister Noreen McGowan Pediatric Nursing Conference, which Cardinal Glennon sponsors annually, took place on Sr. Noreen's final day, October 1. A number of her former students shared stories, memories, and best wishes. The conference celebrated her contributions to pediatric nurses everywhere.



Bridgid McNamara, FSM, and Mary Anne Murphy, FSM, were honored August 15 by SSM St. Clare's Hospital in Baraboo, Wisconsin, for their decades of faithful service. Sr. Bridgid began working at St. Mary's Ringling Hospital there in 1967, and Sr. Mary Anne came to Baraboo in 1973. They retired in 2007 but have volunteered at St. Clare's since. They moved to St. Louis in late August.



### Agnes Reinkemeyer, FSM, who was



murdered July 12, 1989, at the FSM mission in Wema, Kenya, was honored on the 20th anniversary of her death by Seton Hall University, where she was dean of the College of Nursing (1968–1977). The

university endowed the scholarship set up in her honor at the time of her death. Mary Jean Ryan, FSM, chair and CEO of SSM Health Care, was ranked one of the top 100 most powerful people in health care by *Modern Healthcare Magazine* for the eighth consecutive year. The magazine has done the ranking for nine years, beginning in 2002; 2010's list includes President Barack Obama, U.S. Department of Health

and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

In November 2010 Sr. Mary Jean also received the Missouri Hospital Association's Distinguished Service Award, which recog-



nizes individuals who have made significant contributions to health care, Missouri hospitals and the communities they serve.

In September SSM Health Care was named one of *Modern Healthcare Magazine's* Best Places to Work in Healthcare. The awards program recognizes healthcare workplaces that "enable employees to perform at their optimum level to provide patients and customers with the best possible care and services." SSM Health Care serves more than two million people annually in Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Illinois, and Missouri.

### **Gifts Received Gifts Received** January 1, 2010–June 30, 2010 Thank you to all our generous donors!

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*In honor of Mary Cornelia Immegart, FSM* Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Andy Hays Ms. Mary Catherine Heimburger

The move from St. Mary of the Angels is under way, but we expect it to take at least another year before all the sisters have moved from the premises. Until the convent is officially closed, the FSM Leadership Team and administrative offices will continue at our 1100 Bellevue Avenue location here in Richmond Heights, Missouri.

We ask your prayers for God's continued blessing as we move forward through this transition!

*In honor of the Kinsella Family* Dr. and Mrs. Richard F. Huck

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In honor of Loreda Steinman, FSM And all her family, for good health Ms. Alverna A. Buechter

*In honor of Jovita Marie Stenger, FSM* Mr. and Mrs. Anthony L. Kovac

In honor of my aunt, Mary Dorine Wittenbrink, FSM Ms. Margaret M. Wittenbrink Presence Hospitality Compassion

We're the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, standing with those who need us most.

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If you or someone you know has a special need, please let us know.

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### **A Special Farewell**

Leaving St. Mary of the Angels is difficult, especially for those Franciscan Sisters of Mary who have lived here for so many years.

Perhaps even more difficult is saying farewell to the wonderful people who have helped to make this sacred place a home.

As our sisters have begun the move to The Sarah Community, we have had to adjust our staffing to reflect the smaller numbers of sisters. Some of these treasured employees have retired, and many have found new positions often within SSM Health Care. Our special Human Resources Team has worked hard to make their transition as smooth and as positive as possible.

We are so grateful for the gifts, the time, and the many kindnesses these lovely people have shared with our sisters—many for twenty, thirty or forty years! God has indeed blessed us with them. We will cherish them in prayer and in memory—truly they are and have been a wonderful part of our FSM family.



Franciscan Sisters of Mary 1100 Bellevue Avenue St. Louis, MO 63117-1826

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# Identity and Mission of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary

As Franciscan Sisters of Mary, we live the Gospel as sister to all. We give our life by being present, hospitable and compassionate, choosing to stand with our sisters and brothers who are poor and on the margins of society.