

TRANSFORMED INTO A NEW WAY OF BEING



Rose M. Dowling, FSM
(FSM Leadership Team Member 2007–2015)

Irma Kennebeck, FSM
(FSM Leadership Team Member 2011–2015)

Sandy Schwartz, FSM
(FSM Leadership Team Member 2007–2015)

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Introduction

This article describes the transition journey of a particular congregation, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary (FSM), to a new way of being as it moves to completion. The FSM leadership teams from 2007 to 2015 have written this piece to share our experience with other congregational leadership teams who might be embarking on a similar journey. We share what was helpful to us; perhaps it will give you courage, inspiration and hope for your journey.

Since we are not strangers to significant transformative change, we offer a brief history of our congregation.

On November 16, 1872, Odilia Berger, with her five companions, landed on the St. Louis riverfront to continue religious life, which was under threat in her homeland of Germany. She began a ministry of healing among the poorest of the poor. The community, the Sisters of St. Mary (SSM), attracted many young women who joined in their good works. Mother Odilia died in 1880, appointing her successor to lead the SSM.

In January 1894, Mary Augustine Giesen, SSM, and six companions, for reasons long lost to history, left the Sisters of St. Mary to form their own congregation, the Sisters of St. Francis of Maryville, Missouri (OSF).

For many years these two congregations with shared roots grew and flourished along parallel lines, the sisters caring for the sick and living lives of Gospel integrity. Although each congregation was aware of the presence of a sister community across Missouri, little communication took place between the congregations for many years.

In the years following Vatican II, both congregations took to heart the call to re-examine their beginnings. Slowly, the two congregations opened dialogue about the possibility of reunifying.

On May 13, 1985, the sisters of both congregations voted to join once more as a single congregation of women religious. They chose to rename this reunited community the Franciscan Sisters of Mary (FSM).

In the years following the Franciscan Sisters of Mary had lived through some major congregational transitions and changes. The 2007 FSM Leadership Team (LT), however, had no idea that we would face a reality requiring us to make changes that would affect the sisters so profoundly. Rather than merely reacting to the needs and situations that arose, we committed ourselves to a plan of governance that would involve all the sisters, as far as they were able and willing, in the decisions and responsibility for the well-being of the congregation.

Before plunging into action, the LT defined key values that would guide all our actions and decisions. The key values that provided the basis for our transition were:

- Sisterhood/Presence/Interconnectedness
- Being Realistic/Speaking the Truth/Facing Our Reality
- Discernment
- Mission
- Responsible Stewardship of Our Resources

You will see these values lived throughout this article. They helped us face major issues gracefully and kept us moving forward toward our completion in a systematic and systemic manner. In reality our journey has led not just to transition but to transformation.

“We continue courageously for the love of God.” *

*Last written words of Odilia Berger, foundress of the Sisters of St. Mary.

Part 1: Prelude to Change—Early Signs Signaling the Need to Deal with a New Reality

“Even the next era has no right to judge anything if it lacks the ability to contemplate the past without hatred or envy. But even that judgment would be one-sided, for every subsequent era is the fruit of previous periods and carries much of the past within it. It is fortunate if something of the ancestors lives on in it and continues to be loved and protected; only then does the past become fruitful and effective.”

Rainer Maria Rilke
Early Journals

Religious communities face many challenges these days as we seek to live out our deep-rooted call to be faithful to the Gospel, to our mission. Some challenges are obvious. Others perhaps go deeper, touching the very core of our existence. Our response to such a challenge is rarely a one-time response. If we are faithful, we make a discerned response, taking the next step in the process, and then the next, again and again, until we finally relax into the response to which the Spirit is calling us. That response then turns the key that allows us to know we are “home,” that this is the place from which we are being asked to move forward . . . even if “forward” looks rather peculiar, given our decision. We find ourselves in a place from which most of us would not expect to start . . . a place that allows us the opportunity to look into the mirror at the possibility of our own death—chosen freely and with integrity.

The Franciscan Sisters of Mary (FSM) were faced with just such a choice. It was not an easy decision—nor did it happen quickly. But through discernment over the years, we determined that we were called to redirect our focus, our energy, on revitalizing ourselves as FSM.

These are the highlights of our transition journey into a new way of being.

In 1999 the Franciscan Sisters of Mary (FSM) engaged in the LCWR Viability Study: A Critical Juncture. All FSM were involved in this study. We identified the following concerns:

- Implications of the lack of new membership;
- The eventual future closing of our motherhouse, St. Mary of the Angels Convent; and

- Time and geographic distances that mitigated against deepening relationships within the congregation.

At that time the congregation's leadership team put before us "the need to explore the demands and responsibilities that are ours if we choose to recruit new members or if we choose to make meaning without new members."

Reflecting on these concerns led us to begin to understand that, without new members, with the looming potential loss of our motherhouse, and with the realization that some of our relationships were not all we would want them to be, we were facing some serious work. These challenges confronted us with the reality that our core being as FSM was being touched and we were being nudged to look squarely at ourselves without blinders, without masks.

We responded to that nudge. We recognized that the issues we were facing were much broader than new membership—we were being called to consider the viability of the congregation itself.

New membership was an issue we agreed to pursue in the FSM 2001 General Chapter. Discernment begins with information. So we began our consideration with the fact that, since 1979, no one had joined our congregation and stayed. For twenty-two years, we had gained no new members. (At the time of our 2001 General Chapter, we had 178 sisters. In 2005 we did have one woman, who had left us for 25 years, re-enter the congregation; she remains with us today.)

We faced other facts as well. The generation gap between our sisters and prospective members was becoming wider and wider. Our energy for and commitment to recruiting new members were dwindling as our average age increased.

For the previous twenty years, since 1981, we had spent a fair amount of effort on vocation recruitment, attempting to attract women to our congregation. Many other congregations were attempting some of these initiatives as well, with varying degrees of success. Some of these initiatives included:

- Updating statements of philosophy, policy, procedures, evaluation tools, program goals, objectives and content covering recruitment, admission, postulancy and novitiate;
- Asking local communities to include recruiting new members as a community goal;

- Having members of the formation team visit other local communities of women religious to exchange information and skills and to explore vocation awareness;
- Setting up formal preparation for vocation ministry; and
- Collaborating with other congregations to promote and foster vocations.

In February 2001, just prior to the General Chapter, each sister was asked to share her reflection on the topic of new membership with the Chapter Members by completing a survey on the topic of new members. Among other questions on the survey, sisters were asked, “Shall we put more effort into attracting new members? If yes, what will we be inviting them to?” and “Shall we decide not to take new members? If so, what then?” The sisters’ responses were sent on to the Chapter.

During the April 2001 General Chapter, the question of membership came up very frequently because it was not easy for Chapter Members to open themselves to the possibilities that issue raised. More than once, time was given for Chapter Members to go off alone, to pray with a discerning attitude in order to see where they stood.

Finally, the following four positions emerged:

1. We will not take new members.
2. We will not exert more energy into attracting new members.
3. We will redirect our focus, our energy, on revitalization; if new members come, we will deal with that issue when it arises.
4. We will exert more energy in attracting new members.

Chapter Members were given time for individual reflection so each could identify where she stood on the issue given these possible positions, and why she held her particular position. Upon reconvening, members grouped themselves according to their position on the issue. Each shared her reasons and considered the implications of the group’s position in six years from that time.

The members in the four groups then further considered: “Are there any alternatives or options open to us, given the position we have taken?”

The four groups reported their findings to the entire assembly. Once more members were given reflection time to consider the four positions, taking into consideration the new information that had been shared. One by one, each sister shared her thinking. Initially, the vast majority of Chapter Members had chosen position 4: “We will exert more energy in attracting new members.”

As we continued our conversations, however, we recognized that the goal of revitalizing the congregation—rather than recruiting new members—was our true objective. We were deeply aware of the mission we had and our call to carry it out. We were also deeply aware that times had changed, and that these new times demanded that we be creative and explore new paths, new options. We wanted to focus on pursuing our mission, on living out our faithfulness to the Gospel. In order to be open to revitalization, we needed to accept that we couldn't put most of our energy into simply recruiting new members.

So the decision was made: We would redirect our focus, our energy, on revitalization. If new members came, we would welcome them and deal with the process of formation at that time. Part of that decision meant that we would no longer have a formalized recruiting program.

This decision moved us to engage in other choices that required dealing with issues pointed out in the 1999 LCWR viability study. In 2006, the Stewardship Center, with Julie Walsh as lead, was hired to conduct a feasibility study of our motherhouse, St. Mary of the Angels Convent. Sister residents, staff and leadership were part of the process generating options for its most efficient and effective usage for the residents and the mission. The needs of the sister residents as well as their ages were growing while the overall number was decreasing. Staffing needs were increasing.

Back in 1998, the FSM collaborated with four other congregations of women religious to establish The Sarah Community, a licensed senior care facility, for retired sisters—and laypeople—with levels of care ranging from independent and assisted living to skilled nursing care. FSM knew at some point this would become home for FSM, and the time was quickly approaching

The buildings were not the only thing that needed assessment; so did each of us. At one of our FSM facilitated Gatherings we were asked to sit in “age circles.” This was an attempt to look and see ourselves as we really are. The largest circle of sisters was 80+, and the smallest included only three sisters under 60. This was a very difficult truth to accept as we discussed the limited long-term leadership potential in this group. This painful exercise provided more information. The challenges didn't go away; our ages increased and abilities diminished.

Despite it all, we were deeply aware that we were growing in age, wisdom and grace and becoming open to the next steps in our discernment process and journey.

Part 2: Chapter 2007—The Need for Change Becomes Imminent

A catchy little song goes: *Everything before us led us to this moment, standing on the threshold of a brand-new day.* These lyrics truly describe the FSM journey to completion.

Leadership set out specific plans for working as a team to lead the congregation according to Chapter directives. As a congregation, we took time collectively to grow more deeply conscious of who we were becoming and to what we might be being called. In the five years preceding the pivotal 2007 Chapter, we worked at understanding more deeply the call of our Franciscan spirituality, deepening relationships among us, highlighting each sister's ministry of presence as reflected in our Identity and Mission statement, focusing on our accountability to the primacy of the congregation and, in the final year, rejoicing in our sisterhood and committing to the new life that had been unfolding within and among us.

By early 2007, leadership believed we had realized the outcome of the Five-Year Plan: *In the spirit of our Identity and Mission, we are corporately revitalized as women of prayer, conviction and commitment. Willing to make a difference in our world, we are open to conversion and discernment, and are active carriers of hope and nonviolence.*

Chapter 2007 was historic. Chapter Members began the Chapter with an intentional absence of a printed schedule—a deliberate plan to move as the Spirit led! Beginning our discernment in this fashion renewed and energized us; everyone wanted to be included and to participate. Ultimately this attitude and atmosphere set the stage for what was to come. Had we not concentrated years before on the relationships among us, we would not have been able to make, together, the very difficult decisions involved in facing our reality, our diminishment and our limitations while desiring to remain in mission.

The Chapter Acts of 2007 clearly set direction for the congregation—how we wanted to be with one another and what we hoped to accomplish. This is what we said:

We choose to exercise leadership in the spirit of Francis and Clare who embodied leadership which was counter-cultural for their time. We engage in communal discernment. We empower and resource members to be fully

alive and mission oriented. We remain open to and accepting of change. We create various structures that support shared responsibility and accountability in order to move our Directions forward.

This was the way we chose to BE with one another as we moved into the future.

The Chapter Members further spelled out the work to be DONE. They declared:

Together, membership and leadership:

- *Develop and implement criteria for the disposition of financial resources and properties based on the spirit of our Constitution and our Third Order Rule.*
- *Evaluate and define how we as a Congregation engage with our sponsored ministries.*
- *Create life-giving residential environments for all members, particularly with regard to sisters at St. Mary of the Angels Convent (Motherhouse). As soon as possible, engage qualified persons to educate and assist us as we prepare for the future.*
- *Explore and implement ways to hand on our Charism.*
- *Join with others in collaborative actions for justice, peace and ecological harmony, continuing our commitment to nonviolence.*

Together we move forward in the spirit of conversion and joy. Continue courageously!

To accomplish these Chapter Acts, leadership and membership identified a workable structure for sharing leadership and getting the work done. Ten teams would form: five would focus on our preferred way of BEING and five on what needed to be DONE.

As we began our work as the newly elected leadership team, we wanted to be clear among ourselves about what was needed and what we wanted to call ourselves to be as a leadership team. We took the necessary time to develop the following team goal: *We call ourselves to be spiritual leaders. This includes calling forth and utilizing the gifts among us; embodying shared leadership; and being faithful to our Chapter Acts. We are proactive in the implementation of our 2007 Chapter Acts. We communicate constantly and as clearly as we can among ourselves and with membership. As we go about the above, we live and model a balanced life. In all this, we will continue courageously!*

All too soon we realized what it would mean to continue courageously.

Part 3: Charting a Course for Change

Even as Chapter Acts Teams began the work of fulfilling their mandates, it became increasingly and painfully clear that transition out of the motherhouse would need to be addressed and begun much sooner than originally thought. The convent with its terrazzo stairs and dozens of unalarmed exits made safety a nearly impossible issue. We also had too few skilled nursing and assisted living accommodations for the growing number of sisters who needed them. It was time to close the motherhouse.

Just nine months after election, we, the LT, began planning in earnest the transition process to relocate our sisters and close the motherhouse. We gave attention to:

- identifying key values that would underlie the process (The values are identified and described in **Appendix 1**);
- sharing our plan with our members;
- engaging key lay convent or congregational employees to join us and give us feedback from the employee point of view;
- informing our employees of the plan; and
- working with convent Community Directors and others on the motherhouse Spirit and Life Team to lay out specific activities to help sisters talk about the move, get in touch with their feelings, and process what was inevitable as the realities of aging and changing conditions set in.

From the beginning, we on the Leadership Team pledged ourselves to transparency—to sharing all the information we could with those who would be affected by the changes. As the process continued, we would flood the congregation and its employees with information on the decisions that were made, the rationale behind those decisions, and the plans for how those decisions would be carried out. Anyone with a stake in the outcome was given the information as soon as it was feasible to share it. We believed that trusting people with the information they would want was crucial. By involving them from the start and providing them with enough background to evaluate the situation accurately, we were able to build consensus and buy-in and as much as possible defuse the fear and anger that major transitions cause.

The Leadership Team outlined the transition plan in greater detail by setting up eight Transition Teams to handle specific aspects of the move. Each leadership member assumed responsibility for one or more of the teams. The LT brainstormed

a list of appropriate members, to include both sisters and laypeople, and appointed team members. The eight teams and their primary responsibilities are the following:

- **Facilities/Buildings/Property Area**
 - Find an appropriate buyer for the convent and its campus and engage in negotiations for its sale, salvaging what was important and finding solid ways to sell or otherwise dispose of the rest
- **The Sarah Community (TSC)**
 - Tend to the logistics of moving our sisters from the convent to TSC
- **Personnel—Human Resources**
 - Craft a transition plan that would be compassionate toward those employees losing their jobs, prepare a severance package, contract with an employment service to help employees find other employment, and prepare an incentive program for those in crucial positions to ensure they would be willing to stay until closure of the convent
- **Personnel—“Heart Work”**
 - Maintain employee morale in the face of certain termination for most FSM employees
- **Our Sisters**
 - Help the sisters adjust to leaving the convent; help all FSM adjust to a new reality of being together
- **Remembering and Celebrations Team**
 - Plan celebrations and rituals to honor and bid farewell to people, places and ministries dear to the hearts of the sisters and many others—and to the convent itself
- **External Public Relations and Communications**
 - Focus the image and message that FSM wanted to convey to the public and the most appropriate ways to spread the news of the convent’s closure
- **Archives**
 - Research possibilities for housing the FSM Archives away from the convent, preferably at the site of the hospital system’s archives, and assist in the move as feasible.

The Decluttering Team, not a transition team per se, was also involved in vital aspects of the transition. The team helped all of us in a creative and fun way to pare down our possessions and prepare for the transition. (More specifics about this team are attached as **Appendix 2.**)

The transition for the FSM went very smoothly. Not that the sisters and employees did not grieve the losses—such a scenario would be impossible, given the circumstances. Throughout the process, issues continued to arise that needed to be resolved. But this model—based on shared leadership, responsibility, teamwork and transparency—resulted in as positive an outcome as can be imagined. We found consensus, support, and buy-in. The teams worked remarkably well—partly because every member understood the importance of her or his role and was deeply committed to achieving the objectives. Employees as well as sisters felt deep ownership for the process.

In addition to the ten Chapter Acts Teams and the eight Transition Teams who were working simultaneously, additional groups played important roles in the transition process and the ongoing life of the congregation. Groups helping leadership in the relocation of the FSM from the motherhouse to The Sarah Community (TSC) were:

- **Motherhouse Spirit and Life Planning Team**
This team comprised the Community Directors at the motherhouse, the Pastoral/Spiritual Life Coordinator and Assistant, and Convent Executive Director. In addition to their usual responsibilities, they specifically planned programs and activities that would help the sisters prepare for the major transition about to occur in their lives and express their fears and feelings about the move.
- **FSM Life Care Team**
Coordinating FSM life at TSC and helping the FSM adjust to life in a new “home” and stay engaged in mission in whatever manner best suited their interests and gifts was the role of this team. Essentially team members functioned as community coordinators for FSM at TSC. A member of the LT served as team coordinator. Once the transition from the motherhouse to TSC was completed, a new structure was put into place, accounting for the changes in needs and circumstances.

Assisting in the ongoing life of the congregation were:

- The Gathering Team (GT)**
 This five-member team planned and implemented FSM congregational meetings, which were generally two and a half days in length and four times yearly. The Gathering Team determined very specific intentions for these meetings, using a variety of teaching and learning methods, including prayer and reflection processes. The Leadership Team appointed GT members to serve until replaced, and a member of the LT would serve the GT as leadership liaison. A trained and skilled facilitator hired by the congregation directed the work of the GT. A team with similar function operates today.
- The Monday Meeting Group**
 This group, composed of elected leadership, the Chapter Acts Team leaders, and the GT, met for a full day following each weekend congregational meeting. Its purpose was to evaluate the progress made at those meetings toward fulfilling the Chapter Acts and to coordinate efforts for continuing to achieve what needed to be done to keep us moving toward the future. In addition, this group engaged in ongoing leadership training and occasionally acted as consultant to leadership regarding issues the LT chose to bring to the meeting.

After the 2011 Chapter, group membership changed as Chapter Acts Teams dissolved and a new structure for implementing the Chapter Focus was formed. While individuals changed, the purposes of the group remained the same.

By necessity much of the 2007–2011 Leadership Team activities were focused rather inwardly; those years saw relocation of the sisters and closure of the motherhouse. The Chapter Acts Teams, especially as they dealt with how we wanted to BE with one another and how we hoped to reach out in collaboration with others, helped us all to see that FSM life was bigger than ourselves. We were ready for the next steps on our journey.

Chapter 2011: New Life and New Focus

Chapter 2011 brought us new life and a new focus. We affirmed our FSM Mission *to be the presence of the loving, serving, compassionate, healing Jesus* with new enthusiasm and a deeper commitment. Through discernment and by the surprising action of God’s Spirit, we chose only one Focus: *Flowing from our Mission, we*

focus the power of our intention on compassionate care of Creation in collaboration with others. Every FSM could find herself in the Focus and direct the power of her intention toward it.

To help all of us implement the 2011 Focus in our lives, leadership proposed a structure, and Chapter Members accepted and embraced it. Three Focus Implementation Groups were formed and appointed by leadership to fulfill specific responsibilities relative to the Focus. These groups included:

- **Spirituality Implementation Group**
This group helped us explore and deepen the spirituality underlying the congregational Focus.
- **Internal Implementation Group**
The group helped us, as individuals, groups and the congregation as a whole, to engage in spiritual practices to deepen our experience of the ecological issues related to the congregational Focus.
- **External Implementation Group**
This group helped us identify ways to collaborate with other groups on ecological issues related to the congregational Focus.

Chapter Members chose the areas in which they were interested or believed they could contribute. LT appointed the members, the leader and the assistant leader of each of the groups. A Leadership Team member would be a resource person to each group. At each Gathering, each implementation group would account for its work by giving a report to membership. The coordinating structure for the implementation of the Focus would be the Monday Meeting, now made up of the GT, the leader and assistant leader of each implementation group, and the LT.

Having a comprehensive plan rooted in the values important to us was invaluable as the transition continued and moved to completion. It grounded our work and kept us on track. Knowing who we as the LT were and how we wanted to be with one another and with the congregation as a whole guided our work throughout. Flexibility and adaptability were invaluable. As circumstances changed, we adjusted accordingly. In our earlier years in religious life, we saw many structures remain unchanged and lots of effort spent in maintaining them that way. What we learned during this time of transition was the absolute need for adjusting and changing structures to fit the needs of the moment.

APPENDIX 1

Key Values Underlying the FSM Transition Process

Before detailing a plan for transitioning out of the motherhouse, leadership identified the key values that would underlie the process. We explained in more detail what we meant by each one.

Sisterhood/Presence/Interconnectedness

- Deep sharing . . . of ideas, opinions, thoughts, feelings
- Listening to one another
- Committing to stay involved and engaged in the conversation
- Willing to see the oneness in our diversity
- Willing to be involved with others
- Doing the work to be present to myself so I can be present to the other
- Supporting one another wherever the other is in the process

Being Realistic/Speaking the Truth/Facing Our Reality

- “Calling a spade a spade”
- Being honest but not brutal
- Sitting with the truth of another/another’s reality
- Embracing the truth . . . coming to the point of acceptance
- Living with the paradox
- Finding the gift in life even when it doesn’t feel much like a gift

Discernment

- Making decisions in light of the question “To what is God calling me/us?”
- Speaking my piece of the truth
- Praying for, making choices and acting from the place of inner freedom, not my ego, not my false self

Mission

- Mission is the bedrock of our decision-making
- Discovering the meaning by living into the unfolding of mission in our lives now

- Inward and outward
- Reaching beyond our comfort zone

Responsible Stewardship of Our Resources

- Includes employees, campus, time, money
- Discernment about good expenditure of resources in light of being religious women in mission
- Taking adequate time for transitioning but not so long as to cause psychological paralysis

APPENDIX 2

Declutter Team Topics

(This five-member team encouraged all of us to pare down our possessions and prepare for transition and closure of the motherhouse. Using a “Travel Light!” theme, every two weeks for the better part of a year, this team distributed a lighthearted, upbeat flyer that encouraged all of us to sort through our belongings and get rid of excess. The flyers gave specific instructions about where to bring unneeded items and how to dispose of them. The entire congregation, not just those at the convent, took part in this commitment to declutter and live more simply. This team served FSM from April 2009 to January 2010.)

Listed below are the themes for the bi-monthly flyers.

- Project 1: Retire Those Tired Books! (April 15 to 30)
- Project 2: Part with Publications! (May 1 to 14)
- Project 3: Clear Out Clothes and Shoes! (May 15 to 31)
- Project 4: Knock Out Knick-Knacks! (June 1 to 15)
- Project 5: Discard Cards and Photos! (July 1 to 15)
- Project 6: Christmas in July! (July 15 to 31)
- Project 7: Shutting Down Electronics (August 1 to 15)
- Project 8: Share Your Religious Items (August 15 to 31)
- Project 9: Jettison the Jewelry (September 1 to 15)
- Project 10: Cull Those CDs, DVDs, and Tapes (September 15 to 30)
- Project 11: De-Garbage That Garage (October 1 to 15)
- Project 12: Brave the Basement! (October 15 to 31)
- Project 13: Beautify Bedrooms and Offices! (November 1 to 15)
- Project 14: Kitchen Klutter, Bathroom Blight! (November 15 to 30)
- Project 15: Pitch the Christmas Kitsch! (All December)
- Project 16: Coping with Common Rooms! (January 1 to 15, 2010)

Part 4: Transitioning Our Ministries and Providing for Their Continuance

Throughout the 20th century, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary (FSM) had maintained a network of excellent healthcare facilities, nursing schools, hospice agencies and other caregiving services. In addition, in the wake of Vatican II, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary established ministries that fulfilled contemporary needs. In 2007, besides the SSM Health Care System sponsored by the congregation, the FSM were sponsoring or co-sponsoring a number of other ministries—a Meals on Wheels program operated from St. Mary of the Angels Convent, a birthing center in the lower Rio Grande Valley, transitional housing and developmental services for teenage mothers and their children, and a drop-in center offering intervention and hospitality to women experiencing domestic and sexual abuse, to name a few.

As the needs of the sisters shifted, so did the responsibilities of the congregation for these ministries. More and more, sisters who had founded or led various ministries were retiring or seeking other ways to minister, passing leadership roles to skilled and creative laypeople who could continue what the sisters began. The congregation had no sister replacements and wanted to be good stewards of the mission of these ministries.

From the beginning the LT was committed to a plan of governance by shared leadership.

“FSM Shared Leadership is a formal, cooperative, power-sharing, interdependent relationship with distinction of roles (elected leaders, working groups, members) involving members capable of making needed contributions toward discerned congregational goals.

It is based on the belief that everyone affected by the outcome of a decision needs to be considered in the making of the decision, and that those closest to the matter are most appropriately involved in its development. It flows from the belief that the discerned well-being of the congregation, the common good of its members, and the integrity of its mission for the reign of God is the responsibility of each member according to her role and ability, and each is thus accountable for participating in creating the congregation’s future to the extent she is able.”

(As described by Chapter Acts Team V in December 2010)

The FSM Leadership Team applied this governance principle in regard to its ministries and involved all appropriate people in discernment planning and decision outcomes. The Sponsored Ministries Team, a Chapter Acts Team, examined the ministries sponsored and co-sponsored by the congregation with the intent of envisioning for each a future that did not involve FSM sponsorship, anticipating a time when such sponsorship would no longer be possible, given the aging of the congregation. This was no easy task since no two ministries were similar or structured alike.

Since 2007, the FSM LT has worked to help sponsored ministries become self-sufficient. For some ministries like the birthing center in Texas, the FSM have been able to release sponsorship with few difficulties because the ministry was already functioning fairly independently. The LT worked with smaller ministries to establish independence, helping them relinquish leadership to laypeople and guiding the ministries to become more financially stable and independent of FSM support.

The transition from the motherhouse involved ending Bellevue Meals on Wheels, sponsored by FSM, which had operated from the lower level of the motherhouse for more than 37 years. Due to aging and diminishing numbers of volunteers, this ministry was already transitioning and looking for a program with which to merge. Bellevue Meals on Wheels ended in March 2010 with an appreciation luncheon to honor and thank all present and past volunteers.

In September 2009 sponsorship of Holy Family Services, a birthing center in South Texas, was concluded because no FSM were present onsite any longer. This collaborative ministry was founded by a group of sisters from several congregations and was directed by one of our sisters for 25 years. A number of partners were able and willing to carry on the ministry. FSM held a public departure celebration at the birthing center and gave a monetary gift to help continue its ongoing service.

Relinquishing sponsorship of the Catholic health system established by the Franciscan Sisters of Mary posed a major challenge. Because the FSM held canonical responsibility for the health care system, the FSM needed to ensure that the system would remain distinctively Catholic and continue the FSM legacy even after the sisters were no longer actively involved. The congregation needed to establish a separate group to take on that responsibility.

After much research and consultation with canonical and civil lawyers, the FSM Leadership Team began the formal canonical process to establish a Public Juridic Personality (PJP) to assume sponsorship of the health care system. After completing the application, in spring of 2012 representatives from the Leadership Team and the health care system visited the six bishops of the dioceses in which the system's health centers are situated to solicit letters of opinion regarding the establishment of the PJP. Upon obtaining the letters, in June 2012 the LT sent the completed application to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL), situated in the Vatican. The application was granted with minor adjustments, and the PJP officially assumed sponsorship of the health care system on November 16, 2013.

The PJP—SSM Health Ministries—was celebrated with a missioning of its Members and a social on November 16, the FSM Founders Day. The Franciscan Sisters of Mary, Members of SSM Health Boards and significant others attended.

While three members of the FSM Leadership Team and several laypeople are currently Members of the PJP, in the future the group will move toward a membership that no longer includes Franciscan Sisters of Mary. To that end, the FSM and other qualified people are providing education about Catholic social teaching, the mission of Catholic healthcare, and the legacy and vision of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary.

The FSM also relinquished sponsorship of two other ministries:

- Almost Home—a transitional home for homeless teenage mothers and their children; and
- Woman's Place—a safe drop-in center for women experiencing domestic/sexual abuse.

Leadership of both ministries has transitioned to laypeople. Both ministries are striving to establish independence through the development of strong, involved boards and stable funding.

The FSM celebrated the official independence of Almost Home and Woman's Place in 2014 with a special ceremony honoring each organization and presenting each with a monetary gift to assist in the ministry's continuance.

Part 5: Establishing a Lasting Legacy

Facing the reality of completion and embracing the 2011 Chapter Mission and Focus challenged us to see ourselves and others in a new light. We were well aware that the days of doing ministry as in years past were waning. We now had the opportunity to offer our presence, intention, influence, wisdom years and financial resources to others who shared our values and vision—especially around care of creation and environmental issues.

We came to understand how committed and passionate others outside our congregation were in regard to compassionate care of creation, the issues and concerns on which we were focused through the Spirit’s lead. Through our External Focus Implementation Group, we found wonderful collaborators, both individuals and organizations, with whom we established relationships. We supported their work with our interest, prayer commitments, involvement as possible, and financial contributions. They gave new life to us and pushed us to deepen our mission commitment. The Franciscan Sisters of Mary were establishing our legacy in new collaborative ways.

The Landfill Begg for FSM Involvement

Moving our sisters to a residential community in Bridgeton, Missouri, and moving the FSM administrative offices shortly thereafter in December 2011 introduced us to an unexpected way to live out our Mission and Focus. In our new setting we often noticed a strong, foul odor in the air. We learned it came from the landfills in the neighborhood, the Bridgeton Landfill and the West Lake Landfill. Further inquiry revealed alarming details that led us to involve ourselves in the issue in ways previously unimagined.

The West Lake Landfill contains World War II-era uranium processing residues, illegally dumped there in 1973. The Bridgeton Landfill has a confirmed “smoldering event,” otherwise known as an underground fire. Underground landfill fires can produce potentially toxic gases that leak into the air and are easily smelled by area residents. Alarmingly, these two landfills are side by side.

We found ourselves confronting an issue directly related to our newly adopted Focus, begging for our involvement in some way. The Holy Spirit was offering us a new way to be involved in mission.

We decided to do what we could. Twice monthly since June 2012 we have held a public prayer vigil near the landfills and encourage participation through media coverage and word of mouth. At the vigil we hold signs about the dangers of the radioactive waste that those in passing cars can see. We advocate in any way we can for resolution of the issues.

We lend moral and financial support to the Missouri Coalition for the Environment and to JustMoms STL, a group of committed area mothers concerned with their children's welfare. We write letters and make personal visits to legislators to advocate for moving jurisdiction for remediation of the radioactive wastes to the Army Corps of Engineers, the agency with expertise in cleaning up radioactive sites. Some FSM regularly attend community meetings, standing in solidarity with those most affected by the landfills and leading the group in prayer. Our lay staff member, the FSM Justice-Ecological Coordinator, devotes the majority of her time to this effort, collaborating with those who can best bring this issue to successful resolution.

Our influence is making a difference. Our prayer vigils have gained notice. The FSM Justice-Ecological Coordinator is well known, deeply respected, and well informed—a recognized voice on this issue. The newspapers and media keep focus on this issue and refer specifically to FSM efforts.

Sometimes the Spirit takes us to unexpected places and asks us simply to be who we are and do what we can to make a difference.

Involvement in Mission with Local Collaborators

Challenged by the Congregational Focus, the FSM have learned more about local efforts to care compassionately for all creation. The FSM External Focus Implementation Group connected us with local groups working in ecology who have provided learning and volunteer opportunities for FSM.

Extending FSM Influence Nationally and Internationally through Impact Investing

The Franciscan Sisters of Mary had long had a policy for socially responsible investment. In a 2009 review of this policy, however, our CEO/CFO recognized our approach was not having the social impact the guidelines called for. So he presented the leadership team with two options: rewrite the guidelines or discover

ways to adhere to the ones we had. We enthusiastically opted to find ways for our investments to further our mission.

We knew we would need assistance and, after careful interviews, we hired Imprint Capital (now part of Goldman Sachs Asset Management) to help us develop a strategy, construct a portfolio, and monitor financial and mission/impact performance. The LT was involved in the process all along the way and, when ready, we shared it with the congregation. Without exception, members were absolutely enthused.

The move by Imprint Capital to Goldman Sachs Asset Management was an invitation for us to explore our feelings and values. In the end we realized one of the pressing needs in addressing the effects of climate change is that we need all aspects and players on board. We believe that involvement of a major player like Goldman Sachs Asset Management, who influences where investments are made, is a step in the right direction as they recognize the need for impact investing.

Working with our consultants and financial advisors, we revised our investment policy so we would dedicate up to 15 percent of our investments to impact investing. Today these investments have a wide geographic reach, spanning from the U.S. to Latin American and sub-Saharan Africa. Our investments address issues of concern to us: detoxifying the environment, sustainable land use, clean and renewable energy, energy efficiency, stewardship of natural resources, and waste and pollution reduction.

While our investments are still in the early stages for realizing strong returns on investment, Imprint Capital has helped us build a strong portfolio for achieving financial, environmental and social impact.

Philanthropy: Enabling Others to Do What You Cannot Do

Because of years of wise financial stewardship by congregational treasurers, we are blessed to be able to help others do what our Focus asks—care compassionately for creation.

One of the 2007 Chapter Acts Teams developed criteria for disposition of financial resources and properties and explored and recommended ways to share our resources with others. Their work resulted in the congregation's decision to donate

10 percent of its surplus assets—assets over and above what is needed for the ongoing needs of the congregation, including retirement.

In early 2013, on the advice of the Monday Meeting group, the FSM awarded monetary donations to five local organizations with goals similar to ours to continue and enhance their work. The External Implementation Group recommended these organizations, all of whom already enjoyed a relationship with FSM.

Understanding that we needed a well-defined, well-considered process for awarding future monetary grants, we contracted with Arabella Advisors to help us engage in philanthropy aligned with our Focus.

Arabella Advisors worked with the LT in awarding the grants. Early on they involved the 2011 Chapter Members in spelling out the principles that would guide FSM’s giving and the issues we needed to address. (These principles are listed as **Appendix 3.**) Arabella matched projects with our interests and invited organizations to submit grant proposals. They did a “first pass” review, provided the LT with those reviews and recommendations, and sat with us during the face-to-face interviews with potential grantees. In early 2015, FSM awarded nine grants to organizations, most of which operated on national or international levels. We have finalized a formal grant cycle and process, and Arabella continues to assist the FSM in establishing their legacy through their philanthropy.

Establishing a Legacy through Divestment in Fossil Fuel

In August 2014, with our efforts to invest in clean energy under way, we turned to the next phase of our climate change strategy: divesting from companies that profit from fossil fuel production. We joined others in signing the Divest-Invest pledge, a promise to divest from fossil fuel companies. By the close of 2014, FSM had fully divested from companies engaged in fossil fuel production.

Our CEO/CFO helped found the November Group (now known as the Catholic Impact Investing Collaborative [CIIC]), whose aim is: *Through sharing our relatable experiences and learning we expand impact investing among Catholic organizations.* This group has continued to expand as more Catholic organizations catch the vision for aligning their investments with their goals and values.

Shareholder Advocacy: Making Our Presence Known

FSM shareholder advocacy focuses on large corporations that can make a significant difference on issues of social and economic justice, human rights, energy, and water. Our Justice-Ecological Coordinator gathers information to guide us in proposing policy changes. FSM also collaborates with other groups: joining our efforts with those of others not only amplifies our voice but gives us millions of dollars of leverage, making corporations more willing to meet with and listen to us. Through our advocacy we convinced one company to install recycling bins and switch to recyclable containers and utensils; another company has pledged to manage its water usage more responsibly.

The FSM Legacy Continues through Others Formed in the Heart and Spirit of the FSM

Driven by the 2011 Chapter Mission and Focus, the FSM have formed relationships with individuals and organizations both at home and far beyond to collaborate on caring for creation. The 2015 Chapter affirmed the Focus and called us to widen and deepen our collaborative initiatives and relationships.

Valuing the insights, expertise and commitment to our mission and vision of our lay colleagues, we have placed them in even more responsible positions and given them opportunities to understand more deeply our mission, values, and spirituality.

With closure of the motherhouse and relocation of our sisters and the FSM offices, we asked ourselves, “What are we, as leadership, doing that someone else could be doing?” Our goal was to free ourselves from some of our management concerns so we could better address issues of leading in these changing times.

We decided that a staff of nine would be sufficient: two in finance, four in direct care of the sisters, one Justice-Ecological Minister, one in PR/Communications, and one administrative assistant. In addition, we made our CFO also the CEO and gave him responsibility for managing the staff. With these changes in management structure, leadership now focuses more on giving direction and content to staff. (**Appendix 4** gives a concise summary of major responsibilities for each of our staff positions.)

Leadership develops the staff’s understanding of FSM life. Regularly scheduled staff meetings, usually every six weeks, are held onsite. The meeting agenda is

planned by the LT, but the 90-minute meeting always includes time for presence and prayer, a reflective or educational process regarding our Focus or a deeper understanding of FSM life, and sharing about what's happening in each employee's area of service.

As we prepared to transfer sponsorship of our ministries to lay colleagues, we intensified our sharing with them of the FSM Focus, Mission and Values. We encouraged them to integrate into their work the characteristics of FSM life: the power of Presence, Franciscan spirituality, the values of Franciscan leadership, and using discernment in making decisions. The legacy of the FSM lives on through them.

The FSM Legacy Reaches beyond Our Locale and the United States

Our Focus on compassionate care of creation has not only energized us, it has enlivened others. On two occasions, our CEO/CFO was invited by the White House to participate in investment and climate summits in Washington, D.C.—the White House Roundtable Discussion on Impact Investing in June 2014 and The White House Clean Energy Investment Summit in June 2015. Sharing the FSM journey to divestment of fossil fuel investments took him to a significant conference at the University of Dayton in Ohio. He traveled to Kenya to witness firsthand the effects of our investments in M-KOPA Solar, a consumer lending company that provides pay-as-you-go solar energy services for off-grid customers in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Most recently, he traveled to tell the FSM story in Berlin, Germany. Through him and through our philanthropic giving in South America, Indonesia and elsewhere across the globe, the FSM are having ever greater impact.

While we may be moving toward completion, we are far from complete. We experience daily a new way of being, and our Mission and Focus keep us faithful to our calling. We are grateful that we have come this far, and it is our desire to “continue courageously for the love of God” until the very end.

FSM's Focus Is Guided by These Principles

- **Service and Stewardship:** FSM is committed to serving others and to the compassionate care of creation.
- **Empowering Marginalized People and Their Communities:** FSM is interested in efforts that reduce the impact of environmental degradation on the poor and create economic opportunity and livelihoods for the disadvantaged, especially women and children.
- **Community and Collaboration:** FSM is interested in efforts that bring people from different communities together and that foster collaboration among people, groups and communities; it recognizes the power of collaboration as a tool to achieve great impact.
- **Health and Healing for All Creation:** Given its history in health care, FSM values environmental efforts that promote health and well-being and recognizes the importance of the environment on health.
- **Systemic Change:** FSM is most interested in supporting efforts that address the root cause of problems, including high-risk strategies with a long-term and significant potential for impact.
- **Learning and Evaluation:** FSM is committed to evaluating the impact of its giving and its role as a donor and to adapting to lessons it learns.
- **Partnership:** FSM recognizes it cannot address critical challenges such as clean energy alone and will look to partner with other donors, NGOs and impacted communities to advance long-term, systemic change.

Current FSM Management Structure

(From 2007 to 2015, we went from 100+ employees to nine. Brief descriptions of responsibility follow.)

Chief Executive Officer/Chief Financial Officer

In addition to financial and investment matters, the CEO/CFO has administrative responsibility for Human Resource functions and supervises and performs evaluation review for all FSM staff.

Administrative Assistant

This person, in addition to accomplishing the duties usually occurring in a busy office, primarily assists the leadership team and the CEO/CFO in their work. She is available to assist other congregational staff in administrative duties as time permits.

Director of Finance

This individual manages the Finance Office and handles the day-to-day activities of the office—pays bills, handles insurance correspondence, etc.

Director of Public Relations/Development

This person creates, edits and produces internal and external communications for the congregation and records and acknowledges any donations to the congregation.

Justice-Ecological Coordinator

This individual is the face of FSM and represents the congregation in justice, peace and ecological concerns. In addition, she keeps congregational members informed and involved to the extent realistic for them.

FSM Health Care Team

This team essentially addresses health care and non-health care needs of the sisters. The team meets regularly among themselves, and the team coordinator meets regularly with leadership. The team consists of four members:

Health Care Coordinator coordinates care for the physical and mental well-being for all FSM, particularly for those living at TSC. She is the

liaison to the LT in identifying and communicating health- and age-related concerns, and she coordinates hospital admissions and discharges.

Health Care Assistant does not perform direct nursing services but serves as the primary advocate for FSM living in the TSC skilled nursing area. She regularly completes rounds with the physicians who see our sisters onsite and participates in care plan meetings.

Resource Nurse serves as a health resource to FSM in TSC independent apartments and oversees care for those in the TSC assisted living area.

FSM Community Life Coordinator at TSC, a non-nurse, does a variety of tasks: grocery and personal shopping, troubleshooting telephone and computer difficulties, buying party supplies and setting up FSM socialization and party activities, and, at the time of a move within the facility, coordinating the move and disposing of unneeded furniture.

Part 6: Collaborative Governance Project

The purpose of the CGP shall be to assist participating religious institute(s) with issues of management and internal governance when Religious can no longer fulfill the obligations. This shall be exercised through management of the finances, communications, and legacy of each participating religious institute, as well as the personal care of the Religious through oversight of healthcare and consideration for each one's quality of life. The CGP is dedicated to upholding the unique charism/mission of each participating religious institute. The CGP preserves the identity of each participating institute so it can offer its gift to the world until it comes to completion. The activities will be conducted in a manner consistent with the teaching and laws of the Roman Catholic Church.

Statutes for Collaborative Governance Project, Article II, Purposes

As we moved toward our completion, the last major piece of work was to put into place a governance structure, necessary because we realized that within a few years we would have no sisters able and/or willing to lead the Congregation.

The 2011 FSM Chapter accepted the recommendation the LT presented at that time: "Be it resolved that the general leadership investigate and prepare a report with options and resolutions for the future of the Congregation. The report shall include such options as a 'covenant relationship' with another institute and the appointment of a canonical commissary. The report shall be presented no later than the 2015 FSM Chapter for discussion and decision." Working from this directive the 2011–2015 LT engaged in a process to investigate options for governance to be presented at the 2015 Chapter.

Between July 2012 and January 2013 the LT gathered information on the concept of Covenant Relationship (CR). We did this by:

- Meeting with leadership from a province that was already moving into the area of CR
- Meeting with a local canon lawyer to learn the steps we needed to take to establish a CR
- Attending a workshop on CR by Dan Ward, OSB, and viewing a DVD from the workshop

Speaking with Dan Ward, OSB, and the provincial leadership of a group moving toward CR helped us see that covenant relationship would not be a viable option for FSM governance, as most other religious communities were facing the same

challenges we were facing. We also learned that no other viable options for governance were available. The Resource Center for Religious Institutes (RCRI) was working to help the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) understand that options other than covenant relationship were needed.

In January 2013, based on what we had learned so far, we decided to take three steps:

1. to speak with Frank Morrissey, OMI, in Canada as we had heard that Canada had another option besides CR.
2. to speak with Sharon Holland, IHM, who we felt would be a good resource for information on CR as she had spent many years in Rome at CICLSAL.
3. to invite the Leadership Team of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon, Missouri (CPPS), whose motherhouse and offices are only 20 minutes from the FSM offices, to meet with us:
 - To share information regarding Covenant Relationship; and
 - To support one another in issues of common concern.

Eventually we decided to join forces with the CPPS on this project to see what we might accomplish.

Between March 2013 and October 2013 the LT:

- received information and a reference from Sharon Holland, IHM;
- met with Janice Bader, CPPS, National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) Executive Director—Janice mentioned that a number of congregations and provinces were in situations similar to ours—including Janice's own congregation;
- planned a meeting with canon lawyer Kelly Connors, PM, regarding creative possibilities for alternatives to CR;
- continued our conversations with the CPPS Leadership Team; and
- agreed that the Canadian option for CR was not viable for us.

On November 12 and 13, 2013, the CPPS and FSM leadership teams met with Kelly Connors, PM, to discuss a new approach to governance. Kelly's knowledge and creativity and the two congregations' openness to the promptings of the Spirit led us to the approach we are calling the Collaborative Governance Project (CGP).

Between November 2013 and November 2014 the two congregations:

- shared their hopes and expectations for the creation of a new way of governance for religious congregations that are working toward completion;
- began to pull together what they believed to be a workable model for two or more congregations;
- created statutes and bylaws;
- drew up an organizational chart for the proposed structure;
- formulated a mission statement for the model: “The CGP is dedicated to upholding the unique charism/mission of each participating religious institute. The CGP preserves the identity of each participating institute so it can offer its gift to the world until it comes to completion”;
- identified topics for formation of the Collaborative Governance Project (CGP) Members so they would fully understand and respect the identity of the participating religious congregations; and
- finalized criteria for CGP Board Members.

Over this year we shared information about what was occurring in our congregations, described our charisms and how they are lived out at this time, and outlined characteristics to be included—and excluded—in a model for Governance, Management, and Legacy.

In November 2014 the FSM held a pre-Chapter Meeting at which we presented to Chapter Members the work done on the CGP. The CPPS Leadership Team also attended this meeting to respond to the Chapter Members’ questions.

In 2015 we began working on job descriptions for those who would work in the CGP.

We also asked Kelly, our canon lawyer, to travel to Rome to meet with Fr. Elias Ayuban, CMF, our English-speaking contact at CICLSAL, to present the concept of the CGP to him and ask for his comments. (Note that we were not asking permission for the CGP; the CGP will be a civil corporation, not a canonical entity.) Besides Fr. Elias, Kelly provided copies of the CGP to Fr. Hank Lemoncilla, OMI, also of CICLSAL, and Sr. Sharon Euart, RSM, of the Resource Center for Religious Institutes (RCRI). While they offered minor suggestions, all were in approval of the CGP as it is currently envisioned.

Strengths of the CGP

When she presented the CGP to CICLSAL, Kelly identified the following strengths:

- Because participation in the CGP is a gradual process, it allows each religious institute the greatest autonomy for the longest duration
 - all decisions are made by the institute; while the CGP carries out the decisions and desires of the institute, it does not make the decisions *for* the institute;
- The CGP facilitates keeping each institute's elected officials longer because of the support of the structure;
- No non-member (of each religious institute) is given sole oversight of an institute, protecting the integrity of that oversight;
- The importance of formation seeks to ensure a holistic approach to care and oversight (and carrying out the desires) of the institute; and
- The CGP addresses the exercise of governance and therefore facilitates initiation of the CGP whenever the congregation is ready and ensures the autonomy and decision-making capacities of participating institutes.

At the May 2015 Chapter the FSM voted unanimously to move ahead with the CGP. At their April 2016 Chapter the CPPS approved going forward with the CGP. Both LTs continue to prepare for the implementation of the CGP. The work on the CGP has allowed our congregation to move toward completion with confidence and courage as in our final days we will maintain our charism and the integrity of our community within the structure that will support us.

Part 7: Factors That Helped Us Integrate Our Understanding of Our Reality

We engaged in this life-giving journey one step at a time, awake and alert to the mysteries revealed to us. We intentionally took up and laid down many projects and endeavors. What moved us to continue courageously to look our reality in the eye and give life both to mission and to diminishment?

As we look back on our transition story, we see obvious integrating factors.

Process

Since the end of Vatican II, FSM has been blessed with the good sense to engage excellent facilitation for Chapters and major congregational meetings. We trained our members in facilitation and leadership development. FSM Leadership Team (LT) set up structures for developing processes to engage members in dealing with the major issues of our time like where we would live, where and how we could minister. The key values presented by the LT became a basis for discernment, which became a natural way of life for all the sisters.

A trained facilitator worked with the LT and the various teams as well as with all the members at Congregational Gatherings. This helped to keep us working together, transparent and pursuing the same end.

Our various groups and teams developed many processes to help us work through issues or topics. Processes were designed to include all who were involved in or who would be affected by the specific event or decision. The variety and creativity of our processes were good, helping us to reach the hearts, minds and spirits of our diverse membership.

The Spiritual Practice of Presence

Presence is the essence of FSM Mission: “to be the presence of the loving, serving, compassionate, healing Jesus.” We look at mission today not so much from the perspective of the tasks we perform but from an experiential or spiritual perspective of presence—who we are and how we relate to, connect to and make meaning with the whole of life.

Presence is also the fundamental element of Franciscan spirituality:

- Presence is who and how we are regardless of what we are doing.
- Presence is about being Gospel as we go about whatever we are doing.
- Francis' only desire was to live as Jesus did.

With the Mission and Focus adopted at the 2011 Chapter, our life became more intentional and presence oriented. This change in being called for new spiritual disciplines and behaviors that would keep us present to self, God and all creation as well as help us grow in the practice of presence. Presence became a focal point of our personal and corporate lives. Who and how we are mattered more than simply what we did.

FSM meetings and gatherings began with a sharing of presence—who we are and how we are right now in this moment. Sharing of presence is a way to be transparent with one another, to build trust and form relationship. This practice has helped us to be present to ourselves and to others.

Presence isn't easy. We soon learned how difficult it is to keep our heart space open, our minds without division or resistance, and our bodies not somewhere else—all at the same time. Our efforts helped us with both our inner and outer work; in being fully present to what was right in front of us, we began to see ourselves, our relationships and our reality more clearly and truthfully.

Two other spiritual practices became essential to enhancing our practice of presence: contemplative prayer and discernment.

Contemplative Prayer

Sitting quietly in God's presence and letting God direct us is an essential element of Franciscan spirituality. The LT agreed among ourselves to do contemplative sitting together once a week and introduced the practice to the membership as well. Contemplative prayer and shared solitude were a welcome gift. Spending a time of quiet together and then sharing our presence has now become a common practice, enhancing our relationships and leading to deeper forms of prayer, faith sharing and contemplation.

Discernment

The FSM are committed to discernment as a way of life. We developed a guide for personal discernment based on the Sufi Tradition of the Four Basic Rules of Life. These four rules emphasize behaviors necessary for the practice of presence as well as for discernment. (See **Appendix 5: Personal Discernment.**)

We freely chose this particular transition journey. We invested our heart. Choice became an invitation to commitment. We learned that when we choose with discernment, integrity and passion, we submit ourselves to the miracle of change, however slow and unglamorous it may be.

Symbols, Rituals and Celebrations

Our symbols, rituals and celebrations were the glue that made the connections for us, pushed us forward and kept unifying us. It is hard to talk about our story without mentioning some process or symbol used or a ritual or celebration we shared.

Each congregation has its specific story and cherishes the meaning of that story for its members. Dipping into our founding story, the FSM chose to use the enduring symbol of the basket. The basket (which we still have) was given to our foundress, Mother Odilia Berger, when she came to St. Louis; she used the basket to carry supplies to her sisters and to the sick in their homes.

The other symbol we choose to use was a quilt made at the time of the FSM 125th Anniversary in 1997. The quilt, put together from blocks made by the sisters, depicted congregational ministries, Chapter themes and significant movements in our lives.

Throughout the transition journey we have used and continue to use these symbols with pride and gratitude. They are meaningful to us; in many ways they say more and are more enduring than our words.

In every phase of this journey—closing convents, taking on new living situations, saying farewell to employees, handing over ministries—we found ways to meaningfully ritualize and gratefully celebrate all our transitions.

We cannot describe in detail every ritual and celebration—there were many! Rather, we choose to describe one that integrates elements used in all the smaller events.

The FSM Remembering and Celebration Team planned and hosted a three-day event that beautifully integrated ritual and celebration in allowing us to bid farewell to the beloved FSM motherhouse. (See **Appendix 6: Remembering, Reverencing and Giving Thanks.**)

Each of these integrating factors—process, presence, contemplative prayer, discernment, and ritual and celebration—remain essential elements of our ongoing congregational life, however long that may be. We are still in process, gratefully dipping into the treasures of our past but with a new freedom, engaging the present to create a future of hope for ourselves and all of creation. “A new thing is happening!” And so we “continue courageously for the love of God.”

Personal Discernment

Developed from the Sufi Tradition of the Four Basic Rules of Life*

Show Up and Choose to Be Present

- ❖ Choose to be physically/mentally/emotionally present to the person/issue/situation.
- ❖ Set aside quality time and enough time rather than “fitting it in” between things.
- ❖ Give myself the physical space/place that lends itself to a discernment process.
- ❖ Prepare myself mentally to think of this time as time to offer my wisdom, a responsibility I exercise as a member of our Congregation rather than something “I have to get done.”

Pay Attention to What Has Heart and Meaning

- ❖ As I consider person/issue/situation, what is happening within me?
Where do I experience
 - Excitement?
 - Resistance?
 - Confusion?
 - Anger?
 - Fear?
 - Hope?
 - Defense?
 - Unfinished Business?
 - Etc.?
- ❖ Am I willing to explore with curiosity without closing off possibilities?
- ❖ What healing do I need?

Tell the Truth without Blame or Judgment

- ❖ Identify how I truly see the possibilities regarding this particular issue/situation and allow myself to say the truth to myself without feeling guilty.
- ❖ Challenge myself to see the situation/issue as it really is.
- ❖ Seek for the intent of clarity, whatever further information regarding the issue that I need.

- ❖ If I am telling the truth about myself and the situation/issue there is no need to blame or judge either myself or others. It is from my experience, my point of view and the knowledge I have gathered. It is information for my discernment.

Do Not Be Attached to the Outcome: Be Open to It

- ❖ Speak my truth; offer my wisdom as I know it. Say it to myself and then say it in response to the situation/issue for consideration.
- ❖ Recognize that I do not have the whole truth. I have a part of our collective truth or wisdom, and we are better for my having offered my piece.
- ❖ My ongoing calling in this process is to let go of the outcome. My thoughts, input may not be seen in the result, but I need to acknowledge that I made a difference for the outcome. There is power greater than myself at work here.

- Angeles Arrien, *The Four-Fold Way: Walking the Path of the Warrior, Teacher, Healer and Visionary* (Harper San Francisco, 1993).

APPENDIX 6

Remembering, Reverencing and Giving Thanks: A Celebration of Our Life and Years at St. Mary of the Angels Convent May 14–16, 2010

The intentions for the weekend were to formally end our time at St. Mary of the Angels by:

- Reflecting and sharing our experience of this place
- Identifying the enduring values of our life together that we want to carry forward
- Honoring the sacredness of this place in my/our journey as itinerant Franciscan women religious
- Celebrating the significance of this place with one another
- Celebrating this place with others who share our history

Friday, May 14

The day began with a special breakfast prepared by the Remembering and Celebration Team.

At 9 a.m. all the sisters gathered in the chapel for Morning Praise with the theme of “Gather Us In.”

After Morning Praise Sr. Rose Dowling, FSM president, invited the sisters to see this day as a time to slow down and reflect, to be present to this place. She invited all to focus Friday on St. Mary of the Angels Convent (our motherhouse) and the many memories and associations, pleasant or otherwise, tied to this place—the countless conscious encounters with God that have taken place here. She invited all to spend the morning in quiet reflection, visiting the many sites in the convent and on the grounds that have been sacred: “Place is where we encounter LIFE itself in the Presence of God.”

Each sister received a small booklet entitled *My Dearest Memories of This Place*. The booklet contained space for sisters to write about three special memories associated with St. Mary of the Angels. The questions invited sisters to recall the memory as fully as possible, to identify what made this memory dear to them, and to describe the feelings the memory evoked in them. The morning was spent in mindful walking and quiet reflection.

At 11:30 the sisters celebrated a quiet Mass using the readings of the Morning Praise, focusing on the importance both of place and itinerancy.

In the afternoon all gathered in Berger Hall (large assembly room) for a sharing of memories. The stage resembled a living room, with two comfortable chairs and two microphones set up on both sides of center stage. The audience area was set up in groups of three chairs each. Four pairs of sisters took the stage, and each pair spoke for about ten minutes about important memories they cherished from their years at St. Mary of the Angels.

The stories told by these eight sisters served to “prime the pump” for the sisters in the audience. In their groups of three, sisters then shared in turn with two other sisters some of their own memories of this special place. After about twenty minutes sisters changed places, joining two other sisters, to share still other memories and hear from new voices.

After reconvening, sisters reflected on what the day had meant to them, what they had learned, what they noticed in themselves and others as they shared their stories. Open microphones allowed individuals to describe their feelings and insights.

At 5 p.m. all the sisters gathered for a special banquet in the dining room to enjoy a delicious catered meal and an elegant environment.

Concert . . .

After dinner, the evening held yet another special treat. At 6 p.m. sisters gathered in the chapel. There Peter Hesel, commissioned by the FSM, had set up twenty singers and eight musicians for a special evening prayer, *Concert for the Journey*. The music began with the uplifting spiritual, “I Hear Music in the Air.” The fourteen musical selections that followed were grouped according to themes: gratitude, Franciscan spirit, Mary—a woman for all times, intimacy with God, and “into the future with trust.” The music encompassed a wide spectrum of musical traditions and styles, evoking many emotions to close a full day.

Saturday, May 15

Sisters gathered by 9 a.m. in Berger Hall for the Circle of the Whole.

The auditorium was arranged in two concentric circles facing the center. The sacred space at the center incorporated some of the most sacred images of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary. A big metal basket on the floor held a profusion of red and yellow kalanchoes. A tall pedestal displayed the facsimile of Mother Odilia's basket. On a marble table stood the lamp; on a small wooden table, the Bible. A basket of breads recalled yet another cherished story of our congregation's beginnings.

After a brief introduction by the day's coordinator, Sr. Rose Dowling introduced the Morning Praise, which encompassed the entire morning's events.

The celebration was solemn, beginning with a reading from Ephesians (4:1–6), then transitioned into a Litany of Places. A cantor chanted the names of the many places around the world that have known the presence, hospitality and compassion of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary. The sisters responded, "Know that I am with you always."

The sisters were then invited to reflect on the previous day's experience and the question, "What one or two deep possessions, deep values or ideals do I want us to carry forward into the future?" Each sister received a small card with the question printed on it; each was invited to write a short response of no more than two or three sentences.

The sisters were asked to read aloud the thoughts they had written on the small gray cards. Each sister read her response to the question, then passed the microphone to the sister beside her.

After about ten sisters had shared their hopes for the future, the assembly would pause to reverence in silence what had been said. After another ten, the group would honor the community's thoughts with incense and by singing portions of "Sacred Space Within." This pattern continued until all the sisters had had an opportunity to speak.

When every sister had shared, a dancer lifted Mother Odilia's basket from the sacred space and moved through the room, inviting each sister to offer her response by placing it in the basket. After a short time of contemplative sitting, the morning concluded with a prayer of gratitude for this rich and sacred experience.

Open House . . .

From 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. the sisters hosted a public gathering at St. Mary of the Angels Convent. Welcome banners draped the balcony above the front entrance and hung suspended from other entrances for the guests.

In the weeks leading up to this weekend the Ritual and Celebration Committee had focused on the environment of the convent, resulting in lovely floral arrangements, tasteful groupings of plants, pictures and furnishings, and an ambiance of sacred beauty, not only for the public gathering but for all the events of the weekend.

Dessert buffets were set up at various stations around the convent. Each site featured a beautiful cake showcasing the FSM logo surrounded by dark burgundy roses.

Families and friends, former FSM, donors, friends from FSM ministries, FSM legal and financial consultants, as well as other friends and neighbors came to visit with the sisters and to bid farewell to the convent. Many visited the chapel; bidding farewell to that beautiful space brought tears to many, especially those who had been part of the congregation.

Those who welcomed visitors at the registration tables gave out nearly 400 nametags, and the areas open to the public hummed the entire time.

At 4:30 the LT bid the guests farewell. A number of guests left short messages for the sisters in the baskets provided near the registration tables. Many took home the special commemorative cards with an image of the convent and timeline of its history.

Sunday, May 16

The day began again in Berger Hall with Morning Praise, a quiet reflection on our biblical and congregational ancestors and the journeys they had faced and undertaken. After sitting quietly and prayerfully with their ancestors, the sisters concluded the Morning Praise with the musical reminder “I am with you on the journey, always with you.”

The president then invited the sisters to think about the values they had spoken of in the Circle of the Whole the day before. The words and phrases they had written

on their cards and shared with one another were now posted on lists around the room. The sisters were invited to spend some time in contemplative walking, viewing those values and ideals and considering what they might carry with them into the future.

With soft music playing in the background, sisters silently walked the perimeter of the room, pausing to read and reflect on the values posted on the walls. After some time in contemplation, sisters reconvened at the tables to discuss their insights. They then had the opportunity to share some of those insights at the microphone with the whole assembly.

Some of the deep values and ideals the FSM want to carry forward include:

****Courage *Hospitality *Discernment *Conviction *Commitment *Let the peace of God be with us *Sisterhood *Prophetic action *FSM Charism *Adaptability *Continual transformation *Openness *Continue courageously for the love of God.***

After a short break the FSM reassembled in Berger Hall, where the coordinator of the day invited them to think about how all the events of the weekend had been preparing the FSM to go forward into the life to which we continue to be called—a life of commitment, fidelity, and mission. For each FSM, “one of the values that we have identified is speaking to you most clearly, is moving your heart, is summoning you to the journey before us.” She invited each of the sisters to choose one of the beautifully painted wooden medallions—hearts, spirals, circles, stars—on the tables and to inscribe on the shape the value she wanted to carry forward.

Sisters chose a medallion and inscribed it with one of the paint pens provided. Sisters from Our Lady of Victories (OLV, our infirmary) and some of the sisters living at the convent had already completed their medallions, thanks to the Spirit and Life Team who had helped them. In all, 104 medallions were completed.

Sisters brought their medallions back to their tables and sat down. Then from the foyer moved six sisters carrying the FSM Heritage Quilt. They carefully placed the quilt on tables prepared for it at the center of Berger Hall. The sisters sang “Everything before us brought us to this moment, standing on the threshold of a brand-new day.”

Each sister was invited to fasten her completed medallion to the quilt. A sister had sewn tiny ribbons around the edges, and sisters could thread the ribbon through the

hole in the emblem and tie the medallion to the quilt. Sisters also fastened the medallions of the sisters from OLV to the quilt.

When all the medallions were attached, one of our elderly but able sisters lifted a bowl of incense and in silence reverently censed all four sides of the quilt, praying a blessing on all the sisters and on the journey ahead. The FSM president then revered the quilt with incense. Finally the youngest member of the congregation did the same.

The six quilt-bearers lifted the quilt and carried it in silence out of Berger Hall.

Farewell Liturgy . . .

The 2 p.m. liturgy in the chapel provided a solemn and beautiful close to the weekend's events. The chapel was arranged in an oval, surrounded by sparkling satin banners in turquoise, mauve, and royal blue. In the sacred space at the center of the oval stood the large metal basket full of flowers and an empty pedestal covered in blue cloth surrounded by a hundred small baskets.

The readings for the day dealt with journey and with presence. Three sisters brought to life the Gospel, Luke's account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth, through their dramatic reading.

While the choir and congregation sang Michael Joncas's "We Come to Your Feast," the quilt-bearers ceremoniously carried in the FSM Heritage Quilt with all the medallions attached. They placed the quilt upon the as yet undressed altar, then spread a white altar cloth atop the quilt. Sisters carried in wine and bread baked by one of the sisters. Then a sister carried in Mother Odilia's basket—the true basket—and placed it on the tall pedestal amid the host of smaller baskets.

During communion the choir sang "Ubi Caritas" and the rousing "In the House of Love." Then Sr. Rose Dowling, as president of the FSM, stepped up to the microphone.

She spoke of the weekend and what the FSM had accomplished, remembering, pondering, sharing what God had done for each. Each had named what she had felt is most important to carry forward. She reminded the sisters that the values they had inscribed on the emblems and attached to the FSM Heritage Quilt are what hold FSM together, not a place, even a place as dear as the convent. Rather, it is the inner sacred space the FSM carry that is home, the house of love. "We are

never diminished when we know Whose House we live in and how blessed we are to be witnesses to that love.”

She spoke of Mother Odilia’s basket as an instrument of connection among the sisters and others. She invited the sisters to put into their baskets the essential values that hold the FSM together, to allow the FSM presence to be a home where the poor and marginalized find a place of rest and peace.

The Leadership Team then came forward and presented each sister with one of the beautiful hand-woven baskets from the sacred space, specially made replicas of Mother Odilia’s basket on a smaller scale.

After the final blessing, the choir began singing, “Amen! Amen! Alleluia!” The six quilt-bearers stripped the altar, then lifted the quilt high. Bearing the quilt, they led the procession of FSM out the front door of the convent.

There Sr. Rose, surrounded by the Heritage Quilt and the sisters, gave thanks for the convent building, home to the FSM for more than eighty years, and for the lives of all who passed through and who touched the lives of the FSM. And, as others before had bid farewell to sacred places, she invited the sisters to bid farewell to this sacred place. Just as Ruth and Naomi, Mary and Elizabeth, Jesus, Francis, Clare, Mothers Odilia and Augustine had journeyed forth with their companions, the FSM would journey together, living out the call to fulfill their mission and to “continue courageously for the love of God.”

Once more the quilt-bearers lifted up the FSM Heritage Quilt and slowly but purposefully moved toward the gates that took them outside the convent grounds. All eyes watched as the quilt grew smaller and disappeared from sight, moving forward into a distance beyond where the FSM could see.

The solemn and yet hopeful group reassembled in the Fireside Lounge for a light buffet to close this powerful weekend.

Transforming . . . The End, the Continuation . . .

So this has been our journey . . . so far!

When the Leadership Team began this project some months ago, we started with the key word in the title being “Transition.” The more we wrote and reflected on what had transpired over these years, the more we recognized that something much deeper and more meaningful had taken place—and continues to take place—in each of us and all of us as FSM: Transformation.

Richard Rohr suggests that there are three key components to spiritual transformation*:

- The necessity of a foundational conversion, such as a radical change of consciousness;
- The sign of spiritual conversion, a movement toward the bottom, toward the suffering and simple; and
- A practice for staying open . . . quieting, meditation or contemplation.

These components have certainly been integral to our journey. The radical change we experienced—individually and together—in our everyday lives was mind-boggling for most of us. The shift in our consciousness to a whole new way of expressing our Mission and what it takes for us to understand that calling remains nothing short of breath-taking.

This shift involved moving beyond the past and welcoming a whole new way of being with the poor and suffering. We had been hands-on people who dealt with death and dying in hospitals, with delivering babies on the Mexican border, with homeless teenage mothers and their children, with women in abusive situations. Now we were asked to work collaboratively with others who were leading the action. Often what we could offer was simply our presence and our financial support. This was a whole new call for us, but we have responded, knowing how important that presence is to others.

As for the practice of staying open, well, discernment has become an integrative way of life for us. Staying open challenges us to practicing quiet and contemplation and listening to the promptings of the Spirit. Without this leading and our willingness to listen—however reluctantly at times—we could never have had the deep, life-changing experience of transformation.

We cannot truly convey to ourselves or to others what these so-called “dying years” have been for us. To say they were hard, even heart-wrenching at times, is an understatement. But what we have been gifted with in this process is priceless. We hope you’ve been able to see this as you made the journey with us in this article.

As a leadership team we want to acknowledge the debt of gratitude we owe to each one of our sisters who over these years has done her best to make this journey with grace, love, and courage. Our sisters made it easier for us to continue the life-altering decisions we were led to make.

So we all “continue courageously for the love of God,” knowing we are sisters in mission until the last one of us is welcomed into her eternal home.

* Richard Rohr, Webcast: *Authentic Transformation*, February 23, 2016.