



FSM

MAGAZINE

Franciscan Sisters of Mary

*“For I know well the plans
I have in mind for you, says
the LORD, plans for your
welfare, not woe! plans to
give you a future
full of hope.”*

Jeremiah 29:11

Continuing COURAGEOUSLY

150th Heritage Anniversary

FALL 2021

Founded in 1872, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary is a religious congregation of women within the Roman Catholic Church. Committed to their mission to be the presence of the loving, serving, compassionate, healing Jesus, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary focus the power of their intention on compassionate care of Creation in collaboration with others.

President:

Judith A. Bell, FSM

Councilors:

Susan Scholl, FSM

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About the Front Cover

On the cover is an image of the Sarah Sculpture, which stands near the FSM offices in Bridgeton, Missouri. It depicts Sarah, the wife of Abraham, who in spite of her advanced age bears him a son, through the grace of God. The sculpture portrays her pregnant, laughing with joy: “God has given me cause to laugh, and all who hear of it will laugh with me” (Genesis 21:6).

Like Sarah, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary remain open, trusting in God’s faithfulness and responding with joy to God’s call to serve, even when that call leads in new and often unexpected directions.

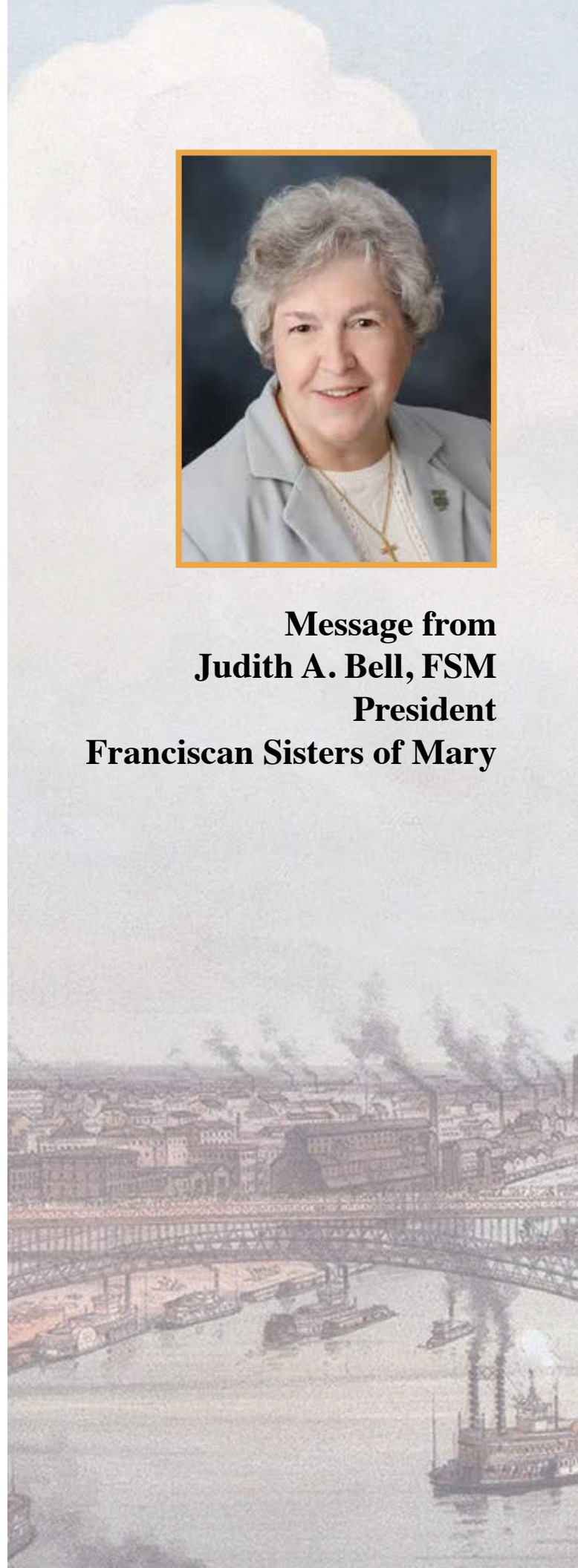
In spite of their dwindling numbers and advancing age, God is not finished with them. Moved by the Spirit, they remain vital, continuing courageously to find ever-new ways to live out their mission to be the presence of the loving, serving, compassionate, healing Jesus.

Editor, Writer:

Sandra A. Ashby



**Message from
Judith A. Bell, FSM
President
Franciscan Sisters of Mary**



Over the years, thanks to the influence of my Dad, I've developed a great appreciation for history. I have been intrigued and inspired, not only by the events that have occurred over the centuries, but even more importantly by my understanding of the effects those events had on the lives of people then as well as the impact and influence those events had in the years following.

In thinking about my Congregation's 150 years—the Heritage Anniversary we are celebrating through November 2022—I have become even more aware of, awed by, and truly grateful for my sisters and the impact they have had through their relationships with individuals as well as through their presence and ministry to the communities in which we have had the privilege to serve.

This 150th anniversary issue of *FSM Magazine* provides an opportunity to look back at some significant events in our congregational life. Truly we stand on the shoulders of the sisters who have gone before us! These earlier events have had a great impact on all of us who came after, filling us with an awareness of God's generous blessings as we “continue courageously for the love of God” into our new future years.

Speaking on behalf of my sisters as well as myself, we send to each of you reading this *FSM Magazine* our love, our forever “thank-yous,” and our prayerful remembrance of the gift of your presence throughout the years of our lives.

Abundant blessings on your personal journey into the future!

Judith A. Bell, FSM

Judith A. Bell, FSM
President



Continuing COURAGEOUSLY



On November 16, 2021, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary begin a year-long celebration honoring the congregation's 150 years.

Mother Odilia Berger's arrival in St. Louis on that bitterly cold November day in 1872 marked a promise—a promise the sisters who followed in her footsteps have striven faithfully to fulfill: “to be the presence of the loving, serving, compassionate, healing Jesus.”

These have been 150 years of great blessing—certainly for the sisters, but even more for those who have known the grace of their presence. The FSM have cared for the sick and the poor; developed cutting-edge technologies for healing; founded and directed hospitals and other healthcare facilities; established nursing schools; and pushed the boundaries in leadership and in setting standards for excellence. They have explored new, innovative ways to care for creation. The FSM have been pioneers, listening to the guidance of the Spirit as their missions took them far from the comforts of home.



Early in those 150 years—in January 1894—a group of seven sisters left the Sisters of St. Mary (SSM) in St. Louis to begin a new venture. Under the leadership of Mother Mary Augustine Giesen, these sisters and their followers, the Sisters of St. Francis of Maryville, Missouri (OSF), brought their healing presence to missions in rural Missouri, Oklahoma, and other sites in the Midwest.



In the wake of Vatican II, as congregations of men and women religious heard the call of the Spirit to seek new ways to serve God, the two communities began to explore the possibility of reunification. Led by the Spirit, building on their common roots in Mother Odilia's mission, and enriched by the other's experience and spirituality, on May 13, 1985, the two congregations decided to share their future. And on August 2, 1987, the Sisters of St. Mary of the Third Order of St. Francis and the Sisters of St. Francis of Maryville became one once more, joining together as the Franciscan Sisters of Mary.

Mother Odilia lived less than eight years after she stepped onto the St. Louis riverfront, but her courage and faith have inspired generations of women to follow in her footsteps, setting out on new and uncharted paths. Her final written message to her sisters—“Therefore continue courageously for the love of God”—continues to inspire them with confidence in the Spirit’s guidance.

Embracing the Moment

For most of us, the world in which we find ourselves is very different from the world in which we expected to be living. This may be especially true for women religious. The young women who many years ago entered the convent and professed their vows would find themselves engaging with change on levels they never expected.



“Most of us were quite clear about the focus of religious life when we entered,” observed Sr. Rose Mary Dowling, FSM president from 2007 to 2015. “Most of us, however, have lived through and continue to live through a significant shift in religious life. For the past fifty-plus years, we have been on the move forward—where, we don’t know with certitude. But steadily, doing our best to listen and to follow the Spirit, we move in faith.

“As Franciscan women in love with God’s creation, we have loved, learned, and relearned how to live that love in the ever-evolving world. From our inception we have been willing to discern and respond to the signs of the time. We have been quietly prophetic in health care, in care of women and children, and in the social issues of our times.

“We are walking in faith toward a new Graced Moment in religious life.”

Through the years the Franciscan Sisters of Mary have embraced each new graced moment, continuing courageously, facing each new challenge, letting go of past certainties and opening themselves to new and unimagined possibilities.

Today, with almost 150 years of caring service, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary continue to lead, courageously seeking fresh ways to be the presence of Jesus to others.

Graced Focus: Compassionate Care of Creation in Collaboration with Others

At the 2011 FSM Chapter, the sisters responded to the call of the Holy Spirit by adopting a single Focus—compassionate care of creation in collaboration with others. As a major part of this Focus, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary are using their resources, through investment and philanthropy, to preserve and grow all life on our planet.

In the decade since that decision, the FSM have also shared what they have learned with many organizations and businesses committed to care of our common home.

Ryan Strode, FSM's Program Director for Mission and Focus, explained how FSM is using their investment and philanthropic strategies to accomplish the Focus. "To bring our Mission and Focus to life, we do four things:



- Support strong frontline and faith leaders who are organizing their communities to care for our common home;
- Equip these leaders to develop community-owned solutions that benefit people and planet;
- Invest in the most promising solutions, generating returns that propel our mission; and
- Tell the story of the partners we support, through our presence and our voice.

"We support frontline communities, those who suffer first and worst from pollution and climate change, including communities of color and low-income populations.



Earth Dance Farms

"Currently, our efforts are concentrated into three areas where we believe FSM is uniquely positioned to be supportive and make an impact in communities:

- Advancing the environmental justice movement in the Midwest;
- Growing a just, sustainable food system in St. Louis; and
- Inspiring Catholic action on climate justice globally.

“We’ve determined we are best equipped to have an impact in the Midwest, where our sisters have had a long history and where there is little funding available for environmental justice,” Ryan continued. “We have shifted our funding toward smaller, community-based organizations led by people of color who are most impacted by poor environmental conditions. And we are beginning to combine our gifts with our investments to better enable those communities to develop enterprises that protect creation (e.g., local food businesses or local clean energy projects) while creating economic opportunity for their residents.”

But while concentrating efforts on more regional support, the FSM are also extending their influence across the world.



The Franciscan Sisters of Mary remain deeply involved with the Laudato Si’ Movement (formerly the Global Catholic Climate Movement, or GCCM)—John O’Shaughnessy, who made initial contact with the group, serves on its Board of Directors as treasurer. The organization strives to give life to Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’*, encouraging Catholic and faith-based organizations to commit to strategies that preserve and protect our common home.

“Similarly, CIIC (the Catholic Impact Investing Collaborative) continues to grow,” Ryan said. In late 2014 John O’Shaughnessy, FSM’s Chief Financial Officer and Chief Investment Officer (CFO/CIO), gathered a small group of investors to discuss the possibilities of impact investing for Catholic nonprofits. Over the years their enthusiasm has resulted in a strong movement worldwide toward faith-based investment.

“CIIC is now a truly global network with a growing base in Canada and the U. K.,” Ryan said. “CIIC is launching a new member program that includes support to Catholic investors interested in moving their investments into impact-oriented businesses that benefit people and planet. John continues to serve as co-chair.”

Sr. Rose Dowling, FSM president in 2014, said: “The Catholic Impact Investing Collaborative was established in November 2014 as an informal ‘neutral space’ for people to come together, share a meal and stories, and build relationships based on their spiritual as well as financial commitment to impact investing. CIIC began in the U. S. Midwest, soon grew to the Northeast and other areas of the U. S., and now is global in scope.



“We are so blessed to be a part of this vital pro-life movement in light of the desperate condition of the planet. We are able to use our resources to focus on sustainability, to preserve and grow all life on Earth, aligning ourselves with those whose values match our Mission and Focus, our Franciscan spirituality.”

That spirituality is reflected even in the ways the FSM approach giving and investing.

“The sisters have adopted and refined an approach to giving that is rooted in Franciscan values and reflects the same emphasis on healing and presence that has always been a part of their ministry over the past 150 years,” Ryan said. “The sisters approach their giving with a sense of humility, recognizing that those closest to the pain know what’s best for their communities.

“Our job is to be present, to listen, and to provide what support we can without asking anything in return. They have led by example, building a philanthropy that is truly unique, rooted in trusting relationships with the people we support.



St. Louis Mutual Aid

“Their leadership in impact investing—and helping others find their way to impact investing through CIIC—is helping change how the Catholic Church thinks about its relationship to wealth.”

Through their philanthropy and impact investment, the sisters have been able to extend their presence and compassion to others worldwide, living out the Mission that brought Mother Odilia to St. Louis 150 years ago.

Graced Crossroads: Collaborative Governance

In 2007, the newly elected FSM Leadership Team spent time evaluating the stability of the congregation and came up with some unexpected, even startling conclusions.

The fact that no new members had joined the congregation was no shock; during the April 2001 Chapter the sisters had accepted the scarcity of vocations and resolved to work on revitalizing the congregation by pursuing the FSM Mission and living out their faithfulness to the Gospel.

But with no new members, the average age of the sisters would continue to rise, and the number of sisters with the gifts and the energy to serve in leadership would continue to decline.

Additionally, the motherhouse, St. Mary of the Angels Convent, was in need of extensive repairs. And with its many staircases, terrazzo floors, and numerous unsecured exits, it no longer met the needs of an aging sisterhood.

Back in 1998 the FSM had proactively joined with four other congregations of sisters to establish The Sarah Community, a retirement facility offering all three levels of care to laypeople as well as women religious. So when St. Mary of the Angels Convent closed in 2010, the sisters who had been living there were welcomed at The Sarah Community.

It was also time to transition responsibility for FSM missions and services to other hands. For Holy Family Birthing Services in Weslaco, Texas, the Leadership Team and the sisters who had served at the center over its then-25 years gathered there in September 2009 to celebrate its new leadership. Bellevue Meals on Wheels, which had operated from the convent for some 37 years, concluded with a celebration for all those volunteers. In a special ceremony in 2014, FSM released sponsorship of Almost Home and Women’s Place into the hands of capable laypeople committed to living out the FSM Mission and values.

Relinquishing sponsorship for SSM Health posed unique challenges. Until 2011, SSM hospitals and medical facilities had been led by the sisters; for 25 years, from 1986 until 2011, Sr. Mary Jean Ryan served as president and CEO of SSM Health. In August 2011, Sr. Mary Jean stepped down to allow lay leadership of the healthcare system. As she said to SSM leaders and employees, “It’s in your hands.”



*In 2002, Sr. Mary Jean Ryan, SSM Health President and CEO, accepted the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award on behalf of SSM Health. SSM Health was the first healthcare organization to earn the nation's top honor for quality management and achievement.
Photo courtesy of SSM Health*

But because the Franciscan Sisters of Mary had founded SSM Health and maintained canonical responsibility for ensuring that the system would remain distinctively Catholic and continue the FSM legacy even after the sisters were no longer actively involved, the FSM needed to establish a separate entity to assume that responsibility. The FSM Leadership Team worked with canon lawyers to create SSM Health Ministries, a Public Juridic Personality (PJP) to assume sponsorship of SSM Health. SSM Health Ministries, which includes laypeople as well as several FSM, officially assumed sponsorship for SSM Health on November 16, 2013.



Photo courtesy of SSM Health

But SSM Health Ministries will also evolve. Someday the PJP will no longer have FSM representatives. Charged with promoting the FSM Mission, the Members of the group undergo formation in Catholic social teaching, the mission of Catholic healthcare, and the legacy and vision of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary.

Selling the convent, moving the sisters, and relinquishing sponsorship of its ministries, however, were just the preliminaries. The major issue—how to provide for the thriving of the congregation until all the sisters were gone—remained.

Sometimes you have to reach out and re-imagine the future.

Re-Envisioning Leadership for the Congregation

“As in many things, while we know the why, the who, how, and what aren’t always so clear, so it requires taking the initial steps, not knowing for sure where they will lead,” Sr. Susan Scholl said. “This is surely an act of trust that the Spirit is leading us somewhere as long as we are listening, discerning, and willing to step out in faith.”

In 2012 the FSM Leadership Team began to explore options. What would happen to the FSM congregation when no sisters were available, willing, or able to serve in leadership?

“We recognized that the model being promoted at that time, covenant relationship, wasn’t workable for many congregations as most were in the same situation as we—not enough sisters for long-term leadership, *needing* a partner versus *becoming* one,” said Sr. Susan, who has served in FSM leadership throughout the transition.

The FSM began looking for creative alternatives. They invited the leadership of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O’Fallon, Missouri (CPPS), to meet with FSM leadership, as this congregation was beginning to face some of the same issues. Together they began exploring possibilities.

In November 2013, FSM and CPPS leadership teams met with canon lawyer Kelly Connors, PM, to discuss a new approach to governance, and the outcome of that meeting led to the development of Collaborative Governance (CG), an approach which “preserves the identity of each participating institute so it can offer its gift to the world until it comes to completion.”

Within Collaborative Governance, FSM (and each other participating congregation) maintains its own identity, Mission, and Focus. Each congregation contributes to the cost of Collaborative Governance—salaries and benefits for shared management and governance staff, costs for shared office space, etc.—but otherwise retains control of its own finances.

It is a unique concept that fulfills the needs of many of today’s religious communities.



“Many congregations have been focused on handing off management functions such as finance, communications, and health care services, but some have yet to come to the realization that governance functions (those of an elected leadership team) are as, if not more, significant,” Sr. Susan observed. “While many still have large numbers, the number of sisters who will be available to fill leadership positions in the future is seriously dwindling.”

“Thus Collaborative Governance addresses not only the need for management services but also the more critical need for governance for religious congregations. It is this governance—and its requirement as identified by Rome and as it appears in Canon Law—that is needed for them to remain a religious congregation in union with the Vatican and the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.”

As each congregation is at a different stage in the process, each makes its own decision about when to transition to Collaborative Governance. According to Sr. Judy Bell, FSM President since 2018, the criteria include:

- Congregational decision not to recruit new members;
- Commitment to and substantial progress toward divestment or alienation of major properties;
- Formerly sponsored ministries now autonomous;
- Formerly sponsored associate programs now autonomous;
- Procedures and guidelines established for any assets not needed for care of the sisters and for operational expenses;
- Congregation is debt-free;
- Congregation is self-funded and able to assume financial responsibility for being a member of CG;
- Existing staff transitioned into being a part of CG staff;
- Congregation will engage in collaborative processes regarding Governance;
- Congregation will agree to comply with the Statutes and Bylaws; and
- New Participating Entities shall be in their final term of elected leadership.

“FSM at this time (2021) has met all the criteria,” Sr. Judy said.

Most of the management positions for Collaborative Governance have been filled. In late summer 2021, a person was also chosen to fill the role of Chair or Commissary. “The search for the Chair/Commissary position has had a number of disruptions and setbacks, especially during the Covid pandemic,” Sr. Judy observed. “We anticipate making a formal announcement concerning our CG Chair in January 2022.”



Janice Bader, CPPS President; Allison Hewitt, CG Executive Director; and Judy Bell, FSM President

Choosing the Chair signals a major transition for FSM. Sr. Susan said, “The more significant transition will be the move to a Chair/Commissary versus what we have always known—our President/Mother General and council/team. It can be difficult for us to imagine this as this is a model we have never known. It is, however, the critical piece of CG, and I trust we will move together into this phase with the same faith, trust, collaborative spirit, and positive attitude that we have known thus far in our journey!”



What happens after the Chair has been chosen? As explained by Sr. Judy, “After she is hired, that Sister will be in formation, learning the congregations’ Mission and culture; working alongside the Leadership Teams to understand the organizational structure, policies and procedures; getting to know the sisters; and working with the CG management team, etc., etc., etc.

“When the Sister Chair indicates her readiness to move into the canonical position as Commissary, the Congregational President will send a formal letter to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) to ask Rome to appoint her as their Commissary.” Once the Commissary has been appointed, the current FSM president and leadership team will step aside.

“Each congregation needs to complete the process individually,” Sr. Judy went on. “FSM will be the first congregation to make this request as the current Leadership Team’s term expires in September 2023. The CPPS will have a Leadership Team until May 2025.”

Collaborative Governance has evolved, gradually taking shape as the sisters have worked through the issues—expected and unexpected—that have arisen. “We spent a fair amount of time changing, tweaking, and adjusting the bylaws and canonical statutes, but eventually we had to get down to the real work and details of implementation,” Sr. Susan said. “This is maybe when the reality set in!!

“I would describe the move from concept to reality as ‘holding it lightly’—while we know where we want and need to go, we also continue to be open to changes and modifications.

“As we work to put in the details, the ‘meat on the bones,’ we also recognize that we are living into something special; it isn’t just a series of transactions and changes. We recognize that, for ourselves and our staff, the actual living into CG may require evolving from what was put down on paper a year—or even a month—ago!”

Opening to a New Way of Being



Collaborative Governance is truly a new way of being for the FSM. But FSM leadership has worked hard to make sure the sisters are kept involved and informed. Transparency has been a major value throughout this process. Sisters' concerns have included:

- “What will be the ‘glue’ that holds us together in the future?”
- “Who’s going to bring us together for meetings, celebrations, fun times if we don’t have a leadership team?”
- “How do we plan for opportunities to strengthen and deepen the bonds of sisterhood?”
- “How do we maintain our vitality and sense of future and mission instead of falling into a mentality of closing down?”

“These are the deeper challenges and questions we need to continue addressing, sorting through, reflecting on,” Sr. Susan said. “Overall, the sisters have been open and accepting, asking pertinent questions and seeking needed information, but positive in this movement.

“I think this is related to the deep work we have done, individually and congregationally, over the past 10 to 20 years. We have developed our contemplative sitting and honed our discernment process; we have held many, many deep conversations and sharing sessions; we have seen how the Spirit has truly been at work in our lives and the life of the congregation; and we have arrived at the realization and strong belief that this is what our God and Creator is calling us to at this point in history. With this faith, we make bold decisions and continue our forward movement!”



Once again, continuing in the footsteps of Mother Odilia, the FSM have proactively recognized and acknowledged an upcoming potential crisis, bravely facing the signs of the time and pioneering a solution that meets the sisters' needs and extends the FSM legacy of living God's love in an ever-evolving world. And once again they have paved the way for others to follow in their footsteps.

"We hope and believe that we are creating a model that other congregations in similar situations will find helpful," Sr. Susan said. "The groundwork has been done, even though implementation takes thought and effort. Our legacy is our values and our presence, in the many ways we live and communicate these. Our legacy also will include the work we are doing with our collaborators to attend to care of creation. Collaborative Governance frees us to give our full attention and efforts to living out our Mission and Focus of being Jesus' healing presence in many and varied ways, and caring for creation."

150 Years and Counting . . .

Over the past century and a half, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary have touched the hearts and lives of far too many individuals to count, in ways that span a broad spectrum of possibilities. Sisters and staff shared some perspectives on how the FSM have brought their gifts of presence, compassion, and vision to the world these many years through their heritage of healing.



Sr. Susan Scholl observed: "We will never fully know the total difference our history has made in each of the lives that have been touched, from those early days of Mother Odilia and Mother Augustine to our philanthropic efforts now, to all those lives that our ministries have touched over the years.

"We talk about the butterfly effect or the old saying that 'for want of a nail, the war was lost.' In other words, trivial things can have major impacts. But we don't always think of how each of our relationships, even if only in passing, may have changed the course of life, of our many lives. That is the healing ministry at work.

"Our history is *us*. Just try to think of all the people you have encountered in one month, much less a lifetime! We have truly been the healing presence of our God day after day, encounter after encounter. The intentionality with which we do everything has the power to change anything and everything."



Sr. Judy Bell said, “The word *presence* was not used to express our early sisters’ ministry of hospitality, health care, and attentiveness to the signs of the time. Their presence, however, was known in the people’s homes where they cared for those ill, while they walked the streets among their St. Louis neighbors, and when they gathered with others to worship and pray at St. Mary of Victories Church or at St. Alphonsus Liguori Church, or ‘Rock Church’ as it is known locally.

“Over our 150 years of presence, by our individually and collectively with others bringing Jesus’ love, healing, and compassionate care, we have made a difference in the lives of individuals, families, civic communities, and educational institutions. Our healing ministry, our presence today, extends to Earth, our common home, and its inhabitants in collaboration with others. As women of faith and with the intentionality of living the Gospel, we have endeavored to continue to be responsive to the signs of our times and to the needs and concerns of future generations.”



Sr. André Evanicsko commented, “The ways in which we have improved the lives of others are profound and way too many to list. Hundreds of thousands, millions of individuals were saved from death or healed or given a better quality of life, not just physically but mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. This had a ripple effect, as they then helped their families and therefore their local communities.

“Improvement in all facets of life was made possible by a group of women who banded together to share faith, creativity, talents, and support of one another as they forged on with determination and perseverance in the face of great hardship, personal sacrifice, and even death, all fueled by the love of God and others. In doing this, these women gave witness to the love of God.”



Sr. Sandy Schwartz, FSM councilor, said, “To the people on the riverfront, we made a difference when we saved their lives. To the people in Oklahoma and all the other places where we served, we made a difference providing health care services. To the people who came for years to the breadline at St. Anthony’s in Oklahoma City, we made a difference. Hopefully we fed not only bodily hungers but their need for acceptance and love. To the African American physician who had admitting privileges at St. Mary’s Infirmary, we made a difference because each could apply for membership in the American Medical Association. To all those persons designated ‘Our Dear Lord’s,’ we made a difference. And to all those to whom we’ve been a friend, a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, a very present presence, we have made a difference.”



Sr. Jeanne Derer agreed: “FSM made a difference—and we were changed, too—when we reached out in many ways over 150 years to courageously embrace the cries of the poor and be their advocate, and now especially to hear and respond to the cries of our suffering common home.”



Sr. Sherri Coleman, FSM councilor, observed, “I don’t know how many sisters have gone before me, and I don’t know the extent of the good works they did or how their presence brought healing. I do know that when I witness a sister’s presence and simple actions of care, I am so impressed and grateful. If I multiply this by hundreds, I am overwhelmed by how we each interpret and live out the charism of our heritage and share it in a variety of ways. Any sister living during these 150 years has witnessed to that charism in small and great ways. Wherever our sisters have been present, that place in the world is better for their having been there.”

Ryan Strode, FSM Mission and Focus Program Director, agreed: “FSM has made a great difference through your decision to think differently about the financial resources at your disposal through investments, through your decision to divest of fossil fuels and to return these resources to the community. I believe FSM has begun a movement within the Catholic Church globally that is changing the church’s relationship with and how it thinks about money and wealth.

“We see the fruits of your leadership and your willingness to share your story and the experience that you’ve had. And I think we see evidence every day that it has taken off globally. More and more people in your position are thinking differently about the role of wealth and resources in our work.”

The FSM have had an impact in so many areas of life—health care, visionary leadership, education, compassionate care of creation, collaborative governance.



For Sr. Rose Dowling, the impact of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary extends far beyond the specific services the sisters have been called to provide. “From the beginning, we kept discerning the needs, moving through them and passing them on as we kept discerning our next move. That’s from the very beginning. That was always where we’ve been and moved along. I believe we’re prophetic, innovative, and collaborative. Particularly with impact investing, I think we are quietly prophetic in an innovative way.”

The Franciscan Sisters of Mary have continued courageously for 150 years, sensitively reading the signs of the times and responding compassionately to the whisperings of the Spirit.

And they are prophetic still, finding new ways to lead even now—creating the Collaborative Governance model, forging new paths in impact investing and directed philanthropy, leading the way in caring for our common home.

God is not finished with them yet:



“For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare, not woe! plans to give you a future full of hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

Near the FSM offices stands a sculpture of Sarah, the wife of Abraham.

Sarah, pregnant in spite of her advanced age, stands tall, radiant. She laughs, embracing the future and all it brings. She is confident, grateful to God for the blessing granted her, open to the new journey that stretches before her.

She stands, a brilliant image of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary.

The Franciscan Sisters of Mary continue courageously into the future, listening for the promptings of the Spirit and open to the new paths and journeys that lie ahead for them. Like Sarah, they embrace the future always with faith and sure trust in God—and deep joy.



FSM *Timeline*



November 16, 1872	Mother Mary Odilia Berger and five companions land on St. Louis Riverfront
1877	St. Mary's Infirmary, the sisters' first hospital, opens
1878	Yellow Fever epidemic; 23 sisters volunteer to go to Memphis, Tennessee, and Canton, Mississippi; only 18 return
October 1880	The Sisters of St. Mary of the Third Order of St. Francis is accepted as a congregation by the Vatican
October 17, 1880	Death of Mother Odilia
January 1894	Mother Augustine Giesen and six sisters leave to establish the Sisters of St. Francis of Maryville, Missouri
November 1929	St. Mary of the Angels Convent opens
1933	St. Mary's Infirmary re-opens as a hospital serving African Americans; African American physicians and nurses staff the hospital
1946	First African American women enter the congregation



March 10, 1965	Srs. Antona Ebo and Eugene Marie Smith join in the march to the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, in protest to Bloody Sunday
May 13, 1985	The Sisters of St. Francis of Maryville and the Sisters of St. Mary of St. Louis vote to reunify
1986	SSM Health Care system is founded, uniting the sisters' hospitals within an administrative system; Sr. Mary Jean Ryan becomes President and CEO of SSM Health, serving through August 2011



August 2, 1987

The Sisters of St. Francis of Maryville, Missouri, and the Sisters of St. Mary of the Third Order of St. Francis unite, becoming the Franciscan Sisters of Mary



1998

The FSM join four other congregations of women religious to establish The Sarah Community

Chapter 2001

The FSM agree not to pursue recruiting new members but rather to revitalize the congregation

2010–2011

The FSM close St. Mary of the Angels Convent, moving the sisters living there to The Sarah Community and moving the administrative offices to Bridgeton nearby

Chapter 2011

The FSM adopt Focus of compassionate care of creation in collaboration with others and establish a team for Mission and Focus

2009–2014

The FSM relinquish responsibility for FSM missions and services (Holy Family Birthing Center, Women's Place, Almost Home, Bellevue Meals on Wheels)

November 16, 2013

November 2013

SSM Health Ministries assumes canonical responsibility for SSM Health FSM leadership, with canon lawyer Kelly Connors, PM, and leadership of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon, Missouri (CPPS), begin development of Collaborative Governance (CG)

2014

FSM divests completely from fossil fuel

November 2014

Catholic Impact Investing Collaborative is founded

June 2019

CG hires Allison Hewitt as CG Executive Director

August 27, 2019

Collaborative Governance is granted Articles of Incorporation, establishing CG as a civil entity

Thank You

We are deeply grateful for all of you who over the past 150 years have blessed us with your gifts, your presence, and your prayers.

Through times of joy and times of trial, you have been there for us and with us. We have known your support and felt the strength of your prayers. Through all these years, we could trust that we never walked alone—truly you have been the face of God for us.

Know that as we continue courageously on the road ahead, we carry you with us. We will keep you always in our hearts and in our prayers, thanking God for the grace that each of you has brought into our lives.



The Franciscan Sisters of Mary will be offering this prayer throughout the celebration of our 150th heritage anniversary year. We invite you to join with us in praying this prayer.

IN GRATITUDE FOR 150 YEARS

As women of faith committed to being hospitable and a healing presence to all creation, we Franciscan Sisters of Mary joyfully give thanks for our heritage of 150 years in mission, led by a faithful God. We undertook ministries in new places because of the trusting relationship you nurtured with those sisters who came before us, Protector God.

You have remained a faithful guide and reliable partner, loving us to the core of our beings. Your steady presence was and is palpable as you supplied steady streams of companions, colleagues and, now, collaborators with whom we join efforts. God of Abundance, as we offered our assistance to others, we have been overwhelmed by blessings of mutuality, and our hearts overflow with gratitude.

It remains a privilege to respond to your call as our discernment reveals. Led by grace, journey with us as we go forward, O Holy One.

Open our senses to today's needs within your Creation. Teach us what is still ours to do! Give us courage to respond with boldness and strength of spirit.

Source of Our Being, surround us with your care as we move into a yet unknown future.

May it be so. Amen.

FSM Leadership Team; July 2021



Franciscan Sisters of Mary

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Mission and Focus of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary



The Mission of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary is to be the presence of the loving, serving, compassionate, healing Jesus.

Flowing from our Mission, we focus the power of our intention on compassionate care of Creation in collaboration with others.

Not every sister could attend the 2019 FSM Chapter. Those who were present brought their baskets; those who were unable to come wrote their hopes and wishes for the Chapter on slips of paper, all of which were brought to Chapter and included in the prayer circle throughout the week.