

SCHOOL SISTERS OF SAINT FRANCIS  
135<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 4-26-2009  
St. Joseph Convent (Motherhouse)  
Milwaukee, WI

The streets were filled with revelers of all ages and sorts. A small group of young men were making their way along the crowded way when an old beggar, shabbily dressed, and smelling from the foul order of the streets stopped one of them and looked him square in the eye and said Pax et Bonum...Peace and Good—a common greeting of the street people of the time—and he held out his hand in anticipation of the expected remuneration. The shocked lad was caught short by the old beggar's sudden appearance. He felt a shudder go through his body as if the beggar was looking right into his soul. His friends urged him on towards the next stop on their merriment and he moved beyond the man with a hasty gift and a heavy heart.

Once again a voice was heard—not unlike the voice of the old beggar. This time asking: “whom is it better to serve; the king or the servant of the king?” The lad responded: “The king, certainly.” With that the lad deserted from the army where he was preparing to enter a battle to protect his state. He was promptly arrested.

After greater travail and much soul searching, incarceration, and sickness, the lad found himself wandering the countryside outside of his city and came upon the ruins of a small church. The remaining sanctuary wall held a crucifix and from it the lad heard the voice of the beggar and the voice of the army speaker yet again—“Francis,” the voice of Christ invited, “repair my church which is falling into ruin.”

In one way or another Franciscan men and women rejoice in regaling listeners with the story of Francis' remarkable conversion. There is joy because it is truly the story of what kind of change can overcome a person who is open to taking the Gospel seriously. Franciscans see in Francis a clear image of one so imbued and so identified with the Person of Jesus Christ that the joy of telling his story always leads to joy in telling the story of Jesus Christ, Himself.

PAX ET BONUM. The famous greeting of Franciscan men and women around the world—Peace and Good—Pace e bene—Paz e bien—in whatever language, it still conveys a deep meaning and spiritual significance to sons and daughters of Francis and Clare of Assisi.

Franciscans humbly share a great sense of honor and joy at being bearers of the Gospel. We understand it to be the grist of our lives and the mandate for our mission in the name of Jesus Christ for the sake of the Church. So, it stands to reason that today we pay special reverence to some very remarkable Franciscan

women and honor their great and significant contribution to this Archdiocese and to the Universal Church.

The clergy, consecrated Religious and faithful laity of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee join voices in the joyful Te Deum that we sang at the beginning of today's Mass. Holy God, we Praise Your Name! Thanks be to God, for the gift of the School Sisters of Saint Francis for the 135 years of faithful and dedicated service here and throughout the world!

Thanks be to God for Mother Alexia, Mother Alfons, and Sister Clara, who responded to the invitation of Archbishop John Martin Henni at the very foundation of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Thanks be to God for the brilliance and artistic genius that Mother Alfons instilled in the congregation so early on and that is still joyfully and enthusiastically celebrated in this magnificent chapel that she inspired and constructed. What a spiritual home—a true Franciscan heart—for the spiritual life both of the sisters and the countless numbers of people who have sought safe haven here from the cares and temptations of the world and through the diligent and spiritual concern and direction of the Sisters here have found peace.

Thanks be to God for the authentic adherence to the Gospel, the inspired feminine intuition, and the good common sense that led to the groundbreaking health and human services engendered in such institutions as Sacred Heart Sanitarium and St. Mary's Hill Hospital that pioneered in treatment for the care of the elderly and those afflicted with mental disorders. These institutions of the School Sisters have become benchmarks for other institutions that followed their Franciscan sense of care for Christ who is sick and poor among us still.

Thanks be to God for artistic, intellectual, and musical talent that has given the community Sisters Jutta Hollenbeck and Augustine Steele and through them the gift of Alverno College that still stands as a bulwark of authentic Catholic higher education in our city and state. For Sisters Cherubim Schaefer and Theophane Hytrek, whose renowned liturgical music has been a source of inspiration and prayer to countless numbers of faithful Christians.

Thanks be to God for the School Sisters who look to the wider picture of world mission and the authentic care of the poor and the challenge of teaching the Gospel in so many countries. The growth of the Church and the teaching of the faith through schools and ministries in near and far places of the world, in Yazoo City, Mississippi, China, Honduras, India and Costa Rica the ministry of the School Sisters has brought PAX et BONUM—Peace and Good—all over the World. What a tremendous gift and response to the charism of the original founders of the Congregation and the true sense of Franciscan witness.

Here in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, we rejoice and give thanks to God for Mother Corona Wirfs who helped build and found St. Joseph High School in Kenosha, a fine school that looks forward to bright promise as it expands and grows in Kenosha even today. The works of the Sisters in numbers of Catholic Schools here, including Queen of Peace, St. Lawrence, and St. Mark's in Kenosha—not to mention the countless numbers of schools in which the Sisters have taught and have left their own wonderful legacies. The numbers of priests and consecrated Religious who have served and still serve the Church who credit their vocations to the School Sisters! The history of Catholic education in our country cannot be written without paying tribute and respect to the work of the School Sisters of Saint Francis.

The worldwide Franciscan community rejoices with you, Sisters, as you celebrate this anniversary of your founding. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee pays you deep respect and honor for the good works you continue in our midst. We are so blest that the Motherhouse of your worldwide congregation is here and that you welcome us so magnificently. We are proud of the partnership you allow us to create with you here at the St. Joseph Center where a significant part of the Central Offices of the Archdiocese are located. This is truly a place of hospitality and Franciscan joy!

The Church rejoices with you today, Sisters. You are still among the largest groups of women Religious in the world and you are still faithful to the basic elements of your foundation and the true spirit of Franciscan Religious life. Our prayers are for you that you may remain faithful and true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and continue to live the message of the Incarnation with the passion and strength of Francis and Clare for the Church. We pray for saintly vocations to your community and offer sincere respect and care for the elder and infirm Sisters. We pray that those who have gone before you will continue to be a light and a guide for you that will go strongly and boldly into the future.

PAX ET BONUM!