

SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS
of Penance and Christian Charity
Sacred Heart Province

Mission Statement

"Awake to the transforming love of God
throughout creation,
we compassionately serve all as sister and brother
by our contemplation, presence,
forgiveness, hope and joy."



SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS
Penance & Christian Charity
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CELEBRATING
75 ^{PLUS} YEARS
OF GOSPEL WITNESS!

Awake to the transforming love of God throughout creation, we compassionately serve all as sister and brother by our contemplation, presence, forgiveness, hope and joy.



A Little Bit of History ~ A Little Bit of Story

1939-2014

ALSO CELEBRATING OUR ASSOCIATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY!



Artist, Sister Regina Boyle, osf

Retelling of our story by
Sr. Mary Joy Peter

from a compilation from various chronicles and other sources,
with contributions and editing from a number of sisters on the
75th Anniversary Committee

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pastoral care, visiting the pueblos and offering classes in sewing, knitting as well as classes in Catholicism. In 1977 Sacred Heart Province turned the clinic over to a congregation of Mexican sisters; Misioneras de la Caridad de María Imaculada, out of San Luis Potosí, Mexico.

A number of years later, Sr. Antonia would find herself in a party of scouts looking for yet another location in Mexico—a place where the Gospel could be lived out amidst the poor. Together with St. Francis Province and Holy Name Province—in 1991 the three United States provinces began a new community in Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. With the passionate encouragement of Don Samuel Ruiz, Bishop of the Diocese of San Cristobal, and the gentle tutelage of Sr. Consuelo Arana (from St. Francis Province) a formation community began to thrive, and continues to maintain a strong non-violent Franciscan presence in a region that is caught in unrest, out-right violence and political oppression.

A few last words...

The Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity have experienced the goodness of God in every year and in every place they've ministered. This short recounting is truly a "A Little Bit of History ~ A Little Bit of Story" and is not meant to represent all the ministries nor all the sisters who labored for the kingdom! Every ministry was (and is) part of the larger picture—we are laborers in the vineyard, all tending that which God sets in front of us. The fruit of these labors live today in the lives of innumerable individuals who have been touched by the Spirit (and the sisters) and have then become Gospel Witnesses, serving the poor, being the voice for the voiceless, healing the wounded and empowering those who struggle under oppression and violence. God's kingdom is here and not yet ... but together we push on and follow Jesus in the footsteps of Francis, Clare and Magdalen.

A special thank you to Sr. Mary Joy Peter who lovingly combed through thousands of pages of chronicles that we might have a little bit of the history.

Thank you to all the editors who 'tweeked' these pages!

Thank you to Donna Kroll for gently putting it all together!



THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS

Sacred Heart Province

... 1939 - 2014 ...

Three holy women stood on the banks of a mighty river flowing east. They stood looking to the west where other holy women lived and labored, scattered across rolling, wooded hills, beyond the great river Mississippi, to the undulating prairies of the Great Plains, flowing to the feet of the majestic Rockies, over snowy peaks to the deserts, lush valleys and on to the great western ocean. It was time for the One to become Three. For the distances were vast, travel slow and arduous and the number of Franciscan holy women growing. It was time for a change in how to govern such far scattered missions of gospel service to a growing nation.





For many, many years, our missionary sisters had been serving the Native American people on two South Dakota reservations. In 1886 the sisters helped establish the St. Francis Mission on the Rosebud Reservation. Three brave women: Mother Kostka Schlaghecker, Srs. Rosalie Schulte and Alcantara Fallon, traveled by train to Valentine, Nebraska, along with Fr. Emil Perrig, S.J. where they were met by Fr. Jutz. On March 24th they arrived at the mission and were welcomed by a very large gathering of Lakota Sioux and called Sina Sapa (holy women). There the weary sisters immediately set about baking bread to feed everyone.

Later, Mother Kostka reflected on the stark beauty of the prairie surrounding the mission and the warm welcome they were given by the people who had every reason to resent the newcomers. In the recent past, white people had meant broken treaties and terrible disease which killed so many of the native peoples. She and the other sisters would have to prove worthy of that warm welcome.

The boarding school opened, the children arrived, and their lives changed forever. How hard they worked through freezing winters and the heat of summer drought that brought prairie fires roaring over the dead grasses. One such fire destroyed most of the mission in 1916. In 1918 the Spanish flu ravaged the mission, compounded by food shortages, and no available medicine, many of the people died without any comfort but the nursing and sacramental care that was provided by the sisters and priests.

Sr. Liguori Mason walked the girls dorm, listening to the rasping coughs and groans of the sick children. There was never enough heat to reach the corners and never enough food to fill stomachs, nor medicine to ease the suffering. It was during times such as these that sister felt discouragement dancing on the fringes of her heart. She continued her journey around the beds, pulling blankets a little tighter and laying her hand on little foreheads, as much to comfort as to check for fever. With a sigh, she turned to leave and lose herself in prayer and be comforted by the Great Spirit.

St. Francis Mission grew and other sisters came to serve the growing school and mission community. The native people began to take over lead-

Over the 75 year history of the building, Marycrest Convent was used for many ministries, serving many people, all done from the deep dedication of the sisters. After years of discernment, consultation and groundwork, in 2009 the Marycrest Motherhouse at 2851 West 52nd Avenue in Denver was closed. A new site for provincial offices and new housing for some of the sisters was established on the old site of the Queen of Peace Oratory, which was razed in 2009. In 2012, after 6 years of negotiations and an economic downturn, the old Marycrest Motherhouse and a majority of the acreage surrounding the building at 52nd and Federal, was sold to developers who shared the sisters' values. The sale heralded a new day of urban renewal and a vision of neighborhood where community and sustainability are the focus. Truly, Aria Denver began a new era in North Denver, with Sisters of St. Francis maintaining a solid presence on the northern edge of that development.



Ministries in Mexico

The Sisters of St. Francis didn't always stay close to home, and a missionary spirit was alive and well in a number of sisters! In 1965 Sister Muriel Witte, Provincial Minister, learned about the poor Indian people of Orizabeta, Hidalgo, Mexico, and after visiting there became convinced that Sacred Heart Province could be of some assistance. The first sisters who volunteered to work at the Mission were Srs. Sheila Carroll, Maristella Gusman, Carmelita Telles, and Joanne Killey.

A small vacant house in Orizabeta was opened as an outpatient clinic by Sr. Joanne. A little later Ken Witte, brother of Srs. Muriel and Monica Witte built a structure for housing the sister nurses and several overnight clinic rooms for patients. Sr. Carmelita and later Sr. Antonia Anthony worked in

was envisioned ... then brought to reality by Srs. Antonella Troshinsky, Constance Tierney, Rosita Marquez and Mary Paul Nevins. Located on the Marycrest campus, MHS served the North Denver area with a passion and



after graduating over 1100 students, closed in 1988 after 30 years. Many sisters taught and helped foster a sense of Catholic values and leadership to the young women who attended. The fruit of these lessons in leadership are evident across the state where women alums stand up...governing, guiding, leading the way!

Feeding the poor ... spiritually and figuratively have been the ministry of many, many sisters in a myriad of settings in Denver. In a time of spiritual thirsting the Catholic Biblical School was born. This program, designed for the ordinary person in the pew, was founded by Sr. Macrina Scott in 1982 and became widely known as a premier program of scripture study.

Other ministries grounded in the Denver area went further afield to bridge cultures and countries. In the 1960's the DeSmits Indian Center supported those Native Americans who found themselves in an urban culture polar opposite from their own. And in the early 1990's, Bridging Hope was founded under the direction of Sr. Sen Nguyen, to provide assistance to the indigent, ill, disadvantaged and disabled women and children in Viet Nam. These and other ministries all sought one thing ... to serve those who stood on the margins ... to give hope and seed joy.

While Sacred Heart Province withdrew from most healthcare ministries in the late 1990's the site of the old Marycrest High School on the Marycrest property begged to be used. After a great deal of communal conversation and discernment, Marycrest Assisted Living came into being. Named Harmony and Serenity, the two buildings served two different populations: one served the elderly and the other served those who needed care but were under 55 years of age. This population served those struggling with MS (Multiple Sclerosis), Traumatic Brain injuries, or other debilitating conditions as middle aged adults. With an eye toward serving the poor Marycrest Assisted Living opened it's doors in 1998 and accepted (as they do today) individuals with low income. This ministry continues today under other sponsorship.

ership positions in their tribe; and in 1968 the school was turned over to a school board and the boarding school closed. Our sisters continued to live and serve there in a more limited capacity. Many beautiful and holy women lived and served the Lakota people since the beginning, suffering much and giving of themselves in selfless service. In 1981 the sisters withdrew their co-partnership with the Jesuits after 95 years. Some of the sisters at St. Francis during this time were Srs. Agnesita Krenzel, Coronata Manion, Carmelita Telles and Colleen Mahoney. Srs. Helen Borszich and Muriel Witte were the last to remain there in pastoral work. Sr. Muriel is now buried there among the people she loved and served so dearly, and was deeply loved in return. She said the simplicity of their faith and generosity in their poverty was an inspiration for her own life. Now we hold in grateful memory the years of laughter and tears, teaching and serving in the spirit of Francis and Claire, the wonderful people of the St. Francis Mission.

Holy Rosary Mission—1888



Two years later, Bishop Martin Marty, OSB, asked the Jesuits to bring faith and education to the Pine Ridge Reservation of the Oglala Sioux. Fr. John Jutz, from St. Francis Mission on the Rosebud Reservation, came and selected a spot called the "Garden of the Reservation" because of the pine studded

ridges and hills, located a 100 miles west. However like any reserve, the U.S. government deemed suitable for the native people and the area never encompassed a major river or arable land. The same drought and fires plagued the new mission where the earth was gumbo when it rained and dust when it didn't. The first buildings were made from the clay of this earth, formed into rough bricks.

Two Franciscan sisters, Sisters Kostka and Alcantara, experienced in building a mission came from St. Francis Mission to help found the new mission. On July 30, 1888, Holy Rosary Mission parish and boarding school formally opened to much celebration and welcome from the native people.

The new mission was born during a time of unrest on the reservation. Late in 1890, the intensity of this unrest stemmed from broken promises of humanitarian aid. The people were starving. The unforgiving land was not hospitable for farming; crops failed in the drought and cattle died. No one listened to the cries of women and children or the pleas of the missionar-

ies. In desperation the despairing people listened to Chief Short Bull and his Ghost Dancers which promised to bring back the buffalo and the freedom of the past. Many believed and danced.

The U.S. government decided force was needed, instead of food and medicine to restore calm to the Pine Ridge area. The soldiers of the 7th Cavalry surprised the band of 300 women, children, and men in their winter camp at Wounded Knee. On a frozen, late December afternoon, the shooting began; no one was spared as even the wounded were left to freeze to death overnight. Heaven alone witnessed the cries and tears of the dying.

At the mission school, Mother Koska gently rocked the fussing child on her lap, murmuring prayers softly to comfort herself as much as to soothe the child. She wondered for the hundredth time if she had made the right decision to stay during this terrible time of unrest and violence. The sisters had been asked to leave for their own safety. But what else could she have done? All the sisters were of one mind in staying with the Jesuits to care for the children. A cold wind chilled the room as she listened to the soft breathing of the now sleeping girl. She didn't know what the morning would bring, yet trusted God to watch over and protect them. Gently she laid the sleeping child in her bed and returned to the chair, listening, praying and ready to respond if the alarm was sounded.

Gradually the people of the reservation returned from hiding and the rhythm of life resumed, but the horror of that winter was never forgotten. The government never admitted responsibility and sought to diminish it. The constant interference over food and clothing contracts were a source of stress for the mission and the people they served.

The great flu epidemic of 1919 spared the mission and the boarding school as it closed its doors to the outside world. Hundreds perished across the prairies with no available medicines or medical care. The suffering was so great. The missionaries baked bread and brought it to homes of the stricken along with the Eucharist.

Chief Red Cloud died in 1920 and was buried at Holy Rosary Mission alongside the Black Robes and Holy Women, who he had invited to come and teach his children. He was a man of deep faith and had suffered alongside the missionaries.

When Fr. John Jutz died in 1924, he was remembered as the builder, the first superior of Holy Rosary Mission, and the peacemaker in the many diffi-

along the dining room wall. There was certainly a loss of privacy on the part of the sisters as tradition was sorely tested in the process of serving such needy people. This work was the passion of Sr. Muriel Witte who possessed real love and care for the poor. A food bank was also started to help feed those in need. Food was donated by grocery stores after Sr. Rose lectured them that it was a sin to burn or throw away good food. Over the forty years, the housing came to be known as 'Damen House.' During this time, those who were ministered to also changed: first served were prostitutes, then newly released prisoners, then victims of domestic violence, homeless families and others. The food bank provided clothing, information and referral, job training, etc. and became Marycrest Resource Center. Other sisters ministering at Damen House were Srs. Carmelita Telles, Mary Teresa Linnehan, Julia Benjamin, and Donna Biacco, and many others over the years.

The Catholic Charismatic Movement found a home at Marycrest. Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) was offered the use of the All Saints Dormitory and this partnership continued for several years. Gradually, this developed into a ministry of hospitality at Marycrest and many sisters were involved in the work. Srs. Eustacia Krenznel, Elenius Pettinger were the early directors until 1996 when Elaine Feldhaus became the director of what was now called the Marycrest Retreat and Conference Center. In 1998, Sr. Mary Joy Peter took over and offered retreats, spiritual direction to individuals, meeting space, and over night accommodations to large groups. The Retreat Center became known for the comfortable rooms and great food. The most often heard comment was about the sense of peace and holiness they experienced. The Retreat Center was closed in November of 2006, as well as the food bank and emergency housing area. Damen House and the Resource Center were closed in September 2005. The King Adult Day Enrichment Program (KADEP), which rented space in the old dormitory, stayed on until the property was sold.

Over the years other sisters founded and worked in a variety of ministries that have touched the poor and spread the Good News of the Gospel. The uneducated and undereducated have been the focus of a number of endeavors, including the Adult Education Tutorial Program founded by Sr. Cecilia Linenbrink in 1964 and Bienestar Family Services, a program of the Archdiocese of Denver and Centro San Juan Diego, founded by Sr. Alicia Cuaron. Both of these programs continue to work with immigrant populations, supplying literacy training, ESL and GED education.

Responding to the need for Catholic education for the young women in North Denver, Marycrest High School, a college preparation school for girls,



needs of the sisters and lay people in the Denver area and so the Queen of Peace Oratory was built in 1968 on the northern property. It was the fulfillment of Sr. Marian Rotherham's dream and she was the first director there. Fr.

Edward Flaherty, SJ, served the sisters and guests for many years as chaplain. Sr. Esther Jasper came to Queen of Peace and found it a wonderful place for prayer and contemplation in her retirement from Novice Director. She stayed there for many years helping in the operation and direction of the Oratory. Sisters from other orders and our provinces were welcomed. Private directed retreats were introduced and Sr. Geraldine Clifford was instrumental in the beginning of this new form of making a retreat. The Jesuit Retreat House in Fraser, Colorado, was available for the sisters each summer for a retreat in the rarified, pure air of the beautiful Rockies.



The flood of 1965 left many people homeless and in need of shelter. Sr. Muriel Witte, the provincial superior at that time, opened up the dormitory as a temporary shelter for those in need. In 1970 there were fewer sisters living at Marycrest and the second floor west wing was opened to nine elderly women who shared in the life of the sisters. Sr. Borromea Befit took care of their needs and later Sr. Helena Hager served in this ministry. The garden level dormitory became emergency housing for homeless families in 1971. Sr. Xavier Kirscht taught the children and worked with Sr. Rose Wentz who managed this new ministry of the sisters. The families shared meals with the sisters and at one time there were six baby highchairs lined up

cult situations which arose during the early years of mission settlement. The Franciscan sisters were the unsung heroes working with the Jesuits in humble and selfless service to the Lakota people. A few of these were Srs. Clarentia, Serena, Dolorosa, Magdalene, and Monica who worked for years feeding, sewing, and teaching the children. Young women from both Indian missions came to religious life and joined in our mission work. They were Srs. Genevieve Cuny, Marie Therese Archambault (Sr. Francis Mission), Bernadette Clifford, and Geraldine Clifford, who later served our province as Provincial Minister and the founder of St. Francis Home for neglected children on the Pine Ridge. One important person to visit the reservation was Robert Kennedy in the spring of 1968. He was respectful of their culture and the problems facing the reservation such as poverty and joblessness.



A knock on the convent door brought Sr. Monica Witte to open it to an elder grandmother with two small children clinging to her skirt. She was one of many grandmothers raising their grandchildren for absent parents. The woman spoke quietly to Monica for several minutes, showing the beadwork in her hands. Nodding, Monica walked first to her bedroom where she found a few dollars and then on to the general closet in the sisters' dormitory, where a collection box of old clothing and the sisters own coats, shoes and other personal things were stored. Making her selections, she muttered a prayer of gratitude for the generosity of her sisters. Later she would tell them of the family in need and the happiness on the faces of the children as they left with cookies and other food as well as the items of clothing. Sr. Monica closed the door, holding the beadwork which she would take to the next Province meeting and sell to her sisters. The money she received would then come back to the mission where it would help other needy people. Sr. Monica was a teacher for many years and well known and respected for her generosity and love for the people.

In 1971 a lay school board was formed which gave the people active participation in the decision making for the future of the school. Open span classrooms, the Montessori School for pre-school age children, and new buildings became a reality as Fr. Earl Kurth, a great friend to the sisters, and the development director for the mission, raised the necessary funds to ensure the future of Red Cloud Indian School, as it was now named. In

1980, the boarding school was closed and the children were bussed to and from school each day. A new elementary school was built to provide room for the growing school. The Centennial celebration in 1988 was attended by many sisters who had served at Holy Rosary Mission and its schools, along with visitors from Germany, Poland, Netherlands, and Brazil. Srs. Magdalene and Dolorosa were dearly loved by the people and honored for their many years of service to the people they loved.

One hundred years of work and suffering, joys and sorrows for both missionaries and the Indian people passed. The Lakota people came to their own understanding of a destiny uniquely their own. The white Christian influence took a toll on the culture and heritage of the Lakota Sioux of the great plains, but it also empowered them through education to self determination for themselves what their future would look like. The renaming of the school to Red Cloud Indian School was an important step in honoring the people and the great chief who wanted only the best for his people.



Responding to the needs of children (often the poorest of the poor) has always been at the heart of the ministries of the Sisters of St. Francis. Responding to the desperate needs of children who were orphaned or left without parental supervision due to illness, incarceration, abuse, neglect etc., in 1983 Sr. Geraldine Clifford began St. Francis Home for children on the Pine Ridge Reservation at Manderson, South Dakota. Srs. Geraldine, Betty Adams and Colleen Mahony were the first to open their arms and provide a loving, safe, nurturing environment for Lakota children whose lives had been touched by trauma. Many sisters and sister's family members worked to build the dwellings which would become "home" for many. As of 2014, this is the last of the ministries sponsored by the Sisters of St. Francis, which still operates under the compassionate eye of Sr. Geraldine.

St. Mary's Academy, O'Neill, Nebraska – 1900



The wild, wild west might best describe the beginnings of the Irish settlement which came to be called O'Neill after its founder General John O'Neill in 1874. Fr. Michael Cassidy was influential in taming this rough pioneer town and growing the Catholic faith of the settlers. This strong

Marycrest - Denver, Colorado

Mother Lidwina Jacobs, the administrative head of the North American sisters, came to Denver in January 27th, 1938, for visitation with the sisters at St. Elizabeth's Convent. There were to be three provinces in the United States in order to better serve the sisters working across the country. She was stymied when she found the recommended land in Broomfield to be unsuitable and located too far from Denver. She went on to California and was successful in buying land there for the new western province. In April, she returned to Denver and inspected the Winslow estate in north Denver and found it to be exactly what the sisters were looking for. The twelve room house, on the 20 acres boasted a barn, chicken coop, garden and an orchard producing cherries, grapes, apples, peaches and corn. On May 4, 1938, she bought the land for \$25,000 and the new Sacred Heart Province was established! The elegant mansion was converted into a Franciscan home for the sisters. Mother Erica Hughes was the first provincial superior and Srs. Bernice Danley, Immaculata McCarthy, and Humiliata Krenznel joined her. The first postulants, Anne Hayes and Monica Held, came in the fall of 1938 and their number was gradually increased to seven. Franciscan and Jesuit priests served as spiritual guides and celebrated mass for the sisters.



In February of 1950, the Painter residence became the new provincial administration building while the stucco house was transformed into the novitiate to accommodate the growing number of young women entering religious life. Sr. Elma became provincial superior in 1951, while Mother Erica Hughes returned to

St. Mary's in O'Neill, Nebraska, where she died in 1953. The beautiful Marycrest building was built in 1958 and ten years later was increased in size to its present dimensions.

With Vatican II, Marycrest opened its doors to the poor and became a spiritual resource. The province saw a need for space to serve the spiritual

In response to the needs of the people, Bishop Duffy of Grand Island encouraged the sisters to build and expand the school. Early on it became a well used space: St. Agnes Academy and the sisters soon hosted a clergy retreat for the priests of the Kearney diocese. The sisters worked to provide a warm and welcoming space for them, which they appreciated, especially the good food. In 1928, the first two boys graduated and many others followed over the years.

During these years, the sisters suffered many illnesses and even tuberculosis as they worked to ease the suffering of the people they had committed their lives to serve in this vast land. The depression hit the Alliance area hard as they experienced terrible drought and dust storms which buried fields and destroyed livestock. Many farmers and ranchers lost their land and this effected the whole area's economic stability. The sisters rationed food and the parish helped support the school.

By 1961 the boarding school was closed and the oldest part of the building was razed. Soon after, the parish assumed ownership of the school and its support. Several sisters continued to teach and work in the parish. Grades 1 – 6 were closed and the higher grades occupied the building until the 1977 boom of the railroad industry brought new families and business, which led to the reopening of the grade school. Over time the enrollment at the high school dropped off as the public school could offer more options in terms of sports, art, band, etc. Sr. Joan Linenbrink was principal at St. Agnes from 1979 to 1986. The final high school graduation took place on May 13, 1988. In 1990 the oldest 1911 wing of the school was demolished and a new parish center built there.

Today, the sisters at Marian Residence have routine contact with groups of students from St. Agnes—and love the “adopt a sister” program that pairs the sisters and 5th graders from the school. This, in addition to the thriving Associate program, daily mass at Marian Residence for the people of Holy Rosary Parish, volunteer work at the school, parish and other settings provides strong witness to the way of St. Francis and the values of Mother Magdalen.

Other schools the sisters staffed and operated in the area were in Rushville, Nebraska, 1947 to 1966 and Scottsbluff, Nebraska, 1955. Our sisters left both the school and hospital in the 1980's.

community desired a school and to that end a school was completed in 1890. But before the Dominican sisters could arrive, the building was destroyed by fire.

The dream persisted and three sisters and brothers came from St. Francis Mission to begin work on a new building, financed and staffed by our sisters. The new school opened in September of 1900 and was named St. Mary's Academy. Girls came from near and far to live in the dormitory; and the boys joined them as day students for the elementary grades, but needed to transfer to the public school for the upper grades. As the number of students increased, the school was expanded several times to accommodate them. The boarding school was no longer needed by 1960 and the parish took over responsibility for the educational facility. Many of our sisters were once boarders at St. Mary's and later served as teachers there. (Sr. Mary Joy's father and siblings all attended or boarded there, too.)

Things changed rapidly in the 1960's; a new convent was built in 1961 and a new High School building in 1962. The grade school took over the space vacated by the upper grades and even offered classroom space for four classes from the O'Neill Public School.



In 1965, fire destroyed this grand old building in a matter of a few hours on a cold February evening. The students had all left for the day when smoke and fire erupted and the sisters and firemen tried to rescue as many desks and books as possible before it became unsafe to do so. The graduation gowns were lost along with other priceless things, and even the valiant efforts of Sr. Mary Carroll to save them wasn't successful as the firemen refused to let her enter the building again. When the smoke cleared, the building was a total loss.

The generous spirit of the people once again blossomed into fruit as books and spaces were made available for the school to continue. The O'Neill Public School and the National Guard Armory opened their doors for the grade school children with little or no rent charged for the spaces. Thankfully, fire insurance coverage was able to provide for the rebuilding of a smaller, single level, new elementary school building. Long time pastor, Fr. Timothy O'Sullivan, was a staunch supporter of our sisters and the school until his death in September of 1966. Others who are remembered for their tireless service to St. Mary's School are: Mother Kostka Schlaghecker, first superior and founder who came from St. Francis Mission, as well as Sisters Leona Haid, Mathilda Scharitz, Justine Michels, Alphonse Kamshoff, Dolores Disch, Elma Vifquain, Boniface Hufnagel, Immaculata McCarthy, Antonella Troshynski and Mary Carroll. Barbara Birminham was a generous benefactor and teacher for many years. The sisters were blessed with many more generous donors throughout the years; too many to be named here.

The people of the O'Neill community continue to support the schools today, as they always have throughout its long history, remembering:

*The smoke rose ominously over the darkening sky,
as the last of any sunlight died to the west.
The grief was palpable as the flames devoured
and spewed ashes on the sorrowful community gathered,
as at a wake for the grand and graceful building.
There was the golden staircase melting into the fire
which licked its graceful curves leading
to where the sisters prayed.
The stairs which dared students to traverse unseen
or pay the consequences for such disobedience.
Yet, clinging to the smooth and polished banister,
stepping close to it on each step,
it was possible to reach such heights as allowed by
the golden staircase, and find the holy place above.
So many memories wrapped round the community that night,
joys and sorrows, hope and faith,
even the savage flames failed to destroy.
The fire would have died sooner that night,
if all the tears shed had been dropped on it.
Then, as in the beginning, hope and new life would
rise once again from ashes.*

ten cared for the sick free of charge, accepting produce and meat as payment. This continued during the food shortages of World War II and the blizzard of 1948-1949. The kindness and self-sacrifice of the sisters did not go unnoticed, and resulted in surprising conversions. In 1958 the Licensed Vocational Nursing (LVN) Program was opened and Miss Ellen Jensen was the first director. A new hospital was built in Box Butte County in 1973. St. Joseph Hospital remained in operation until 1976, when it was converted to a gerontology center for the care of the elderly. Srs. Mabel Meng, Elenius Pettinger, Ruth Weber and Miriam Rubel carried on the Franciscan heritage of service to the people of Alliance. Sr. Kathleen Dillon was the first administrator of the gerontology center. By 1980, St. Agnes Convent became Marian Residence and our elderly and infirm sisters were moved there. A financial crisis was experienced once again during these years and by 1987, the gerontology center was no longer subsidized by the province. St. Joseph's closed its doors in June of 1989. It was demolished in 1989-1990 and the parish bought the land and turned it into a playground for the St. Agnes School students. The sisters continue individually to minister to people in the nursing homes, the assisted living facilities, and the local hospital.

Marian Residence continues to serve many of Sacred Heart Province's retired sisters, especially those who have need of nursing care and support. Their interaction with the larger Alliance community and Holy Rosary Parish is a blessing for everyone.

Healthcare was a passion for the sisters and Alliance was not the only setting in Nebraska—the other healthcare site the sisters were intricately involved with included St. Mary's Hospital in Scottsbluff which the sisters sponsored between 1945 and 1977.

St. Agnes Academy, Alliance, Nebraska

In the autumn of 1908, Sr. Agnes Academy was opened to students, even though the building would not be finished for another week. The first boarder also arrived at this time and within a year there would be 19 boarders and 125 day students. A new wing was built in 1911 on the growing school. Holy Rosary Parish lost their church to fire in February of that same year. The flu epidemic of 1918 followed on the heels of World War I and the community of Alliance suffered its effects: many died, including six boarders.



Kenmare Community Hospital, Kenmare, North Dakota

The sisters took over sponsorship of the Kenmare Hospital through St. Joseph's in Minot in 1980. This allowed the hospital to expand services and become more self-sufficient. Restructuring by the province in 1982 resulted in the formation of Sacred Heart Corporation, later called Marycrest Health System, which provided supervision and consultation to the healthcare facilities sponsored and owned by the sisters throughout the province. This sponsorship ended in 1998 when St. Joseph's in Minot was sold. Srs. Paula Archuleta, Francis Grubb, and Miriam Rubel were instrumental in providing a Franciscan presence for the patients and community in Kenmare.

St. Joseph Hospital, Alliance, Nebraska



St. Joseph's was the first of several hospitals in what would become Sacred Heart Province. Alliance was a railroad center by 1911, in a community that already had a small hospital, which was owned by the Mercy Sisters and had four doctors providing service to the patients. By May of 1911, the Mer-

cy sisters left Alliance and Mother Agatha McMullen, superior of the St. Agnes Academy (1908) and a nurse, came in to help. She oversaw the building of a new wing in 1916. Alliance weathered the great flu epidemic of 1918 with many suffering from the illness and others dying. It was a most difficult time for the sisters working in the hospital and the school. Soon after this crisis was behind them, the hospital experienced opposition from the state government over taxation. Sr. Ligouri Mason with the help of legal council was successful in winning a tax exemption status for the hospital. In 1920, a school of nursing was opened and for 30 years provided a vital service to Alliance and the surrounding area. Mother Rosalia Eversum died in November of 1921 of spinal meningitis, which caused a health concern for the community. She is remembered as a holy woman of deep prayer and spiritual support for the work of the sisters. In 1926, and again in 1928, new additions were built on to the hospital as the community continued to grow. Accreditation with the American College of Surgeons was granted July 19, 1926. Sr. Theola Vetter became head of the nursing school in 1930.

Through all these years, the sisters continued to provide healthcare for the poor. During the drought and dust of the depression years, the sisters of-

St. Anthony Hospital – 1950



It was in 1950 that Mother Erica Hughes broke ground for the new hospital in O'Neill, Nebraska. St. Anthony's Hospital opened in 1952 with 35 beds and was a model health care center for the entire region. Mother Erica was an incredible force for good in the early planning and continuing support of this hospital. She died there in 1953 leaving it in the capable hands of such sisters as Srs. Bertrand Fleming, Dolores Disch, Ludmilla Hagar, and Fara Mertins. Two lay persons,

Joe and Lucille Dufek, continued to work at the new hospital for years. They had worked with Dr. Julius Brown prior to St. Anthony's, in an eight bed house. Sr. Carmen Baumeister oversaw the expansion of the hospital which would encompass new services and space to accommodate more patients. In 1973, Charles Scheinost, a lay man, became the administrator and in 1983 Sacred Heart Corporation took over the management and sponsorship of St. Anthony's. Then in 1998, the sisters sold the hospital. Srs. Francis Grubb, Rita Neyens, and Margaret Schneider were the last of the Franciscan sisters to work in the hospital under the sponsorship of the Franciscans, yet even today Sr. Colleen Mahony provides a compassionate touch as Chaplain and the Director of Pastoral Care. Today, the modern hospital (Avera St. Anthony's) stands as a tribute to the commitment and generosity of the Sisters of St. Francis and the fulfillment of their work.

In 1984, the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity began an Associate Program. Lay men and women, single and married were invited to join the sisters in a spirit of collaboration. These individuals, many of whom had known and worked beside the Sisters for years, committed themselves to following the call of the Gospel in the spirit St. Francis and Mother Magdalen. The first group of associates were received in Denver and shortly after, the second group of associates were received in O'Neill, Nebraska. They continue to hold a Franciscan presence in the community to this day!

St. Joseph Hospital – Minot, North Dakota



In 1901, four Franciscan sisters from Tiffin, Ohio, arrived in Minot to establish a hospital there. However, there were many difficulties and the small group split, with two recalled and two asking to join our sisters who came from Havre, Montana. A bigger building was needed and Mother Seraphim

persisted in her determination to purchase the needed land at a public auction. She achieved her goal and began building a new hospital which opened in 1918. That was the year of the great flu epidemic and Minot was hard hit with many illnesses and deaths. The sisters worked tirelessly to nurse the stricken, and not one of them succumbed to the flu.



A school of nursing was established in 1911 to train the much needed nurses for the growing hospital. By 1926, our sisters were also teaching at St. Leo Parish School to provide an education for the children in this growing city. At this time, new requirements by the medical association (College of Surgeons) caused difficulties for St. Joseph's Hospi-

tal and culminated in the departure of ten doctors who built a Protestant hospital down the street. This struggle between the two hospitals continued through the years.

The depression years of the 1930's brought drought and heat which destroyed crops and brought businesses to bankruptcy. At one point during these years, seventy-five percent of the patients were on Federal Relief Programs. The sisters provided health care free of charge for many people. They also provided spiritual nourishment and care for the families of patients. Many holy sisters worked tirelessly over the years to make St. Joseph's successful, some of these sisters were: Srs. Eveline Franier, Clotildis Wegner, Helena Hager, and Borromea Befit. Sister Theola Vetter was honored for her commendable service as a nurse and for her many years both in the hospital and the emergency room.

In 1958, it was decided by the three U.S. Province Provincials to use the St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing as the training center for all the sisters from the three provinces who wanted to be nurses. For this reason, the school name was changed to St. Francis School of Nursing. The teaching staff was composed of sister nurses from all three provinces. New additions were built in 1962 and 1965 further expanding the range of services provided by the hospital and increasing the number of beds. The St. Francis School of Nursing closed in 1971 after 60 years of training nurses for the community and sister nurses for the U.S. provinces. A total of 727 nurses graduated from the School of Nursing. In 1969, a baccalaureate nursing program was established at Minot State College through the directorship of Sister Mabel Meng and the support of the Sisters. It continues to flourish to this day.

Finally, in 1998, due to the lack of sisters to manage and work in the hospital, as well as the continued competition and conflict in the medical field, St. Joseph's Hospital was sold. The presence of the Sisters of St. Francis in Minot, North Dakota, had been long and fruitful and they left a legacy of faithful care for the community.

The Franciscan spirit continues in Minot through the presence and activities of the associate members as well as the St. Joseph's Community Health Foundation. What a gift both of these are to the people of Northwestern North Dakota.

It was blustery, snowing and twenty degrees below zero, as Sr. Theola hurried across the snow covered emergency area. A call had come saying an ambulance was on its way, and as the head of emergency services that night, she was the one on call. An accident on the slippery roads had caused the injuries that the ambulance was now bringing to the door. Sister prayed that God would also be there to guide the doctors and bless those injured. This was her life, always ready to take care of whoever came to St. Joe's and be a calming presence in the midst of what often was chaos. She slipped through the doors and into her white coat as emergency personnel sprang into action. A few minutes later it had been assessed that the family had bumps and broken bones but would recover. Sr. Theola decided to check on a couple previous patients she had cared for earlier that day. For now, a prayer of gratitude filled her heart. Maybe it would stop snowing by the time she walked back to the convent.

