

FRANCISCAN SISTERS, T.O.R.
of Penance of the Sorrowful Mother

Under His Mercy

MAY 2016



MERCY FOR HUNGRY HEARTS: *Florida State University Women's Spring Break Mission*

"Clearly the work of the Spirit is being done at Florida State."

BY SR. MARY GEMMA HARRIS, T.O.R.

Samantha Arvin was a little nervous. She had never been to a soup kitchen before.

When she and the other women from the Florida State University women's spring break mission, "Mercy for Hungry Hearts", visited Jubilee Soup Kitchen in Pittsburgh, PA, Sam had the task of putting food on trays for the homeless who were coming in. Then she saw him—one of the men.

She walked over and struck up a conversation. They talked about life and their shared love for travel. Sam had been having a rough semester, and her encounter at the soup kitchen and other places on the trip gave her a new experience of love.

"I was very closed in to what I was going through," she said. "When I opened up myself to others and just allowed the Lord to work through me, I realized it wasn't all about me. There are so many people that need so much love."

Sr. Della Marie Doyle, T.O.R., and Sr. Eliana Day, T.O.R., our two sisters serving at Florida State this year, brought 18 students and two Catholic Student Union staff on the trip, a 15-hour drive from Tallahassee to Pittsburgh.

Angela Gaughan, a youth minister at St. Bernard's Catholic Church in Mt. Lebanon, near Pittsburgh, helped organize the trip and chauffeur the women throughout the week.

"At all of the sites they visited, the people were so touched by the generous spirit of the girls and the sisters," Angela said. "They were always willing to do whatever they were asked."

One of those tasks was cleaning at Angels' Place, a free childcare center for single parents who are full-time students. They served with the Little Sisters of the Poor at their home for the elderly, and helped other local families in their homes.

To Make Known God's Merciful Love

The trip also included a pilgrimage to the beautiful, old Catholic churches of Pittsburgh and the Holy Doors of Mercy they found along the way.

“They had a real joy for the faith, and it was neat to see that fostered so beautifully by Sr. Eliana and Sr. Della Marie,” Angela said.

Sr. Eliana said the conversations with the women made the trip a beautiful bonding experience. She said, *“It seemed like every time I turned around, someone said, ‘Sister, I have a question!’ I loved it, because we were able to form them in informal ways.”*

Sam, a junior at Florida State, loved the opportunity to spend personal time with the sisters, including a visit to our motherhouse in Toronto. *“I really experienced spiritual motherhood for the first time,”* Sam said. *“I saw you all living it out. You just wanted to love us.”*

WORKING WITH A SAINT

BY SR. RITA CLARE YOCHES, T.O.R.

Coordinator of Samaritan House Thrift Store and Emergency Food Bank



Courtesy of Franciscan University

Joe being honored last spring for his 25 years of service by Father Sean Sheridan, T.O.R., president of Franciscan University.

donations and multiple requests for food and clothing from “Jesus” in the distressing disguise of the poor, who has time to think about getting new floors?

But in September the solution came through one of our new volunteers, Joe, a former employee of Physical Plant Services at Franciscan University of Steubenville and a Third Order Secular Franciscan. I mentioned to Joe in passing that I wanted new floors at the store, and he took it upon himself to call Lowe’s to check on materials and prices for me. It was going to cost about \$10,000, a little too much for us. So, Joe called Vince Oliver, a manager in Physical Plant Services at Franciscan University, and asked for his advice. Joe came back to me with phone numbers of contractors who were going to give us the flooring at cost and make zero profit on us! In this Jubilee Year of Mercy they had been encouraged by Franciscan University’s President Fr. Sean Sheridan to use their talents to do works of mercy for others! WOW...what mercy!

Joe also had information about what type of tile flooring we should get. I picked out a coffee color because coffee is what our shoppers spill

The trip and its impact on the women from the Catholic Student Union was just one fruit of our first year on campus.

“Clearly the work of the Spirit is being done at Florida State,” Angela said.



Hanna Stegman of Florida State holding two boys of a set of triplets. Students helped the overwhelmed mom by cleaning and completing projects around the house.

the most at Samaritan House. The project got underway on Monday, January 4, thanks to a local youth group and some of our downtown volunteers who helped us get everything off of the floors and shelves. The floors were ready to be trampled on when we opened our doors for business on the following Monday, thanks to the men who worked so hard to put in the floors, and our volunteers Rick, Floyd, the Young family, and the Ice family, who helped us put the store back together.

The only problem was that Joe, the man who started this whole project, was now too sick to come in to the store and see the floors. I kept thinking he would get better and be able to come. Joe lived with constant pain, though you would never know it by the smile on his face every day and his calm, gentle and holy presence.

When Joe had to be admitted to the hospital, I decided to take pictures of the new floor and bring them to him. But the night I was going to go up to the hospital, I asked the Lord what I should do, and I felt I heard the Lord say, *“Stay here in chapel and pray.”* I said, *“Well then, Lord, you had better take care of Joe, because I was going to go visit him tonight.”* Joe died two days later. I was upset that I never got to visit him and show him the pictures of the new floor, the fruit of his labor. But, I realized my prayers for Joe that night in chapel were more efficacious for him than a visit would have been, and that he would not have been himself if I had gone to the hospital.

As I was driving the day he died, I started crying thinking that Joe never got to see the floors that we would not have if it weren’t for him. Then, it hit me—Joe is seeing the floors, and he does not have to look at them on a camera and he is not in pain while looking at them. Joe, the saintly man that you are, pray for us!



MERCY HAS EYES TO SEE: *Steubenville Mission*

BY SR. AGNES THÉRÈSE DAVIS, T.O.R.

This year's mission shirts say, "*Discover the Beauty*," printed boldly under a silhouette of the skyline of Steubenville. Looking back at the week I spent with Franciscan University students spending their spring break in prayer and service for Steubenville, I think the choice of motto was prophetic. As I introduced the students to the town and people I love, I came to a clearer understanding of what Jesus meant when he told his disciples, "*Blessed are your eyes because they see.*"

A few days into our mission this year, a student came to me. "Sister," he said, "*can I ask you something? Isn't it like totally depressing seeing this stuff every day? Doesn't it get heavy?*"

I had to think about that for a minute before answering. How do I feel about seeing so much suffering every day? Of course, there are moments that are just plain sad, like when you learn that a young woman has chosen to abort her child, or when you hear that a job opportunity fell through, or when the volunteer you've spent hours with doesn't come in to work because he's drunk again. But that's not what I see.

"No," I answered the student, "*It's not totally depressing.*" I went on to explain about the beauty I have discovered living and serving in downtown Steubenville. We who live at our mission house downtown like to say we are "*living the dream*" because we are blessed to spend



our days with the same sort of people that Jesus chose as his friends. If you read the Gospels, you will notice that most of the time Jesus was completely surrounded by people in need. He did not flinch from any aspect of human reality, no matter how raw, and in every person he saw something beautiful, something precious, and something worth saving.

Our relationship with Christ begins when we allow him to look at our particular human reality and discover the beauty there, hidden though it may be under sin and suffering. And as we learn what love is from Love Incarnate, we, too, begin to have eyes to see the beauty hidden in others.



REPRESENTING JESUS

BY ELISE CHABOT, POSTULANT

I recently had the opportunity to be on the Steubenville spring break mission team. My favorite part of my experience was the interactions that I had with the students throughout the week. I was blessed to discover the beauty of their souls,

which they so willingly shared with me. Several students opened up to me a lot, which is not something I initially expected.

People are often very vulnerable in sharing their hearts with sisters, and that often takes me by surprise. It is deeply humbling, because I know that the level of intimacy that took place in these conversations had nothing to do with myself and had everything to do with him whom I represent—Jesus Christ and His Church!

OHIO UNIVERSITY MINISTRY

BY SR. MARY GEMMA HARRIS, T.O.R.

We have continued our ministry with Ohio University's Newman Community, their Catholic campus ministry program. In March, Sr. Rita Clare traveled to the campus in Athens for a Newman Night, where she spoke on the philosophical and Biblical problem of evil—If God is good and all-powerful, why is there still evil in the world? She brought with her Shirley Kilonsky, the mother of one of our novices (Sr. Agnes Maria) and an alumna of Ohio University. Shirley shared her testimony with the students and encouraged them in their involvement in the Newman club and their reception of the sacraments. Sr. Rita Clare said, "*She called them on to greatness like only a mother can.*"



A group of 11 Ohio University students came to Steubenville for their spring break, led by their campus minister, Paul Riffon, the brother of one of our novices (Sr. Chiara Joan). They shared in our works of mercy at Samaritan House and visited Franciscan University of Steubenville. "*They were a great help,*" Sr. Rita Clare said. "*We love our Ohio U students!*"

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RETREAT TALKS ONLINE

All are welcome to enjoy our Lenten Retreat talks online under our website's "MEDIA" tab, "EVENT TALKS," and to view the pictures on our Facebook page.

Thank you to all who joined us for our Lenten Retreat, *"Immersed in the Father's Mercy."* Thank you to Fr. Tom Sparacino and to all of the priests who donated their time. We are keeping all of the retreatants and priests in our prayers and hope to see you again soon!

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"To Make Known God's Merciful Love"



UPCOMING JUBILEES

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS



In this archive picture of our Mary Garden are future Jubilee celebrants, Mother Mary Ann (far left) and Sr. Mary Rose (far right), along with Sr. Katherine (center) who celebrated her Jubilee last August.

In July 2016, the Franciscan Sisters, T.O.R., will honor and celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Vows of Mother Mary Ann Kessler, T.O.R., and Sr. Mary Rose Bratlien, T.O.R. Please congratulate them and join them in thanking God for his faithfulness and love!