



Under His Mercy **Mission House Update**

Steubenville, Ohio

"Christ has no body now but yours ..."

-ST. TERESA OF AVILA



BY SR. CHIARA JOAN, T.O.R.

Sister, I just met God!"

These are words that would make any sister rejoice! They were spoken to me one day by a homeless young woman who came into the thrift store and emergency food bank that we manage in downtown Steubenville. Of course, I secretly hoped that Alexis and her boyfriend Steven had found the perpetual adoration chapel downtown. In reality, they had "met God" through the kindness of others.

They had been wandering around with nowhere to go in the middle of the night when a fireman offered the fire station as a warm place to stay. Alexis and Steven gratefully accepted. In the morning, a policeman offered to buy them a meal. They truly felt they had encountered God's goodness in these two men.

It made me think about how I also represent God to the people I meet. If I have a generous and merciful heart, I can reflect the heart of the Father to each broken, poor, and empty soul. Ultimately, He is the one who loves them through me. I am His instrument.

I had this opportunity recently with a man named James. James was desperate. He was newly unemployed and had just been divorced. He also was the primary caregiver for his two children, a young boy and girl. James first came into the thrift store in the days leading up to Thanksgiving. He had nothing—no pots, no silverware, no cups. The other sisters and I did our best to give him items from the random assortment that is donated to the store.

A few days later, I got a phone call from a group at Franciscan University of Steubenville that wanted to sponsor a family for Christmas. I prayed about who should receive it, and I knew it should be James. When the donations came, the sisters and I delivered everything to his family. We were not the direct providers for their needs, but we were blessed to be the distributors. Things seemed to be looking up—they were settled into a home, the kids were doing well in school, and James had a job.

After Christmas break, however, things took a turn for the worse. There were layoffs at James' work after the holidays and he lost his job. The utilities bill was past due and he and his family were facing eviction. James and I made phone calls together for more than an hour one day, seeking employment or at least some generous soul who could help him financially in the short term.

As the weeks went by, he was able to find help to cover all their needs except one month's worth of rent. Everything hung on this rent payment. James and I made more phone calls, but we only ran into dead ends.

Soon, there was only a week left before James would be evicted. After I learned this, I returned home feeling defeated. I knew that James was facing not only the loss of his house, but also the ability to care for his children. I did the only thing I could—I went to pray with my sisters. As I prayed, I felt the Lord gently and firmly "tap" me on the shoulder. I was trying to be this man's savior. I was trying to fix the problem with my own knowledge and power, instead of letting God be a father to James. As much as I care about him and want his family to have all they need, the Father loves him so much more and even calls him "beloved". James is "worth more than many sparrows" (Mt. 10:31).

The next day, when James came in to the thrift store, I took a moment and asked the Lord how He wanted to provide for His son. I myself had nothing to give, but I knew that He had a plan. I felt an inspiration to call Franciscan University of Steubenville and make a plea for help for James' situation. Days passed. With fewer than 24 hours left before the eviction, a Franciscan University

employee came to see me. He said his department could not help, but he had felt in his heart that he was meant to personally tithe to this family. He wrote a check for the exact amount that James needed for rent.

It was such a beautiful experience for me. I felt that I myself had nothing to offer. I did not have the money or resources to help this man. But when I was able to surrender him to the Lord, God the Father was able to provide for him in ways that I could not. I played the role of a mother, simply receiving and giving through my hands what the Father wanted to give to James.

When I called James the next morning to tell him the news, he was completely in awe. He did not know what to say. Finally, after some time, he said, "I'm one lucky man, Sister". "No", I replied, "but you are one very loved man."

God is ultimate Goodness and the source of all good, but He chooses to use us to be vessels of this goodness and mercy. And when He works through us, we are not merely His puppets or

robots. He uses our free choices, our gifts, and our creative, unique response to accomplish His will. He uses our flesh and our humanity. I saw this so clearly with James and I see it in a thousand ways in our ministry all the time. It is true—every tired, hungry, lonely person has the opportunity to meet God in us, if we are willing.

By the way, Alexis and Steven are now settled in an apartment in downtown Steubenville and are anticipating the birth of their first daughter, another child of the Father.

Please note: If you would like to support the sisters to carry out their ministry to the poor, please send your donations to our community designated for "Mission Houses". You can also mark this on the envelope attached to this newsletter. If you want to make a donation that directly provides for the needs of the poor, please contact us and we can provide you with a list of possible charities.

Tallahassee, Florida

A Daughter of God

Two of our sisters currently serve at the Catholic Student Union at Florida State University. Here a recent graduate shares her experience with them.



Upon becoming involved with the Catholic Student Union, I discovered a new perspective on everything in my life.

Before I became involved with CSU, I spent most of my time going out to parties and drinking. I sat in my sin rather than offering it up to God. But after attending a CSU event, within moments I knew something was

different. I felt loved for who I was: a daughter of God. Regardless of my physical looks, every person I encountered saw me for my beautiful soul.

As I became more involved, I felt called to dive deeper into my spiritual life, and that brought me to the sisters. When I first met Sister Rita Clare, I felt a sense of relief. She wasn't what the world portrays as your stereotypical nun. She is funny, God-driven, loving, and very outgoing. She wasn't perfect, but she was full of so much love to give.

Before I began to meet up with Sister weekly, I thought that I had to do life on my own and depended on spiritual books to guide me. I would go to my priest with questions that a man could never fully grasp and it always made me long for more. I never thought

TESTIMONY BY ALI ALEMAN

that someone like a nun could have anything in common with me, but she did. Every obstacle I faced, Sister walked with me. No matter how ashamed I was of my sins, she loved me, and her relentless love broke my walls down and brought me back to the feet of Jesus every time. Before Sister, I would hide bits and pieces of myself from others, but her witness proved to me that we are all worthy of love and no matter what we have been through we can always look to God.

One obstacle I struggled with was my family's lack of spirituality, but I played Sister's witness on a podcast for my mom, and she now attends church and reconciliation weekly (something she hadn't done in over 20 years).

Although I don't feel a calling to the Sisterhood, Sister Rita Clare redefined my idea of a vocation and my view of life itself. We are all called to mission, no matter where we may be. Sister's strong love for everyone has inspired me to spread that love to others around me. Without this experience I would have never approached my home parish to start a youth group, and, more importantly, without Sister's guidance, I would have never thought I would have been worthy enough to spread my witness.

I will forever be grateful for everything that CSU brought into my life: the love, friendships, guidance, and hope. Everyone's witness is different, and Sister helped me to see the beauty in the brokenness of mine.

Ali graduated from Florida State University in December 2019 with a degree in hospitality. She is currently working as a sales representative for Techtronics and is discerning the possibility of starting a youth group at her local church in Jacksonville, Florida.

Florida State University Facts:

- Total undergraduate students in 2019: **33,000**
- Average number of students who attend Sunday Mass: **1,000**
- Average number of students at Catholic Student Union events: **300**

- Number of students in Women's Group (coordinated by our sisters): **115-125**
- Number of women in a small group (our sisters each facilitate one): **19 groups with 6-7 each**
- Students participating in annual women's retreat: **70**
- Students receiving spiritual advising each semester from 2 sisters: **about 40**

Gaming, Austria

Our 4 Greccio Mission House sisters serve students at Franciscan University's study abroad program through liturgical ministries, spiritual direction, and Women's Invested Small Groups. Here are testimonies from some of the students who have been impacted by their ministry.



Jerome
(WITH SR. JUNE BENEDICTA)

I was able to have Sr. Elizabeth as a spiritual director, and I felt so known by the Lord during those meetings. Sr. Elizabeth had this tangible spousal union with Christ that made me realize, for the first time ever, that there is a lot more to be said by simply being with the Lord rather than doing things in His name. Admittedly, as a guy, it's really hard to just "be" and not "do," and perhaps one of the greatest gifts I've ever had was witnessing the love Sr. Elizabeth had for her spouse. I felt loved by the way Sr. Elizabeth loved Jesus ... I do know that after realizing the power of being present to God, my prayer literally changed forever... somehow God wants me because I am His, not because of what He will do through me or the ways I try to please Him.



Madeleine

Since returning from Gaming, my prayer life has continued to grow in a steady but gentle arc. The sisters taught me how to more fully encounter Jesus in prayer and specifically in the Scriptures, which was always something I had struggled with. I'm still trying to become more consistent, but I've begun to prioritize Scripture and incorporate it into my daily prayer. The sisters taught me how to pray with Scriptures using the Ignatian method, and now I find myself in prayer lying on Jesus' chest at the Last Supper like St. John and walking towards him on the waters like St. Peter. In those and similar experiences, I'm learning intimacy and trust in more concrete ways, and it's all bringing me closer to Him.



Lee

I found that the small women's group taught me how to develop and maintain a consistent prayer life, and really provided me with the spiritual and emotional support I needed throughout the semester. I absolutely loved the community I found in that group and the constant encouragement from Sr. Elizabeth and the other girls. I think after that experience, I've learned how to pray with Scripture in a way that is interactive and personal. I still face a lot of struggles in my prayer life, but I know how to pray in a way that is fruitful for me and I think that's incredibly valuable.



Michelle

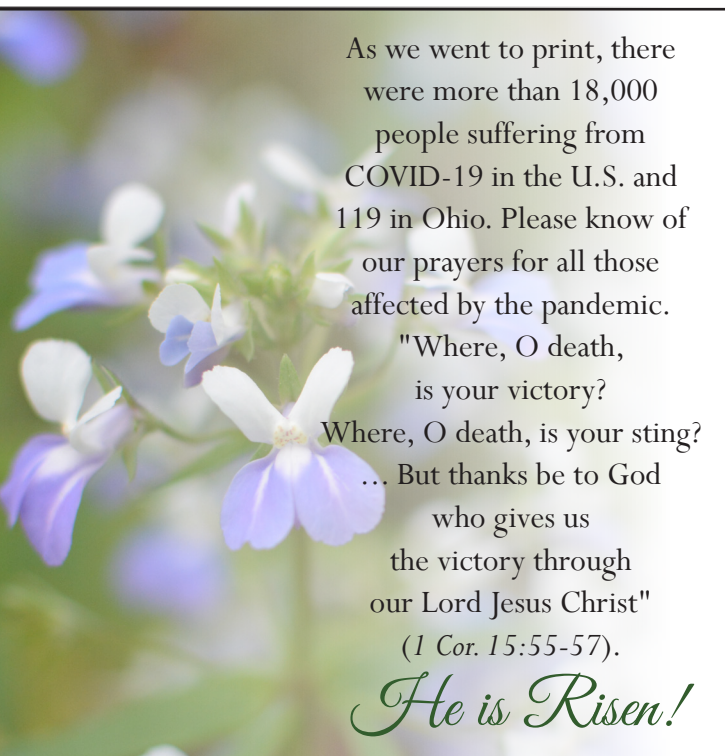
(WITH SR. AGNES MARIA)
Sr. Eliana was my spiritual director in Austria. She taught me Ignatian prayer, with is a method of praying and journaling with scripture by imagining yourself in the scene. Before I learned to pray this way, I never had a particular desire to read or pray with scripture. But learning this method of prayer totally changed that for me. I really liked imagining myself being with Jesus and experiencing his love through the different scriptures. Learning to pray this way has had a lasting impact. Currently, one of my favorite ways to pray is to do Ignatian prayer with the daily Gospel reading.

By the Numbers

- Students in Austria each semester: **about 180-220**
- Women who have participated in a Women's Invested Small Group since Spring 2018: **165**
- Spring 2020: **46** women in **5** small groups
- Students receiving spiritual direction each semester from 2 sisters: **22** regulars plus numerous "drop-ins"
- Average number of students involved in liturgical and Praise and Worship ministries each semester: **70-80**

FRANCISCAN SISTERS, T.O.R.
OF PENANCE OF THE SORROWFUL MOTHER
369 LITTLE CHURCH RD.
TORONTO, OHIO 43964
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As we went to print, there were more than 18,000 people suffering from COVID-19 in the U.S. and 119 in Ohio. Please know of our prayers for all those affected by the pandemic.

"Where, O death,
is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?

... But thanks be to God

who gives us
the victory through
our Lord Jesus Christ"

(1 Cor. 15:55-57).

He is Risen!

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*"To Glorify God and Make
Known His Merciful Love"*



UPCOMING EVENTS

GENERAL CHAPTER MAY 28-JUNE 10

Our perpetually professed members will take part in community meetings from May 28 until June 10. This also includes the election of our Reverend Mother and four General Council members.

What did Sister say? General Chapter?
Our own Sr. Jean Daugherty wrote a blogpost explaining General Chapter.

Look for it @

www.franciscansisterstor.org/news/blog.

*Please pray for us!
Come, Holy Spirit!*

SHARE HIS MERCY BENEFIT BANQUET SATURDAY, OCT. 24

The Difference Jesus Makes



Mass will be celebrated by Fr. Dave Pivonka, TOR; banquet will follow at St. Florian Hall in Wintersville.

Check our website in the coming months for more information!