

Franciscan Season of Giving

a word from Christine...

Beginning with the Feast Day for St Clare (on August 11), we invite you who form the community that is the Franciscan Spiritual Center to join us in a season of prayer and thanksgiving, reflection on the last year and preparation for what is to come.

We will share some of the voices of the Franciscan Spiritual Center. Our aim is to name what happens in this community, be curious and open to the presence of the Divine, and discern how we may nurture community for the benefit of one another and for the world.

We hope these stories encourage you to pay attention to what is sacred in your life. We also hope you will consider supporting us – financially as we seek to meet our year end obligations, in prayer as we dream about the future, and with your presence as we celebrate the gifts of community and intimacy with our God.



Change may be inevitable, but it's seldom easy. This past year it was the speed of change and the accompanying angst that surprised me most.

When I first accepted the role of director for the Franciscan Spiritual Center (a ministry of the Sisters of St Francis of Philadelphia), I recognized the remit included shepherding the ministry toward sustainability into an uncertain future. Survival into the next era was

not guaranteed. The Franciscan charism would need to be picked up by lay people.

I had skills and gifts to offer, I knew. There was a team in place, I could see. And abundant good will. But I knew those things alone would not be enough. Holy Spirit would need to take the lead, infusing life and meaning to whatever came next. The idea excited me even if I had no real idea what it would look like.

In the past year Sr Mary Jo Chaves, a foundational presence to this community, endured eight hospitalizations. It has been an ordeal for her personally and for the many of us who know and love her. I miss her presence in the office and her nearness in my life. I witnessed firsthand her mighty resistance to an evolving new reality. But for those of us who had the opportunity to accompany her, we also got to witness glimpses of her essence. As her body and her persona failed her, essence endured. It's the kind of gift that can come with the journey of elders - elders who know how to yield to Spirit.

Have you noticed how unwelcome change confuses boundaries? And wrecks our best laid plans?

This year my mom (and foundational presence in my life) also endured her own body's betrayal. When I moved to Oregon three years ago, I liked everything about my new home except the physical distance I'd created from my mother. So, I made a plan for that. But the plan was not enough. This year she and I absorbed the costs of that move.

This year, too, my country seemed to shift on its axis. I began 2025 with a stoic, determined acceptance of an election outcome. My fortitude did not hold. I've been surprised by the regular flow of tears, the flashes of anger, and my own demanding inner taskmaster. Thankfully, I've also experienced scripture that bubbles up within me unbidden and a prayer life that also shifted on its axis.

My colleague, Eileen Parfrey, met me in the hallway one day after a long week for both of us. As can happen when spiritual directors get to work together in the same office, she protected the confidentiality of her directees while also sharing an insight of wisdom. "I heard something today," she offered. "Caretaking is resistance." Tears flooded us. We recognized in that moment the dignity of the human person, which is often not acknowledged in a culture that values

productivity, efficiency, and consumption. I wondered if the vulnerability created in accompanying someone is not also a way we remain open to Spirit infusion.

This year we (in this community we call the Franciscan Spiritual Center) made more steps toward sustainability. We used our skills, gifts, grit, teamwork, and the goodwill of a larger community. I am delighted with our accomplishments.

- We welcomed 29 students into a new Franciscan training program for spiritual directors. (It was created for a broader student base and designed for sustainability between lead teachers. In doing so we recruited new mentors and teachers, thus expanding the depth of shared leadership.)
- We found new opportunities to accompany church congregations who want to deepen their listening in small group settings.
- We initiated a new bookkeeping system, (already improving our ability to work within budgets and demonstrate our fiscal reliability to donors and grant makers).
- We decided how much office space we really required (thus choosing to live more within our means).
- And the “we” who stepped up and contributed towards these efforts included a lovely (and sometimes surprising) mix of the willing.

That’s the business end of stewardship. Necessary and satisfying. And how am I understanding Spirit’s grace-filled infusions into these works? More and more, I rely less on the big and dramatic and, instead, am struck by subtle choices and yielded hearts.

This life is not easy. (No serious observation of the cross would suggest otherwise.) And, while it may seem counterintuitive when change is bearing down on us, learn how to be still and pay attention. Do not look away. Pray with your most honest self. Allow Scripture to nourish you and gird you up. Give what is yours to give, contribute your presence to the community of saints, and expect Spirit to surprise you.

May you be encouraged,

Christine Naylor

FSC director & spiritual director

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