

Franciscan Season of Giving

a word from Sister Hoa

Join us in a season of prayer, thanksgiving, and reflection.

For the next several weeks we offer you voices from this Franciscan community so you may pay attention to what is sacred in your life.



"Do you know how old I am?"

I smile, "Tell me."

"I'm 99. I'm the youngest in my family," she says with a soft giggle. She tells me this every time I visit.

When I first began my pastoral care ministry, I often wondered what I could say or do to ease the pain and loneliness I encountered. I believed I should have comforting words or some kind of answer.

Through the Spiritual Direction Training Program (SDTP) at the Franciscan Spiritual Center, I have come to realize that I do not need to fill the silence with words. What I can offer is simply a prayerful, loving presence. Presence itself is a gift.

Through this program, I have grown in ways I did not expect. Even though our classes and meetings are online, I experienced real connection with my fellow students and faculty. The experience helped me understand more deeply that God can meet us wherever we are, even through a screen. It also invited me to see others and myself with new eyes.

God has given me the grace to pause, and I am still learning to return to that pause. In that pause, I am invited to trust the Holy Spirit to guide the encounter. For me, the story of Emmaus reflects this. Jesus was already walking beside the disciples while they were still confused, grieving, and unable to recognize him. In the same way, God is already there, present before I arrive.

My role is not to bring God into the conversation, but to walk alongside another person, listen deeply, and notice with them what may be happening in their life. I do not need to fix anything. Sometimes, as we listen and walk together, we slowly come to recognize that God was already there.

Our studies have helped me see more deeply that every person is unique, created in the image and likeness of God, and reveals God's love in a way no one else can. Learning to pause has helped me live this more intentionally. When I slow down, I can more fully see the person in front of me, not only their vulnerability, but their belovedness.

I think of this when I sit beside the resident who tells me she is 99 and the youngest in her family. Then a few minutes later, she tells me the same story again.

But I no longer hear repetition. I hear a life that can never be repeated.

She is not just an elderly resident. She is a daughter, a sister, and a beloved child of God. I glimpse God's love in a way only she can reveal.

A scholarship made it possible for me to enter this program. The generosity of the Franciscan Spiritual Center and its supporters has become a blessing that extends beyond me. It enters every room

where I sit with someone who is ill, grieving, lonely, or nearing the end of life. It is present when I listen without rushing, when I resist the need to fix, and when I let them know that they are seen, loved, and never alone.

I am deeply grateful. Your support has touched my life. Through this ministry, it continues to touch the lives of others: one encounter, one pause, and one prayer at a time.

With deep gratitude,

Thanh-Hoa Nguyen

Sister in the congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, based in New Orleans

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