



*Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, NY*

Volume 8  
Issue 34

April 2023

## The Associate Alliance



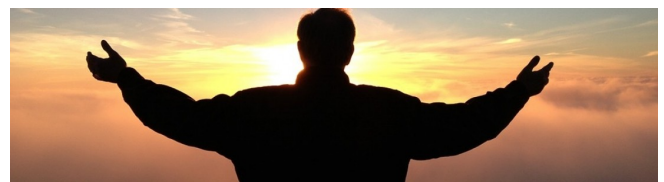
### Practice and Postures of Prayer

Who taught you to pray and what did you learn in Church on Sunday morning about prayer? Some of what we learned is good and some is not so great ~ even hurtful. Today, I invite you to think about a moment of prayer that was meaningful and life giving. Where were you? Recall what you saw, heard, smelled, and felt deep in your soul. For example, I had a moment of being in the need of prayer ~ I went outside and felt the warm sunny day, heard birds joining me in prayer, smelled the flowers, and my soul felt peace. In that moment I knew what Moses did, standing before a burning bush ~ that all ground is holy. Where was that moment you felt fully alive in God's presence? Enter that holy memory again.

In chapter 6 of Matthew, Jesus turns to prayer. Note that Jesus is preaching outside, in creation, so perhaps it makes sense we feel closest to God out in nature, especially as Franciscans. Jesus talks of almsgiving or offerings, public prayers offered where others eavesdrop on our dialogue with God, and fasting. Perhaps those categories don't quite fit what you have been recalling in your memories. After all, while there is still charitable giving, most of that can be done online or perhaps a check we put in an envelope. Most of us don't publicly pray. Fasting is a diet trend not a prayer topic, right?

And yet, I want you to hold these postures/practices close to your heart. Jesus is saying that prayer is more expansive than folding our hands and bowing our heads. Jesus is calling us to look at where you are offering your energy ~ time and talents ~ right now. Where and how you show up is almsgiving of your presence. What fills your calendar? Look over your checking account: besides the mortgage and utilities, where else did you share financial resources in the last month? Finally, fasting is not only refraining from food, but we can also fast from cynicism or criticism (of self and others). When I think of fasting, I love the quote from Viktor Frankl, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." That space is where you pause, or fast in our response-society, where a person has to reply to that text right now. How might fasting be sacred pauses throughout your day to listen for God's wisdom?

I invite you to be playful with categories of sharing our time, talents, and treasures; our words and actions; and fasting. I encourage you to be creative in backing away from the too much-ness of this world. May these words of Jesus open you to how these three practices/postures of prayer might connect you to the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of our lives every day. Amen.



Our associate Cicera Marino da Costa, member of the Araguacema community, succumbed to cancer on February 2, 2023.



Excerpt from Psalm 104

God the Creator and Provider  
Bless the Lord, O my soul.  
O Lord my God, You are very great.  
You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,  
and plants for people to use,  
to bring forth food from the earth,  
and wine to gladden the human heart,  
oil to make the face shine,  
and bread to strengthen the human heart  
The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly.  
In them the birds build their nests;  
the stork has its home in the fir trees.  
The high mountains are for the wild goats;  
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.  
You have made the moon to mark the seasons;  
the sun knows its time for setting.  
You make darkness and it is night,  
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.  
When the sun rises, lions withdraw and lie down in their dens.  
People go out to their work and to their labor until evening.  
O Lord, how manifold are your works!  
In wisdom you have made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.



Easter Prayer

Hope of all hopes,  
God of new life,  
God of resurrection,  
we come before you this Easter season,  
with our hearts rejoicing in you.  
And yet, despite our joy and hope,  
we feel the darkness around us.  
God, may we know your healing presence in that darkness,  
and may your light shine in and through us.



## **“And the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14)**

So let us go on an adventure through the Gospels. Some of you just thought, “Hmm, sounds intriguing, tell me more.” Some of you just thought, “Boy, would you look at the time, I really need to go... somewhere.” Wait! This just might be expansive and elastic. For some, you will find meaning in opening your Bible, reading the designated passage, and then the reflection. For others, reading the reflection will be enough. For still others, you may want to read one of the gospels slowly and prayerfully. There are as many ways to read the gospels as there are people reading this meditation right now. There is no “right” way or “correct” answer.

At this point, maybe you have found your Bible, opened it up to the Gospel of John and are thinking, why are we starting in John? Matthew comes first, shouldn't we start at the beginning of the New Testament? Great question! The reason is that John's Gospel just may be one of the most powerful and profound poems of faith written. John borrows the words of Genesis, where in the beginning God surfed the surging chaos calmly singing to all that chaotic sloshing stew of inkiness until the chaos collaborates with God in bringing forth creation. John says, not only did God do that, but the Word (Jesus, God's love in the flesh) was right there riding the waves with the wind in Christ's face too. This love song was not a solo of God, but a duet with chaos itself forming a choir to join in the holy hymn that we still hear when we are out in creation. Go outside today and listen. Leave your phone inside and go for a walk around your neighborhood or sit on your porch. What are five things you see, four things you hear, three things you feel on your skin, two things you can smell, and one thing you taste?

Where do you need God to surf into the chaos of your life today with a holy presence?

John says that the holy lives among us, moves into our neighborhood – right next door. God, as we learned in Exodus, camps with us amid our lives. God takes on flesh and breath and bone ~ the full human experience infused with the divine ~ to show us life. This is the gospel or good news.

John preaches and proclaims that Jesus is the light of the world, Son of God, Prince of Peace who brings good news that sets us free. That is what we are doing when dwelling in the Word ~ so the Word (or good news) can dwell in us. When we read the gospels, like the disciples in John 1:39, we wonder, “Where is Christ abiding or residing right now?” We curiously follow Jesus to see what we see. This is the invitation to engage and encounter the Word that shows us a way to life so that we may live the Easter truth every day of life this year.

What are you looking for, Jesus asked in John 1:38. Hold that question today, what are you looking for, yearning or striving or praying for? Even if you do not know an exact answer right now, we may join the disciples in each gospel, following the One who is God's collaborator in creativity still to this day.





New Jersey Associates  
celebrate  
Saint Patrick's Day

### Next Issue of the *Associate Alliance*

This not a happy announcement: it is with a heavy heart that the June issue of the *Associate Alliance* will be cancelled. It is impossible to do a newsletter without the cooperation of any/every Associate community. This issue was published with only two submissions. There has been no participation from groups around the US, Jamaica or Brazil: no reflections, no prayers, no pictures, no subjects being discussed within the communities.

It is particularly discouraging given that Easter is only a few weeks away - no community is doing anything special for Easter?!

This newsletter has been published for many years and it would be unfortunate to stop sharing our stories. If nothing is shared for the October issue, the *Alliance* cannot continue to be done by only one person.

#### Definition of **COMMUNITY**:

A unified body of individuals such as people with common interests; a group of people with a common characteristic or interest; a body of persons of common interests scattered through a larger society; a body of persons having a common history or common social interests; a group linked by a common policy and/or belief; an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common belief structure; a common character with joint ownership or participation or fellowship.

**Merriam Webster Dictionary**

It is amazing what can be accomplished in one year. The Russian aggression against Ukraine began on February 24, 2022. My cousin Katya and her teenage daughters, Zhanna and Rymma, were able to escape from their home in Zaporizhzhia to Poland in early March.

My large family of cousins (on my Mom's side) swung into action and were able to pool resources to provide funds for Katya and the girls to get to and live in Poland for three and a half months, moving five times with rent increases each time, food, clothing, medical necessities (including Covid and other vaccinations), travel to Warsaw for visa and identity checks, as well as vet services for their little dog, Lakki. We wrote to our congressional representatives, senators, Immigration services, U.S. State Department and Homeland Security advocating on their behalf. Finally, in May, we learned that they were accepted into a special U.S. program, *Unite for Ukraine*. They landed at New York's Kennedy Airport on June 14<sup>th</sup> and after isolating for 5 days, went to Pikeville, TN to live with cousins, Mary and Jim, on their horse ranch because they had room for the three of them in their home.

In August the girls started school. Zhanna (17) as a senior and Rymma (14) as a junior. They loved the bus ride to school because they were able to immerse themselves in English, singing American songs with the other kids, and teaching them some Ukrainian. Typical teenagers, they participated in Home Coming, football games, Winter Dance, etc.

All three got their social security numbers. Zhanna and Katya applied for and eventually received their work permits – Katya full-time and Zhanna part-time. While the girls are going to school they are eligible for food stamps and other government assistance (medical, dental and eye). Family funding also purchased a used car, paid for insurance and some necessary repairs. Katya got her Tennessee driver's license.

Fast forward to five days before Christmas, 12/20/2022. Katya and the girls entered a new and exciting chapter - they moved into their own two-bedroom apartment in downtown Pikeville! They wanted to have the time over the Christmas break to get things fixed up, be closer to their friends and job opportunities.

When Zhanna graduates in May, they may choose to move to the larger city of Cleveland, Tennessee which has an established Ukrainian community and may provide them with future friends from their home country, churches, and other resources, including access to free English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for Katya and many more job opportunities. Zhanna is already planning on attending the local community college.

There were enough funds in their family resourced banking account that they were able to pay six month's rent (which includes utilities), cell phone service, Zhanna's cap and gown, other graduation expenses, and to purchase things for the apartment.

Now it is up to them to become acclimated to their new surroundings, become more fluent in English and integrated into American society. They must become self-sufficient if they wish to remain in the US. The family also purchased round trip tickets back to Ukraine in the event they do decide to return. Our hope is that Katya, Zhanna and Rymma will continue to be the good, hard-working people we have come to know and have a positive impact in their new community and country.

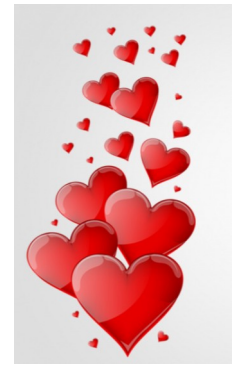
Zhanna and Rymma ready for Winter Dance



Flag of Ukraine



Truck loaded up for moving day!



## A Prayer for Our Earth

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes

Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

*Pope Francis, Laudato Si*

April  
22  
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**The Associate Alliance** is a publication of the Associates of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, NY.

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