



Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, NY

Associate Program

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The Associate Alliance

“Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God.”

JOEL 2:12-13

With these words the prophet Joel calls us to our great annual retreat, the 40 days of Lent.

Especially during this past year, we have known the pressures of life which have made us feel stressful and daunted. At the end of the day, we often find ourselves drained and burned out. This time of retreat is our yearly opportunity to reset priorities, to set aside time for God, for one another, and for works of compassion and justice.

What is at stake is our sense of living out God’s calling. This sense of call is often buried under accumulated layers of life and work. This is a matter of the heart. Joel invites us back to the journey of our “whole heart,” to discover again the roots of our calling. It is a time to return to the Lord and to a deeply felt orientation to those whose lives we are privileged to share and serve.

Lent is our journey back to the wellsprings of hope and compassion that make our lives rich and worthwhile. For Christians, the cross of ashes traced upon us on Ash Wednesday will become newly burnished at Easter; once again it will be that resplendent cross traced on our foreheads at Baptism. This journey helps us center ourselves in that deep desire that roots our lives in God and care for one another.

At Easter we will immerse our newcomers to faith in the waters of baptism and renew our own baptismal commitment. It is a recommitment to our calling to extend the Lord’s healing touch, especially to those in greatest need. We do not do this alone. Joel inaugurates our Lent by bringing us together: “Call an assembly. Gather the people” (*Joel 2:15-16*). Only by taking this journey together can we hope to find the support and passion necessary to give our hearts and hands once again to the Lord’s great work of healing this broken, beloved world one person at a time.

REFLECTION

- * How will you simplify your life this Lent and make time to pay closer attention to your longing for God?
- * How can you challenge your local community/cluster/associate community to an even greater commitment to those in need?
- * How will you give a special place to those “most in need,” among family and friends?



Whenever I read or hear about human slavery and trafficking, it really touches my heart in a personal way. I knew a teenage girl who was friends with my granddaughter and who visited our home quite often. She became a victim of human trafficking. Although she was “rescued,” she is still battling many issues at the young age of 17.



This Lenten season let us pray that more and more people will be in a better relationship with our Lord, that all will be able to love and be in better relationships with one another.

As Pope Francis stated in his encyclical, may “we love expansively and witness and share respect for each person we encounter no matter their circumstances, no matter where they are from.” Pope Francis leads us in healing divisions just as St. Francis and St. Clare did.

Associates of Pires do Rio Join Celebration

Claudio Alves de Oliveira

The Associate community of Pires do Rio participated in a Thanksgiving Mass, celebrating 44 years of religious life for Friar Vilmar.

The parishioners of the church have a great love and affection for Fr. Vilmar. He has a wonderful talent for presenting the messages of Jesus using simple language and explaining things in a way that all can understand. Like a good teacher, he celebrates each Mass with joy, as if each Mass were his first. He is captivating and treats all as if he were still a young and emotion-filled seminarian. May God bless his life and vocation!



LET US PRAY:

*Creator God,
recreate our hearts this Lent.
Give us new eyes for the needs of Your people in their
great want.
Guide our hands for the humble
service You ask of us each day.
Deepen our hunger for that baptismal
living through which You call us to
help renew Your beloved people and world, in justice
and in peace.
In Your precious and life-giving name
we pray.*



AMEN.

Meet Ella Pulido - Associate from Miami, FL

Ella has been a member of the Miami Associate community since 2012 and currently serves on the Leadership Team.

When asked what first led her to the Miami Associates, Ella had an interesting story to tell. Around 2012, she attended a meeting at St. Rose of Lima parish in Miami, FL which was required for parents with children attending CCD classes. One of the speakers happened to be Sr. Margaret Mary Kimmins, who spoke on grace and how, as a Franciscan sister, she was present to every human being. Her words on the difference between social justice and charity spoke to Ella's heart and resonated deeply with her. As she prepared to leave, Sr. Michele Dolyk, who "just happened" to be sitting in the pew behind her, tapped her on the shoulder and invited her to one of the Associate meetings. Ella attended the next meeting and loved it. From the very first meeting with our Sisters and Associates, Ella felt hospitality and warmth and a sense of belonging. She also experienced a sense of warmth and welcome at the Assembly meetings she subsequently attended in Tampa.



Ella Pulido

Ella was present at the 25th Anniversary gathering of the Associate program at the Motherhouse in Allegany and heard Sr. Pat Klemm speak on Incarnational Theology. This spoke deeply to Ella's soul and affirmed a belief that she had held deeply for quite some time.

Ella has been an integral part of the Miami Associate community and has also participated in the Hispanic Associates program which started a few years ago. She also attended the last Congregational Chapter as a Spanish/English translator.

Ella is married, has three children - two daughters and a son - and lives in Weston, Florida near Miami. She works as a personal lines insurance agent for AAA, which keeps her extremely busy.

When asked how being an Associate has made an impact on her life, Ella feels that the greatest change in her life is how she relates to others – seeing the goodness and Christ presence in each person she meets. Franciscan spirituality has also given her a greater appreciation of the sacredness of nature and all of creation.

Fasting During Lent

Sr. Rosimeire Dias Noletto

I will fast	from judging others	I will discover the Christ who lives in them
I will fast	from using hurtful words	I will use healing words
I will fast	from selfishness	I will live with charity
I will fast	from restlessness	I will seek to have patience
I will fast	from pessimism	I will fill myself with hope
I will fast	from worries	I will trust God more
I will fast	from complaints	I will thank God for the wonders in my life
I will fast	from distress	I will pray more frequently
I will fast	from bitterness	I will forgive
I will fast	from self-importance	I will be more compassionate
I will fast	from concern over my possessions	I will be more generous
I will fast	from feeling despondent	I will be filled by enthusiasm and faith

I will fast from everything that separates me from Jesus

I will try to live closer to Him.

A Blessing for Troubled Times

Marcia Gill

In his book of poetic blessings, "**To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings**" (2008)- the late Irish priest, poet, philosopher and mystic John O'Donohue writes in his introduction: "There is a quiet light that shines in every heart. It draws no attention to itself, though it is always secretly there. It is what illuminates our minds to see beauty, our desire to seek possibility, and our hearts to love life. We enter the world as strangers who all at once become heirs to a harvest of memory, spirit and dream that has long preceded us and will now enfold, nourish and sustain us. The gift of the world is our first blessing. May we all receive blessing upon blessing. And may we realize our power to bless, heal and renew one another."



On the day when
the weight deadens
on your shoulders
and you stumble,
may the clay dance
to balance you.

And when your eyes
freeze behind
the gray window
and the ghost of loss
gets into you,
may a flock of colors,
indigo, red, green
and azure blue,
come to awaken in you
a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays
in the curragh of thought
and a stain of ocean
blackens beneath you,
may there come across the waters
a path of yellow moonlight
to bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
may the clarity of light be yours,
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.

And so may a slow
wind work these words
of love around you,
an invisible cloak
to mind your life.

While looking at quotes from St Francis, one seemed especially relevant to the challenges of our present reality. Francis said, "a single sunbeam is enough to drive away many shadows." During these days of "social distancing" and "sheltering in place", I have found that there are many ways to "reach out and touch someone." The following are some of the ways to engage in the ministry of presence during this difficult time.

1. **Essential Errands.** Make "an attitude of gratitude" a priority towards all the "essential personnel" that you meet along the way. Thank them for working and being there to provide the essential services we all need in this time of crisis. Encounters with people in drive-throughs, grocery and convenience stores, the laundromat, sanitation workers, Post Office workers and pharmacy workers can all be opportunities to thank these people who are putting themselves at risk by working during this pandemic.
2. **Phone Ministry.** When talking with someone on the phone these days, leave the time frame open-ended. Yesterday, returning a call from a very active 85 year old woman who was finding the pandemic isolation both lonely and boring, we talked for an hour. Last week, calling the wife of a local Secular Franciscan whose husband had recently died in the hospital of a Covid-19 infection, she shared that the hardest part of it all was not being able to visit or say goodbye to him. When calling a friend who lives a distance from me and who is on oxygen 24/7 for a chronic lung condition, we talked for two hours.
3. **Facebook.** This is another avenue for ministry, especially at this time. When health care workers on the front lines share their experiences, thank them for their service. Share that they are prayed for each day, for their well-being and safety. Lift up their spirits. Facebook can also be a vehicle for evangelization by posting online opportunities for Mass, other spiritual events and resources, as well as prayers and reflections. Another opportunity afforded by Facebook, is being an advocate for some of the current issues that face us each day. There are many opportunities to stand up and vote for positive outcomes in such areas as: care of Mother Earth, endangered animal species, Dreamers and immigrants as well as other issues.

As Franciscans during this time of great crisis, we can bring the gift of our presence in so many ways. We can be a blessing in the lives of so many who are suffering and offer them encouragement. We can indeed be the single sunbeam that drives away the many shadows present amid the Covid-19 crisis.

Thoughts on Matthew 13

Lesson One: *Seeds Need a Rich Environment.* A seed that lacks appropriate soil may sprout, but will quickly wither and die. They require a rich, healthy environment in which to grow. This applies to the environment in which we grow as Christian disciples: there must be an ongoing flow of comfort and security, challenge and inspiration, learning and service. We create an environment for our spiritual formation through prayer, study, worship, fellowship, and service.

Lesson Two: *Seeds Can't Be Rushed.* When seeds do not sprout, take root, grow, try yelling at them. Preposterous idea, right? No one would think that they could somehow rush the normal growing process. Seeds require the amount of time that they require. Seeds teach us that we need to learn to wait - patience is the key ingredient to transformational growth.

Lesson Three: *Seeds Have a Purpose Larger Than Themselves.* Growth is not the purpose of a seed - unless seeds give rise to new seeds, they fail to fulfill their purpose. Transformation never happens for its own sake. Change happens to lead us to a new place. Growth occurs that we might not only know more, but that we might **do** more. Seeds are judged, ultimately, on the fruit that they bear. Christians may never content themselves with growing in their knowledge and love of God. Growth that fails to lead to a change in behavior is not healthy. We grow for a reason, and that reason is something much larger than any individual's needs.

The lessons of the seed help us see Lent, not as a time of sacrifice and denial, but as a time of preparation and anticipation - preparation for the work to which God calls us and anticipation of the fullness of life that God promises.



Florence Hee, osf

Some of the answers to that question came from Florence Marie Hee, OSF, (an Aston Franciscan). She holds a Ph.D. in Organizational Psychology and is the Charism Coordinator/Facilitator for her congregation. Not that she has all the answers in some little black book, but she certainly knows from experience that we (Allegany associates and sisters) hold the wisdom within ourselves. We just need someone to help us birth what is already incubating in the deep recesses of our being.

Joyce Ramage and Kathy Doyle sent her a lot of information about our program: the Handbook and Guidebook, the data that was obtained from the Visitations done by Jeanne Williams and Kathy, our demographics (most of us are in our 50's, 60's, and 70's), the Charism Development Team outline, as well as the Zoom Assembly responses from both the Day 1 Associate Breakout sessions and the last question of the evaluation pertaining to associates. These all helped her in developing an Associate Leadership Visioning Retreat. The Chapter 2021 theme played a role in our planning - that we would use the contemplative dialogue process with small break out groups to facilitate better listening and meaningful conversation.

The retreat was scheduled for three days in January via Zoom. All members of the Associate Advisory Committee as well as local leaders from each community (US, Jamaica and Brazil) were invited to attend. A song from Carrie Newcomer's album, *The Beautiful Not Yet*, entitled "Lean in Toward the Light", opened the retreat and set the tone for our time together. Then, using the Appreciative Inquiry method of 4 D's: Discover – Dream – Design – Destiny, Florence guided us to first **Appreciate**: What Gives Us Life, then led us to **Dream**: What Might Be (envisioning for the next three years). From there we were directed to **Design**: How Can It Be (co-constructing) and then moved to **Destiny**: What Will Be (sustaining the future).

Sunday January 24, was the last day of the three-day retreat and focused on the future. Florence prepared a summary of all of the previous discussions and emailed them out prior to the meeting, in order to be reviewed and reflected upon. During the Zoom meeting, small group breakouts occurred and each person was asked to present two to three topics and/or aspects that were important to them. The groups then synthesized them further. Once back in the large group, each one reported on their discussions. These were recorded as well. There were similarities, variations and novel approaches, all of which will be taken up by the Associate Advisory Committee for follow up and possible implementation. One idea that had broad support was strengthening relationships between associates - within their local communities, among the local communities themselves and with associates from other congregations.

Although Zoom is not ideal, it does make "being with" other associates easily "doable" and affordable, so expect to see work on that in the short term.

It seems that the future of the Allegany Associate Program is based on at least one aspect of the past - the very basic Franciscan trait of building relationships!



