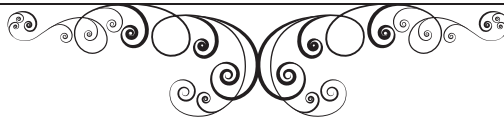


The Story of Cojourning: Walking with the Rochester Franciscans



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Foreword

The Franciscan movement birthed in the thirteenth century has waxed and waned over the centuries. In the twentieth century a new expression burst into history not unlike the early penitents finding inspiration from Francis, the affiliation of lay persons with congregations of vowed religious. Enlivened by the Vatican II teaching of the universal call to holiness, laity sought authentic expressions of following the Gospel of Jesus Christ without becoming professed religious. Some discovered their hearts resonating with the Sisters of Saint Francis in Rochester. The Sisters' core values of living the Gospel of Jesus Christ in prayer, poverty and humility never grow old. Persons living these values realize that the call to Francis to "rebuild my house" has new interpretation in each moment of history. The name "Cojourner" denotes the relationship in which individuals and Sisters desire to walk together exploring their lives, mission and ministry in the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare and Mother Alfred Moes, foundress of the congregation. In *The Story of Cojourning*, Marianne Hockema highlights the steady growth and development of this movement of a covenant relationship with the Sisters. The Sisters and Cojourners in the Covenant ceremony "mutually agree to challenge and affirm one another in our continued growth in a values-based lifestyle, witnessing to our basic interdependence as citizens of one global community." As our hearts expand in love, so we become like lighthouses providing hope and direction to a weary world.



Sister Ramona Miller

Sister Ramona Miller



Table of Contents

1	Go and Repair My House
5	Nature or Nurture?
9	The Proposal
13	The Process
21	Cojourning Pioneers
27	Leaders, Champions and Coordinators
43	Committees, Councils and Community
47	Cojourners Today – Boots on the Ground
61	What Then is the Franciscan Charism?
63	Cojourning 2030
69	The Journey is Essential to the Dream
75	Epilogue
77	From the Author
79	Appendix

The Story of Cojourning: Walking with the Rochester Franciscans

What was it that day in the long, long ago that drew Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone (better known as Francis of Assisi) to the crumbling, abandoned San Damiano church outside Assisi's city walls? This was a 23-year-old man who loved the good life, perhaps, at times, even in excess. His was a life of good friends, good wine, good times – a life of revelry and hedonism. So, what was it that prompted him to renounce that 13th century “la dolce vita” for a life of poverty; a life where he embraced the leper and willingly subjected himself to derision and disdain – at times from the very church he loved? And on that particular day in 1205, what drew him through the cobblestone streets of Assisi, across the piazza, past merchants and friends calling his name, along a steep path down from the city, and into that little church? And once inside, what led him to kneel at the base of the San Damiano cross and hear those words whispered only to him on that morning, but shouted to others across the centuries, echoing for many even today?

GO AND REPAIR MY HOUSE...

And what about Clare, contemporary of Francis, who, after hearing his message ran from her parents, eschewed a life of ease and affluence, and chose instead to embrace a life of poverty and hardship? What did she hear that caused her to give up the many

comforts of home and family and instead, found the Order of Poor Ladies, inviting others to join her in a sparsely furnished, stone nunnery for the purpose of embracing poverty just as Christ had?

GO AND REPAIR MY HOUSE...

Similarly, some 600 years later, what prompted the Moes sisters, Maria and Barbara, to leave a comfortable life filled with loving parents, a beautiful home, generous dowries, and private teachers in Remich, a lovely city in Luxembourg along the Mosel River, to cast it all aside? What compelled them to embark on a six-week treacherous voyage by ship to America with the aim of ministering to Native Americans? What was it they heard?

GO AND REPAIR MY HOUSE...

Once in America after enduring a dusty, bone-rattling journey in a horse-drawn wagon from New York to Milwaukee, what did those two sisters hear after learning from Bishop Henni (who originally recruited them) that there were no longer Native Americans in the vicinity to whom they might minister? What did they hear that kept them moving forward instead of booking passage on the next ship home? What was it that led the younger sister, Maria (Mother Alfred), to keep moving forward, despite being asked to leave one religious order for “lack of a calling,” choosing to leave another order on her own and eventually starting two other orders affiliated with the Franciscan Friars Minor? What voice did she hear that prompted her to stand up to the church hierarchy, start schools, build hospitals and make a bold proposition to Dr. William Worrall Mayo that grew into the premier medical center in the world?

GO AND REPAIR MY HOUSE...

In 1962, what voice was it that prompted Pope John XXIII (il papa buono) to call thousands of bishops, nuns and other religious leaders to the Vatican and challenge them to forge a new set of operating principles for the Catholic Church? Could he foresee that Vatican II could radically change the culture of the Catholic Church, minimizing the hierarchy where possible and promoting participation of the laity to a much greater degree in the Church's mission? What message did he hear that enabled him to take such a bold and daring initiative? Was it something he felt called to do, beginning with the origins of his vocation as a Secular Franciscan? "I have loved Saint Francis and his followers from my childhood," he said. "I am a Secular Franciscan since age 14. Let us take Saint Francis, the friend of the Lord, as our model."

GO AND REPAIR MY HOUSE...

What about those 1,652 young women who since 1887 evidently heard something that made them leave families, friends, security and, in one case, a brand-new yellow convertible given to dissuade a daughter's decision to enter the convent, to profess their vows and give their lives to the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Third Order Regular of the Congregation of our Lady of Lourdes of Rochester, Minnesota? Something compelled them, drew them, directed them, and pulled them into a life of commitment to God, to community, and to the care of others. What was it they heard?

GO AND REPAIR MY HOUSE...

Could it be that today's Franciscan Cojourners, now numbering more than 125, feel that same pull, hear that same admonition, and somehow know that their way forward is to walk on the same path chosen by Saint Francis, Saint Clare, Mother Mary Alfred Moes, Pope John XXIII, and more than 1600 Franciscan Sisters? Who are these Cojourners and how did the Franciscan Cojourning movement begin?

Nature or Nurture?

“People don’t become Franciscans; they are born Franciscan.”

*- Friar Agostino Gemelli, O.F.M., 20th
century physician and psychologist*

“I think, I feel Franciscan.”

- Rosemary Grebin Palms, Cojourner

Rosemary Grebin was a product of public schools, meeting Sisters for only two weeks each summer in “catechism school.” She chose to attend the College of Saint Teresa, however, where she met the Rochester Franciscans. She admired her teachers who were Franciscan Sisters, and she was taken with Sister Bernetta Quinn, the Sister who was assigned to her corridor in the residence hall. By the end of her first semester, she had decided she wanted to be one of them. She became a postulant in 1958 and was given the name Sister Mary Francha.

For many, the path from postulant to novice to Sister could be daunting, yet Rosemary felt called to continue and made her final vows in 1963. After she had finished her bachelor’s degree and had had three years teaching experience, she was sent to graduate school to further her education. It was there in the turbulent ‘60s where she seriously started questioning her childhood faith and her call to be a Sister.

After four years away from living in Community, she requested that leadership return her to regular convent life in the hopes of coming to a decision about staying or leaving religious life. While teaching English at the College of Saint Teresa, she made the painful decision to request a leave of absence. But the pain of separation from her beloved Sisters was strong.



Sister Francha (Rosemary Grebin Palms)

Rosemary remained close friends with several Sisters of Saint Francis, cherishing her bond with them and their mission and feeling gratitude for all she had been given. That personal bond was born of a deep faith in Christ, deepened by a shared devotion to the Franciscan charism and an enduring commitment to the

mission of the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Third Order Regular of the Congregation of Our Lady of Lourdes. She was quite sure that regardless of her situation either as a Sister or not as a Sister, either as a married woman or single woman, either in this world or the next, that bond would remain forever.

Her thoughts may have seemed contradictory and implausible to some, but to Rosemary, they eventually led to a clear pathway.

Rosemary started doing research on some experiments a few other religious communities were trying that some called “lay affiliation” – non-vowed persons sharing gospel values, and even “missions” with vowed persons in some way. In spring 1970, she wrote a letter to about 30 women who were on leave of absence or had already left the order. Would any of them be interested in such an experiment?

I will myself be taking a leave of absence in June, she wrote. I leave with love for my Franciscan Sisters; I leave without bitterness; I leave with a sense of responsibility to those who have educated me and those who have spent a lifetime in service and now deserve a cared-for retirement. I want to keep in touch! I think, I feel “Franciscan.” I will always, I hope, wish to serve my fellow man.

Therefore, I have been for some time now interested in some type of “lay affiliation” (the name does not matter) with the Franciscans of Rochester. My first idea was some type of structured organization listing the rights, privileges and responsibilities of such a group. My current thought is in the direction of one much less structured, quite informal even.

Would it not be to everyone's advantage if those who wished to join an auxiliary group could have that opportunity?

As I see it, the auxiliary member could offer professional, financial, and/or moral support to the Rochester Franciscans, to the services these OSFs (Order of Saint Francis) perform, and to the ideals they strive for.

The nucleus group could in turn offer its moral and spiritual support and friendship to the "satellite" members – welcoming them in houses and convents, and inviting them to share in retreats, workshops, and the like.

Rosemary followed that letter with an actual proposal sent for consideration later in the summer of 1970. "I had been reading about other congregations starting affiliate movements, and so I wrote a proposal that would enable Sisters who had left the Congregation to maintain a more formal relationship."

The Proposal



May 2008: Kay Mullen, Virginia Coupe, Pat Simmons, Elena Rodriquez, Eileen Lundy

A Proposal Concerning Lay Affiliation

The lay and religious forms of living out the commitment of baptism are not antagonistic, but rather they are complementary. Neither is freer than the other; both are limited. Each one needs the other. Keeping this in mind, I propose some type of lay affiliation program specifically designed for former members of our Congregation who regain a desire to be loosely affiliated but who choose a different style of life, married or single. In the past, the Church's official stance regarding a dispensation from final

vows precluded any continuing affiliation: the wording of the dispensation virtually forbade it. The Church has now adopted a stance much more understanding and accepting, even making it possible to return to the Congregation at any time after official dispensation. It seems the climate is right at this time to consider ways and means to make possible continuing affiliation with former members.

Thomas E. Clarke, S.J., has made some very pertinent observations and suggestions concerning 'The Crisis of Permanent Consecration' and possible alternatives. (*Sisters Today*, XLI, August-September, 1969, pp.1-15). He writes in part:

The life of the counsels, as a distinct Christian life-form, does call for a permanent engagement. But there are several things which this permanent engagement does not exclude: First, it does not exclude that we have some groups or communities in the Church, including celibate groups, in which permanency of commitment is not part of the structure, in which the decision to remain celibate for the sake of apostolic work in a particular group will have the nature of a career decision fully open to be changed. Secondly, it does not exclude that, within a community whose basic or core membership is committed on the basis of a lifetime dedication, there should also be associate members who never make such a lifetime commitment. In the conditions of life today, there would seem to be a good deal to be said for such communities, which have historical antecedents in such kinds of membership as that of oblates and donnes.

A further question here would be whether such associate membership could be extended to married people. The various efforts made at heterogeneous communities (celibates and married) in the past are not entirely encouraging, but it may be that we are in a period of life of the Church, and the world, where this difficult dream may be capable of realization. As I understand the Focolare movement, it represents such a heterogeneous grouping of dedicated Christians. I would understand such a conception as being in continuity with the association that religious and seculars had in the past through Third Orders sodalities and similar groups.

Rosemary continued her proposal after citing the article above:

Similar groups might include a new lay affiliation program inaugurated by the La Crosse, Wisconsin Franciscans, and the current experiment of the California IHMs.

Preliminary feelers concerning some type of lay affiliation have been sent to those women presently on leave of absence from our Congregation (sent by myself) and to those who have signed dispensations within the past two years (sent by Sister Margaret Mary Modde). From these groups alone, there are perhaps 15 who showed interest in some type of affiliation, even though the concept remains rather vague.

Our reasons for desiring affiliations are probably varied. My own feeling is that I have a deep love for the Franciscan ideals and for many of my Franciscan Sisters... I want to keep in

touch in order to continue sharing friendships and sharing responsibilities.

The actual form this affiliation would take should be flexible and largely unstructured. In broad terms, as I see it, the auxiliary member could offer professional, financial, and/or moral support to the Rochester Franciscans, to the services this Congregation performs, and to the ideals it strives for. The Rochester Franciscans, as the nucleus group, could, in turn, arrange an organ for communication and provide for occasional gatherings, perhaps similar to alumnae homecoming weekends, for the exchange of ideas, worship and recreation... There are almost endless possibilities and advantages to both the congregation and lay affiliate with such an arrangement and cross-fertilization of ideas.

The exact nature of lay affiliation should perhaps never be defined. Part of its beauty is in its evolutionary nature. I propose that we let its form evolve as seems best from year to year. As a practical beginning, I propose that we write to all former members of our Congregation and invite them to receive the Tidings or similar organ of communication, and then during the next year invite them to a homecoming weekend, to pastoral action weekends and like events. The interested former members who respond to such invitations may well become the lay affiliates of the future. Let us rely on the Spirit and see how the wind blows.

The Process

**“In their hearts humans plan their course,
but the Lord establishes their steps.”**

- Proverbs 16.9

Read today, Rosemary’s proposal seems like such a good idea – absolutely prescient. Several individuals who had left the Congregation during that time expressed interest in her idea, as did several active Sisters.

But the proposal’s initial reception at the Chapter of 1970 overall was lukewarm at best. The Sisters had just experienced massive changes with Vatican II, and this proposal presented yet another change which some felt threatened their role as consecrated religious. Wisely, the Executive Council decided to create a task force to study lay affiliation and to communicate with interested persons in the hopes of making specific proposals in the next session of Chapter.

A groundswell developed from Rosemary’s initial proposal. It was the first of many, many steps in what would become a 12-year odyssey of exploration and discernment. In 1972, for example, Sister Agnes Malone, vocation director, presented a proposal to the Executive Council on lay affiliation after working with an individual who first sought to become a Sister and then withdrew her application and inquired about lay affiliation. While no action was taken on this specific request, Sister Agnes persevered. She



Maureen McKenzie, Sister Monessa Overby, Kay Mullen, 1994



Maureen McKenzie, Sister Kay Wagner

began by researching lay affiliation programs of other congregations in preparation for a report for the 1974 Chapter. Concurrently, she also developed a proposal for associate membership in 1972, suggesting “that a professionally trained woman desiring service or familiarity with religious life live as an integral member of the celibate community by written contract, receiving a Sister’s stipend and assuming personal expenses, in a program administered by the vocation director.”

Early the following year, Sister Agnes expanded her initial work to create a “Proposal for Lay Membership II,” which broadened the program to include former Sisters, single or married; their spouses; and friends involved in helping as lay resources in area and congregation forums.

Sister Claire Weisdorf joined forces and introduced a discussion on lay affiliation during June Chapter in 1973. That discussion led



Sister Agnes Malone and Sister Margaret Mary Modde in the 1980s

to the Research Team in Ministry being charged with setting up a committee to study the possibilities of lay affiliation and report their recommendations at the first session of 1974 Chapter.

The idea was gathering momentum among the Sisters of Saint Francis across the country and in Bogotá. Sisters in various area forums were proposing lay membership for consideration at Chapter meetings.

The Research Team in Ministry, with Sister Agnes Malone leading the way, spent 1973 analyzing information from existing programs and discussing issues. The team recommended that the vocational aspects of an associate program be considered and that any program developed emphasize community interaction as well. They also agreed to brainstorm with two former members interested in pursuing an associate program.

Progress was slow but the idea had taken root. In 1973 another early

lay affiliation advocate, Sister Margaret Mary Modde, executive secretary of the National Sisters Vocation Council, initiated a nationwide survey and developed the following proposal presented to Chapter in 1974:

Associate membership in a religious community could provide for a wide variety of persons to participate in the spirit of the Sisters of Saint Francis while at the same time, allowing the Sisters of Saint Francis to share in the spirit, gifts and charisms of those persons who have basically chosen a different life style.

Associate members may include:

1. Young women who wish to share, in varying degrees, the service and community aspects of religious life, but who do not intend, at the present, to make a life-time commitment.
2. Single, widowed, divorced, married persons, men, women or couples, who have close bonds with the Sisters of Saint Francis and who wish to strengthen these bonds through shared liturgy, prayer and discussion on a regular basis.
3. Former members of our Community who may wish to continue, in some way, close ties with us.

This was an amazing and inclusive proposal, perhaps even radical, for 1974. There was no requirement for a specific religious affiliation



Signing of the Cojourner Covenant in 2018

nor commitment to a prescribed set of doctrinal principles. Women AND men were welcome as were single, divorced or widowed persons. Those with a different lifestyle were welcomed. Cojourners were later described as adults, men and women, single and married, vowed and ordained, of various creeds, cultures and walks of life. After hearing the report and proposal, the 1974 Chapter voted that the “Congregation develop tools for lay involvement at the lay level.”

Whether intentional or serendipitous, the similarity to how Saint Francis organized his ministry is evident. He welcomed all. In fact, the rule for the Third Order was developed in part to accommodate the thousands of lay individuals who wanted to follow his teachings and way of life without actually becoming professed religious. “Go and repair my house” was his spiritual dictate; a direction he gladly shared with all who wished to follow. In his *Letter to all the*

Faithful, he extended a special invitation to all those who wished to live the spiritual life while remaining in their present vocations: "To all Christians, religious, clerics and layfolk, men and women, and to all inhabitants of the earth, Brother Francis, their servant and subject, offers respectful greeting and desires for them the true peace of heaven and sincerity in the Lord."



*Blessing prayer by the Sisters and
Cojourners in the Spirituality Center*

That same inclusive sentiment was evident in 1877 when Mother Alfred opened the doors to Rochester's first academy to girls *and* boys – and they didn't have to be Catholic. It was echoed again in 1889 when she was questioned by a local newspaper whether or not the newly constructed Saint Marys Hospital would be only for Catholic patients. She made it abundantly clear that the hospital would serve all persons in need of medical care.

**"The cause of suffering humanity knows no religion
and no sex; the charity of the Sisters of Saint Francis
is as broad as their religion."**

- Mother Mary Alfred Moes

According to Sister Arnold Ritchey, inclusivity was never a problem for Mother Alfred. She saw a need and met it, enlisting the best

resources she could find, both human and otherwise. She worked constantly and effectively with the laity, including community leaders, architects, bankers, construction managers and day laborers in the schools built during her tenure. Once the schools were constructed, she welcomed not only the students, but their parents as well. To reinforce that exact point, Sister Bernadine Jax, another proponent of the Cojourning Program, wryly points out that Mother Alfred could work with anyone – even Episcopalians! (William Worrall Mayo to whom Mother Alfred proposed the creation of Saint Marys Hospital was Episcopalian as were his two sons, Will and Charles).

The proposal's germination continued slowly. Following Chapter in 1981, the Executive Council established a lay affiliation committee with Sister Monessa Overby as liaison. In November 1982, the committee brought together a diverse group of lay persons who believed they, too, were called in their own way to the mission and ministry of Francis and Jesus. The committee report given to the 1984 Chapter recommended an actual start-up with a pilot program of three interested persons: Libby McDougall, Maureen McKenzie and Steve Ohly. This program was based on several principles: mutuality; movement of the Spirit; openness to all women and men; and a signed Cojourner Covenant with no legal or financial obligation.

“The word Cojourning was chosen to describe the relationship in which individuals and Sisters of Saint Francis desire to walk together exploring their lives, mission and ministry in the spirit of Saint Francis and Saint Clare of Assisi and Mother Mary Alfred Moes, foundress of the order.”

- Brief History of Cojourning, Assisi Heights Archives

After the committee report was presented at the 1984 Chapter meeting, Sister Eleanor Granger, long-time advocate and champion of the Cojourning Program, moved that the Cojourner concept and process be adopted as a new dimension of the Rochester Franciscan Congregation. The motion passed unanimously.

Finally in 1999, some 28 years after submitting a proposal that would result in this new dimension – a vibrant and inclusive thread being woven into the tapestry of the Sisters of Saint Francis – Rosemary Grebin Palms became a Cojourner.

“Early on,” Rosemary says, “Cojourning resulted from an attraction or affection for a particular Sister. Now, the attraction is to the charism of Francis. Cojourning is an organism, not an organization.”



Rosemary Grebin Palms

Cojourner Pioneers

Sister Monessa Overby

“Francis embraced the laity; it seemed to me that we should, too.”

Sister Monessa’s involvement in promoting the Cojourner Program was significant when she served on the 1982 committee that brought the proposal to the 1984 Chapter. During those same years, Sister Monessa was in her volunteer ministry at the Newman Center in Winona, Minnesota, where she worked with Fr. Dan Corcoran, who later became a Cojourner, and where she met Steve Ohly, who became the first



*Sisters Monessa Overby and
Patricia Sablatura*

Cojourner. Just as she had in Minnesota, Sister Monessa shared the charism of Francis in her work and with the Cojourner Committee in the West Forum of Rochester Franciscans. She also was invited to share her counseling and administrative experience at the Betty Ford Center in California.

“Vatican II encouraged us to go back to our roots, go back to the charism of Saint Francis,” according to Sister Monessa. “He was a

drastic contrast to the world he lived in at the time. He was on fire with his relationship to the Spirit moving in his life. He didn't set out to convert people, yet there were hundreds of people attracted to follow him who for many reasons did not want to become vowed religious. From this awareness grew the *Exhortation to the Faithful*, which gave the laity directions for following in Francis' footsteps. Today, the model for Rochester Franciscans is called Cojourning. It is mutual support for responding to a common call; mutual encouragement for the faith journey; and together, embodying the Franciscan charism to grow in the love of God and make a difference in the world. Cojourning is a movement of the Spirit in our lives."

Steve Ohly

"Grab two and I'll get the milk."

- Sister Crispina

Steve Ohly was first introduced to Franciscan Sisters by having them as teachers in elementary and high school. In fact, he says he first learned about the connection between Christianity and social justice in high school from his teachers. However, he got even closer to them on a personal basis by washing pots and pans in the kitchen at Assisi Heights when he was in high school. And, while he appreciated their kindness and educational prowess as superb



Steve Ohly and Sister Monessa Overby at time of Steve's Cojourner ceremony

teachers, as a growing teenager, he especially liked their chocolate chip cookies. One evening while washing his usual pile of pots and pans, he was overcome with the sweet, sweet smell of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies wafting right under his nose. No one seemed interested in offering him a cookie, so when the pots and pans were rinsed, dried and put away, he quietly walked into the pantry and took a cookie. Turning to leave the pantry with the cookie still grasped in his hand, he encountered Sister Crispina standing in the doorway. He thought for a minute and then stammered, "Ah, ah, ah – I suppose you think I'm stealing this cookie." And Sister Crispina, wise woman that she was, said in the most Franciscan way possible, "Grab two and I'll get the milk."

From that moment, he was hooked and on far more than the Sisters' chocolate chip cookies.

"If I hadn't had that early exposure to Franciscan values, my life would be very different. Having that experience turned me on a path I've grown in throughout my life, he stated.

"After a brief stint in seminary at Saint Marys University, I transferred to Winona State to study nursing. That's where I met Fr. Dan Corcoran, who had taken the bold step at that time to invite Sister Monessa Overby to join him in pastoral ministry. Their commitment to social justice, life-long learning and personal spiritual growth was the pathway I wanted to follow. Becoming a Cojourner was a natural step for me.

"As Cojourners, we recognize that we live in a fragile, unequal and unjust world. The way forward, especially if you believe in

a Franciscan way – a Christian way – is for all of us to repair that world. Together we can heal the world through justice, connection and community.”

Jane Campion

**“I felt as called to be a lay person as I had earlier
been called to be a Franciscan Sister.”**

The road to Assisi Heights in Rochester was a short drive for Jane Campion who grew up in Lake City, Minnesota. She, like many others, developed an affinity and admiration for her Franciscan teachers and, she wanted from an early age to model her life after their example. Her parents supported her decision completely and drove her to Rochester in 1949 to enter the convent. Jane’s considerable talents were quickly recognized, and she was encouraged to further her education earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees in nursing and counseling. As Sister Richaea, she held several leadership positions in nursing at Saint Marys Hospital and then decided to explore a new venture away from Minnesota. She set out for Georgia where she taught nursing at Emory University, and she later became head of the Alcoholic and Drug Section of the Georgia State Department of Health. “The people I worked with in addiction taught me so much, especially about moving on,” she says. “I felt called at that time to



Cojourner Jane Campion

return to the secular world to do what was mine to do, to fulfill my purpose in this world. I learned from them how that could happen.”

After 10 years in Georgia, she returned to Rochester knowing that her next steps would be the hardest she had ever taken. “I didn’t want to leave; yet I was called to do so. The Franciscans were and are my sisters,” she says. “I offered to leave Rochester if that would make it easier, but Sister Generose Gervais, hospital administrator for Saint Marys Hospital, quickly nixed that idea. She told me, ‘I need you here.’” And so, Jane became an assistant administrator at Saint Marys and maintained her connection with the Franciscan community. When she learned of the Cojourning Program, she knew it was the answer to prayer. “I loved the community; I wanted to continue to follow Francis; I needed to find Francis of Assisi right here in Rochester, and through the Cojourning Program, I did just that. Sister Kate Zimmerman walked with me as I became a Cojourner. What I have been gifted by being a Cojourner is the opportunity to share my values and ethics with others. People are looking for a spiritual anchor, looking for ways for God to be with them. That can happen through Cojourning.”



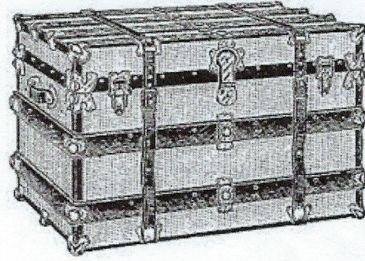
Leaders, Champions and Coordinators

**“Pray as though everything depended on God.
Work as though everything depended on you.”**

- St. Augustine

Often there's a significant gap between a great idea and the transformation of that idea into a workable program. Sometimes the distance is insurmountable; the gap between idea and implementation is just too large. However, in this instance, the initial leaders, champions and coordinators for the Cojourning Program were Franciscan Sisters, direct spiritual descendants of Mother Mary Alfred Moes, who founded their order after a bumpy start with two religious orders, a priest and a bishop along the way. Mother Alfred had always depended on God to guide her, even when the journey was rugged, as it was from the day she and her sister set sail in 1851 from the French port of LeHavre. She knew she had to rely on her faith – and her footwork – even when religious leaders of the day disagreed with some of her ideas. She did just that one day in Illinois by seeking a new religious affiliation in 1863 with the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis, which eventually was incorporated as the Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis of Joliet. Mother Alfred was appointed general superior, but only for the short term. More challenges ensued, including some internal election chicanery that effectively thwarted her leadership. This setback simply confirmed for the next elected superior of Joliet Franciscans and for Mother Alfred “what was hers to do.” At the direction of the new Mother Superior, Mother Alfred

packed a trunk, bought a ticket and set out by train from Joliet for Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and eventually by stagecoach to Waseca, Minnesota. Her original plan was to start a school in Waseca where she had purchased property for that purpose. However,



there was a lack of agreement among town citizens of exactly where the school should be located so her plans did not materialize. Mother Alfred remained undaunted, repacked her trunk and boarded the stagecoach heading east toward Owatonna where she built and launched Sacred Heart Academy in 1877 with the townspeople's full support. During construction of this school, she received an invitation from Father O'Gorman, a priest in Rochester, to start yet another school and this time in Rochester. The school in Rochester, named the Academy of Our Lady of Lourdes, opened in the fall of 1877. Mother Alfred and 24 Sisters from the Joliet Congregation were forced to found a new congregation in Rochester because of demands made by the bishop of Chicago with whom Mother Alfred did not agree. The Academy of Our Lady of Lourdes became the central administration of the new congregation for whom Mother Alfred was the Mother Superior. Starting, building and supervising schools seemed to be her forte as she led the development and administration of 28 schools during her tenure as Superior of the Rochester Franciscans, 1877-1889. As one biographer commented, for Mother Alfred, "to think was to do."

On the heels of all this activity, she also proposed, financed and supervised construction of Saint Marys Hospital, completed in 1889. Not content to simply fund and erect the region's first three-

story medical facility, she also managed to convince local physician Dr. William Worrall Mayo that the only way the project could go forward, despite his initial protests, would be if he and his two sons would provide the medical staff. And although she and her Sisters were members of a teaching order, she assured the Mayos the Sisters would do whatever was needed to provide the nursing care in the new venture. True to Mother Alfred's promise, five Franciscan Sisters went from blackboard to bedside on that chilly day in September 1889 when the hospital first opened. "With our faith, hope and energy, it will succeed," she once said. And it did – beyond anyone's wildest expectations.

Given Mother Alfred's spiritual imprimatur and her legendary legacy of hard work, Sisters who become Cojourner leaders, champions and coordinators had not a moment's concern that the program somehow would not become a reality, benefiting Cojourners and Sisters alike. They brought their own faith, hope and energy to the program along with considerable administrative and organizational skills. There was no doubt in their minds this program would succeed. After all, they were Franciscans and just like Mother Alfred, "to think was to do."

Whether leader, champion, coordinator, or often a blend of all three, every Franciscan who interacted with the Cojourning Program left a clear path of innovation, organization and dedication for those who followed. From the first mailing list to the first database; from typed paper documents with multiple "carbon copies" to lightning-fast emails copying hundreds; from telephone interviews with one person to Zoom video meetings with hundreds; and from delicate webs spun to snare a spider's prey to powerful, electronically spun websites capturing Cojourners around the world, the Cojourning

Program adopted every new technology supporting the importance of community. As Steve Ohly, pioneer Cojourner, said, "Community and connection – for Cojourners, they're everything."

Sister Marlys Jax, Coordinator 1991-1993

**"I look at the Cojourning Program as
an extension of Mother Alfred."**

Initially, a Cojourner Committee under the auspices of the Executive Council oversaw the development of Cojourners. As the first named coordinator of the Cojourning Program, Sister Marlys Jax said she felt a bit like Mother Alfred starting out on one of her many ventures that resulted in schools, hospitals and even new religious orders. With Mother Alfred in mind as a role model, Sister Marlys says she merely followed the signs already on the Franciscan road. She fails to mention, however, her own boundless energy, amazing creativity, and total commitment to making the Cojourning Program a success.



Sister Marlys Jax

"I was thrilled when the Cojourning proposal passed through Chapter," she says. "It was tough sledding at first, but I knew education was the key to this program's initial acceptance and success. We had to broaden our perspective from a Cojourner's relationship with one Sister to a relationship with the entire community."

“I also knew that we had to help Cojourners come to know Francis and Clare on a personal level. We created ongoing sessions in Rochester called ‘Prisms and Charisms,’ where Cojourners could learn more about us. For one session in particular, we actually brought Mother Alfred, Saint Francis and Saint Clare to the event – at least in spirit. Mother Alfred was played by Sister Carlan Kraman, author of Mother Alfred’s biography, *Odyssey in Faith*, and she sat at Mother Alfred’s actual desk that was brought out of storage for the event. Saint Francis was played by Sister Emmanuel Collins, professor of English at the College of Saint Teresa, and a nationally recognized Franciscan scholar. Saint Clare was “channeled” by professor and historical scholar, Sister Ingrid Peterson. It was magical. Cojourners were encouraged to ask any question that came to mind. We wanted them to understand the charism of Saint Francis and the charism of the Rochester Franciscans. Equally as important, we wanted to celebrate the charisms Cojourners brought to us. They learned from us and we surely learned from them. Mutuality is key.”

In the midst of creating opportunities for Cojourners and Sisters to deepen their spirituality together, Sister Marlys and her team saw the need for the Cojourning Program to be easily identifiable and relatable through the creation of its own logo. “I have a love for logos and believe that we should look at a logo and know exactly what it represents,” she says. She reached out to Sister Clairvaux McFarland, Franciscan community artist and renowned icon creator, and asked her to design a logo that met that criteria. The logo, shown on the next page, was selected because as the text accompanying the logo reveals, it “conveys the weaving and interconnections that are both the vision and reality of Cojourning. The design symbolizes unity and collaboration. It is intended to

illustrate paths which are similar yet different, interwoven yet distinct, moving in the same direction yet never becoming the same.”



Sister Marlys continues, “I look at the Cojourning Program as an extension of Mother Alfred. Her vision came from her heels up; it came from her soul and set the entire tone for the medical center. She was interested in the common person and greater good for humanity. She and her Sisters embodied the Church in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Today in the 21st century, Sisters and Cojourners walking together – we are the church.”

Sister Shirley Schmitz, Coordinator 1993-1997

“Cojourners don’t take vows but they do make a commitment to the Franciscan charism.”

Sister Shirley Schmitz first became acquainted with Franciscan Sisters through religious education in her school. She recalls those Sisters as being happy, joyful and prayerful, loving religious life and loving children. By 8th grade, she knew exactly what path she wanted her life to follow. “God gave me this vocation – He called me to it and I wasn’t going to say no.”



Sister Shirley Schmitz

Sister Shirley particularly welcomed working with the laity. "Francis had no problem with the laity. He was with them all the time, especially the poor and marginalized.

"Vatican II, she continued, "helped us to consider Cojourning even though it was just beginning. We were admonished to 'go back to our roots,' and our roots were working with the laity to serve the poor.

"Now, we see people who want to walk with the Sisters through Cojourning for many of the same reasons people chose to follow Francis. Most express a desire to know a deeper spirituality and to be connected with a group committed to peace, justice and the environment.

"Cojourners will play an important role in our lives as our numbers diminish. In the meantime, it's Cojourners from the outside coming in that bring life to our Sisters."

Rochester Franciscan leadership never wavered in its support for the Cojourning Program in many ways, including a welcome acknowledgement that coordinators for the program could be members of the laity as well as professed religious. Darlene Coffman followed Sister Shirley Schmitz as Cojourner Program Coordinator and served until 1999. At that time Sister Wanda Mettes in the Incorporation Office agreed to coordinate communication with the Cojourners. She established database records and an information checklist for candidates. She also sent the book, *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God*, by Marie Dennis, to Franciscan Life Teams to be used for orientation with Cojourner candidates. Sister Wanda was a

strong proponent for team leadership. "Once formation was led by a team," she said, "the orientation was improved. The commitment for living the Cojourner Covenant became stronger."

"If it's of God, it's going to flourish and it did."

- Sister Bernadine Jax

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Cojourning Program continued to grow slowly and was largely decentralized. Rochester Franciscans within their own organizational structure had established regional forums throughout the United States and in Colombia where groups of Sisters were located. The forums provided regional connection and community for Sisters placed on assignment throughout the United States and South America.

Area forums were invited to participate in the Cojourner Program and, for the most part, developed their own criteria for membership and meetings. Relationships were still primarily between one Sister and one Cojourner, but leadership in those regional areas also saw the need for greater continuity and expansion of relationships to the broader community. In June 1999 at the Sisters' General Chapter, the concept of Rochester Franciscan Life Teams (RFLT) was approved. These were small teams of Sisters and Cojourners in five geographic areas that acted as a complement to the existing regional forums. These teams were committed to helping individuals deepen their involvement in and understanding of Rochester Franciscan life and process of Cojourning. They assisted interested persons through various levels of commitment in vowed religious life and in the relatively new concept of Cojourning. RFLT teams were located in far flung places including Albuquerque, New Mexico; St. Paul,

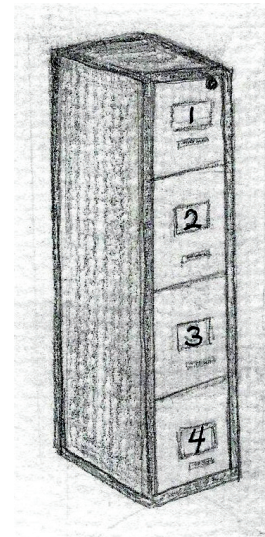
Minnesota; Bogotá, Colombia; Rochester, Minnesota; and Pembroke, Georgia.

Sister Dolore Rockers, Congregational president in 2000, asked Sister Arnold Ritchey to lead a Rochester Franciscan Life Team (RFLT) to meet the needs of the burgeoning program. Sister Arnold subsequently chose Sister Bernadine Jax as her teammate and “right-hand woman.”

With unparalleled “can-do” attitudes, these two Sisters set about to put Cojourning on the Franciscan map in Rochester – literally and figuratively. For one thing, there was no designated physical space for the program at Assisi Heights. There were handfuls of covenant documents, pamphlets, pictures, minutes and programs from Cojourning events that they initially kept in their own rooms, often tucked away, for example, in Wilson House where Sister Arnold was living.

“We were meeting monthly with interested candidates in the Barbara Moes Room, and then we decided to have Sunday gatherings at Wilson House, too,” Sister Bernadine recounts. “We were generating materials weekly and carting things back and forth. So, my first request to Sister Dolore, president of the Community at that time, was for a four-drawer file cabinet.”

That genesis moment with its four-drawer file cabinet eventually evolved into a separate office for the Cojourner candidate materials on the



administrative corridor of Assisi Heights, two doors down from the president of the Community. With that welcome real estate, the Cojourning Program now had a physical presence on the Assisi Heights footprint.

Even more important than its physical space, what was happening with the program's spiritual coordinates?

Go to the Head of the Class

Enter the curriculum. Who better than two well-educated and experienced teachers to assess the educational needs of Cojourner candidates, evaluate existing pamphlets, documents and other materials, and then design a curriculum with goals, objectives and a published guide? Sisters Arnold and Bernadine hit the ground running.

"There was a general plan passed on to us, but no specific curriculum to follow. We saw the need to have a bigger plan, so we contacted the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA) in La Crosse, Wisconsin," remembers Sister Bernadine. "They had a wonderful program with two tracks, one for affiliates and another for prayer affiliates. They gave us a copy of their handbook and other related materials and recommended *Following Francis*, by Susan Pitchford.

Once back in Rochester, Sisters Arnold and Bernadine met with Sister Ramona Miller, vice-president of the Congregation at that time, and noted author and Franciscan scholar. They were hoping her considerable workload might be outweighed by her love of

Francis and her commitment to share his story. Congregational Minister Sister Tierney Trueman concurred and told Sister Ramona to develop the Formation Program. Sister Ramona's collaboration with the RFLT resulted in a curriculum that continues to be used today. The Cojourner Coordinator(s) sponsored workshops led by Sister Ramona for Sisters and Cojourners to be prepared to serve as "companions" for candidates desiring to become Cojourners.



Sister Ramona Miller

A significant accomplishment for several Sisters, including Sisters Marlys Jax, Arnold Ritchey, Bernadine Jax and Ann Redig, was the development of the Cojourner Covenant that has remained the same since its inception. It represents a public attestation of the commitment Sisters and Cojourners have to one another and to gospel and Franciscan values. It is signed by the Cojourner candidate upon becoming a Cojourner, the contact Sister or Cojourner, a representative from the Franciscan Leadership Team, member of the Rochester Franciscan Life Team and other witnesses. Following confirmation by the Leadership Team, Cojourning commences from the date of the Covenant Ceremony.

The covenant reads as follows:

I, _____, commit myself to a Cojourning relationship with the Rochester Franciscan Community. I desire to share my life and spiritual journey with you.

We, the Sisters of Saint Francis, commit ourselves to this Cojourning relationship. We desire to share our lived expression of Gospel values in the spirit of Francis and Clare of Assisi.

Together, we, Sisters and Cojourners, mutually agree to challenge and affirm one another in our continued growth in a values-based lifestyle, witnessing to our basic interdependence as citizens of one global community.

Sister Ann Redig, Candidate Liaison 2006-2022

“I see Cojourners wherever they are as the yeast that expands the whole Rochester Franciscan charism.”

Like many of her Franciscan Sisters, Sister Ann Redig first encountered the kindness and warmth of Franciscan Sisters in her parish’s summer school and later in middle and high school. “The Franciscan Sisters,” she recalls, “had a spirit that was very welcoming. I knew I wanted to be a teacher and the Franciscan community was a good fit for me. I came to the convent in 1959 as part of the first class of postulants to live at Assisi



Sister Ann Redig

Heights, and not the College of Saint Teresa, for the year.”

After receiving her degree from the College of Saint Teresa and teaching for several years, Sister Ann spent several years in Bogotá, during which time she served on the Bogotá Franciscan Life Team, supporting the development of the Bogotá Cojourners and Sisters. When she returned to Rochester, she became Vocation Director for both Sisters and Cojourners. Interestingly, the initial path of study was similar for both Sisters and Cojourners with a final discernment leading some to choose to take vows to become consecrated religious, and others to choose to make a covenant through Cojourning with the Sisters of Saint Francis. Sister Ann shepherded both groups equally with warmth, encouragement, understanding and amazing coordination at every step.

Sister Ann says writings attributed to scholar, Sister Ilia Delio, cited within the chapter “Clare of Assisi and the Mysticism of Motherhood,” of *Franciscans at Prayer*, by Timothy Johnson, influenced her efforts and can be applied aptly to Franciscan Cojourners today.

“This means we are to become vessels of God’s compassionate love for others... We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become. Imitation is not a literal mimicking of Christ, rather it means becoming the image of the beloved, an image disclosed through transformation.”

Ginni Cormack,
From Cake to Commitment to Coordinator 2009-2013



Ginni Cormack decorating a cake

Among her many talents, Ginni Cormack loves baking, especially baking and decorating cakes. In fact, it is because of this sweet avocation that she became acquainted with the Minnesota Association of Cake Decorators and its star member, Sister Ralph Jahner. Sister Ralph was known throughout Minnesota for her beautifully decorated cakes, including one that was a perfect replica of Saint Marys Hospital. Her creation received national recognition and became the showpiece for the hospital's 100th birthday celebration in 1989 and was displayed prominently in Mayo Clinic's Plummer Building for months.

Sister Ralph and Ginni became fast friends in Sister Ralph's kitchen in the basement of Assisi Heights while drinking coffee and

perfecting all manner of frostings – from butter cream to ganache to fondant. Ginni, like so many others touched by Sister Ralph, was attracted to her warmth, her skill, her welcoming invitation to all who ventured near her kitchen and to her faith. Soon, Sister Ralph and Ginni and Ginni's husband, Marty, were attending Mass together at Assisi Heights and even spending Sunday afternoons at Wilson House with several Sisters. So, when the possibility of a Cojourner Coordinator position was mentioned, Marty thought Ginni had just the right ingredients to make an amazing coordinator. And so did the Sisters of Saint Francis.

Ginni recalls she went from cake to commitment to coordinator, becoming a Cojourner in 2002 and then coordinator in 2009.

“Cojourning allows like-minded, spiritual people to come together, and we have a history that is all ours,” she says. “We use that history in how we face the world today. While we each bring our own gifts and strengths to the Franciscan charism, we are all working toward a common goal of living gospel values through our commitment to peace and justice and concern for the environment. Francis gave his followers tools to stand on their own, to continue the directive he received to “repair my house.” That’s what Cojourning does for us. We are given the tools to stand on our own and continue that repair wherever we can make a difference. The world is our house.”

Cojourner Coordinators and Years of Service



Darlene Coffman
(1998 – 1999)



Kathy Johnson
(2007 – 2009)



Ginni Cormack
(2009 – 2014)



Pam Captain
(2014 – 2018)



Margo Kroshus
(2018 – 2022)



Jan Manahan
(2022 - Present)

(See also: Appendix, page 79.)

Committees, Councils and Community

**Without consultation, plans are frustrated,
but with many counselors they succeed.**

- Proverbs 15:22

There has never been a shortage of “counselors” within the Rochester Franciscan Community. These are women who know that their strength, their accomplishments, their faith, and even their ability to “repair my house” stem from their commitment to gospel values and from their reliance on one another through community. Teams, task forces, work groups, committees, councils, and sometimes “kitchen cabinets” all are employed to get the job done – whether fulfilling their order’s mission on a global scale or determining locally what to plant in the backyard to support ecological initiatives. Franciscan Sisters are educated, forward-thinking women who are used to having a say in how things are run. After all, they began voting for their own leadership decades before women won the right to vote in national elections in 1920. Discussion, deliberation and discernment are part of their Franciscan DNA.

The Cojourner Core Committee, formed in 1982, brought those exact qualities to the task at hand. Comprised initially of Sisters Monessa Overby, Patricia Sablatura, Diane Ruppert and Margo Lebert, the committee set about to design a system to process requests for information and/or initiation into a Cojourner relationship; develop

materials and resources that would educate Rochester Franciscans and interested persons about the Cojourner movement; and establish an organizational structure for the Cojourning Committee. It continued until 1996 with evolving membership representing dozens of Cojourners and Sisters.

At that time, the Cojourning Committee felt that it had done “what was mine to do.” Committee members had nurtured the program since its inception. The committee had fulfilled its initial goals; membership was increasing; an organizational structure was in place; a coordinator had been hired; and Sisters and Cojourners alike were committed to the success of the program. Other assignments, responsibilities and opportunities beckoned committee members, and the committee decided that the Cojourning Program was no longer a fledgling; instead, it had achieved full flight.

A few years later, perhaps with the admonition from Proverbs in mind, more “counselors” stepped forward to bolster support and increase even more interest in the Cojourning Program. A letter and survey were sent to all Cojourners asking for ideas and for volunteers. The response reflected a renewed surge of interest, ideas and initiative. In 2006, the Cojourner Advisory Council (CAC) was formed. Its first members were Marty Cormack, Kathy Johnson, Marion Kaple, and Sisters Janel Crumb, Margaret Boler and Sue Reif. Sisters Anne Walch and Ramona Miller served as co-liaisons with Academy Leadership. Its purpose was developed based on Chapter Directives which called on the council “to implement the congregational recommitment to the ongoing development of the Sister/Cojourner relationship; foster Franciscan Life Groups – local gatherings of Sisters, Cojourners and interested persons to share

life and spirituality; and offer clarification of the legal aspects of the Cojourner relationship with the Sisters of Saint Francis.” (From “History of Cojourner Advisory Council (CAC)”)



*RFLT – RA (Rochester Franciscan Life Team – Rochester Area)
Back: Sister Claudia Laliberte, Sister Colleen Byron, Sister Arnold Ritchey,
Judy Dawley, Sister Bernadine Jax
Front: Sister Severin Duehren, Marty Cormack, Kathy Colescott*

Sue Hoisington, Cojourner Advisory Council member, recently summed up what Cojourning means to her. “As Cojourners,” she says, “we are all seeking a deeper sense of connectedness as well as exploring ways to deepen our spirituality. Being a Cojourner is about relationship with one another, with God, with the Rochester Franciscans and with the broader world. As a member of CAC,

I am graced to be able to assist with exploring, identifying and assisting with facilitating opportunities to foster and nurture those relationships.”

Sister Marisa McDonald, congregational archives office, recalls that other initiatives to support Cojourning were also embraced by the Franciscan community. Beginning in 2006, the Franciscan Life Identity in Mission (FLIM) Committee began meeting and continued meeting for several years with the purpose of engaging Sisters and Cojourners in living out the Franciscan charism. Then in 2014, the Office of Franciscan Life and Mission, later becoming the Cojourning Office, was created to support Sisters and Cojourners in areas of spirituality, justice and peace, and care for creation. The initial members of the Franciscan Life and Mission Team were Cojourners Pam Captain and Mary Doucette and Sisters Linda Wieser, Kathy Warren and Judy Angst. Sister Chris Stanoch served as liaison to Leadership.

Cojourners Today - Boots on the Ground

“Cojourners are adults—men and women, single and married, vowed, ordained and non-ordained, young and not-so-young—of various creeds, cultures and walks of life, living within and beyond the borders of the Americas.”

“They share common values as belief in God, reverence for life, interdependence of all the universe, concern for the poor, care of the earth and commitment to justice and peace. “

- The Cojourner Handbook

A *New York Times* article, published in 2011, entitled “Nuns Who Won’t Stop Nudging,” recounted the efforts of a group of Franciscan Sisters in Philadelphia who set about to “educate” a large investment firm about the need for Wall Street to protect consumers, rein in executive pay, increase transparency and remember the poor. The article quickly dispelled the notion that Franciscan Sisters live only quiet, cloistered lives removed from the secular world, consumed with their prayers and rituals. Hardly. While not written about Rochester Franciscans, it could have been. Similar to Rochester Franciscans and their Cojourning companions, these women were activists determined to make a difference in the world.



“Boots on the Ground”

Franciscan Cojourners today make a difference as they journey together on a pathway clearly outlined in the prayer attributed to Saint Francis whose first supplication is, "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace." For Cojourners, that "instrument" may be local or it may be international; it may be a silent prayer or a strident call; it may benefit one or one million; its "nudge" may be subtle or if need be, directly in the face of injustice.

Through Justice and Peace Ministries, Franciscan Sisters, Cojourners and community partners journey together to educate, advocate and commit to disabling unjust systems and systemic injustices. According to Sister JoAnn Haney, "Cojourning today is the same as when Mother Alfred was alive. She responded to what was happening in the moment. So do we."

Bogotá

"We believe that Church is community and Cojourning is community. It's connecting, gathering, being there for one another with real friendship and real love."

- Abilio Peña Buendia

Cojourners in America are committed to Franciscan themes of peace and justice, care of the marginalized, and reverence for all creation. They sponsor educational programs, advocate through the justice system for immigrants and the homeless, attend rallies, protest injustice when necessary, and support ecological initiatives.

Cojourners in Colombia do all those things, too, except it is too often in a world where governmental corruption and military violence may be part of the equation as well.

Abilio Peña Buendia has been a Cojourner since 2012. He says the program appealed to him because of its emphasis on social and climate justice, nonviolence, commitment to peace, and the importance of community and prayer.



Abilio Peña Buendia

In 1997 he first met Sister Carolina Pardo Jaramillo in Colombia while attending a religious conference. He was immediately drawn to her work with the Peace and Justice Commission. He soon joined Sister Carolina and others in walking with – accompanying – 12 communities in danger of losing their land.

At times, what they encountered was horrific, with groups of military invading a village, giving people three hours to leave, and then murdering those who did not follow their commands. “We walked with these communities,” he says, “trying to find ways for them to stay in the territory and maintain their land in the middle of a war. We looked for funds, networked for human rights, and tried to influence regional and national policies.”

During the time Abilio became a Cojourner in 2012, he was receiving death threats and threats of prison through judicial action against him because of his work. “At that time,” he recalls, “I was welcomed by the Franciscans in Rochester in order to save my life. But they saved more than my life. Through their ongoing efforts, including letters and petitions in support for the protection of our leaders, many Colombia citizens were spared from police attacks and killings.”



*Group photo from Sister Carolina's PowerPoint Presentation
"50 years of OSFs in Colombia for AH Celebration"*

For a while conditions in Colombia seemed to improve. Abilio and Sister Carolina, along with five Cojourners, two Cojourner candidates, and a few others, were able to support a group of young leaders. "We raised money for a new library for one neighborhood. We also raised money to continue our accompaniment of other humanitarian missions. We continue to support communities in outlying regions as best we can for the security and safety of social leaders."

Despite the gravity and danger often inherent in social issues faced by Abilio, Sister Carolina and other Colombian Cojourners, their commitment to spiritual growth continues. "We meet every two weeks to pray, have other meetings monthly, and plan spiritual retreats every six months," Abilio says. "We sense a very real connection with Pope Francis as he recalls Saint Francis in admonishing us to rebuild the church of the world in our 'Casa Comun,' our common home."

Border Crossings

“How can we be silent?”

- Sisters of Saint Francis

According to the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, in 2014 the United States government first declared a crisis at the southern border to address the rapid increase in the number of unaccompanied children, and, to a lesser extent, women migrating through border checkpoints and/or unguarded entry points, especially into Texas. Eight years later, the crisis has only worsened. Few would argue this situation at the border is a humanitarian crisis of immense proportions; but many disagree on how to handle the influx of immigrants; how to stem the flow from South America; whose responsibility it is to address the crisis; which political party is at fault; and why this is happening, etc. The primary question continually posed as millions are detained, thousands are arrested and hundreds die is not so much how to meet the needs of the human crisis, but instead, “How can we control the border?”

That is not the primary question for the Sisters of Saint Francis and Franciscan Cojourners. Instead, they pose this question: “How can we be silent when individual families cross borders to avoid starvation, homelessness due to drought and violence, and are not welcomed as valued persons?”

While the question for these followers of Saint Francis may be rhetorical, their response is anything but. It was “boots on the ground” for Sisters Mary Kay Mahowald and Arnold Ritchey who spent 10 years in El Paso, Texas, working in various capacities with

immigrants. Sister Mary Kay started as a chaplain with Bien Vivir, a community-based health care program developed to serve the frail and elderly. After two years, she felt God calling her to even more challenging work. She worked in an immigration detention center within the federal government's Immigration and Customs Enforcement program. It was there she saw first-hand the trauma of children separated from their mothers. "You cannot begin to imagine the horror those mothers felt when their children were taken from them and not returned," she remembers.

Sister Arnold Ritchey, too, witnessed the plight and suffering of the immigrants. She worked in Nazareth House, a welcoming center for immigrants where they could find clothing, a warm meal and a genuinely warm reception. Sister Arnold remembers one woman who looked at her and said, "You're the first person who has smiled at me since I left Nicaragua." Even though Sister Arnold did not speak Spanish, just her presence and helpfulness brought comfort to those she encountered. One surprising task she did not expect was trying to help immigrants find shoelaces. The Border Patrol routinely takes shoelaces from immigrants to hinder their attempts to run away at some future point. Sister Arnold recounts finding ribbons for one family to use for shoelaces for their children.

Sisters Arnold and Mary Kay both agree, "We were there in solidarity with the immigrants. It was a privilege to be there; a privilege to journey with them in their suffering; and a privilege to join lay men and women and religious men and women from all faiths in standing with our brothers and sisters. We were a compassionate presence, advocating for the worth of each individual whom we met."

That person-to-person approach is supported in part by a committee of Franciscans and Cojourners in Rochester led by Social Justice Coordinator Sister Jennifer Corbett (2018 – 2022). “We’ve made generous donations to houses and organizations at the border receiving immigrants. We support whatever they might need – food, health care, clothes, bus tickets – whatever will help. Best of all, our committee, comprised of Cojourners and Sisters, functions on trust. When our committee receives a request, we trust the word of those making the request. We can help immediately. In this way, we know we can make a difference and we have.”

Sisters and Cojourners continue to support immigration advocacy “by studying, analyzing and acting on issues that lead to systemic change, as well as by participating in direct actions that aid our immigrant brothers and sisters.” (Taken from the 2022 Chapter Statement of the Congregation)

Backstreets

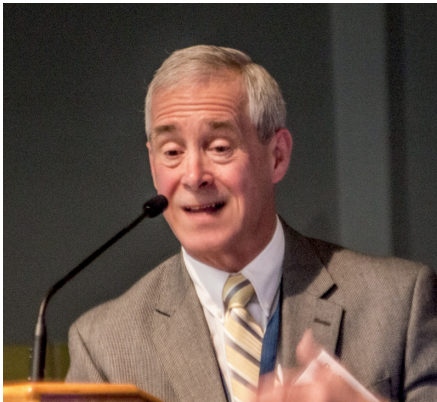
**“Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless;
maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.”**

- Psalm 82:3

For 12 years, the Spirituality Center at Assisi Heights served as the tactical center for a program that brought awareness and action to the plight of individuals caught in the devastating web of human trafficking. Surprising to many was that human trafficking was not confined to major cities or coastal or border states with large immigrant or homeless populations. Southern Minnesota, in fact, was not immune to human trafficking, defined by the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 as the use of force, fraud

or coercion to obtain labor or commercial sex. It can also encompass forced marriage, domestic servitude and the recruitment of child soldiers in war. It has been described as the worst form of abuse that can be inflicted on an individual.

“The program we developed had a tremendous impact,” according to Sister Marlys Jax, director of the Spirituality Center. “The camaraderie of the Sisters and Cojourners coming together to tackle this issue was incredible. Sister Anne Walch was instrumental in bringing the program to us, and Sister Mary Eliot Crowley and several Cojourners – including Arnie Graff, M.D., Darlene Kelly, M.D., and Diane Wroblewski – were key in its successful implementation. We engaged experts from Washington, D.C., to visit Rochester and educate us and other interested community members on what human trafficking was and how we could best combat it. We then developed our own program and recruited Sisters and Cojourners who took this program to hundreds of



*Dr. Arne Graff, Cojourner,
presenting at a Human Trafficking
Awareness event in 2015*



*Display at Human Trafficking
Awareness events*

individuals in towns, cities, schools, parishes and other interested groups in southern Minnesota and parts of California as well. Cojourners were essential to the success of this program.”

According to Sister Mary Eliot Crowley, the program’s success in raising awareness was amazing. “We brought people to the understanding that those being trafficked were our daughters, our sons, our sisters and our brothers. We shared how those engaged in human trafficking employ ways of grooming that are subtle, powerful and insidious. Often after our presentations, trafficking victims would come forward to ask for help for themselves and others to begin the healing process. So, in addition to our efforts to educate, we also provided victim advocacy efforts.

“Because of our collaborative efforts with other community groups, we continue to raise awareness and provide victim assistance wherever we can,” she concludes.

Sisters and Cojourners also continue to monitor human trafficking incidents, legislation and litigation, and the well-traveled PowerPoint presentation they jointly developed is “at the ready” whenever a need arises. Their efforts remain active not only in Minnesota, but in other states as well. Cojourner Michele DesLauriers, for example, heard about the education and advocacy the Sisters were offering in Rochester around the topic of human trafficking. She was inspired while working with other organizations to establish the Alliance to Combat Human Trafficking in Pueblo, Colorado. She wrote material for awareness education that included resources and ways one could help. During the pandemic, she served as a contractor for the Colorado Department of Human Services to offer its Zoom trainings throughout the state.

Backyards – Neighborhoods Around the Globe and Right Next Door

“As stewards of God’s creation, we are called to make the earth a beautiful garden for the human family. When we destroy our forests, ravage our soil and pollute our seas, we betray that noble calling.”

- Pope Francis

“Climate change endangers all of creation. Its adverse effects are especially felt by our poor brothers and sisters around the world.”

- Rochester Franciscans’ Corporate Stance, June 1, 2009

When the United States withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord in 2020, Sisters and Cojourners joined forces in the Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) with 194 nations of the world and the Pope to object and to continue to support the elements within the agreement. In particular, the CCWG has engaged with the international community to offer respect and reverence for “our common home” through support of tree planting projects in Cambodia and Cameroon, installation of solar panels at Assisi Heights, and investment in renewable energy and “green” corporations. Sister Joan Brown, executive director, New Mexico Interfaith Power & Light, has been a valuable resource person for promoting advocacy for the environment.

**“Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,
so useful, humble, precious and pure.”**

- Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon, St. Francis of Assisi

On a more local level, Sister Joy Barth, although diminutive in



Sisters Joy Barth and Janel Crumb



Sister Joy Barth with The Earth Charter

stature, has long been recognized as a bona fide force of nature. From chairing the Water Working Group comprised of Sisters and Cojourners to ensure safe, affordable and non-privatized drinking water, to leading the successful charge against the use of plastic water bottles at Assisi Heights, Sister Joy's entire life has demonstrated reverence and respect for the earth. Some might say she literally grew into that role, first tending her family's huge garden on a farm near Chatfield, Minnesota, and later supervising the gardens at Assisi Heights from planting through cultivating through harvesting, including selecting only the finest organic fertilizer for her vegetables and flowers! "What could be more natural," Sister Joy offers, "than to have a reverent relationship with God's nature? It is His divine gift to us and to all creatures."

Building Bridges with All People

"Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth, which is our common home, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all."

- Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti

According to Cojourner Coordinator Jan Manahan, Building Bridges began even before Pope Francis issued this encyclical. “It really started as an interfaith group that began after 9/11. At one time, we called it Journey of Peace; now it’s Building Bridges.

“Initially we reached out to other faiths, and then we realized our effort needed to transcend any one religion. We need to engage everyone we can in the community, building bridges through listening to others with compassion and understanding. Once we hear others’ stories, we quickly discover we are much more alike than different.

“Cojourners feel empowered in this movement. The Sisters have inspired us. We don’t have to wait to take the initiative. The Dorothy Day House is a good example. Cojourners now have full responsibility for meal service once a month at the Dorothy Day House. We are following in the Sisters’ footsteps.”

Cojourners also don’t limit their efforts solely to Franciscan initiatives. Marty Cormack, for example, provided leadership in establishing the District Council for the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Rochester in 2014. Periodically, Cojourners are asked to share the difference they are making in their families, churches, workplaces, civic groups, and local communities through their committed efforts to incorporate Franciscan ideals in their daily lives. An attempt to chart these activities proved daunting as Cojourners recounted thousands of activities.

**“The cause of suffering humanity knows no religion
and no sex; the charity of the Sisters of Saint Francis
is as broad as their religion.”**

- Mother Mary Alfred Moes

What was true in 1889 remains constant today. Wherever and whenever suffering occurs, Sisters and Cojourners remain committed to be a “compassionate presence for peace in our world, striving for justice and reverence for all creation.” (2003 *Mission Statement*)

Whether addressing issues related to climate change, immigration, human trafficking, mountaintop coal mining, Palestinian Human Rights, responsible corporations, women in the Church, or local community issues, Franciscan Sisters and Cojourners alike are instrumental in sowing love where there is hatred, pardon where there is injury, faith where there is doubt, hope where there is despair, light where there is darkness, and joy where there is sadness.

“We are companions on a journey. We walk together with the same goal in mind – living the gospel and rebuilding the church – individually and together in the trinity of love. We are all one.”

- Sister Patricia Fritz



What Then is the Franciscan Charism?

Charism is a term often described as a gift from God to be used for the benefit of others. According to Sister Carol Zinn, Sisters of St. Joseph, (SSJ), executive director for Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), both religious and laity can be called to a charism. “It’s a calling to a movement, not an institution,” she says.

Sister Ramona Miller, past president of the Sisters of Saint Francis and noted Franciscan scholar, expands on that description. Writing in the Spring 2022 issue of *Interchange*, she says, “When I think of someone with charisma, the person has a special energy that invites one to listen and pay attention to what they are about. The charisma of Francis of Assisi in the 13th century attracted many followers because of his love of Jesus. His authentic witness of living the Gospel was unencumbered with rules and regulations. His joyful spirit and strong proclamation that God loves everyone, that all persons are good – created in the image and likeness of God – began a movement that has endured through the centuries. Francis’ special spirit given by God is *charism*.”



“Dancing Francis” by
Sister Clairvaux McFarland

“Cojourners attracted to the Franciscan charism feel called to journey together, or ‘co-journey,’ sharing their lives, prayer, mission and ministry in the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi and the foundress, Mother Mary Alfred Moes.”

Cojourning 2030

**“We must not be content only to see things as they are.
We must have the vision, faith and hope to see
what things can and must become.”**

- Sister Generose Gervais

**“As we go into the future, we must not
lose the good things of the past.”**

- Sister Mary Brigh Cassidy

“Pray to God, but keep rowing to shore.”

- Old Russian Proverb

Biblical scholars cite concern and confusion among the disciples about how their early movement would continue following the crucifixion and death of their leader, Jesus Christ. Some thought the movement would never survive the harsh Roman laws prescribing death or prison for practicing Christians. Others thought the movement was doomed because early Christianity was comprised of several different factions – all comprised of believers but believers not always in perfect harmony about how to move forward. Even the disciples themselves lacked agreement on how best to proceed.

Similarly, at the end of Francis’ life when because of weariness and illness, he took a step back from leadership, there must have been concern among the Brothers and other followers about what the future would bring. The Brothers had their papal rule, as did Francis’ lay followers, but without the charisma and vision of Francis, how would they continue?

Interestingly, neither Jesus nor Francis seemed overly concerned in recorded history about the future of their ministries. Both knew their deaths were imminent; yet neither made lengthy lists of goals, objectives and tactics for their followers to undertake in order that their movements might continue. Jesus admonished his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you,” (Matthew 28:18-20). Francis echoed that same approach in a more condensed version: “I have done what was mine to do; may Christ teach you yours.” Another statement, often attributed to Francis, summarizes his approach as well. “Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary use words.”

Similarly, toward the end of Mother Alfred’s life, through yet another questionable election, she ultimately stepped away with grace and quiet acceptance from her leadership role in the Franciscan Order she had founded. She also moved away from her beloved Saint Marys Hospital which she had similarly founded and built. And she slowly bid farewell to countless numbers of Sisters in Minnesota and Illinois who through the years had called her “mother” and friend. When W.W. Mayo visited her in St. Paul and implored her to return to Saint Marys Hospital, she said simply, “No, this is where God wants me to be.” (*Odyssey in Faith*, Sister Carlan Kraman)

All three – Jesus, Francis and Mother Alfred – had done what was theirs to do. All three had complete faith in God and His message. All three understood that their pathway in life was a signpost leading to a much larger and more profound journey.

Christianity flourished and remains the largest religion in the world with more than two billion followers; Francis' respect for the dignity of all persons and his devotion to the earth and all its creatures became basic tenets in countless religious, spiritual and philosophical movements; and Mother Alfred's amazing resilience and "can do" approach are still evidenced today by Franciscan Sisters and their Cojourning companions.

More often than not, Cojourning is referred to as a "movement" and not a program. Its future seems ensured because its followers are drawn to the Franciscan charism of living gospel values, respect for all living things and commitment to the ecological health of the planet.

How that future will evolve will be guided in part by a team called "Cojourners 2030," initially led by Cojourners Margo Kroshus and Sue Hoisington and including Mary Wellik, Juli Wilkerson, Bruce Rohde, Kevin Ryan and Sister Marlys Jax who serves as liaison to leadership.

Formed in 2021, the team's goals are to develop a 10-year plan for Cojourners in concert with the mission of the Rochester Franciscans.

"The number of Sisters of Saint Francis is decreasing, similar to religious orders throughout the world," Margo explains. "With



Statues of Francis and Clare

so many options now available to women, very few are choosing to take the steps and the vows necessary to become consecrated religious.

“At the same time, the number of lay individuals seeking association with religious orders has doubled since 2002 growing from 25,000 to 55,942 (Data from the Center for Applied Research Apostolate). We are in the midst of a paradigm shift.

“We currently have more than 120 Cojourners with several individuals in process. In the past, many Cojourners were attracted to Cojourning because of a relationship they had with an individual Sister. Now, interested candidates come to us because they are drawn to the Franciscan charism and mission of the Sisters of Saint Francis. They are seeking a deeper spirituality in their lives that they find in Cojourning.”

“We can create a future,” according to Mary Wellik. “Our team has specific goals which really came into focus for us when we added the phrase to assure the inclusion of Rochester Franciscan charism and legacy is perpetuated and built upon. That is our future.”

“We’re part of a Franciscan renaissance,” Margo continues. “It’s a national and international movement and we’re latched on. The Franciscan Federation is leading the way in ensuring that there is strong support for lay associate (Cojourning) programs. As Cojourners, it’s now our time to step up and do “what is ours to do” in response to charism of Saint Francis and in support of the mission of the Sisters of Saint Francis.”

Sister Chris Stanoch, councilor on the 2022-2026 Franciscan Leadership Team, sums up their perspective on the Cojourning movement. She says, “We embrace the Cojourners ‘what is ours to do,’ and we look forward to celebrating the 40-year anniversary of Cojourning in 2024. We walk as one with Cojourners on the same path following in the footsteps of Saint Francis. May it be ever so.”

The Journey is Essential to the Dream

“The Journey is Essential to the Dream.”

- Saint Francis of Assisi

When Francis Bernardone left that church in Assisi after hearing the admonition, “Go and Repair My House,” he knew that his task was far greater than patching a roof or plastering a wall. And while he did repair a small church, the Portiuncula, his most notable efforts at repair embraced the world at large as the “church” needing the most repair. Francis’ example by words and deeds provided a critique of the bloated and cumbersome bureaucracy of the 13th century Catholic Church, but far beyond that, he dedicated his life to living out the gospel values with all whom he encountered. His interaction with the leper, the Sultan of Egypt, the peasants in Umbria, and the entire world he embraced from creatures to climate to his “Cojourners” reflected his sense that God was present in every aspect of the world.

People were drawn to walk with Francis in a similar manner as those drawn to walk with Jesus. Initially, all who followed Francis and Jesus were members of the laity. While some were named as disciples and apostles, some as brothers, some as priests and some later as martyrs and saints, initially, they all walked alongside both individuals as simple followers. There was no thought to hierarchy, title, rank or social status. They simply wanted to travel spiritual and physical roads with these individuals. Theirs was a response

to the Spirit moving in their lives calling them to the mission and charism that would change the world.

Similarly, Mother Alfred and the Sisters of Saint Francis attracted hundreds of individuals who chose to join the order of the Sisters of Saint Francis, Third Order Regular of Our Lady of Lourdes, founded by Mother Alfred. But they also walked with an equal number of laity who wanted to share the Franciscan journey whether building schools or hospitals, ministering to the sick, supporting the poor, embracing the marginalized or caring for the planet. They, too, were drawn to a life-altering mission and charism.

GO AND REPAIR MY HOUSE...

Most echoes are fleeting and ethereal, bouncing around caverns and canyons, quickly fading into nothingness. But some echoes remain – long after their sound waves dissipate. Somehow, those echoes’ reverberations can be heard for centuries, often gaining influence and momentum through the generations.

The Rochester Franciscan Cojourners were formed in order to accommodate those who wanted to walk with the Sisters on a journey of mutuality and commitment to the Franciscan charism and gospel values. Far more than a program, Franciscan Cojourners are part of a movement begun centuries ago at the base of a cross in a sleepy little village in Italy where a simple man heard a powerful message that changed the world.

GO AND REPAIR MY HOUSE...

Franciscan Cojourners hear that echo even today.

**“Today we need a Church capable of walking at people’s side, of
doing more than simply listening to them; a Church
which accompanies them on their journey.”**

- Pope Francis

Cojourning

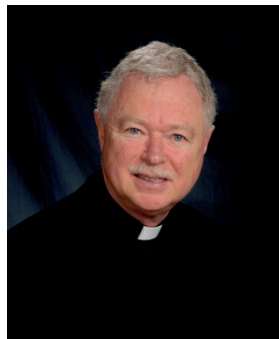
Official now, while life
stories long intertwined.

Christ story,
learning, teaching
grades 1 through 12.
Serving in school, hospital
being church,
naming Christ
pointing where God is and
is Not,
valuing the undervalued
letting the mute have voice.

Choosing
works of mercy
not works of war.
Can this be done by one?
Not so far, and
not now!

We journey together
weaving stories, courageous.

- Fr. Joe Keefe, *Cojourner* (1992)



Epilogue

It seems only fitting that we might conclude this wonderful story of the Franciscan Cojourning program with a few words often expressed by the foundress of the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Third Order Regular of the Congregation of Our Lady of Lourdes, Mother Mary Alfred Moes. At the end of long days filled with administrative duties, construction oversight and prayer with her Sisters, Mother Alfred often would compose beautiful letters, usually in German, filled with genuine warmth and affection for her recipients. She often concluded her letters with the words and signature shared with you today:

**With love to you and all the dear Sisters from me.
I remain yours lovingly in the Sacred Heart.**

- Mother M. Alfred

Mother M. Alfred





From the Author

The Story of Cojourning: Walking with the Rochester Franciscans is not intended to be a scholarly accounting of people, dates, places and activities related to Cojourning, even though many of the Franciscan Sisters and others who gave so generously of their time and talents to this story are indeed scholars. Instead, it is an attempt to capture the essence of a movement – the spirit of Saint Francis – that still speaks today to those willing to listen.

About the Author

Marianne L. Hockema first encountered the Rochester Franciscan community when she joined the Department of Public Affairs at Saint Marys Hospital in 1978. She recounts her interactions with Franciscan Sisters, including Sisters Mary Brigh Cassidy, Generose Gervais, Meigan Fogarty, Eleanor Granger, and Lauren Weinandt as life altering.



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