

The Canticle

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Voice of
The Community
of St. Francis,
Province of
The Americas

The Family Link at 30

The year 2015 is being observed as the 30th anniversary of The Family Link, the hospitality ministry founded in 1985 by Sr. Ruth and Ray Cope. In this issue of *The Canticle*, Ruth reminisces about the motivations leading her to begin this ministry. Ruth has been the Program Director of The Family Link since the beginning.



Sr. Ruth in the mid-1980s with a Family Link poster made to display at the Diocese of California annual convention.

The Family Link was established to provide affordable accommodations in a safe, supportive environment for families and loved ones visiting people in San Francisco with life-threatening medical conditions. In the beginning this was primarily A.I.D.S., but more recently has also been cancer, transplants, and critical injuries.

Over the years they have provided over half a million guest nights to people from every state and continent (except Antarctica!) In addition to

accommodations, The Family Link promotes mutual exchange of information and emotional support among the families who are often isolated and in great emotional distress.

THE FAMILY LINK

30th ANNIVERSARY

1985 ~ 2015



August 8th

6:30 - 9:00pm

St. Aidan's Episcopal Church
San Francisco

You can learn more about The Family Link at www.thefamilylink.com.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE.....

We share news of two of our "outreach" ministries.

As regular readers of *The Canticle* already know, for the past 10 years we have been helping to support **Jean Isemba, TSSF**, in her life and ministry in Papua New Guinea. There is an update on her new house.

A second outreach ministry (since 2000) is our support of a girl at **Our Little Roses**, a home in Honduras for girls who would otherwise be living in great poverty and subject to neglect and abuse.

Journeying Together into God's Embrace

Sr. Ruth, CSF

What came to be known as the A.I.D.S. crisis began at the start of the 1980s. Some young men became suddenly, incurably ill and their families rushed to San Francisco to be with them. Since St. Francis House is only one block from St. Luke's Hospital, we offered accommodation to loved ones in our guest apartment. Most of these men lived just a few days; nobody knew what this scourge was or how it could be stopped. I felt drawn into this dark but familiar terror; it's the only way I can describe the pull to respond.

I was born in 1949, so much of my childhood was either hearing about "The War", or being afraid that an atomic bomb was going to be dropped on Great Britain by the Russians. I had no idea what an atomic bomb could, or would, do, but always there was the threat that life could end in a sudden, nightmarish, untimely manner, possibly without my family beside me. It was that lurking threat that I could identify with in those earliest days of A.I.D.S., though the illness had no name at that time. Something was lurking out there that could snatch away a life, and it had more power to kill than anyone had to stop it.

Childhood turned into teen years – powerful years when we can do so much when supported by friends. The advice of parents no longer counted and rolling one's eyes became a favorite exercise! But, when fear struck, it wasn't school friends who had the most power but rather the comforting reassurance of snuggling into a parent, or being held in their loving arms. If the bomb dropped I knew it was my family I wanted to be surrounded by.

One day I was looking at a copy of Michelangelo's "Pieta" and felt such a strong connection with the people who were being struck down in early manhood, and the mothers who came to stand helplessly, but lovingly beside them. It was an empowering connection that—long story short—brought about The Family Link. Michelangelo captures the devotion of Mary to her son, and her suffering. Jesus is a dead body in Mary's arms. The focus is on Mary, full of a mother's love, grief-stricken, devastated by the loss of her son. The artist carries us into the agony that Mary is enduring and, at the same time, touches that place of unbearable loss in our own hearts.



Sr. Ruth cutting the cake at the 25th anniversary celebration five years ago.

How many times Mary must have thought about, and dreaded, this terrible moment; this last time of taking her beloved son into her arms!

The tears of thousands of mothers, fathers, spouses and children have been shed in both private and public rooms of The Family Link. Unbearable grief reflects the enormity of love. Love is of God; loving another is an imprint of God on our hearts. More than thirty years on I am still privileged to share a little of the journey that our guests are embarked upon. I have no answers to give them: there's no way I can be a signpost, just a fellow traveler along life's path. The living icon is that we journey together into God's embrace. The hand that reaches out to us already has us carved into it. For me the journey's end is filled with hospitality; a place of union and reunion, where sorrow and sighing are no more, and the words, "Welcome home" will ring in our ears.

Sr. Ruth at The Family Link, in an uncharacteristically relaxed pose.



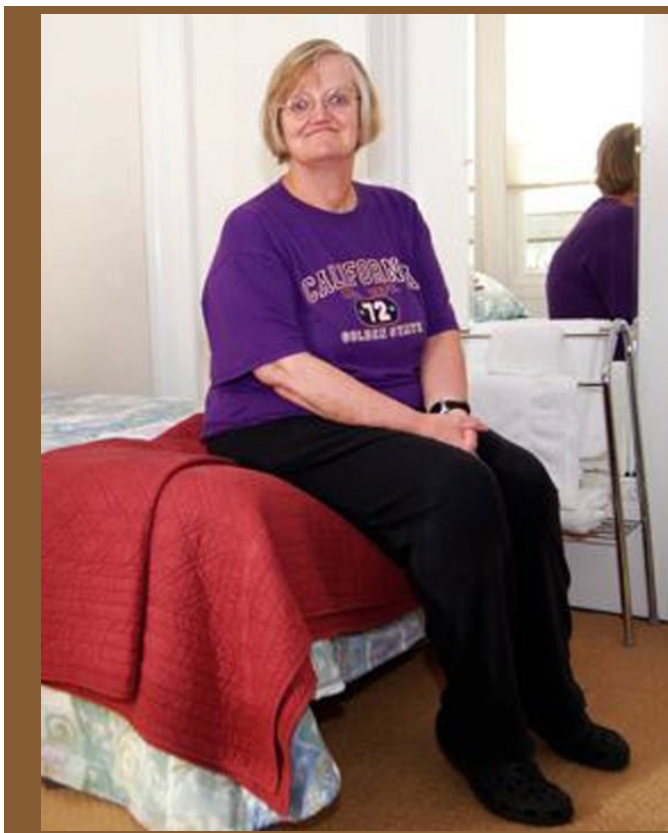
JEAN ISEMBA, TSSF — HER NEW HOUSE!

Thank you to all who generously contributed toward the construction of Jean Isemba's new house in Papua New Guinea in response to our appeal last Fall. She now has a non-leaky roof over her head and is no longer in danger of having the rotting posts holding up her house fall on her as she cooks in her under-house kitchen. Thank you. She is grateful, we are grateful.



There is more information about Jean and her life and ministry in the December 2013 issue of *The Canticle*, available on our website under Newsletter Archives. www.communitystfrancis.org

***Jean Isemba with her niece Ruth
(named in honor of Sr. Ruth).***



Sr. Maggie also works at The Family Link. She does office administration. Unofficially, she also helps with Ruth's two canine companions, one of whom, Morag, is pictured here.



The Canticle

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The Canticle

is the newsletter of the
Community of St.
Francis, a religious
order for women in the
Franciscan tradition in
the Episcopal Church.



The Family Link — 30 Years

.OUR LITTLE ROSES MINISTRIES

Our Little Roses runs a home in San Pedro Sula for girls who are orphaned, abandoned, or remanded by the local courts. The home provides an education and nurture to girls who would otherwise be growing into adulthood under conditions of extreme deprivation.



Since she was 7 in 2000 until she left the OLR program in 2014, we sponsored Josselyn (top row middle on the OLR calendar for 2013.)



The new child whom we sponsor is named Rocio (middle foreground). We are very pleased to be able to support the excellent work of Our Little Roses and contribute to the quality of life of a young girl in Honduras.

www.ourlittleroses.org

The Canticle—digital version

The newsletter of the Community of St. Francis, *The Canticle*, is now available in a digital edition. If you would like to receive this publication online, please send us your e-mail address.

We will print a limited number of newsletters for mailing to people who have requested to receive a paper copy. But we would appreciate e-mail addresses if possible! Thank you!

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*And for the most up-to-date and more informal contact, check out our Facebook page
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