



The Canticle

July 2022
Volume 40 No. 1

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

Being Present With the Poor

For over 40 years, a painting of the Good Samaritan by Japanese Christian artist Sadao Watanabe has presided over our living room at St. Francis House. “And he had compassion on him,” the words of the parable, hold special meaning because they were inscribed on the altar of Good Samaritan Church where I worked for many years.

Our Baptismal Covenant calls us to serve our neighbors and respect the dignity of every person. The Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion, as adopted by the Anglican Consultative Council, include responding to human need by loving service and seeking to transform unjust structures of society.

With Watanabe’s painting so prominently on view, it is not surprising that the call to “have compassion” has been perpetually on the minds and hearts of the CSF Sisters. As Franciscans we are conscious of the 800 year tradition of service to the poor, the sick, and the marginalized that has characterized the Franciscan charism since the days Francis was caring for the lepers near Assisi.

A critical aspect of Francis’ association with lepers in his day was not simply that he offered compassionate service, but that he was truly present with the poor. He didn’t minister to lepers from afar. His momentous encounter with a leper when he was a young man led him to leap down from his horse and embrace the outcast. Later on his preaching missions, he accepted the hospitality of local leprosaria. Lepers were always welcomed as guests at the various Franciscan friaries.



Relationships were very important to Francis, and he viewed all with whom he was connected as kin — hence his Canticle of Brother Sun which addresses the sun, moon, stars, wind, water, fire, earth, and plants as brothers and sisters. The lepers, too, were brothers and sisters and worthy of respectful relationship. Francis enjoyed interacting with his diverse kin, rejoicing in being present with them.

Francis provides us with a model of relationship based on friendship and respect, even in the midst of service ministry. Francis teaches us how to Be Present With the Poor.

There are many ways of being present, but a major one involves touching one another with love, friendship, compassion, respect. I once had a massage client at an HIV program burst into tears during the massage and confessed that it had been so long since anyone had touched her with respect.

As Americans, we are not much of a touch culture. In fact we tend to be more like a “touch phobic” society! Isolation due to the Pandemic has led to widespread touch starvation. Scientists have discovered that touch is a very basic form of “nutrition”. Babies that haven’t been touched enough do not thrive and tend to exhibit very similar symptoms to malnourished infants.

And as for the homeless poor...most people don’t even touch them with their eyes. These people need to be SEEN and acknowledged. BE PRESENT!

Pamela Clare, CSF



The homeless population is very visible in San Francisco, as is the crisis of drug overdose. There are people sitting and sleeping on sidewalks, tent camps, as well as open-air drug use and drug dealing. The pandemic and the opioid crisis have brought increased devastation to an already traumatized population.



CARE THROUGH TOUCH

Since 2004, Pamela Clare has been involved with the ministry of Care Through Touch (CTI), a non-profit organization whose mission is to be present and to care through touch people traumatized by poverty, homelessness, abuse, addiction, and illness. This takes place in the context of massage therapy which provides touch that transforms body, mind, heart, and spirit. Mary Ann Finch, founder of CTI, speaks of the massage experience in these words, “Their struggles are imprinted in our hands, their suffering in our hearts; our souls listen to their hopes, and our faith empowers them to believe in themselves.”

Pamela Clare’s work with CTI has taken her to various social service agencies in the inner city heart of San Francisco. She has worked at drop-in centers, food programs, shelters (including the Gubbio Project day shelter at St. John the Evangelist Church), health programs, and residence hotels. The first couple of years of the Pandemic virtually terminated the massage work, but currently Pamela is working at a Department of Public Health urban clinic and a drop-in center, and hopes soon to return to work at Martin de Porres House of Hospitality (a Catholic Worker community).



Sr. Pamela Clare with Norman DePover, a frequent massage client and formerly homeless man, who has been part of CTI’s “adjunct faculty,” a group of homeless and formerly homeless people who help teach new CTI volunteers about life on the streets.



Photo by John Varner

Sr. Pamela Clare working at the Gubbio Project (No Masks! obviously pre-Pandemic) where people are invited to come into the church and sleep on mats or cots in the mornings. It is a great privilege to facilitate sacred sleep.



Sr. Jean working at Martins 15 years ago.

MARTIN DE PORRES

CSF has had a long association with “Martins” going back to the late 1970s. Most of our Sisters have worked there at one time or another. Sr. Jean volunteered in their food preparation and serving program for about 15 years. Sr. Maggie also worked there for about ten years... as did Sr. Cecilia, Sr. Elizabeth Ann, Sr. Lynne, every novice we’ve had since 1993, and women who have joined us for the Residential Immersion Program in Franciscan Spirituality. It has been an inspiring friendship and a fruitful partnership.

OPEN CATHEDRAL

Up until the Pandemic shut-down in March 2020, Sr. Maggie was a member of the congregation of Open Cathedral, a ministry of the San Francisco Night Ministry. Open Cathedral is Night Ministry’s “day job,” so to speak. They provide Sunday worship outdoors at the Civic Center and Thursday late afternoon worship in the Mission District.

Srs. Jean and Pamela Clare have helped provide the after-worship meal at the Mission Open Cathedral event as part of an outreach ministry of their parish, Holy Innocents Church. With Eucharist and a meal and the blessing of community, people at Open Cathedral are nurtured warmly at least once a week.

Open Cathedral at Civic Center (Sr. Maggie in brown hoodie at left). The San Francisco Night Ministry is an ecumenical chaplaincy to people in crisis at night on the streets and in the bars and cafes of the inner city. They also have a night crisis phone line. One of our sisters (Rose) was the first woman to walk the streets as a Night Minister.



ADVOCACY

Jim Rice, editor of Sojourners magazine, wrote in a recent edition, “The Christian faith is inherently incarnational—living belief is embodied in action in the world around us.” (sojo.net)

The CSF Sisters in San Francisco have been involved in advocacy since we joined Amnesty International (AmnestyUSA.org) in 1981. One of the most informative sources for educating ourselves and for taking action on urgent domestic and international issues has been the Episcopal Public Policy Network (eppn.org). Organizations like these help us to incarnate our spirituality—a very basic Franciscan concept.

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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.



Being With the Poor

Unfortunately.....

Our Ten-Day Intensive Residential Program **Companions in Franciscan Spirituality** is still on hiatus. Hopefully in 2023 the status of the pandemic will allow us to once again offer these opportunities for sharing our life and studying Franciscan Spirituality during Holy Week, Mid-Summer, and Francistide.

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*Sisters Maggie, Jean and Pamela Clare at
our local parish, Holy Innocents Church.*