

The Canticle

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

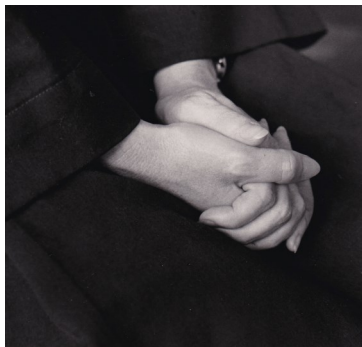
St. Francis House

On August 11, we celebrated the feast of St. Clare of Assisi and in late July, the feast of Sts. Mary, Martha and Lazarus of Bethany. These feasts caused us to reflect on the identity and mission of St. Francis House as a House of Prayer, a House of Hospitality and a House of Healing.

The house in Bethany was the place that provided hospitality for Jesus many times in his ministry (twice documented in the Gospels). Jesus' visits to Bethany were intimate and tender. Clearly the three siblings were good friends and Jesus felt welcomed and at home in the house at Bethany. It was at Bethany that Jesus worked his greatest miracle (the raising of Lazarus), and later the house served as his refuge after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

PRAYER

St. Francis House was blessed and dedicated on Sept. 7, 1975. The heart center of the house is our small chapel where corporate prayer and individual contemplative



prayer have been offered daily for over 45 years. The Sisters, like the other members of the Society of St. Francis, observe the Daily Offices – Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer, Evening Prayer and Compline. We also have



had weekday Eucharists as part of our life, except between mid-March 2020 and late May 2021 when the coronavirus pandemic shut us down. It was a joyful day when we resumed weekday Eucharists in May after Pentecost.

HOSPITALITY

The house of Mary and Martha of Bethany was obviously a house of hospitality, as is St. Francis House. We welcome guests for weekday Eucharist and breakfast. Over the years we have greatly appreciated the wider circle of community that has grown around our breaking bread together.

Our Guest Ministry is focused on the Garden Apartment which is available for visitors – retreatants,

people on sabbatical, family and friends visiting the city. People coming to San Francisco for courses or special events have always been welcome. Most recently we had a group of cello students here for an intensive long weekend of cello playing, as well as a priest from Louisiana on sabbatical.

The apartment is a self-contained one-bedroom apartment with small kitchen. It has a separate entrance from the main house so it has been possible to host a few guests during this time of pandemic. The apartment is on the first floor so has no stairs, but the bathroom is not handicap accessible. Our hospitality ministry is officially opened again as of this summer and people are beginning to travel again so demand for the apartment is growing.



Left: Living room in the guest apartment.

Right: Our guest apartment opens out onto the house garden.

HEALING

St. Clare is known as a woman of prayer. She began her Franciscan journey alongside Francis in the world where she helped with the care of the poor and the sick. She became known as a healer. The Church and secular society pressured her into a life of prayer within the enclosure, but her reputation as a healer continued to grow.

At the spring 2021 virtual meeting of CAROA (Conference of Anglican Religious Orders in the Americas) Br. James Koester of the Order of the Holy Cross painted a picture of the folks who will be seeking out monastic hospitality in this Covid era. He pointed out that people who will be coming to us will have suffered varying degrees of loss, grief, and loneliness. The emotional and mental health impact of the pandemic will linger for years. Br. James said, "I believe that one of the things which we will need to do...is to make a safe, secure, and welcoming space for grief."

Guests who have stayed with us over the years have often come to heal. Sometimes it is simply the need for rest of body, mind, and spirit after a stressful time in their lives. Others have come grieving the loss of a loved one or a job. Still others have suffered from pain and sickness and sought the solace of a quiet, peaceful, prayerful environment to help with healing.

At San Damiano in Assisi, the home of St. Clare and her sisterhood, there is a contemporary painting of Clare and Francis. It shows Francis in his final sickness when he was blind and in great pain, both physical and spiritual. In the painting Clare is ministering to Francis, tenderly bathing his eyes. Francis had sought the solace of his faithful follower Clare and her simple religious house in his extremity. Thus it was that Clare was able to offer hospitality and healing to Francis in his last days.



It is our hope that St. Francis House can emulate Clare and the siblings from Bethany in offering our House of Prayer, Hospitality, and Healing to the world.

The View from St. Francis House

Sr. Pamela Clare, CSF

St. Francis House is an urban house rather than a rural monastery. The view from my room looks out onto our back garden which provides a sacred space of beauty and peace in the midst of this city named for our patron, St. Francis of Assisi. Our garden is where the veggies grow and the butterflies and hummingbirds flit around the flowers which perfume the air. Urban raccoons scuttle and skunks amble unmolested along the path. When I poke my head out the window, I can almost feel the wave of oxygen produced by the friendly vegetation that responds so well to my efforts of feeding, weeding, and watering. The grass-covered top of Bernal Heights to the south stands prominently above the rows of houses gradually climbing up the hill. Bernal Heights used to be a diverse working class neighborhood, but like everything else in this area, has become more upscale in the past few years.

If I move to the front of the house and look out our living room window, I see Cesar Chavez Street, a busy road that cuts across the city west to east down toward the San Francisco Bay. It is a privilege to live on a street named after the great Mexican American leader, especially since the previous name for our street was "Army." If I follow the street uphill (west) in my mind's eye, I come to the Noe Valley District, a mostly residential neighborhood of young families and upwardly mobile folks. The relentless tech-boom-driven process of conversion of old apartments to condominiums starts with the house right next door on the uphill side of us.

If I follow the street downhill (east) into the traditionally lower middle class and immigrant neighborhood of the Mission District, within two blocks I begin to encounter small groups of Latin American casual laborers, undocumented workers who have come up to El Norte fleeing the oppressive governments, horrendous gang violence, and the poor economies down south. Several "affordable" housing units and one low-income housing project are found on the street. And then there are the scattered tents of our homeless neighbors, mostly concentrated in the area of the freeway overpass, but one tent half a block away, only recently displaced by newly installed large plant pots.

By the time I reach the Bay, I am in the dock area that until very recently was home to a deserted naval base highly contaminated from toxic wastes, including

nuclear materials; as well as one of the state's oldest and dirtiest power plants and a sewage treatment plant. This is all changing drastically as the area is being redeveloped for mixed commercial and residential use. The district used to be home to many of the poorest people of color in the city; people who suffered unusually high rates of asthma and breast cancer among other ailments – a shameful example of environmental racism in this city of St. Francis. Now most of the apartments and houses have been gentrified, leaving only the still extant housing projects for low income people of color. They have worked hard to get rid of the toxic wastes and the neighborhood is vastly improved, but where have the people gone?

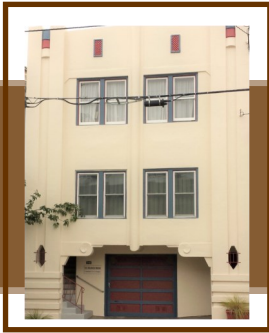
We are an urban house of Franciscan Sisters with a history of involvement in ministry in the wider community. If I walk out from our house and travel north (a one hour walk), I come to the skid row of San Francisco where I work as a massage therapist with homeless and poor people. A prominent landmark in this neighborhood is St. Anthony's Dining Room, a ministry of the Roman Catholic Franciscan Friars. This Civic Center area is where, prior to the pandemic, Sr. Maggie attended Open Cathedral's open-air Eucharist on Sundays. It is also only a 30 minute walk back south into the Mission District again to Martin de Porres House of Hospitality, a Catholic Worker soup kitchen, where (also prior to the pandemic) I did massage and all the Sisters have worked as volunteers over the past 40 years. Martins is at 16th Street and Potrero. If I walk west on 16th toward Mission Street, I find Mission Neighborhood Resource Center which offers food, fellowship, bingo, hygiene products and other activities for the poor and homeless women of the neighborhood on Thursday Ladies Night—another place I did massage pre-pandemic. Two blocks further west is St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church, where the Gubbio Project invites people to come in and sleep weekday mornings and where, once a week, I... (pre-pandemic ditto). A 30 minute walk from there on Guerrero Street brings me back to St. Francis House.

Back home in the late afternoon, I again stand in my room. Now I see the famous San Francisco ocean fog rushing over the hills from the west and pouring down into our little valley. This rushing wind is like the breath of the Holy Spirit, providing life-giving moisture to the plants and making our stagnant air--smoke-filled now during fire season--clear and fresh. I pray that as a people in this great city (and nation) we may open our hearts to the blowing wind of the Spirit that can bring new life, clarity and freshness.

The Canticle

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The Canticle
is the newsletter of the
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St. Francis House

Our Ten-Day Intensive Residential Program **Companions in Franciscan Spirituality** is still on hiatus. Hopefully in 2022 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, Pamela Clare, and Jean.