



Dear families and friends,

Christmas 2018

The significance of the mystery of the Incarnation is brought before us so vividly every year during the Christmas season, when "He Who is infinite, inscrutable, ineffable, has come close to us in Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary in the stable at Bethlehem" (Pope St. John Paul II). Our Holy Mother Clare herself noted, "The Son of God became for us the Way." It is Jesus who shows us the way on our journey to the Father. He assumed our humanity to teach us humility and dependence on the Father. His *birth* was precisely part of the manner in which He would point out the way. *Birth, re-birth, new life, new beginnings* are constantly part of our daily experience and this year has been remarkable for the many and varied ways we have experienced such *renewal*.

Although the year began a bit like Agatha Christie's story, "Ten Little Indians," when the Sisters began disappearing one by one and not returning, our story had a bit of a brighter ending. Struck by the particular strain of the flu virus that was not included in our flu shots, almost the entire community was decimated in short order. First one, then another, and "then there were none..." we never knew who would be hit next. One morning for Holy Mass there were only nine of us on our feet (out of 21). Thanks be to God the virus that came on so suddenly also left quickly, though it took a bit to recover and begin eating solid food again and feel *resurrected!*

By February 2<sup>nd</sup>, the feast of the Presentation and World Day of Consecrated Life, we were ready to receive a new member into our now-healthy community. Sarah, a young woman from St. Charles in the Rockford Diocese, was ready and eager to begin her *new life* as a Poor Clare candidate and just waiting for the green light. In the ten months she has been with us, she has already experienced much growth and many changes in the *early stages* of her religious life as she continues to "put off the old man" and put on the new!



In March, during the penitential season of Lent, when the whole Church focuses on the themes of conversion and *spiritual renewal*, Fr. Jim Ciमितaro, O.F.M. Conv. conducted our annual community retreat. During his daily conferences we reviewed together some of the essential elements of our consecrated life and it was a strong impetus to fan the flame of fervor and make a *new beginning* by returning to the basics.



On March 18<sup>th</sup> we annually observe "Vow Day." It is the anniversary of the night in 1212 when St. Clare left home to begin her *new form of life*. We celebrate the way of life that was handed down to us from our Foundress with particular solemnity and together renew our holy vows in a special ceremony. This year it was also the day Divine Providence chose for the screening of Abbie Reese's documentary film, *Chosen*, that gives a little glimpse into our daily lives. We are grateful to Abbie for giving us this unique opportunity to share our way of life and vocation with others.

April came quickly and there were several outstanding events awaiting us. At the invitation of the Federal Abbess and her council, Mother Abbess and a Sister delegate from our monastery attended the Chapter of the Poor Clare Federation of Mary Immaculate as auditors. They received a very warm and sisterly welcome and felt at home and encouraged by the shared vision and common observance of our sister monasteries. Our study of the Apostolic Constitution, *Vultum Dei Quaerere*, and the resulting discernment process led to our decision to return to the Federation of Mary Immaculate as Chapter members. Thus we *begin a new chapter* in the history of our monastery as we await the approval and confirmation of our petition by the Holy See. As part of a *renewal* process to help support women contemplatives in their vocation to be beacons to the world, all autonomous monasteries of contemplative women have been asked, among other things, to join a Federation by April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019. We are very grateful to the Poor Clare Federation of Mary Immaculate for welcoming us so joyfully with open arms!

On April 28<sup>th</sup> we celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ordination of St. Maximilian Kolbe. To mark the occasion, our chaplain, Fr. Nicholas Federspiel, conducted a special Holy Hour which included Exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary, a talk on St. Maximilian Kolbe and Benediction. Our devotion to the "Knight of the Immaculata" and our Immaculate Mother herself was fueled by the beautiful account and touching stories of his humble but extremely fruitful consecrated life. The following week, Father began



Holy Spirit kite flying on Pentecost

giving us excellent weekly classes, spanning from May to August, on St. Thomas Aquinas and the *Summa Theologica*. We enjoyed the opportunity to discover for ourselves what a great teacher Fr. Federspiel is and we look forward to more classes on different topics in the future.

Before April ended, Seminarian Jack Reichardt launched our newly designed website. Over the course of only a few short months he succeeded in breathing *new life* into our monastery's website and we have received many compliments on the outcome! If you have not yet seen it, you can find a description of our Poor Clare vocation, a calendar of upcoming events, a virtual tour of our Chapel and more at [www.rockfordpoorclares.org](http://www.rockfordpoorclares.org). We are grateful to Jack for the gift of his time and talent in designing the new website and keeping it updated for us, and to all in the Diocese of Rockford for their help and support in this project. Our Lord enjoins: "The gift you have received, give as a gift," and we happily share with you this great gift we have received.

In May we were pleasantly surprised with another gift we had been praying for but had not anticipated receiving at that time.

The Instruction *Cor Orans* from the Holy See, giving further directives for the renewal of women's contemplative communities, was issued. Besides confirming the regulation to join a Federation, one of the other points in the Instruction that affected us the most and required more immediate action was the reorganization of the stages of initial formation. Now the 9-12 years of initial formation will be divided into four stages, beginning with an aspirancy. Another change is that the novice's canonical year will be the second year instead of the first. So, Sarah who had entered a few months earlier as a "candidate," quickly and willingly became an "aspirant." Please keep her in your prayers as she discerns her vocation as an extern sister in our community and enters more deeply into her monastic formation. The Instruction *Cor Orans* rightly recognizes that "the person is built very slowly," and it emphasizes the primacy of conversion, transformation and configuration to Christ: basically, putting off the old man and putting on the new! "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is *born anew*, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

In June we were blessed by visits of all three of our newly ordained transitional deacons who are also in the process of entering wholeheartedly into a *new life*. Deacon Robert Blood came for Holy Mass and to preach the homily. Deacons John Kladar and Charles Warren each came for Friday Rosary and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. We continue to accompany these fine young men with our prayers, that they may become priests after the Heart of Jesus.

In mid-July Fr. Federspiel treated us to a triduum leading up to the 825<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our Holy Mother Clare's *birthday*. In his daily homilies, he reminded us of some of the essential characteristics of our charism and St. Clare's own desires for her daughters. Further reflection and discussion at recreation over the three days were prompted by the thought provoking questions he gave us to ponder. Born in 1193, St. Clare was to become a great light in her own time and in salvation history. In the *Legend of St. Clare*, Friar Thomas of Celano draws a parallel between her mother, Ortolana, and the Blessed Virgin Mary. While praying in the Church of San Damiano before the same crucifix that spoke to St. Francis, Donna Ortolana heard a mysterious voice: "Fear not, woman, for you shall bring forth without danger a light which shall greatly illumine the world." In a beautiful biography, *Clare: Her Light and Her Song*, Sr. Mary Seraphim observes: "Fear not, woman! 'Fear not, Mary... Do not be afraid, Joseph, son of David.' How often had Ortolana heard that word of peace read out from the Scriptures! As she pursues this remembrance, her wonder increases. She had heard, 'You shall bring forth without danger a light.' Centuries earlier a girl in Galilee had heard a similar announcement: 'You shall give birth to a Son' and a wise old man in the temple had called him 'a light which shall greatly illumine the world.' Like another Mary, Ortolana ponders these words, cherishing them in her heart, questioning their possible meaning..." And indeed, St. Clare did become a great light that continues to shine brightly on our path and light up our way.

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Deacon Robert Blood purifying vessels



Deacon John Kladar at Benediction



Deacon Charles Warren at Benediction



## Merry Christmas

In gratitude  
for your goodness to us,  
you will be remembered in a

Novena of Masses, Holy Communion,  
and Devotions to the Christ Child.

May the joy and peace  
of the Christmas season  
fill your hearts and homes with  
hope and blessings.

The Poor Clare Nuns  
Corpus Christi Monastery  
Rockford, Illinois

September was another very full month. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, we had the great joy of celebrating Sr. Mary Andrea of St. Joseph's 60<sup>th</sup> Jubilee of Profession. After Holy Mass, Sr. Andrea renewed her vows in the hands of Mother Abbess during a private ceremony in our Office Choir. Hymns, little gifts, special meals and flowers all contributed to making the day festive. At our evening recreation, the novitiate sisters gave a concert and Sr. Andrea shared memories of the early stirrings of her vocation and how she came to our monastery on a clandestine visit by bus from Dubuque, Iowa.

We dedicated the next day, September 13<sup>th</sup>, to honor Mary, Rosa Mystica by heeding her request for prayer and reparation. We begged the Mother of all Priests to watch over her sons and for her powerful intercession to help heal the painful scandal and division in the Church. It was a fitting prelude to the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross on September 14<sup>th</sup>, when we had two opportunities to make public reparation for those who have caused scandal in the Church. During our regular Friday Rosary and Benediction service we prayed the Rosary of Healing and Justice for the victims of abuse. Then, joining Bishop Malloy in spirit, who requested the priests and faithful of the Diocese to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for healing and reparation, we had a second Mass in our Chapel at 7:00 p.m., the same time Bishop Malloy was celebrating his Mass at the Cathedral.

On September 20<sup>th</sup> we commemorated another Franciscan centennial: the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the stigmata of Padre Pio. Fr. Federspiel conducted a Holy Hour similar to the one we had honoring St. Maximilian Kolbe. We are grateful to Father for his interest in celebrating with us these significant spiritual events and for his joyful and generous service to our community.

On September 30<sup>th</sup>, Sr. Mary Colette of our Mother Most Pure had the great joy of taking the next step on her vocational journey by making her First Profession of Vows during Holy Mass. Msgr. Charles Mangan of the Diocese of Sioux Falls and Fr. David Vogel, our former chaplain, were able to join Fr. Federspiel at the altar to concelebrate the Mass and Seminarian Jack Reichardt, a close friend of Sr. Colette's brother, was server. Sister's many friends and relatives who had traveled from South Dakota for the occasion witnessed the rite from the chapel. Later they were able to see and share her joy in her *new life* as they visited with her in the parlor. On the final evening of our three day community celebration, the Sisters put on a play, *Unlikely Providence*, inspired by the Book of Esther.

The Rockford Diocese participated in the tour of the International Pilgrim Virgin statue of Our Lady of Fatima from September 18<sup>th</sup> through October 5<sup>th</sup>. We joined our prayers and sacrifices to those of so many others while Our Lady was visiting the parishes and briefly stopped at our own monastery. It was a powerful joint effort to hasten forgiveness, healing, peace and unity in our fragmented country and Church and to bring about the *spiritual renewal* of which we are so deeply in need!

November was soon upon us and our Canonical Visitation for our own deep *spiritual renewal* was fast approaching. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, Abbot John Brahill, O.S.B. and Fr. Joel Rippinger, O.S.B. from Marmion Abbey came for the day to conduct the first part of the Visitation. We deeply appreciated their generosity and the paternal kindness with which they listened to each Sister and we feel blessed by their competent assistance and valuable insights on monastic and community life. Then, on November 20<sup>th</sup>, Bishop David Malloy came for the morning to conduct the local Visitation. He joined us for the Divine Office in our Office Choir, then toured the monastery and accompanied us on our visit to the cemetery to pray for our deceased. The morning concluded with a gathering in the community room, where the Bishop addressed the community, gave an opportunity for us to ask questions and entrusted his special intentions to our prayers. What a joy it was for us to have this special time with our Bishop!



Sr. Andrea opening Jubilee gifts



The 60th Jubilee concert



The radiant new spouse of Christ



*Bishop Malloy blessing graves with Holy Water*

As Advent heralds a new liturgical year and we look forward to a *new beginning* in 2019, it is our prayer for the world, our country, the Church, our families and communities and each one individually, that the *birth* of Jesus will teach us what it means to be *born anew*. As we await his coming may we be spiritually *renewed!* Come, Lord Jesus!

A Most Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year!

*Mother Maria Dominica and all the Sisters*



*Our annual Corpus Christi Procession*

*All are welcome to our  
Christmas Masses:  
Midnight Mass (preceded by  
carols at 11:45pm)  
Mass at Dawn 7:30 am  
Mass During the Day 9:30 am*

Current Occupant or

*Poor Clare Colettine Nuns*  
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