

Special Edition of *Co-Franciscan News*: First in a Series of Three

JOURNEYS VENTURED
HEARTS OF HOPE
150
Years
-of-
Grace

Sesquicentennial Celebration

1876-2026



Franciscan Sisters
of the Sacred Heart

St. Francis Woods
9201 W. St. Francis Road, Frankfort, IL

fssh.net

Dear Family, Friends, and Fellow Pilgrims,

With great joy and gratitude, we will gather next year, 2026, to celebrate 150 years of "journeys ventured...with hearts of hope." This remarkable milestone of the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart is not only a reflection of the past but also a promise for the future.

In the providence of God through the guidance of the Church, we find our mission. From our seraphic Father Francis and our mother Sister Clare, we find our charism. With the founders and pioneers of our Religious Institute, we find our roots.

Over these many years, countless individuals-sisters, associates, lay colleagues, ministry partners, staff, family, friends, donors – have contributed their time, talents, and hearts to bring us to this moment. Throughout the upcoming year we honor their legacy and celebrate the many blessings that have carried us through a century and a half.

Francis wrote to his followers,

"How happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and God will make a home and dwelling place with them."



*"Praise" by Kay
Francis Berger, OSF*

Joy has been our traditional song of praise and thanksgiving since the very beginning. On this 150th anniversary of Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart presence in America, we sing and dance with hearts full of gratitude for God's mercy in Francis' words to those:

"who love God with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, and with their whole strength."

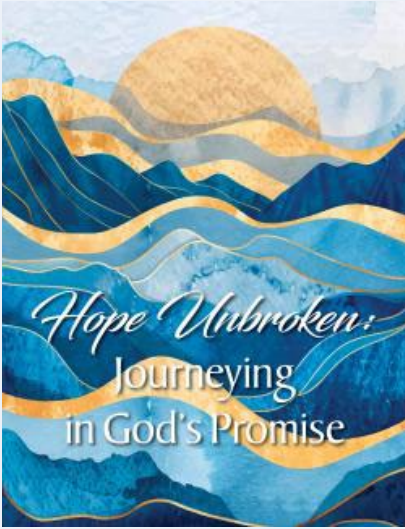
As we reflect on the history, we acknowledge with gratitude that our congregation has been God's instrument of peace, healing, and hope across time and place. Let us savor the memories that we share and the dreams that well up within us, imagining our charism and our mission into a future full of hope.

As we look ahead, may this anniversary inspire us to continue building on the strong foundation laid before us and the many shoulders upon which we stand. Together, we embrace the journey forward with hope, faith, and gratitude.

With heartfelt celebration for the blessed years of grace in the words of Dag Hammarskjöld, (Secretary General of the United Nations from 1953-1961), we exclaim: "For all that has been, thanks; for all that is to come, yes!"

Peace and all good! With all my Sisters, we wish you, "Happy 150th Anniversary!"

Sr. Mary Elizabeth Imler
General Minister



2025 LCWR Assembly

Srs. Mary Elizabeth Imler, Christina Fuller, and Genevieve Rupp attended the 2025 LCWR Assembly Aug 12, 2025, to Aug 15, 2025, in Atlanta, Georgia. The theme was "Hope Unbroken: Journeying in God's Promise." This year's LCWR assembly responds to the call of Pope Francis who wrote, "Today our world is experiencing a tragic 'famine' of hope. So much pain, emptiness, and inconsolable grief surrounds us! May we become messengers of the consolation bestowed by the Spirit. When we radiate hope, God opens new paths along our journey." As religious life leaders, we are challenged to be bearers of this hope to all whom we encounter. The 2025 LCWR assembly will acknowledge the struggle of these times and explore the practices that can ground us in faith so that we can live "hope unbroken" for the sake of the world, the church, and our religious communities.

Sr. Mary Elizabeth Imler

Congratulations, Sister Gayle Lynn!

Sr. Gayle Lynn Rusbasan is now a certified Spiritual Director after completing the Spiritual Direction Preparation Program (SDPP) through the Franciscan Spirituality Center (FSC) in LaCrosse, WI. May the Spirit guide and bless her work and those she serves.

Sister Viviane Completes Course on St. Clare of Assisi

In September Sr. Viviane de Sousa completed the course "Saint Clare of Assisi: Life and Writings," which began in August and was offered online by the Franciscan Institute of Theological Education. She writes, "The experience was very fruitful."

The UISG's Call: "Let Us Not Remain Silent"

In a world torn apart by war and inhumanity – in Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, Myanmar, Haiti, Democratic Republic of the Congo and in so many other countries wounded by both visible and invisible conflicts – we cannot remain silent spectators. Each day we see faces marked by pain, lives shattered, peoples deprived of dignity and peace, especially the women and children.



As Women of hope, rooted in faith and immersed in the wounds of our time, we feel a deep need to raise our voices and unite our hearts.

As Women at the frontiers, walking alongside those who suffer, listening to the cry of the poor and of the earth, we hold the responsibility to build communion, to protect life, and to call for justice.

As Women who keep watch in the night, we continue to believe that even in the darkest hour, a light can still shine – the light of the Gospel, of justice, and of fraternity.

We seek the intercession of the Mother of God, Our Lady of Peace, and entrust ourselves to her, that she may tenderly answer the cries of the peoples and teach us how to be a humble and prophetic presence in places of suffering.

International Union Superiors General

Hope 2025: Sisters Gather in Rome to Discuss Future

I participated in the Leadership Collaborative (LC) Conference: Hope 2025 Rome. This gathering brought together Sisters under 65 from around the globe, in person and online, to explore transformative leadership rooted in Gospel values and a vision of global sisterhood. Together, we reflected on what it means to serve, witness, and lead with hope, passion, and healing love. A highlight for me was the presentation by Gen Verde, the international performing arts group from the Focolare Movement whose message rekindled faith and joy in even the most indifferent young hearts. It affirmed my belief in the Arts as a transformative, healing element in today's world.

Sr. Lovina Francis Pammit

Immigration Court Accompaniment

On July 30, 2025, I joined a group of approximately 25 clergy and religious leaders from various faith traditions—including a Quaker couple—for a training session in Immigration Court Accompaniment. We gathered in front of the Federal Court Building in Los Angeles, united by a shared commitment to stand in solidarity with our immigrant and asylum-seeking neighbors.

Our morning began with a detailed briefing. We were instructed on our purpose: to be a peaceful, non-obstructive presence in the courthouse, bearing witness to the proceedings and offering moral support to those navigating the immigration system alone.

We were guided on how to address the judge, how to conduct ourselves in the courtroom, and what to say if approached by ICE agents. We were reminded that our role was not to intervene, but to observe, accompany, and, when possible, assist with communication and follow-up. For secure communication, we downloaded the Signal app, as phone calls are not permitted inside the building. We were given a layout of the courthouse and assigned to different floors. In one courtroom, we observed virtual hearings—only the judge and attorneys were present, and the cases moved swiftly. In another courtroom, we witnessed a more heartbreaking moment: a man appeared alone, without legal representation, in response to a notice to appear. His case was closed, and he exited the courtroom quietly. At that time, one of our group asked him for his name, immigration number, and family contact information.



Moments later, as he stepped into the hallway, three ICE agents approached and handcuffed him. He was taken directly to a holding facility, where he now awaits deportation within days. One of our group was able to notify his family, provide them with visiting hours, and advise them to bring a jacket and any necessary medications—knowing that detention centers are kept uncomfortably cold. We then walked together to the undisclosed detention center where he was taken. There, outside its walls, we held a debriefing session—processing what we had seen, what we felt, and what we could do next. At our debriefing, a lawyer walked by and thanked us for our presence.

The Diocese will soon send out dates for future accompaniment opportunities. We will be in small groups and invited to return and continue this vital ministry of presence and compassion. This experience was a stark reminder of the vulnerability of those caught in the immigration system—and the power of simply showing up. Our presence will not change the outcome of a case, but it affirms the dignity of each person and reminds them they are not alone.

Sr. Ruth Agee

~ 3 ~

Renovations at Icoaraci in Brazil

Renovations are in full swing for the 25-year-old convent of San Damiano in Icoaraci. The Sisters are very excited despite the dust and mess. They are enlarging the front rooms and slightly enlarging the kitchen, waterproofing the walls with flooring, opening windows, and building the facade of the house and the wall and a new chapel.

IFC-TOR

Attending the IFC-TOR (International Franciscan Conference of the Third Order Regular) in Assisi was a true privilege. The Franciscan call to live the Gospel life continues to resonate deeply in today's world—we are urgently needed as healing, loving members of our global Franciscan family. It was no surprise that Sr. Mary Elizabeth was elected to the Board as a "non-Rome resident" member. She and her fellow Board members have important work ahead.

As the days unfolded, we journeyed from lamentation to celebration, forging bonds of friendship and exploring new paths for collaboration across continents. One of my most memorable moments was conducting the choir for the Vigil Mass of Pentecost. By some miracle (and a very active WhatsApp group), we made it work across languages, and we continue to check in with one another to this day.

I returned home with a heart full of gratitude, joy, inspiration, and renewed hope!

Sr. Lovina Francis Pammit

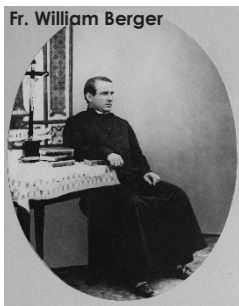
Join us on the Journey!

PROCLAMATION: January 1, 2026 (via Zoom)
YEAR OF CELEBRATION: January 1, 2026 – December 30, 2026
DAY OF JUBILEE: May 31, 2026 (Mass with Bishop Ronald Hicks)

**150 years ago,
a remnant of the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart
was forced to leave their homeland in the Black Forest of Germany
and sailed to North America.**

*In the next three special celebratory issues, we will recount our 150 years of grace.
We will recover our historical founding, uncover our years of ministry, and discover future realities.*

Fr. William Berger



"Sisters of mercy, joyous and poor." Such was the vision of Father William Berger when he founded the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart. Father Berger was born March 22, 1834, in Sasbach in what was the Grand Duchy of Baden. Ordained to the priesthood October 8, 1857, Father Berger spent the next nine years as pastor of various parishes throughout the region.

Everywhere he went he found the same needs among the poor, the sick, and the orphans who had no one to care for them. Father Berger had great devotion to St. Vincent de Paul and cherished the idea of founding a religious sisterhood to care for the sick and the poor in the various parishes where he served. A lover of St. Francis, he envisioned a group of religious women who, though poor, would serve with joy and bring comfort and solace to their fellow men.

Parish Rectory in
Prinzbach where
Fr. Berger last
ministered.



Father Berger's efforts were finally successful. Appointed Pastor of Seelbach, he met many young ladies who desired to enter religious life but could find no Congregation in the area that would receive them.

On June 21, 1866, one young lady, who was later to become Sister Coletta Himmelsbach, hearing Father Berger's plan, was inspired to

assist in this endeavor. The second story of her parents' home was given over for this purpose. More women came together to work, pray, and live in community in her family home.

Sr. Coletta's
parents' home



Sister Coletta
Himmelsbach

Tretenhof



As other young ladies wished to join this group, Father purchased a permanent Motherhouse called Tretenhof outside the village of Seelbach. The Sisters dedicated their first chapel to Maria Hilf (Mother of Perpetual Help). They went humbly about their duties, caring for the sick in their homes and gathering orphaned children and teaching them the basics.

History relates that Bismark, the so called "Iron Chancellor," bestowed the "Iron Cross" on one Sister



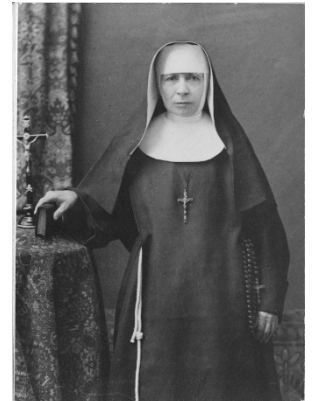
Sister Katherina Schindler
with Iron Cross

for "faithful service on the field of battle." Contrarily, fearing that the allegiance which Catholics showed to the church of Rome would impede the unification of the German empire he was building, he began a series of repressive acts to stamp out the influence of clergy and religious. Government "May Laws" were passed, and on February 23, 1876, the Sisters at Tretenhof were served an edict requiring them to disband.



The good priest, Father Berger, who had so joyfully watched the nurturing of his dream and had seen the little group grow to sixty members in such a short period of time, with a heart filled with sorrow attempted to console the Sisters and to assist them in making their decision as to what course to follow. As they looked to him as their spiritual father to guide and direct them, his advice was simple. "Return good for evil, bless those who persecute you, and joyfully await the time when Divine Providence will again reunite you,"

A leader and an option arose. Sister M. Anastasia Bischler suggested emigrating to the United States. Typical of her tact and generosity, she made no attempt to force the Sisters in their decision. After much prayer and a chance meeting with a priest from the Diocese of Fort Wayne, Indiana, Sr. Anastasia announced that

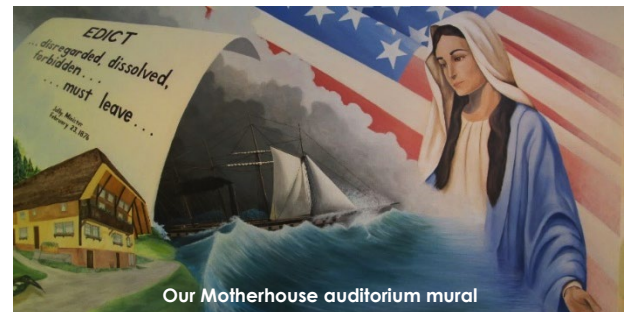


Sister Anastasia Bischler

she would sail for America and there rebuild the Congregation. She invited anyone who wished to join her.

A small group emigrated to America in 1876 and found initial refuge in a small town of Avilla in the Diocese of Fort Wayne, Indiana, and formed the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart. Some non-emigrating members, also forced to leave their base in Tretenhof during the Kulturkampf, went underground doing works of neighborly love in Gengenbach and eventually reestablished themselves as the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The German founder's hopes have been realized far beyond his expectations. He had desired to found a Franciscan Third Order Regular to fulfill the aspirations of so many young ladies in Germany being denied an opportunity to respond to a religious vocation. He envisioned their service to the Church by caring for the ill, the elderly, and all in need.



The American foundress and the pioneer group endured a great deal of poverty in the country where they had sought both refuge and ministerial fulfillment. Rev. Dominic Duehmig's spiritual and temporal assistance in those early days were most fortunate.

However, the Sisters themselves deserve credit for the determination to survive and to serve in America. Their German heritage of industry and discipline equipped them to adapt to local needs. Their spirituality supported their readiness to become involved in a diversity of services which the steady flow of recruits from Germany made possible. As they had done in their homeland, the Sisters immediately began to care for the ill, the elderly, and all who sought their assistance. They were faithful to the German founder's aim, always with the approval of their ecclesiastical superiors. The community in America as well as its sister community in Germany have demonstrated fidelity to their Franciscan heritage by allying themselves firmly to the Church through grace-filled updating.

The fulfillment of Father Berger's vision of "Sisters of mercy, joyous and poor" will be in our next edition.

Resources: FSSH Rule and Life and Constitutions, Doctoral Dissertation of Sr. Marilyn Phillips, One Step and Then Another by Sr. Adeline Mazure, German and American Chronicles and presentations from Community Days.

Hope-Filled Happenings

Grateful for Your Support!

Thank you to all those who supported us through sponsorship, participation, or prayer for our August 1st Eighth Annual Golf Outing and our Annual Fraternitas dinner and raffle on September 6. We are blessed and humbled by your faithfulness and enthusiasm for our mission, journeying with us as pilgrims of hope.

– Vallerie Wonders

SouthWest Interfaith Team (SWIFT) Picnic

Five of our Sisters—Sisters Marilyn Renninger, Christine Bowman, Kim Marie Wolf, Iaci Araujo de Miranda, and I—took part in the SWIFT picnic on August 10 held at the Peace Memorial Church outdoor gathering space in Orland Park.

– Sr. Lovina Francis Pammit



Jubilee of Mission & Justice



On September 21, the Franciscan Fire Committee offered an inspiring afternoon of reflection, information and action on mission and justice. It was part of their series celebrating the Jubilee Year, Pilgrims of Hope. Twenty five pilgrims of hope reflected on words of Pope Francis spotlighting dignity for all, the poor, and the marginalized. Presentations were given on Viator House and Bethany House, homes of hospitality that offer housing and supportive services for young asylum seekers hoping to find a safe and better life in the US. Those present wrote encouraging notes to offer hope to the residents. The afternoon ended with the Peace Prayer of St. Francis, reminding all that our mission to offer peace through justice to the world. – Sr. Joyce Shanabarger

Missionary Course in the Amazon

The Missionary course in the Amazon, taught by the Regional Pastoral Institute – IPAR, linked to the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil—CNBB, was a very rich experience that I had the opportunity and joy to participate in July 21 - July 26. Much more than acquiring knowledge, this course allowed me to look at the mission in the reality in which I live with a different focus, expanding my perception of the Amazon, with all its people, culture and spirituality. Furthermore, it became clear once again how much we need to care for our Common Home, together, as gathered communities, but also personally.



One of the experiences we had was visiting an urban social movement (Gueto Hub) on the outskirts of Belém, young people organizing to participate in COP 30. And how beautiful it was to hear from them that when their parents fought for better lives, it was in our communities that they gathered, with the support of our beloved Father Bruno Sec. The same happened at other important moments in the history of the Amazon. It was the Church, alongside the people, in search of adequate living conditions. May we, today too, be those people who stand alongside those fighting for the promotion of life. The next UN Climate Conference (COP30) in Belém will be a critical moment for the preservation of our Common Home. This year we celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Cantic of the Creatures and the 10th anniversary of Laudato Si', a large Franciscan delegation will be present in Belém. – Sr. Viviane de Sousa

Vocational Month in Brazil

For us, August was a time of grace and encounters that deeply marked our vocational journey. The theme "Pilgrims because we are called" and the motto "Hope does not disappoint" reminded us that vocation is always a journey: no one arrives ready, but we are all led by the Lord who calls and sends us. Each encounter we experienced brought the flavor of listening, sharing, and discernment, helping us to realize that vocation is a gift from God that is incarnated in the concrete life of each person. We can affirm: we have been strengthened in hope and confirmed in our desire to continue to be a merciful, joyful, and poor presence, walking together as pilgrims of the Kingdom, so that the Church and the world may feel that God still calls and sends us. – Sr. Claudia Pires

Don't Miss This Online Event!

Bill Short, OFM via Zoom:

The Inclusive Community of Francis and Clare

Saturday, October 11, 10 AM-12 PM

For more information and to register:

<https://www.portforprayer.org/>

Lee Menichella Makes First Commitment as an Associate

On June 28, 2025, in the presence of Sisters and Associates, Lee Menichella joyfully pronounced his initial commitment to live the Gospel with compassion in the spirit of Francis and Clare. His commitment was affirmed by Sr. Mary Elizabeth Imler, Sr. Christina Fuller and those gathered, both in person and via Zoom. During the ceremony, Lee offered a heartfelt reflection on the Beatitudes, sharing with us how his Associate commitment strengthens his resolve to live the Beatitudes. His words echoed the heart of a life rooted in humility, mercy, peacemaking, and a deep hunger for righteousness.

By his "YES" Lee joins the FSSH Associates, a community of peacemakers, justice-seekers, and everyday mystics. He walks with companions who hunger for righteousness, seeking peace and fraternitas. He joins the Associates in living the Gospel in parishes and prayer spaces, classrooms and office cubicles, kitchens and neighborhood corners. Throughout this journey, Lee discovered that the Associate call is a simple yet powerful path, marked by compassion, sustained by prayer, and always open to the Spirit's invitation to do the works of neighborly love. - Pat Tomich

Dee and Peter DeLapa presented Lee Menichella with the Associate pin and a rose, symbols of our Associate relationship. Dee, Peter and Pat Tomich accompanied Lee throughout the Orientation process.



Kate Galgan Accepts Operations Manager Role as Port Bids Fond Farewell to Two Leaders

On August 21, St. Francis Woods bid a fond farewell to two long-time administrative staff and have since welcomed the talents and experience of two more. Mary Lou Nugent, former Port Administrator, has moved on to other pursuits after 17 years of dedicated service. After 10 years of faithful service, former Program Director Sr. Janice Keenan has returned to her own congregation as her talents and presence were called upon by her Sisters.

Kate Galgan, who has served the Port in multiple roles since 1999, has accepted the new position of Operations Manager at the Port. Meanwhile, Suzanne Carter is newly hired as Program Director.



Dates to Remember

Friday, Oct. 3, 4:15 p.m.: Transitus of St. Francis & Potluck

Saturday, Oct. 4, 10:30 a.m: Pilgrimage of Hope for Creation

Sunday, Oct. 5, 1 p.m.: Blessing of Pets and Gifts of Creation

Saturday, Dec. 13: Santamental Christmas

Sunday, Dec. 14: A Franciscan Christmas Pilgrimage

Thursdays thru May: Scripture Reflections

Sunday, Nov. 2 to Saturday, Nov. 8: National Vocation Awareness Week (NVAW)

"Blessing of Pets"

1:00 p.m., October 5, 2025

*Celebrating the Season of Creation:
Blessing of Pets (and other items)*



Sponsored by Franciscan Fire Committee
Event held outside the Motherhouse Entrance

St. Francis Woods
9201 W. St. Francis Rd., Frankfort, IL 60423



Our Sesquicentennial!

Commemorate the daring four Sisters who arrived through New York's harbor among waving USA centennial flags then traveling to Avilla, IN, 150 years ago. Celebrate with the courageous 23 sisters who followed and all Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart who continue to serve throughout North and South America. Please join us in thankful prayers for all God has done.

Join us in prayerful Days of Recollection every First Friday of the month (or any day that works for you each month. Available fssh.net.)

MONTH

January
February
March
April
May
June
July
August
September
October
November
December

THEME

Mothering
Poverty
Obedience
Consecration
Itineracy
Reparation
Care of Creation
Contemplation
Humility
Eucharist
Thanksgiving
Incarnation

To learn more about the events and how the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart continue to live our charism and mission, visit our website at fssh.net/About/150th

OR

Scan the QR code below:



Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart

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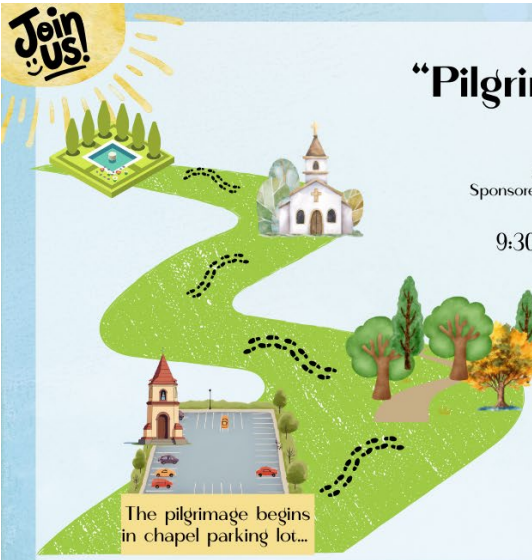
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Franciscan Spirituality Program: It's not too late to join in the discussion of this year's pick for our Franciscan Spirituality Program: Live Like Francis: Reflections on Franciscan Life in the World by Jovian Weigel, OFM, and Leonard Foley, OFM (published by Franciscan Media, copyright 2016). Every second Wednesday of the month, September through May (except January), 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. in the auditorium, we explore how to live like Saint Francis in today's society.

Transitus of St. Francis Followed by Potluck Supper Oct. 3 at St. Francis Woods in Frankfort

The Transitus of St. Francis, a celebration of hope and joy at 4:15 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 3, will be followed by a potluck supper with the Sisters at 9201 W. St. Francis Road, Frankfort. Those attending the potluck, please RSVP by Sept. 30 <https://fssh.net/connect/attend-events/> and bring a side dish (either a salad or a dessert).



“Pilgrimage of Hope for Creation”
800 Steps | October 4, 2025
 St Francis Woods, 9201 W. St. Francis Rd., Frankfort, IL 60423
 Sponsored by Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart/ Laudato Si' Committee

9:30 a.m. Mass followed by 10:30 a.m. Pilgrimage

Join us as we journey, renewing our commitment to live in harmony with one another, Mother Earth, and the Cosmos.

Let this pilgrimage be a time of prayer and silence, and a time to enjoy one another's company as we celebrate creation.

*Rain plan: Journey will take place inside the Motherhouse building.

The pilgrimage begins in chapel parking lot...