

Franciscan Voices

Living and Promoting Active Nonviolence and Peacemaking | December 2025

Celebrating 160 Years!

The history of the Sisters of St. Francis dates back to Gethsemani, KY, when three local women - Caroline Warren, Sally Walker, and Lizzie Lillis - answered a call to conduct a school for girls in that region. The trio began a communal life of work and prayer, and became Franciscan tertiaries. They were declared to be the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis with approbation by Bishop Lavialle on January 21, 1866.

The sisters, whose numbers had grown, migrated to Iowa in 1890 in hopes of finding teaching positions. The ministry of healthcare began, too. The sisters purchased property and moved to Clinton in 1893.

As we soon celebrate 160 years since Caroline, Sally, and Lizzie answered the call to serve, many changes have occurred in society and in the church. We have kept pace with those changes - education, healthcare, social services, peace and justice advocacy, pastoral and campus ministry, early childhood education, AIDS ministry, legal aid to poor persons, care for the elderly, prison ministry, and restorative justice.

Today, we have 37 sisters throughout Iowa, Illinois, Oregon, and California. Aside from our "retired" sisters, others are serving in congregational leadership and in positions as a Pastoral Associate, Recovery Support Specialist, Religious Education Coordinator, and Restorative Justice Practitioner.

Learn more about our journey and celebration of 160 years of mission and ministry in a recent publication from our development office, which is available on our website [here](#).



Nuns Against Gun Violence



Sr. Deborah Schneider signs a letter to Bishop Walsh as Jennifer Kryszak overlooks.

by Jennifer Kryszak, Director of Strategic Planning, Franciscan Peace Center

Nuns Against Gun Violence (NAGV) and the Franciscan Peace Center continue to pray, educate, and advocate for gun violence prevention. Here are a few ways that you can join our efforts:

Send a letter to your bishop: In early October, the Steering Committee of NAGV sent letters to all active and auxiliary bishops in the United States. We asked them to take concrete steps to address gun violence, including preaching about gun violence and prioritizing approaches to build community and promote peace. NAGV is receiving responses from several of the bishops, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops updated and reissued "[A Mercy and Peacebuilding Approach to Gun Violence \(2025\)](#)," which NAGV had requested they do.

Twenty-four Clinton Franciscans signed and sent the letter to Bishop Walsh of the Diocese of Davenport. Sisters in different dioceses were invited to send letters to their

NAGV continued on page 2

Sharing Fund Grants Awarded

We annually distribute grants from our Sharing Fund to organizations that benefit people who are poor, powerless, and oppressed; change attitudes or sensitize people to the causes of injustice; promote constructive change in institutions and structures affecting the well-being of people; or promote peace and justice. Individual sisters nominate the organizations and/or agencies in October. Then, a committee reviews the nominations and offers their recommendations to the Leadership Team.

The following twenty-nine organizations are recipients of our 2025 Sharing Fund grants:

- Aurora Area Interfaith Food Pantry *Aurora, IL*
- Café on Vine *Davenport, IA*
- Catalina McAuley Soup Kitchen *Silver Spring, MD*
- Catholic Worker House *Iowa City, IA*
- Center for Action and Contemplation *Albuquerque, NM*
- Churches for Middle East Peace *Washington, DC*
- Clinton Trees Forever *Clinton, IA*
- Escucha Me Voz Iowa *Iowa City, IA*
- Help Build Hope Housing *Orland Park, IL*
- Humility Homes and Services *Davenport, IA*
- Interfaith Community Services *Escondido, CA*
- Iowa Faith & Climate Network *Des Moines, IA*
- L'Arche Clinton *Clinton, IA*
- Mater Dei USA *Oxford, IA*
- Migrant Farmworkers Assistance Fund *Kansas City, MO*
- Native American Veterans Assistance *Rapid City, SD*
- Pillars Community Health *Countryside, IL*
- Sisters Water Project *Dubuque, IA*
- St. Francis Mission *St. Francis, SD*
- St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Charities *Orland Park, IL*
- St. Francis of Assisi Crisis Center *Orland Park, IL*
- St. James Immigrant Fund *Chicago, IL*
- St. John Vianney Haiti Committee *Bettendorf, IA*
- St. Vincent Mission *David, KY*
- The Pregnancy Center *Clinton, IA*
- Willis Dady Homeless Services *Cedar Rapids, IA*
- YWCA *Clinton, IA*
- YWCA Children's Center *Clinton, IA*
- YWCA Empowerment Center *Clinton, IA*

NAGV continued...

local bishops. Across the NAGV coalition, hundreds of sisters sent letters to their bishops. To continue this conversation with our bishops, we invite you to [personalize and send a letter](#) to your bishop.

Be an informed consumer: As people consider investments and purchases, it is good to reflect on the values demonstrated by the companies with which we do business. Before making a purchase or hiring a company, the [Highland Park Peace Project](#) encourages consumers to consider whether a company supports gun manufacturers. You can access their public database of companies that do business with civilian-facing assault weapon manufacturers to disrupt the systems that protect gun manufacturers.

Participate in a local or national event: Nuns Against Gun Violence and the Franciscan Peace Center are co-sponsoring Newtown Action Alliance's 13th Annual

[National Vigil for All Victims of Gun Violence](#) on December 10 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. CST. You can watch the livestream of the vigil on the [St. Mark's Episcopal Church Facebook](#) page.

This year the Newtown Action Alliance is highlighting the ways that gun violence intersects with diverse issues in our society, including political violence. They are promoting [#FreedomToLive nationwide vigils and events](#) on December 10. Locally in Clinton, the Clinton Ministerial Association will host a [UN Human Rights Day Prayer Service and Advocacy](#) event.

Sign up to receive information about the 2026 NAGV Lenten Fast: Nuns Against Gun Violence will extend an invitation for Catholics across the country to fast for gun violence prevention. Please consider how you could invite your family, parish, school, or organization to join this Lenten observance. If you would like to receive information about the Lenten Fast, please sign up [here](#).

— Completion of “Clay for Peace” Ministry —

Sister Phyllis Morris thought the end of her “Clay for Peace” ministry was over two years ago, but then she responded to a couple of requests that had her at it again.

“Now I do believe that the last request from Sister Anne Martin Phelan is truly the end,” said Sister Phyllis. After making a few Tau Peace Circle pieces, Sister Anne Martin asked for sixteen small crosses that she would use for her catechetics work and team at St. Cajetan Parish in Chicago, Illinois. “I have gifted Phyllis's art pieces very often, for many years. I give them to family, friends, and staff of my parish ministry.”



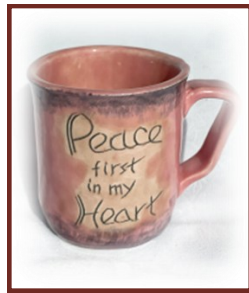
Sisters Anne Martin Phelan and Phyllis Morris

Sister Phyllis began working with clay in 2002 while caring for a ceramic artist in Portland, Oregon, recovering from surgery. There, Sister Phyllis learned what would be the foundations for her own creations. Upon returning to Clinton, she began making ceramic pieces designed to promote active nonviolence and peacemaking, the mission of the Sisters of St. Francis. These creations soon earned the name “Clay for Peace.” Since 2009, Sister Phyllis has crafted 3,713 pieces.

“Over the years people have referred to the clay work as my ‘hobby,’ to which I clarified that I never considered clay work a hobby but rather a way to promote peace through clay. Peace in our charism,” explained Sister Phyllis.

You may have heard the expression “it’s not written in stone” referring to the changing nature of ideas in different contexts. But the message of peace expressed in this medium is literally written in stone. “In some future era, archaeologists who may dig up these pieces will know that we promoted peace in our time,” said Sister Phyllis.

She has just over 200 ceramic pieces left in her current inventory. They are featured in display cases at The Canticule for anyone wishing to shop. Suggested donation prices are included near the available items.



Various peace ceramics crafted by Sister Phyllis Morris over the years.

— New Corporate Board Members —

We are pleased to announce two new lay members of the Sisters of St. Francis, Clinton, Iowa Corporate Board. Joining the Leadership Team, the board now includes James Nelson of NelsonCorp Wealth Management and Marilee Hilgendorf, a Mount Saint Clare College alumna. Erin Meyermann, our Director of Finance, is also serving as an ex officio non-voting member.

This new Corporate Board model is in preparation for having an appointed leader. When that leader comes, she will be the chair of the Board.

Orientation was held on August 26, with the first regular Corporate Board meeting on October 21. The Board meets at least annually and on an as-needed basis.



Nelson & Hilgendorf ▶

— Sharing the Message of Christ's Birth: A Call to Action —

by Jennifer Kryszak, Director of Strategic Planning, Franciscan Peace Center

So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. (Luke 2:16-17)

In the past few months, I have been praying for Aseed, an infant living in Gaza. My prayer and thoughts for Aseed often include strong emotions of fear, dread, and hopelessness. I imagine the pain and fear of Aseed's parents, family, and friends as they tend to a small child. My faith prods me not to stay in these emotions, but rather to work to ensure that Aseed and all Palestinian children can thrive.

In the Gospel of Luke, the shepherds were changed by their encounter with the Christ Child. In our own lives, the birth of Christ calls us to bring God's love and peace into the world. The love and peace that Christ calls us to embody is a challenge to our way of life, a challenge to move away from fear and complacency to hope and action. Do we make known the message about the Christ Child? Do we recognize how the birth of Christ calls us to care for all children, all people, all of creation?

Aseed's life intersects with the lives of others around the globe and those in our communities. To ensure that Palestinian children can thrive, we need to create a culture of peace and nonviolence that truly values each life and all of creation. As we work to embody Christ in the world, let us recognize the intersectionality of social

and ecological justice and engage diverse issues. We invite you to join the Franciscan Peace Center in these efforts:

- Pray and advocate for a child in Gaza. Sign up to receive a child's name through the [Let Children Live campaign](#).
- Speak up against antisemitism and all forms of hate. Engage the [Blue Square Alliance Against Hate](#) to learn about antisemitism and how you can make a difference.
- Reflect on how our faith calls us to love the poor. Read [Pope Leo XIV's Apostolic Exhortation Dilexi te](#).
- Protect our democracy and promote active nonviolence. Join Pace e Bene's [Rise and Shine: It's Resistance Time campaign](#).
- Watch "[Interfaith Nonviolent Civil Resistance 101](#)" to learn how you can work to resist authoritarianism.
- Take the USCCB's [Cabrin Pledge](#) to remember our immigrant heritage as Catholics and engage our faith in response to current events.
- Watch "[Climate Change and Migration: Two Interconnected Crises](#)" to learn how you can advocate for creation and our immigrant brothers and sisters.

— Impact of Solar Panels at The Canticle —

As followers of St. Francis of Assisi, we are committed to care of creation. We have done our part to live in ways that sustain and not drain Earth's resources.

Our thirty-six arrays of solar panels at The Canticle went live in 2015. Totalling 324 panels, they have produced over 1.3 million kilowatt hours of energy since inception.

On average, the solar panels produce about 25% of our yearly energy needs for The Canticle.

In the past ten years, our solar panels have saved over 1,400 tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) pollution from entering the atmosphere. That's equivalent to planting 35,000 new trees or taking about 275 cars off the road for a year!



Solar panel field at The Canticle

Immigration Common Read

by Marsha Thrall, Director of Programming, Franciscan Peace Center

"Most people seem to not understand how hard immigrants, especially Hispanic people, work to make our communities a better place." - Participant, October's Immigration Common Read conversation

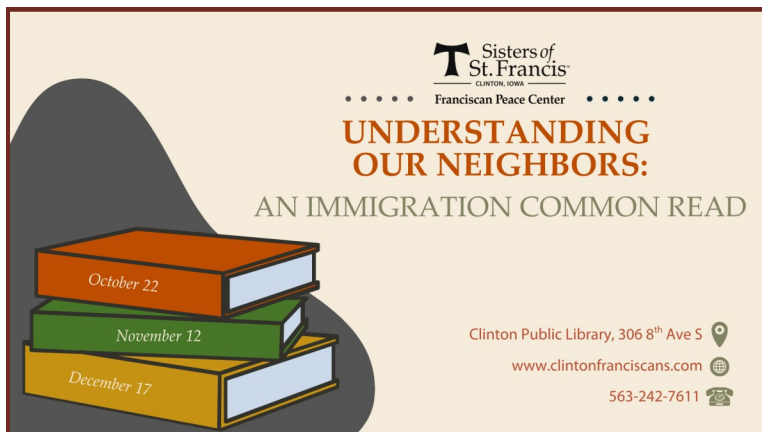
In recent months, it has become apparent that the need to stand in solidarity with our immigrant neighbors is more critical than it has been in the past. ICE raids in communities like Chicago, Minneapolis, and even in Iowa City and Des Moines have led to violent abductions of people living and working in the United States under the implied promise of safety and security posed by the idea of the "American Dream."

In the face of this violence against our immigrant brothers and sisters, it has become increasingly important to ask the question, "What is mine to do?" In response to this question, the Franciscan Peace Center has formed a committee of community members ready to help the wider community understand the many contributions that immigrants make to society, while also squashing many of the misconceptions or myths associated with immigration in the United States.

In October, at the advice of the committee, the Franciscan Peace Center began Clinton-centered, public-facing education efforts to foster an understanding of immigration issues faced by our immigrant brothers and sisters. The first effort was hosting a three-part common read series featuring books that highlight the experiences of immigrants at various stages of their journey to, and life in, the United States.

During October's conversation, seven members of the Clinton community from a variety of backgrounds came together at the Clinton Public Library to discuss Karla Cornejo Villavicencio's award-winning book, *The Undocumented Americans*. During this initial two-hour conversation, a community leader from Clinton who migrated to the United States from Cuba explained the challenges faced during their own immigration process and how they feel in our current political climate, noting that more needs to be done to advocate for and protect our immigrant neighbors.

These conversations continued in November with an intergenerational reading of the book *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card* by Sara Saedi. Any person aged 13 and up from the local community was invited to participate in the reading and conversation.



The final immigration common read in this series will be held at the Clinton Public Library on Wednesday, December 17, starting at 5:00 p.m. CST. December's book will be *"They Take Our Jobs!" And 20 Other Myths About Immigration* by Aviva Chomsky.

Beginning in early 2026, the Franciscan Peace Center, along with the support of the immigration committee, will begin facilitating small group roundtable discussions intended to inform the community about the pervasive myths surrounding immigration issues in the United States. Have questions or want to know how you can participate? Contact Marsha Thrall at mthrall@clintonfranciscans.com or call 563-242-7611.

Other Upcoming Events

- ♦ **December 10:** UN Human Rights Day Prayer Service and Advocacy Event; 6:00-8:00 p.m. CST; First United Presbyterian Church, 400 5th Ave S, Clinton.
- ♦ **December 10:** Film screening of *The Sultan and The Saint*; 5:30-7:00 p.m. CST; The Lighthouse Schools, 400 N Bluff Blvd, Clinton.
- ♦ **December 15:** Webinar *Unseen Chains: Understanding and Responding to Labor Trafficking*; 5:00-6:00 p.m. CST; register online at www.clintonfranciscans.com.
- ♦ **January 18:** Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration; 1:30-3:00 p.m. CST; Clinton Community College, 1000 Lincoln Blvd, Clinton.

Advent Day of Reflection



An Advent Day of Reflection facilitated by Sister Joan Mueller, OSC, Ph.D., will be held on December 6 at The Canticle. This will be a quiet day of Advent prayer, moving participants deeply into the mystery of the Annunciation. In song, prayer, and silence, participants will follow the prayer of Clare of Assisi in uniting the contemplative movement in their hearts with their desire to impact our world.

Sister Joan is a gifted spiritual director and internationally recognized Franciscan researcher and scholar. A former superior and formation director for her community, she brings wisdom, compassion, and decades of experience in the Poor Clare tradition. She founded Project Welcome Refugee Community in Omaha, NE, working to educate and mentor more than 500 refugee children and earning the U.S. Presidential Points of Light Award for this work. During her time as Professor of Christian Spirituality and Systematic Theology at Creighton University, she authored more than twenty scholarly and popular books in theology and spirituality.

Join the Franciscan Federation each Sunday in Advent at 6:00 p.m. CT for "Women of Hope," a contemplative online Vespers series. Each gathering will follow the rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours, with psalms, scripture, and intercessions, and will feature a reflection drawing from the wisdom of Franciscan women and others across the Church as we move through the season of preparation. Register for the series [here](#).

Supportive Housing Update

As last reported in the December 2023 edition of [Franciscan Voices](#), construction is moving along on the Clinton YWCA's new Supportive Housing building, named 399 Housing, and is set to open in early 2026.

This will be more than just a building — it will be a place of hope, safety, and home for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in our community. With twenty-four supportive housing units and the Clinton YWCA Empowerment Center relocating to the first floor, this will be a space where people can begin to rebuild their lives with dignity and support.

As supporters of this project, we look forward to the ribbon cutting in 2026!



Annual Donor Report



Sisters of St. Francis, Clinton, Iowa
Annual Donor Report
July 1, 2024 — June 30, 2025

Our Annual Donor Report for the fiscal year July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025, is now available on our [website](#).

We are grateful to all who have supported our congregation — through one-time gifts, ongoing contributions, or by including us in their estate plans. Listing our donors is one meaningful way we express our appreciation for their generosity and commitment.

Are you interested in supporting our sisters and our mission of living and promoting active nonviolence and peacemaking? Monetary donations can be made for the needs of our retired sisters, Franciscan Peace Center, and/or wherever our need is the greatest. We also hold an endowment with the [Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque](#).



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