Ministry Report

News/Views
From the Franciscan Sisters
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Pilgrims of Hope

By Vince Gallucci, Chief Administrative Officer

As November arrives and the year begins to close, we pause to recognize the hope our patients, residents, families, and teammates carry through our ministries. In the Franciscan tradition, hope is not abstract — it is lived, practiced, and shared. This year, we have seen hope expressed throughout our organization.

In our rural critical access hospitals, hope often begins in moments of uncertainty. A patient's fear softens because a nurse listens, a physician explains, and a staff member offers kindness. These simple acts of presence turn anxiety into trust and remind us that healing is both clinical and human.

In our elder services and assisted living communities, hope comes from the daily companionship we offer residents. Our teams sit with someone through a difficult night, celebrate small steps forward, and help individuals feel known and valued. Families often rediscover hope when they witness the dignity and affection shown to their loved ones.

In our retirement communities, hope grows through connection. Residents encourage one another, share stories, and build friendships that become sources of strength. Their witness shows that community sustains hope and that it continues to deepen with age.

In our music and performing arts center, hope becomes tangible. A concert lifts the spirit of someone coming to a performance. A student learning a new piece finds confidence. A volunteer welcoming a guest makes someone feel at home.



Through all of this, Catholic healthcare and education remain a sign of hope. Not because we avoid hardship, but because we choose to meet it with compassion, integrity, and reverence for every person's dignity. Our ministries continue to be places where we live out the Franciscan values of simplicity, presence, and care for the vulnerable.

As the year draws to a close, may we honor the hope that has carried us, recognize the pilgrims of hope among us, and continue walking forward with gratitude and purpose.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity Sponsored Ministries is to carry out the commitment of the Sponsor to the healing and educational mission of the Catholic Church through the provision of quality health care and educational services.

In a spirit of partnership with dedicated religious and lay leaders, the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity Sponsored Ministries will strengthen the Sponsor's commitment by leading change, ensuring stewardship of resources and integrating mission and values.

Message from the President

Cultivating Sacred Spaces for Healing Together

Friends,



Ryan Neville

I have a confession to make: I love a good romantic drama, and one of my absolute favorites is the 1998 movie Hope Floats. In the film, when the life of Birdee Pruitt (played by Sandra Bullock) is completely upended, we witness a powerful truth: true restoration only begins when a person finds a safe, non-judgmental environment to navigate life's storms. For Birdee, that safe harbor was her small Texas hometown.

For all of us within the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity Sponsored Ministries (FSCCM), this theme mirrors our daily calling. In Catholic healthcare, creating a "safe space" is not just a operational goal; it is a sacred extension of our Franciscan tradition of hospitality and radical care.

Our ministries are called to be a sanctuary, and that shelter is intentionally built for two vital groups:

- **For Our Residents and Patients**: True healing requires emotional and spiritual security alongside medical care. Together, we ensure our facilities are safe havens where those in our care can express fear, pain, or vulnerability, knowing their inherent dignity is fiercely protected.

- **For Our Employees and Caregivers**: We know you cannot pour from an empty cup. Amid the heavy, daily demands of healthcare, leadership is deeply committed to cultivating a workplace culture where you can voice fatigue, share grief, and find mutual support without judgment.

When you feel deeply supported, valued, and spiritually anchored, that grace naturally flows outward to our patients and residents. Thank you for your dedication to making our workplace a genuine vessel of Christ's healing—for each other, and for those we serve.

The Sister Martin Flavin Award

At the 2026 Leadership Enrichment Program, Thomas Veeser was awarded the prestigious Sister Martin Flavin Franciscan Ministry Award. Tom is transformative in his work by leading quality initiatives and as partner and advocate with the Froedtert ThedaCare system. Tom manages the evolving nursing profession and quality efforts, ensuring governance and operations remain aligned to the local and enterprise priorities. He brings a unique perspective to his work given his experience with other Franciscan health systems. Tom is assertive, objective, and passionate about his work and supportive of those he serves.



Left to right, Ryan Neville, Sister Marlita Henseler, Tom Veeser, Heather Veeser, and Brian Graf,

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By Tom Brefka, Pastoral Care Director

Pilgrims of Hope: Walking Together—Deacon Tom Brefka

What a joyous season this has been for our entire Clement Manor Community and for me!

On Saturday, September 12, 2026, I celebrated the culmination of more than four years of hard work, formation, prayer, and dedication in my ordination to the permanent diaconate. I, along with ten other men, was ordained to serve the Church within the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

Clement Manor has supported me throughout these years in so many meaningful ways. Staff and residents prayed for me, administration supported me and allowed me time to attend the necessary formation commitments, and our Pastoral Care team took on additional responsibilities to maintain our high standard of spiritual care while I was away. Their support reminded me that this journey was never mine alone.



The ordination of Deacon Tom Brefka.

The Clement Manor Community was also very present at the ordination Mass. Members of leadership attended; many of the priests who live at Clement Manor were there, and a bus full of residents came to pray and share their support of the Church and me. The ordination was filled with the beautiful pageantry and ritual of our Catholic faith—something profoundly moving for anyone in attendance, but especially when one of those being ordained is part of your own community.



Participants in the Pilgrimage Walk from St. Matthias Parish to Clement Manor.

My wife has also sacrificed and supported me throughout this journey. She has learned that becoming a deacon means that she also becomes part of a ministry of service. Once again, the Clement Manor Community surrounded us with love by hosting a special welcoming cake social to thank her and offer their congratulations and well wishes to both of us.

Clement Manor continues to show what it means to be a community of hope.

Our chapel is one of eleven official pilgrimage sites for the Jubilee Year of St. Francis. On Saturday, September 26, our community welcomed a group of pilgrims from St. Matthias Parish, just one mile away from Clement Manor. They walked together from St. Matthias to our chapel to pray, share fellowship, and seek the intercession of St. Francis during this special Jubilee year.

That pilgrimage was a beautiful reminder that we are all pilgrims. We walk different paths, carry different joys and challenges, and sometimes need others to walk beside us.

At Clement Manor, hope is found in those who pray for one another, serve one another, listen to one another, and offer compassion along the way.

The Jubilee Year may end, but our pilgrimage continues. And wherever the journey takes us, we can keep walking together—and be signs of hope for one another.

By Janet Schuler, Communications Manager

Pilgrims of Hope: Continuing the Journey

Being a pilgrim means moving forward with purpose, trusting that each step leads toward something greater. At Franciscan Healthcare, that journey has always been rooted in a commitment to serve others with compassion, dignity, and respect. As we look beyond the Jubilee Year 2025 and toward the future, those values continue to guide the work we do each day. They shape how we care for our neighbors, support one another, and respond to the changing needs of the communities we serve.



Lila, a former Swing Bed Program patient, is pictured with some of the Franciscan Healthcare team members who assisted in her recovery.

One of the clearest examples of hope can be found in the lives of those entrusted to our care. A woman came to Franciscan Healthcare's Swing Bed Program with a very personal goal. Her grandson was getting married, and she wanted to walk down the aisle alongside her family. She did not want to arrive in a wheelchair. She wanted to walk on her own.

Through determination, rehabilitation and the encouragement of her care team, she worked steadily toward that goal. When the wedding day arrived, she was able to attend on her feet. Her achievement was more than a physical milestone. It was a testament to the power of hope and a reminder that healing often begins with believing something is possible.

That same spirit can be seen in our team members. Whether caring for patients in the hospital, supporting families through Home Health and Hospice, nurturing children at Bright Beginnings, or helping community members reach important destinations through JOYRIDE Public Transit, our colleagues bring our ministry values to life every day. They walk beside people through difficult moments, joyful celebrations, major milestones, and ordinary days. In every circumstance, the person comes first.

Our ministry also continues to grow, not simply for the sake of growth, but to better serve those who depend on us. JOYRIDE helps remove transportation barriers by providing rides to medical appointments, grocery stores, and other essential destinations. On the Franciscan Healthcare campus, the removal of the former convent and relocation of the Sisters' residence have created space for the next chapter of our physical campus. Plans for a new surgical wing and expanded services will allow more individuals and families to receive quality care closer to home.

As we continue this journey, our hope extends beyond new buildings, additional services, and future expansion. It is a hope for stronger communities and a future where patients, families, and associates know they are valued and cared for. We carry forward the mission begun generations ago: serving others in the spirit of Jesus Christ, protecting human dignity, and bringing hope, healing, and compassion wherever we are called to serve.

By Roxanne Miner, OFS, Mission and Pastoral Care

Bringing Hope, Healing, and Compassion into the Future

In Catholic healthcare, healing and compassion are understood as a continuation of Christ's mission. We provide hope even when a cure is not possible. At the same time, modern medicine continues to advance, bringing new treatments and possibilities that offer even greater hope to our patients. Cancer care is a powerful example of how innovation is transforming the way we treat disease and provide hope.

Angie Popp, RN, of the HFM Cancer Care Clinic, has been an oncology nurse for 30 years. Throughout her career, she has witnessed remarkable advances in cancer treatment. "Thirty years ago, chemotherapy was pretty much all we had to give," Popp explains. "We had some good results, but we never used the word 'cure' back then unless the cancer could be surgically removed."

Today, cancer treatment encompasses many more options, including several types of immunotherapies and targeted therapies. One of the most significant advances is Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) testing, which is helping providers personalize cancer care and make more informed treatment decisions.

NGS testing can be performed on a tumor tissue sample or a blood sample at the time of diagnosis or when cancer recurs. The test profiles the tumor, identifies specific mutations and biomarkers, and can help determine whether targeted therapies may be effective. Because these treatments are tailored to the characteristics of an individual's cancer, they may offer improved outcomes with fewer side effects for some patients.

Results typically take about two weeks. While not every patient will have a targetable mutation, the information gained through NGS testing can help providers determine which treatments may be appropriate—and which may not be beneficial. It can also identify potential clinical trial opportunities.

"Cancer used to be more of an acute disease," Popp says. "Now, it can be more like a chronic disease that is manageable." That change has opened the door to more treatment possibilities and more reasons for hope. When cancer can be managed or stabilized, patients may have additional opportunities for treatment as new therapies become available. For our cancer patients, knowing that there may be another option ahead can make a meaningful difference.

Sara Duzeski is one patient who has benefited from Oncotype Dx testing, which helps predict the likelihood of cancer recurrence and whether chemotherapy will be beneficial in early-stage breast cancer. Duzeski is pictured here with members of the cancer care team after completing her cancer treatment. When she began chemotherapy, a friend suggested that she might need a hat and encouraged her to make one as a project during treatment.

The hat features four large flowers, one for each chemotherapy treatment she completed. Her chemotherapy course was personally challenging. She added a vine with berries to her hat, with each berry representing one of her radiation treatments. She plans to add leaves to represent each doctor who played a role in her care.

Her hat has become much more than something to wear. It is a beautiful representation of Duzeski's perseverance, strength, and journey through treatment—and a reminder of the hope that can be found through compassionate care, medical innovation, and the people who walk alongside patients every step of the way.



Sara Duzeski shares a moment with her cancer care team.

By Lisa Marshall, Marketing and Public Relations

Holding on to Hope

For six years, Natalie Thompson prayed for one thing.

She wanted to be a mother.

Month after month, she and her husband hoped for good news. They waited, wondered and endured the heartbreak of negative pregnancy tests.

Then, in 2024, it happened.

"I was pregnant," Natalie said. "After six years of hoping, waiting, and wondering if it would ever happen, our dream was finally coming true."

Then, near the end of November, her right shoulder started to hurt.

Looking for answers, Natalie met with Matthew Craig, M.D., fellowship-trained and board-certified orthopedic surgeon at Genesis Orthopedic Center. Testing revealed what could be cancer in her shoulder.

By then, Natalie was nine months pregnant. More tests followed.

One morning, before work, Natalie logged into MyChart and read the results.

She had cancer. It was spreading through her body.

"After waiting six years for a child, I suddenly found myself wondering if I would live long enough to watch my daughter grow up," Natalie said.

Yet even in that moment, one thing had not changed.

She wanted to be a mom.

Soon after, Natalie turned to Callie E. Crider, D.O., board-certified obstetrician & gynecologist at Genesis OB/GYN Group, who had been caring for her throughout her pregnancy.

"For the first time since my diagnosis, I felt something other than fear," Natalie said. "It was hope."

Soon afterward, her daughter was born.

The day after having her baby, Natalie received more answers.

She had HR-positive metastatic breast cancer.

Natalie was rushed to the Genesis Cancer Care Center. Scott A. Wegner, M.D., fellowship-trained and board-certified hematologist/oncologist and chief medical officer for Genesis Medical Group, and Shalini Garg Gupta, M.D., board-certified radiation oncologist at Genesis Cancer Care Center, developed a personalized treatment plan for her.

Natalie underwent radiation treatments, hormone therapy, and other medications.

Most importantly, she never felt alone.



After years of waiting to become a mother, Natalie treasures every moment with her 2-year-old daughter.

"My team of doctors and nurses answered every question," Natalie said. "They addressed every concern. Every step of the way, I was treated with compassion, dignity, and kindness."

And through it all, she had her baby. She had her daughter. And she had her life.

Today, Natalie gets to watch her daughter grow.

"I get to hold her," Natalie said. "I get to be her mom."

For that, Natalie, her husband and their daughter will be forever grateful to the Genesis caregivers who stood beside them when they needed them most.

By Sister Louise Hembrecht, OSF, Mission Leader

The Presence of Hope in Daily Life

Residents at St. Joseph's Elder Services, both at St. Joseph's Retirement Community (assisted living) and at St. Joseph's Hillside Villa (long term care) have had to leave many things behind. Family homes have been moved out of, and possessions have been greatly reduced to fit in the space of the apartments or rooms. Life is different, but new doors have been opened. Social interactions with old friends and meeting new friends are part of the fabric of everyday life. Attending spiritual services is possible again and various activities offer choices and make life interesting.

There is a subtle hope that pervades each day at St. Joseph's Elder Services. This hope is rooted in consistency and a certain predictability. Care is provided by staff who are familiar. Though new staff are hired and traveling staff or agency are present on long-term basis and become familiar faces, many staff members are well-established and well-grounded in the mission – to live and promote the healing mission of Jesus Christ. Of the little more than one hundred, more than a fourth of the staff members worked for St. Joseph's before the Villa was built or became employees when it opened. Nearly fifty other staff members have been with St. Joseph's for three to five years. Leadership has been stabilized and is involved in the everyday life of the residents. High school and college students return to work during breaks in school schedules. These familiar faces bring smiles and requests for updates from the last encounter. This consistency of caregivers provides a positive atmosphere.

But hope is more than consistency. It involves the ability to continue to participate in activities and to make choices. Sometimes the choices are simple – what to eat from the varied menu or to request something else, or to participate in a planned activity or not. It means that participation in events beyond the facility is possible whether the fair, or an auto or craft show. Transportation will be provided and staff members will assist family in making that participation available. Family or joyride excursions to check out the countryside are part of the ordinary.

Hope is also found in the meaningful interactions that take place within the facility and through visits from loved ones, including grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It is reflected in the joy of embracing elderly relatives, sharing popcorn and ice cream, and creating treasured memories together. It means family members can sit beside residents during religious services, while young children may have their own chair or sit on a resident's lap, even when the chapel is full. These simple yet profound moments of connection, belonging, and shared faith help make life meaningful and keep the bonds of family strong.

These simple examples are not ones that would be in theological dissertations, but they are ones that keep our residents interested in life, excited about present possibilities, and focused on future life here and life in eternity with the God who loves them. It is being a pilgrim of hope.



Profound moments of connection with friends and family through excursions and activities.

By George Davis, Executive Director of Mission

The Power of Presence: Living Our Mission Through Compassionate Care

At St. Paul Elder Services, our mission comes to life every day through the compassion, respect, and love our associates bring to the people they serve. Sometimes, the most powerful examples of our mission are found in the simple moments when someone feels seen, valued, and genuinely cared for.

One experience that continues to warm my heart and soul began with a phone call from a local priest seeking help for his mother. The youngest of nine children, he was concerned about his mother's declining health while she lived at another assisted living facility. She was losing weight and the staff were not assisting her with eating. Some family members believed it might be time for hospice, while others felt there was still hope for improvement.

The family needed guidance, and we were asked if we could help. We immediately reached out to our Director of Admissions, Nicole, who met with the family, listened to their concerns, and helped them explore the possibilities at St. Paul Elder Services. Following a tour, arrangements were made for his mother to come to our rehabilitation neighborhood. She later transitioned to a long-term support neighborhood at St. Paul Home where she continues to receive care. Today, his mother is doing remarkably well. She is enjoying meals, experiencing life with smiles, and overall thriving. Her family is deeply grateful and has personally expressed their appreciation several times.





Through compassionate care, attentive listening, and genuine kindness, associates at St. Paul Elder Services bring the organization's Franciscan mission to life, offering hope, dignity, and comfort to residents and their families.

Recently, while visiting our rehabilitation neighborhood, we began sharing the wonderful news about her progress with some of the associates who had cared for her. They remembered her well. As we talked, one certified nursing assistant responded with four simple words: "All for the glory of God!"

Those words were deeply touching. In that moment, it was easy to recognize an associate who truly understood why we are here. She sees her work not simply as a job, but as a calling—a holy opportunity to serve others through the gifts God has given her.

This is the power of presence. It is the difference we make when we listen, respond to needs, honor each person's dignity, and recognize the individual behind every care plan. It is also a beautiful reflection of the mission of St. Paul Elder Services: to provide compassionate, person-centered care rooted in our Catholic identity and Franciscan values.

Our mission is not lived only through policies or words. It is lived through every meal thoughtfully prepared, every concern heard, every smile encouraged, and every family reassured. When our associates serve with love and compassion, they become instruments of hope and healing.

May we continue to recognize these sacred moments and remember that, through our daily work, we have the privilege of making a lasting difference in the lives of those entrusted to our care—all for the glory of God.

By Charyce Welch, Business Manager

Welcoming Hope, Music, and Community to The Franciscan Center

Holy Family Conservatory and Franciscan Center stand at a remarkable moment in time. With 100 years behind us, the idea of the next century feels both hopeful and undefined. Where do we go from here? How do we grow? What comes next? Our past reflects extraordinary achievement, but our future depends on how boldly we nurture the growth of our Center today.

That hope is found in the people who fill our halls: our students, teachers, patrons, families, and community members. As each of us belongs to a family, becoming part of the rhythm of our community's families brings purpose and renewed optimism. Summer months may feel quiet, but the energy shifts the moment school begins. Fall sessions breathe life back into the building. Children practicing instruments, parents chatting in the lobby, teachers returning with renewed passion. Our Music for Tots™ students giggling as they shout "hoorah!" marching through the hallways to The Ants Go Marching One by One. Adult learners discover confidence they didn't know they had, celebrated at our adult student gatherings. These moments remind us that the Center is not simply a building; it is a growing hub of hope, creativity, and the promise that music will continue to echo through these walls for generations.



Dr. Stanislava Varshavski with her piano students.

Our teachers deepen that promise. Their return each year brings optimism, dedication, and a commitment to sharing their gift with learners of every age. They pass down memories, skills, love of music, and traditions that become part of the identity of every student who walks through our doors. The pride felt by parents, students, and all community members during each recital, as students showcase their growth and newly developed talent, reinforces one truth: the show must go on.

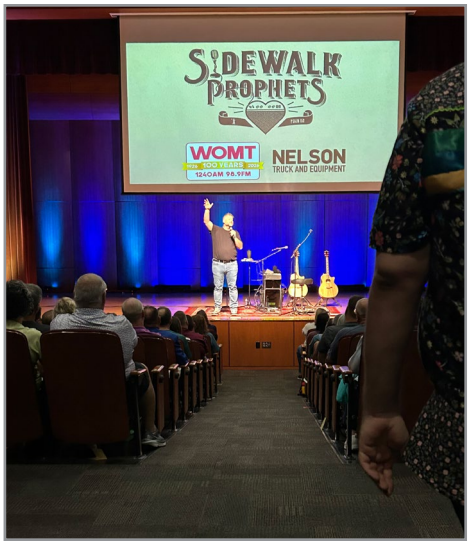
Our patrons add another layer of inspiration. Their stories of past celebrations, present milestones, and future dreams remind us that The Franciscan Center has long been woven into the fabric of community life. We are a pillar of creativity, connection, and shared aspiration. As we look ahead, we are expanding our concert series, strengthening our outreach throughout Manitowoc, and building programs that reflect the needs and dreams of today's families.

We do this so that 100 years from now, those who stand in our place will look back and see the impact of what we chose to build today: a legacy of music, community, and possibility that continues to grow.









Music education and performances are alive and well at The Franciscan Center.