



Servant News

Franciscan Servants of the Holy Family



Sister Doris Engeman

PO Box 7251

Shawnee Mission, KS 66207 785-218-2894

srdoris@kcfranciscans.org

www.kcfranciscans.org

December 2023+

Dear family and friends, Peace and All Good!

Each year as Christmas approaches, we locate the tubs and boxes where all the items of Christmas have been resting since the previous year. Along with the lights, wreaths, candles, the tree and its ornaments of all sorts, hopefully there is, to be located in a place of prominence, the Nativity scene.

This scene invites us into understanding Jesus and the story of His birth. I so enjoy the endearing image, often witnessed in churches and other places when children, drawn to the Nativity scene, stand motionless, enthralled by the characters, the beauty, the mystery. When the parents catch up, there unfolds a quiet conversation, a teaching moment, a moment of evangelization.

It seems appropriate to share a bit of the history of the first Living Nativity scene. Since Jesus' birth over 2 millennia ago, artists have depicted the scene of His birth, in paintings in the churches of Rome, etc. But it wasn't until 1223 AD (800 years ago) that St. Francis of Assisi re-enacted the scene, the *first Living Nativity* on Christmas eve.

So much did St. Francis love Jesus, that he asked a friend to gather some animals among the caves of Greccio (Italy). According to Thomas of Celano, the first biographer of St. Francis, "... friars came to Greccio from various parts, together with people from the farmsteads in the area, who brought flowers and torches to light up that holy night. When Francis arrived, he found a manger full of hay, an ox and a donkey. All those present experienced a new and indescribable joy in the presence of the Christmas scene. The priest then solemnly celebrated the Eucharist over the manger, showing the bond between the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Eucharist... this scene was accompanied by the gift of a



marvelous vision: one of those present saw the Baby Jesus himself lying in the manger."

Although St. Francis wasn't physically present at Jesus' birth, this depiction of St. Francis holding the Baby Jesus expresses his loving, profound connection with the poor and humble Christ Child.

Pope Francis, in his 2019 Apostolic Letter *Admirabile signum* (enchanting image) says,

"The nativity scene is like a living Gospel rising up from the pages of sacred Scripture. As we contemplate the Christmas story, we are invited to set out on a spiritual journey, drawn by the humility of the God who became human in order to encounter every man and woman. We come to realize that so great is his love for us that he became one of us, so that we in turn might become one with him."



Every Nativity scene has a story and a way of teaching. The one above holds my first image of Jesus' birth. Having been purchased by our parents a piece or two at a time, these small painted plaster pieces, a few with price tags still attached (5 and 10 cents ea.) somehow survived the young hands of my siblings and I as we arranged and rearranged them throughout the Christmas Season. We made sure the kings arrived from the East, the animals were all gazing at the baby. The cardboard stable has even survived 6+ decades. What a joy to gaze on it and receive the story it tells!

The past months have had a steady, busy pace with ministry with the Secular Franciscans and spiritual mentorship, directing a Women's Retreat in October, and ministering to moms who come to St. Mary's Home for Mothers. These moms come to us single, pregnant, homeless, in need of a safe and loving environment. In November, I was a co-presenter at the Alliance for Life (MO) Conference in KC on the topic of Seeking Safety, one of the therapies used with the moms at St. Mary's Home.

Family reunions and weddings were numerous this summer/fall, which were great times to re-unite with many family members and friends.

"The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family." - John Paul II

"Every family is holy, not because it is perfect, but because God is at work in it..."

On this 800th anniversary of the first Living Nativity, a group of dedicated volunteers have been preparing for our 5th annual Living Nativity. This event provides a tangible way of celebrating and reflecting on the birth of Jesus. Join us if you can!

I hope you will spend some time reflecting on a Nativity scene, in your home or elsewhere. May the beautiful, pure, powerful and enduring love of the Christ Child draw you ever closer to Himself. My prayer is that you will welcome and embrace this encounter with Jesus whole-heartedly.

God bless you!

Sister Doris



Franciscan Servants of the Holy Family Presents
THE LIVING NATIVITY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2023 1:00—4:00 PM
Community Indoor Arena
Douglas County Fairgrounds
1930 Harper St, Lawrence KS 66046
LIVE ANIMALS, MUSIC and MORE
Free event. Donations accepted.

Celebrating the 800th anniversary of the first Living Nativity.

A Prayer For Families
*Heavenly Father,
you gave us the gift of each other
and made us a family.
Bless our family today with an
abundance of Your love,
the grace to forgive and to ask for
forgiveness, and to be generous in
serving each other,
that we may be a sign
of holiness and unity in the world,
becoming more each day,
like the Blessed Trinity,
and the Holy Family at Nazareth,
a communion of life and love. Amen.
Holy Family,
help us grow in holiness and unity.*

Novena for Families

Join the Franciscan Servants of the Holy Family in praying a novena, (you may use the prayer above, or another) December 23-31, asking for the intercession of the Holy Family for your own family, and the needs of all families. We ask for protection of family life, for guidance in the midst of joys and challenges, in gratitude for our many blessings.... Sunday, December 31 is the Feast of the Holy Family. *Jesus, Mary and Joseph, pray for us!*

With gratitude for your prayers, for the many volunteers, and financial help, **thank you** for helping further the Franciscan Servants' ministry to families:
helping families grow in holiness and unity.

God bless you!

The Franciscan Servants of the Holy Family is a 501(c)(3) non-profit (tax-exempt) organization. Your donations are income tax deductible.

*** Online options:**
www.kcfranciscans.org

*** By check:**
Franciscan Servants of the Holy Family
PO Box 7251
Shawnee Mission, KS 66207



With gratitude to Richard and Dana King for the printing of this newsletter and prep for mailing.