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Dominican
ROOTS

Racine, Wisconsin



*Sponsored Ministries Adapt
During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

From Editor Chris Broslavick, OP

We are caught in the inescapable web of a global pandemic. A tiny, invisible virus has caused us to change our behavior in now all too familiar ways—wear a mask, wash hands frequently, avoid crowds and maintain social distance, a mantra of which we are growing weary!

COVID-19 has not only affected individuals and families, but it has also affected organizations. Programs and services had to be modified there, too. In this issue of Dominican Roots, we have asked a staff member from each of our ministries to give us an inside view of the workings of the organization and changes in his/her role during these past many months.



We cannot deny the toll that the coronavirus has taken on the lives of far too many. Death and sickness bring deep sadness. And to varying degrees, we all share in it. But there is another side. With places closed, our busy routines disrupted and more time to be with ourselves, perhaps you have listened to more music, learned a new skill, watched good movies, or really noticed the glorious nature that surrounds us. The photo of the scene on our cover was captured with the artistic and contemplative eye of S. Shirley Kubat. We are caught in a web. What are you doing in there? What have been the insights, the blessings, the challenges of this time for you?

From President Maryann McMahon, OP



“Grow through what you go through.” That pithy verse has helped me and many others through this COVID 19 pandemic. The statement begs the questions: how did you grow in the year and what were the circumstances of that growth? It was the pandemic that called forth growth in all our Sisters. Trying to keep a congregate living setting with Sisters at an average age of 82 safe these past months has meant change and growth on everyone’s part.

Everything about food service delivery changed. We placed all Chapel chairs six feet apart and ceased using prayer sheets. There was no Mass at all from March to May of 2020 when we resumed our Sunday Mass for Sisters living at Siena Center only.

We asked 12 Sisters to move into the Retreat Center so their rooms could become isolation units for COVID positive Sisters and quarantine space for those people exposed to the virus. There are daily health screening procedures and temperatures are taken daily of all essential workers and Sister residents. We began regular COVID testing for all staff and residents and waited for test results. We have had three Sisters test positive for the virus but all were asymptomatic before and during their two week isolation time. We have had a few essential workers test positive as well, and all have returned to work healthy once again.

We have been blessed by God in this experience, and we have grown in patience, perseverance and kindness. We more easily see where we need to be more supportive and loving of one another and when to offer a helping hand. We have come to recognize and appreciate more fully that a single message can have multiple ways of being heard and understood. We appreciate the little things much more, like wine once in a while with a meal or a Culver’s custard brought in by a friend. We have learned to use Zoom to connect with our loved ones and to do Community meetings and prayer. We have grown our creativity in many different ways. We have indeed grown through all that the year of COVID has been for us. Thank God there is light at the end of the tunnel with the vaccines and with the new things we have learned and are because of the pandemic. Let’s continue to “grow through what we go through.”

HOPES Center

I'm a retired (sort of) pastor and for more than three years I have been privileged to serve on the board of the HOPES Center, a Dominican sponsored ministry that seeks to serve people who are homeless. What has been even more fulfilling is working as a team leader with one of the Center's Street Outreach Teams.

Every Wednesday evening, two bright and talented women and I go out onto the streets of Racine and beyond, seeking those who are experiencing homelessness. We go with food, water, coffee, socks, blankets and sleeping bags. We seek to serve their immediate physical needs; to meet them where they are, to create relationships, and to hopefully point them towards the help they need to get off the street. Sometimes we are able to immediately get people to shelter. At other times it takes a hundred or more contacts to create the trust needed to encourage change.



*Warren
Williams
Outreach
Team Leader*

The COVID-19 pandemic caused many changes at the HOPES Center. The Center for years served as a refuge and gathering place for the homeless. While our people could still come and get their mail, use a computer or meet with HOPES staff members (by appointment), the office grew much quieter. At first only our executive director was in the office. Later other staff members were able to be present.

The Center was able to fulfill its mission, though certainly with some limitations. Outreach continued but with a limited staff. Scott took the lion's share of outreach hours with the help of his wife and daughter, and on Wednesday evenings with me. Eventually one of my Wednesday night partners, Rebecca Headly, rejoined the team, giving Scott a bit of respite.



Then in late October I had my own experience with COVID. In early November I was hospitalized, and COVID very nearly took my life. That meant Scott Metzger was back on outreach three or four nights a week.

I am grateful to the many people, including many Dominican Sisters, who sustained me with prayer. I was able to return to outreach in January. I returned with two bits of knowledge. First, how absolutely serious COVID-19 can be. The inability to breathe creates

desperate panic. I was blessed to survive. Many have not. But I also learned again the great privilege of serving Jesus as we find him in the hungry, the cold and the homeless. On His behalf and theirs, I give thanks to the Dominican Sisters for creating and sustaining this amazing ministry.

Bethany Apartments



*Traci Lang
Family
Advocate*

Since we offer transitional living to domestic abuse survivors and their children, a family advocate can be valuable to those we serve in helping them reach self-sufficiency.

Pre-COVID, I helped with school issues, adult education, parenting, visitation, child support, family activities and enrichment opportunities, both in-house and within the broader community.

Since the pandemic, the children now attend virtual schooling, staff meets face-to-face with clients less frequently, and parents are monitoring virtual schooling, so there are no longer educational enrichment opportunities offered. Also, outside activities are on hold, but some are tentatively scheduled for the near future.

As an organization, we have resorted to communicating more over the phone and through the internet. We are also ensuring that more supplies are going to our residents. This is a hard time to stay home, stay healthy, oversee children's education and maintain employment. With several other community organizations struggling or working in limited capacities, we now wear "a few more hats" than before in trying to meet our residents' needs.

Our new way of functioning has brought some blessings. I think learning to adapt, make changes, and find a "plan B" brings growth. Life will often carry unforeseen difficulties, and learning how to manage them is healthy. Also, in some ways, the pandemic has leveled the playing field...our residents aren't alone in struggling right now. There are many others outside of Bethany also struggling, and it has made people more compassionate and helpful. Some resources are more available. The added time provides some people more opportunity to organize, plan and be more involved with their children.



The negatives of COVID within our agency are the lack of being able to congregate for services and socializing. Some of the outside resources we were referring our residents to use are closed or working in different/limited capacities. The fear of becoming ill or our loved ones becoming ill is stressful. And things I see some days as blessings can be seen as negatives the very next day when perspectives get flipped.

Siena Retreat Center



*Nikki Madsen
Arrangements
Coordinator*

As Siena Retreat Center celebrates its 55th anniversary of providing a place of peace and renewal, we are presented with the task of finding new ways to connect and serve the community. Pre-pandemic every room of the retreat center would be bustling with activity. A simple walk down the hallway would provide one with the sound of talented speakers inspiring a crowd, the hum of sewing machines from a busy quilting group or the calming sound of group prayer. These days things look quite a bit different as the Retreat Center has only been hosting individual private retreatants. The halls are quieter, the meeting rooms are empty, and the frequent sound of zoom calls can be heard echoing from office spaces. Like any challenge, the pandemic has offered us the opportunity to branch out to aid in deepening spirituality in new forms. Programs have gone virtual, spiritual direction is often done over the phone and private retreatants enjoy the grounds to themselves as they disconnect from the world's troubles and focus on rejuvenating their souls.

I began my professional journey with Siena Retreat Center in May of 2020. Following in the footsteps of Sr. Dolores Catanach, I learned the ins and outs of the Arrangements Coordinator position. In many ways, starting this role amid the pandemic was a hidden blessing. It has offered me the time to ask questions, ease into the procedures, and explore the inner workings of the organization in depth. I've had the opportunity to step outside of my office and spend time working in other areas of the retreat center. Often my pen and paper are replaced with a camera and laptop as I provide technical support for virtual programs and social media videos. I've enjoyed exploring the bookstore and helping shoppers, serving meals in the dining room, and welcoming guests on arrival at the front desk.

While there is no denying the impacts of the pandemic have been devastating in many ways, I think it is important to seek out the good. Never again will I take for granted hugging my loved ones or sharing a meal at the same table. I will be forever grateful for advancements in technology that allow us to connect when being together isn't an option. And my thankfulness for a place of safety and integrity like Siena Retreat Center has never been stronger. I wish everyone good health and happiness as we work together through these unprecedented times.

Congratulations to the Siena Retreat Center on your 55th Anniversary!

Eco-Justice Center



*Dawn DeMuyt
Program
Manager*



It was a quiet year full of reflection at the Eco-Justice Center. I am the Program Manager of the Youth Farm Corps program. 2021 will be the sixth year of our youth gardening initiative at the center, where we spend each summer providing employment to young adults as they learn organic gardening and nutritional cooking skills.

For this environmental educational center, you can imagine 2020 was a difficult year to deliver our programs due to the decision to close our campus to volunteers and visitors for the health and safety of all. Sadly, we were unable to properly celebrate Eco-Justice's 15th anniversary in the spring, a tribute to our founding members and the Racine Dominican Community.

While the pandemic impact was certainly financial, the loss of engaging with our community was more heartfelt. Missing the faces of our volunteers and visitors, the exuberant joy and wonder of the children at our camps, and the greater Racine community coming together at our Fall Festival and Farm to Table events has provided us with insight on our core values.

Farm Corps minimized our hired summer crew to three college-aged students, and we had a successful year growing an abundance of healthy and organic food. The beauty and predictability of the seeds germinating and the plants thriving, in spite of the chaotic world, provided peace and stability to the days. Our harvest of over 1,500 pounds of organically grown produce was distributed to a local food pantry, along with on-site farm stand sales, food preservation and program cooking lessons.

With a small crew and a focus on the gardens, we were able to connect with each other and "grow" in a more meaningful way. While we missed the high level of activity and having children on site exploring the gardens, we are renewed in our dedication to finding new paths that will build resilience and justice in our local food system.

Congratulations to the Eco-Justice Center on your 15th Anniversary!

Senior Companion Program

I am the Office Assistant for the Senior Companion Program (SCP). I work part time for SCP and am primarily responsible for social and print media, designing and maintaining our website, and helping out wherever necessary!

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our program significantly. One main purpose of SCP is to help alleviate loneliness in the older population in our community. Many of our SCP clients live in facilities that are on “lock down,” so our volunteers are not allowed to visit.

Due to their age or circumstance, most of our clients do not have access nor do they know how to use a computer, so visiting virtually isn't a feasible option. We have been continuing to make and maintain connections through cards and phone calls, and while that's certainly better than nothing, we cannot wait to resume face-to-face visits!

The pandemic has affected my work at SCP. As we needed to cancel all of our events, there simply aren't as many promotional flyers to create, and there is not much to highlight on our website or social media. I have corresponded with our volunteers and clients through cards several times, and I have been searching for grant opportunities for which we qualify. We are always looking for budget-friendly ways to publicize and promote SCP, to attract more volunteers and new clients, and to get word out about one of Racine's best kept secrets since 1978!



Jeanne Kocha
Office
Assistant



Although COVID-19 definitely has its bad points, it also has some positives. The uncertainty and fear of the unknown have been a little difficult for me to deal with. I don't really mind staying at home, but I definitely miss seeing my family and friends. I really miss my other jobs (as a piano accompanist), and I miss being able to jump in the car and go--without a plan, or a mask, or hand sanitizer. I just miss the regular routine “stuff” in my life.

That being said, I think one of the blessings from the pandemic may be recognizing the importance of family and friends, of home and work, of our normal routine. The realization that we should be more grateful for the regular “stuff” is one very good thing to come out of COVID-19.

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“...to sustain the fundamental right of every person to pursue the fullness of life and to share in the common good.”

*-Article 8 (partial), Constitution of the
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