

DOMINICAN SISTERS OF SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

JUST *Words*



***Finding
a
way
forward***

Vol. 26, No. 3 Fall 2026

THE CONTEXT

Finding a way forward can be easy when there is a map to consult. Yet too many times the reality is there is no map. Welcome to the fall issue of *Just Words*. We hope the articles in this issue offer a kind of map, guiding you to consider ways forward to best attend to the some of our pressing, critical issues as they present themselves in your time and place.



explore new ways forward together. Experience how fostering an equitable community spirit is one fruit ripening at the Dominican Literacy Center in Aurora, as the leadership writes a new chapter for sustainability of the ministry with expansion of the board. Join Sr. Barbara Blesse and a group of “thirty-something” parishioners as they explore the challenges of AI – and discover hope and a way forward in Pope Leo XIV’s new encyclical.

Look for a value-centered way forward as we enter the busy seasons of voting and holiday planning. Revisit how the U.S. bishops’ document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* can help us navigate turbulent times, and consider Associate Linda Buescher’s thought-provoking questions in making decisions about shopping and gift-giving.

It is our hope and prayer that as you read through the articles in this issue you, too, are able to find ways forward in these times. Map or no map – our “due north” is the call to compassionately preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. May it always be this call that illumines each step of all our ways forward.

Mission Statement:
Called by God
into right relationship with all
creation and graced by
Dominican life and mission, we
compassionately preach the Gospel
of Jesus Christ.

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Faithful Citizenship: A Way Forward in Turbulent Times

Every election season brings the same exhaustion – sharper ads, testier conversations, and the urge to just look away from politics altogether. It’s understandable. But it’s not, in the end, a Catholic response.

The U.S. bishops call the alternative “faithful citizenship.” Their teaching document, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, names responsible citizenship a virtue and political participation a moral obligation – grounded not in the news cycle, but in timeless principles like human dignity,

solidarity, and the common good. Voting, in this view, isn’t a private act completed once every few years. It’s shared work, woven into the ongoing life of a community.

That means faithful citizenship can’t end at the ballot box. The Dominican Sisters of Springfield model this well: every Wednesday, Sisters hold a quiet public witness for migrants, for workers, for the Earth, the right for all to participate, dignity of impoverished persons, and peace – what Sr. M. Paul McCaughey, our community leader, calls simply “taking steps to love in

your local setting.” No office, no campaign required.

So, what does faithful citizenship look like beyond voting? Forming your conscience with real teaching, not talking points. Showing up at the local level, where housing and education decisions actually happen. Resisting single-issue thinking. And bringing prayer into it, so action doesn’t collapse into mere partisanship.

The chaos won’t quiet down. But the way forward isn’t disengagement – it’s steady, local, faithful presence for peace with justice.

Contemplative Holiday Gifting

By Associate Lucinda Buescher

The anticipation of Christmas can reignite the awe and wonder we felt when we first experienced the miracle of the Nativity. Yet holding on to that joy can be challenging when holiday treats, toys, and décor are around every corner, adding to our “to-do” lists. Even with good

intentions to scale back, things can snowball. Let us find a way forward through this sacred season by using Dominican values to discern how we gift responsibly.

In Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*, he brings to the forefront the cry of the Earth. Earth is a divine gift for which we are obliged to care. Before purchasing a gift, consider its impact on

the planet. What will become of it after the holidays? Can it be repaired if something breaks? Consider purchasing durable items from companies that honor the “right to repair” by making replacement parts available.



The Dominican commitment to justice also calls us to consider the people who make the gifts we purchase. Are workers paid a fair, living wage? Are their health and safety protected? Purchasing from local artisans, craft fairs, and fair-trade cooperatives can offer some reassurance that products are made with respect for human dignity.

Creating a shopping list with these environmental and ethical considerations will require a bit of study. Perhaps spending this time in contemplation could bring the peace we most need during this season. And remember: “... every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights ...” (James 1:17).

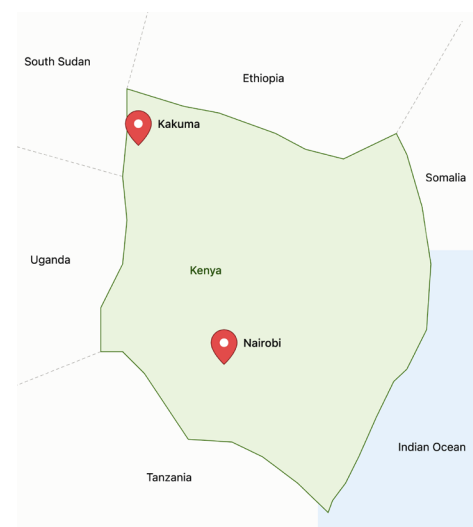
Finding a Way Forward, 30 Years and Counting

By Sister Anita Cleary, OP

Sister Anita Cleary, OP (Springfield) joined Dominican Associate Dr. Margaret Lombe (Springfield), Sister Helena Im, OP (Mission San Jose) and volunteer Kathryn Raistrick for a two-week ministry experience of teaching fiber arts with artisans connected with the Jesuit Refugee Services in Kenya. This journey started out as a simple way to share some of the spinning wheels from the now closed Jubilee Farm, an ecology and spirituality center of the Dominican Sisters of Springfield. The experience further deepened their yearning for accompaniment within the global Dominican family.

Sometimes finding a way forward takes place in a country far from one's land of birth, in an unknown environment, where hope for a different future may take decades to fulfill. "I lived there five years." "I have lived here fourteen years." "I have lived here eight years." Some have spent their whole lives here.

"There" and "here" is the Kakuma Refugee Camp, located 30 kilometers south of the South Sudan border in the northwestern corner of Turkana County, Kenya (see map). The predominant countries from which the



camp hosts refugees are South Sudan, Somalia, the Dominican Republic of the Congo, and Burundi. Kakuma Refugee Camp has expanded three times

since it opened in 1992, so one hears references to Kakuma I, II, III and IV. During our visit, we heard: "It was a good idea to start the camp for refugees.

The problem is that there was not a detailed plan for when the camp would end." Just this past May, more than 1,080 individuals sought asylum from their Earth-scarred, war-torn countries where children and women are considered collateral damage.

The Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), our liaison for ministry in the camp, is under the jurisdiction of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).



Sister Anita Cleary teaches a class in spinning using the spinning wheel.

which has worked with the Kenyan government, as well as numerous aid-based agencies, since the 1950's.

There are more than 300,000 refugees in the camps. There also are refugees in Nairobi and various other cities who are able to live outside of Kakuma because they have sponsors and are able to support themselves and their families with some assistance. They come from all walks of life. Many once held professional jobs in their home countries.

Our invitation was to teach artisan refugees in Kakuma and in Nairobi, all of whom are professors, tailors,

continued on page 5

Finding a Way Forward, 30 Years and Counting continued from page 4

teachers, wood workers, or religious leaders. The four of us worked with 33 artisans and the JRS staff to teach Kumihimo — a form of disc weaving to create braid-like strands for jewelry or edging on garments or bags — and the use of peg looms — a style of knitting where one creates a flat or round knitted article from pegs or nails on looms of various shapes and sizes. In addition, we shared techniques for the use of a drop spindle and spinning wheels. Learning the drop spindle and the spinning wheel give the artisans the opportunity to create their own yarn for future Kumihimo and peg loom projects.

In Nairobi, we worked with artisans who were encouraged to learn a new skill in case they could not make sufficient income utilizing their original degrees. In both locations, we were often astonished at the learners' creativity and ability to quickly apply what they were learning to their current artistry. We witnessed this simple, tangible means of finding a way forward. We know in the near future these items will make their way into the JRS marketplace store, Mikono.

As part of our experience, members of the JRS staff took us to various locations of their ministry outreach: a fishery, vegetable gardens,

and several of their nine schools. Many elementary students, sometimes more than half of the students in a classroom, have disabilities, making teaching even more challenging. One teacher shared that some of her students are non-verbal, so for them to learn the alphabet in order to write is essential. Sr. Helena observed, "I experienced from the children a deep longing for God and concern for our common wellbeing. Young Kenyans offered me hope because they voiced dissatisfaction with having their own personal comforts when there are others who are suffering."

We also met several religious communities working with refugees, some directly in the camp and others an hour's drive away from Nairobi. We felt especially at home visiting with the Dominican Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, hearing of their work in their two orphanages in Juja.

At the end of the first week, more than 20 members of the JRS staff came together for a retreat day facilitated by Dr. Margaret Lombe and JRS staff members. This was a day for personal reflection and sharing as well as team-



Dominican Sister Anita Cleary and Kathryn Raistrick visits with Dominican Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. (Photo by friend of the Sisters)

building. Dr. Lombe spoke of the retreat as "a precious gift that provided space for our JRS sisters and brothers to step back from their daily engagements and focus on themselves. There was joy, a sense of replenishment and renewed commitment to the mission of accompanying our refugee brothers and sisters."

We all so often exchanged the words with one another "Asante sana" – "Thank you so much" and "Karibo sana" – "you're welcome." We all realized that to be human is more than surviving. It is about solidarity, about being creative, about contributing to the wellbeing of others. Both facilitators and learners indeed encountered a new way forward.

Some photos by Tito Mise, Jesuit Refugee Services.

The Stories That Carry Us Forward

In the Dominican Literacy Center in Aurora, in late August, six of us sat in the gathering room – a perfect name for a place of stories.

We had come together to talk about what we wanted people to know about the Center, what had changed us, what had surprised us and what kept us there. As we talked, another story emerged: the story of a Dominican ministry entering a new chapter.

The Dominican Literacy Center began in 1993 under the direction of Sr. Kathleen Ryan and a team of Sisters committed to teaching English and offering citizenship classes to immigrant women. For more than three decades, Dominican Sisters have provided leadership for the Center, while lay partners have been essential to its growth. Sr. Kathleen served as its director until 2024, when Claire Wiesner-Smillie, a lay person, became director.

“We are all of us together a learning community.”

Now, that partnership is taking another step forward. In 2026, the Center expanded its governing membership to include lay leaders. In May, the new members traveled to the Dominican Sisters’ Motherhouse in

Springfield, where Sr. M. Paul McCaughey and the Council spent a day orienting them to the Sisters, their mission, and the ministry they are helping carry forward.

“The growth of the Dominican Literacy Center has always resulted from the work and wisdom

of the Sisters and their lay partners,” says Sr. M. Paul. “Inviting lay women to share in the leadership of the Center serves to ensure the Dominican charism continues with integrity.”

But what, exactly, is being carried forward?

Questions shaped the conversation: What was important about the Center? What surprised them, kept them there, challenged them, or brought them grace? What had this work

helped them realize, and what had they come to think about differently?

Again and again, the group returned to the students whose stories had touched and changed them. Their words spilled out into the room, back and forth among them, each one coming from connections to specific

students. Their hearts were full of these women.

One thing they wanted to make clear was that the Center is a community,

“Through the stories, I came to see the stamina of our students, how much deeper their well of resilience is than I have had to draw upon. And they are without bitterness.”

not simply a collection of individuals. They spoke of creating a welcoming, inviting, safe, and comfortable place where students and staff come to see beauty, wonder, love, and dignity in one another. Though the goals and outcomes are framed around language, they said, everyone helps one another beyond those measurable goals. What matters is that they are all in this together.

Stories permeate the place. Students begin the registration process by telling their stories. The stories are formative of and vital to the community created. The stories are added to and shared more widely.

One staff member reflected on what she had come to see through those stories: the stamina of the students, and how much deeper their well of resilience was than anything she had had to

Stories That Carry Us Forward continued from page 6

draw upon. And, she noted, they are without bitterness.

Another staff member reflected on language.

“I have learned this about language: It is not just a product of place. It informs and changes the way you think. If you don’t have language for it, you can’t think it.”

An unplanned conversation about different ways of naming God and Christ became a way to break open that insight.

One day, a student, frustrated by her difficulty learning English, said, “In Spanish I am really smart...”

The words stayed with the staff member who heard them. She realized in a new way how challenging and humiliating it can be to not understand, and how the process can make a person feel infantilized. To some degree, she reflected, you have to be willing to hold that experience in order to learn better.

“It is a whole new level of being together and loving each other.”

The stories also open a new, expanding consciousness as staff and students learn about struggles in other countries. They carry forward, in their

own connections outside the Center, the ways their experiences there have changed them. Students and tutors have broader views of other cultures through the stories shared. Students and staff are awakened to a sense of justice.

“It is a whole new level of being together and loving each other,” one staff member said.

Things have evolved since the Center’s beginning. It now welcomes students from 22 countries. Technology has become increasingly important, and grants allow the Center to keep up with constantly changing technology.

“What I love is that our use of technology is grounded in charism and mission,” one staff member said.

Connections among the staff, connections with the students, connections to the Dominican way of being,

working and relating, and the realization that this

work is a call – all of it is held up in a communion of stories.

There is, indeed, lifeblood in stories. Community is formed and nurtured

through them, community that holds the past with respect and honor as it looks forward, community that breaks through different kinds of isolation, community that becomes healing and outward-focused.

“It is not just a product of place. It informs and changes the way you think. If you don’t have language for it, you can’t think it.”

And thus are we redeemed.

Pedro Casaldáliga, in “The Heart Full of Names,” writes: “At the end of the road they will tell me

Have you lived?

Have you loved?

And I, without saying anything,

I will open the heart full of names.”

And that is exactly what happened in the gathering room. The women opened their hearts full of names – names of students, names of colleagues, names of people whose stories had changed them.

Perhaps that is how a ministry finds a way forward: not by leaving its story behind, but by opening its heart to those who will carry it into what comes next.

Encontrar un camino hacia adelante, 30 años y contando

Por Hermana Anita Cleary, OP

La Hermana Anita Cleary, OP (Springfield) se unió a la Asociada Dominica Dra. Margaret Lombe (Springfield), la Hermana Helena Im, OP (Misión San José) y la voluntaria Kathryn Raistrick para una experiencia ministerial de dos semanas enseñando artes textiles con artesanos vinculados a los Servicios Jesuitas para Refugiados en Kenia. Este viaje comenzó como una forma sencilla de compartir algunas de las ruelas de la ahora cerrada Jubilee Farm, un centro de ecología y espiritualidad de las Hermanas Dominicas de Springfield. Esta experiencia profundizó aún más su anhelo de acompañamiento dentro de la familia Dominica global.

A veces, encontrar un camino a seguir ocurre en un país lejos de la tierra de nacimiento, en un entorno desconocido, donde la esperanza de un futuro diferente puede tardar décadas en cumplirse. “Viví allí cinco años.” “He vivido aquí catorce años.” “He vivido aquí ocho años.” Algunos han pasado toda su vida aquí.

“Allí” y “aquí” está el Campo de Refugiados de Kakuma, situado a 30 kilómetros al sur de la frontera con Sudán del Sur, en la esquina noroeste del condado de Turkana, Kenia (véase el mapa). Los países predominantes de los que el campamento acoge refugiados son Sudán del Sur, Somalia, la República Dominicana del Congo y

Burundi. El Campo de Refugiados de Kakuma se ha ampliado tres veces desde su apertura en 1992, por lo que se oyen referencias a Kakuma I, II, III y IV. Durante nuestra visita, escuchamos: “Fue buena idea iniciar el campo para refugiados. El problema es que no había un plan detallado para cuándo terminaría el campo.” Tan solo en mayo pasado, más de 1.080 personas solicitaron asilo en sus países devastados por la Tierra y devastados por la guerra, donde niños y mujeres son considerados daños colaterales.

Los Servicios Jesuitas para Refugiados (JRS), nuestro enlace para el ministerio en el campo, están bajo la jurisdicción del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados (ACNUR). ACNUR ha colaborado con el gobierno keniano, así como con numerosas agencias basadas en la ayuda, desde los años 50.



Equipo de JRS con las visitantes.

Hay más de 300.000 refugiados en los campos. También hay refugiados en Nairobi y en varias otras ciudades que pueden vivir fuera de Kakuma porque tienen patrocinadores y pueden mantenerse a sí mismos y a sus familias con cierta ayuda. Proviene de todos los ámbitos de la vida. Muchos tuvieron empleos profesionales en sus países de origen.

Nuestra invitación era enseñar a refugiados artesanos en Kakuma y Nairobi, todos ellos profesores, sastres, carpinteros, o líderes religiosos. Los cuatro trabajamos con 33 artesanos y el personal de JRS para enseñar Kumihimo — una forma de tejido con discos

para crear trenzas para joyería o bordear prendas o bolsos — y el uso de telares de clavijas — un estilo de punto en el que se crea un artículo de punto plano o redondo con clavijas o clavijas en telares de diversas formas y tamaños. Además, compartimos técnicas para el uso de un husillo de colgante y de ruedas de hilar. Aprender el husillo y el torno de hilar da a los artesanos la oportunidad de crear su propio hilo para futuros proyectos de Kumihimo y telares de pinzas.

En Nairobi, trabajamos con artesanos a los que se les animaba a aprender una nueva habilidad en caso de que no pudieran obtener ingresos suficientes utilizando sus títulos originales. En ambas ubicaciones, a menudo nos sorprendía la creatividad de los alumnos y su capacidad para aplicar rápidamente lo que aprendían a su arte actual. Fuimos testigos de este medio simple y tangible para encontrar un camino a seguir. Sabemos que en un futuro próximo estos artículos llegarán a la tienda



La Hermana Helena recibe un abrazo de una nueva amiga.

JRS marketplace, Mikono. Como parte de nuestra experiencia, miembros del personal de JRS nos llevaron a varios lugares de su labor ministerial: una pesquería, huertos, y varias de sus nueve escuelas. Muchos alumnos de primaria, a veces más de la mitad de los alumnos de un aula, tienen discapacidades, lo que hace que la enseñanza sea aún más difícil. Una profesora compartió que algunos de sus alumnos son no verbales, por lo que para ellos aprender el alfabeto para poder escribir es esencial. La Hermana Helena observó: “Experimenté en los niños un profundo anhelo por Dios y preocupación por nuestro bienestar común. Los jóvenes kenianos me ofrecieron esperanza porque expresaron insatisfacción por tener sus propias comodidades personales cuando hay otros que están sufriendo.”

También conocimos a varias comunidades religiosas que trabajan con refugiados, algunas directamente en el campamento y otras a una hora en coche de Nairobi. Nos sentimos

especialmente en casa visitando a las Hermanas Misioneras Dominicas del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, escuchando sobre su labor en sus dos orfanatos en Juja. Al final de la primera semana, más de 20 miembros del personal de JRS se reunieron para un día de retiro facilitado por la Dra. Margaret Lombe y miembros del personal de JRS. Fue un día de reflexión personal, compartir y de trabajo en equipo. La Dra. Lombe habló del retiro como “un regalo precioso que proporcionó espacio para que nuestras hermanas y hermanos de JRS se distanciaran de sus compromisos diarios y se centraran en sí mismos. Hubo alegría, una sensación de renovación y un compromiso renovado con la misión de acompañar a nuestros hermanos y hermanas refugiados.”

A menudo intercambiábamos las palabras “*Asante sana*” – “Muchas gracias” y “*Karibo sana*” – “de nada.” Todos nos dimos cuenta de que ser humano es más que sobrevivir. Se trata de solidaridad, de ser creativos, de contribuir al bienestar de los demás. Tanto facilitadores como aprendices encontraron efectivamente un nuevo camino hacia adelante.

Algunas fotos son de Tito Mise, JRS.

The Text Exchange that Changed Everything

By Sister Barbara Blesse , OP

Tor texted: “Hello! Have you read the new encyclical?”

Me (on the third day of my annual retreat): “Yes. Just finished it this morning.”

Tor: “Want to talk about it some time?”

Me “(shocked that anyone ‘in the pews’ had actually read the papal document, least of all someone in their 30s) “Sure!”

Two weeks later, Tor and I met and she managed to expand my perspective wider than I could have ever imagined! By the time of our

appointment, in addition to having read Pope Leo XIV’s Encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas: Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*, Tor, a “thirty-something life-long learner,” had pursued further research about the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on society by reading most of the book *Empire of AI* by Karen Hao.

Early on in our discussion that day, she mentioned Pope Francis’ Encyclical: *Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home*. Thinking she had mixed up the two encyclicals, I

realized differently when she made the connection between the two because of the damage that AI data centers do to Earth with their over-consumption of electrical energy and local water supplies, depriving nearby residents of these two resources otherwise needed for their own wellbeing. Unbelievable noise pollution, minimal job opportunities, and negative psychological effects on workers were just a few other topics Tor addressed in that conversation.

She also revealed that three other “thirty-somethings” had joined her in reading the encyclical. One of them, Yeni, in reflecting on the “group experience” referenced Matthew 18:20: ‘For where two or three gather in my name, I am there with them.’ resonated with me. It wasn’t just the comradeship or united view but the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. It provided me with deeper understanding of what perhaps I might have missed. I believe that being in community is how we were meant to be in this world – no one ever has to do things alone.”

Another friend, Brent, noting he was a Protestant, felt that “the Holy Father’s opinion on the issue of the expanse of Artificial Intelligence is truly

continued on page 11

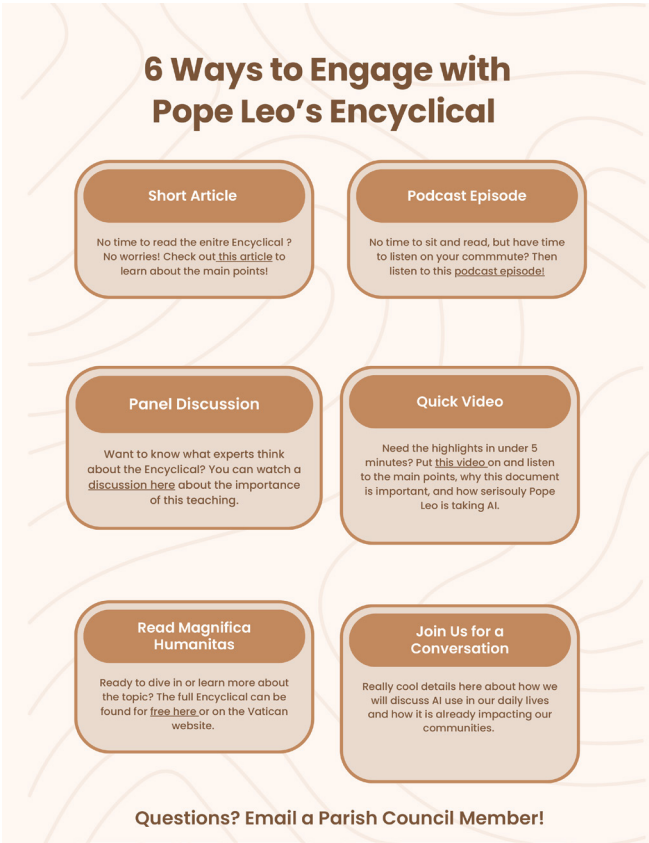
The Text Exchange that Changed Everything continued from page 10

founded in a deep concern for humanity and that all individuals should be aware of and take it seriously. At this point it is understood that this subject is not one that is going away.”

Syd, yet another friend, observed: “AI in its current form is dangerous for its users, the environment, and the social-economic structures of our world. A very small and specific number of people, unregulated and without an accountability structure, hold all the power for how each AI model is used and what information is presented in it. The idea that AI is an unbiased searching tool is laughable at best. It is allowing a curation of a certain type of culture that the owners and decision makers for that model wish to see the world move toward.”

So how do we meet the challenge that AI, in its current form, poses?

Tor wrote: “I believe there is hope and there is a way forward! We can both embrace technology and



A bulletin ad that Tor created for the parish.

be mindful about how we create, train, and produce technology, especially AI. We have to come together as a collective people and advocate for responsible and slower progress over profit. We need to lobby our representatives, attend local protests and rallies, and refuse to use irresponsible and dangerous programs like ChatGPT. We have a duty and a right to fight against the current iteration of AI, for ourselves, for our children, and for our Church.”

Tor succeeded in winning the blessing and support of

the parish’s Pastoral Council and will soon be inviting parishioners to gather to explore the implications of AI for humanity. This coming together will offer parishioners the opportunity to learn, share concerns, ask questions, and perhaps brainstorm practical ways to help friends and neighbors to deal with the whole of the AI situation in thoughtful ways that are in keeping with the common good.

At this gathering, Tor plans to give input from her research with Syd, Yeni, and Brent at her side offering their learnings and viewpoints as young adults as well. Their exercise of critical thinking skills and bold acknowledgement of the many complexities of AI, is impressive. Their collective energy in engaging this issue is palpable.

Carbondale, the city in which our parish resides and home of Southern Illinois University, recently made the decision not to host a data center, effective for at least one year. With faith-filled, active, and caring citizens like Tor, Syd, Yeni, and Brent, perhaps their deeply-held convictions will inspire others in what’s considered by many to be a “small college town” to continue to resist welcoming data centers anywhere far into the future!



Brent Martin, Yeni Ramos, Syd Crowder, and Tor Neal share their perspectives on Pope Leo XIV’s Encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas: Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence* along with Pope Francis’ Encyclical: *Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home*.

The Road We Cannot Yet See

By Associate Michael Riordan, Ed.D, President, Marian Catholic High School

Last issue, we asked ourselves what is ours to give. But the recent Dominican Associates Day of Reflection left me with a harder question underneath that one: when the road ahead is uncertain – even chaotic – how do we find the way forward at all? I don't think the answer is having a map. I think it's learning how to walk without one, together.

On Saturday, August 22, 2026, a group of more than 150 Dominican Sisters and Dominican Associates assembled at Sacred Heart Convent for a "Dominican Day of Reflection." The group was treated to an informational presentation by Prioress General Sister Mary Paul McCaughey and Vicar General Sister Joanne Delehanty regarding the progress made toward the congregation's "Chapter Direction Statement." This was followed by a wonderful address by Father Bob Kelly, who prompted us all to reflect on our unique roles and relationships as part of

the Dominican family.

Father Bob's reflections on "The Art of Encounter and Accompaniment: Journeying Together" reminded me that accompaniment begins by meeting people where they are, walking alongside them, and listening carefully enough to recognize how God may already be at work in their lives. He described accompaniment as a sacred task – one that requires commitment, discernment, and attentiveness to God's call.



Father Bob Kelly, OP preaches to Sisters and Associate on The Road to Emmaus a biblical account in the Gospel of Luke where the resurrected Jesus appears to two disciples.

The Road to Emmaus, which we explored, offered a particularly meaningful image. Jesus encounters two disciples who are confused, disappointed, and uncertain about what lies ahead.

He does not immediately provide answers. Instead, He draws near. He asks a question. He listens. And then He walks with them. That, itself, is a way forward – not knowing the destination, but trusting the presence of a companion on the road.

There is an important lesson in that story for all of us. In moments of uncertainty, we can be tempted to believe that leadership means having the answers or knowing precisely where the road will lead. During our Day of

Reflection, the Sisters and the Associates engaged in our own "Emmaus Walk," offering a wonderful opportunity to grow relationships, gain perspective, and provide a transformative experience just as Jesus provided the disciples. The Day of Reflection reminded me that faithful leadership may instead begin with presence: listening, discerning, building relationships, and trusting that the Spirit is present on the road with us.

That message resonates deeply with me in my role as President of Marian Catholic High School, a sponsored ministry of

The Road We Cannot Yet See
continued from page 12

the Dominican Sisters of Springfield. Each day, I have the privilege – and responsibility – of helping

ensure that the Dominican charism remains alive for another generation of young people. The Sisters' Chapter Direction Statement calls for educational ministries to remain places of authentic



Sisters and Associates listen to the lesson of walking together.

2026 Season of Creation - Sept. 1 - Oct. 4



The Dominican Sisters opened the Season of Creation, beginning Sept. 1, 2026, with a prayer service focused on the "Theme of Water". Pope Leo XIV reminded us "...we are once again invited to contemplate the gift of life and to cherish the earth that sustains it, for they are tangible ways of offering praise to our Creator." Although the official season has ended, in reality every day is a reminder of our need for gratitude and celebration and the need to care for our common home through prayer and action.

faith and learning and to ensure accountability to Dominican charism, inclusion, and justice. That responsibility cannot simply be preserved in documents or traditions. It must be lived through relationships.

Perhaps that is what is mine to give: to help foster a school community in which each of us genuinely encounter one another; where students, families, faculty, staff, alumni, Sisters, and Associates know that they are valued; and where we accompany young people as they discover who God is calling them to become.

Our Day of Reflection reminded us that the Dominican story has always been a journey. For 35 years, Springfield Dominican Sisters and Associates have walked together through "conversations, friendships, study, prayer, ministry, joys, disappointments, and moments of grace."

The road ahead may not always be clear. But perhaps we do not need to see the whole road to take the next step. We need only the faith to walk it – together, one step at a time.

CONGRATS

Congratulations to **Sister Mila Díaz Solano, OP**, who has been elected the president of AHLMA (Asociacion de Hermanas Latinas Misioneras de America/ Association of Latin American Missionary Sisters).



Sister Beth Murphy, OP, has been appointed to the Board of Trustees for the Franciscan Missionaries of our Lady Health System for a three-year term. Based in Baton Rouge, FMOLHS is one of the largest health systems in the state. It also includes a former sponsored institution of the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, St. Dominic Health, in Jackson, Miss.



Respiratory Therapist at St. Thomas Medical Services and Dominican Associate **Howard Derrick** (2012), who serves as the Health Initiative Chairman of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., was recently featured in an article in the *Jackson Advocate* for his service to his community. Whether it is cleaning highways or growing organic vegetables to help feed local families, Derrick doesn't just schedule events – he shows up in order to make his community better.



Dominican Associate **Rachel Gotanco** (2009) earned the Diocesan Award as Most Distinguished Woman for her work at Church of the Little Flower in Springfield.

Marian Catholic High School president and Associate **Michael Riordan** (2025) accepted an invitation to serve on the 2027 Dominican Educator Learning Community Academy Steering Committee. The hope is that the experience would not only allow him to help shape the Academy, but also offer opportunities to continue enriching his own work at Marian through the Dominican charism.



Dominican Associate **Erica Smith** (2018) and her team at Mission Outreach were honored with the Catholic Health Association's 2026 Achievement Citation award for their work in transforming global health by connecting surplus medical supplies in the U.S. to hospital and clinics around the world.

IN MEMORIAM

Please pray for the repose of the souls of the Sisters and Associates who have died in the peace of Christ.

Visit <https://springfield.org/donate> to make a gift in memory of a Sister or Associate who has died.

PARTNERS IN MISSION

A Moral Compass, A Passion for Numbers, and a Desire To Give Back

Jason Jansen's connection to the Dominican Sisters of Springfield began in the classroom – and the lessons he learned there have stayed with him long after his school days ended.

Growing up in Springfield, Jason was educated by the Dominican Sisters at Christ the King and Sacred Heart Griffin. He credits the Sisters with giving him “a strong moral compass and a passion for numbers.” He especially remembers the open debates in Sister Theodora's theology class.

“It challenged us with critical thinking in forming very different opinions, however the Gospel message was the center and it formed that moral compass,” Jason recalls.

His passion for numbers likely began with math being his favorite subject, but he also credits Sister Kathleen Anne Tait, OP, with making algebra understandable and even easy. Geometry, however, was another matter. Sister Mary Diana spent countless hours tutoring Jason, helping him discover how his love of numbers might shape his future.

After college at Notre Dame, Jason moved to Chicago for work. Although he was physically farther from Springfield, the values he

learned from his family and the Dominican Sisters continued to shape the husband and father he became. He met his wife, Kristina, in Chicago, and together they relied on those values as they raised their three children.

Jason worked as a financial planner and coach for a firm in Austin, Texas, before recently transferring to Atlanta, Georgia, so their children could be closer to family.

Jason and Kristina responded to the Dominican Sisters' first appeal and have remained faithful donors for the past 10 years, since the Mission Advancement Office began. His financial training taught Jason the importance of planning for retirement, and he understood that the stipends the Sisters had received throughout their history were insufficient to provide for their future needs.

For Jason, giving is a way to give back to the Sisters – and to give back what God has given his family. The Jansens also appreciate all that the Sisters continue to do as they



Jason Jansen along with his wife and children on a vacation.

care for their elder members and carry on ministries of social justice, education, health care, and spiritual formation.

The Dominican Sisters are grateful not only for the Jansens' generosity, but for all who help care for our elder Sisters and support the mission God continues to give us. In many ways, Jason's story is a testament to the lasting impact of those who taught him: the lessons that shaped his moral compass continue to guide how he lives – and gives – today.



Sister Kathleen Anne Tait, OP, is the Director of Development for the Dominican Sisters of Springfield.



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OF SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

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Dominican Sources

"Indeed, uncertainty is often not an obstacle to discernment, but one of its indispensable companions. It teaches us humility, disposes us to listen, and gradually frees us from the illusion that our lives are ultimately our own to control."

—Fr. Gerard Francisco Timoner III
Master of the Order of Preachers

DATEBOOK

October	12	Indigenous Peoples Day / Columbus Day
	23-25	Veritas Retreat "Created in Truth to Live God's Call" with Sr. Mary Jo at SHC for women 21-45
	31	All Hallows' Eve
November	1	All Saints' Day
	2	All Souls' Day
	2-8	National Vocation Awareness Week
	3	Feast of St. Martin De Porres, 1st Black saint of the Americas
	3	U.S. General Election
	7	Autumn Day of Renewal (women 21-45) at SHC with Sr. Mary Jo
	11	Veteran's Day
	15	Feast of St. Albert the Great, Dominican scientist and theologian
	26	Thanksgiving
Nov. 29 - Dec.	29	Dominican Month for Peace
December	6	Advent Taize (SHC 3:30 pm – open to the public)
	8	Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
	9	Evening of Contemplation – Advent – at SHC with Sr. Denise (women 21-45)
	25	Christmas