Furthering Francis


By Alice Miller Nation

Do you remember the story of Francis and the wolf of Gubbio? Or what about when Francis meets the Sultan? Here is one more, the story of Francis and the leper? SBU students take a class called the Way of Francis and Clare as part of the required curriculum, typically in their freshman year. In this class they learn some of the Franciscan literature, including these three stories.

Each of these stories is about encountering others. As the team of students and I gathered to talk about the stories and theme for this newsletter, they realized quickly that all of the content focused on the ways our students encounter others. Whether it be Lily Chittenden doing the nails of a resident at Field of Dreams in Allegany (see photo), Brady Nicosia coming to a Bona Buddies coordinator meeting letting us know that “Billy really needs to get into Bona Buddies because he needs help with his homework and we have students who are willing and able to help him,” Dan Schifferhauer thoughtfully speaking to a guest at the Warming House, or the many student volunteers at the SBU Food Pantry welcoming members of the campus community as they choose a few items to stretch their food budget – it’s all about the ways we encounter one another each and every day.

In each of the outreach programs of the Franciscan Center for Social Concern, SBU students take the real life application of our Franciscan stories to heart, and to the streets. Every. Single. Day.

It is inspiring to sit in my office and open the mail to find $5 and a handwritten note, “It was amazing to find the wonderful lunch you [the Warming House] provided at the recent Rural Area Medical Clinic at JCC’s campus in Olean. I was there seven hours waiting to see the vision staff, so needless to say, the meal was so handy and very much appreciated. Thank you!” (No name)

At St. Bonaventure, we prepare young people for the world once they leave the campus. Not only do they receive a good education, but they also form and develop their Franciscan hearts. The students I have the honor of encountering each day make us all proud to be a Bonnie.

Peace and all good,
Alice Miller Nation

Lily Chittenden, 21, ’22, gently paints the fingernails of a resident at Field of Dreams assisted living facility.

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A birthday party for the Warming House

The concept of giving is a powerful one, even among 10-year-old girls! Claire and her family began volunteering at the Warming House during the pandemic. Claire loves the Warming House as much as the Warming House loves her.

When it came time to plan her birthday party, she mixed things up a bit. Instead of welcoming gifts for herself, she invited the party guests to bring food items the Warming House does not often have in stock in the pantry.

The student coordinator team gave Claire a list of food items and the response was overwhelming. Potato chips and dip, fresh strawberries and blueberries, ice cream and sundae toppings, fresh broccoli and soda are just some of the many items donated.

For Evelyn Penman and Jon Kirk, the Warming House is an opportunity like no other.

Both community volunteers from Olean, Evelyn and Jon share their experiences not only volunteering at the Warming House, but forming relationships with St. Bonaventure student volunteers, friars and program coordinators, as well as Warming House guests.

As assistant director of the Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts at the university, Evelyn finds little day-to-day contact with students. In her days spent volunteering, however, she is able to get to know student groups that come to the Warming House, even if it’s just for an afternoon.

She reflected on the kindness and optimism present by all.

“In my work I don’t usually see how the Franciscan values are played out as much, but at the Warming House, you can definitely see that much greater,” she said.

With the reopening of indoor dining, Evelyn saw a great difference in community relationships from the previous outdoor “to-go” meals. In her experience with outdoor serving, she said that “people still came to talk beforehand,” whether that was in the parking lot or while grabbing their food. Although outdoor serving put a damper on really getting to know the guests, she saw much optimism and high spirits by guests arriving at the door for a nice conversation with volunteers.

For avid volunteer Jon Kirk, the Warming House provides an opportunity for St. Bonaventure students that he didn’t see at the large state school he attended.

Jon started volunteering during the summer, when many undergraduate students were not around.

He developed strong relationships with Warming House coordinators such as Hiryu (Mike) Waseda, Walter Kinder and Adam Buringham, who he spent a lot of time with at the Warming House.

“In my opinion, I look at them as really good friends now,” he said, noting that the four of them shared advice, personal stories, and many laughs.

In having these personal conversations, Jon expressed how “it was a confidence booster knowing someone was so comfortable with me.” It allowed him to make an everlasting bond with the young motivated gentlemen beside him.

Jon also got to know Franciscan friars Br. Angel Vasquez, O.F.M., and Fr. Xavier Seubert, O.F.M. He feels as though the people he met along the way “gave him the insight to become a better person” and pushed him to continue volunteering.

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Sarah Haq, a junior at SBU, accompanied Alice Miller Nation to greet and thank those gathered at the party. Like many childhood birthday parties, the girls were busy painting and giggling when Sarah and Alice arrived. After talking about the thoughtfulness of their generosity and a little bit about the people who would eat the food they brought, the girls posed for a picture and got back to decorating T-shirts and celebrating friendship.

Generosity comes in many ways. This time, a 10-year-old and her family led the way.