



# OSF *Caring for Creation*

NOVEMBER 2023

## *Dear Friend,*

Fifty miles west of Milwaukee lies a quaint community known as Jefferson, Wis. It was here in 1904 that the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi began their ministry to special needs children at St. Coletta of Wisconsin.

Not far from St. Coletta was a 120-acre family centennial dairy farm belonging to Clarence and Alice Koch. It was on this farm that Sister Julianne Koch, her three brothers and a sister, were raised. As anyone who was raised on a farm knows, the whole family gets involved in caring for the animals and raising crops.

Today we hear about the importance of sustainability in caring for planet Earth. From her father, Sister Julianne learned the importance of rotating their crops to replenish the soil with nutrients to help increase the yield.

They did not use herbicides to deal with the weeds that grew in the fields or in their large garden. Instead, they would pull the weeds by hand or use a hoe.

From observing her father, she learned the importance of listening to weather reports or watching the sky to see when would be the best time for planting and harvesting.

Summer is a very busy time on the farm. At the age of 10, her dad taught her how to drive their horses to harvest the hay. Later on, she also learned how to drive the tractor to rake the hay, cultivate the corn, and run the bailer.

As she drove the tractor, she would look at the sky and the clouds. She said that it was out in the fields enjoying nature, when she received her vocational call. She found herself being very mindful of God and thanking God for all that they had.

Sister Julianne remembers how, in spring, the church parking lot would be filled with tractors and farm machinery to celebrate Rogation Days. The farm equipment and samples of soil from the fields were blessed. Special prayers were said for the crops and for a good harvest.

Sister Julianne would bring soil from her family farm to be blessed. When she got home, she would sprinkle some of the soil on each of their fields.



*Sister Julianne in her sewing room along with her handmade dresses and bottle gift bags.*



*A stocked freezer of bountiful harvest and beautiful flowers grown from past season's blooms.*



*Homemade jams ready for lids.*



Jax “supervises” the whole process from sap to syrup.

Her family’s farm was self-sustaining and provided food for the family. They processed their own meat. Her mother planted a huge garden of vegetables after the days of the Ice Men (May 11-13) had passed. They had an orchard filled with a variety of fruit trees and grapevines. During the summer and fall her mother would be busy canning and freezing the fruits and vegetable they harvested. She also made delicious homemade jams and jellies.

From helping her mother, Sister Julianne learned the skill of preserving vegetables and fruits. Using her mother’s freezer cartons, she now fills her freezer with her own garden vegetables. In addition, the Sisters she lives with enjoy eating her delicious jams.

Awareness of the importance of recycling in caring for our environment has become a part of our life. Sister Julianne believes in recycling flower seeds in the fall to be used in her flowerbeds in the spring. She provides a banquet of zinnias for the neighborhood birds, bees, and butterflies.

One of her favorite places to shop is a resale shop in Jefferson called Twice is Nice. Before buying a new spool of thread, she will see if she can find the thread she needs there. From donations of fabric she makes little girl dresses and gift bags for wine bottles, jams, and jellies. Her creations can be found at the Cornerstone Gift Shop at St. Francis Convent.

In the spring of the year, Sister Julianne travels to

her sister’s and family’s farm in Elmwood, Wis. She joins her family in going out to the woods to tap the sugar maples for sap. Even Jax, a border collie, has a role to play in “guiding everyone from the woods” when the sap has been gathered. Most of the equipment used and the shack where they process the sap into syrup comes from recycled materials. This past spring, they placed 507 taps on the trees and made 112 gallons of maple syrup. Her sister sells the bottled syrup at a local farmers market throughout the summer.

Being true to their Franciscan call, Sister Julianne and the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi see the Earth and its inhabitants as precious gifts from God. Our Sisters continue to respond to the call to cherish and respect those they serve, the Earth, and all living creatures.

If you are able to make a gift to help supplement the everyday living needs of our Sisters who bring God’s love and goodness to others, this would mean much to us.

I want to thank you in advance. Be assured that we include you and your intentions in our daily prayers. May God bless you abundantly for the kindness and generosity you show to others.

Gratefully in St. Francis,

*Sister Mary Kemen, OSF*  
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