

I truly stand here humbled before all of you, as I represent my sisters in community – the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago, my associates in ministry at Franciscan Sisters of Chicago Service Corporation, (FSCSC) and the FSCSC Board of Directors thanking the National Catholic Chaplains Association for recognizing our efforts of collaboration and support in extending the Mission of Jesus through our ministry in Pastoral Care.

Our Foundress, Mother Mary Theresa Dudzik, an immigrant from Poland, came to the northwest side of Chicago in 1881. She loved the elderly so much that after her siblings had left home she began taking the elderly and poor into her family home and caring for them. As you saw in the first slide – she said that she felt the misery and suffering of others and continually thought of how to be of service. With some of her female friends who experienced a similar sense of urgency to serve, she began the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago.

Their life was not easy, for they were just beginning religious life while at the same time ministering to those that they brought in to live with them in various rented buildings. In effect, those early residents were a significant part of the religious formation of our first Sisters. Mother Theresa wrote retrospectively a chronicle of significant events in the community. She said: “...my greatest joy was when I knelt down to say the evening prayers and rosary with the residents and saw how fervently and willingly they participated in the religious exercises, although the situation was quite the reverse when they first came.... Prior to the admission of these aged women, most of them had not attended church for many years. Many had a deplorable habit of cursing, and I insisted strenuously that (these aged women) get rid of that fault.” That was our first introduction to the ministry of Pastoral Care among some pretty feisty Chicago elderly women in the 1890s.

What we learned from our first Sisters is to love and serve unconditionally, to be faithful despite adversity, to be joyful while facing challenges and to trust in the Providence of God. That mindset has become the foundation for the culture of FSCSC. I can proudly say that we have struggled to maintain our ministry of elder-care services in the midst of governmental and financial constraints and have always remained true to our founding charism of “feeling the misery and suffering of others” and responding with loving care. Our Board and Management have never wavered in their support of Pastoral Care. We have seen successful survey results of our Pastoral Care services but more importantly we know that we have cared for our residents as Jesus would.

I know that we would not be here tonight if not for the leadership of Jeanette Lindish, our Vice-President for Mission and Pastoral Care. She is the essence of what it means to be pastoral, creative, energetic, compassionate, and deeply spiritual. She has guided and challenged our Pastoral Care associates in their growth and development emphasizing mutuality and collegiality. In addition she began the initial stages of board formation - teaching, expanding our knowledge base, challenging our thinking and training us in a deliberative process we call the Franciscan decision-making model.

We honor our pastoral care associates who so richly deserve to be recognized for their unselfish service. You saw them and heard from them in the video and must have felt their deep dedication and passion.

All of us, the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago and FSCSC also recognize each of you for you are the face of Jesus to so many people because of who you are. God emanates from each of you even when you are not aware of it. God is in your smile, your listening, your voice, your silence, your prayer, your sharing and even in your frowning. You journey with so many people in both the joys and sorrows of everyday life. Like Jesus, you read the heart.

Our prayer and blessing for all of you, is that God give you peace and that you may allow the powerful Spirit of God to fill you and to work within you and through you.