One hundred years ago, the Spirit manifested itself to three women of faith, prophetic vision, and courage—Sister Solana Leczna, Sister Ernestine Matz, and Sister Hilaria Matz, members of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary Immaculate of Joliet, Illinois. Responding to the needs of Polish immigrants, these three Sisters separated from the Joliet Franciscans to remain at St. Stanislaus Kostka in St. Louis, a parish consisting of 2300 parishioners with over 600 children in the school where the Sisters taught.

In the early twentieth century, the vision of the Sisters broadened beyond only Polish-speaking parishes to include staffing other schools in predominantly rural parishes in Missouri and Illinois. In 1906, Mother Solana signed a court document giving the Sisterhood an official title the “Polish Franciscan School Sisters of St. Louis.” The community was known by that name for over twenty years.

From 1907 to 1957, the Sisters’ central headquarters was the Motherhouse at 3419 Gasconade Street in South St. Louis. Additions were made to accommodate the growing needs of a number of sisters. During those 50 years, the ministry expanded to include schools in all parts of the country.

By the early 1940s the Sisters ministered in elementary and secondary schools in Louisiana and New Mexico, working with African American and Hispanic students, and teaching, counseling and social work with the impoverished families at the Catholic Indian Center in Gallup, New Mexico. The initial apostolate of education was expanded in 1953 to include work in the health care ministry with the acquisition of hospitals in Green Springs, Ohio, and Humboldt, Tennessee.

In the early 1960s, the Sisters responded to an invitation from the Bishop of Thailand to teach English and provide religious instruction to children. The Sisters taught at the Star of the Sea (School for Girls), the Congregation’s first “foreign mission” in Phuket, Thailand, for seven years.

In the 1990s, escalating retirement needs and costs, and the expansion of the St. Louis airport influenced major decisions for the Sisters. Bound by a common heart rather than a common place or work, and in the poverty of spirit for the sake of mission, the Sisters divested of the Motherhouse and property in Ferguson. Our retired Sisters needing assisted living or skilled nursing care were moved to Cardinal Carberry Senior Living Center in Shrewsbury.

They built administrative offices in Kirkwood, Missouri, and the sisters moved into apartments, convents and homes, allowing the Sisters to live and work among God’s people. The Sisters’ mission is to be a transforming presence in society through witnessing Gospel values. They strive to be prayerful women of faith, prophetic vision and courage. As a
community of 92 women committed to serving the poor and to empowering others to live the
gospel with hope and joy, the Sisters serve in 13 states in pastoral care, education, health
care, youth ministry and social services. The needs of society and the Church have always
been the fundamental force behind the Sisters’ efforts.

At their 2007 annual meeting, the Sisters chose as a congregation to focus on Care of Earth,
naming the effort, Franciscans for Earth. An Office of Eco-Justice was established with
collaborative sustainability efforts in the St. Louis area where the administrative in offices
are located. By the summer of 2013, they expanded their efforts with the opening of their
property near De Soto, Missouri, with a demonstration garden providing education,
collaboration and advocacy to this primarily rural area. In the words of one of the
foundedresses, Mother Ernestine Matz, “There is no place too far, no service too humble, and
no person too lowly.”

Current Ministries:

Advocate for Elderly
Alternate High School Teacher
Artist
CEO and President-National Catholic
Development Conference
Chaplain
Director Catholic Charities—
Effingham, Illinois
Director of Faith Formation
Director of Food Pantry
Director of Liturgy and Music
Director of Practical Nursing
Director of Religious Education
Director of Spiritual Care Department
Education-Early Childhood
Education-Elementary
Education-Junior High
Education-Principal
Education-University Professor
Family Specialist

Family Liaison-Native
American Indian Reservation
Healing and Deliverance Ministry
Ministry of Prayer
Mission Advancement
Nursing
Pastoral Associate
Pastoral Care
Pastoral Minister
Pharmacy Technician
Program Director for Homeless Shelter
Retreat House Director
Sacristan
Seamstress
Secretary-NO/AIDS Task Force
Senior Home Care
Staffing Coordinator
Spiritual Director
Treasurer

Collaborative Ministries through Leadership Conference of Women Religious
English Tutoring Project
Intercommunity Ecological Council
Intercommunity Justice
Marian Middle School

For More Information contact:
Sister Joann Nowak, OSF
335 South Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122
srjoann@fsolph.org
www.franciscansisters-olph.org
314-965-3700