

Sharing Our Story

Bernardine Franciscan Associates ~ Shenandoah, PA *Sister Marietta Andrzejewska ~ Associate Companion*

Proclaiming the Good News with their words and their lives, the associates in Shenandoah, PA, with their associate companion, Sister Marietta Andrzejewska, share their story with you, their sister and brother associates. They tell us of the inspiration to bring hope through the power of prayer to Mary, our Mother.



In an article written by Joseph Slovacki, a Shenandoah associate, Joseph shares a prayer experience of the Bernardine Franciscan Associates and members of their Divine Mercy Parish prayer group with you.

“All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle.”

Saint Francis of Assisi

Right after Ash Wednesday on February 26th, 2020, the world had received devastating news. A deadly pandemic was sweeping across the world and reached the shores of Pennsylvania. Not only were businesses closing, events being cancelled and states were closing, our Churches in our Diocese also closed their doors to protect people from getting the virus.

With the closing of the churches, fear began to strike the souls of our Divine Mercy Parish. When the parish was not able to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday, people began to lose hope.

Yes, we could watch Mass on TV or on the internet. However, what we were really missing were our monthly Franciscan Associate meetings, with our faith sharing sessions and fellowship.

In the beginning of May, our fellow associate member, Peter Cheslukowski, was on social media and saw a video of a parish in Italy making a floating balloon rosary in the colors of blue and white. People were singing to our Blessed Mother and praying the rosary. As Peter was watching the video, he felt the Holy Spirit inspiring him:

“Peter, make a balloon rosary in your little town.”

Peter began to see that this balloon rosary would be a great way among our associates and our parishioners to lift our spirits high, and pray together with one voice. This would also be a way for us to bring hope and a spark of light in the sea of darkness we felt we were in.

Peter was so inspired, he shared the video with Sister Marietta, associate companion, Joseph Selvocki and other associates. Sister Marietta became very excited and felt that the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima on May 13th would be a great day to implement the idea with the balloon rosary.

When Monsignor Bocian, Pastor of our Divine Mercy Parish, gave approval, we went into action to plan the event and to learn how to make a balloon rosary.

We chose Saint Casimir's Cemetery to have the event because in this huge space, the balloon rosary could be led in procession down the road as people from the parish who were wearing masks and social distancing could pray the rosary.

We got the word out about the balloon rosary by word of mouth, social media and phone calls. With fear gripping so many people, we were concerned that not many would attend this spiritual event.

A few hours before our spiritual event was to begin, some of our associates went up to the cemetery to assemble the balloon rosary. While we were putting the rosary all together, the wind began to increase and fear began to grip us that we would not be able to hold the balloon rosary up high for all to see. We all began to pray that the wind would subside.

As we were walking down the center road of the cemetery, the procession began with people dressed in blue and white clothing holding candles and flowers. A statue of Our Lady of Fatima was carried in front of the people carrying the balloon rosary which was attached on poles being held up high.



While we slowly walked in procession, we were impressed to see how many people wearing masks and social distancing were reciting the rosary. Some people sat in their cars parked outside the cemetery gates to see and to pray the rosary.

Seeing the people gathered, we had tears in our eyes and with our hearts fully of joy, our spirits were soaring as we walked in procession. Miraculously, even the wind subsided and the sun came out in all of its majestic glory.

Not only was the Blessed Mother smiling down on us, our parish family no longer felt the fear and hopelessness which gripped our hearts.

We will never forget what all of us felt that day!