

Many of these people are Franciscans from the Holy Name Province. Others work with Franciscans. Keep in mind that these are my impressions of these people, and at that, they are unfortunately trite descriptions of beautiful people. In keeping with the themes of joy, inspiration and playfulness, I have intentionally tried to express both the “serious” and “humorous” sides of the following people.

My favorite of Kierkegaard’s expressions: “Once you label me, you negate me” — so please forgive me for any negating which I now partake in:

Father Michael Duffy, OFM — an avid Apple, Inc. fan himself — who has spent his life helping hundreds (and perhaps even thousands) of people. Michael is an inspiration to me by his humility and down-to-earth disposition. I often think that the Franciscan Volunteer Ministry is maintained by Michael to support his ice cream habit — since, with young volunteers, he always has people to buy a cone for.

Brother Fred Dilger, OFM — who, in full sublimity, had changed his life with great sacrifice in order to serve with and to the poor, and who does so with such grace and humor so as to quickly become everyone’s friend before, in turn, challenging those with whom he is friendly. Embracing the playful joyfulness of a Franciscan Friar, Fred can often be found on Sunday nights watching his favorite Talking Heads music videos, or discussing with zeal the latest pop-culture headline.

Father William DeBiase, OFM — at fifty years in the order, having served in both the United States and Japan, having been a veteran of the Korean War, having reached a point in his life when he could have retired — Father Bill still determined that he should establish an online community for those (including young people) who hungered for a Franciscan connection. Despite being a busy man, Father Bill still took time to play some catch with another volunteer and me ... which unfortunately, after Bill was hit with a softball, resulted in a black eye. We laughed about it later.

Brother Xavier De La Heurta, OFM — a clear inspiration to all around him, Brother Xavier is unanimously loved by the entire homeless community of Kensington (and, I could almost claim, all of Philadelphia). I remember another worker at the Saint Francis Inn joking that if a guest says that Brother Xavier is not helping them, the must be in more trouble than any human can fix.

Sister Mary Augustini, OSF — my “twin” as she calls me, was born the exact same day as I was (Dec. 9, but exactly 50 years apart). Sr. Mary is the most conscientious person that I have ever met in my entire life; but that does not stop her from finding the occasional “cleaning Monday” to dance while scrubbing the Inn’s ovens.

Brother John Gill, OFM — one of the most intelligent, caring, and compassionate friars that I have met, I can most clearly recall the occasions when Brother John was laughing *at* me. This was not always a good sign, because everyone at the Inn knows that if Brother John Gill is laughing, then it must truly be funny.

Barbara Salapek — Barbara is most certainly more compassionate and, generally, tougher than I am! She is also very artistic and well read. However, she is an inspiration to me because of her confidence in caring for others; including the way in which she can easily find a way to laugh with guests and volunteers.

Sister Leslie Birks, OSF — I once watched in horror as Sister Leslie dressed wounds on the feet of a homeless man and I thought often since then of the story of St. Francis and the Leper. I also cannot stop laughing about the time that she pushed me out of the way to crow-bar fix a broken door on the Inn’s van. Furthermore, she and Sister Mary usually comprise a formidable “corn hole” team at staff picnics.

Judy Stachecki — I believe that there are certain qualities that people develop after the occasion of being a mother, and although I was not very far from home when I lived in community with her, I felt that Judy looks after the FVMs and the guests with a particular tenderness that perhaps can best be described as motherly. When it comes to events like the Inn’s Super Bowl party (or even at the Monday meals that we had as a community together) that is when you can see Judy at her most joyful!

Karen Pushaw — the Ivy League lawyer, who has delivered a commencement address at a LaSalle University, read books that I will never be able to read, and loved Philadelphia's history with a zeal that rivals Father Michael's obsession with New Hampshire. But, as with almost all other people who have worked with the HNP community for a long time, that particular sense of Franciscan humor can be found deep within Karen's bones, and her ribbing of Michael can be described as nothing short of ruthless.

Sister Xavier Kozubal, CSFN — When I first met Sister Xavier, she was so down-to-earth that I was surprised later to hear all that she had accomplished in her life. If only all PhD's had Xavier's disposition, college students would be much happier and the world would be more joyful.

Sister Jude Niemiec, CSFN — Jude's art is a reflection of her personality: it is both beautiful and graceful. I think that my (and fellow FVM Mary Donahue's) fondest memory of Jude was when she, kneeling on the ground at a volunteer's home, pet a dog behind his ears and melted into the moment with the literal tenderness (and playfulness) of a saint.

Sister Janet Reagan, OSF — It is lucky that Sister Janet starting off liking me because I attended St. Joe's Prep — but I frankly do not know of anyone who Janet does not love. The expression 'the patience of a saint' finds itself at home with Janet, perhaps especially because she works with middle-school students!

Father Pat Seiber, OFM — It is unfortunate that Father Pat started off making fun of me for having attended St. Joe's Prep, but he also never stopped. A native Philadelphian and expert pacifist, Father Pat is an inspiration to all Catholics with a global conscious. And even though he used to protest at the Army-Navy football games, I know firsthand that he can still throw a football.

Katie Sullivan — Katie has been the wizard behind the curtain of the FVM program for many years now, and in that position passionately helped scores of young adults experience a truly great year (or two) of volunteering. Katie is also famous (or infamous) for her many photos at FVM events. I once picked up her camera during a retreat to see some of the pictures that she had taken, held down the "scroll" button, and watched to my amazement as our entire retreat was portrayed in way similar to time-lapse animation. But the joy through which she expresses this passion is particularly inspirational.