

Volume 19.1 Spring 2016

# NEWS

A Publication of  THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

*Also in this issue:*

- Sisters Celebrate 125 Years of Ministry in Spokane Diocese
- People & Places
- Sharing the Good News

## A Ministry of Cuddling

*Sister Loretta Francis Mann Comforts Sick Babies*

## Commitment Statement

We recommit ourselves  
to “rebuilding the Church”  
by living the passion of the Gospel  
in the discerning spirit  
of our Franciscan charism and tradition.

We are willing to take the necessary  
risks to be a healing, compassionate  
presence in our violent world especially  
with women, children, and those who  
have no voice.

We desire to reflect this commitment  
in our dialogue with the entire Church,  
in our own governing structures, and  
in our relationship with one another  
as sister.

## Mission Statement

We, the Sisters of St. Francis of  
Philadelphia, choose to live the Gospel  
in the prophetic spirit of Francis of  
Assisi and our Foundress Mother Francis  
Bachmann. With Jesus Christ as Brother,  
we live as sister with one another, with  
the entire human family and with all  
creation. Calling ourselves and one  
another to continuous conversion of  
heart, we commit ourselves to a life of  
contemplation, poverty and humility.

As vowed women of the Church, we  
respond with diverse gifts in a spirit of  
collaboration and of mutual service to  
the needs of others, especially the  
economically poor, the marginal and  
the oppressed. Seeking to participate  
in the Spirit's action in the world, we  
direct our personal and corporate  
resources to the promotion of justice,  
peace, and reconciliation.

Filled with trust in the goodness of  
God, we move forward.

## POINT OF VIEW

**A**s I read the articles for this issue of Good News, the famous song, “Love Changes Everything” from Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical, *Aspects of Love*, came to mind.

Love, love changes everything  
Hands and faces, earth and sky  
Love, love changes everything  
How you live and how you die...  
Nothing in the world will ever be the same.



**Sister Mary Kathryn  
Dougherty, OSF  
Congregational Minister**

*In Spokane, Washington, the Sisters of St. Francis have loved and nurtured orphans, children, and infants, those who are homeless, and families for over 125 years. That love changed everything for the hundreds of young children who crossed the thresholds of St. Joseph Orphanage, the five group homes, St. Anne’s Baby Home, and now the families who come to St. Joseph Family Center. In addition, many children were educated by the sisters, not only in the Catholic schools of Mt. St. Joseph Academy and St. Charles School but also through the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, a religious education program for Catholic children unable to attend the Catholic schools. The sisters’ desire and determination to shore up the Catholic faith in remote areas was immense and their love changed everything! While these active ministries transitioned and flourished, in a quiet, serene area of Spokane, the Kairos House of Prayer was created and continues to welcome all who seek God’s presence through silence and contemplation. Time away from the hectic pace of life and time in prayer allows people to once again become centered and grounded in God. Here lives are transformed.*

*In Hartford, Connecticut, Sister Loretta Francis Mann volunteers at Saint Francis Hospital cuddling infants who are in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Her presence with the babies, their parents, and the medical staff brings a love that also changes everything. Sister Loretta prays for each infant individually and then she holds and cuddles each baby, offering the newborn a sense of comfort and security. The impact of this type of care and concern—this love—transforms a painful experience into one of compassion. Love changes everything!*

*May these stories inspire you to be conscious of the moments of transforming love in your life, especially the transforming love of our God in Jesus. Let us be grateful for love and be inspired to respond lovingly to all we meet. It just may change everything!*

Blessings,

*Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty, OSF*





VOLUME 19.1 SPRING 2016

# INSIDE *Good* NEWS CONTENTS

Point of View. .... 2

**Sisters Celebrate 125 Years of  
Ministry in Spokane Diocese. .... 4**

*The Sisters of St. Francis have an extensive history in the Diocese of Spokane—dating back to 1890 when the first five courageous women stepped off a train onto a dusty street. This was the beginning of a legacy of service that continues today. The celebration in October was one of remembrance and gratitude for all the ways that the sisters have been and continue to be present to the people of the region.*

Written by Deb Litman  
Photography by Tim LaBarge

People & Places ..... 10

**A Ministry of Cuddling: Sister  
Loretta Francis Mann Comforts  
Sick Babies ..... 12**

*Sister Loretta Francis Mann has to have one of the most rewarding ministries—she gets to cuddle and sing to babies! Sister Loretta volunteers as a baby cuddler at the NICU at Saint Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut. Her ministry is one of presence—being there to hold and comfort the babies when their parents can't be.*

Written by Deb Litman  
Photography by Andrea Cipraini-Mecchi

Sharing the Good News ..... 16

Focus ..... 18

**Communications Office**  
609 South Convent Road  
Aston, PA 19014  
Tel (610) 558-7726  
Fax (610) 558-6131  
goodnews@osfphila.org

**Managing Editor**  
Florence Smith

**Assistant Editor**  
Sister Ann Marie Slavin, OSF

**Editorial Board**  
Sister Corda Marie Bergbauer, OSF  
Sister Marie Monica Borden, OSF  
Sister Marie Therese Carr, OSF  
Sister Helen Jacobson, OSF  
Sister Mary Lonergan, OSF  
Sister Jean Rupertus, OSF

**Graphic Design**  
Geneen Pintof

The purpose of *Good News* is to further the Gospel mission of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia by sharing the good news of the congregation with our friends, family, companions, and sisters. Through this publication, we hope to share the charism of our congregation and invite others to become involved in our mission.

*Good News* is published three times a year (spring, summer, winter) by the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. We welcome your feedback and comments; correspondence should be addressed to *Good News* at address above.

Visit our website! [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org)



The environmental savings by printing this document with FSC certified stock on an FSC certified press are:  
Trees preserved for the future: 43; Lbs water-borne waste not created: 124.17; Gallons wastewater flow saved: 18,266; Lbs solid waste not generated: 2,021; Lbs net greenhouse gases prevented: 3,979; BTUs energy not consumed: 30,459,240

**On the cover:** Sister Loretta cuddles one of the babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Saint Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut. This very special ministry brings a loving presence to the infants whose parents are unable to stay with them all day. The personal interaction Sister Loretta provides is critical to the babies' physical and emotional wellbeing.



On October 25, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia celebrated the 125th anniversary of ministry in Spokane. Sisters, friends, and companions in ministry came from far and wide for the festivities.



# Sisters Celebrate 125 Years of

✠ “THE HEAVENS ARE TELLING THE GLORY OF GOD,  
AND ALL CREATION IS SHOUTING FOR JOY.”



*Like so many of the ministries of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia in Spokane, St. Anne's Home evolved with the needs of the community: a daycare for children whose mothers worked in defense plants, a home for unwed pregnant women, and a home for orphans awaiting adoption.*



On a beautiful autumn day, October 24, 2015, St. Charles Church in Spokane resounded with the jubilant music of an historic Franciscan celebration. Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia traveled from east and west to join the five sisters who continue the congregation's presence in the Spokane Diocese 125 years after the first five courageous pioneers arrived from Philadelphia in 1890.

In a full church, the sisters—along with friends and companions in ministry—joyfully celebrated God's gracious goodness during their long years of loving service in the diocese. Bishop Thomas Daly, assisted by the pastor, Rev. Thomas Connolly, and several local clergy, presided over a festive liturgy honoring the dedicated women religious





*Sisters who attended the anniversary event enjoyed reminiscing about the past and discussing the possibilities for the future of ministry in Spokane.*

# Ministry in Spokane Diocese

who—to paraphrase the words of homilist Rev. Tyrone Schaff—“bravely sowed the seeds and gambled on God’s providence to reap a wondrous harvest in the vineyard of Eastern Washington.”

Following the Mass a reception in the school auditorium provided food and opportunity to reconnect, reflect, and reminisce. Pictorial displays of past and present missions and ministries helped to recall how it all began and remember all that was achieved.

## St. Joseph Orphanage

Almost two weeks after leaving Philadelphia, three women dressed in traditional black robes with black flowing veils stepped off the train

*continued on page 6*



*Mt. St. Joseph Academy was established to support the newly thriving railroad community that had grown up in the previously sleepy town of Tekoa, about 40 miles south of Spokane.*



(Top) A group of boys play together at St. Joseph Orphanage. St. Joseph's served as an orphanage until 1973 and then as a group home for children before evolving into St. Joseph's Family Center, a personal growth, counseling, and retreat center. (Right) The history of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia in Spokane is very much a part of Sister Carmel Gregg's own personal history of ministry. Through the years she has served at St. Charles School, St. Joseph Family Center, and today at St. Ann Convent.



Photo © Susie Fitzhugh

“WE HAVE A LOT  
TO CELEBRATE  
AND, HOPEFULLY,  
A LOT MORE TO  
ACCOMPLISH.”

onto the dusty streets of Spokane Falls on a warm August afternoon in 1890. Compared to the bustling city they had left behind, their first impression of this “unknown and uncertain” new home was that it was the Wild, Wild West. Sisters Barbara Kuhn, Neri Terion, and Onuphria Kahsnitz—joined two weeks later by Rhabana Loftus and Oswald Stark—had come at the request of Rev. Charles Mackin who had begged for help caring for orphaned children. A few weeks later, in a little wood-framed building on donated land beside the Spokane River, the orphanage opened with six children. By the end of the year, the number had swelled to 40. A small addition was erected and St. Joseph's Orphanage was formally blessed on November 2, 1891.

By the year 1899, with over 90 children to care for and with no knowledge of where the first cent was coming from, plans were put in place for a larger building. Through the great heartedness of Spokane donors—primarily Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sweeney—an imposing four-story brick structure was ready for occupancy and dedicated in

January 1901, miraculously “debt free.”

The history of St. Joseph's proves God's goodness to those who trust. For 40 years Sister Oswalda exemplified this in an

extraordinary way. Daily she went by horse and buggy begging for food from ranchers and suppliers for the hungry orphans. It was said that “Her appeals for aid were irresistible and her smile ever bright and cheerful.”

In the 1970s Washington State changed the way it took care of children in need and required St. Joseph's Orphanage to provide group homes so that siblings could be together. Adapting to the needs of the time, the Sisters of St. Francis built five houses behind the former brick orphanage. In 1982 with the state's decision to place children in foster homes, the mission of St. Joseph's as a children's home ended. During those 80 plus years, however, St. Joseph's was the only home some children knew. “I came to St. Joe's when I was six years old,” one lady said simply. “I have known and loved the sisters for over 60 years.” A native of Spokane, Sister Joanne Clavel commented, “St. Joseph's helped many children grow into loving, responsible adults.”

## St. Joseph Family Center (SJFC) Today

Today SJFC continues to assist families. On the same property where the orphanage once stood, the center operates two complementary programs. The counseling program provides high quality, professional mental health services for couples, families, teens, and seniors as well as marriage counseling, anger management classes, and



St. Joseph Orphanage opened its doors in 1890, in a small, wood-framed building. In 1901 an updated four-story brick structure was built and still stands today.



parenting seminars. The Franciscan Place offers spiritual direction, retreats, and healing and contemplative arts/practices. “People who cross our doorway know that they are in a sacred, holy place,” said Sister Patricia Novak, spirituality/healing arts program director. “We are feeding something in people’s souls.”

Sister Carmel Gregg, administrator from 1987-1999, emphasized the focus of the center’s mission. “Each year we re-evaluate and evolve to meet the greatest needs.” In all their ministries, however, one thing remains constant—the sisters are committed to the underserved. In the words of current executive director, Sister Patricia Millen, “We fill a void. Without St. Joseph’s Family Center, a lot of people would not be served.”

## Mt. St. Joseph’s Academy, Tekoa

Just two years after opening St. Joseph’s Orphanage, the Sisters of St. Francis again answered Fr. Mackin’s call for help in Tekoa, a small town about 40 miles south of Spokane. Tekoa had no parish church but the town needed a school to accommodate a newly thriving railroad community. One of the four rooms of the sisters’ “poorly built wooden abode” was pressed into service as a chapel for both the sisters and the townspeople whenever a priest was available. Otherwise they traveled by horse

and farm wagon to the Indian Mission in Lapway, a 10-mile distance over Indian reservation lands.

Lacking sufficient funds, plans were drawn for a “...plain and simple school building.” Mt. St. Joseph’s Academy opened in 1892 with ten boarders and at its height had over 200 students—boarding and day. With the loss of the railroads in the 1940s and easier access to automobile transportation, the need for a boarding school lessened. The academy finally closed in 1950, leaving a rich legacy of courage, adaptability, and priceless memories.

Even a brief record of Tekoa would be incomplete without the story of Mother Juvenalis Perry—a barely five foot tall Boston lady—running from window to window shooting her gun full of blanks into the night sky to scare away the garden thieves (the vegetables were sorely needed for the boarders’ table) and her early morning “reprimand” from the local sheriff. Today, a beautiful rose garden—planted and dedicated by Bishop William Weigand, a former student—is a memorial to the sisters’ ministry and friendship.

*continued on page 8*

*Two years after opening St. Joseph Orphanage, the Sisters of St. Francis answered a call for help in Tekoa. Mt. St. Joseph Academy opened in 1892 with ten boarding students and 25 day students and had more than two hundred boarders at its height.*



*The crowd at the luncheon enjoyed reconnecting with one another and perusing the large trove of photos and memorabilia that had been meticulously compiled.*



*The luncheon held at St. Charles School included a wide range of people who have been part of the history of the sisters' ministry in Spokane. Students from St. Charles School helped to serve those who attended.*



*continued from page 7*

## St. Charles School

When one door closes another opens. As Mt. St. Joseph's Academy was closing its doors after 58 years of service, the sisters

were called upon to open a new elementary school in Spokane. St. Charles was the first new parish school to be established in the diocese in 35 years. In a hastily constructed four-room building, four sisters greeted their new students in September 1951. "A new grade was added each year until there were 16 classrooms with sisters teaching every grade," says former student Sister Joanne Clavel. "I was in the first 1<sup>st</sup> grade class and I had a dif-

ferent sister each year. It was the beginning of the story of how I became a Franciscan."

By the 1960s school enrollment had grown to well over 700. Today the Sisters of St. Francis no longer teach at St. Charles but competent and caring lay professionals keep the Franciscan spirit alive and well.

## St. Anne's Baby Home

Over the years the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia have been called to serve in new and challenging ways. In 1943 Bishop Charles White of Spokane asked the congregation to administer a temporary home for

the infants that Catholic Charities was trying to place in adoptive or foster homes and St. Anne's Baby Home was born. During World War II, the home also became a daycare for children whose parents were involved in the war efforts.

Eventually St. Anne's became a residence for unwed pregnant girls. Healthcare and counseling were provided to help them decide whether to keep their babies or place them for adoption. Sister Elaine Thaden, who ministered at the baby home from 1973-1975, recalled, "It was a welcoming place where young women could find a temporary home with people who loved and cared for them."

St. Anne's mission soon expanded to caring for babies with severe physical problems. Indeed, one could say that those who worked there truly exemplified the Dalai Lama's belief that religion is compassion. In 1983, Catholic Charities assumed total responsibility for St. Anne's Baby Home.



*St. Charles School began serving students in 1951. Today, the school remains a place where knowledge and a strong Franciscan spirit get passed down to the next generation.*





# HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Pray for the continued success of the ministries of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia in Spokane.
- Be open to change in your own life. It can be difficult to move beyond the ways things have been done in the past. Sometimes, however, it is only by reinvention that we can continue to be vital in the face of an ever-evolving world.
- Celebrate the rich history to be found in your family, school, club, place of worship, or workspace. Connecting with the inspiration, passion, and dedication of those who came before you can serve as a wonderful source of renewed spirit and enthusiasm.
- Remember that each one of us has the ability to make a difference. Take stock of the needs in your own community and kickstart an effort to address one or more of your area's most pressing problems.
- Use the enclosed envelope to make a donation to St. Joseph Family Center.



*In 1975 Sister Mary Presentina—who worked alongside Sister Maurina for over twenty years—published a book entitled, **And Away We Go**, presenting a graphic account of the achievements and setbacks, joys and frustrations of working with parents and their children, educating both on their fundamental faith.*

## Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD)

In August, 1956, Bishop Bernard Topel invited two Sisters of St. Francis to take over the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in the Spokane Diocese. Together with other Franciscan sisters and lay collaborators, Sisters Maurina Rockenstein and Presentina Baechle had labored for 21 years in the Baker Diocese, creating a catechetical structure that achieved national acclaim. What it entailed was the creation of a way to provide religious education for Catholic children—many of whom lived in remote and isolated areas—who were unable to attend Catholic schools.

On arriving in Spokane, the sisters set up and further developed their unique and very effective CCD program. In 1960 Sisters Presentina and Maurina received the Pro

Ecclesia et Pontifice medal from Pope John XXIII for their untiring and devoted service to the religious education of youth outside of Catholic schools. Bishop Topel wrote, “The difference their coming made was great—extraordinarily great.”

## Kairos House of Prayer

Following years of classroom teaching, Sister Florence Leone Poch felt a strong call to establish a place of prayer where people could seek respite from the increasingly hectic pace of everyday life. After several years of discernment, working in temporary locations, and compelled by Bishop Bernard Topel's request to start a house in Spokane, Sister Florence located “a place of our own” in the wooded foothills near Wandermere. Forty years later Kairos House of Prayer is still welcoming individuals and groups who seek silence and contemplative space in order to transform their lives. “The work here is God's,” Sister Florence reminds us. “We are here to help but God is in charge.”



*Kairos House of Prayer welcomes people seeking a place of quiet respite where they can take time to hear the voice of God.*

## Transitions

Transitions, one of the congregation's most recent ministries in Spokane, is a collaborative effort between the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia and three other congregations of women religious. The ministry, recently featured in *Good News*, is a series of programs designed to make life better for women and children in various stages of life transitions. Although there are no sisters currently providing direct services at Transitions, the congregation supports the ministry through financial sponsorship and board guidance.

## Celebrating the Past - Looking to the Future

When Sister Elaine Thaden welcomed everyone to Spokane, she reminded participants that “Who and what we celebrate is huge... We celebrate the hundreds of children who made mothers of us and the thousands of children who made educators of us. We celebrate the troubled parents, couples, families, individuals, and young unmarried mothers who made genuine big sisters and counselors of us. We celebrate the newborn babies and their ecstatic adoptive parents who brought us such joy as well as the severely handicapped children who broke our hearts and taught us to let go.” Sister Patricia Novak captured it simply, “We have a lot to celebrate and, hopefully, a lot more to accomplish.” As Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, the celebration was also about our “Yes” to all that the future holds. ■

For more information or comments on this article, contact [goodnews@osfphila.org](mailto:goodnews@osfphila.org).

◀ *Members of the Trenton Companions in Faith met with members of the Zubaida Muslim community.*



## Who are the 'Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia'?

*Through this section we hope to share a glimpse of our congregation and the individuals who make real its mission.*



*Sister Christine Still earned a Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies from Seattle University's School of Theology and Ministry.*

### NEW JERSEY

**Sister Dominica LoBianco** and our **Franciscan Companions in Faith** from the Trenton area met with members of the Zubaida Muslim community to celebrate EID, a time of thanksgiving for God's many blessings. The program began with prayer and a reflection on Moses. An audio-visual presentation on Zubaida's many social ministries evidenced their efforts to serve those who are poor: the Trenton Soup Kitchen, distribution of Christmas gifts, food pantry, and a newly formed health clinic to meet the needs of the underinsured. Imam Mubeen shared the story of Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael and their unwavering obedience to God's call—a central theme in Islam. These stories teach all of us the necessity of surrendering to God's power—a power that is merciful and never destructive. Imam Mubeen concluded with this question for meditation: "How can I adjust my life so that I am always obedient?"



### WASHINGTON

**Sister Christine Still's** busy schedule not only includes her ministry with vocations. In 2015 she completed studies for an M.A. in Pastoral Studies from Seattle University's School of Theology and Ministry. During her studies, Sister Christine also participated in Christifideles, a program coordinated jointly by the Archdiocese of Seattle

and the School of Theology and Ministry to prepare the laity for ministry in the Church. In addition, she was also commissioned by Archbishop Sartain as a lay ecclesial minister for the archdiocese.



### PENNSYLVANIA

Two of our sisters were honored at Neumann University's homecoming dinner in October. **Sister Linda DeCero** received the 2015 Alumni Association Recognition Award which is presented to outstanding alumni who have shown dedication and devoted service to the university. She graduated from Neumann with a master's degree in pastoral care and counseling in 2001. Sister Linda has worked at Neumann since 1996 and currently serves as the director of Pastoral Service. She assists as a pastoral presence in student conduct hearings, responds to medical emergencies, provides support in assisting resident assistants with mission-oriented programming, and plans evenings of reflection for them. She also serves as chaplain for several sports teams and is the advisor for the gospel choir. **Sister Margaret Grace Gannon** received the Alumni Association Honorary Alumni Award. She is well known to the folks at Neumann because of her work as president of Drexel Neumann Academy. The school, a cosponsored ministry of the Sisters of St. Francis, Neumann University, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and St. Katharine Drexel Parish, became a reality when the last Catholic school in Chester was threatened with closure. Sister Margaret has served as president since the school opened in 2007—leading it to its current status as an independent Catholic School with a Franciscan spirit. The academy provides the children of Chester with the "opportunity to be models of peacemaking in a violent environment and the education for a bright and successful future."



## MARYLAND

**Our Lady of Lourdes Parish** in Bethesda held a special celebration honoring our sisters who had taught in the parish school. Seven of our sisters traveled to Bethesda for the festivities which included liturgy and the blessing of both a beautiful bronze statue representing the Franciscan sisters and a plaque listing the names of the 92 sisters who had taught there. During the program, John Ford, a former student of Our Lady of Lourdes School and more recently a member of Neumann University's board, did an enjoyable presentation entitled "A Room Full of Memories."



(L-R) Sisters Christopher Marie Wagner, Helen Jacobson, Corda Marie Bergbauer, Mary Farrell, Anne McFadden, Constance Davis, Colette Gerry.

personalized card. She once had a student request that she make a pillow for her father who was a U.S. Army sergeant on his way to Afghanistan. Sister Margaret made a pocket-size pillow and sent it over. She later received a card of gratitude from the U.S. Army along with her very own encased American flag and certificate. The article written by Rita Piro concludes with a quote from Sister Margaret stating, "Having a ministry that reaches so many and which has brought so much joy and consolation is a dream come true. I hope and pray that others will come up with their own version of a way to reach out to those in need."

retirement residence. The celebration included a beautiful performance by both the adult and children's choirs, the blessing of a monument engraved with the names of all the sisters who served in the parish, refreshments, and a visit from Santa. As a final token of appreciation, Sister Clare Agnes was presented with a beautiful bouquet of pink roses.



## INDIANA

**Sisters Elaine Thaden and Christine Still** attended the 2015 National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) held in Indianapolis. NCYC's biennial program is a three day, high-energy experience of keynote presentations, prayer, community, and keynote speakers for 23,000 teens, parents, and youth ministers from around the country. A key component of NCYC is the thematic park which is a blend of traditional exhibit booths with interactive areas featuring service projects, games, recreation, live musical performances, arts, and sports. This year's theme was "Here I Am, Lord." Representatives from 55 religious congregations were on hand, using a variety of avenues to promote vocations to religious life: exhibitors, storytellers, vocation teams, and mentors for the animators. To commemorate the Year of Consecrated Life, fifteen of those congregations—including the Sisters of St. Francis—conducted teaching sessions about their respective spiritual traditions and held prayer experiences in the chapel.



Sister Margaret Xavier displays samples of her prayer pillows.



## PENNSYLVANIA

**Sister Margaret Xavier Romans** was recently acknowledged in the October edition of the *St. Anthony Messenger* for her latest endeavor. When not working in her regular ministry, Sister Margaret enjoys designing and creating prayer pillows for those who are sick or in difficult situations. "This ministry is the outgrowth of just being aware of the needs of others and using something as simple as a pillow to let the other person know that he or she is not alone but is held in prayer in a special way," she explained in the article. The pillow-making process is a very thought-out one. She first chooses a fabric in the person's favorite color, attaches a cross-stitched block with the person's name and its meaning, and sends it along with a



## NEW JERSEY

Over the years a number of our sisters ministered at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish in Passaic. In 2010 financial difficulties necessitated closing the school but the sisters and their many contributions have not been forgotten. In November **Sister Clare Agnes Conforti** was invited to speak at each of the parish Masses. She presented a short history of the sisters' contributions there beginning in 1926. Her presentation elicited memories from parishioners, especially her mention of the first kindergarten graduation in 1955. A number of those in attendance just happened to be members of that class! The parish showed its appreciation of the sisters' work by donating proceeds from a special collection to support Assisi House, the sisters'



“SHE DOES MORE THAN HOLD THE BABIES. SHE LOVES THESE BABIES  
AND THE BABIES KNOW THIS.”





*When she arrives to work, Sister Loretta scrubs in the same way the doctors and nurses on the unit do. Then she meets with the nurses on duty (pictured above with Nurse Anne Rajotte) to discuss the present population of babies and their care needs.*

# A Ministry of Cuddling

*Sister Loretta Francis Mann  
Comforts Sick Babies*

**I**t is early morning and the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Saint Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut, is bustling with calm efficiency. Nurses are busy caring for the littlest of patients—so small that they are weighed in grams instead of pounds. Among the rows of incubators and isolettes, Sister Loretta Francis Mann stands silently next to one of the tiny babies, saying a prayer just for him. When she is through, she moves to the next crib—repeating the process until she has visited and prayed over every infant in the unit.

Sister Loretta has been coming to the NICU as a volunteer baby cuddler for the past six years. Her ministry is one of presence—being there to hold and comfort the babies when their parents can't be. She started coming one day a week, then increased to two. Now she is in the NICU every Monday, Tuesday, and Friday carrying out a ministry that she says is the best she's ever had. "I loved every minute of my time in education," said Sister Loretta who spent years in the classroom and as a principal, "but on my first day here, I knew this was my future."

Once she is finished praying for each baby, Sister Loretta looks to the nurses to tell her where she is needed most. She spends the rest of the day with a baby in her arms, taking time with each one to help him or her feel safe, secure, and loved. "The babies in the NICU need that interaction," said Brigette Doane who has been a nurse in the unit for 16 years. "They are going through a lot—lights, noise, needle sticks. It's important that we have the cuddlers and Sister Loretta does the most amazing job at it."

## Filling the Gap

Having to leave a baby in the NICU is not a scenario any parent relishes. Unfortunately, every year 10 to 15 percent of babies born in the U.S. end up spending time there. For many parents that means having to head home before their newborn is ready to come with them. "They feel brokenhearted when they go home and the baby can't," said Sister Loretta.

*continued on page 14*

▼ *Doctor Jose Arias-Camison examines one of the patients in the NICU. He and the other medical staff who are closely monitoring these babies are very grateful for the service that Sister Loretta provides. The loving one-on-one contact she gives each baby is crucial in those early days of life.*

“No parent expects their child to end up with us,” said Dr. Jose Arias-Camison, director of the Saint Francis Hospital NICU. “Every parent imagines a beautiful experience and a healthy baby. So when the babies come to the NICU, there are a lot of emotions.”

Aciela and Jeffrey Wallner had to leave their son Jadeison in the NICU just two days after he was born. “It was such a stressful time,” said Aciela of the month that Jadeison spent in the unit. “It was comforting to know that Sister Loretta was there for him when we couldn’t be. When I would go in the mornings to see him, she would already be there—holding him, singing to him, reading him books.”

Some babies in the unit are especially in need of the comfort a cuddler provides. Babies experiencing withdrawal from exposure to narcotics during gestation exhibit a variety of symptoms, including tremors, excessive irritability and crying, and trouble sleeping. “These babies shake and scream,” said Sister Loretta. “They need extra care so I spend a lot of time with them.”

“When I have a difficult baby and I know Sister Loretta is here, I can be sure that that baby will get what he or she needs,” said NICU nurse Margaret Zawilinski. “She will sit for hours with them to settle them.”

Occasionally there will be a baby in the unit whose parents don’t come at all. These infants—who often end up being discharged to foster homes—also benefit significantly from the care and attention of cuddlers like Sister Loretta who, for the first weeks of their lives, provide them with the physical and emotional attention that is vital to their development and well-being. According to Dr. Jose, the benefits of human interaction for neonates are well documented. Research has shown that being held leads to higher pain tolerance, more stable body temperature, and stronger vital signs.



▲ *New mother, Michelle Cadario, visits with her baby who is in an incubator. Many new mothers are released before their NICU babies. Although they long to spend all day and night with their little ones, many times other responsibilities (such as older children) makes that impossible.*

As much as parents want to stay with their newborns, responsibilities at home—older children, jobs, and other obligations—often make it necessary for them to be separated much more than they would like. It is not unusual for mothers to approach Sister Loretta and ask that she be sure to hold their babies while they are away. Knowing she will be there for their little ones helps give parents peace of mind. “Our families love Sister Loretta,” said Dr. Jose. “She does more than hold the babies. She loves these babies and the babies know this.”

## HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Pray for the health of babies born with medical struggles, for those who care for them, and for those who love them.
- Volunteer to be a baby cuddler in a neonatal intensive care unit near you. Hospitals who offer these programs provide training for volunteers on how to provide therapeutic talk and touch to infants in the NICU.
- Be a support to a friend or family member with a newborn. Offer to care for older children, cook a meal, or run errands.
- Do you knit or crochet? Find out whether your local hospital needs hats, blankets, and booties for its littlest patients. If so, start a knitting or crocheting group dedicated to providing them.



*Sister Loretta spends time with Judean Crosby and her baby girl. The relationships that Sister Loretta builds with families in the NICU often extend beyond the hospital. It is not unusual for her to keep in touch with parents and their children as babies who spent their first weeks in intensive care continue to grow and flourish at home.*



## Keeping in Touch

Sister Loretta's devotion to the babies for whom she cares goes beyond the walls of the NICU. She has been known to visit babies at other hospitals when they get transferred and to keep in touch with families once the babies go home. "Parents are very thankful for her and she really becomes part of their lives," said Brigitte. "She goes to countless Christenings and birthday parties."

That is true for Jadeison and his parents who still visit Sister Loretta regularly. "She is such a sweetheart, so warmhearted," said Aciela. "When we go to her house, Jadeison runs up to her, hugs her, and sits on her lap. She sings him the song she used to sing to him in the hospital." When Jadeison turned one recently, Sister Loretta got a cake and threw a little party for him.

"I get so involved with these babies," said Sister Loretta. "I have pictures all over my house of babies I have cuddled. I feel like a mother to 100 babies!"

"Sister Loretta is a volunteer but she makes it like a job," said Dr. Jose. "She is very dedicated and she has a gift for what she does."



▲ *Even when she is unable to take the infants out of their incubators, Sister Loretta uses the power of touch and gentle talk to calm them, fostering a deep human connection.*

She has an aura around her—always smiling, full of love and compassion. She is a positive influence for everyone."

"We all love Sister Loretta," said Brigitte. "She is caring, kind, gentle, loving, and very comforting. We often tell her we need her to cuddle the staff!"

Always thinking of others, Sister Loretta soon may be cutting back her cuddling schedule to two days a week. She is reluctant to give up a day but says she feels an obligation to make a space available for others who want to experience the joy of serving in the NICU. In the meantime, she says she is immensely grateful for the work she is doing. "I thank God every day that I found this ministry," said Sister Loretta. "I will do it until I can't do it anymore." ■

For more information or comments on this article, contact [goodnews@osfphila.org](mailto:goodnews@osfphila.org).

# SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

*Everyone has within a piece of good news.*

— Anne Frank (adapted)

See more good news at [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org)



(L-R) Sisters Maureen Fox, Loretta Schaff, Sara Marks, and Ruth Bernadette O'Connor were part of more than 100 pilgrims who traveled to El Salvador to mark the 35th anniversary of the martyrdom of four American church women.

## Pilgrimage to El Salvador

Last November marked the 35th anniversary of the torture and death of four church women in El Salvador: Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, lay missionary Jean Donovan, and Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel. Sisters Loretta Schaff, Maureen Fox, Ruth Bernadette O'Connor, and Sara Marks represented our congregation in this year's pilgrimage. Sisters Ruth and Loretta both described the highlights of the pilgrimage on their Facebook pages and Sara created a special travel blog in which to record her memories. For each of the sisters, one of the highlights was a visit to Comunidad Esquipulos, the site where the four women were murdered. A church now stands there in memory of the events. There the pilgrims heard testimonies from people who knew the missionaries. As Sister Loretta explained, "Their spirits are still very alive among the people after 35 years."

## GoodWeave: Weaving Freedom

GoodWeave is a recipient of one of our congregation's social justice grants. Aware that the handmade carpet industry exploits nearly 250,000 children, the organization works in Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. to "stop child labor in the carpet industry and to replicate its market-based approach in other sectors." Companies licensed by GoodWeave agree to open all levels of their supply chains for random, surprise inspection, thus unlocking doors where children toil in obscurity and ensuring that if a child is hidden away in a sub-contracted workshop, that child will be found and protected. As a result, in 2015, 65 children were rescued from labor on the looms and provided rehabilitation and 50,000 weaving families were reached through GoodWeave's supply chain and community-based programs in India, Nepal, and Afghanistan. Nearly 4,000 children were offered education and thousands of others were deterred from entering the workforce.



*The GoodWeave label is the best assurance that no child labor was used in the making of your rug.*



Photo © U. Roberto Romano, courtesy of GoodWeave

## Clare of Assisi House Opening Soon

Clare of Assisi House is moving closer to an opening date and two of our sisters are actively involved, not only in making that opening happen but also in carrying out the facility's mission. Robin Ball, the founder and director of Clare of Assisi House, envisions a place in the Reading and Berks County area where women coming out of prison can find both a second chance and a safe and supportive environment. Sisters Eileen Doherty and Kathleen McMullin, assistant director and program director respectively, will assist staff in providing multiple services to help the women reintegrate back into society and to regain their independence. The team has established partnerships with various local organizations and has held various fundraisers to translate their plans into realities.



## Franciscan Volunteer Program is Thriving

Our *Franciscan Volunteers: No Risk, No Gain* program is thriving! Hopefully we are finding ourselves on a path to becoming financially self-sustaining. Ministry-wise we have been blessed with four amazing and talented young people who not only share their joy of growing in community with our sisters, but who also bring a mutually reciprocated joy to community. As they continue to live their year with us, we invite you to check out a few sources of reading more about them! The Franciscan Volunteers now have both a Twitter account, (@NoRisk\_NoGain), as



well as a blog which can be found at [franciscanvolunteers.tumblr.com](http://franciscanvolunteers.tumblr.com). And we're making plans to expand the program. Last September Sara Marks, the program's director, met with our sisters in Tacoma, Washington. They are in the midst of making plans for a second volunteer house to be opened on the west coast in the fall of 2016. Ministry sites will include St. Ann's Convent, St. Francis House, Catholic Community Services, and St. Leo's Parish L'Honey Program. Stay posted for more details on these ministry sites as well as the logistics of the volunteer community in the west.



On Saturday, November 21, the Philadelphia Area Coalition for Responsible Investment (PACRI) held a half-day seminar on climate change at Neumann University's Meagher Theater. Before an enthusiastic crowd of more than 150, keynote speaker Sister Ilia Delio, OSF (pictured, left) spoke of her perspectives on Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si," as well as the connections between cosmology and faith. Following the keynote address, separate panels titled "Investing in a Time of Change" and "Grassroots Strategies for Effective Change" addressed specific concerns for our future. Sister Nora Nash (pictured, right) explored the risks and rewards of climate sensitive investments, the merits of impact investing, and the implications of investing decisions on environmental policy.



## In Memoriam

Sister Marie Evelyn Sinnett  
(formerly Sister Mary Leonard)  
October 10, 2015

Sister Francis Carmel Gonzon  
October 14, 2015

Sister Mary Matthew Cola  
October 26, 2015

Sister Mary Peter Kerner  
October 31, 2015

Sister Joella Francis Campbell  
November 15, 2015

Sister Claudia Cunningham  
November 19, 2015

Sister Anne Charles  
(formerly Sister Philomene Marie)  
December 5, 2015

CELEBRATING

# Jubilee

AS SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF  
PHILADELPHIA

*Congratulations to the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia celebrating milestones in their religious life! Join with us in congratulating them on many years of service to the people of God as Sisters of St. Francis.*

80 years  
Professed 1936  
RUBY JUBILARIAN

SISTER CATHERINE GEORGINE PORTNER

75 years  
Professed 1941  
DIAMOND JUBILARIANS

SISTER ELIZABETH DOYLE

SISTER ANN JOSEPH HARTMAN

SISTER KATHLEEN TOBIN

70 years  
Professed 1946  
DIAMOND JUBILARIANS

SISTER TRINITA BALBACH

SISTER MARY TERESA CARMICHAEL

SISTER ROSA CARMICHAEL

SISTER MANETTO RUOCCHIO

50 years  
Professed 1966  
GOLDEN JUBILARIANS

SISTER BERNADETTE BRAZIL

SISTER MARY JO CHAVES

SISTER JOANNE CLAVEL

SISTER ROSE TERESA DVORAK

SISTER RUTH MARIE FISHBURN

SISTER MARIJANE HRESKO

SISTER MARY KENNEDY

SISTER JEAN MARGARET McDEVITT

SISTER JEANNE PATRICE NISLEY

SISTER MARILYN CLARE SANDS

SISTER JOHN CELESTE WEITZEL

*Recognize a name? Would you like to reconnect or send a congratulatory note? Send communications to Florence Smith; 609 S. Convent Road; Aston, PA 19014; [communications@osfphila.org](mailto:communications@osfphila.org)*

► *Julie's quiet demeanor and gentle smile when she is working with the sisters create an aura of calm that is both healing and relaxing.*



# FoCUS

JULIE MARTINEZ



"OVER THE YEARS I HAVE SEEN  
QUITE A FEW SISTERS DEAL WITH  
PAIN AND ILLNESS. I HOPE I  
HAVE MADE THEIR JOURNEY A  
LITTLE EASIER."

– JULIE MARTINEZ

Twenty-five years ago, Julie Martinez worked at a local geriatric center as well as for a healthcare agency that sent her to various facilities. When a friend told her about Assisi House, our retirement residence in Aston, Pennsylvania, Julie applied and was initially hired as a medicine nurse working evenings from four to nine. "After one month I was offered full-time work," she said. "I gave two weeks' notice and never looked back."

Julie's responsibilities in caring for our sisters require her to distribute medications, perform necessary treatments, and remain alert to safety issues and the general well-being of her patients. However, she is quick to recall the influence of Sister Rosa Mystica, her initial supervisor at Assisi House. "She believed in teamwork," she explained. This concept apparently continues to motivate her. Sister Rose Raymond Barba, assistant administrator at Assisi House, shared a similar assessment of Julie. "She goes over and above her responsibilities," Sister Rose remarked. "Julie is an unassuming soul who puts the needs of others, especially our sisters, before her own. She preaches the Gospel, not so much with words but with her daily activities—truly Franciscan!"

Assisi House administrator, Sister Jane LaManna, also sees Julie as someone who carries out our Franciscan values and mission in her relationship with the sisters. "Julie is a wonderful, compassionate nurse—a strong advocate of person-centered care," Sister Jane explained. "She gives each sister special attention without counting the cost—all is a labor of love." Then she added, "Julie is family to us and she daily exemplifies our values of relationship, collaboration, and stewardship."

Julie most likely would not describe herself in terms like "Franciscan" and "sharing the mission." She clearly experiences, however, a sense of family with the sisters with whom she ministers. "I have been there when there was laughter and when there were tears," she recalled—"tears of laughter at an accomplishment or tears of sadness at the loss of a family member or close friend. I would not trade my experience at Assisi House for anything in the world!"

◀ *Julie (center) celebrated 25 years of service with our sisters at Assisi House.*





# Let's Hear From You!

- \_\_\_\_ Please add my name to the mailing list for *Good News*. (This is a secure list to which no other mail will be sent unless you request to receive information.)
- \_\_\_\_ I am receiving duplicate copies of *Good News*. Enclosed is the address label that contains the mailing address to be removed from your mailing list. (Mail card and address label in envelope.)
- \_\_\_\_ Please remove my name from the mailing list; I no longer wish to receive *Good News*.
- \_\_\_\_ Please add my email to your e-list so I can receive my copy electronically. In addition, please remove my address from your hard copy list.
- \_\_\_\_ Please send a copy of *Good News* to the following individual:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

## Select areas of interest to receive information about the congregation.

- ☐ Companion Program ☐ Franciscan Spiritual Centers (select one): ☐ Aston, PA ☐ Milwaukie, OR ☐ Young Franciscans
- ☐ Community Supported Agriculture: ☐ Sisters of St. Francis Foundation ☐ Vocations ☐ Franciscan Volunteer Program  
Red Hill Farm, Aston PA



### Join Our E-News Mailing List!

Visit [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org) to sign-up. It only takes a minute to enter your email address to receive prayerful, entertaining, and informative e-news from the Sisters of St. Francis twice per month.



### Join us!



Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia



SrsOfStFrancis

Link directly to our pages from our website homepage: [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org)

## SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS FOUNDATION



## Assisi House Needs a New Roof. Your Help is Needed.

If you have ever had to replace the roof on your house, you know well how expensive it is. The Sisters of St. Francis face the same thing with Assisi House, their retirement home in Aston. The facility's roof, with a footage in excess of 68,000 square feet, is already past the 20-year warranty. This past summer's storms resulted in major damage to the roof. Replacing it is now a necessity, but will cost almost \$400,000!

This is an unplanned expense causing a major challenge for the sisters. Your support is appreciated.

☐ **Yes, I would like to help.** Please accept my donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to assist with the replacement of the Assisi House roof.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

STREET ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

**Please mail your donation to:** Sisters of St. Francis Foundation, 609 S. Convent Road, Aston, PA 19014. **You can also make your donation online by visiting our website:** [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org), and clicking on the top right tab, "Your Gift." **For more information contact:** Sr. Mary Vandergeest, OSF, (610) 558-7713, [mvdgeest@osfphila.org](mailto:mvdgeest@osfphila.org).

Please tear out this page and mail completed to:

GOOD NEWS, Communications Office, Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, 609 S. Convent Road, Aston, PA 19014-1207

Visit us online at [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org) or call us at (610) 558-7726

The Sisters of St. Francis  
of Philadelphia  
609 S. Convent Road  
Aston, PA 19014-1207  
Change Service Requested

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
ROYERSFORD, PA  
PERMIT NO. 539



Visit our website at [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org)

► In 1900 students in Sister Claude McKelvey's first and second grade class sit politely for a picture at St. Joseph Orphanage in Spokane, Washington. Opening in 1890, St. Joseph's was the Sisters of St. Francis' first ministry in the diocese. Today 125 years later, the sisters are celebrated for the many ways in which they have been and continue to be of service to the people in the area. Read more of our great history in the Spokane area and the wondrous anniversary celebration on page 4.



## Vigil to End Gun Violence

Like many Americans the Sisters of St. Francis are concerned about the increasing number of mass shootings and are working to raise consciousness about the need to promote peace and reject violence, especially gun violence. On Friday, December 11, about 50 of our sisters and friends gathered outside the motherhouse property for a silent vigil. We joined in solidarity with thousands of others throughout the country who were engaged in similar vigils and gatherings. Many of the participants carried signs enumerating the number of deaths in various parts of the U.S. in recent years—including in our own Delaware County.

*At the close of our silent vigil calling awareness to the tragic effects of gun violence, we joined in singing "We Shall Overcome."*



## SAVE THE DATES

Join us for our inaugural  
**Franciscan  
Night!**



► April 16, 2016 from 7 - 10 P.M.  
Our Lady of Angels Convent

Enjoy an evening of food, games,  
entertainment, and a silent auction  
benefiting our retired sisters

22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Sisters of St. Francis  
**Golf Tournament**

► September 12, 2016  
Radley Run Country Club

