

Volume 19.3 Winter 2016

# Good NEWS

A Publication of THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

Also in this issue:

- Light Amidst Darkness:  
Offering Hope to Asylum  
Seekers
- People & Places
- Sharing the Good News

Providing  
Meals *and*  
So Much More  
*at St. Francis Inn*

## 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

**R**ecently I saw the photograph of the five-year-old boy, Omran Daqneesh, sitting in an ambulance after being rescued from a building hit by an airstrike in Aleppo, Syria. Bleeding and covered in dust, he sat still and silent. His eyes showed he was in shock. I was haunted by that image and wondered about his future. I can't imagine how lonely he must be. How many people suffer this same violence and loneliness daily? How do they recover? Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, said, “We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes from community.”



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

The articles in this issue of Good News give witness to lives being transformed, not only by the service rendered but more by the love conveyed and the community formed. In Baltimore, Sister Anne Patrice Hefner ministers with Asylee Women Enterprise. AWE is a collaborative effort of eight congregations of women religious providing transitional housing, education, and employment readiness to those seeking asylum. The women come to the United States requesting protection from persecution because of their race, religion, political affiliation, or national origin. In the process, the volunteers at AWE become their new family—supporting them through the long immigration process. Here the women can rebuild their lives through love and community.

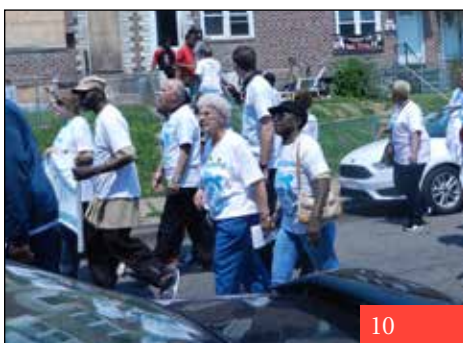
St. Francis Inn is no ordinary soup kitchen. The inn has been serving meals to the neediest families and individuals in Philadelphia for over 35 years. They nourish people, not only with food but also with respect and dignity. Sister Leslie Birks is one of the team who creates a warm, loving atmosphere for all the guests. The highly committed staff pray, celebrate Mass, and share community time together. Their community life empowers the mission. Guests who enter St. Francis Inn feeling isolated depart knowing they are valued and connected. They are family.

Let us pray for the many people throughout the world who are alone and in great need. May we do whatever we can—where we are—to build community and welcome all with deep respect.

Blessings,

*Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty, OSF*





VOLUME 19.3 WINTER 2016

# INSIDE *Good* NEWS CONTENTS

## Point of View. .... 2

## Light Amidst Darkness: Offering Hope to Asylum Seekers. .... 4

*Asylee Women Enterprise (AWE) in Baltimore, Maryland, helps those seeking asylum to rebuild their lives and their spirits by providing transitional housing, community, and other supportive services. Sister Anne Patrice Hefner works closely with the women at the center and offers hope and support. In addition, she developed the volunteer program and helps wherever needed.*

Written by Deb Litman

Photography by Andrea Cipraini-Mecchi

## People & Places ..... 10

## Providing Meals and So Much More at St. Francis Inn ..... 12

*Sister Leslie Birks, along with all the other staff and volunteers at St. Francis Inn in Philadelphia, work tirelessly to feed those who are poor. However, that means more than just providing meals. It means feeding the person's soul, treating them with dignity, and offering other services that provide a hand-up in life—building relationships that build community.*

Written by Deb Litman

Photography by Andrea Cipraini-Mecchi

## Sharing the Good News ..... 16

## Focus. .... 18

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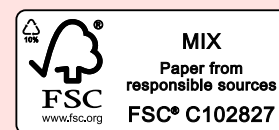
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The purpose of *Good News* is to further the Gospel mission of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia by sharing the good news of the congregation with our friends, family, companions, and sisters. Through this publication, we hope to share the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

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**On the cover:** Arnetta gives Sister Leslie Birks a big hug while waiting in line. Sister Leslie is a loved and trusted friend to guests who visit St. Francis Inn in search of hot meals and friendly faces.

“THESE WOMEN DIDN'T COME HERE  
FOR A BETTER LIFE. THEY CAME HERE  
TO SAVE THEIR LIVES.”

# Light Amidst Darkness



## *Offering Hope to Asylum Seekers*

◀ Sister Anne Patrice Hefner (center) talks with Catholic High grad and volunteer Arnelle Fonlon. Arnelle, whose parents immigrated from Cameroon, helps to teach English at AWE. Volunteers like Arnelle make many of the AWE's programs possible.

Just after Christmas in 2010, Molly Corbett received a phone call from the United Way looking for help housing Amina, a refugee from Afghanistan who was eight months pregnant and seeking asylum in the United States. The woman had already been turned away from one nonprofit and many others were closed for the holiday. Amina had nowhere to go.

Molly, who was working as a development consultant for the Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore at the time, turned to her employers for help. Thinking they had about four weeks before Amina's baby was born, the Benedictines welcomed Amina into the monastery until a more traditional home for

a mother and child could be found. When the baby—a boy named Aasim—was born just six days later, he was delivered pro bono at Mercy Medical Center and Amina was placed in contact with an attorney to work with her on an application for asylum. The birth of this child and the realization of the needs of women seeking asylum eventually gave birth to Asylee Women Enterprise (AWE).

After discharge from the hospital, mother and son returned to Emmanuel Monastery, a community of 19 Benedictine sisters, which they ended up calling home for two years. The arrangement gave Amina the support she needed and brought a powerful

*continued on page 6*





*This French-speaking woman from the Democratic Republic of Congo is seeking asylum in the United States. She lives with a young host couple and has been teaching herself English online. Here she treasures what most take for granted—a fresh, clean glass of water.*

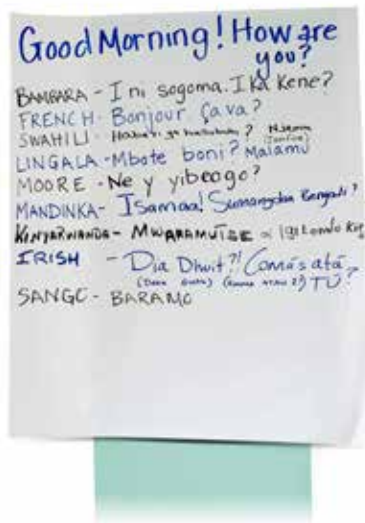
*In addition to daily living support, AWE partners with Tahirih to provide legal services and Intercultural Counseling Connections to provide mental health services.*



► Learning to speak English is an essential step to becoming independent in the United States.

Sister John, SSND, teaches English to a woman from West Africa who arrived at AWE nine months ago. In addition to teaching ESL, volunteers work with asylum seekers on such skills as navigating the public transportation system and applying for employment.

AWE OFFERS INDIVIDUALS A PLACE TO BE SAFE AND TO FEEL EMPOWERED TO MOVE FORWARD WITH LIFE WITH THE SUPPORT OF GOOD FRIENDS AND A NEW FAMILY.



Handmade signs like this hang in various parts of the living space so that people can address each other in their native language.



new sense of purpose to the older sisters at the convent. As positive as the experience was, it also highlighted the incredible lack of housing and services for asylum seekers in the city. “I discovered that there literally were no housing opportunities in Baltimore for people seeking asylum,” said Molly.

That meant that asylum seekers who, by definition are fleeing persecution in their home countries, are left with nowhere to go. Despite the fact that asylum seekers are in the United States legally, they can’t receive any government benefits until their asylum has been decided—a process that can take two to three years. That means no food stamps, no Medicaid, no job placement, no

case management services. In fact, asylees must wait 150 days from the time they file their asylum applications just to apply for a work permit. Due to backlogs, it is often months after the application that a work permit is actually received. “During that time they really have nothing,” said Sister Anne Patrice Hefner, a Sister of St. Francis of Philadelphia, who has worked at AWE for the past year and a half.

In response to the unfilled need, Molly began calling around to congregations of women religious looking for help. In the end, eight congregations—the Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, the Grey Nuns



of the Sacred Heart, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill, and the Sisters of Bon Secours—came together to create Asylee Women Enterprise. AWE helps those seeking asylum to rebuild their lives and their spirits by providing transitional housing, a nurturing community, and a host of supportive services. “These women didn’t come here for a better life. They came here to save their lives,” said Molly. “Their fear of going home is so real that they will go without shelter and without eating to make sure they are here legally.”

## Developing A Solution

Finding a safe, stable place to live is the first order of business for people seeking asylum in the United States. AWE arranges housing for each woman based on her individual needs and the availability of housing. “There was space open in convents and who better to offer hospitality!” said Molly. “Sisters know how to live in community. Many of the asylum seekers also come from cultures where they live in community but they come here alone—ripped from their families, their communities, their homes. Having a stable housing situation helps to decrease post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. AWE serves as a

foundation for building a community here.” Although it started as a small endeavor, AWE currently houses 24 asylum seekers—several in convents and motherhouses—making the organization the largest provider of housing for asylum seekers on the east coast and recently has begun working with men and children.

Although AWE houses a number of individuals, many more from throughout Baltimore and its surrounding suburbs receive support and services through AWE’s day programs. “We have individuals who come a distance for the programs we offer. It’s not just a ride down the street,” said Laura Wagner, first program director for AWE. “Almost everyone takes two buses to get to us.”

During the week, clients gather at the former St. Anthony’s Convent for various programs. On Mondays and Wednesdays, they can participate in AWE’s Employment and Education Program which includes formal English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, sessions on resume writing, interviewing skills, driver’s education, and financial literacy. “We stress work readiness and preparation so that when they are granted permission to work, the individuals have re-established a sense of confidence within their new environment,” Sister Anne explained.

Because AWE’s clients arrive with different levels of education, classes run the gamut from ESL for beginners to college level courses. Still, even those with graduate degrees and extensive work experience often find it extremely challenging to find work in the United States. Sister Anne remembers one woman from Rwanda with a master’s degree in organizational management who considered herself lucky to land a job selling shoes at a chain store. An Afghani woman who was fluent in three languages and had a medical school degree was relieved to find a part-time job as an interpreter at a local hospital. Those with less education and experience have an even more difficult time.

While Mondays and Wednesdays at AWE concentrate on work readiness, Tuesdays and Thursdays have a more laid-back, social atmosphere. On those days, clients at the center enjoy activities such as crafts, sewing, computer time, cooking, and yoga. “These are activities that build community,” said Laura. “They are vehicles for conversation.” These sessions are run primarily by volunteers, many of whom Sister Anne recruits. “I was thrilled when Sister Anne approached me and said that her community had a mission grant that would allow her to work here,” said Molly. “At that time I was the only staff person. Sister Anne has done a

*continued on page 8*

► **Volunteer Joanne Haney** helps a woman try to locate work online. Single moms with children seem to be the most vulnerable because they don’t have work authorization. Housing options are limited and childcare needs complicate a woman’s ability to find a job once she is granted work permits.



▲ **Volunteer Chloe Barnett** (left) has been teaching English at AWE for six months. Here she is leading a discussion on religion. AWE started working with men last year under a new grant they received to work with survivors of torture and asylum seekers.



▲ **Director Tiffany Nelms** (right) talks with Laura Wagner, program director, and Sister Anne Patrice as they make up a room at the convent. When the new shelter is ready, it will provide an additional 24 rooms. The new shelter is the former St. Anthony Convent in which our sisters resided for many years. Over the past few months, AWE has had many new clients with children. Although they can’t house them yet, they do provide them with case management and resources.

*continued from page 7*

wonderful job of developing the volunteer program.” Sister Anne also floats wherever needed—whether that be as an ESL instructor or a sous chef for a cooking class.

On one recent afternoon, volunteers brought in ingredients for a hands-on lesson on cooking traditional American dishes, a session that many of the women had requested. In addition, the women take turns making their own traditional dishes for others to try. “We had a really great moment recently when one of the women

*Today everyone at AWE is celebrating Teresa's birthday. Celebrations like this one provide a strong sense of family and community for people who have left many or all of their loved ones behind.*



*Sister Anne's dog Bella is also part of the extended AWE family and is always eager to spread love throughout the house.*

offered to cook fufu (a starchy accompaniment for stews, sauces, or relishes common in West Africa),” said Laura. “She made a relish with caterpillars and several of the women tried it. These kinds of activities not only build community and knowledge, they also highlight the fact that we all have something of value to share with one another.”

## Making A Connection

That kind of sharing—of knowledge, of fears, of burdens, and of joys—is perhaps the most crucial component of what AWE offers to asylum seekers as they navigate the long and lonely asylum process. Most of the

clients have no family in the United States. AWE volunteers and other asylum seekers become their new family, standing with them, not only through the immigration process but also during the ups and downs of adjusting to a new life.

The AWE community is there to drive clients to attorney visits and doctor appointments and to attend Immigration Court with them. When one woman had surgery recently, staff, volunteers, and fellow asylees rallied around her—accompanying her to the hospital, helping with meals, and keeping her company.

“Asylum seekers have been fleeing their countries. Their lives have been in danger. Many of them tend to self-isolate,” said Sister Anne. “That is why the programs we provide are so important. It is how a good support system develops.”

Though the clients at the center arrive frightened and reluctant, Sister Anne says she marvels at the change that comes about as they begin to trust in the safety of their new situation and develop new and meaningful relationships. “At first you can feel the waves of sadness coming off them. They cannot sleep. They have nightmares,” she said. “But slowly, you can see the improvement. You see relief.”

The clients also share holidays and traditions from the many parts of the world from which they hail. They celebrate one another's birthdays with food and even impromptu dance parties. Slowly joy begins to creep back into their lives—sometimes through the most mundane of tasks made special by having someone with whom to share them. “One of the most wonderful times I have had was shopping for jeans with a 22-year old woman,” said Sister Anne. “For her it was something so age-appropriate after going through so much for a young person. We were laughing so hard. We were like grandmother and granddaughter!”

Sister Anne builds meaningful relationships with each of the clients at AWE and genuinely shares in their journeys. She goes to dinner with them, stops by the stores where they are working to offer encouragement, and gleefully texts back congratulations when the women send her photos of a new





*Yanks arrived at AWE in September 2015. He is a devout Muslim and a hard-working gardener. This is the first year of the extensive garden at the center—thanks to the help of five volunteers from the University of Maryland who installed the raised beds and planted the original seedlings. This garden is valuable because it not only provides fresh food for participants, but also is a way for participants to give back and be of service.*

car or the announcement of a new job. “Many of the women consider Sister Anne like a grandmother,” said Molly. “She is dedicated to meeting their needs in any way possible and she appreciates and celebrates their spirits.”

This includes bringing in a spiritual component for those individuals who are looking for that. Many clients—be they Christian, Muslim, or Hindu—ask Sister Anne to pray

with them or for them, a request that she is honored and happy to accommodate. “My friends tell me that it is obvious that I love these women,” she said. “And they are right. I do.” Many people have benefitted from what Sister Anne calls “the Sister network.” Asylee Women Enterprise provides more than just a bed and shelter. It provides a home—a place for these women, men, and children to lay their heads and worries, a



place to be safe and to feel empowered to move forward with life with the support of good friends and a new family. ■

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

## HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Educate yourself about human rights abuses around the world.
- Sign a petition or write a letter to your congressional representatives urging them to provide the appropriations necessary to ensure that refugees have the support they need.
- Volunteer with a program that works with refugees and asylum seekers. These centers are always looking for attorneys, law students, healthcare professionals, interpreters, and other caring individuals to assist in their efforts.
- Donate items such as clothing, blankets, pencils and paper, and toiletries to a center that works with refugees and asylum seekers.
- Employ a refugee. Many refugees are highly educated and may have been professionals or small business owners in their home countries. They bring a wealth of knowledge and skills to the job and are motivated by a strong desire to regain self-sufficiency and financial stability.





◀ *Companions Phyllis Petryk, Marge Mikulski, and Mary Buggy absorb the richness of Sr. Rose Mary Eve Holter's presentation.*

*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.*

## PENNSYLVANIA

Companions and sisters gathered at Our Lady of Angels Convent in early March for the annual Companion Retreat Day. Presenter Sister Rose Mary Eve Holter developed the theme "Living in the Heart of God's Mercy" in ways that touched hearts and opened minds. Using music, her own personal story, quiet time, and sharings from various writers, she provided what can only be identified as "nuggets of wisdom"—concepts that attendees might carry away in notes or in their hearts for further reflection. Proceeds from a flea market table and a raffle of two gift baskets contributed by Companions Nancy Opalski and Pat Langan added to a scholarship fund for companions who might wish to attend the yearly retreat but who might need an assist with funding.



## WASHINGTON

The Puyallup Lions Club recently presented **Sister Patricia Michalek** with the Melvin Jones Fellowship Award which honors individuals who demonstrate dedicated humanitarian services. Sister Patricia's service is particularly evident in her work at St. Francis House which was started in the 1970s by her parents, Stan

and Doris Michalek, to serve the needs of people living below the poverty line. Sister Pat and her volunteers continue that mission today—providing meals, clothing, and furniture to individuals and families in a way that helps them over the rough times. Acknowledging Sister Pat's humanitarian efforts, John Budzak, Jr., secretary of the Puyallup Lions Club, said, "She works hard for the underprivileged and does it so quietly nobody knows about it or who she is."



## PENNSYLVANIA

The summer 2016 issue of Neumann University's *Accent* recognized various achievements of our sisters. **Sister Linda Sario** received the Charles R. and Mary F. Lindback Foundation Award for Distinguished Teaching. **Sister Elizabeth Kirk** received the Presidential Humanitarian Award. **Sister Christopher Marie Wagner** received the President's Distinguished Alumni Award. **Sister Deborah Krist** was cited as Distinguished Alumni for Education and Human Services. **Sisters Marguerite O'Beirne and Diane Tomkinson** were noted for academic efforts. Sister Marguerite addressed a session of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. Sister Diane organized and presided over a series of papers on "Medieval Franciscan Women as Theologians" and facilitated a meeting at the Medieval Congress. The publication also recalled a 2005 effort by Sister Corda Marie Bergbauer's niece, Regina Black Lennox, to establish a scholarship in her aunt's name. That initial effort—a luncheon—netted almost \$10,000. Grants from that scholarship have helped 11 deserving students.





*Sister Jean Rupertus (center) joined Chester residents to walk through the streets singing and praying for peace.*

## PENNSYLVANIA

Some of our sisters joined with local groups in several justice and peace efforts. In May the **sisters from Anna's Place** traveled with 75 Chester residents to attend the Rally for Universal Backgrounds on Gun Sales held at the state capitol in Harrisburg. The Chester group was connected with Delaware County United for Sensible Gun Policy. In May, a group of sisters joined the men, women, and children who walked through parts of Chester singing and praying. Walkers wore t-shirts reading "Building a Better Chester. We See You, We Hear You, We Care About You." The walk was one of several to be held throughout the year in sections described as "high crime areas." Sister Jean Rupertus described the experience as "the closest experience to 'church' that I think the God of many names envisions."



## WISCONSIN

**The Franciscan Federation** is 50 years old! Every aspect of the 2016 conference helped to develop the theme, "Fifty Years of God's Love and Mercy." Presentations by Sister Mary Elizabeth Imler, OSF; Sister Edna Michel, OSF; and Father David Couturier invited attendees to view those 50 years by recalling the past, examining the present, and looking to the future. Special recogni-

tion was given to the women and men who, over these 50 years, served as either president or executive director of the federation. Our own sisters—Sisters Rose Cecilia Case and Madonna Marie Cunningham—both served terms as president. Sister Kathleen Moffatt served as executive director and continues to be actively involved in various capacities.



*(L-R) Sisters Joan Dreisbach, Ann Forrest, Joan Cooper, and Anne Leo Broadhurst take turns sharing their thoughts on the latest read, *Among Schoolchildren*.*



## PENNSYLVANIA

There's something new afoot in Assisi House—a book club initiated last fall by **Sister Ann Forrest**! Each month a group of residents gather to discuss the current month's selection. Their most recent choice was Tracy Kidder's *Among Schoolchildren*—an appropriate selection because many of

the sisters can relate to the challenges and joys of teaching. Sister Ann works through a program at the Aston Library to acquire both multiple copies of the same book and a discussion guide. The sisters agree that, in addition to what they learn from the book itself, they also learn from the shared discussion.



## MASSACHUSETTS

**Sister Josephine Harty** was a recipient of the 2015 Cheverus Award, an award that is named after Bishop Jean-Louis Lefebvre de Cheverus, the founding bishop of Boston. Recipients include laity, religious, and deacons and is given to recognize service to the Church and to the people of God. Sister Josephine was nominated as a recipient because of her many years of service at Our Lady of the Assumption School and Parish. Father Paul Ritt, a member of Lynnfield's Catholic Collaborative, acknowledged her years of service in the Archdiocese of Boston saying, "She serves with humility and dedication to her students and she's much beloved by faculty and students and parents over the years."

► Sister Leslie is available to help guests in large and small ways wherever and whenever she is needed. Here she stops to help 9-year-old Isabella with her hair bow.



▼ Volunteers serve a sit-down table service meal in the dining room every day of the year. In addition, a breakfast of hot or cold cereal or pastries is provided three times a week.



▼ Visitors to Marie's Closet, a clothes bank run by St. Francis Inn staff and volunteers, receive vouchers for items such as clothing, shoes, warm winter coats, hats, and gloves. Those without vouchers or who exceed their voucher limit can purchase items for \$1 each.



▲ David G. Fields (left) waits with friends in the 94 degree heat for hours before the inn opens. He pushes a shopping cart and proudly claims it as his, saying that his mother always taught him to never be ashamed, to always be proud.

# Providing Meals *and* So

“IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT FOOD. IT IS ABOUT BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.”

Arnetta gives Sister Leslie a big hug while Betty waits patiently. Betty, looking for some comfort herself, has just arrived from a funeral for her 15-year old nephew who was shot by a 17-year-old boy.



Every seat at St. Francis Inn is taken for the dinner rush on this delightful evening. Diners sit around tables talking as wait staff hurry back and forth to deliver meals and refill drinks. The atmosphere is familiar. The regulars check in with one another and newcomers are welcomed with warm smiles and hearty helpings. Located on Kensington Avenue in Philadelphia, St. Francis Inn serves between 250 and 400 people each day. Although there are lines to get in the door, this is not one of Philly’s many posh and pricey bistros. A different kind of eatery, St. Francis Inn is as busy as the hippest hot spot in

Center City. But here the food is donated, staff members volunteer their time, and the meals are free.

Since 1979 St. Francis Inn has been serving up sustenance to those in need. A little different than many soup kitchens, the inn trades cafeteria-style lines for traditional table service. This allows guests to be served with an extra helping of dignity and respect and encourages folks to socialize, feeding their spirits along with their bodies.

“There is a sense of community among the people who come and the staff,” said Sister Leslie Birks who has been ministering at St.



*The St. Francis Inn sits at the edge of the newly trendy area of Kensington in Philadelphia. The sisters and brothers who minister there live next door to the kitchen and serve hot meals to between 250 and 400 people each day.*



# Much More

## *at St. Francis Inn*

Francis Inn for 26 years. “We know them. They know us.”

### Feeding Body And Soul

The origin of St. Francis Inn dates back to September 1977 when two Franciscan Friars came to Philadelphia to begin a ministry with those who are poor. They did not have a specific notion about the best way to serve those in need when they first arrived, so they lived on the streets for a while to learn firsthand what the needs of the people really were. “What they came away with was that those who are poor in

Philadelphia needed to have decent food and to see the Gospel in action,” said Father Michael Duffy who has ministered at St. Francis Inn for 28 years.

St. Francis Inn opened its doors in December of 1979 and staff members and volunteers have served a meal there every day since. The ministry relies on the generosity of local grocery stores and businesses as well as churches and individuals for food donations. “We are blessed,” said Sister Leslie.

The inn is a bustling place. The staff work all day to pick-up, sort, cook, and plate

food. That includes Sister Leslie, a Sister of St. Francis of Philadelphia, who, while small in stature, is not short on stamina. “Sister Leslie is a bundle of energy,” said Father Michael. “I never see her sit down. She is always cleaning, sorting, cooking, and organizing.”

Around four o’clock, people start lining up outside for dinner. “By 4:30 it is a madhouse,” Father Michael said. “Three hundred people are lined up to come in and 48 people are being served at a time. The kitchen, the servers, the bussers, and the clean-up crew are all working nonstop.

*continued on page 14*





▲ Each day before dinner service begins, everyone joins together for a moment of prayer. Although the work at St. Francis Inn is exhausting, the staff and volunteers who minister there agree that the spiritual rewards are extraordinary.

▼ Volunteer Madeline Budway and her husband, John, travel up from Raleigh, North Carolina, two months out of the year to work at St. Francis Inn.



▲ Eighteen-year-old volunteer Casey Horner loads a tray before serving her table. Casey traveled with others from her church in North Jersey to volunteer for a week at the inn.



◀ Sixteen-year-old volunteer Skylar Andrade bakes cookies that will be served for dessert.



▲ Sister Mary Augustini and Father Michael Duffy work the door, counting heads and welcoming guests. Seniors are the first to be served at the inn.



At six o'clock the guests leave and we clean up, mop the floor, and prepare to do it all again the next day."

Despite the volume of guests, the inn retains a warm and friendly atmosphere—avoiding any sense of assembly line dining. "What is refreshing is how familial the whole thing feels even as we turn out over 400 meals in an hour and a half," said Kevin Cilano, a full-time staff member. "Sister Leslie is very mindful of people's experience of the place. She makes an extra effort to welcome people." Sister Leslie is quick to acknowledge, "It's not just about food. It is about building relationships—talking to people and sometimes just listening. It is about treating everybody with respect and helping where we can."

The comradery guests feel at the inn is an important component of the experience. Many of them are regulars for whom the

meal is just part of the draw. The senior citizens, in particular, look forward to the social component of the meals, hanging out in the dining room and the yard. One frequent guest, an elderly African American woman, shows up hours before each meal and settles in on a milk crate that she brings along with her. "This is where I meet my friends," she tells the staff.

For many guests, the staff at the inn are the closest thing they have to family. If they end up in the hospital or in jail, the inn is the first place they call. When they have a baby, they stop by before they go home. "It is a place where they are loved and accepted," said Father Michael.

## Managing Difficult Situations

St. Francis Inn serves families, singles, and seniors. Some are homeless. Many have a room where they can stay but no water or

electricity. Others have to choose between paying for rent or for food. In addition to poverty, some guests struggle with addiction and mental illness. As the end of the month approaches, the need for food assistance increases because food stamps and social security checks are depleted. "We have families using one can of tomato soup diluted six times to stretch it out for four kids," said Father Michael.

That kind of stress and strain may lead to frustrations that spill over into the St. Francis Inn dining room. "Most days things are fine but every once in a while there is a fight, or someone who has been beaten up comes in and needs help," said Sister Leslie. Sister Leslie is a valuable resource at these moments. "She commands respect and has an amazing ability to diffuse tense or violent situations," said Kevin. "I've seen her step between some big guys who are fighting and say, 'Let's not do this,' and they listen."



## Being A Different Kind Of Team

Although Father Michael calls Sister Leslie “One of the pillars of St. Francis Inn,” he is also quick to explain that the St. Francis Inn staff is a very special kind of team with a deep commitment to egalitarianism, faith, and service. They pray together, celebrate Mass together, share community dinners, and make retreats together. There is no hierarchy within the team. They take turns performing the tasks necessary to keep the inn running smoothly. “There is no boss,” said Father Michael. “We meet together and discuss what needs to be done and then we go to work together. We don’t seek to serve the poor. We seek to become poor and to serve our brothers and sisters.”

In addition to the team, volunteers come daily to help. This includes the breakfast crews who come in to serve the breakfast meal on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays as well as people who volunteer weekly at the main meal. Some volunteers join the staff for a month or more each year. Many youth, high school, college, and adult groups also come for a weekend or a full week to help prepare and serve meals.

“One of the volunteer groups was from a college in upstate New York,” said Father Michael. “One of the young women was serving a table where a particularly hard-nosed, surly guest was sitting. The guest asked the student where she was from and when the woman told her, the guest was so touched. She said, ‘You mean you came all the way down from New York just to serve us? Wow! Just when I thought there were no good people left in the world!’”

## Filling In The Gaps

In addition to dine-in meals, St. Francis Inn Ministries also provide monthly food baskets for individuals and families, as well as many other tangible and intangible resources to support the guests. There is a place at the inn to send mail and to use the phone. Guests can also select clothing items from Marie’s Closet, a clothes bank run by St. Francis Inn staff and volunteers. The closet supplies clothing and shoes for men, women, and children, providing between 300 and 400 changes of clothing each month.

Furthermore, the Urban Center provides social services to families and individuals who are dealing with issues related to poverty and/or homelessness. The center provides housing services that include assessment, information, and referrals on housing resources as well as case management services to families and individuals. The Thea Bowman Women’s Center is a day center open four days a week providing a safe and secure place for women. It also is a place to shower and do laundry. It seeks to be a supportive caring presence among those who are poor, offering a place where the marginalized can experience a sense of acceptance and belonging.

The vision for the St. Francis Inn Ministries is to respond to the current needs. “We do everything we can to use the resources we have to benefit the most people,” said Sister Leslie. Sister Leslie left teaching 26 years ago to follow Francis’ footsteps and work more closely with those who are poor. Working at St. Francis Inn allows her to live the

Gospel, to connect with people on a deeper level. “We are all broken,” said Sister Leslie. “Some of us wear our brokenness on the inside, others wear it on the outside for all to see. However, we are all God’s people and deserve love and respect. We are a family at St. Francis Inn and we are here for one another.” ■

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

## HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Pray for those dealing with hunger, homelessness, instability, mental illness, and addiction.
- Build personal relationships with people in your community who are struggling with poverty. Folks who lack financial stability often feel isolated. Being treated with dignity and respect can help them to restore hope in their lives.
- Look for ways to respond to the needs in your own back yard. Start by talking with key leaders in your community or surveying those around you about what they see as the most pressing issues.
- Volunteer your time and talents at a food pantry or soup kitchen near you.
- Make a regular donation of food, clothing, toiletries, diapers, or other items to a local center that serves the needs of those who are poor. Although many of these programs receive generous donations around the holidays, the need continues year-round.
- Advocate for jobs that pay a living wage, support for those who cannot work, and services for people with mental illness.



*Volunteers bag extra bread which will be left outside for visitors to take with them.*



*Sister Leslie boxes up food that will be delivered to families with children under 12 who can not get to the inn for a hot meal.*

# 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)

## Welcome Service for Immigrants

A number of our sisters in the Tacoma area are ministering with people being released from the Immigration Center. Sisters Carmel Gregg, Anne McNamara, Jude Connelly, Rochelle Liu, Joan Roddy, Marie Inez Gonzales, and Companion Mary Jones are part of a group called AID NW and help to cover the “Release Welcoming” component of the organization. At their worksite—a 31-foot motorhome—outside the Immigration Center, they help releasees reconnect with relatives who will arrange long distance transportation. The sisters provide transportation to the bus station or airport and for those in need, they pay bus fare. Housing is available for both women and men who have no relatives. “Releasees who are strangers to the U.S. or to Washington State and who have no personal contacts feel abandoned, anxious, and nervous,” explained Sister Marie Inez. “It is beautiful to see the relaxation and peace on their faces once they realize that we will get them to their destinations or help them get situated.”



▲ (L-R) Sister Rochelle Liu, coordinator Galen Hunt, a volunteer trainee, and Sister Marie Inez Gonzales are all working to meet the needs of individuals released from the Immigration Center in Tacoma, Washington

## Welcome Our New Candidate!



Sisters Carol Warnke, Christine Still, and Theresa Lamkin hosted a prayer service to mark Maria Anna Dela Paz's reception into Candidacy.

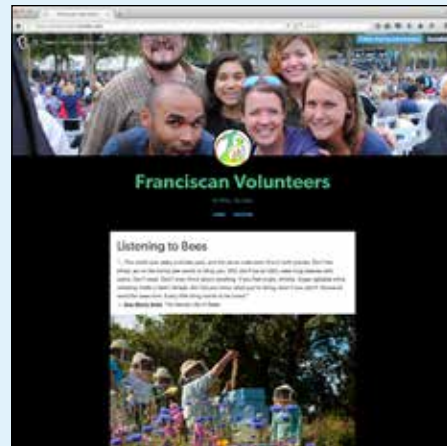
We welcome Maria Anna Dela Paz into our Candidacy Program. She has been in relationship with us since 2014, visits St. Ann's Convent regularly, and is a Companion in Faith. The sisters in the Tacoma area gathered on July 10 to welcome her with a ritual prayer service. Maria Anna currently shares community life with our sisters in Tacoma, Washington. She works as a senior advisor for the American Honors Program at Pierce College and will continue that work as she

begins candidacy. Please join us in praying for Maria Anna as she continues her discernment of religious life.

## Listening to the Bees: A Summer Immersion Program

Our *Franciscan Volunteers: No Risk, No Gain* Program implemented an immersion experience this summer. The weeklong program was held at L'Honey Project. Sara Marks, director of the volunteer program, accompanied the participants. The experience was one that grounded participants in the Franciscan charism of caring for creation and called them to remember Pope Francis' words in *Laudato Si*.

Reflections during the week were based on Chapter 4 of the encyclical on an integral ecology. Sara described the “life lessons” she learned from beekeeper Rick Samyn. “Rick’s gentleness with his ‘girls’ was endearing,” Sara explained, “and spoke the deep truth that Pope Francis shared about the interconnectedness of all creation.” To learn more about the experience, visit Sara’s blog at <http://franciscanvolunteers.tumblr.com>.





# Gathering Day Works to Transform Lives

Our 2016 Gathering Day was held in the Mirenda Center and was attended by sisters, companions, and former members. The day began with prayer and faith sharing on the theme “Transforming Life’s Challenges: A Mind, Body, and Spirit Perspective.” Dr. Robert Wicks discussed stress as a process rather than a cataclysmic event. Dr. Karen Albaugh outlined information on types of health and wellness and shared several ways of dealing with stress, including coloring, guided meditation, music, and affirmation reminders. Focusing on our 2014 chapter directives, the leadership team asked each attendee to commit in writing to a specific aspect of the directives for which she would pray. That sense of commitment continued during the liturgy. Sister Kathleen Flood renewed her vows as a Sister of St.

Francis of Philadelphia and our companions renewed their commitment to live out our Franciscan charism in their lives.



◀ Attendees at Gathering Day focus on their coloring project—one way recommended to relieve stress.



## In Memoriam

Sister Ann Rosaire Bradley  
May 28, 2016

Sister Theresa Mary Mich  
June 8, 2016

Sister Georgine Marie Smith  
June 9, 2016

Sister Elsa Vazquez  
(formerly Sister Maria Angelica)  
June 23, 2016

Sister Helen St. Paul Herberich  
July 3, 2016

Sister Jacqueline Christian  
(formerly Sister Andrew Marie)  
August 4, 2016

Sister Anthony Celine O’Leary  
September 2, 2016

# Under the Big Red Dome

Because visitors to our motherhouse are always so impressed by the beauty of our chapel and the somewhat “awed” sense of just being inside the large domed building, Sister Kathleen Parisi has been offering guided tours. The result has definitely been positive. She was even contacted by the Bethel Historical Society about adding the motherhouse to their list of tours. We also recently welcomed 27 people from Riddle Village, a nearby retirement community. That particular tour was scheduled by a former registrar from Neumann University, Larry Friedman, because he wanted his friends to meet the sisters and enjoy the beauty of the motherhouse. Several sisters assisted with the tour which ended with a delicious farm-to-table lunch prepared by our food services staff.

▶ Mike Sabolcik, a member of our food service staff, serves guests from Riddle Village. All ingredients for the lunch were fresh from our Red Hill Farm.



# Focus

## FRANK GIAMBOY

FRANK THOROUGHLY ENJOYS HELPING PROMOTE THE SISTERS AND THEIR MINISTRIES THROUGH HIS RADIO SHOW. "WHAT BETTER WAY TO GIVE BACK?"

► In his free time, Frank Giamboy likes to stay active with exercise or a round of golf. He is also a Civil War history and movie buff.



What most people don't know is that Frank Giamboy, financial advisor for Waddell & Reed, is also Frank Gregory, radio personality for WDEL 101.7 F.M. in Wilmington, Delaware. Listen to WDEL on Saturday mornings between the hours of 9 A.M. and noon, and you will hear his show, the Saturday Hot Spot—featuring special guests like the pet doctor, the antique toy expert, the psychic, and, at times, our very own Sister Corda Marie Bergbauer.

How Frank came to know the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia is an interesting story. During a particularly rough time in his life, he was dining at a local restaurant

and spotted Sister Corda having a meal in a booth nearby. Being the funny guy that he is—Frank used to do stand-up comedy in his younger years—he walked over to Sister Corda and made a joke, "I know you took a vow of poverty but I can fix that," and he handed her his card. Then he got serious and told her that he was having some difficulty and could use some prayers. Sister Corda, always willing to pray for those in need, immediately returned to the convent, went out to the Grotto, and prayed for Frank. She sent him a note and a great friendship ensued.

Since then Frank has helped further the mission of the sisters by inviting Sister Corda to appear on his radio show. She talks about the congregation and its ministries, the annual flea market that helps children in Africa, and other events that may be taking place. Frank remembers the first time she appeared on the show along with Sister Eileen Valerie

Kulacz. "It was Christmas time and I wanted to make it special for her, so I asked all the guests to bring in little gifts for her," he recalled. Frank has helped in other ways, too. He has participated in the Annual Golf Tournament and often donates event tickets and other goods to be sold at the flea market or given as door prizes.

Frank thoroughly enjoys helping promote the sisters and their ministries through his radio show. "What better way to give back?" he asks simply.



▲ Frank often stops by the convent to visit with Sister Corda. "His outgoing personality invites callers to the program. He gets everybody involved. He is truly a gift to his the listeners and to our congregation," she said.

► Frank Gregory (far right) interviews Ed Wuchter (left) and Ryan Dean (center) of Certitude Home Improvement during the Kennett Square Mushroom Festival. Ed and Ryan aren't just guests of the show. They are also financial clients of Frank as well.





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Red Hill Farm, Aston PA



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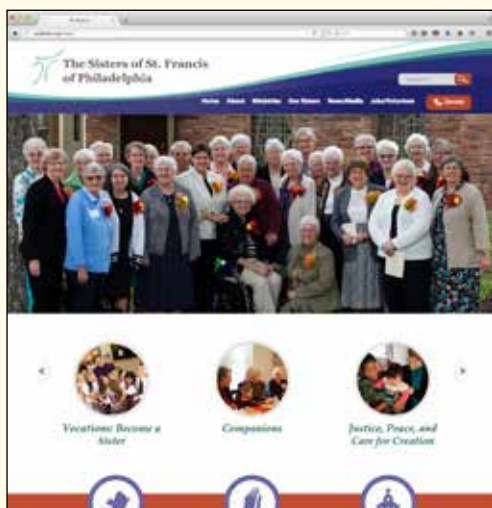


## Celebrating Milestones in Religious Life

On June 12, sisters, companions, and former members gathered in Our Lady of Angels Convent for the annual jubilee liturgy celebrated by Fr. Cyprian Rosen, OFM CAP. The jubilarians who live in Assisi House also held a special celebration on June 5. The 17 jubilarians celebrated 50, 70, 75, and 80 years of religious profession. During their collective 1,065 years of religious life, these women ministered in 26 dioceses, 14 states, and three countries—serving in education, healthcare, parish ministry, social services, congregational ministry, spiritual ministry, care of orphans, diocesan ministry, senior services, and caregiving.

◀ During the liturgy the jubilarians renewed the vows they had first professed 50, 70, 75, or 80 years ago.

## The Sisters of St. Francis Launch New Website



As the leaves on the trees begin to change, to dance, and to fall, we too are embracing a beautiful change. In the spirit of thanksgiving, we announce the unveiling of our new congregational website. We have enhanced our site with easier navigation, new videos, and a full section dedicated to spirituality and prayer. We think you will enjoy the new look, layout, photos, and videos. The site is fully accessible

from any mobile or desktop device. Check back regularly for recent news, upcoming events, and so much more. After you have had a chance to peruse the site, we would love your feedback. Tell us what you think at [communications@osfphila.org](mailto:communications@osfphila.org).



▲ Ministering to those who are poor or homeless has been a mission of the Sisters of St. Francis since they were founded in 1855 by Mother Francis Bachmann. One of Mother Francis' quotes that has held steadfast in the congregation is, "As long as God does not stop giving to us, we shall not stop giving to the poor." Much like the sister seen here—serving a meal to the children at St. Mary's Orphanage—Sister Leslie Birks carries on the tradition of serving those who are poor at St. Francis Inn in Philadelphia. The great staff and volunteers at the inn in Philadelphia serve a hot meal every day of the year to those who are poor. Read more on page 12.