

Volume 22.1 Spring 2019

NEWS

A Publication of  THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

Offering Hope *and* Healing *at* Aquinas Center

Also in this issue:

- Spirituality Through Art:
A Ministry in Beauty
- People & Places
- Sharing the Good News

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

As I read the articles for this issue of Good News, I was reminded of a letter written by Pope John Paul II to artists in 1999. In it he expressed his hope that artists would have an especially intense experience of creative inspiration.

He says, “May the beauty which you pass on to generations still to come be such that it will stir them to wonder! Faced with the sacredness of life and of the human person, and before the marvels of the universe, wonder is the only appropriate attitude.” When we experience beauty, we transcend self and catch a glimpse of the eternal.



Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty, OSF
Congregational Minister

In this issue we read about Sister Christopher Marie Wagner who shares the mystery of her call from God to art ministry. Creating beauty through various mediums—drawing, painting, ceramics, stained glass, and iconography—is a gift Sister Christopher treasures. The art comes from her keen ability to see beyond the earthly realm. It is formed through her prayer—asking God for guidance and asking that the art lift the spirits of those who will see it. Her beautiful works draw others to reflection and contemplation, stirring them to wonder.

In a very different manner, Sister Mary Kennedy generates light for the immigrants and refugees whom she accompanies at the Aquinas Center in South Philadelphia. Through her course on healing, her creative techniques, and her guidance through the legal processes of immigration, clients find a sister—an advocate they can trust. Sister Mary's faith guides her each day, always being open to God's call. Her awareness of the sacredness of each person is perceived and also evokes an attitude of wonder.

From this wonder there can come enthusiasm... Thanks to this enthusiasm, humanity, every time it loses its way, will be able to lift itself up and set out again on the right path. In this sense it has been said with profound insight that “beauty will save the world.” – Pope John Paul II

Perhaps we are all called to be artists—not professional artists—but artists of a sort, creating beauty by living well and fiercely loving all whom we meet.

May you and all your loved ones experience Beauty each day!

Blessings,

Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty, OSF



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In her ministry at the Aquinas Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Sister Mary Kennedy primarily serves immigrants and refugees from Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. The center offers clients much needed sanctuary as well as counseling, legal help, advocacy, and classes on everything from English to money management.

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Sister Christopher Marie Wagner has a passion for art which shows through the beauty of her work. She has completed many projects, including restoration of all of the stained glass in Our Lady of Angels Convent as well as some original pieces. She also creates and teaches writing icons which is a meditative, prayerful form of art with very symbolic meaning.

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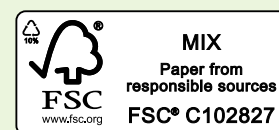
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The purpose of *Good News* is to further the Gospel mission of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia by sharing the good news of the congregation with our friends, family, companions, and sisters. Through this publication, we hope to share the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

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.

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On the cover: Sister Mary Kennedy opens the door for one of the many clients of Aquinas Center in South Philadelphia. The spirit of hospitality is at the heart of everything she does at the center which serves as a haven for immigrants and refugees from around the world.

Sister Mary talks with Carid Maranan in Aquinas Center's colorful hallway. Carid, a proud new U.S. citizen, helped paint the mural that adorns the corridor's walls. He also was granted the Mayor's Award for Service for his commitment to volunteer work and is currently attending the Community College of Philadelphia.

Offering Hope *and* Healing *at* Aquinas Center

“HOSPITALITY, SOLIDARITY, RESPONSIVENESS, AND TRANSFORMATION ARE THE FOUR CORE VALUES OF OUR MISSION.”



Sister Mary is constantly moving around the grounds of the center. She speaks Spanish most of the time and often stops to greet and even hug the people she meets as she passes.

Sister Mary Kennedy takes in the sights and sounds of the neighborhood as she walks the two and a half blocks each morning to her ministry at the Aquinas Center in the heart of South Philadelphia. Turning a corner, she is greeted by the bright colors and powerful message of the murals adorning the center's outer walls. Painted by community members, the murals reflect the common vision of her clients who hail from disparate countries around the world but who are linked by their unifying hope of establishing better lives for themselves and their families.

Approximately 600 people come through the Aquinas Center's doors each week—primarily immigrants and refugees from Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. In addition to much needed sanctuary, these folks find a host of other programs including counseling, legal help, advocacy, and classes on everything from English to money management. “Hospitality, solidarity, responsiveness, and transformation are the four core values of our mission,” said Executive Director Bethany Welch.

Beginning to Heal

Sister Mary has been ministering at the Aquinas Center as an employee of Catholic Social Services since January 2015 and has been involved in Hispanic and immigrant

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“I TRY TO GIVE PEOPLE MY FULL ATTENTION. WHEN PEOPLE SEE THAT THEY ARE BEING LISTENED TO AND RESPECTED, THEY BEGIN TO TRUST.”

Sister Mary shows Annunciata a Nativity scene that was donated to the center along with other household and religious items. Annunciata ended up taking the crèche home to her family to use during Christmas.



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ministry for decades. Her time spent in Guatemala—living with and ministering to people in the poorest of conditions—has prepared her well for the ministry work she does at the Aquinas Center. She is fluent in Spanish, allowing her to communicate easily with the many Spanish-speaking clients who come to the center. Although being able to speak to folks is important, she says that listening is the foundation of her approach. “I try to give people my full attention,” said Sister Mary. “When people see that they are being listened to and respected, they begin to trust.”

Establishing that trust is a crucial and often difficult step for many of the Aquinas Center’s clients who arrive after years of trauma in their countries of origin. Annunciata*, who works with Sister Mary at the center on a regular basis, is an indigenous Mayan woman from Guatemala who grew up in a physically and emotionally abusive household. She lived in a rural community where car bombings were a regular occurrence and indigenous people were being killed by the military. When she was just 11 years old, she witnessed the remains of her god-brother who had been hatcheted to death. Annunciata escaped to the United States via an arduous journey. She traveled under a bus—literally

* Names have been changed to protect an individual’s identity.

crammed into a shelf near the wheel and then barely escaped drowning while crossing the Rio Grande River.

Once in the U.S., Annunciata struggled with anger and anxiety. When her husband, Julio, heard that Sister Mary offered a course called “Healing Our Hearts,” he approached her about working with his wife. “I began seeing Annunciata once a week,” said Sister Mary. “Initially she was a little nervous around me and I tried to put her at ease. My relationship with her started out as a teacher and developed over months. Now she considers me a good friend.”

Sister Mary led Annunciata through exercises on improving her self-esteem, understanding anger, and moving toward forgiveness. “She was not in touch with her own anger and needed to befriend it, understand it, and use its positive energy in her life,” said Sister Mary. “She is getting there slowly but surely.”

Sister Mary also taught Annunciata about relaxation imagery, deep breathing, and other coping skills to help reduce her anxiety. “She gets excited about coming to class because it is allowing her to grow in ways she never even thought of,” Sister Mary said. “Her mental state for the most part now is relaxed instead of alarmed and fearful. She is so positive and hopeful that she could be a role model for others who have had a very difficult life.”

“My life has been transformed through the mercy of God, my mother, my husband, and the classes with Sister Mary that have helped me understand and learn new coping techniques,” said Annunciata. She adds that she also is pleased to have passed on some of the lessons she has learned to her son.



Children attend a Sunday School class run by Annunciata who has taken many classes at Aquinas Center. Annunciata has worked with Sister Mary through a course called “Healing Our Hearts” and has done extensive work to build her self-esteem, manage anger, and improve her parenting skills.



Sister Mary introduces the Parenting Café approach to one of the ESL classes at the Aquinas Center. The approach teaches parents how to handle the disciplining of their children in a calm, measured way in an attempt to break the cycle of violence that has been a part of many of their lives. "A lot of the parents have been bullied and beaten themselves, their self-esteem crushed," said Sister Mary. "We teach love and respect, an understanding of what children are capable of at different stages, and strategies to correct behavior in a positive, constructive way."

Guiding the Next Generation

For many of the immigrants who come to the Aquinas Center, the desire to provide their children with a better experience than they had is a primary motivator. Despite this, Sister Mary says that it isn't always easy to get people to attend parenting classes because of the stigma that surrounds them. "It has been a struggle," she explained. "For the majority of people at the Aquinas Center, coming to a parenting class is akin to saying, 'I don't know how to parent.'"

To deal with this, Sister Mary has begun "The Parenting Café," a monthly social gathering that encourages parents to get to know one another, share their struggles and successes, and learn more about child development and parenting strategies. She provides cards with questions to get

discussions rolling, then allows participants to propel the conversation according to whatever parenting issues they are facing. "They are not allowed to give advice or direction about how someone else should handle a situation but they can give examples from their own lives about similar experiences or challenges that they have faced," said Sister Mary.

Sister Mary sometimes will interject ideas, particularly to help parents understand what is reasonable to expect of a child of a certain age or to suggest an approach that may be outside their experience. Sometimes the advice she gives is as simple as taking a moment alone in the bathroom to gather

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Sister Mary works with operations coordinator, Martina Hyacinth, to prepare a hot meal for a homeless man who recently reached out to the center. Despite sometimes limited resources, there is always a seat at the table for anyone seeking help.



Housed in a former convent, Aquinas Center is located in a poor, largely immigrant neighborhood in South Philadelphia. Although people told Sister Mary when she first moved in that the area was dangerous, she says she never feels frightened. "Once people know you, they look after you when you are passing by," she said. "Plus I have my guardian angels with me. I walk with confidence."

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themselves when they feel like they are at the point of rage. "We talk about ways to move from physical punishment to more positive ways of behavior management," said Sister Mary. "We do role playing where I play the naughty child, the laissez-faire mother, or the mother who expects too much. This gives the parents the opportunity to model positive interactions."

Sister Mary also emphasizes that love and respect are the most important aspects of parenting. "I want them to understand that it is essential to establish a loving relationship with the children so that the children know they can never lose their parents' love," she said.

Immigration Legal Services

Whatever else is going on in Aquinas' immigrant families is often happening under the ever-present shadow of immigration worries. The center has worked to support families through the complicated immigration process since it opened its doors in 2013 but took an extra step this past September by officially launching a program of immigration legal services rec-

ognized by the U.S. Department of Justice. Sister Mary has become an accredited representative of the program and is trained to help immigrants with a variety of non-litigation legal services. "The idea is to provide low-cost, high-quality, and culturally accessible legal services," she explained. "I help people fill out citizenship applications, help them understand the questions, prepare deportation defense packets, accompany them to immigration interviews, and translate for them." She also helps family members locate loved ones who have been picked up in immigration raids, writes letters of support for family members in deportation proceedings, and teaches "Know Your Rights" trainings. "Things like filling out the citizenship application can be very overwhelming for people," she added. "The government wants to know every detail of your life. They want to know about your educational background, your work history, your family members, every place you've ever lived, your health history, and how long you've been paying taxes."

According to Bethany, the recent exclusionary rhetoric in the U.S. has increased fear among immigrants. "The current

Life is a struggle for this gentleman who recently arrived from Indonesia and is currently homeless. After serving him a hot meal, Sister Mary set out on foot to take him to a temporary home. On their walk, they passed the International Christian Center—also an Indonesian Church—where Sister Mary helps to make an introduction.



climate complicates things for families because they don't know who to trust," said Bethany. "They are left asking themselves, 'Should I enroll my child in school? Should I fill out this form as a path toward citizenship?' There is tremendous anxiety among families."

Getting to know people on a personal level and developing relationships is key to alleviating some of that fear. Sister Mary builds trust by being an engaged and compassionate listener and a passionate champion for all who need her. By getting to know her clients' stories so deeply, she is well equipped to guide them to the options that best fit their circumstances, takes care of what she can, and refers those who need more specialized legal work to reputable immigration attorneys who are willing to charge affordable rates. "Sister Mary learns the bigger story to hear what pathways are open," explained Bethany. "For that you need trust and conversation. That is a natural fit for Sister Mary."

Right now, the pathways for Annunciata are limited. According to the American Immigration Council, "U.S. immigration law is very complex, and there is much confusion as to how it works. The Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA), the body of law governing current immigration policy, provides for an annual worldwide limit of 675,000 permanent immigrants, with certain exceptions for close family members. In addition to the numerical limits placed upon the various immigration preferences, the INA also places a limit on how many immigrants can come to the United States from any one country.

Currently, no group of permanent immigrants (family-based and employment-based) from a single country can exceed seven percent of the total amount of people immigrating to the United States in a single fiscal year." In order to even qualify for U.S. citizenship through naturalization, an individual must have had lawful permanent resident status (a green card) for at least five years. How does all of this affect Annunciata? She is undocumented and, for the time being, it is not possible to change her status. Her son is a freshman in high school and she hopes to see him graduate and go on to college. Sister Mary has helped her prepare a deportation defense packet in case she is ever picked up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). As Bethany said, "Sometimes the question becomes, 'How can we support people even if there is not a pathway to citizenship?'"

Letting Faith Be the Guide

Whether she is helping people heal from trauma, teaching them techniques for better parenting, or guiding them through the immigration process, Sister Mary's loving manner, accessible presence, and steadfast determination make her ideal for her role at Aquinas Center. In all that she does, she says she lets her faith lead the way, remaining alert to what God is asking from her and ready and open to receiving what she needs when she needs it. "My faith is a large part of my life," said Sister Mary. "I wouldn't be able to do a fraction of what I do without it." ■

For more information or comments on this article, contact goodnews@osfphila.org.

HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Urge your elected officials to support refugee resettlement.
- Learn the facts and spread the word about refugees seeking asylum in the United States. The current climate around immigration has created widespread misinformation about refugees. It is important to remember that refugees are fleeing violence and persecution and are seeking safety and the opportunity to move their lives forward.
- Promote reputable landlords offering affordable housing to immigrants and refugees.
- If you have rental properties, consider leasing one or more of them to a newly arrived immigrant or refugee—even if it means having to be flexible with lease terms, waiving the security deposit, or being willing to accept a little less than the going rate for your space.
- Patronize local businesses run by refugees. Or, if you are an employer yourself, offer a job to a newly arrived immigrant.
- Assemble a donation drive. Team up with friends, family, or coworkers to collect household items, school supplies, clothing, or gift cards for newly arrived families.



◀ *The Kenya Climate Change Art and Essay Competition challenged children to use their gifts of art and writing to urge others to protect our Earth and our environment.*

AFRICA

For many years Sister Julie Mulvihill has ministered with the children at Nyumbani Children's Home in Kenya. Recently two of the children were among the winners of the Kenya Climate Change Art and Essay Competition. Sister Julie and 15 of the children from the home accompanied Nicholas and Simon—the two winners—to the awards ceremony which was held at the Kenya Meteorological Department. All of the children who attended—both winners and their guests—received t-shirts, water bottles, a snack, and lunch. That evening Sister Julie treated Simon and Nicholas to dinner at a local mall to celebrate their success.

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

Our retired sisters at Assisi House have discovered Wii! Recently they held their second annual Wii Bowling Tournament. During the fall the sisters held practices, games, semifinal and final matches—and ultimately a bowling banquet to salute the winners. Sisters Denis Maguire and Gloria Keltz were the runners up but the title of 2018 Bowling Champions belonged to Sisters Georgina Marmino and Anna Maria Keenaghan! The teams were celebrated at a bowling banquet attended by the other residents of Assisi House.



The 2018 Assisi House Bowlers: (l-r) Sisters Fran Acton, Gloria Keltz (runner up), Mary Teresa Coll, Anna Maria Keenaghan (champion), James Maureen Maguire, Denis Maguire (runner up), Georgina Marmino (champion), St. Joseph Brennon.

PENNSYLVANIA

November 15-16, 2018, were busy days at our motherhouse in Aston. The event? Our Annual Christmas Craft Fair! People came from nearby and from a distance—sisters, family members, friends, neighbors. As usual our sisters—and friends—were generous with both time and talents. Knitted and crocheted articles for all ages graced the tables. Candy and other tasty food filled other areas. Christmas decorations of a variety of styles and types were popular items. In addition to sales, visitors had the pleasure of greeting old friends and making new ones—all part of who we are as Franciscan women. Stay tuned to our website, www.osfphila.org, for the dates of next year's sale.



Sister Margaret Lewis displayed some of her beautiful wreaths and hand-crafted bows—both very popular items.



PENNSYLVANIA

A group of our sisters from the motherhouse as well as from nearby convents participated in the Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Service organized by the Aston Ministerium and held in Aston Presbyterian Church. A unique aspect of this year's service was that two of the worship leaders were from non-Christian faith traditions. Rabbi Helen Plotkin from Mekom Torah shared a reading from Isaiah and Imam Numaan Cheema from the Zubaida Foundation read a selection from the Koran. Prior to the closing blessing which was given by Sister Jean Ustasiewski, participants processed to the sanctuary to receive an individual blessing from one of the evening's worship leaders.



Sisters Marie Therese Carr, Helen Budzik, Elizabeth DeWaele, Marie Angela Presenza, Christa Marie Thompson, and Jean Ustasiewski were part of the intercongregational choir during the Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Service.

PENNSYLVANIA

In October 1918 our sisters began ministering at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Morton, traveling every Sunday from Glen Riddle to teach religion. In 1936 the sisters moved to a donated house near the church. The house also doubled as a school. Today two of our sisters continue to work in Our Lady of Angels Regional School located on the grounds of OLPH Parish. Six of our sisters reside in the convent, one of whom volunteers in the school. The 100th anniversary of our sisters' presence was celebrated at a recent parish liturgy. Following the liturgy a social was held in the convent to celebrate the occasion.



Sister Margaret Xavier Romans received the Franciscan Heritage Award at the Catholic High School of Baltimore.

the school's Franciscan Core Values: loving service; ongoing conversion; witness to justice, peace, and reconciliation; and stewardship. Sister Margaret's reception of the award was based on her many outreach efforts to others, especially her gifts of hand-designed pillows crafted for individuals in need. The presenter also cited Sister Margaret's social justice initiatives, her efforts at empowering women, her current ministry as a sacristan, and her efforts to make others feel at home.



WASHINGTON

"You're invited to gather with us for an inspiring life-changing morning of miracles." These words from the St. Francis House website invited folks in and around the Puyallup area to attend the 15th Annual Miracle Maker's Breakfast. Sister Patricia Michalek is director of St. Francis House, a ministry founded by her parents, Doris and Stan Michalek, in the early 1970s. The



Enjoying the Miracle Makers Breakfast! Front (l-r): Sisters Kathy Dougherty, Patricia Michalek, Colette Gerry, Rochelle Liu. Back (l-r): Sisters Jude Connelly, Christine Still, Joan Roddy, Anne McNamara.

annual Miracle Maker's Breakfast is one of Sr. Patricia's efforts to continue providing assistance to people in need of a helping hand. A number of our sisters were on hand to enjoy this year's breakfast.



PENNSYLVANIA

After their arrival in August, our 2018-2019 Franciscan Volunteers were commissioned and began their ministries. Natalie Wasek, a graduate of St. Bonaventure University, works in our Corporate Social Responsibility Office. Hannah Marks graduated from the University of South Carolina and volunteers with the Encounter Program at the Aquinas Center in Philadelphia. Both young women also spend time conversing with our sisters in Assisi House, particularly on what being "Franciscan" means.



After one of their gatherings and discussions with the Assisi House residents, the volunteers remained for a chat with Sister Mary Ann Potenza. (l-r) Hannah Marks, Sr. Mary Ann Potenza, Natalie Wasek, Sara Marks

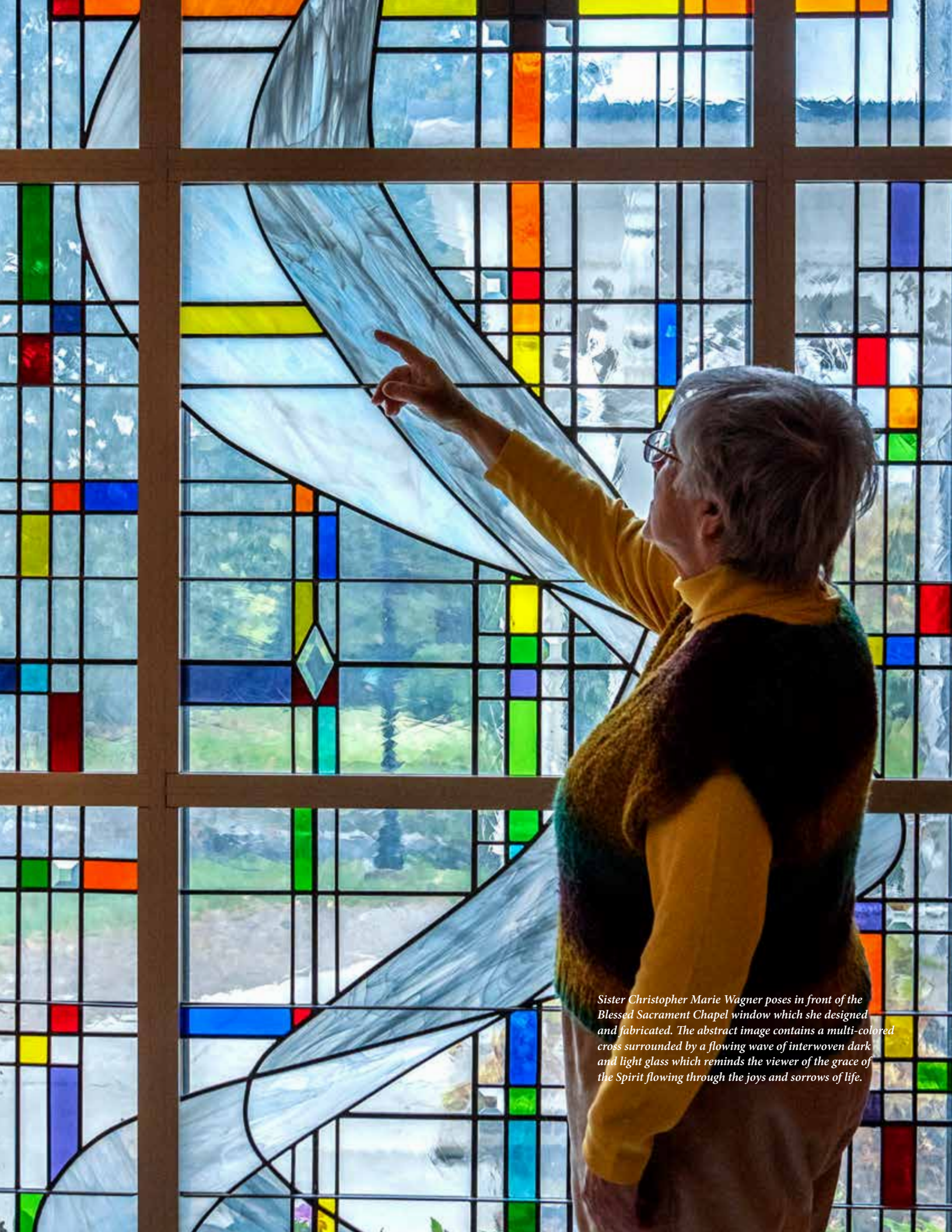


A number of our sisters, including former principals Sisters Deborah Krist and Angela Mary O'Connell, attended the celebration of our ongoing congregational presence at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Morton.



MARYLAND

The Catholic High School of Baltimore recently presented the Franciscan Heritage Award to Sister Margaret Xavier Romans. Recipients are alumnae who demonstrate



Sister Christopher Marie Wagner poses in front of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel window which she designed and fabricated. The abstract image contains a multi-colored cross surrounded by a flowing wave of interwoven dark and light glass which reminds the viewer of the grace of the Spirit flowing through the joys and sorrows of life.

“THE GIFT GOD HAS GIVEN ME OF BEING ABLE TO CREATE
WORKS OF ART IS SUCH A WONDERFUL BLESSING.”

Spirituality Through Art

A Ministry in Beauty

If a picture is worth a thousand words, Sister Christopher Marie Wagner’s ministry speaks volumes. A full-time artist, Sister Chris’ passion for art goes back to her high school days at the Catholic High School of Baltimore when she began staying after school for oil painting classes offered by Sister Jane Frances Girard. Later when she herself was teaching second grade, she took drawing and ceramics classes in her free time. When the teacher singled her out for her impressive work, Sister Chris began to think it might be possible to make art her ministry. She went back to school, earning her MFA from Catholic University. She then headed to Neumann University where she established the art department and spent 15 years teaching. When it was time for her to step away from full-time teaching to allow herself more time to create her own work, Sister Chris began by resuming her role as student and serving a year-long apprenticeship with a stained glass restorer.

The Beauty of Working with Glass

By getting trained in the art and craft of stained glass, Sister Chris became part of an artistic tradition that has been around since the 7th century. While clear glass windows encourage looking out into the world, viewers of stained glass are invited to meditate on a vision of beauty—a scene depicting



The Nave windows are a series of 12 windows that grace the walls of chapel and that depict various saints as well as the Ascension and the Assumption. Pictured here are the St. Joseph, Our Lady of Fatima, St. Clare of Assisi, and St. Francis of Assisi windows. Sister Christopher Marie Wagner painstakingly removed and replaced every bit of glass in these windows and in all the others in the chapel in a process that took more than nine years to complete.

Old Testament stories, the life of Christ, images of angels or saints, or abstract shapes and colors. “I love glass,” said Sister Chris. “It is one of the most beautiful physical items in the world—especially colored glass. It brings light into our world.”

One of Sister Chris’ first glass projects was the Canticum Mural that she created with fellow artist and Catholic High alum, Linda Vonderschmidt-LaStella. The mural is a 19 x 7½ foot piece made of stoneware with clay, glazes, stains, and faceted glass and was inspired by the beautiful hymn written by St. Francis of Assisi—The Canticum of Creation. The mural was originally commissioned for the Franciscan Health System but is now located in the

Rocco A. Abessinio Building at Neumann University. “It was great to work with Sister Chris,” said Linda. “When you’re a clay artist, the form is yours to make; essentially you are the driver of the car. Sister Chris recognized this and was comfortable with it; she knew what was hers to do and embraced the challenge. We worked together to tweak and perfect the colors and design. Everybody had their part to play. It was a very positive experience.” The piece is an artistic depiction of all the elements of nature. The mural reflects healing symbols by use of water and fire as well as emotional and spiritual healing through reconciliation.

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The Canticle Mural designed by Linda Vonderschmidt-LaStella and Sister Christopher Marie Wagner hangs in the Abessinio Building at Neumann University.



Sister Christopher works on an icon she is currently writing. Icon "writing" is more than just an art form. It is a spiritual discipline and a form of prayer. Sister Christopher has written more than 60 icons. She also teaches iconography—mostly to beginners.



Beginning in 1998, Sister Chris undertook an immense restoration project—a nine-year labor of love to bring the stained glass windows in Our Lady of Angels Chapel in Aston back to their original glory. The process required meticulous work and precise attention to detail. Sister Chris began by removing the windows from the chapel and making a graphite rubbing of each one to ensure she could keep track of the proper location of every piece of glass. Then she recycled the lead and cleaned and evaluated the glass, replacing any glass that was faded. In addition to the colored glass itself, many of the pieces were also painted. This required Sister Chris to exactly match both the color and style of the painting. After airbrushing and firing the enamels, she put each piece of glass in its place. She then leaded the window, working from the corner, soldering and nailing as she went along. Once the window was soldered on both sides, she added putty to make the windows waterproof.

After restoring the old windows, Sister Chris designed and created an original stained glass window in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel where there once was a door. That process was very different from stained glass restoration, requiring her to develop her own pattern and motif. Unlike the more figurative style of the older win-



A close up detail of the Canticle Mural shows the varied stoneware, glazes, stains, and faceted glass that were used in the creation of the piece.

dows, Sister Chris' original designs tend to be more abstract. "I like to do things with movement and flow," she explained.

Even abstract window designs can communicate meaning or evoke a contemplative mood, of course, and Sister Chris' most recent designs are wonderful examples. She is currently working on a series of stained glass windows commissioned by St. Francis Hospital in Wilmington, Delaware. "When these windows were first commissioned, the plan was to have them in the infusion center, so that was my inspiration. I thought of the people who would be looking at the windows as they got their treatments, a tube of medicine flowing." The windows feature a ribbon of circles going across each panel among abstract figures. The result is both beautiful and affective. "The glass element adds dynamic brilliance to any room," Linda agrees. "It brings light and transparency and gives such added beauty."

“When I am doing a design, I pray over it,” said Sister Chris. “I pray for guidance and I pray for the people who will receive it or for people who are suffering in some particular way.” In addition to windows, Sister Chris designs and creates smaller items such as sanctuary lamps and vigil lights, always trying out new designs.

The Spiritual Power of Iconography

Just before Sister Chris began her nine-year window restoration project, she became involved in the practice of iconography, attending classes given by the Prosopon School at various retreat centers. Icon “writing,” as it is called, is a meditative, prayerful, and somewhat ritualized art form in which the materials and processes as well as the images have symbolic meaning. Icons are written on wooden boards carved with a recess in the center. The board is covered in layers of gesso, a white paint made of animal hide glue, marble dust, and chalk used as a primer. Sister Chris makes the gesso herself using a double boiler. The paint she uses is egg tempera which she makes using a combination of egg yolk, white wine, and pigment. The designs themselves are flat, a departure from the use of linear perspective which is employed in both traditional and contemporary art to depict relative size and depth. “This is because it is a spiritual space rather than a realistic, earthly space,” explains Sister Chris. “We are being led to the spiritual world, not representing the earthly world.”

Iconographers regard their work as prayer, making immersion in theological principles as important as artistic proficiency. Traditional icons are painted from dark to light and involve

Sister Christopher Marie enjoys creating her own stained glass designs, approaching the process prayerfully. (inset) Once a design is complete, she gets down to the meticulous work of slowly and methodically assembling the piece. Although the process is long and laborious, it is one that Sister Christopher finds very rewarding.



Sister Christopher Marie removed, evaluated, and catalogued each window in the chapel during the restoration process. She then restored or replaced each piece of glass—painting and firing as necessary—before releading, soldering, and puttying each window.

numerous prescribed, symbolic steps. “The whole concept is that you are moving from darkness into light as Christ came into the world bringing light,” said Sister Chris. “Writing an icon is a very spiritual experience. Before I start, I say a prayer asking God for guidance and asking that the art I am about to create lifts the spirits of those who look at it and brings beauty and joy into their lives. As I work I enter into a different realm. It is a very special thing.”

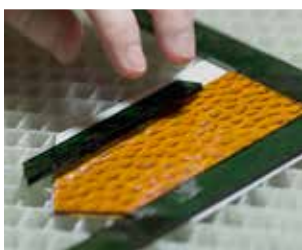
Although iconography has its roots in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the practice and use of icons is becoming more familiar to those in the West. “I think as more and more pastors have placed icons in their churches, people have become more

comfortable with them. As people spend time with them, they begin to recognize the beauty in them,” said Sister Chris. “We say that we ‘write’ an icon because you ‘read’ an icon by letting it speak to you as you sit and pray before it. It is a window to a spiritual world.”

Art as a Way of Life

Although stained glass and iconography are her two primary mediums, Sister Chris always has several projects in the works. She has done some oil painting—including a large, semi-abstract depiction of St. Benedict Joseph Labre with a group of homeless men commissioned by St. Joseph Labre House in Bremerton, Washington, and a series of beach scenes for the Sisters of St. Francis’ apartments in Sea Isle City, New Jersey. She also teaches when she can—sharing her gifts at iconography workshops as well as with the sisters at Assisi House, sings in the choir, and occasionally cantors at Mass. “The gift God has given me of being able to create works of art is such a wonderful blessing,” said Sister Chris. “It is what helps me to focus and share what I can see with others.” ■

For more information or comments on this article, contact goodnews@osfphila.org.



SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Everyone has within a piece of good news.

— Anne Frank (adapted)

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Assisi House Meditation Garden



Sister Kathy Dougherty, congregational minister, thanks Susan Garza (center), her husband Stephen, and their niece Judy Happ, who were present for the blessing of the Meditation Garden.

Something new graces the side lawn of Assisi House, our retirement residence in Aston, Pennsylvania—a meditation garden complete with water trickling over rocks and stones and an area to sit and simply “be,” to pray, or to chat quietly with a friend. During the blessing of the new garden, Sister Peggy Egan, administrator of Assisi House, thanked Sue Garza, the niece of our deceased Sister Mary Happ, whose donation made the garden possible. She also thanked Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty and the leadership team, the foundation, and the men from plant operations for making this dream a reality.

Sister Peggy, in explaining the purpose of a meditation garden, referred to it as a “place where everything is soothing and peaceful, a place to praise God for the beauty of creation, a place to allow the sounds

of the water to refresh our souls, a place for the singing of birds to bring joy to our hearts, a place to remind us that we are ‘called to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God.’” Reactions from the Assisi House residents seem to confirm that description. Sister Ann Conrad Koerner explained that she goes there to pray each morning. “It lifts my spirits for the day,” she said. Similarly Sister Dorothy Real enjoys the movement of the water and watching the birds. “I always feel more relaxed after I visit the garden,” she explained.



Closing of St. Ann Convent

In October our sisters dealt with an event that touched us personally—the closing of St. Ann Convent, our retirement residence in Tacoma, Washington. Many of the sisters from the west coast gathered at the convent for the closing ritual. Sister Jude Connelly, the administrator of St. Ann’s, used a prayer service from *Praying our Goodbyes* by Joyce Rupp. During one particularly emotional point in the service, the sisters were asked to write their “goodbyes” on slips of paper and place them in a bowl. That bowl itself had a particular significance. Last year a tree that the sisters had named the “Grandma Tree” because it had stood on the property for 110 years fell. The gentleman who carted the tree away gifted the sisters with the bowl which had been made from the wood of the Grandma Tree.

On October 3 the sisters also celebrated the final Transitus Service at St. Ann’s—a Franciscan prayer service commemorating the death of St. Francis. Sisters Mary Kathryn Dougherty and Colette Gerry, members of our leadership team, were present and Sister Mary Kathryn shared the homily. Sister Jude expressed her gratitude to both of them. “They helped to give us a sense of closure and strength and complimented us for our way of handling a difficult closure,” she said. “They also gave us a sense of encouragement to look to the future.”



▲ Sisters from various parts of the west coast gathered at St. Ann Convent for the closing rituals. (l-r) Srs. Carmel Gregg, Esther Stewart, Mary Coakley, Joan Roddy, Maureen Duignan, Carol Warnke, Ruth Fishburn, Anne McNamara, Theresa Lamkin, Christine Still, Patricia Millen, Joanne Clavel, Mary Ann Gallagher, Mary Lonergan, Frances Calhoun, Guadalupe Medina, Mary Jo Chaves, Emma Holdener.

▲ During the prayer service in St. Ann Convent chapel, Sr. Anne McNamara—and each of the sisters present—placed a paper in the bowl listing their goodbyes.

Hurricane Michael's Destruction: Panama City Parish

A few years ago we published an article in *Good News* about Sister Jean O'Connor's ministry at St. Dominic's Parish in Panama City, Florida. The article focused on her work with the parish's Vacation Bible School Program. Like most Americans, you've read articles or watched TV news coverage of the extensive damage caused by Hurricane Michael. Panama City was one of the areas that received extensive damage. Hurricane Michael hit St. Dominic's Parish with extreme force and devastated the parish and the surrounding community. Every structure on the church grounds is either in ruins or is badly damaged. The parish hall and bookstore were completely leveled. The church building has roof damage, broken stained glass windows, and water damage throughout the sanctuary. The apartment buildings and church office—which was recently renovated—have significant interior and exterior damage. The rectory has a damaged roof, collapsed ceilings, and water damage. Sister Jean, together with other parish staff, had taken shelter inside the religious education building and was there when the building collapsed. Fortunately no one was injured. We are trying to raise money to help the parish rebuild. You can help by donating and/or with your prayers. Donations can be made either to Catholic Charities in Florida or to the parish GoFundMe page.



In Memoriam

Sister Ursula Tisdall
December 13, 2018

Sister Manetto Ruocchio
December 18, 2018

Sister Margaret Appell
(formerly Sister St. Margaret)
January 4, 2019

Sister Kathleen Cronin
(formerly Sister St. Philomene)
January 4, 2019



Fundraising to help St. Dominic's Parish recover from Hurricane Michael can be found on both GoFundMe and on the Catholic Charities in Florida web pages.



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.

75 years
Professed 1944
RUBY JUBILARIANS

SISTER NADINE ROSE BENNETT
SISTER AGNES BONNER
SISTER JAMES FRANCES MCGLASHEN

70 years
Professed 1949
DIAMOND JUBILARIANS

SISTER CORDA MARIE BERGBAUER
SISTER AGNES BORKOWSKI
SISTER AGNES ST JOSEPH BRESNEN
SISTER MARGARET ST JOHN BROCATO
SISTER MARIE CIMINO
SISTER MARY TERESA COLL
SISTER NANCY CROSSEN
SISTER ALETTA DOROTHY DONAHUE
SISTER HELEN ANN GAIDOS
SISTER MARY LOUISE HEINLE
SISTER ELEANOR HORNEMAN
SISTER ANNE CONRAD KOERNER
SISTER MARGARET MARY LEWIS
SISTER JUSTINA MARIE MILLER
SISTER IDA MARIE NICKLAS
SISTER ANNIE FRANCES OMAN

50 years
Professed 1969
GOLDEN JUBILARIANS

SISTER MARY MAGDALENE GRECO
SISTER BARBARA ANN HAROLD
SISTER ELIZABETH HOWE
SISTER HELEN JACOBSON
SISTER MICHELE THERESE KRICKZY
SISTER SHARON MARIE ROBINSON

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

Focus

► Heading toward their 50th wedding anniversary, Karen and Don “treasure their relationship with the sisters and credit them with being a kind and caring guiding force in both their professional and personal lives.”



DON WESTERMANN

“IT IS WITH GREAT JOY THAT I CAN SAY THAT IT HAS BEEN MY PRIVILEGE AND PLEASURE TO SERVE WITH THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS FOR OVER 30 YEARS.”

► While Karen and Don have financially supported many ministries of the sisters over the years, presently the couple helped to purchase uniforms for students in need at Drexel Neumann Academy in Chester, Pennsylvania.



February 1988 marked the beginning of Don and Karen Westermann’s long-term relationship with the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. Employed by the Franciscan Health System (FHS) for ten years, Don repeatedly observed, admired, and absorbed how the sisters “did the right and just thing” and proceeded to do likewise. According to Sister Margaret Lewis, “Don is a ‘one of a kind’ individual intellectually and by personality. When he was CFO at Franciscan Health System, Don’s mentoring, reassuring suggestions, and directions made difficult financial issues for our hospitals less cumbersome and more achievable because of his caring, supportive, and nonjudgmental attitude.”

One of Don’s proudest moments was helping to establish the Ministry Fund—at the time of FHS’ merger into Catholic Health Initiatives—in recognition of the sisters’ extraordinary service in healthcare. For 20 years this fund has been used to support many ministries both within and outside the congregation.

Since 1998 Don has served as interim director of the Sisters of St. Francis Foundation, acting director of finance, member of the Financial Advisory Board (including a 10-year term as chair), participant on the Strategic Planning Group, and member of the Foundation Board.

The parents of three and grandparents of five, Don and Karen’s current focus is savoring time with family. Most memorable are summer vacations in Avalon and Christmas tradition observances, including an annual trip to the Christmas Markets of Germany, Austria, France, and Italy. When not involved with grandparent duties, Karen keeps house while Don gardens and landscapes.

“In today’s world, where decency and honesty seem to suffer at the hands of expedient solutions and where honesty seems to be in short supply, the path that the sisters follow is truly uplifting,” Don said. “Time and again Karen and I have stood in awe, not only of the great works they do but also of the never changing kindness and caring they use in moving their ministry forward. It is with great joy that I can say that it has been my privilege and pleasure to serve with the Sisters of St. Francis for over 30 years.”

▲ Helping to foster and advance the mission of the sisters, the experience and expertise of the Financial Advisory Board provides valuable input to decision making regarding good stewardship of resources.



► Karen and Don “have taken particular delight in how the sisters greet someone. With a warm embrace, kind smiles, hearty laughter, and uplifting words, they make all feel welcomed and valued.”



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- Red Hill Farm, Aston PA



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Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

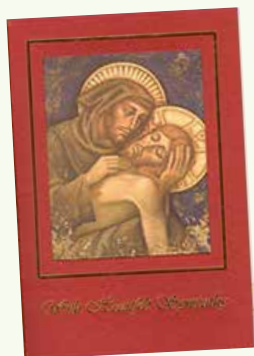


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SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS FOUNDATION

A Simple Gift of Spirit and Prayer



St. Francis and Christ Memorial Card

This special card is made of a crimson linen cardstock with beautiful gold foil imprint and comes tied with a thin gold cord. The front of the card features a cut-out through which to view the St. Francis and Christ artwork of Piero Casentini. Inside is a quote from the "Canticum of the Sun" by St. Francis of Assisi, "Be praised, O God, for all that you have made... and for Sister Death, happy those whom your love calls home."

\$25 Donation Please send me _____ cards.

ORDER MEMORIAL/ ALL-OCCASION CARDS

Recipients are remembered in prayers offered monthly at the celebration of the Eucharist at both Our Lady of Angels Convent and Assisi House, the congregation's retirement home, in Aston, Pennsylvania. For more information call: (610) 558-7714 or visit our website at www.osfphila.org.

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This card is meant to express the compassion you feel in your heart and the faith you have

in a loving and caring God. \$10 Donation

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A remembrance in prayer is a great way to celebrate a birthday, anniversary, confirmation, or get-well. Its versatility even provides using it for a deceased loved one. Amount of gift decided by donor.

Please send me _____ cards.

Happy All-Occasion Cards: God's Love Shines Through You



A picture of the beautifully colored stained glass window designed and crafted by Sister Christopher Marie Wagner, OSF, graces the cover of our newest card creation. \$10 Donation

Please send me _____ cards.

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STATE _____

ZIP _____

PHONE NUMBER: ☐ HOME

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E-MAIL _____

Please tear out this page and mail completed to:

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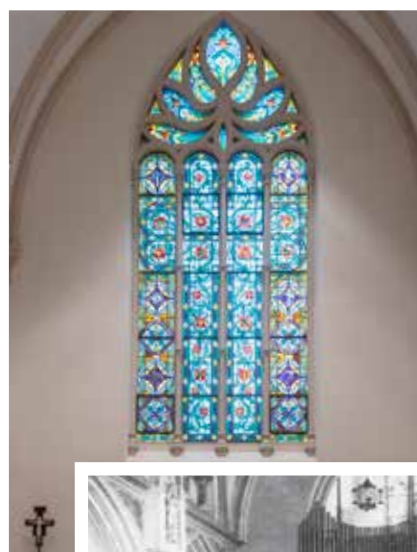


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Sisters Hold Gun Violence Vigil

In remembrance of the six year mark of the Sandy Hook Elementary school tragedy as well as the 600,000 American victims and survivors of gun violence since December 2012, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia participated in a nationwide prayer vigil to #EndGunViolence. The vigil took place on Thursday, December 13, 2018, at Our Lady of Angels Convent. The vigil began with a prayer service inside and then participants processed out to the road to hold a silent candlelight vigil in honor of all victims and survivors of gun violence. "Situations of injustice and violence continue to take on new dimensions and challenges. Gun violence deaths and injuries must not be tolerated," said Sr. Marie Lucey, OSF. "We must call on our legislators to act."

Participants in the 2018 Gun Violence Vigil gathered in silence outside Our Lady of Angels Convent displaying signs urging others to join in the effort to help prevent gun violence.



Work began on Our Lady of Angels Chapel in 1878. The early sisters carried the first stones from the quarry below the convent. Rt. Rev. Bishop Wood laid the cornerstone in May 1879. Over the years the chapel has undergone many renovations, including the restoration of all the stained glass windows by Sister Christopher Marie Wagner beginning in 1998 (left). This was an immense project that took several years to complete. Stained glass is found in hidden corners all over the chapel, including 16 small windows that allow light to enter the vaulting ceiling of the chapel.



The largest windows are the transepts, each containing more than 24 panels each. Read more on page 12.



Sister James Frances McGlashen Turns 100!

On January 18, Sister James Frances McGlashen celebrated her 100th birthday. In addition, however, the year also marks another huge milestone—75 years as a Sister of St. Francis. Sister James, a graduate of Hallahan High School in Philadelphia, spent many of her years in ministry as an educator in both the Philadelphia and Baltimore areas. From 2006-2017, until the age of 98, Sister James volunteered at St. Mary Medical Center in Langhorne and has only been “retired” for the past year and a half. “She is an amazing and inspirational woman,” says former coworker, Diane Vincenti. We wish you a very Happy Birthday, Sister James!

