

Volume 22.2 Summer 2019

Good NEWS

A Publication of  THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

Also in this issue:

- Coming Together on the Island: A Parish Community Thrives by the Sea
- People & Places
- Foundation Annual Report

Living *on the* Margins

Serving God's People in the Alaskan Wilderness

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

Occasionally I have an intense experience where I am moved in such a way that I have a deep inner knowing that the sacred surrounds me. There is no conscious effort on my part to make this happen. It just happens. I explain it as God's grace in my life—the Spirit at work around me. In these moments **I know God IS**. Mechtild of Magdeburg (1212-1282) said it well: “The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw all things in God and God in all things.”



Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty, OSF
Congregational Minister

The articles in this issue of Good News reveal how the perceived ordinary events of life are, in fact, extraordinary because the Spirit of God is unmistakably present. We read about Sister Marian Leaf who lives in Aniak, Alaska, and serves in the YK Delta, a very remote section of western Alaska. In this beautiful geographic region, Marian supports lay leadership in five parishes, works with parents preparing children for the sacraments, provides faith formation, and plays the organ during Mass. She is a presence, a part of the community, collaborating with others to build community. There are many challenges in this area and these strong, compassionate faith communities are the anchor for their villages.

Across the continent another perceived ordinary town encounters the extraordinary presence of God in the faith community of St. Francis of Assisi Parish on Long Beach Island. Sister Patricia McNiff is a compassionate, listening presence to many people in need of support. Through the RCIA program, the Survivors of Suicide group, the children's choir, or simply by personal encounter, Sister Pat's welcoming spirit makes people feel at ease, freeing them to open their hearts and welcome the transformative power of God's love. Long Beach Island experienced the devastating impact of Hurricane Sandy in 2012. During this challenging time, Sister Pat and the St. Francis community rallied together to assist all those who were displaced. Each day the faith and love of this community makes visible the invisible reality of God's presence, God's grace.

As we experience the ordinary events of life, may we have the eyes to see “all things in God and God in all things.”

Blessings,

Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty, OSF



4



12



10

VOLUME 22.2 SUMMER 2019

INSIDE *Good* NEWS CONTENTS

Point of View.....2

**Living on the Margins:
Serving God's People in the
Alaskan Wilderness 4**

Sister Marian Leaf ministers to five parishes in the extremely remote Y-K Delta in Western Alaska. She travels from parish to parish by bush plane, boat, or snow mobile to share her Franciscan presence.

**Written by Deb Litman
Photography by Andrea Cipraini-Mecchi**

People & Places.....10

**Coming Together on the Island:
A Parish Community Thrives
by the Sea.....12**

Sister Patricia McNiff ministers to a thriving parish community of nearly 3,000 families on Long Beach Island, New Jersey. Through hurricanes and sunshine—since 1885—there has been a strong Catholic presence on the island, one that Sister Patricia helps to maintain and foster.

**Written by Deb Litman
Photography by Andrea Cipraini-Mecchi**

Foundation Annual Report 16

Focus.....18

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

Managing Editor
Florence Smith

Assistant Editor
Sister Ann Marie Slavin, OSF

Editorial Board
Sister Corda Marie Bergbauer, OSF
Sister Marie Therese Carr, OSF
Sister Constance Jean Furseth, OSF
Dr. Joseph Glass
Sister Helen Jacobson, OSF
Sister Jacqueline Marie Kotz, OSF
Sister Mary Lonergan, OSF

Graphic Design
Geneen Pintof

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

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

Visit our website! www.osfphila.org

**print releaf logo
(printer to insert)**

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

On the cover: Ministering in Western Alaska necessitates traveling by snow machine during the winter months. Sister Marian Leaf takes dressing warmly seriously to withstand battering winds and temperatures that drop to -30 degrees Fahrenheit.

“THINGS MOVE AT A DIFFERENT PACE HERE THAN THEY DO IN THE LOWER 48 STATES. IT’S A DIFFERENT TEMPO, A DIFFERENT RHYTHM.”

Sister Marian Leaf wakes up to darkness at her home in Aniak, Alaska. It is late December. Although she is up early, the sun won’t rise until about 10:30 A.M. The temperature is -30 degrees and despite her relief that her incoming water isn’t frozen, the first step in her morning ritual is to boil water and pour it down the drain to clear any ice which may be forming in the sewer pipe—just in case. This is life in Western Alaska where Sister Marian ministers to five parishes in the extremely remote Y-K Delta—named for its location which is framed on the north by the Yukon River and to the south by the Kuskokwim River.

Sister Marian’s home base in Aniak has a population of approximately 500 people. She also travels to Upper Kalskag, population 231; Holy Cross, population 190; Russian Mission, population 338; and the relatively large and bustling city of Bethel which is home to around 9,000. These towns are built primarily on tundra and have virtually no roads connecting them. Travel is by bush plane—the mode of transportation Sister Marian utilizes to get from one parish to another—or by boat in summer and snow mobiles in winter. Of course, even those methods of transportation are dependent on weather. Not only is it impossible for residents to travel during inclement weather, but delivery of food and other essentials also becomes problematic. The three smaller village churches that Sister Marian serves do not have running water or year-round sewers. Power outages are common throughout the region and unheated buildings get cold very quickly with temperatures well below freezing. To stay prepared, Sister Marian keeps extra water in the store room, canned goods in her pantry, and, of course, plenty of clothing designed for extreme cold.

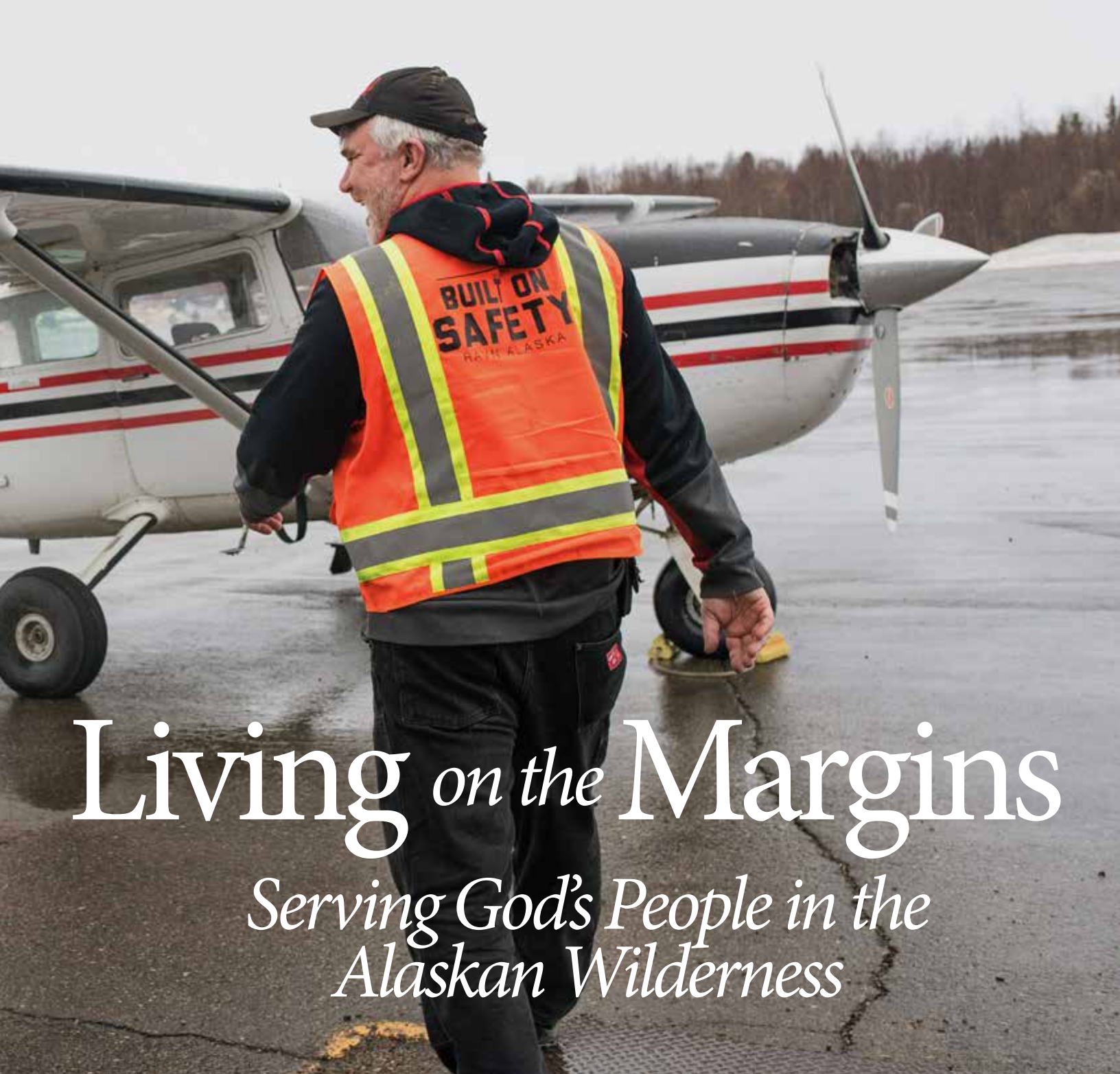
continued on page 6

(Right) Although St. Theresa Church in Aniak might not have the grandeur of many churches in the lower 48, this simple building serves a central role in the lives of the village residents. (Middle Right) Sister Marian helps a homebound elder remove his trash on the way out. She often borrows a truck and takes trash from a few homes to the city’s dump. (Far Right) Below freezing temperatures don’t stop local children from playing ball on the river dyke in front of the church.



Because of her frequent trips from one parish to another, Sister Marian is on a first name basis with the pilots of the small bush planes that service the YK Delta. Travel of any kind is a challenge in this part of the world due to extreme weather conditions and a dearth of roads. In addition to planes, Sister Marian travels by snow machine in winter and boat during the summer. When frozen, the river dyke acts as a walkway as well as a path for snow mobiles and the river acts as a road connecting one town to another. The most dangerous and isolating time of the year comes during spring and fall when the water is neither sufficiently frozen nor thawed to use as a means of travel.





Living *on the* Margins

*Serving God's People in the
Alaskan Wilderness*





Sister Ellen Eugene Callaghan, Patricia Millen, and Kathleen Radich in St. Mary's, Alaska, in 1998.

Serving the Yup'ik People

Sister Marian Leaf is not our only sister who ministers in Alaska—Sisters Kathleen Radich and Ellen Eugene Callaghan both minister in St. Mary's serving the Yup'ik people on the Alaskan Yukon Delta. This is a presence that began in 1997 after the bishops of Fairbanks and Juneau instituted a Native Ministry Training Program in 1991. Sister Kathy, who had previously ministered in other regions of Alaska for more than a decade, became the diocesan coordinator of rural ministry for the Yukon-Kuskokwim-Delta region. She now visits 24 villages that span more than 110 miles. Sister Ellen Eugene acts as the director of the Native Ministry Training Program—designing presentations and workshops for pastoral councils, parish administrators, and catechetical teacher training as well as developing religious education curriculum for elementary grades.

“WE MIRROR WHAT IS HAPPENING ELSEWHERE WITH SMALLER NUMBERS PARTICIPATING BUT, BECAUSE WE ARE SMALLER, WE FEEL IT THAT MUCH MORE.”

continued from page 5

Leading From Behind

Life in Alaska took some getting used to for Sister Marian who came to Aniak directly from a 12-year stint in Africa. “Just going out to run an errand or to stop at someone's house is a time-consuming project,” she explained. “Walking, which generates heat, or using a snow machine, which generates a mean wind-chill factor, requires two different combinations of clothes during extreme cold.” Nevertheless, she wouldn't trade it for the world. She believes she has been blessed with a beautiful ministry site and considers it a gift to work with the people of the Y-K Delta.

Most residents in Sister Marian's parishes are Alaskan natives—either Yupik Eskimos or Athabaskan Indians. The majority live a traditional subsistence lifestyle of hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering. “Things move at a different pace here than they do

in the lower 48 states. It's a different tempo, a different rhythm,” said Sister Marian. “It's not like a city parish.”

A priest from Fairbanks visits each parish in the region about once every six weeks. He comes and stays approximately two-to-three days in each village. Other priests that live in the Y-K region may visit parishes more frequently. Because Sister Marian also travels from place to place, lay leaders such as permanent deacons and Eucharistic ministers take the lead. “It may not be the conventional way of doing things but it all gets done,” said Sister Marian. “If a priest is not around and I'm not around, the parishes still function. That is the idea. My role is to support lay leaders and to lead from behind.” If there is a death in the parish, for example, people call the lay leader for help with making arrangements and conducting funeral services. Similarly, the deacon and Eucharistic minister lead events such as the nightly rosary which is conducted in

Sister Marian greets Carrie Longpre as she opens the library. The women are meeting today to work on plans for the summer reading program which will incorporate music and art in addition to an engaging selection of titles.

Sister Marian checks in on Paul, Carrie Longpre's husband. Paul and Carrie were homesteaders for 18 years in the Alaskan wilderness. Paul loves sharing stories with Sister Marian about the good old days on the homestead. Homesteading was a way people could obtain federal land virtually free if they met certain requirements, including living on the land and cultivating a portion of it. It was a legal way to obtain land in Alaska until 1986.





(Left) Local residents Angie and Carl begin the Sunday service. With such a small congregation, each member's contribution has a big impact. People fill in where needed, including Sister Marian who often plays piano at the Sunday service. (Above) Adian (12) does the collection. He is also an altar boy.

people's homes in the Aniak parish every night in October. "Occasionally when needed, I will step in to lead a Sunday service or a funeral but my role is not to overstep or take over—I only fill in when asked," said Sister Marian.

Sister Marian is currently working with three simultaneous confirmation classes in separate village parishes. Because she is in Aniak more often, she conducts all those classes herself. In the other parishes, she tries to hold classes but due to the stretches of time between her visits, she works with parents and provides the needed materials. Similarly, when children prepare for first communion or first reconciliation (confession), Sister Marian sends materials to aid parents in working with their children. When she is in the village herself, she meets with the families to help them along. "It is a collaborative effort," she explained. "I help parents understand their role in passing on the faith to their children."

Despite the emphasis on collaboration and self-sufficiency, Sister Marian is still an integral part of the parish. She does the

vast majority of the baptismal preparation classes in all four parishes as well as the first communion, reconciliation, confirmation, and marriage classes; anointing of the sick; and adult faith education sessions. In addition, she is also involved in various degrees in budgeting, year-end reports, parish planning, and working with parish administrators in dealing with building upkeep, maintenance issues, and repairs.

But it is who Sister Marian is—as much as what she does—that makes her such a cherished part of the communities in which she ministers. "Sister Marian is a really good person. People here really like her," said Angie Morgan, Eucharistic minister and pastoral coordinator in Aniak. "She is very friendly and she does a lot for us. I miss her when she travels."

Operating with Small Numbers

Because the parishes in the Y-K region are small and geographically isolated, they operate in a much smaller context than the Church in the lower 48 and even in other parts of their own Fairbanks diocese with

parishes along the road system. "We live and work on the margins of the Catholic Church," said Sister Marian. "We mirror what is happening elsewhere with smaller numbers participating but, because we are smaller, we feel it that much more."

In Aniak, eight-to-fourteen people gather regularly for Sunday worship, whereas Kalskag has 15-to-20 and Holy Cross and Russian Mission only four or five. Still, the limited numbers belie the strength of faith that exists in these modest congregations. "I am inspired by our lay leaders and those who show up every week," said Sister Marian. "The people who do gather are people of strong faith—vibrant, loving, and caring."

For members who do not attend routinely, the Church can still be an oasis in trying times. "Sometimes we see a family who is not usually at services come in on a Sunday," said Sister Marian. "People touch into the Church when they need it. Those who come regularly carry the parish and hold the faith for the entire village. When others come at times of crisis, we are there."

Of course, small numbers can be a challenge, particularly when there is work to be done. "One of the difficult things about a small parish is that there aren't as many people to help," said Edith Morgan, planning administrator of the parish. Still, the sense of community among those who do

continued on page 8

► Greetings of peace in Aniak are big hugs. “While I push and encourage from behind,” said Sister Marian. “It is the parish ministers and the faith community that have realized their success!”



(Below) Sometimes after services, everyone gathers for a community meal. Local favorite dishes are served, including Muktuk (far right) which is whale skin and fat; and Aquataq (right) which is Eskimo ice cream—a dessert made of white fish, seal oil, sugar, and blueberries.



► Sister Marian gathers singers to practice choir music after Sunday Mass. “We love the fact that she brings music into the church in Aniak,” said Edith Morgan. “It makes us sound so lively and she keeps us on our toes by introducing new songs.”



continued from page 7

participate is incredibly strong. “Everybody knows everybody,” said Edith. “We just had a little gathering for a baptism. We had a potluck; everybody brought something. It seems like we have more opportunity for things like that because we are small.”

That sense of community lifts people up not only in times of joy, but in times of sadness as well. When a parishioner’s loved one is sick or dying in the hospital in Anchorage, people in Aniak gather at someone’s home, call into the patient’s room, put the phone on speaker, and pray the rosary with those at the bedside. Those present at the hospital will place the phone by the ear of the patient as their loved ones back home pray and sing songs of faith and comfort.

The Yupik people also incorporate their own cultural traditions into their churches. When young people catch their first moose, there is a celebration in their honor. Yupik dancing by school students in native dress is incorporated into special occasions. Women often wear Kuspiks (a parka of lightweight cloth typically worn by Eskimos) to church and the deacons typically wear them when serving at the altar. “Our goal is to help the people cultivate a truly Yupik Church, to empower them to do for themselves, and to be responsible for their own spiritual communities,” said Sister Kathy Radich, OSF, coordinator of rural ministries for 24 parishes in Western Alaska. “Sister Marian certainly has a gift for that.”

Walking with the People

Despite the beauty of both the culture and the region, western Alaska has its share of struggles. More than 30 percent of families in the Y-K Delta have incomes well below the federal poverty level. Very few jobs are available and opportunities for entertainment are limited. There is a high incidence of alcoholism and drug addiction in the region and suicide rates are among the highest in the United States. In addition, the already poor region is being affected by climate change. Melting permafrost, erosion, and flooding are causing homes and other buildings to become unstable or in danger of collapse and salmon have become less plentiful. Still, very few people leave; life in the region is all they have



Sister Marian visits the town's one and only store. The shop has limited supplies with extremely high prices (notice the over \$9 price tag for Cheerios). Because Aniak is currently waiting for the breakup (thaw), some foods and supplies are sparse. Once the river becomes navigable again, residents will be able to access items at a much lower cost.

known. Some try going away to college but the majority come back without finishing, finding the cultural differences too difficult or the financial burden too heavy.

Sister Marian is committed to walking with the people, whatever their journey. "Part of my role is to affirm people and not let discouragement enter in," said Sister Marian. "My ministry is about being present to people, being in relationship with them. Having a religious sister in the village means something to them and I am here to support them."

Sister Marian meets people where they are—both figuratively and literally. She listens deeply, compassionately, and with an open mind and is always ready to connect with others no matter what the situation. "I've offered just as much pastoral support in the aisle at the store as in the church," she said.

In her baptismal preparation classes, Sister Marian describes the baptismal journey as walking home to God and walking one another home to God. "As I join people's walk home to God, they join my journey as



well," she said. "This mutual exchange nestles my ministry here in Alaska deep within my call to a Franciscan way of life. It's all about relationship with others and walking home together in mutuality and love." ■

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

HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Step up to serve in your local church or community. No matter what the size, most religious congregations and community groups rely on volunteers to make things happen. Giving your time and talent to a cause you believe in will be a gift to yourself and others.
- Look for beauty in a variety of landscapes. God's majesty can be found in the serenity of the ocean and the warm glow of the sun on your face, the starkness of the tundra and the bracing cold of the Arctic wind, the lushness of the forest and the soft give of the earth beneath your feet.
- Think outside the box. Sometimes the way most people give back isn't right for you. Don't be afraid to look at a problem from a different perspective or approach a situation in a novel way.
- Be present to others on their journey. Challenge yourself to listen deeply to those around you, to give them the full measure of your attention, and to meet them where they are.
- Donate to the Sisters of St. Francis Foundation to help support the ministries of our sisters.

► Sister Maria Orlandini talks with people living on the sidewalk outside the embassy in the Honduras capitol of Tegucigalpa. Nearly 80 families have been forced out of their homes by the rich family in the area who is slowly depriving people of their land.



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.

▼ The families of Sister Madonna Marie Cunningham, Mother Everilda Flynn, and Sister Margarella O'Neill display the photos that will be displayed in their respective residences.



HONDURAS

Sister Maria Orlandini was among the nearly 75 faith leaders and immigrant justice advocates, mostly from the United States, and several joining from South America, to travel to Honduras on March 18-25 to meet with grassroots and religious partners to understand more deeply the root causes of migration that have spurred thousands to flee Honduras. The international, interfaith delegation met with organizations working and advocating for the rights of migrants and explored factors that are forcing migrants to flee, including violence; environmental degradation; and

the ongoing effects of the 2009 coup which opened the door for drug cartels, organized crime, corrupt security forces, and near total impunity for human rights violations. Read a reflection from the trip written by Sister Maria on our website: <https://osfphila.org/justice-and-peace/immigration/>.



PENNSYLVANIA

On March 30, several sisters from the motherhouse and retirement residence gathered at the Aston Community Center as part of the **2019 Rise Against Hunger**. Also on hand were our former employee, Jerome Burton, and his wife Leigh. We donned hairnets and plastic gloves and settled at one of the work tables. Shortly before 9:30 came the signal to begin. Some tables prepared the individual bags. Volunteers measured designated helpings of rice, soy protein, dehydrated vegetables, and vitamins into small plastic bags. Runners carried the bags to a second group who weighed each bag before passing it to volunteers to be stapled. Runners then took the stapled bags to their final station where they were packaged for shipping. The final gong sounded at 10:30 and we learned that we had prepared a little over 22,000 meals to be sent to our sisters and brothers in the "world's most vulnerable countries"!



PENNSYLVANIA

Charter Day is a day of celebration for both the Sisters of St. Francis and the students and faculty at Neumann University. This year's Charter Day celebration honored Neumann's first three presidents: **Mother Everilda Flynn, Sister Madonna Marie Cunningham, and Sister Margarella O'Neill**. The annual Charter Day Mass was held at Our Lady of Angels Chapel where students, administration, and our sisters gathered for liturgy and prayer. After Mass, a luncheon was held at the Mirenda Center



Piece of St. John Neumann's vestment (left); St. John Neumann's cape (lower right); St. John Neumann's zucchetto (upper right); smaller figures at top: ornate egg mounted on base with hinged door picturing St. John Neumann. The inside is a copy of Coletti's painting of St. John Neumann in a classroom with two Sisters of St. Francis and five school children.

just before Neumann president, Dr. Chris Everett Domes' welcome speech and the renaming ceremony hosted by Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty. During the afternoon, Neumann University's three residence halls were given new titles: Flynn, Cunningham, and O'Neill Halls. The Sisters of St. Francis want to thank Neumann University—one of the congregation's sponsored ministries—for this gracious honor and for an unforgettable Charter Day.



PENNSYLVANIA

In January, Sister Kathy Dougherty and Patrick Hayes, archivist for the Redemptorists of the Baltimore Province, signed the Deed of Gift documents regarding the transfer of several artifacts belonging to or associated with **St. John Neumann** from our congregational archives to the Redemptorist archives. This formality was the culmination of a process begun in March 2018 when our archivist, Sister Helen Jacobson, received a request for display-worthy objects for a new museum occupying the first floor of St. Peter School across from the National Shrine of St. John Neumann in Philadelphia. After the necessary documents were prepared, the items were packed and placed on hold until the fabricators building the display cases were finally ready for the artifacts. The grand opening celebrations for the new St. John Neumann Museum were held April 29-May 3, 2019.

NORTH CAROLINA

Sister Damian Marie Jackson was recently recognized by the Diocese of Raleigh where she has ministered for 30+ years both by an article in the diocesan newspaper, *North Carolina Catholic*, and in a video on YouTube. Looking back over her 65 years as a Sister of St. Francis of Philadelphia, Damian described her early connection with our sisters both in elementary and secondary school—and her initial surprise when her request to enter the congregation was granted! She described a delightful story about her first teaching experience as a novice. The article goes on to cite her 36 years in the Diocese of Raleigh—30 as director of the Avila Retreat House and the last six in what she termed a “ministry of presence.” The latter, Sister Damian explained, simply means “being ready and willing to respond to the needs of others as they are presented to me.”




PENNSYLVANIA

Nationwide congregations of women religious celebrated **National Catholic Sisters Week** from March 8-14—and the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia were no exception. On Wednesday, March 13, the sisters at our motherhouse were invited to lunch by Neumann University president, Dr. Chris Domes. The luncheon was held at Neumann's dining hall where we had our choice of the many delicious entrees and desserts. The following day our roles were somewhat reversed. The sisters hosted a

group of Neumann students for an enjoyable supper. And even better than the meal itself was the opportunity to interact with these young women and men. Earlier in the week, our sisters at Assisi House were also able to celebrate National Catholic Sisters Week with a group of Neumann University students who joined them for lunch and provided entertainment during their St. Patrick's Day celebration.



In addition to joining us for dinner, these young women were also part of the Neumann University contingent that marched with us in the Philadelphia St. Patrick's Day Parade.



Sister Pat and Edna Suckow meet before RCIA classes to talk about the day's lesson. The church, St. Francis of Assisi on Long Beach Island, where they are meeting endured three feet of water during Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

When most people think of Long Beach Island, New Jersey, they think of sun, surf, and sand. The 18-mile-long barrier island along the Atlantic Ocean is known for its stretches of white beaches and small shore towns. LBI, or simply “the Island” as it is known by locals, is home to about 20,000 people on a year-round basis. That population swells during the summer months and reaches about 100,000 people, including part-time residents and tourists. But the Island is more than just flip-flops and beach umbrellas. The Catholic Church has had

a presence there since the 19th Century when early priests from Camden, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, endured bad weather and tedious boat and train travel to bring the Word of Christ to a handful of people on the Island. Masses were offered by visiting priests as early as 1885 until the first resident pastor was appointed in 1905. At that time there were 19 Catholics living on Long Beach Island. Today there are nearly 3,000 families registered in what is now known as St. Francis of Assisi Parish. The parish is comprised of four churches: St. Francis of Assisi Church

in Brant Beach, St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Beach Haven, St. Thomas of Villanova Church in Surf City, and St. Clare Church in Loveladies. Only St. Francis of Assisi Church is open year round with the others open according to the seasonal population.

A Welcoming Presence

St. Francis of Assisi is a dynamic, bustling parish and for the past 17 years, Sister Patricia McNiff has been at the center of the activity. “Everybody loves Sister Pat,”



St. Clare's Church, St. Thomas of Villanova Church, and St. Francis of Assisi Church are all part of the landscape and community on Long Beach Island, New Jersey.

Coming Together on the Island

A Parish Community Thrives by the Sea

✧ "I THINK ALMOST WITHOUT EXCEPTION THE WORD THAT PEOPLE USE TO DESCRIBE ST. FRANCIS IS 'WELCOMING'."

said parishioner Edna Suckow. "She does so many things, a lot of which most people don't even know about. She is soft-spoken, gentle, and spiritual. She is always moving but always has time to listen."

Edna has been involved with the parish since 1985 when she bought a house on LBI. Although she had been raised Protestant, she felt drawn to St. Francis of Assisi Parish. "I think almost without exception the word that people use to describe St. Francis is 'welcoming'—whether it is someone who vacations for one or two weeks or others like me who are here year round," said Edna. "I have always felt at home here."

When Edna began thinking about conversion, she felt a bit intimidated. So she called Sister Pat for guidance. "She was very reassuring without pressuring me at all," said Edna. "She walked me right through the process. Now she has me teaching Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) classes myself."

"Many times people who are beginning adult faith formation wonder if they really belong—I help them to feel welcome," said Sister Pat who oversees the RCIA program.



Parishioners Carol Dunn, Loretta Kapler, and Linda Reilly organize bags of food at the St. Francis Community Center food pantry which serves approximately 10-20 families per day. The community center works hand in hand with the parish helping to meet the needs of area residents. The winter months are often the hardest for families because the economic benefits of tourism have dried up for the season.

She remembers one woman who had been baptized in another faith and had been coming to Mass for decades. She had raised her children Catholic but had never become Catholic herself. Finally, in her 70s, the woman came to Sister Pat with her desire to go through the RCIA program but was unsure about whether she could be an

asset to the Church at her age. "I told her she would be a gift to us," said Sister Pat. In the end, the woman did convert and today is an active and integral part of the parish.

"I always tell people that God calls them, not me," said Sister Pat. She never approaches people about entering the RCIA

continued on page 14



The back of St. Francis Community Center sits right on the bay and includes multiple basketball courts and a pool for community members. Being surrounded by water on both the east and west sides means that this community gets pummeled when fierce storms hit the coast.

HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Be a welcoming presence. Whether you are at work, school, church, or in your neighborhood, helping those around you feel at home is a tremendous gift.
- Remember that it is possible for some good to come even from suffering and adversity. Attempt to use the lessons you have learned from difficulties in your own life to teach and help others facing similar situations.
- Pray for people who are rebuilding their lives after hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and earthquakes.
- Donate funds to disaster relief organizations after a natural disaster. These organizations are often best equipped to provide assistance during emergencies and long-term recovery efforts.
- Give blood. Donated blood is an especially meaningful way to help out in the wake of a natural disaster. In extreme weather conditions, road travel is often hazardous, preventing regular donors from giving and canceling scheduled blood drives. At the same time, there is often an increased demand for blood.

program, but rather fosters a welcoming attitude that allows and encourages people to take that step when they feel ready.

The ability to engender that kind of comfort and trust is one of Sister Pat's most precious gifts. And nowhere is that quality more important than in her role as facilitator of the Survivors of Suicide group that meets at St. Francis. The group was started 15 years ago when a woman approached Sister Pat and Father Steve Kluge, a priest who has since moved on to another parish, before Mass and whispered that the service was for her daughter who had taken her own life. "Father Steve told her that was nothing someone should have to whisper," said Sister Pat. "That was how the idea for the group was born."

Since that time, the Survivors of Suicide group has been a support and comfort to more than 100 people who have lost a loved one to suicide. "The pain is raw but seeing people reach out to one another in comfort and consolation is transformative," said Sister Pat. In addition to the support group, the parish holds an annual Mass on Mercy Sunday for survivors of suicide. "These families, some of whom have had members of their own family shun them, need to know that this is a place where they are accepted," she said.

Just as in life, parish ministry juxtaposes sorrow and grief with joy and celebration.

One of Sister Pat's great pleasures is working with parents on Baptism preparation. She helps them to understand Baptism as a sacrament of belonging and to think about what moments and rituals in their own families allowed them to know God better. "It is a very beautiful experience for young couples," said Sister Pat. "Some haven't been to church in years but they come with hope in their hearts to bring their child to faith. It is a privilege to be part of their children's faith formation and a great joy to experience new life in the church."

Another one of Sister Pat's favorite responsibilities is working with the children's choir along with the music director. "That is one of my delights," she said. "We help the children to praise God through song. We help them read the music. But, as often is the case, my ministry is more about presence than doing. Sometimes, I just tie their shoes."

Strength in the Face of Hardship

Perhaps never was Sister Pat's ministry of presence more important than in late October 2012 when Hurricane Sandy pummeled Long Beach Island. A nine-foot storm surge pounded the coastline, damaging or destroying homes along the ocean and bay fronts. Residents were evacuated and portions of the island were severely flooded with the ocean meeting the bay



Helping with the youth choir is a great joy for Sister Pat. She describes the task as one of her "delights" and relishes working with the children to praise God through their music.



Fr. Jim Scullion and Sister Pat lead a discussion with participants of the suicide survivors meeting. Jo Vennwald (above in red sweater) worked with Sister Pat to start the support group after losing her daughter to suicide. Today the group is a lifeline for other families who are suffering.

in spots. Four feet of sand covered the streets in some areas. The Manahawkin Bay Bridge, the only vehicular route onto the island, remained closed to residents for a full 13 days following the storm and even locals were prohibited from returning to the island except for brief visits to retrieve belongings. Long Beach Island was finally reopened to residents and building owners on November 10. However, many neighborhoods were still without sewer, water, and electric service at that time.

The first Sunday after the hurricane, St. Francis parishioners gathered for Mass at nearby St. Mary's Parish in Barnegat, New Jersey, where they had been invited to gather for their own special service. People were happy and relieved to be together and offered whatever help they could to one another. "Four hundred people came," said Sister Pat. "It was very emotional. When the first hymn began, 'Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled,' people cried."

The tragedy highlighted the faith and spirit of the community at St. Francis. People helped one another in any way they could—assisting one another in find-

ing temporary housing, clearing debris, or just offering a sympathetic ear. People whose homes had survived hosted others at their houses for hot meals. Folks enjoyed coming together, socializing, and sharing information about resources to help get back on their feet. Although Sister Pat was herself displaced, she continued to be a support for others. "We continued to minister even though we were itinerants for a while—just as Jesus and Francis were."

Many of the services of St. Francis Community Center, located just behind St. Francis Church, continued during the rebuilding of the island. Although the center itself couldn't reopen its doors until January, staff did what they could out of a wing at St. Mary's that the neighboring parish allowed them to use. Elements of the center's child and adult day care; senior citizen and family services; food pantry; homeless prevention program; counseling services; parenting and violence prevention workshops; and GED, ESL, and work readiness classes all continued to some extent during this difficult time. "The church and the community center are like the two arms

of Christ reaching out spiritually as well as to the human needs of our people," said Sister Pat. "It was important to continue that as much as possible while people were struggling."

A Spiritual Home

Today, it is hard to find much evidence of the storm that destroyed so much of Long Beach Island just seven years ago. What folks will find upon entering any one of the four churches in the parish is a warm welcome, a spiritual home, and a helping hand. "The people of St. Francis have a generous spirit," said Sister Pat. "It is that gift of everyday people that makes St. Francis what it is." Sister Kathleen Flood, another Sister of St. Francis who also ministered at St. Francis as a pastoral associate and counselor, added that "it has been a great blessing to witness this faith community's response to be disciples of Christ by reaching out to those who are in need. Indeed the works of mercy are in action here!" ■

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)

See more good news at www.osfphila.org

Sisters of St. Francis Foundation 2018 Annual Report

Dear Friends,

Peace and all good!

“Works of love directed to one’s neighbor are the most perfect external manifestation of the interior grace of the Spirit...”

— Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, Nov. 24, 2013

The ministries of the Sisters of St. Francis require the love of groups of people working with one accord. In this we are so very blessed to be able to count on your goodness. Without you, our care for our retired sisters and for those in need would be much less—if not impossible. Indeed, the grace of the Holy Spirit lives and moves within you.

Shown in our 2018 Annual Foundation Report are the areas where your support has allowed us to minister. While dollars count, they do not show the faces of those who were served. Picture the residents of Chester, victims of abuse, refugee families, students, our elderly sisters—these and many others are the faces of those whose lives you have touched by your goodness. Picture also how you have been able to help them, be it through food, services, or housing. You have invested in them through your love and their lives will be forever changed.

We celebrate and commend your response to the Spirit within you in collaborating with our efforts to help so many people in need. We look forward to our future work together.

With gratitude and thanksgiving,

Sr. Deborah Krist, OSF

Sister Deborah Krist, OSF
Director of Mission Advancement

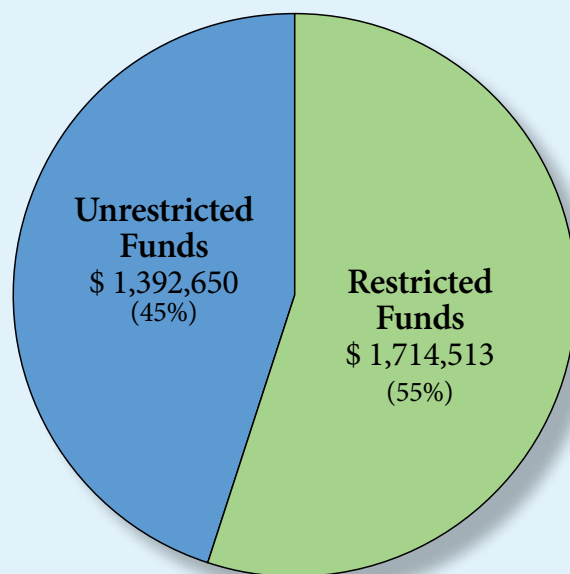
*With Hearts Filled with Gratitude,
The Sisters of St. Francis*



Total Donations: \$ 3,107,163

Restricted: \$ 1,714,513 (55%)

Unrestricted: \$ 1,392,650 (45%)

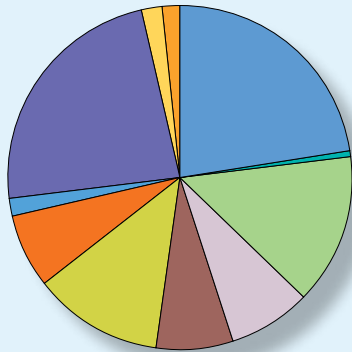


Sources of Donations: Website/Social Media Donations, Direct Mail Appeals, Good News, Golf Tournament, Franciscan Night, Christmas Craft Fair, E-News, Memorial Gifts, Memorial Cards, Grants, Recurring Gifts, Estates, and Inheritances.

The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia assume operational costs of the foundation.

Distribution of Unrestricted Funds: \$ 709,153*

Unrestricted funds were designated by the congregational leadership to assist various ministries—for example, helping to improve lives through Anna's Place, the Ministry of Caring, and Solidarity with Sudan; fostering young minds through education ministries; and giving women and children a place to live through Transitions, Dawn's Place, and Asylee Women's Enterprise.



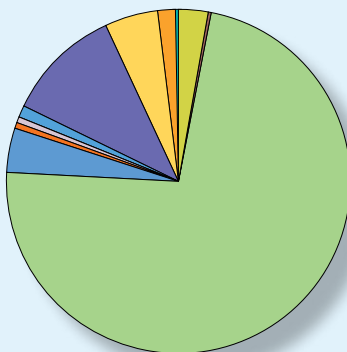
* Note: \$ 1,392,650 was received in current year

- Ministry Funds: \$ 160,000 (22.6%)
- Ministries Outside U.S.: \$ 5,200 (0.7%)
- Neumann University Capital Campaign: \$ 100,000 (14.1%)
- Education: \$ 54,000 (7.6%)
- Shelter & Social Ministries: \$ 52,045 (7.3%)
- OSF Volunteer Program: \$ 86,333 (12.2%)
- Retirement: \$ 50,000 (7.1%)
- Sisters' U.S. Ministries: \$ 11,000 (1.6%)
- Capital: \$ 165,575 (23.3%)
- St. Francis House: \$ 15,000 (2.1%)
- Franciscan Action Network: \$ 10,000 (1.4%)



Your generous donations to the Sisters of St. Francis Foundation help to care for our elderly sisters residing in Assisi House and allow us to reach out to those who are poor and disenfranchised—like the refugee families that come for aid to East Bay Sanctuary

Distribution of Restricted Funds: \$ 1,714,513



- Retirement (Assisi House): \$ 51,397 (3%)
- Retirement (St. Ann Convent): \$ 2,700 (0.2%)
- Retirement (General): \$ 1,247,861 (72.8%)
- OLA Capital: \$ 70,128 (4.1%)
- Education: \$ 11,105 (0.6%)
- Ministries Outside U.S.: \$ 11,410 (0.7%)
- Memorial Garden: \$ 350 (0.0%)
- Parish & Spiritual Ministries: \$ 16,111 (0.9%)
- Assisi House Capital: \$ 186,162 (10.9%)
- Shelter & Social Ministries: \$ 86,409 (5%)
- OSF Volunteer Program: \$ 30,880 (1.8%)



Distribution of Restricted Categories:
Ministries outside the U.S.: Africa, Haiti; **Assisi House Capital:** beds, chairs, speaker system, boiler, furnishings, meditation garden; **OLA Capital:** dining room chairs, oven, wireless upgrade, elevator upgrade; **Education:** Drexel Neumann Academy, The Catholic High School of Baltimore, Neumann University; **Parish and Spiritual Ministries:** Franciscan Spiritual Center-West, OLA Chapel collections; **Memorial Garden:** trees; **Shelter and Social Ministries:** Anna's Place, Chester Community Coalition, Clare of Assisi House, Hispanic Ministries of DELCO, Ministry of Caring, peace and justice initiatives, Red Hill Farm, Philadelphia Catholic Services, St. Francis Inn, discretionary fund for the poor.

In Memoriam

Sister Julia Tierney
 (formerly Sister Jarlath Anne)
 February 15, 2019

Sister Theodore Klingseisen
 March 12, 2019

Sister Georgellen Brilmyer
 March 20, 2019

Sister Francesca Krolczyk
 March 24, 2019

Sister Marie Monica Borden
 May 23, 2019

Therefore, every dollar that our donors give is used solely for the ministries and elder care.

► Mary Stover sees Assisi House as a “unique place to be” and both residents and staff see her as the right person for the job. In addition to the many varied activities, Mary also enjoys writing a column for the congregation’s internal newsletter.



Focus

MARY STOVER

“HER JOYFUL SPIRIT IS CONTAGIOUS AND THE SISTERS RESPOND TO HER LEAD BY JOINING IN WITH HIGH SPIRITS.”

– SISTER JULIE MCCOLE

Mary Stover is the activities director at Assisi House, the sister’s retirement residence in Aston—a position that blends well with Mary’s innate personality. “I love being with the sisters,” she explained. “I’m a ‘crafty’ kind of person and can use my creativity.” Mary plans a variety of activities for the sisters’ enjoyment, including crafts, bingo, holiday parties, Wii bowling tournaments, outside entertainment—the list goes on. Assisi House administrator, Sister Peggy Egan, is quick to recognize Mary’s contributions. “She uses her creative gifts to find activities that sisters enjoy,” Sister Peggy explained. “She is tireless in her efforts and is a team player.”



Mary Stover and husband Brendan; (front, l-r) Daughter Anna; sons John and Brendan

The journey to Assisi House was not an easy one. In 2000 Mary’s 21-year-old daughter, Sarah, was killed by a drunk driver. Two years later Mary realized that in dealing with her grief, she needed “to get out of the house.” While she knew of the Sisters of St. Francis, she had not had any contact with them. However, she inquired about volunteering and started by helping feed the sisters with severe dementia in Clare Hall. Later she volunteered in the activities office and is now the director. “Mary bubbles with enthusiasm when it comes to our sisters,” Sister Rose Barba, assistant administrator, said. “She has an up-beat personality and is relaxed just ‘being with’ our sisters. Her Franciscan heart is always evident.”

In addition to the programs she herself plans, Mary enjoys attending the employee charism sessions. She especially enjoyed the session on the San Damiano crucifix. “The description of the various aspects of the crucifix helped me to feel more of a kinship with St. Francis,” she explained. Sister Julie McCole, director of resident services, shared how Mary incorporates our charism into activities. “Mary is hospitable and caring,” Julie said. “She takes the initiative in involving the sisters in justice-related activities and provides projects that sensitize the sisters to the needs of people that are less fortunate.”

As for her feelings about her job, Mary sees Assisi House as a unique place to be. “The sisters embrace you as family,” she explained. “They were my saving grace when I needed it and took me out of my grieving.

It’s been a wonderful journey that continues.”

► Mary claims to have a “goofy personality” and will often dress up for the various activities. “I’m never embarrassed,” she explained. “If I can make the sisters laugh, I don’t mind.”



Let's Hear From You!

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

Name _____ E-Mail Address _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Select areas of interest to receive information about the congregation.

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



Join Our E-News Mailing List!

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



Join us!



Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia



SrsofStFrancis

Link directly to our pages from our website homepage: www.osfphila.org

SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS FOUNDATION

KINDNESS faith
believe LOVE purpose
community truth hope JOY
spirit gratitude
family

How Can You Help?
**Your Gift can make
all the Difference.**

- ☐ **Online** – Make a secured gift online at www.osfphila.org
- ☐ **Check** – Send a check or money order payable to
The Sisters of St. Francis Foundation
609 S. Convent Road
Aston, PA 19014
- ☐ **Events** – Host or sponsor an event to benefit the Sisters of St. Francis Foundation. Please contact Sister Debbie Krist at dkrist@osfphila.org or (610) 558-7713.
- ☐ **Foundation Support** – If you or a family member has a foundation, contributions to the Sisters of St. Francis may be made through your foundation.
- ☐ **Planned Giving** – Tax advantages are available through planned giving, including bequests, securities, life insurance, and more individual retirement withdrawals.
- ☐ **Recurring Gift** – Set up a monthly deduction from your personal banking account. Contact Elaine at etwadell@osfphila.org or (610) 558-6132.
- ☐ **Matching Gift** – Ask your employer or your spouse's employer to match your contribution.
- ☐ **Honorarium/Memorials** – Make a gift in memory or in honor of a family member or friend. Contact Sister Kathleen Parisi at kparisi@osfphila.org or (610) 558-7714.

I would like to be contacted.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE NUMBER: ☐ HOME ☐ CELL _____ E-MAIL _____

Please tear out this page and mail completed to:

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

Visit us online at www.osfphila.org or call us at (610) 558-7726

SUMMER 2019 19

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

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
P A I D
ROYERSFORD, PA
PERMIT NO. 539



Visit our website at www.osfphila.org



St. John's Bible Comes to Aston

In December we had a special display of *The St. John's Bible* at Our Lady of Angels Convent. Carol Primavera Paris was on hand to do presentations and to answer questions. *The Saint John's Bible* is the first completely handwritten and illuminated Bible commissioned by a Benedictine Abbey since the invention of the printing press. Led by Donald Jackson in collaboration with theologians at St. John's Abbey and the University of Minnesota, six calligraphers and six artists handwrote all 1,150 pages and created 300 major illustrations on approximately 300 sheets of calfskin vellum. The Bible took 15 years to complete. The Bible was also on display at Assisi House for our retired sisters.

◀ Assisi House Sisters Agnes Bonner and Imelda Dooley take a closer look at the intricate details on the pages of the St. John's Bible.

In 1967, the sisters ministering to the people living in the parish community of Brant Beach, New Jersey, on Long Beach Island, lived in the "Antoninian House" convent (pictured)—which was connected by a fence to the "Marion House" convent. It was not uncommon for the sisters living in the convents to host backyard barbeques and invite members of the community to join them. Read how Sister Patricia McNiff is continuing the Franciscan relationship with the members of this ocean community on page 12.



Fun at the St. Patrick's Day Parade

Once again our sisters participated in the Philadelphia St. Patrick's Day Parade. The parade, held on March 10, had the theme, "St. Patrick, Unite Us." With this theme in mind, the Sisters of St. Francis united with Neumann University and displayed our shared mission, faith, and call to service with our float. A group of Neumann students provided parade-goers with dancing, music, and a display of sign language while sisters and staff smiled and waved foam shamrocks. We were honored to learn that our participation won the Hon. James H.J. Tate Award which is presented to the most outstanding organization that exemplifies the Spirit of the Parade.



Sisters GERALDA MESKILL and DEBORAH KRIST stop to get a quick photo with "St. Patrick" during the parade.