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# Good NEWS

A Publication of THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA



## Combating Violence

*by Working Through Trauma*

Also in this issue:

- Helping Sisters Be Their Best Selves
- 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

*In recent years there seems to be an increase of violence in our world: wars, terrorism, mass shootings, and acts of violence against minority groups—to name a few. But perhaps there is not additional violence. Possibly we are simply informed more quickly, even instantaneously, through social media. Violence is not new. We read of violence in the scriptures, especially in the Old Testament.*

*As people of faith, we are called to be people of hope, people who believe that our God desires good for all humanity. God spoke to the Israelites exiled in Babylon saying: “I know the plans I have in mind for you, plans for your welfare not your woe, plans to give you a future full of hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11). Throughout the Gospels, Jesus shows us a God who loves generously, is compassionate, and desires mercy and justice. God yearns for our well-being. As followers of Jesus, we, in turn, give witness with our lives that God has plans for a future full of hope for all people and creation. When those who suffer receive our compassion, our gentleness, and our love, their human dignity is recognized and affirmed. They are given a seed of hope.*

*In this issue of Good News, we read about the Chester Community Coalition, a center providing free, trauma-informed support services for people directly affected by violence. Sister Jean Rupertus and other members of the coalition bring a sense of safety and compassionate presence to families whose lives have been devastated by violence. Gradually lives are transformed from being fearful to trusting again. They are given a seed of hope.*

*We also read about Sister John Celeste Weitzel, a physical therapist who provides exercise and strengthening classes as well as other types of physical therapy to our sisters residing in Our Lady of Angels Convent. Through her support, many sisters are walking with more confidence and a sense of well-being. Under the watchful eye of Sister John Celeste, sisters' weaknesses are identified and they are given personal training to gain back their strength. She provides hope and comfort for her sisters.*

*As we strive to live Gospel lives, let us hold the vision of a God who loves generously and let us be bold in witnessing God's love and compassion bringing hope to others.*

Blessings,

*Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty, OSF*



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







# Combating Violence

*by Working Through Trauma*

*The work being done at the CCC is very intense. All involved have been through deep trauma. In order to protect the victims, we will not be sharing their personal details. Talk therapy is one of the primary ways that they help victims work through their experiences.*



“WHEN SOMEONE LOSES A LOVED ONE TO AN ACT OF VIOLENCE, IT’S TRAUMATIC. THAT TRAUMA LIVES INSIDE THE BODY FOR A LONG, LONG TIME.”

Jacob\* came to the Chester Community Coalition as a nine-year-old—three years after being used as a human shield during a shooting. Although his physical injuries had healed during that time, his emotional wounds had not. He had begun misbehaving and the school he attended had labeled him a behavioral problem. In another instance, a mother and her two daughters, aged 12 and 16, came to the center after losing their son and brother to gun violence. All three were struggling with the loss, especially Sasha,\* the 12-year-old, who was experiencing a lot of physical problems in the form of stomachaches and headaches as a result of the trauma. She was missing school and acting out in class and at home.

It’s not a stretch to say that Chester, Pennsylvania, is a battle zone—especially for young men. Settled in 1681 as a safe haven for Quakers, this city of 36,000 located 20 miles southwest of Philadelphia now has the dubious distinction of having one of the highest per capita murder rates in the country. From 2016 through 2018, the murder rate for young men aged 15-34 averaged about 3.3 for every 1,000 people—higher than the average hostile death rate for combat troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As director of Anna’s Place, a welcome center opened by the Sisters of St. Francis in 2009 and committed to being a safe haven to the people of Chester, Sister Jean Rupertus recognized the incredible impact this violence was having on the community every day. “Although we grieved with those who lost someone, attended funerals, and offered families support, we didn’t feel like we were making enough of a difference,” said Sister Jean. “The gun violence continues throughout the Chester community and families have little access to supportive services to help them heal.

*continued on page 6*

*Finance director and board secretary Fran Stier, program director Alexia Clarke, and grant manager Sister Jean Rupertus make up the incredible team that runs the Chester Community Coalition. The women work collaboratively and all three agree that their strengths complement one another.*



*Community members leave stuffed animals, flowers, and other items at a pop-up memorial for a young man killed by gun violence on the streets of Chester. “There is a lot of anger, resentment, unanswered questions, grief, and sadness among the people here,” said Alexia.*

\* The names in this story were changed to protect the identities of the children.

“VIOLENCE IS CONTAGIOUS AND TRAUMA IS THE VECTOR BY WHICH VIOLENCE TRAVELS. IF WE CAN HELP PEOPLE COPE, WE CAN REDUCE VIOLENCE.”

*An herbalist visits the CCC on a regular basis, providing classes on self-care through natural remedies and bringing items like these herbal sleep pillows which are designed to promote peaceful sleep*



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In an effort to help stem the violence, Sister Jean joined with Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence. It was here that she met Fran Stier, a partner and advocate for families. The group met regularly with victims of gun violence, rallied at gun stores, and advocated for gun law reform but it still didn't seem to be enough. When she learned of an opportunity for a three-year anti-violence grant from Catholic Health Initiatives, Sister Jean teamed up with Fran, started a committee representative of Chester, and applied. Their grant proposal was accepted and the Chester Community Coalition (CCC) was opened in 2018 with the mission “to heal the psychological and emotional impact of homicides and reduce trauma-related violence in the City of Chester.”



Alexia Clarke was hired as program director and Fran stepped into the role of finance officer and board secretary. Sister Jean took the role of grant manager. Since that time, funding from various faith communities, foundations, and individuals have allowed the coalition to provide additional services to adults and youth from 8-18 years old as well as art therapy for children 4-7 years of age.

### Breaking the Cycle of Violence

In disadvantaged communities of color like Chester, homicide bereavement takes a heavy toll that often goes beyond the typical grief that accompanies the death of a loved one. Depression, complicated

*Alexia, Fran, and Sister Jean begin their meeting with a prayer, asking God to bring peace to the community of Chester.*







*Art therapy is an important part of the healing process for many gun violence victims, particularly children. In addition to being an emotional outlet, art therapy can help young people better understand their feelings and open up dialogue about situations that may be difficult for them to share.*

grief disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder may extend years after the loss. Children suffer intrusive reimagining, angry outbursts, and hypervigilance. “When someone loses a loved one to an act of violence, it’s traumatic,” said Sister Jean. “That trauma lives inside the body for a long, long time and people are not able to draw on their good memories because they are so wounded. Mothers, sisters, brothers, children. . . they are all traumatized in this cycle of violence. It escalates until there is healing.”

Studies show that high levels of adversity during childhood take a toll that is visible through adulthood. Adverse childhood experiences can lead to hair-trigger reactions to anger and an inability to think through the consequences of actions. The disagreements that lead to violence in Chester are often as seemingly banal as one young man looking at another’s girlfriend or someone going into a store in the wrong part of town. “The young men in this community deserve better than that,” said Fran. “They deserve to have hope that they will have a future.”

## Change with the Help of Trauma Counseling

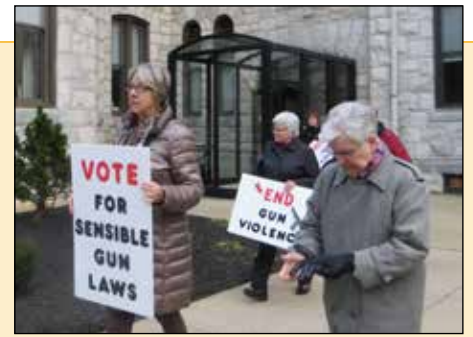
Counseling at the Chester Community Coalition takes place in a closed group format with meetings once a week for 12 weeks. Transportation is provided and

every session begins with a family style meal. The first goal is to help clients come to understand the direct relationship between their feelings, their physical and mental health, and their actions. The second is to empower them with the skills to take care of themselves and improve their quality of life. “Violence is contagious and trauma is the vector by which violence travels,” said Alexia. “If we can help people cope, we can reduce violence.”

Remember Sasha, the 12 year old who came to the center after the death of her brother? Well, as the weeks of counseling progressed, she began to recognize what kinds of things were triggering a heightened emotional state. She found that events like birthdays, anniversaries, or news of another shooting could send her into a downward spiral.

“Just identifying these triggers helps,” said Alexia. “It helps people to understand how trauma affects them so they can move from ‘What is wrong with me?’ to ‘What is happening?’ That is something they can work with.” From there counselors lead participants through group conversations about how to handle negative emotions and thoughts. Clients learn how to direct those feelings, preventing negative emotions from festering and perpetuating more violence in the community. They practice grounding techniques to bring their focus back to the present and reconnect with the thinking side of their brain.

*continued on page 8*



*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.*

## Corporate Stand Against Gun Violence

The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia recently declared a corporate stand against gun violence. Conscious of the growing use of assault and other weapons in our society, we take this stand on behalf of gun safety reform, thereby committing to educate ourselves and others toward a safer culture of life. The statistics of death and injury by gun violence in the U.S. are breathtaking! They challenge us to do what we can to bring to light the enormity and the costs of human life because of the lack of adequate gun safety reform. We plan to take action on this stand by advocating for extensive and up-to-date background checks on people purchasing guns; by participating in actions both locally and nationally that challenge the present gun laws; by voting to elect those who support gun safety reform; by volunteering with organizations who support gun safety reform; by reading and by signing letters and e-mails, and making phone calls to senators and representatives; by including gun safety reform in our daily prayers; and by avoiding shopping in stores that sell guns. Join us in our fight for a safer, more peaceful world. Read more about our corporate stand on our website, [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org).



▲ Sister Jean and Lineada Smith from Anna's Place greet one another during a walk to end gun violence. In addition to her work at the CCC, Sister Jean served as director of Anna's Place which provides a safe place for the people of Chester to gather.

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And as for Jacob, "within four weeks of beginning counseling, the school was telling us they were seeing an improvement in him," said Alexia. "It had been such a short time that we really questioned whether it could be the program making the difference. However, there hadn't been any other change. It was so significant for him to be able to talk about his feelings, to be heard, and to be given the tools to manage his emotions. At the end of the program, we created referrals for him so he could receive more intensive support."

Very young children often benefit from different approaches to therapy and many are helped by employing art as a way to work through their feelings and move toward healing. One little girl who came to the coalition had been living with her great aunt since her father was killed. The aunt was grappling with how to answer the questions the child was asking. Art therapy helped the girl navigate and cope with her grief. "She was struggling with how to see her father," said Fran. "Was he still inside the house where she lived? When she drew him outside the house, she wanted to draw another house around him because she didn't want to imagine him without a house around him."

"We appreciate the impact for children," said Alexia. "They lose someone to murder



Participants of a Stop the Gun Violence Walk march through the streets of Chester. The walk was created and sponsored by JrKickz, a locally-owned sneaker company committed to raising awareness to end gun violence.

but often can't talk about it. They worry about the pain it causes their caregivers or fear of being shut down. And because organizations are not always trauma-informed, children are accused of behavior problems when they are actually dealing with traumatic grief."

## Taking Healing One Step Further

In addition to its counseling services, the coalition provides a number of alternative programs to support its clients. Two support groups meet—one for people who have survived a violent experience and are living with the effects of that violence and a second for caregivers and family of victims of violence. These groups are open—allowing flexibility in when people can start or join the group and allowing members to drop in when they are able. The support groups are a tremendous source of comfort and encouragement for people who often feel alone in their experiences. "People are grateful to be with others," said Alexia.

"They tend to keep in touch even outside the group to support each other."

Recently a licensed herbalist has begun providing herbal teas during precounseling mealtimes and developing aromatherapy sleep aids for families dealing with the effects of trauma such as insomnia and flashbacks. On evenings when she doesn't attend, participants ask when the "tea lady" is going to be back. In fact, her presence has been so well received that she is starting a 10-week class on self-care through natural remedies. "It is wonderful to see the difference in people as the weeks progress," said Sister Jean. "They become more lighthearted. You see children being children again."

## A Sister's Mission

Sister Jean provides the macroview of the program, offering oversight and serving as the connection with Catholic Health Initiatives. She meets with Alexia and Fran every week and is present before every therapy session interacting with clients. "Sister Jean holds us to our mission and to





▲ Alexia works a table at a Chester block party and health fair. At the table, she hands out herbal sachets and talks to community members about the services the CCC offers. Here she is visited by Ronald Hughes and his daughter. He is a pastor who also works on the CCC advisory board. Moments like this are pivotal for Alexia and the others to connect with the community.



▲ Despite the violence in their neighborhoods, life goes on for the people of Chester, Pennsylvania. Children play in the same streets where many have been killed.



▲ A common sight for residents of Chester is the presence of police during a disturbance or violent crime. The CCC staff have a great relationship with the authorities and even have an officer who serves on the advisory board. The goal of both groups is to break the cycle of violence and to make the streets safer for residents.

our role as stewards of our funding,” said Alexia. “She is a fierce defender of our program and of our families. She helps us to think through the challenging issues. Plus she connects really well to families.”

Alexia tells the story of a 15-year-old girl who came to her first session wearing headphones and with her head down—determined not to engage. “By week five, that same girl came in, walked right over, and gave Sister Jean a hug,” said Alexia. “That’s because Sister Jean is able to make people feel safe.”

## The Positive Impact

As expected, it has taken some time for individuals as well as the community of Chester as a whole to come to know and trust the Chester Community Coalition. “People have questions,” Alexia explained. “Is talking about a problem going to make it worse? Is it too close to the pain?” Many are cautious with outsiders. In the past they have seen services pop up in the neighborhood and then disappear. Still the overall reception has been positive. “The word is spreading and we are seeing a positive impact,” Alexia said. “Young people who were completely closed off are express-

ing affection to members of the staff and children who had multiple suspensions from school are being commended for the improvement in their behavior. Those who haven’t had time or space to really care for themselves are practicing skills they have learned at the center.” More and more, people who have heard about CCC are dropping in to talk or learn more. “We intend to be around for the long haul,” Alexia promised. “When people are ready, we will be here.” ■

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

## HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Identify and support initiatives in your neighborhood that build social networks, improve public spaces, promote community healing, and foster economic stability and prosperity.
- Educate yourself about legislation targeted at reducing gun violence and why these measures matter. Then write a letter to the editor in your local paper in support of gun violence prevention.
- Encourage your elected representatives to support and advocate for effective gun violence prevention legislation. Vote for candidates who support measures to reduce gun violence.
- Volunteer at a nonprofit near you. The Chester Community Coalition is always looking for volunteers to help with childcare, drive vans, and serve meals. Your community center probably has similar needs.
- Support the CCC! Send a donation to the Urban Affairs Coalition, Attn: Lee Wall, 1207 Chestnut St., 7th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19107. Be sure to indicate that the donation is for the Chester Community Coalition.





*Sister Robert Marie Green displays the award from the Knights of Columbus recognizing her outreach efforts both within and beyond the parish.*

## NEW JERSEY

**Sister Robert Marie Green** was honored by the St. Hedwig Council of the Knights of Columbus of Trenton, New Jersey, at their 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Vocations Dinner. The Knights recognized and expressed their appreciation for Sister Robert Marie's dedication in serving the spiritual needs of the church and parish communities. The dinner was attended by many parish members who work closely with her. Following a career in education, Sister Robert began ministry as a pastoral associate in Corpus Christi Parish, Willingboro. During the past 21 years, she ministered to the sick through visits to those homebound or hospitalized, worked with families preparing for funerals, and began a Senior Club. She plans events to help support St. Francis Inn in Philadelphia and takes a group of volunteers each week to help serve meals at the Inn. She also assists with the parish's St. Vincent DePaul Society as the liaison and support for the work of this organization. In other words, wherever Sister Robert Marie is needed to assist in bringing the Gospel message to others, she is there!



## PENNSYLVANIA

Twenty years ago Sister Miriam Eileen Murray was a caseworker at **Project H.O.M.E.** in Philadelphia. She asked residents to name an activity they would enjoy. Bingo was the popular choice. Initially games were played during the work day. Sister Miriam eventually moved to another ministry, volunteers were sought, the games were moved to Friday nights, and the interest grew.

Sisters Miriam and Catherine O'Donnell continued as part of the team. They requested and received monies from our Mission Fund to buy a simple microphone



*Members of the Core Bingo Staff: (l-r) Stanley E. Edwards, Sister Miriam Eileen Murray, Sister Mary Scullion, Sister Kate O'Donnell, Theresa Hatton, Geneen Pintof, George Hatton.*

system and to provide snacks and prizes. Recently the games ended but the memories linger: the joy of the winners, the gift of seeing young volunteers waiting on residents, the fun experienced by those who played and those who served!



## DELAWARE

**Sister Margaret Cunniffe** was the recipient of the sixth annual award in memory of Fr. Roberto Balducelli from St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Wilmington, Delaware. She received the award during Mass on June 8. She had served the parish for many years and was a close advisor, confidante, and friend to Father Roberto. We congratulate Sister Margaret for this well-deserved award.



*Sister Margaret Cunniffe, standing next to a portrait of Father Roberto Balducelli, OSFS.*



## PENNSYLVANIA

St. Mary Medical Center in Langhorne named the newly renovated Conference Center, formerly the convent of the Sisters of St. Francis, in honor of **Sister Clare Carty**. As hospital administrator from 1980-1999, Sister Clare had a key role in transforming St. Mary's into a medical and trauma center. The medical center's administration is pleased to be able to



► *Sister Patricia Hinton displays the Excellence in Pastoral Care Award presented to her by members of the North Mississippi Medical Center's pastoral care team.*

recognize Sister Clare, to honor her service, and to honor the medical center's legacy as a Franciscan ministry. The conference center will serve as a central meeting hall for leadership meetings and other hospital gatherings and will also house the office of philanthropy and some educational offices.



## MASSACHUSETTS

Our Lady of the Assumption School (OLA) in Lynnfield held its first annual Hall of Fame Gala and **Sister Martha Pooler** was selected as the school's first inductee. Sister Martha first ministered at OLA as a first grade teacher from 1961-1965 and returned as principal from 1987-2008. William Bachner, current vice principal, explained that during those years, Sister Martha oversaw many educational changes to the curriculum as well as structural changes to the campus. He added that, although these accomplishments would have been more than sufficient to earn her induction into the Hall of Fame, the comments shared by coworkers and former students touched upon what made Sister Martha special and her dedication distinct: her humor and her tireless, roll-up-your-sleeves efforts to make the school a shining example of the intrinsic connection between faith and education, education and faith.



## MISSISSIPPI

**Sister Patricia Hinton** was one of two volunteers recently recognized by the pastoral care department of the North Mississippi Medical Center (NMMC) in Tupelo, Mississippi, at the facility's annual Pastoral Care Conference. Since completing her Clinical Pastoral Education, Sister Pat has served as a volunteer chaplain at NMMC where she visits patients of various faith denominations. In addition, she serves as music and liturgy minister at two Mississippi parishes: St. Christopher Church in Pontotoc and at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Houston.



## OREGON

**Sister Loretta Schaff** was one of two presenters at the OFS-USA 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Seminar for Secular Franciscans held at St. Francis University in July. She presented on the topic "Clare of God: A Spirituality for Our Time." Sister Loretta, who has been associated with the secular Franciscans for many years, is now a regional spiritual assistant for the Troubadours of Peace Region in the Pacific Northwest. The Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) was established by St. Francis of Assisi more than 800 years ago. Their purpose is to bring the Gospel to life where people live and work. Members look for ways to embrace the Gospel in their daily lives and to help others to do likewise.

◀ *OLA School principal, Cindy Donovan, presents Sister Martha Pooler with an award.*

## DELAWARE

A recent issue of *Reaching Out*, a publication of the Ministry of Caring, spotlighted the 40th anniversary year of Emmanuel Dining Room. The article quotes Azaria Hyson, former volunteer and seasonal worker who now works full-time in the dining room. Azaria described the relationship she developed with Emmanuel Dining Room South site manager, **Sister Kathleen O'Donnell**. "She gave me constructive criticism to make me better myself," said Azaria. "That is why I always come back to her as somebody I can talk to." Sister Kathleen finds volunteering a learning experience for everyone. She, in turn, learns from the volunteers. "Their spirit is a teaching tool for me because I can learn how to be more patient and understanding of people," she said. "They know a lot of the clients so they can help us understand a situation." In the 40 years of Emmanuel Dining Room's existence, many relationships have been fostered by healing and learning. The Ministry of Caring will celebrate its 40 years with a fundraiser event on November 21, 2019, at the Francis X. Norton Center in Wilmington.



*Sister Kathleen O'Donnell is featured in a recent issue of the Ministry of Caring's newsletter.*



Sister Celeste leads a group strengthening class on Mondays and Wednesdays directly after Mass. The sessions are popular with many sisters who are very happy to be able to attend exercise classes without ever leaving the motherhouse.



# Helping Sisters *Be Their* Best Selves



“THEY ARE INSPIRED BECAUSE THEY CAN FEEL THE DIFFERENCE. AFTER TWO OR THREE WEEKS THEY START TO TELL ME, ‘I AM FEELING STRONGER ALREADY.’”

If the occasional visitor to the Our Lady of Angels Convent in Aston, Pennsylvania, were to come to chapel these days, they might notice that the sisters are walking just a bit straighter on their way up to receive Communion. Those who used to grasp the ends of pews to steady themselves are strolling right down the center of the aisle and some who once moved with a heavy step have developed a bit more spring. Ask any one of them where their newfound agility comes from and you are likely to get the same reply: “Sister Celeste.”

For many years Sister John Celeste Weitzel ministered at St. Joseph Medical Center in Towson, Maryland, where she offered specialized physical therapy to patients with skeletal dysplasia—commonly known as dwarfism. She worked with one of the world’s most renowned surgeons in the field. It was challenging but very rewarding work and she delighted in being able to help people. After additional ministry work in home care therapy in the Baltimore area, Sister John Celeste came back to Aston in November 2015 to be closer to the motherhouse. Although her days of full-time min-

istry were now behind her, she knew she still had skills to share. Initially she thought she might be of use at Assisi House, the sisters’ retirement residence, but their contract with Mercy LIFE had them covered. Then Sister Celeste began noticing the trouble some of the sisters at the motherhouse were having with balance and weakness and a new idea began to take shape.

“I asked if I could set up a physical therapy department in the lower level of the motherhouse and the congregational leadership team was very supportive,” said Sister



*Sister Celeste creates an individualized program tailored to the needs of each sister with whom she works. (Left) The physical therapy room in the motherhouse contains all the equipment Sister Celeste needs to provide an extensive range of services to the sisters who come to her. (Middle) Sitting on an exercise ball activates the core muscles required to maintain balance. (Right) Sister Corda Marie Bergbauer uses chairs for stability and balance.*

Celeste. A little shopping and rearranging later, and the PT office was up and running. Sister Celeste now works four days a week seeing four to five sisters per day. Those sisters seeking therapy come twice a week and follow a regimen designed specifically for them.

"Each sister who comes has a prescription from her doctor for physical therapy because I want to be sure they are physically able to do the work," said Sister Celeste. "When they come, they bring a list of current medications and their past medical history. I take a blood pressure and heart rate reading at each session."

Even those sisters coming in for a specific concern get a complete evaluation from Sister Celeste before they begin therapy. "A lot of sisters have lost strength in their arms and hips. Balance is a big issue," said Sister Celeste. "These sisters are not acutely ill. They are 70, 80, 90+ years of age and not as active as they used to be. With less activity, muscles weaken and when muscles weaken balance decreases."

Sisters come to Sister Celeste with a set goal and work on a variety of exercises to reach that goal. They want to get stronger. They want to be able to get up from sitting without having to use their arms to push up. They want to walk without the use of a cane. Sister Celeste has even seen a few sisters who have had knee replacements who come to her once they finish rehab just to get a little stronger and to improve their balance.

Sister Anita Cattafesta goes to Sister John Celeste for help with posture among other things. "With Sister Celeste, not only will your body enjoy some new life, but you also come alive with smiles and laughter," Sister Anita said. "A few false turns or mis-

understood directions can be fun. Sister Celeste is gentle and patient but also clear and targeted." Sister Anita admits that it takes time. "I am feeling good about the progress I am making," she said. "Sister Celeste has been a great help to me."

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*Sister Celeste's enthusiasm helps keep the sessions engaging and encourages sisters to keep coming back. "Sister Celeste is a very positive person," said Sister Corda Marie. "She believes that if you want to walk better and are willing to put in the work, you can do it. She is very encouraging."*



*Sister Celeste focuses a lot of attention on core strengthening which is vital to mobility as people age.*



*continued from page 13*

Sister Corda Marie Bergbauer has been working with Sister Celeste for about three years. “She keeps me walking,” said Sister Corda Marie who meets with Sister Celeste on Mondays and Wednesdays for approximately 30-45 minutes a session. She works on strengthening her arms and legs using weights, Thera-bands, and manual resistance as well as balance exercises such as shifting side to side and front to back on a movable surface. “She has done marvels for my balance,” said Sister Corda Marie. “At the age of 94, I use a cane for long distances but usually I don’t need it.”

### Gaining Motivation from Strength

Sister Celeste insists that the best motivation is the improvement sisters feel in their own strength and mobility. “They are inspired because they can feel the difference,” she explained. “After two or three weeks, they start to tell me, ‘I am feeling stronger already.’ Their walking feels safer.”

Another motivation for many of the sisters is ensuring that they can use the stairs safely and efficiently during a timed fire drill.

“That is very important,” said Sister Celeste. “If a sister isn’t able to make it down the steps in a certain amount of time, she isn’t able to continue living in the motherhouse.” The safety of the sisters is the number one priority.

Physical therapy is hard work but the sisters at the motherhouse say that Sister Celeste manages to keep things interesting and even fun. “No two sessions are the same,” said Sister Margaret Xavier Romans. “During my last session, she had me walk across the room bouncing a ball. At first I told her that wouldn’t be necessary because I wasn’t planning on playing basketball but, of course, when you are doing the two things at once, it makes the walking harder. I surprised myself by being able to do it. She explains what you are doing and why you are doing it. And Holy Moses, it works! I’m 78 and I’m walking like I’m 25! Sister Celeste has the ability to listen to where you are and to get you to where you need to be. She is awesome. That is the only word I can use for her.”

### A Holistic Approach

The sisters are also very grateful that they don’t have to leave the motherhouse for



*Leg extensions with ankle weights work the abs and hip flexors.*



*Sister John Celeste Weitzel begins Sister Janice Hallacher's physical therapy session by taking vital signs, a practice she maintains for each and every patient.*

physical therapy. It makes the process much easier for them, particularly for those who do not drive. Once Sister Celeste discharges them from regular physical therapy sessions, sisters have the option to attend a group strengthening class that meets Mondays and Wednesdays directly after Mass. There they work on things like balancing on one foot and transitioning from sitting to standing as well as continued strengthening exercises. "The group classes are great," Sister Helen Jacobson explained. "The sisters keep each other motivated. We use weights, towels, exercise balls, etc. Sister Celeste keeps things challenging, fun, and—most importantly—effective at gaining strength and mobility."

Sister Celeste also has the unusual benefit of seeing her patients on a day-to-day basis and observing them in their everyday activities. If she sees a sister struggling with something, she may offer advice or suggest a visit to their doctor. "I see them in different circumstances," she explained. "I remind people about their posture—encourage them to straighten up when they walk." Sometimes Sister Celeste will even go up to a sister's bedroom to see how she can make the space safer or easier to navigate. "One sister had all these rugs in

her room," said Sister Celeste. "It was creating an uneven surface and was a fall risk. Once we removed them, she did much better."

The ability to have that kind of comprehensive and holistic view of each of her patients has been a gift not just to the sisters taking part in the therapy sessions, but also to Sister Celeste as well. "I have always preferred working with people for a longer time, developing a relationship and trust, and seeing their progress," said Sister Celeste. "I am very grateful that our leadership team has allowed me to do this. It makes me happy to see the sisters' progress. I pray each day that God continues to use me as an instrument of healing and gives me the strength I need to continue doing it." ■

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



▲ Although physical therapy can be challenging, Sister Celeste keeps sessions from feeling onerous with her sense of humor and persistent optimism.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Retired? The skills that you utilized during your professional life undoubtedly are still valuable to organizations in your area. Give back by volunteering your expertise to a group in need.
- Help out at a senior center near you. Whether you are leading an exercise class, a craft project, or a bingo game, the enrichment activities you provide to the elderly can be crucial to their overall wellness.
- Maintain your own health and fitness as you age. Exercise improves your strength, flexibility, and posture which in turn will help with balance, coordination, and fall reduction.
- Keep exercise fun! There are plenty of ways to stay fit. Try pickle ball, ballroom dancing, Tai Chi, water aerobics, or whatever appeals to you.



# SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

*Everyone has within a piece of good news.*

— Anne Frank (adapted)

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

## Standing With and Welcoming Our Immigrant Brothers and Sisters

### Immigrant Accompaniment Program

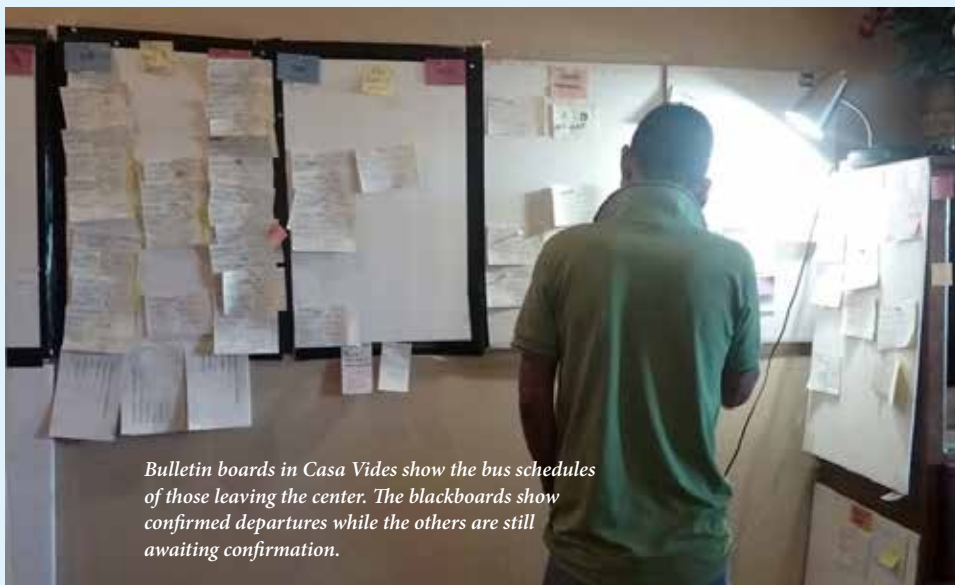
★ Seattle, Washington



In recent years sisters in the Seattle/Tacoma area have been involved in helping immigrants through involvement with the Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center in Seattle. Some sisters, for example, worked to assist and welcome immigrants released from the Tacoma Northwest Detention Center. More recently the sisters became aware that released immigrants who are required to report to ICE often disappear by being deported to their country of origin without notice to their families. This awareness led to a new program called South Sound Accompaniment. Through this program, volunteers are present to witness the court hearing process and to be a liaison to the immigrant's family. The immigrant must request the presence of the volunteers at the hearing. The good news is that having witnesses present tends to prevent deportation.

One of the primary news topics as of late revolves around immigration. In 1996 our congregation took a corporate stand for comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform. In light of the recent crisis at the U.S./Mexico border, several of our sisters volunteered to work with refugees in El Paso, Texas. In April Sister Mary Kennedy spent two weeks there. On a typical day she dealt with phone calls, greeted refugees arriving on the ICE bus, assisted

them with various needs, and allowed them opportunities just to talk and to express their concerns and their fears. She created a vivid image of their situation when she described the routine for lunch generously donated by a local Presbyterian Church. "The people had to line up and have their hands cleaned with a sanitizer because there were no group bathrooms available," Sister Mary explained.



*Bulletin boards in Casa Vides show the bus schedules of those leaving the center. The blackboards show confirmed departures while the others are still awaiting confirmation.*



### Franciscan Federation Honors

Our sisters were, as usual, well represented at the annual Franciscan Federation Conference. However, not only were they "simply" in attendance, a number of them received specific acknowledgements and appointments during the conference. Sister Maureen Duignan was acknowledged as our honoree for the annual federation award as an individual whose life exemplifies the conference theme. Sister Patricia Millen was elected to the Commission of Regions while Sister Celeste Crine was elected to the federation's national board. Sister Kathleen Moffatt was presented with an award from the Commission for the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition.

◀ *Representing our congregation at the 2019 Franciscan Federation: (l-r) Sisters Christine Still, Kathy Dougherty, Joanne Clavel, Patricia Millen, Patricia Smith, Kathleen Moffatt, Maureen Duignan, Celeste Crine, Marie Lucey, Maria Orlandini.*

Sister Caroline Sweeney is giving a year of service in El Paso at Casa Vides where she works with refugees who have been stripped at the border of their dignity, money, and passports. Many of them traveled for days or weeks by foot, bus, train, or truck. Some of the families have lost a family member on the journey. Others come from the hospital with broken bones after jumping the wall and have been in wheelchairs for weeks. Kept initially at government centers where they were separated from family, they are happy to reach Casa Vides where they find “real” food, a change of clothes, a bath, and a bed. Their families in the U.S. are contacted. Sister Caroline and the staff assure them they will have help getting to bus terminals or the airport when they leave.

In March Sister Maria Orlandini served as part of a delegation to Honduras—the second time she has done so. “This time I was here to see for myself why so many people choose to migrate to the U.S. border.” Her “learning” began shortly after she left the airport and realized the effects of a four year drought and the effect this had on the farmers. She also learned about the efforts of land and water defenders to protect their water from mine runoff—only to be criminalized



*The rise of anti-immigrant bias and backlash in the United States greatly concerns us as Sisters of St. Francis. We continue to seek just, comprehensive immigration reform through legislation and continue to take action to diminish the economic and political hardships immigrants face.*

by the power of big business. She witnessed the strength, tenacity, and sacrifice of the people of Guapinal—and their poverty. Sister Maria also became aware of the role Americans play in Honduras where the aid we send goes to the military who, in turn, oppress their people and militarize the nation in the name of national security. “I went to see the root causes of migration and I found a country of strong people,” Maria concluded. “However, in a country with almost 70% of its people living in poverty and 44% living in misery, there is really no alternative but to go somewhere else in order to survive.”



## In Memoriam

Sister Margaret Mary O'Reilly  
(formerly Sister Mary Alacoque)  
June 7, 2019

Sister Marie Inez Gonzales  
June 19, 2019

Sister Alberta Manzo  
June 19, 2019

Sister Jordan Marie Goeke  
June 28, 2019

Sister Margaret Maureen Thompson  
June 29, 2019

Sister William Clare Platt  
July 25, 2019

Sister Barbara Ann Lucas  
(formerly Sister Eleanor Marie)  
July 26, 2019

Sister Josephine Harty  
July 29, 2019

## Three New Sisters Join the Congregation

August 11 and 12 marked a week-end of special celebrations for our sisters. On Saturday Sisters Maria Anna Dela Paz and Kathryn Ann Dutrow professed their first vows as Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. Sister Kathleen Flood professed her final vows on Sunday, August 12. We welcome these women into our congregation and pray for each of them as they move on to share our beautiful Franciscan charism with those with whom they minister.



*The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia warmly welcome three new sisters to the congregation (Left to Right): Sister Maria Anna Dela Paz, Sister Kathryn Ann Dutrow, and Sister Kathleen Mary Flood.*



# Focus

## ROGER COX

► One of Roger's favorite things to do is solve problems which is why he is so good at his job at OLA. He is also pretty good at trivia and helped to develop a congregation-themed Quizzo game that was used in one of the staff's values sessions.



"WHEN SOMETHING GOES WRONG AND WE CALL ROGER, THE REWARD IS MORE THAN GETTING THE PROBLEM FIXED. IT IS WORKING WITH SOMEONE WHO SHARES OUR CHARISM AND CARES AS MUCH AS WE DO."

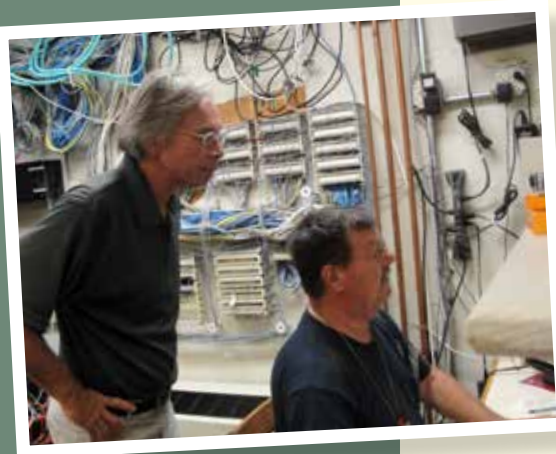
– SISTER CHRISTA THOMPSON

Mark Twain once said, "Humor is mankind's greatest blessing." Roger Cox, operations manager at Our Lady of Angels Convent (OLA) agrees, saying, "I try to make light of things. It gets me through the day." Roger came to the Sisters of St. Francis more than 26 years ago when he relocated from Florida with his pregnant wife. He had never heard of the sisters before. "I was just applying for every position available," Roger stated. In his interview with Sister Euthalia, then the house administrator, he told a Catholic-related joke to break the ice. Nervous, he wasn't sure if he had blown his opportunity of the job but Sister Euthalia liked his sense of humor and hired him. "The sisters surprise me," Roger said. "They are fascinating women, well-rounded, funny, and open-minded."

Roger is in charge of managing the staff that handles the day-to-day operations, not just at OLA but also at other convents owned by the sisters. It is a big job. His team oversees the building, utilities—gas, water, electric, plumbing—and even trash removal. When asked how he feels that he carries out the sister's values and mission, Roger explained that, "You have to see everything as a big picture. It's not just the repair—but the cause—and how the fix affects the environment and the people." He finds his job very much about hospitality and stewardship—trying to make the buildings more pleasant for sisters and visitors during an issue/repair. "I like solving problems. Sure some are easier than others but I like a challenge. There is a customer service element to the job in making people feel comfortable." Sister Christa Thompson appreciates Roger's customer service approach. "'Call Roger' is a part of our vocabulary," she said. "He is a man who models the Franciscan charism—not just in what he does, but who he is."

Roger keeps as busy in his spare time as he does at work. He currently plays drums in three different local bands although he admits he has cut back some to allow for more free time to spend with his family. To reflect on what Mark Twain said, humor may be mankind's greatest blessing but Roger certainly is a great blessing to the sisters and to all whom he encounters.

► Roger loves spending time with the family which includes his wife, Lorraine; son, Nick; and daughter, Allison. Here they are in Italy. However, the family recently took a trip to Hawaii and now Roger can proudly say he has been to all 50 states.



▲ Roger Cox and Pete Brotschul check on Our Lady of Angels' HVAC system in the basement computer room. The system monitors the temperature on all five floors at any given time.



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- Red Hill Farm, Aston PA



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## Celebrating A Combined 1720 Years of Service

On June 9 we honored our sisters celebrating 50, 70, and 75 years of religious profession with a special jubilee liturgy. Father Cyprian Rosen, OFM Cap., presided over the liturgy during which the jubilarians renewed their vows of celibacy, poverty, and obedience—vows which they had professed 75, 70, or 50 years ago. Following the liturgy both jubilarians and their guests gathered for luncheon at Our Lady of Angels Convent.

► *The 2019 jubilarians renew their vows during the liturgy.*



## Franciscan Volunteers Share Our Franciscan Charism



*Sara Marks with Natalie Wasek and Hannah Marks, were grateful for the year they spent together during their time with the Franciscan Volunteers Program.*

In late June we said “good-bye” to Natalie Wasek and Hannah Marks, our 2018-2019 Franciscan Volunteers. During the liturgy the sisters blessed the two young women and reminded them that they were welcome to return at any time. Refreshments and storytelling followed. We are grateful to Natalie and Hannah for their year of service in the Corporate Social

Responsibility Office and at the Aquinas Center. We are grateful to Sara Marks for mentoring them in our Franciscan values, charism, and spirituality. Our 2019-2020 volunteer, Katherine Stevick, arrived in August. During her year of service, Katherine will live with our sisters in Wilmington, Delaware.

*Helping children prosper and grow in an environment and culture that is not always working in their favor has been a long standing mission of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. In 1943 the sisters in Philadelphia went door to door urging parents of African American children to send their students to St. Elizabeth School—giving them an opportunity to learn and succeed in life. Today Sister Jean Rupertus and the Chester Community Coalition are helping children in the crime-riddled city of Chester to overcome grief from tragedy and to prosper in school and their futures. Read more on page 4.*

