

Volume 23.2 Summer 2020

# NEWS

A Publication of  THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

Also in this issue:

- Ministering to the Sick:  
On the Forefront of a  
Pandemic
- People & Places
- Foundation Annual Report

ASEC

AFRICAN  
SISTERS  
EDUCATION  
COLLABORATIVE

*African Sisters Education Collaborative:*

# Transformation through Empowerment

## 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

*Since the publication of the last issue of Good News, we have seen the world rapidly change. The COVID-19 pandemic transformed our families, communities, our country, and the global community. We witnessed the suffering and death of many to this disease. Families stood at a distance unable to comfort their ill and dying loved ones. Healthcare providers heroically risked their own lives to care for others while they lacked the proper personal protective equipment. The virus had a severe impact on the economy. Businesses laid off employees, millions applied for unemployment, and many more families lined up to receive food from local foodbanks. Schools and churches closed and we did our best to connect and support one another through social media.*



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

*Throughout this crisis, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious offered its members weekly reflections. We were invited to pray, contemplate, and reflect on the deeper invitation that the pandemic provided. Our prayer invited us to participate in the transformation while holding in our hearts all who suffered. Through those reflections, I was reminded of the Spanish Flu of 1918. Our sisters participated in that crisis and offered their assistance to those in need. Standing on their shoulders, we are continually challenged by their witness and our faith to respond to our vulnerable brothers and sisters.*

*In this issue of Good News you will read about the pandemic of 1918 and how Catholic sisters responded to the crisis—particularly our sisters in the east and the west. They, too, risked their lives to serve and care for those with the flu. Although 2020 is a different time, our sisters responded in new and creative ways to the current emergency.*

*Over 20 years ago we recognized a critical need in Africa among Catholic sisters. Four women's congregations and their respective colleges and universities responded together by creating the African Sisters Education Collaborative to provide educational opportunities for the sisters. Through scholarship and leadership programs as well as opportunities to earn higher education degrees, the sisters in Africa are now transforming their communities. They are providing quality education, healthcare, social services, and spiritual ministries throughout Africa improving the quality of life in their countries. It has been an awesome experience of global sisterhood.*

*May we always seek the deeper invitation being presented to us when we see great needs among our brothers and sisters.*

Blessings,

*Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty, OSF*





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*The Sisters of St. Francis and Neumann University are charter members of the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC). ASEC helps to facilitate access to education for women religious in Africa that leads to growth, leadership, and a hand in overcoming many of Africa's biggest developmental challenges.*

Written by Sara McDermott  
Photography provided by ASEC

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*In 1918 the Spanish Flu pandemic hit the world hard. Sisters from all over put their lives on the line to minister to the sick. Now, more than 100 years later, the world is in the throes of another pandemic and though our sisters are not needed in the same way, they are still making a difference and doing all they can to minister to the people of God where there is a need.*

Written by Sara McDermott  
Photography by Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

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

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

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*Girls at B. Hillhorst Secondary School in Morogoro, Tanzania, “aim higher” under the guidance of assistant headmistress, Sister Efrasina Mbiki, CICM. Sister Efrasina received her Masters of Education through ASEC’s Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) program in 2018.*





ASEC board members with ASEC staff meet during the annual ASEC Board of Directors meeting hosted at Marywood University in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The board meets in person twice a year. Sister Kathryn Dougherty, OSF; Sister Draru Mary Cecilia; and Sister Kathryn Miller, SSJ, are proud of all that ASEC has been able to accomplish over the last 20+ years.

# *African Sisters Education Collaborative:* Transformation through Empowerment

“TO THINK OF ASEC IS TO THINK OF SISTER-TO-SISTER SUPPORT... THIS UNIQUE ORGANIZATION IS ALL ABOUT SISTERS HELPING OTHER SISTERS HOWEVER THEY CAN.”

When people hear “DIY,” a popular acronym for “do it yourself,” they’re likely to think of crafts and other creative projects. It is not a phrase that comes readily to mind while pondering solutions for the issues facing the people of Africa. However, it was the concept of “DIY” that led a group of Catholic sisters to form the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC) back in 1999. Women religious from four separate congregations got together to ask, “What can we do to support sisters in the young churches of Africa?”

Africa is a continent where the number of women religious is growing. Between the years 2005 and 2015, the sisterhood in sub-Saharan Africa grew by approximately 22%. Forty thousand sisters currently live in this part of the world and have the potential to be a powerful force for good. Their ability to impact their communities, though, hinges on receiving the proper training and education to address the very serious problems facing their world. These problems, to name a few, include the ravages of war, inadequate healthcare, human trafficking, and lack of food. Among those forty thou-

sand sisters, 80% have no higher education credentials.

When, in 1999, those U.S.-based sisters asked themselves what could be done to aid their sisters in Africa, they chose to draw on all the resources available to them to provide an education to these potential leaders and, by extension, help solve a variety of crises throughout the region. ASEC was born.

“This level of cooperation (across congregations) is not usual,” says Sister Draru Mary  
*continued on page 6*

## EDUCATION IS POWER AND IF THEY DON'T OBTAIN IT—EVEN IN THE FACE OF GREAT ADVERSITY—THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO BEST SERVE THEIR COMMUNITIES.

▼ Sister Irene Lucy Onyai, LSMIG, ASEC's programs coordinator in Uganda, presents Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) participants with laptops. Sisters in SLDI receive laptops after the second year of their three year training.



*continued from page 5*

Cecilia, executive director of ASEC. Since ASEC's beginning, the same four congregations have worked together to continually further its mission: the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia (Chestnut Hill College), the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Scranton (Marywood

what it is that they need." ASEC, spanning not only multiple congregations but also two continents and multiple countries, has demonstrated phenomenal organizational ability which allows for the needs expressed to be addressed. Despite each country having its own specific issues, everything gets done.

### Building Confidence to Build a Better World

At its heart, ASEC is about building confidence in African sisters. "We're talking about areas of the world where women's voices aren't always heard," said Sister Florence Hee, an ASEC board member and charism coordinator with the Sisters of St. Francis. In these sisters' cultures, "they are sometimes considered more subservient." This is why one of ASEC's primary goals is to educate sisters and boost their confidence so they can be leaders in their congregations. ASEC helps them to recognize that they have something to bring to the table.

"African sisters can use their voice to move into the future," explained Sister Florence. With self-confidence, "they can do more than what they did traditionally." Oftentimes, in addition to practical education and training, it is this shift in mindset that enables a sister to reach her full potential.

Since ASEC has been in operation, participating sisters have seen their mission to empower come to fruition. Leadership within congregations turns over every few years and those who have been educated through ASEC's programs are the ones stepping up to fill those roles. This is a concrete example of how educating sisters is having a ripple effect, bringing their new skills into their ministries. As of now, 5,300 sisters have gone through ASEC's programs.



▲ ASEC's HESA program recruits sisters to study at its partner institutions across 10 countries in Africa as a cohort of four to 20 sisters. Together the sisters participate in orientation and reflective learning. The cohort serves as a support network throughout the sisters' studies.

University), the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia (Neumann University), and the Society of the Holy Child Jesus (Rosemont College).

"To think of ASEC is to think of sister-to-sister support," Sister Draru continues. "This unique organization is all about sisters helping other sisters however they can."

According to Sister Kathy Dougherty, an ASEC board member and congregational minister of the Sisters of St. Francis, there is "an openness for sisters (in Africa) to say



▲ Field trips began in 2015 to provide a "hands on" learning experience for SLDI participants. Sisters studying both administration and finance visit an array of model projects and sites. In 2018, participants in South Sudan visited Bishop Mazzoldi Memorial Primary and Kindergarten Schools where alumnae of ASEC's programs serve.





*(Left) Sister Bertha Chigowani believes that educating the Malawian youth about caring for the environment will provide hope for the future and stop the harm being done to forests. Here she assists students of Ntcheu Roman Catholic Primary School, Malawi, with planting trees. (Below) Sisters at the Combini Missionary Sisters' project in rural Zambia focus on renewable energy such as windmills, solar power, biogas, and earth bags used to sustain life with organic farming.*



## Education is Power

When ASEC first began, it was with the goal of delivering higher education and leadership courses. ASEC's two initial programs, the Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) and Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA), addressed these concerns.

SLDI is ASEC's largest program and aims to provide sisters with the training and technology they need to take on leadership

roles within their communities. For example, many of the programs that the sisters participate in exist solely on donations so good bookkeeping is vital. However, most sisters have no familiarity with any kind of bookkeeping software or process. By getting this basic training, they acquire skills that they are able to apply directly to their ministries.

To give some insight into the far-reaching effects of this program, those who have gone through its training are estimated

to have served over 2.2 million people, created over 3,800 jobs, and raised over \$19.3 million for projects in their communities.

Upon completion of SLDI, HESA may be a sister's next step. HESA provides undergraduate and master's level education to the sisters—building upon their prior experience to get them the credentials they need to step up in their ministries. Initially, this program only offered sisters the chance to take online courses. Today, however, partnerships exist with 24 universities and colleges. Sisters can complete online courses at a partner university in the U.S. or receive onsite education from a partner university in Africa. This provides the opportunity for higher education for women religious who may otherwise have never considered pursuing such a path.

*continued on page 8*





*continued from page 7*

While these programs have gone on to have invaluable impact, those in charge quickly realized that these were not enough. The sisters they were trying to serve often did not even have the equivalent of a high school education, making the concept of higher education completely out of the question. That's when ASEC's Scholarship Program, offering two-year scholarships to sisters who need to complete secondary school or earn certificates, was created.

While ASEC now serves 10 countries in Africa, the Scholarship Program was specifically inspired by the sisters in Tanzania, 65% of whom had not completed their secondary education. The Bigwa School in Tanzania is a residential high school where sisters, typically in their 20s, can earn those diplomas. The program has now expanded to Malawi, Zambia, and Ghana.

Some sisters may feel shy about returning to school at this point in their lives. Much younger students, who had opportunities earlier, may excel in the classroom while older sisters struggle to catch up. Despite this challenge, the sisters recognize how invaluable it is to get a full education so that they can move forward.

Their dedication to their education is awe-inspiring. Some sisters live in areas that are torn apart by war and conflict. They realize that they must study even when bullets are being fired outside. Education is power and if they don't obtain it—even in the face of great adversity—they won't be able to best serve their communities.



## Accomplishing the Impossible

In their newfound leadership roles, sisters in Africa have been able to accomplish remarkable feats. Originally from Uganda, Sister Draru talks about her “first trip” to Africa to check in on the progress made by an ASEC participant. She went to the small village of Makunka in Zambia. The only way to reach the village was to drive on what Sister Draru refers to as “animal pathways”—literally paths forged by animals through the wilderness. She and her team rode in a four-wheel-drive pick-up and a journey that might have taken 35 minutes on a regular road took two and a half hours.

With such a difficult route, citizens of this village clearly had no way to get to a hospital in a medical emergency. The only logical solution was for the village to develop a system of care that could be self-contained. For this reason, a sister who had gone through ASEC's programs built a health center there, bringing in nurses, midwives, and the best medical healthcare professionals she could afford.

As Sister Draru pointed out, this hard-to-reach area would not have received help

*ASEC support efforts at Bigwa Secondary School in Morogoro, Tanzania, are multidimensional. In addition to education scholarships, ASEC also facilitated the construction of a dining hall, a dormitory, a fish pond, and a state-of-the-art science laboratory consisting of three well-equipped biology, physics, and chemistry labs! ASEC's goal is to ensure that scholarship recipients receive the best education possible and are provided with a safe and healthy environment where they can focus on their studies.*

unless the sister who brought about the change was first empowered and educated. “You can only reach (such an area) if you build the capacity of a sister,” she said.

Prison reform is another area in which an ASEC graduate has effected meaningful change. When Sister Gwendoline Bijiisang Ngwemetoh, SST—an SLDI alumna in Cameroon—looked into a nearby prison facility, she was appalled by what she found. The prison was filthy and the prisoners were living in unhygienic conditions that were breeding grounds for disease. She immediately went to officials and told them that it needed to be cleaned because the prisoners deserved better.

She was quickly met with the age-old excuse that there was no money to hire a cleaning crew. She responded with the very logical solution, “Have the prisoners clean it.” Using her leadership training, she devised a system by which the prisoners themselves would get the prison in shape and offered to work right alongside them.

During the course of Sister Gwendoline's time working with the prisoners, they began to ask what would become of them



once they were released. After hearing the same question—“Where will we go?”—multiple times, she had an idea. She decided to set up a bakery where the prisoners could find employment after serving their sentences. In this way, they could earn money and gain real-life work experience to restart their lives.

These examples are just a small taste of the programs ASEC participants have been implementing. Other problems that they addressed include malnourishment, food security, human trafficking, and the environment. One sister set about planting forests of Moringa trees, a drought-resistant tree with medicinal properties, both to aid the environment and to nourish the community. Another sister in Kenya was thrown in prison when she spoke out against human trafficking in an effort to prevent a group of local girls from being trafficked. Ironically, she wound up being thrown out of prison for preaching her ideologies while incarcerated.

## Impact That Can't Be Measured

All the U.S.-based sisters who work with ASEC marvel both at the impact the organization has had and at the gratitude of the African sisters whom they meet.

“Their gratitude was so humbling,” Sister Kathy said, speaking of the sisters she met from Africa while in Rome for the Union of International Superior Generals meeting. “They told me, ‘This has impacted us so greatly.’”



◀ Upon graduation from ASEC's programs, sisters are able to fund and manage their own projects that speak directly to the needs of their communities. In Tanzania, the CDNK sisters initiated an embroidery and sewing school for girls.

▼ Sisters gather in prayer at the Catholic Sisters: Champions of Sustainable Development in Africa Convening in Nairobi, Kenya, in October 2016. The event was organized by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation in order to appreciate Catholic sisters as key players in the global partnership for sustainable development.



According to the board members of ASEC, the biggest challenge they currently face is simply raising awareness about the organization. ASEC just celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019 with little fanfare. The hope is that, by ASEC's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, there will be greater public awareness about who they are and what they do.

The example ASEC sets has much to teach the world. “This is a collaboration par

excellence,” says Sister Draru. “Don't come as a giver; come as a friend and partner.”

In this spirit of collaboration, ASEC has gone on to accomplish great things. ■

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

## HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Spread the word! Tell others about the good work that is being accomplished by ASEC and encourage them to visit [www.asec-sldi.org](http://www.asec-sldi.org) for more information.
- Donate to ASEC's programs through [www.asec-sldi.org/donate](http://www.asec-sldi.org/donate) knowing that you personally are contributing to the growth and good works of sisters in Africa.
- Think about where you can apply the principle of “DIY” in your own life to do good. Take inspiration from the sisters who first conceived of ASEC by thinking about what you can do with the resources you have to make a difference!
- Adopt ASEC's spirit of collaboration to work with others as friends and partners.
- Give to organizations and promote causes that aim to empower women. Traditionally, women from all countries have received less education than their male counterparts. Decide to elevate women worldwide.

# PEOPLE & PLACES



▲ (l-r) Carol Baiocchi, Mary Lou Pappolla, Patricia St Clair, Margaret Mikulski, Lori Spanier, Kathleen Joyce, Kathy Boehm, Sandy Bengardino, Mary Furlong, Phyllis Petryk, Mary Rutecki, Joyce McGowan Cleveland, Catherine Nugent

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

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

### PENNSYLVANIA

November 16 marked a very special event for our congregation—one might call it an historic event. Our **Franciscan Companions in Mission** program was originally founded in 1986. Many of our present companions have been part of the program since those beginning days. However, the November 2019 gathering marked the beginning of something new—a day of recognition honoring our companions who have been associated with us for 25 or more years. The celebration was held at our motherhouse in Aston. The 18 companions represented faith groups from Aston, Bryn Mawr, Langhorne, Spokane, and Tacoma. We are grateful for the relationship developed with these companions and for the many ways in which they have helped to share our charism over these 25+ years.



Sisters Deborah Krist and Lynn Patrice Lavin standing side-by-side — they are connected forever by the scars left from the life-giving procedure.



### PENNSYLVANIA

In addition to their usual “winter farm chores,” our **Red Hill Farm** farmers, Lilley and Madison, kept busy enhancing their own background as well as providing enriching opportunities for others. They attended the Mid-Atlantic Fruits and Vegetable Convention in Hershey and the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture Conference in Lancaster. They also planned activities for others—CSA members, sisters, and members of the surrounding communities. In January Susan Long, a mediation specialist, addressed a group about the benefits of mindfulness. At another farm-sponsored gathering, Joe Daniels from Penn State Master Gardeners in Delaware County did a presentation on how to care for household plants. One might say that our farm crew spent the winter planting—for both themselves and others—seeds that will continue to produce good fruit!



### PENNSYLVANIA

**Sister Lynn Patrice Lavin** needed a kidney and **Sister Deborah Krist** gave her one. Sounds so simple, yet so incredible. These are two sisters—not by blood but by vocation. There was no telling that they would be a match at all but Sister Debbie just knew she would be a good fit. “It was an act of God for sure,” Sister Debbie said. “It has been an amazing journey which I believe, through the grace of God, has changed both our lives!” Returning to work and getting back into a normal routine, both sisters say that they now have a new appreciation for life. “What really matters becomes more focused,” said Sister Lynn. “I am definitely so much more grounded in my trust in how God provides for us! There is a blessing that comes with being vulnerable. We are living in a world of exchange and it is not always easy to receive but I have been given an incredible gift.”





## WASHINGTON

During the last few years, the majority of our sisters from St. Ann Convent, our former retirement residence in Tacoma, moved east to Assisi House. The St. Ann property—a long time part of our history—was purchased by Trouvés Health Care Corporation. In November sisters in the Tacoma area gathered at the former St. Ann Convent for a special blessing of Trouvés St. Ann, the new facility that is now housed in the former convent. During the blessing ceremony, our sisters and the new staff utilized various objects and shared memories that played a significant part of life at St. Ann's and wove them into a blessing for those whose lives will be part of the new St. Ann's. Referring to the St. Ann facility, Greg Unruh, head of the Trouvés program, said, "We are delighted to carry on this ministry on such sacred ground."



## PENNSYLVANIA

The gift shop at Assisi House had served the sisters and visitors for many years. However, it became apparent that sisters, staff, and visitors were only purchasing candy and cards. With the popularity of online shopping, our religious articles were no longer selling. It was decided that we would transform the space into



*Sister Dorita Slaughter happily serves and chats with Sisters Kathleen Winkelman and Ida Nicklas as they enjoy their coffee at Holy Grounds.*



*Sisters Esther Stewart, Jude Connelly, Carol Warnke, Mary Anne Gallagher, and Carmel Gregg supported the blessing of the new facility, Trouvés St. Ann.*

a coffee shop. We had a contest to see what we might name the space. **Holy Grounds** was the overall winner. On October 4 we dedicated and blessed our Holy Grounds. Sisters and staff have expressed much gratitude for this space of fellowship as well as for the special coffees, teas, and goodies. Candy and cards are also available. There is no charge for any products—only donations. So far we have been able to continue to supply the shop with no problem. Most of all, the success of the coffee shop is the mingling of sisters, staff, and visitors in a comfortable and welcoming space. It sings aloud of the value we put on relationship.



## AFRICA

As the Coronavirus continues to spread in Kenya, the president continues to remind people to follow the containment guidelines. But, like everywhere else, some are not heeding his warnings and others are just doing the best they can. It is almost impossible to keep distance in the informal communities where people are so crowded together and water is not readily available. For **Sister Julia Mulvihill** and the children at **Nyumbani Children's Home**, it has also been a struggle but they are managing. Everyone is working together to keep all of the children and staff safe. The weather has been a little rainier than usual which is a blessing for crops and for filling water storage tanks. But rain is not so great for the children who are home all day because schools are closed. Children have access to the educational programs on TV and radio and also use their textbooks to keep up with school work. Nyumbani Children's Home is also

very lucky to have a well-stocked library. The children seem to be happy, healthy, and full of energy—especially when they get outside to play.



## PENNSYLVANIA

In 1980 our congregation celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary. To honor those years, the congregational council decided to donate money to an organization working for justice or with people whose rights were being denied.

Sister Marie Lucey, a council member at that time, suggested that the money be used to create a fund. The interest would be used to give smaller donations to organizations recommended by the sisters. Thus the **Social Justice Fund** was born. Over

the 40 intervening years, additional funds were added. The fund met the needs of thousands throughout the world. The 2019 cycle marked the closure of the fund. The monies will now become part of our new impact investing commitment. In March, sisters and companions involved in working with the fund as well as several recipients gathered at Assisi House to celebrate the success that flowed from those 40 years of giving.



*Sister Nora Nash thanked the sisters and companions who served on the Social Justice Fund Committee over the years and welcomed guests whose organizations were recipients of the fund.*

*The Spanish Flu of 1918 hit Philadelphia and its surrounding areas very hard and the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia were there to help. In addition to ministering to the sick at St. Mary's Hospital—the first hospital opened by our sisters—overcrowding prompted sisters to set up makeshift facilities in schools and town halls.*

✧ THEY BECAME KNOWN AS TRUE “ANGELS OF MERCY,” HELPING DISSOLVE PREJUDICE AS THEY NURSED PEOPLE “IRRESPECTIVE OF CREED OR COLOR.”



# Ministering to *on the* Forefront

**I**n October of 1918, the streets of Philadelphia were hushed. Regular life was at a standstill. Dead bodies were stored in basements and on porches as people died in greater numbers than local morgues could handle. In the midst of all this, the Sisters of St. Francis were donning gauze masks and riding streetcars down deserted streets to minister to the sick. The Spanish Flu, one of the deadliest pandemics in human history, had struck.

World War I had yet to end so America's regular working force of nurses was severely depleted. Deaths from the epidemic numbered in the hundreds each day—some days five times higher than that day's casualties of war. As a result, leaders within the Church put out a call for sisters to commit themselves to the task of caring for the country's ill. Thousands of sisters rose to the occasion, putting their own lives at risk. As hospitals were over-crowded, they ministered to patients both in make-shift facilities they set up in schools or town halls and privately in patients' homes.

## An Unprecedented Situation

Impromptu or not, hospitals established by sisters sheltered thousands of patients. One example of such a hospital was Westview Farm in Pennsylvania. Originally intended as a convalescent home for soldiers returning from war, wealthy philanthropist Samuel J. Riddle converted the venue into an emergency hospital (Riddle Memorial Hospital now part of Mainline Health) where sisters could aid the sick and dying. They were so short on supplies that sisters had to bring sheets from their motherhouse for patients. Many of the sisters who cared tirelessly for the ill in 1918 had no medical training. Most had been teachers until finding themselves in this unprecedented situation. However, they didn't turn away from the call simply because this “wasn't their job.”

Historical accounts depict sisters who, within just two days, found themselves transported from the lives they knew to working around the clock offering comfort to those who were dying. One particularly vivid account describes how Sister Mary Faustina McKenna stayed by the side of another



*Sisters served in the medical field in a variety of ways over the years. Sister Hugolina, pictured here at St. Joseph Hospital in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, worked as a lab supervisor.*





◀ Despite having little to no background in medicine, thousands of sisters nationwide stepped up to answer the call to minister to the sick. Sisters quickly learned what they could about medical care and, beyond that, gave comfort to those who were ill or dying and supported families who lost loved ones to the dreaded disease.

▼ St. Agnes Hospital in Philadelphia was a key location for the sisters' work in Philadelphia during the outbreak. Additionally, the sisters at numerous hospitals across the nation from Philadelphia to Spokane, Washington, stepped up to help the sick.



# the Sick: of a Pandemic

sister who contracted the illness while serving others. The afflicted sister began vomiting blood and eventually choked to death while in the throes of a hemorrhage, making her one of 23 sisters in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia who, in the course of their work, would die of the Spanish Flu. This number represents approximately 17.5% of the 131 sisters who rose to the call in that region—a percentage that was also reflected in other parts of the country where sisters were devoting themselves to this cause. By early October both Wilmington and Baltimore were affected and later in the

month the scourge developed in the west where our sisters in Franciscan hospitals cared for victims. It was the first time in history that the Sisters of St. Francis had fatalities as a result of ministering to the sick—fifteen of our sisters perished as a result. Sister Mary Faustina would later receive letters of commendation from Pope Benedict XV for her selfless work during the Spanish Flu epidemic.

In the end, it is estimated that between 50-100 million people died of the Spanish Flu pandemic worldwide. At least 675,000

of those deaths were in the United States. While the numbers are high, B. Franklin Royer, Acting Commissioner of Health of Pennsylvania, acknowledged how “without the services rendered by these good women many additional lives would have been sacrificed.” Perhaps most phenomenal of all, these sisters refused any kind of payment for their services throughout this tragedy. They became known as true “angels of mercy,” helping dissolve prejudice as they nursed people “irrespective of creed or color.”

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*Nurses are on the front lines during a pandemic. From 1918 to now, we need and respect nurses for their training and selflessness in crisis. Here we see an “army of nurses” who recently completed their training and are ready to serve.*

IN DECEMBER 1860, MOTHER FRANCIS BACHMANN OPENED THE CONGREGATION'S FIRST HOSPITAL, ST. MARY'S IN PHILADELPHIA, BECAUSE THE SISTERS' CONVENTS COULD NOT ACCOMMODATE ALL THEIR SICK POOR. SINCE THAT TIME, STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF OUR FOUNDING SISTERS, THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS HAVE WORKED IN VARIED JOBS IN HEALTHCARE AT MANY LOCATIONS.



▲ From 1947 to 1953, surgeries at St. Agnes Hospital (Philadelphia) were performed under the watchful eye of Sister Michael St. Joseph Scullion, RN, who was professed in 1944 and trained at St. Francis Hospital, Trenton, New Jersey.

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## Spreading the Faith

An interesting side effect of the sisters' service was how it changed attitudes toward Catholicism in a multitude of communities. As one sister at Washington, DC's Georgetown Hospital wrote, the sisters' "loving care and sympathy has won many hearts back to God."

One community that saw a great shift in its mindset was that of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Sisters had been trying to rebuild a dilapidated Catholic hospital in Lancaster for quite some time before the pandemic hit but had been met with staunch opposition. Locals even went so far as to refuse to sell the sisters goods, trying to force them to leave the area out of desperation for basic supplies. However, as a result of the sisters' awe-inspiring work during the epidemic, attitudes quickly changed. Not only were sisters embraced by the community, but multiple conversions and baptisms also took place.

Additionally, many who had strayed from the faith found themselves reconciled to God in their final moments. Ironically, one such man, Frank Dougherty, was the cousin of then Archbishop of Philadelphia, Dennis Dougherty. Frank was considered the black sheep of the family and hadn't received the sacraments in over 18 years. After contracting the illness, he came to be in the care of the sisters and, inspired by their kindness, found himself reconciled to his faith, receiving the last rites before his death.

## A Modern Epidemic

Now, in 2020, the world is faced with the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the same strategies for preventing the spread of the disease are in effect today as in 1918 such as the closing of schools, churches, and nonessential stores. Fortunately, though, there are more resources than there were 102 years ago both in terms of medical personnel and technology. Easily accessible news and social media help keep the public informed and families may safely see those

▼ With training completed at St. Joseph Hospital (Reading, Pennsylvania), Sister Florence Wissler, RN, supervised the operating room at St. Joseph Hospital (Lancaster, Pennsylvania) from 1952 to 1956.



▲ After 14 years of teaching elementary school, the then Sister Elisea (now Sister Anne Lawrence) earned a B.S. in pharmacy at Duquesne University and went on to serve as chief pharmacist at St. Joseph Hospital (Lancaster, Pennsylvania).

who have tested positive via FaceTime. Most importantly, though, people can seek diagnoses virtually, saving them a trip to the hospital and saving the hospital a testing kit.

Sisters Anne Lupita McNamara and Jude Connelly sit on the board of CHI Franciscan Health System, a system of nine hospitals affiliated with Catholic Health Initiatives in Washington and Oregon. As former nurses and hospital administrators, they marvel at how hospitals are handling the current crisis and feel gratitude for how the Franciscan mission is honored by today's medical personnel.

"Our mission is so embraced by coworkers. It's beautiful to see," said Sister Jude. "Their commitment and compassionate care is certainly reflective of who we are."

## Community Support

Despite having better resources than in 1918, frontline medical staff still find the experience overwhelming. The hospitals in the CHI Franciscan network have respite rooms where workers can retreat and connect with a chaplain or social worker for





▲ Sister Cecilia St. Francis later known as Sister Frances Walker, was described as “a woman of the Beatitudes” with “a very deep and consistent love of the poor and underserved.” Here she is shown working at St. Joseph Hospital (Lancaster, Pennsylvania).



▲ Sister Mary Teresa Carmichael was missioned at St. Joseph Hospital (Lancaster, Pennsylvania) where she served as supervisor of central supply for 10 years.



▲ Before switching to a ministry in visual art, Sister St. Joseph Brennon is seen here on rotation as a student nurse in the pediatric department of St. Joseph Hospital (Lancaster, Pennsylvania) where she was trained from 1951 to 1954.

emotional support. An outpouring of community support has also aided them in their efforts. “We get calls from the community asking if they can send pizzas, notes, or flowers,” said Sister Anne. “There’s also a committee organizing donations to help workers with things like hiring a babysitter so they can come to work.” Such responses reflect a model of gratitude and support that is being seen all across the world.

“I’ve put out S.O.S.s for masks and gloves, all kinds of stuff,” said Sister Margaret

▼ Having been educated in x-ray technology at St. Francis Hospital (Wilmington, Delaware), Sister Beatrice Diamond applied her expertise at St. Joseph Hospital in Lancaster from 1948 to 1965.



(Peggy) Egan, administrator at Assisi House, the retirement convent for the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia in Aston, Pennsylvania. “The good news is, people have been so responsive—staff members, sisters, and the local community alike...It’s wonderful. The bad news is, it’s still not enough.”

While times like these inevitably cause stress, Sister Peggy emphatically notes that she’s “seeing so much goodness coming out of people. I would just like to give a big, heartfelt thank you...to all of those people who have stepped up and tried to help us out.” She went on to say, “God, you bring good out of everything and this is the good that we’re seeing.”

## A Spirit of Giving

“There is no routine day,” said Sister Rose Raymond Barba, a nurse and assistant administrator at Assisi House. “Since this virus has taken over our universe, we’re very busy. But (we) always say: ‘There are no boundaries when there is a need.’”

This sentiment, an echo of the sisters’ in 1918, is felt across the country. Fortunately, while hospitals are fully staffed and sisters are not being pulled from their normal lives to help the sick, our sisters are still making every effort to help where they can. In addition to our sisters in healthcare on the front lines, we have sisters helping to clean, making masks, giving virtual spiritual direction, and so on. Heeding our call to be a healing, compassionate presence, the congregation offered housing to healthcare professionals from Crozer-Chester Medical Center in

# HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Abide by all CDC guidelines during a pandemic. Respect the rules of social distancing, wash your hands often, and be sure to wear a face mask when in public spaces.
- Many small local businesses now find themselves in economic crisis. Whenever possible, support these businesses by ordering goods and take-out food either online or over the phone.
- Find ways to support essential workers. Acts of gratitude can range from posting thank you notes for trash collectors and mail carriers to sending food or donating money to medical organizations working around the clock.
- Consider donating items that are in high demand such as face masks and medical supplies. Also, as the American Red Cross is now experiencing a severe shortage of blood donations, consider donating blood for those in need.
- Volunteer for organizations that are providing important services at this time. Many organizations find themselves short-staffed due to illness. Contact charities you care about and ask how you can be of service while still keeping safety guidelines in mind.

unused areas in our retreat facilities during this crisis. These approximate 12 healthcare providers are unable to return home after their shifts because the family members with whom they live have compromised immune systems.

As Ketul Patel, CEO of CHI Franciscan, said in a thank you to their organization’s frontline workers: (Their) commitment to our mission, regardless of the day or circumstance, is admirable—a true demonstration of the values our sisters instilled more than 125 years ago. ■

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

# SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

*Everyone has within a piece of good news.*

— Anne Frank (adapted)

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

## Sisters of St. Francis Foundation 2019 Annual Report

*Dear Friends,*

Peace and all good!

*“Let us remain united. Let us make our closeness felt to those who are alone and to those who are most stricken.” – Pope Francis*

These are challenging times. As each one of us struggles to remain healthy and to take care of those closest to us, the words of Pope Francis resonate within us. “We need to stay connected to one another. Together we will triumph over the challenges that threaten all of us and find our way to help those who most need our love.”

Our 2019 Annual Foundation Annual Report reflects your support in assisting the Sisters of St. Francis in continuing our mission. We continue to take care of our sisters who have always worked to improve the lives of others as we pray for and assist those in our communities who struggle each day to survive in the pandemic. Through your generosity, we have been able to continue to take care of those in need.

The report shows how your generosity has changed the lives of others. The funds support the elder care of our retired sisters and many ministries. From Anna's Place in Chester, Pennsylvania, to the Transitions Living Center in Spokane, Washington, the Sisters of St. Francis remain committed to assisting those who are poor, the marginalized, and those struggling against social injustice. Your contributions have made a difference in so many lives—we thank you for your generosity and kindness.

Remember that your gifts have created positive change and will continue to do so in the future. We celebrate your goodness and appreciate what you do for the Sisters of St. Francis. We continue to look forward to partnering with you—thank you!

In gratitude and thanksgiving,

*Sr. Deborah Krist, OSF*

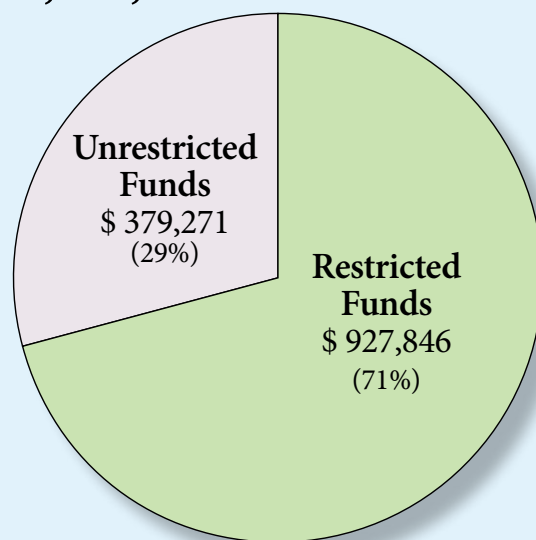
Sister Deborah Krist, OSF  
Director of Mission Advancement

WITH HEARTS FILLED WITH GRATITUDE,  
THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS

*Thank you!*

FISCAL YEAR 2019

**Total Donations Received:**  
**\$ 1,307,117\***



**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.

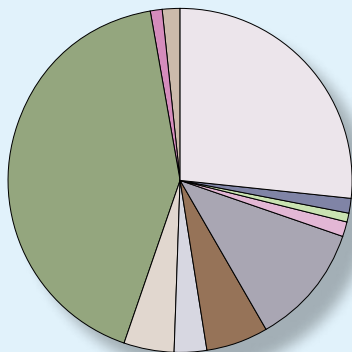
\* These figures do not include \$ 735,000 of Unrestricted Funds gifts received in FY 2018, which were designated and distributed in FY 2019.

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



## Distribution of Unrestricted Funds: \$ 971,559

Unrestricted funds were designated by the congregational leadership to assist various ministries—for example, helping to improve lives through Anna's Place, Annunciation House, Aquinas Center, Family Counseling Center of St. Paul's, St. Francis Inn, and the Ministry of Caring; fostering young minds through education ministries; and providing housing and opportunity at Transitions, Dawn's Place, and Asylee Women's Enterprise.



- Ministry Funds: \$ 260,000 (27%)
- Ministries Outside U.S.: \$ 13,000 (1%)
- Neumann University Campus Ministry: \$ 10,000 (1%)
- Education: \$ 13,000 (1%)
- Shelter & Social Ministries: \$ 110,000 (11%)
- OSF Volunteer Program: \$ 57,106 (6%)
- Retirement: \$ 30,000 (3%)
- Sisters' U.S. Ministries: \$ 44,000 (5%)
- Capital: \$ 409,453 (42%)
- CHI St. Joseph Children's Health: \$ 10,000 (1%)
- Hurricane Relief: \$ 15,000 (2%)



## In Memoriam

Sister Joan Christine Tobin, OSF  
(formerly Sister Joseph Christi)  
December 27, 2019

Sister James Frances McGlashen, OSF  
January 8, 2020

Sister William Margaret Romen, OSF  
January 20, 2020

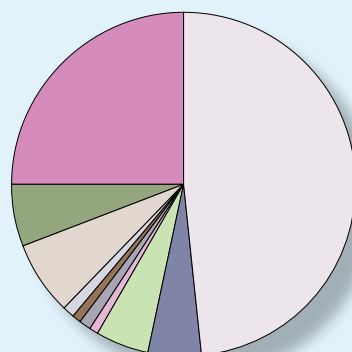
Sister Annie Frances Oman, OSF  
(formerly Sister Margaret Patricia)  
February 29, 2020

Sister Gabriel McAvey, OSF  
March 4, 2020

Sister Maria Angelita Ortiz, OSF  
April 10, 2020

*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 by helping to offer a safe, welcoming place where neighbors and visitors can experience radical hospitality at both Anna's Place in Chester and the Aquinas Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

## Distribution of Restricted Funds: \$ 927,846



- Retirement & Assisi House: \$ 452,365 (49%)
- Shelter & Social Ministries: \$ 50,250 (5%)
- OSF Volunteer Program: \$ 51,082 (5%)
- OLA Capital: \$ 1,200 (>1%)
- Education: \$ 12,182 (1%)
- Ministries Outside U.S.: \$ 5,183 (1%)
- Memorial Garden: \$ 6,275 (1%)
- Parish & Spiritual Ministries: \$ 61,625 (7%)
- Formation and Sister Needs: \$ 59,428 (6%)
- Assisi House Capital: \$ 228,256 (25%)

### ***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.

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

► Louise Ucci-Hartley ministers at Assisi House with our retired sisters.



# FoCUS

## LOUISE HARTLEY

“LOUISE EMBODIES THE FRANCISCAN SPIRIT OF RELATIONSHIP. WHETHER HELPING PEOPLE OR TALKING TO OUR ASSISI HOUSE BIRDS, LOUISE IS MOST ENGAGING.”

If you ask Louise Ucci-Hartley when she met the Sisters of St. Francis, she'll probably respond, “Well, I was born at St. Agnes Hospital.” However, her first awareness of our sisters is her connection to St. Benedict School in Philadelphia. And her connection with Assisi House? About 20 years ago, trying to get information for a parish activity, she visited Sister Margaret St. Francis who worked at Assisi House. Louise got the information she sought—and was invited to join the volunteers. The rest is history.

Today Louise is a part-time employee at Assisi House. Some days find her greeting visitors at the front desk. Other days she interacts with the sisters in various ways. One of her favorite activities is working with the sisters in Clare Hall. Each Tuesday she provides a cooking demonstration for the sisters—an activity which all involved enjoy. “Louise has delighted the sisters with her creative cooking demonstrations,” said Sister Peggy Egan, administrator of Assisi House. “The delicious aromas, the tangy tastes, and the clever presentation keep sisters engaged and happy.” On Wednesdays, Louise changes the tempo from food to music. “On Wednesdays we sing and dance for the sisters,” she explained. For this she is accompanied by sisters from other convents who provide singing, dancing, and musical accompaniment.

In addition to her work at Assisi House, Louise also provides service to the congregation in other ways. She is always on hand to help set up and assist with visitors at our annual craft fair. When our sisters provided a yearly tea party for employees, Louise was on hand to serve. She has also been helpful getting donations for our foundation's Annual Franciscan Night.

Asked how she sees herself sharing the mission and spirit of the Sisters of St. Francis, Louise responded, “That spirit's been embedded in me since childhood. I still remember what specific sisters said to me when I was a child. Who I am today I credit to my parents and the sisters.” Asked about her work with the sisters at Assisi House, Louise said simply, “They're family—and I'm all about family!”



▲ Louise Ucci-Hartley “crowns” Sister Mary Patricia Johnson with the chef hat while Sister Agnes Marie O'Brien looks on.

► One of three children of Italian immigrants, Louise views family as “gift.” She is the mother of three daughters and grandmother of seven young adults (five of whom are pictured here.)





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- ☐ Community Supported Agriculture: ☐ Sisters of St. Francis Foundation ☐ Vocations ☐ Young Adult Engagement
- Red Hill Farm, Aston PA



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## SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS FOUNDATION

# Be A Part of Us!

*The Sisters of St. Francis welcome your help.  
You can partner with us in so many ways:*

- ☐ **Appeals:** Support through the direct mail helps support the sisters and our ministries.
- ☐ **Online:** Go to [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org) to make a donation online.
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- ☐ **Events:** Host or sponsor an event to support the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. Contact Sister Deborah Krist at [dkrist@osfphila.org](mailto:dkrist@osfphila.org).
- ☐ **Recurring Gift:** Contribute monthly. Contact Elaine Twaddell at (610) 558-6132 or [etwaddell@osfphila.org](mailto:etwaddell@osfphila.org).
- ☐ **Bequest:** Give a gift through your will to help the sisters. Contact Sister Deborah Krist at [dkrist@osfphila.org](mailto:dkrist@osfphila.org).
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- ☐ **Special Gifts:** Identify the Sisters of St. Francis as beneficiaries of charitable trusts, IRAs, 401(k), and life insurance plans. Contact Sister Deborah Krist at [dkrist@osfphila.org](mailto:dkrist@osfphila.org).

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## Donated Tabernacle and Monstrance

In November Bishop Arthur Serratelli, Bishop of the Diocese of Paterson, received a letter from Bishop Julio Cesar Corniel in the Dominican Republic regarding the need for a tabernacle for the year-long celebration of the 525<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Mass offered in the new world. Bishop Serratelli relayed the message to the various diocesan and religious organizations and parishes. In a later issue of *The Beacon*, the diocesan newspaper, Bishop Serratelli acknowledged that "The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia responded immediately, not only with a tabernacle, but also with a monstrance."

► *Monstrance held up at the 525<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mass in the Dominican Republic.*



▲ *The Sisters of St. Francis have collaborated on the African Sister Education Collaborative (ASEC) since its inception in 1999. One institution that ASEC supports is the Bigwa Sisters Secondary School in Morogoro, Tanzania. In the early 2000s—in an effort to bring greater stability to the school and its programs—ASEC asked our now deceased sister, Sister Ann Michele Zwosta, to collaborate as mentor with Bigwa's newest principal, Sister Theresia Kessey. One of the first goals that Sisters Ann and Theresia set was to find ways to improve student proficiency in English—thus improving scores on the national exams. Sister Ann returned to Tanzania a few times and also assisted with the development of a nutrition program. Before Sister Ann Michele left the Bigwa School, Sister Theresia and the sisters gifted her with flowers and an African style skirt. On page 4, read about ASEC and how it continues to educate sisters in Africa.*



## Saying No to Racism

Racism is rooted in our culture, our country, our churches, and in us as a people. As Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, we invite ourselves, our companions, and coworkers, along with our elected officials and Church leaders, to address the atrocities of this issue of racism on all levels. While we are long overdue in directly confronting the reality of racism, we recognize the need to look within our own hearts as we meditate on the words, "*to change the world I must start with me.*" We are taking actions to educate ourselves through our Facing Racism Taskforce, we are part of marches and demonstrations for equality, we are part of a collective group to help develop this statement, and we are signatories to the Investor Statement of Solidarity to Address Systemic Racism and Call to Action. With this clear commitment, we will work collectively to develop the strategies, tools, resources and will share what we learn to be part of the movement to dismantle systemic racism and promote racial equity.