

Volume 23.3 Winter 2020

# NEWS

A Publication of  THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

*Also in this issue:*

- For the Love of Horses
- People & Places
- Sharing the Good News

Challenging Times  
*call for* Imaginative  
Responses

## 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

**A**s I read the two articles for this issue of Good News, the words of Thomas Merton's Book of Hours came to my mind: “And the deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words, and beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And we have to recover our original unity. What we have to be is what we are.” Although the pandemic has shifted our lives and our way of being in the world and our relationships, what remains is our oneness in Christ, our communion with all of God's creation. In this unprecedented time, Jesus continues to call us to love God and love one another.



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

In this issue of Good News, we read about our ministries and their challenge to respond creatively as Covid-19 drastically impacted their typical activities. The Franciscan Spiritual Center West, Neumann University, and Anna's Place were able to cultivate new ways to honor the dignity of the persons they encounter. They worked hard to maintain the deepest level of communication and communion with those they serve. Spiritual direction continued through Zoom meetings offering comfort and connection. Videos and podcasts with messages of care and concern reached students who were disappointed that their academic year ended so abruptly. Necessary assistance, including groceries, replaced computer classes and bingo—responding to the immediate needs of our neighbors in Chester. These relationships and actions provided hope to people who are suffering through a crisis, often feeling isolated and alone.

You will also read about Sister Elizabeth Howe, a medical doctor, and her experience of a deep connection with Maggie, a mare that she rides in the beauty of nature. She feels bonded with this majestic animal. Her love for horses and riding, the focus it demands, and her oneness with the creature are metaphors for her relationship with God and her patients in the emergency department. She imagines that St. Francis would value these relationships because he revered all creatures referring to them as “brother” and “sister” and he had a special love for those most in need. Sister Beth's encounter with her patients, with Maggie, and with all whom she meets reflect our original unity, our oneness.

In this issue of Good News, we celebrate our God who has created us as one family called to love one another in the good times of life and in the unexpected challenges we face with Covid-19.

Blessings,

*Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty, OSF*



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*When she first entered the convent at nineteen, Sister Elizabeth Howe thought it meant giving up horses for good. However, while it would be years before she rode again, God had other plans. Sister Beth works hard to balance the three major areas of her life: sister, doctor, and horse lover—all of which she is proud to be.*

Written by Sara McDermott  
Photography by Andrea Cipriani-Mecchi

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

**Managing Editor**  
Florence Smith

**Assistant Editor**  
Sister Ann Marie Slavin, OSF

**Editorial Board**  
Sister Corda Marie Bergbauer, OSF  
Dr. Joseph Glass  
Sister Helen Jacobson, OSF  
Sister Jacqueline Marie Kotz, OSF  
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Sister Carol Ann Warnke, OSF

**Graphic Design**  
Geneen Pintof

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

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

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*On the cover: Seeing surgical masks on every face you meet is a new reality. Neumann University decided to have a little fun, while stressing the importance of safety, by putting a mask on a statue of St. Francis.*





From left: Spiritual retreats via Zoom is the new normal for both the Franciscan Spiritual Centers (Aston, Pennsylvania, and Milwaukee, Oregon)—making it possible to connect even if not in person. Volunteers at Anna's Place in Chester, Pennsylvania, gather to help pack up and distribute food to those in the community.

# Challenging Times *call for* Imaginative Responses



*Incoming freshmen and returning students at Neumann University in Aston truly do find themselves entering a “whole new world” as they pursue their education in the time of Covid-19.*

## ✧ HELPING OTHERS TO FEEL VALUED IS VITAL TO COMBATING FEELINGS OF ISOLATION AND ANXIETY.

**I**n March of 2020, the world faced a massive crisis in the form of Covid-19. Life as most people knew it was completely upended. People everywhere scrambled to find a “new normal” and those doing spiritual work were no exception.

The employees of the Franciscan Spiritual Center (FSC) West, Neumann University, and Anna’s Place were each challenged to adapt to the current situation in their own unique way. Despite the challenges, people at each establishment—as well as many other ministries in which our sisters are engaged—found the best means to serve their communities while keeping hope and faith alive.

### Finding What’s Essential

When they had to close their doors on March 17, the staff at the Franciscan Spiritual Center (FSC) West in Milwaukee,

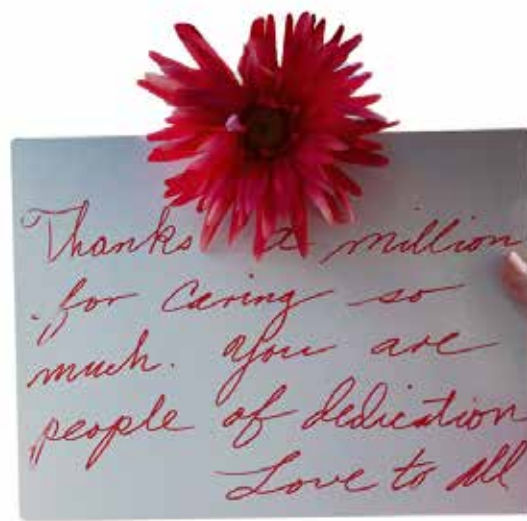
Oregon, pondered how a “nonessential” organization could continue to function during a global pandemic. However, they discovered they are far from nonessential. Indeed, the spiritual comfort and direction they provide is perhaps more “essential” now than ever.

According to Larry Peacock, a former United Methodist Pastor and the current director of FSC West, people are mourning. “There are things they have been looking forward to that aren’t happening,” he said. “They’re mourning what they’ve lost. It’s important to listen to the pain and anguish coming out of that and to let them know that out of grief, other things can emerge.”

While the “new normal” certainly meant letting go of many cherished aspects of daily life, most people in spiritual services report that God has shown up for them in surprising ways. While the way they con-

nect with others has changed, the core of their service—and of their connection—has remained the same.

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*Handmade cards helped keep the Assisi House staff in a positive mindset after long shifts and fatigue started taking its toll.*



“WE HAVE TO  
BE SIGNS OF  
HOPE AND  
POSITIVE  
THINKING.”

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FSC West has been able to adapt many of their programs into online offerings. In the past the majority of their participants have been locals but an unexpected silver lining of the pandemic has been how people worldwide began to participate in their classes virtually.

In terms of personalized spiritual direction, Sister Mary Jo Chaves, OSF, a spiritual director at FSC West, explained that, “While they miss the personal contact, at the same time, some people feel safer in their own space.” She has over 30 spiritual directees that she meets with regularly for one-on-one sessions. These meetings now take place via Zoom and many people have been more open in their one-on-one calls with Sister Mary Jo than they were during live meetings.

“The deepest gift to share is presence,” said Sister Mary Jo who finds ways to cultivate a sacred and respectful atmosphere online.



▲ Outdoor labyrinths offer the perfect setting for contemplation and reflection while still maintaining safety guidelines.

She may light a candle for calls and will also hide herself from her own view on Zoom in order to put her focus more fully on the client.

The biggest surprise came when a sister based in Zambia enrolled in a course on spiritual direction. Because of this, FSC West realized that they could have a global presence far beyond what they had previously envisioned. To Larry Peacock it all “feels like Jeremiah telling his relatives to go buy land because there will be a future.”

During their “downtime” in quarantine, the staff at FSC West also completed building an outdoor labyrinth for people to walk in order to center themselves spiritually. During a brief stop to check on the office, Larry looked out the window and saw someone from the community already walking the labyrinth while wearing a mask. This seems a perfect image for the current times.

## Looking to the Future at Neumann U.

Throughout the pandemic young people have faced their own particular set of challenges. College students found themselves robbed of traditions and ceremonies that constitute an important part of college life. It was particularly disappointing to seniors not to have a live graduation.

When asked what concern weighs most heavily on the minds of students at Neumann University in Aston, Pennsylvania, Sister Marguerite O’Beirne, OSF, vice president for mission and ministry, said “uncertainty.” Indeed, in times



Sister Mary Jo Chaves tries to incorporate as many of her usual rituals into her daily routine as possible in an effort to maintain some normalcy. Here she begins a prayer ritual to find some quiet and focus before attending a Zoom meeting.



*During Teacher Appreciation Week in May, students went out of their way to get special messages to their favorite teachers by standing outside their offices with creative handmade signs.*



of crisis, it is often uncertainty about what comes next that leaves people anxious and stressed. At a time in their lives when the focus should be on the future, graduates are left completely unsure about what that future will look like.

Above all Neumann University strives to make students feel valued, respected, and heard throughout the crisis. A core Franciscan value that Neumann embodies is showing reverence for each individual person. When the university first closed as a result of the pandemic and students had to return to campus to gather their belongings, it was an especially challenging moment. During this solemn move-out, students received bags with a Neumann prayer card, t-shirt, treats, hand sanitizer, and mask to wear as they gathered their things. The masks had Neumann Knights on them. Later graduating seniors also were offered a virtual senior retreat through campus ministry and received special gift bags that included champagne glasses to toast their accomplishment.

"It's so important to let them know that they're valued and missed on campus," said Sister Marguerite. This advice could be applied worldwide right now. Helping

others to feel valued is vital to combating feelings of isolation and anxiety.

Since the pandemic hit, Sister Marguerite's primary goal has been figuring out how to do this virtually. In a video that she posted on the NeuReflections blog, she reminded students that "You are the heart and soul of Neumann University, the reason we exist, and you are very special."

"One of the unique things we did was the 'Reach Out and Touch Program,'" she said. Members of Neumann's faculty and staff worked to contact each and every Neumann student and were successfully able to reach about 93% of the student body. They wanted to gauge both how students were handling the transition to online learning and how they were doing overall. The Sisters of St. Francis also sent over one thousand personal notes to incoming freshmen.

Technology has provided opportunities to move many programs online although Sister Marguerite cautioned against scheduling Zoom calls that run over 45 minutes. "People get Zoom fatigue," she explained. "Humans are meant to be in person...but the goal now is to stay

healthy—that's paramount beyond all else—while still giving a quality education."

When asked for advice on getting students through this, Sister Marguerite stressed the importance of instilling hope, resilience, and patience. "We have to be signs of hope and positive thinking," she said.

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▼ *Despite the heartbreak of not being able to hold a live graduation for finishing seniors, Neumann administrators still found ways to make the milestone special.*







▼ Sisters Maggie Gannon (right), codirector of Anna's Place, and her housemate, Sister Clare D'Auria, helped prepare fresh lunches for those who are among the region's poorest, although the service was open to all who seek it.



▲ Anna's Place in Chester was lucky enough to have proper staffing and funds during the pandemic, thanks to the generosity and help from the community at large. Some even signed over their \$1200 stimulus checks to the organization to buy food for those in need.

*continued from page 7*

## Ministering to Those Less Fortunate

While people worldwide have suffered in various ways during the pandemic, it's undeniable that those who already lived below the poverty line prior to these events face even greater challenges. Sister Cathy McGowan, SSJ, codirector at Anna's Place, a Franciscan hospitality center in Chester, Pennsylvania, said, "We knew we were serving those in need but it's just become so much clearer through all this."

Chester is a city that deals with issues of poverty and violence. Sister Maggie Gannon, OSF, Anna's Place codirector, talked about how in the midst of the pandemic, "violence continues, gun violence especially. I think Chester has the second highest incidence of gun violence in the

U.S. per capita—at least that's what it was last year. Now many residents were working jobs that have been cut so poverty has increased as has the frustration."

In the midst of all this, Anna's Place offers a safe space for Chester citizens. Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, Anna's Place offered a variety of classes to local community members, including art, crochet, flower arranging, computer skills, and, just in the last year, English as a second language. Additionally they have always hosted a crowd-pleasing Bingo game on Tuesdays and served a hot lunch on Thursdays.

When the pandemic hit, the staff at Anna's Place had to shift focus. In their case, moving courses online wouldn't work. The majority of people that they serve don't have computers at home nor do they know

how to use them. Instead the staff turned their attention toward ensuring that people would be fed during the crisis. They began handing out bags of groceries and toiletries/household items on Tuesdays and Thursdays. No documentation is required for people to come get the goods; the service is open to all.

Sister Maggie expected that they would run out of food and planned to ask friends and family for help to replenish their stock. Miraculously though, unsolicited donations of both food and gift cards began to pour in. Some people even sent their stimulus checks, signing the full \$1200 over to Anna's Place. "It was like the loaves and the fishes," Sister Maggie mused. Some days they were able to hand out more than 80 bags of groceries.

The need for this generosity is evident. It allows Anna's Place to serve not only those who are homeless, but also senior citizens on fixed incomes and those who have lost work. One woman who came for food shared that she worked for a school district for 40 years and was recently let go. She now depends on Anna's Place to put food on the table.



## HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- If you find yourself struggling in these uncertain times, reach out for guidance from spiritual centers in your area. Ask about options to attend meetings virtually.
- To help center yourself and find calm during tumultuous events, find an outdoor labyrinth in your area that you can walk or create your own 'walking meditation' by going for a mindful stroll in your neighborhood.
- Consider donating money and goods to organizations such as Anna's Place which help keep poorer communities afloat in this time of mass job loss and economic uncertainty. The website for Anna's Place is continually updated to let people know their most pressing needs. [www.annasplace.org](http://www.annasplace.org)
- Reflect on whether you have a special skill you could use to help others—much like "Cookie Steve" at Anna's Place. Ponder your own unique gifts and talents to come up with something you can offer to benefit students, nonprofit organizations, or your community.
- Continue to abide by all CDC guidelines to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Respect the rules of social distancing, wash your hands often, and be sure to wear a face mask when in public spaces.

Occasionally Zaks Hamburgers, a local restaurant, works with other local businesses and donors to provide hot meals in addition to the groceries. A local man dubbed "Cookie Steve" has also been baking and donating fresh chocolate chip cookies twice a week. Word has spread like wildfire and the number of people coming to receive this kindness has grown weekly.

While Anna's Place doesn't offer formal spiritual direction, program coordinator Sister Elizabeth (Libby) Pepe, OSF, still

stresses the importance of being a listening presence. "I listen and find out that this one's daughter was shot and killed in the street or this person who lives on the street is struggling to fend off deep depression," Sister Libby explained. Over time the sisters come to know each person's story, building a foundation of trust and safety on which those in need can rely.

Sister Libby marvels at both the gratitude and the generosity of the people served by Anna's Place. Far from grabbing their own

bags of groceries and taking off, if there is something they don't need, they will leave it for another family. "They are aware that they may be just one person but a larger family might need more... It's not just taking and grabbing. There's real consideration of others, offering whatever little they can in the midst of this," said Sister Libby.

### One Step at a Time

As people everywhere continue to navigate the strange circumstances that have dominated life since March, it is helpful to keep the image of St. Francis in mind. In his time St. Francis focused on what needed to be done in the moment, encouraging his followers to adapt to situations as they came. This mindset is invaluable to those who are trying to find their way through the labyrinth of the confusing and troubled times in which they find themselves.

There is no easy answer for how to get through a pandemic with hope and faith intact but by focusing on the here and now, people can better connect with the needs of others and—by serving them—better connect with God. In the words of Larry Peacock, "Take one step forward and then ask, what's the next thing you can do?" ■

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



*The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia have been praying for all those infected by the virus and for their loved ones as well as for health care professionals who willingly expose themselves to the pandemic every day. They have also offered housing to the health care professionals from Crozer-Chester Medical Center in their unused spiritual center spaces—Clare House and the Hermitages—during the current health crisis. These health care providers are often unable to return home after their shifts because the family members with whom they live have compromised immune systems. The sisters' facilities can accommodate up to 12 individuals safely.*

# PEOPLE & PLACES

## WASHINGTON, DC

*"One of the deepest longings of the human heart is for security, peace, and stability. The possession of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction is not the answer to this desire."*

—Pope Francis, Nagasaki, Hypocentre Park. November 2019

Through a recent publication and request from PAX CHRISTI, we have been invited to participate once again in a project remembering the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The request was to make banners and/or ribbons that could be displayed in Washington or in a significant place of our choice. This was a special request as the display is an effort to raise awareness of the imminent threat of nuclear weapons in our world today and reflects what befalls us if nuclear weapons ever were to rain down on Earth again. This project aims to spur the imagination of all that would be lost if we succumb again to the use of a nuclear weapon. The Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Committee's response is the banner that we made to be sent to Washington and Sister Dominica's words, **"In a nuclear war, we would not like losing OUR BREATH—whether it be the breath of the Spirit, our own breath, or the breath of living beings."** Pictured on our banner are images of people from a variety of races, creeds, and religious traditions; different species of birds and animals; and various pictures of the beauty of our natural resources. This is our way of commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing and our pledge to work for a world that will never know such destruction again.



▲ Sisters Dominica LoBianco and Catherine O'Donnell hold up the OSF Peace Ribbon 2020 banner that was sent to Washington, DC, to be put on display.

## 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.



## MARYLAND

Sister Anne Patrice Hefner is leaving Asylee Women Enterprise after six years of committed dedication and service to women and children making a new home and life in Baltimore, Maryland. She received an award certificate as a token of gratitude. Asylee Women Enterprise helps

those seeking asylum to rebuild their lives and their spirits by providing transitional housing, community, and other supportive services. Asylum seekers, by definition, are fleeing persecution in their home countries and are left with nowhere to go. Despite the fact that asylum seekers are in the United States legally, they can't receive any government benefits until their asylum has been decided—a process that can take two to three years. That means no food stamps, no Medicaid, no job placement, no case management services. In fact, asylees must wait 150 days from the time they file their asylum applications just to apply for a work permit. Due to backlogs, it is often months after applying that a work permit is actually received. "During that time they really have nothing," Sister Anne said. During her years with Asylee, she worked closely with the women at the center to offer hope and support. In addition, she developed the volunteer program and helped wherever needed.



## AFRICA

Like the rest of the world, the people of Kenya are struggling to keep well during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sister Julie Mulvihill continues to work with the children at Nyumbani Children's Home in Kenya to keep them well and safe from the ongoing threat of the virus. Like children in any family, the Nyumbani children need entertainment. In her letters, Sister Julie described some of their recent activities. The children were hard



A Covid-19 poster created by a child at the Nyumbani Children's Home in Kenya which was part of a writing and art project geared to show how to prevent the spread of Covid-19.



at work writing poetry and plays, drawing pictures for art contests, and practicing for an African Dance Off at the home. Sister Julie described the sound of drums beating throughout the week prior to the dance contest as the children practiced in their cottages. When the contest began, some of the dancers even did comedy routines. Everyone wore African dress for the occasion. After each dance, the audience selected the best dance in each group by a round of applause.



## NEW JERSEY

Beginning in March 2020, our lives were changed drastically by the onset of Covid-19 and we continue to deal with this plight today. Some of our sponsored ministries and our sisters have found ways to adapt to the necessary changes and still carry on their ministries. **Sister Janet Thiel**, for example, responded to the Covid crisis at Georgian Court University through her continued ministry—a ministry that happens to deal with data and analysis of student responses to the crisis. Without the data that was collected, the students would not have been able to get the quality education they've come to expect. The school now knows what worked, what didn't, and what can be improved on going forward—and a good deal of this is thanks to the work of Sister Janet Thiel.



## PENNSYLVANIA

On July 22 we had a very special visitor at Our Lady of Angels Convent—Philadelphia's **Archbishop Nelson Perez**. Following his arrival, Archbishop Perez concelebrated Mass with Father Cyprian Rosen, OLA chaplain; Father Francis Sariego, Assisi House chaplain; and Msgr. John Savinski, former pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Morton. During his homily, Archbishop Perez referred to God as a "great God of surprises" and enumerated some of the God-given "surprises" in his own life. He also focused on Mary Magdalen whose feast day we were celebrating. The archbishop spoke



▲ Archbishop Nelson Perez shared a meaningful homily with the sisters during Mass.

▶ Sister Geralda Meskill greets Archbishop Perez with an elbow bump.



about the "surprises" in Mary Magdalen's life—especially experiences arising from her ability to "stick around"—an ability evidenced by her presence at the foot of the cross and her early morning surprise at the empty tomb. Following the liturgy Archbishop Perez waited in the main corridor, providing each of the sisters an opportunity to greet him. Sister Kathleen Parisi then took the archbishop on a tour of Our Lady of Angels Convent after which he enjoyed lunch with our leadership team before heading back to Philadelphia. We are so grateful for Archbishop Perez's visit. His relaxed manner of relating to others as well as his interest in who we are and what we do made his visit one to remember.



## VARIOUS STATES

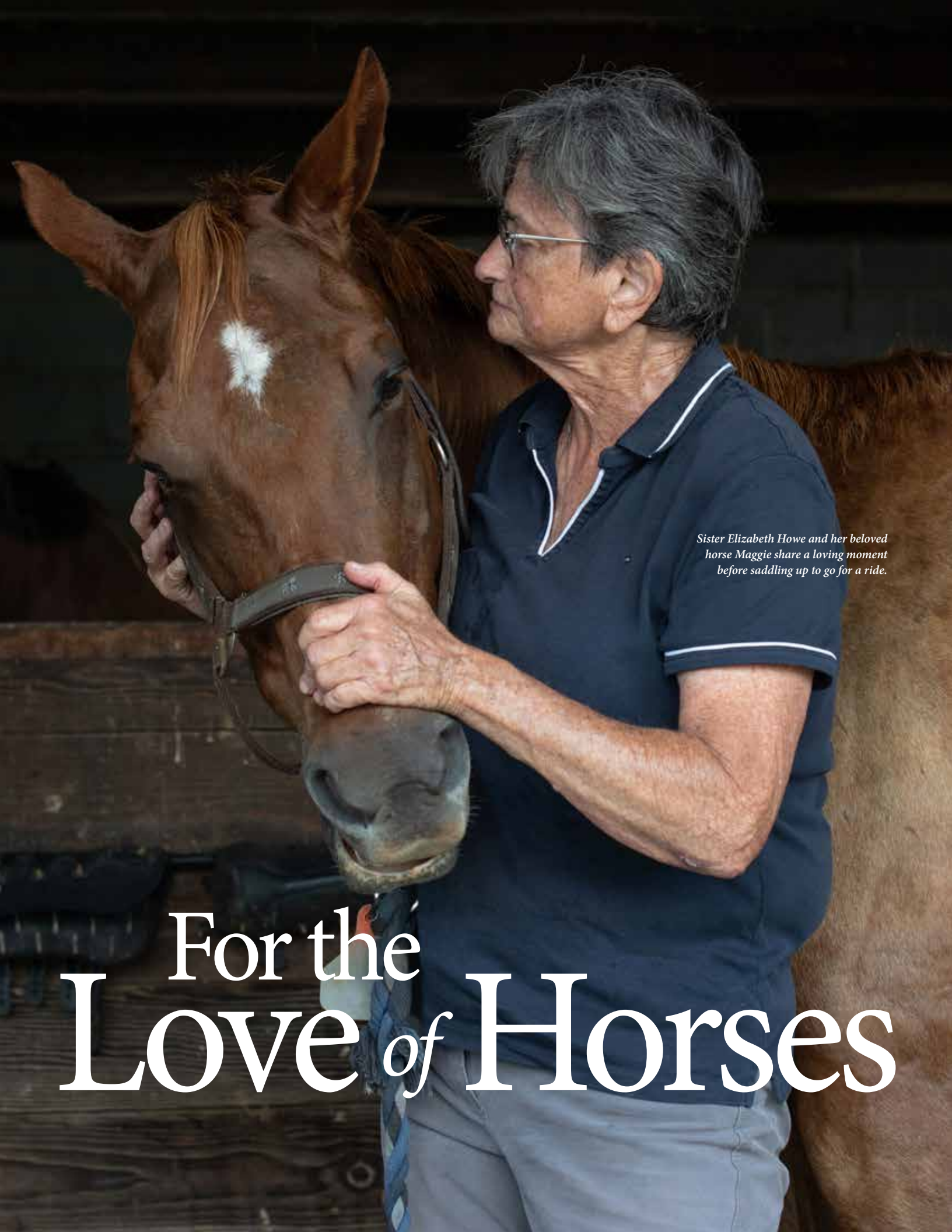
Within the last few years, our congregation has set up a **Facing Racism Taskforce**. One of their projects was to develop book discussions dealing with the issue. Currently there are five groups in process that are discussing the book *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo, PhD. Each group has a facilitator and determines their own schedule in discussing two or three chapters at their Zoom gatherings. These discussions have been challenging, yet enlightening. Facing

our white privilege and recognizing our white fragility can lead to transformation. Currently there are 20 sisters, four companions, and four young adults who gather in five different groups.



## PENNSYLVANIA

African sister, **Sister Faith Ngugi**, a Sister of Mary Immaculate (SMI), graduated from Neumann University in May and will be moving back to Africa to pass along the knowledge that she has learned here in the U.S. We wish her much love, success, and blessings in her future. We certainly have enjoyed having her here with us at OLA. **Sister Catherine Ndambiri**, SMI, who is also from Kenya, has been living at OLA, but will be returning to Neumann virtually this year. **Sister Anne Kimiri**, another sister from their congregation, will begin her studies at Neumann and will reside at the motherhouse. These sisters receive room and board from the Sisters of St. Francis and scholarships from Neumann University. Two additional sisters from the same African congregation, **Sisters Jane Kongo** and **Alice Watuku**, began working at Assisi House in August. They are nurses who graduated from Immaculata College in 2019.



*Sister Elizabeth Howe and her beloved horse Maggie share a loving moment before saddling up to go for a ride.*

For the  
Love *of* Horses



COMPLETE FOCUS ON  
AND CONNECTION  
WITH ANOTHER LIVING  
CREATURE FEELS LIKE  
ANOTHER WAY TO  
CONNECT WITH GOD.



*Sister Beth is grateful to have had horses in her life, even participating in jumping competitions as a youth. Glory Farms (right) has given her the chance to continue to have that contact as often as she can. She is thrilled to ride with Paige (above), whom she has known and trained with since Paige's childhood.*



While on retreat at the Jesuit House, Sister Elizabeth "Beth" Howe wakes just before dawn.

About two miles away sits Glory Springs Farm where Sister Beth has worked closely



*Sister Elizabeth Howe, MD, is a friend to horses and humans alike. She has continued to work in Urgent Care during the Covid crisis.*

with Maggie, a mare, for the past eighteen years. As the early morning light spreads over the snow-covered ground, she saddles Maggie up for a ride. It's in this moment, surrounded by the

beauty of nature and sharing a bond with a majestic animal, that she feels riding is holy.

"St. Francis would have had natural horsemanship," she muses. A horse must feel respected and secure in order to bond with a rider successfully. In her work she often thinks that St. Francis was a peaceful person who would have been able to connect with such animals.

## Love and Focus

Sister Beth's love of horses began during early childhood in Pensacola, Florida. At her grandmother's farm was an aged horse named Frank. When Sister Beth was just two or three years old, the adults posed

her, her siblings, and her cousins on Frank. After taking their picture, they led them around the property on gentle rides.

"They would pile all seven of us on that horse!" she recalled. Later, at about age eight, Sister Beth gained experience riding other horses while visiting a family friend in Perdido Bay. Soon she and her three siblings were begging for a horse of their own.

When Sister Beth was 10, their dream came true. Bayboy, a small bay quarter horse, came to live on their farm. While he was intended for all the children, Sister Beth was the one who continued to work with him long-term and was soon showing with him in jumping competitions. Horses in such events are often required to leap over items like tree trunks and picnic tables in addition to raised poles. While Sister Beth and Bayboy mostly did three- or four-foot-high jumps, they once went as high as five feet, an incredibly difficult and dangerous stunt.

Despite the risks, Sister Beth only once sustained a serious injury while riding. "We decided to play cowboys," she confessed, referring once again to childhood. "We'd seen a movie where a cowboy grabbed onto a tree limb from the back of his horse and stayed hanging onto it as the horse rode off." She succeeded in grabbing onto the tree limb but when she dropped, she broke her arm.

While horseback riding injuries aren't too frequent, those that do occur have a high potential to be dangerous. In the world of competitive horseback riding, approximately three riders are killed per year. This number is much higher than in other risky sports such as football. The high risk is why total focus is so important. This need for focus is another link to Sister Beth's spiritual life. While riding, her attention has to be so concentrated that it is almost like entering a meditative state. Complete focus on and connection with another living creature feels like another way to connect with God.

## Divine Intervention

When she first entered the convent at nineteen, Sister Beth thought it meant giving up horses for good. However, while it would be years before she rode again, God had other plans.

After joining the congregation, Sister Beth blossomed in her studies, became a nurse, then a registered nurse, and eventually a nurse practitioner. She wanted to continue her education and found support within her community. Now she is one of a very exclusive group: a sister who is also a

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► Sister Beth and Paige set out on their horses for a long ride. Rides offer a chance to enter a deep, meditative state while in harmony with an animal. This allows Sister Beth to clear her head, connect with God, and experience inner peace—all in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and her ongoing work as a doctor during a health crisis.



▲ Maggie, who was an unbroken and difficult young mare when they met, took a while to warm up to Sister Beth and was hesitant to trust. However Sister Beth won a spot in Maggie's heart with a lot of persistence and treats—especially apples and carrots.

medical doctor. Ten years ago, only 200 sisters in the United States were also MDs, a number that has since likely decreased.

While Sister Beth's medical career began in family practice, she soon found that she could do the most good working in an emergency room. She believes that "this is what St. Francis would do if he were alive today." A high number of people who come into the ER are those without insurance. Due to a lack of income, they do not receive medical care until their conditions become extreme. By working in an ER, Sister Beth directly serves those living in poverty.

In 2002, during a night shift, she learned that a nurse, Wendy Adams, was going to lease a farm. The farm, Glory Springs, housed a large boarding stable in which Wendy and her family would not only keep their own horses but would board others' horses as well.

Wendy's concern, though, was not about operating the farm. It was about Maggie, a two and a half year old filly that another nurse had given her. The nurse had bought Maggie's mother without realizing the horse was pregnant. She allowed the horse



to give birth to Maggie but then needed to find the new filly a home.

Wendy took Maggie on but the young mare was unbroken and difficult. She even kicked Wendy's husband during feeding time. Wendy was worried that Maggie would grow up with a bad disposition and told Sister Beth that if she could train Maggie, Wendy would supply her with whatever was needed. This moment of divine intervention brought horses back into Sister Beth's life. With some finagling, Sister Beth was able to schedule a week where she'd be able to visit Maggie seven days in a row so that they could bond.

During their first encounter, it looked like the mare would turn tail and run... until Sister Beth presented her with an

apple. The very next day when Sister Beth arrived, Maggie bulldozed her way past the other horses in the field to get to her. They formed a quick bond with Maggie often running to Sister Beth the same way that a puppy might run to its owner. Sister Beth was in the saddle by the end of the first week.

When discussing training techniques, Sister Beth emphasizes that "It's important never to be mean." If a horse does something wrong, a trainer can discipline the creature simply by pushing it away. This makes the animal uncomfortable; it knows it has made a mistake. Cruelty, however, should never be used as a form of discipline. Once again, this calls to mind an image of St. Francis and his ability to



reach animals through a peaceful, loving demeanor—not a forceful, menacing one.

## Blue Ribbon Winners

Sister Beth continued training Maggie until 2011 when Paige, Wendy's daughter, was old enough to ride her. Paige was actually born on the same day in the same year as the headstrong horse.

"Paige and Maggie were like oil and water at first," she chuckles, remembering their early days. For example, when Paige tried to boot Maggie with a hoof boot to promote the healthy growth of the horse's hoof, Maggie continually moved her foot, antagonizing the girl. Over time, though, Paige and Maggie formed their own relationship.

Paige began showing Maggie in dressage—an equestrian sport where horses are trained to perform various moves with minimal prompting from the rider. Wendy sent Maggie to Ange Beam at Straight Forward Dressage for training where both Sister Beth and Paige took lessons. Paige went on to show Maggie in some major shows in Maryland, Virginia, and New York and Sister Beth traveled to each show with the family. She also kept Maggie in form when she was not with Ange. Dressage events take place all the way up to an Olympic level and Sister Beth likens it to figure skating where athletes perform certain technical moves.

Paige, now 20 years old, employs Maggie to give lessons to young aspiring riders.

Maggie, whose owners initially worried that she would be mean-spirited, is now so gentle that she is a "starter horse."

As far as competitions go, Paige and her current horse, a thoroughbred named May, compete in barrel racing. Maggie still shows but Sister Beth is now the one who shows her. The two just won their first-ever blue ribbon in dressage this past year at Cedar Valley Farm.

## Finding the Perfect Balance

It can be tricky for Sister Beth to balance the three major areas of her life: sister, doctor, and horse lover. She typically schedules her medical shifts—previously in the ER and now in Urgent Care—in advance and knows that riding has to fit around the other priorities on her calendar.

She does find, though, that the skills required for horseback riding are transferable to the other areas in her life. "When you're with a horse, you have to transform yourself into the animal," she explains. "It's the same with patients." A doctor has to be in sync with patients in order to help them. This requires being totally present with another being. This continual exercise of being present has strengthened Sister Beth's spiritual life as well, making her all the more aware of the connection between all living beings—a very Franciscan concept.

The opportunity to care for Maggie and to go riding regularly is one that Sister Beth never expected. However, she believes

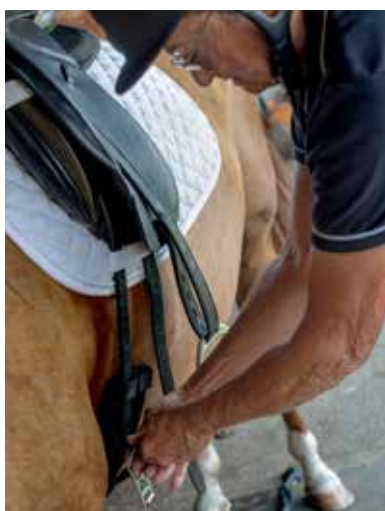
that, "Something clicks if God wants it." Fortunately for Sister Beth, Maggie, and the countless young riders who now take lessons on the gentle horse, this clicked. ■

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

## HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- In the spirit of St. Francis, remember to show kindness to all animals. Animals and the bonds they can share with humans are an excellent reminder of the interconnectedness of all beings.
- Consider donating to your local animal shelter or even adopting a pet, particularly if you now find yourself working from home with time and resources to devote to an animal.
- It is likely that the purchase of Maggie's mother was a rescue sale. If you'd like to go beyond supporting a local animal shelter, look into how you might offer support to horse rescue operations around the world to prevent the slaughter of horses past their prime. Additionally, look into what resources you can contribute to the rescue and care of horses caught in wildfires. These animals are often saved from the flames only by volunteer horse lovers risking their own lives to bring them out.
- Continue to support essential workers such as those working in ERs with encouraging signs, letters of thanks, and gifts.
- If there are young people in your life, consider exposing them to animals such as horses early on to help them foster a sense of connection with and care for other creatures.

*Having a horse requires a lot of hard work and Sister Beth is happy to get her hands dirty to care for Maggie which helps to strengthen their bond. Below, Sister Beth cleans Maggie off and then saddles her up for some exercise.*



# 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)

## Renewal of Vows

August 8, 2020, was an unusual but glorious day for two Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia as we celebrated the renewal of vows on Zoom for the first time in the congregation's history.

Sisters Maria Anna Dela Paz and Kathryn Ann Dutrow were joined—virtually—by more than 20 members of their local community, area chapter, circle of discerners, leadership team, and formation personnel. The prayer service and vow renewal were recorded and shared with sisters and companions via email and OSFConnect.

Sister Florence Hee, charism coordinator, began the meeting and welcomed all via Zoom with the opening prayer. Later in the service, candles were lit and held by the two sisters as Sister Kathy Dougherty, congregational minister, shared the words, “In the name of Jesus, Sisters Ann and Maria, I call you each to renew your vowed commitment. We share in Christ’s light through Clare and Francis, through Mother Francis Bachmann, through each other and all who have gone before us, and through all with whom we are in relationship. Let us extend hands over these sisters and join in silent prayer.”

Sister Maria Anna shared the following on her Facebook page about the day, “Today I renewed my vows for a second year with the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia via Zoom. I am so blessed to celebrate this day with my sisters, Giving Voice sisters, and with the Franciscan family. Here’s to another year of chastity, poverty, and obedience in the Franciscan tradition!” Congratulations, Sisters Maria and Ann!



▲ The new normal of 2020—a computer screen with the faces of all those gathered virtually to celebrate Sisters Maria Anna and Ann.



◀ Sister Maria Anna (Peaches) is all smiles during the vow renewal ceremony. Even though she didn’t get to see everyone in person, she surely felt the love of her Franciscan family.

## Updating the Blue Trail

On Saturday, August 22, Boy Scout troop 225 from the Church of St. Joseph in Aston, Pennsylvania, restored the walking path (blue trail) that leads from Red Hill Farm to the Hermitages. Eagle Scout Peter Rigotti and approximately 20 scouts, parents, and friends gathered to clear fallen trees, debris, and trash from the trail. The trail edges were lined with tree trunks and branches

to help lead walkers along the path. Two foot bridges were repaired and a third one was created with recycled materials. The shrine at the end of the path was cleaned up and seating was created from tree stumps. A box will be mounted



Boy Scout Troop 225 from Aston, Pennsylvania.

at the beginning of the trail which will contain cards that contain questions for reflection. The trail restoration project has been a goal of the Franciscan Spiritual Center, driven by the Care for Creation Committee. Thank you, Scouts, for all your hard work!

## Franciscan Spiritual Center— *The Spirit Lives On!*

One very popular section of our motherhouse in Aston, Pennsylvania, is our Franciscan Spiritual Center. In the milieu of Covid-19, there has been significant uncertainty about when or whether the Franciscan Spiritual Center could open

safely. We do not feel we can safely welcome outside groups until there is a vaccine for the virus. Sadly, this deeply impacts the functioning of the center. For various reasons, we have made the difficult decision to close the center permanently. We plan for the ministry to continue and the staff is working on alternative forms of programming and online retreats. Group gatherings, though not large ones, could take place in various other locations in the future. Clare House and the hermitages will remain open, spiritual direction will continue to be offered, and the center’s website remains at [www.fscaston.org](http://www.fscaston.org).





# Annual Summary of Engagements with Corporations

Each year we marvel at the speed at which the human and natural environment goes through unimaginable changes and we've only begun to realize the impact. Right now, the climate crisis, systemic racism, and the coronavirus call us to stand as one humanity and to be attentive to the most vulnerable in our communities and cities. The lens of the most recent events has allowed us to view suffering and a reservoir of compassion and charity that is immeasurable as we observe the concern for front line workers and the tons of food being distributed to those in need all across the country. We stand in solidarity with all our brothers and sisters and dedicate this corporate report to the many and untold numbers of healthcare and front-line workers who have been profoundly affected by this pandemic.

How we treat each other moving forward—as a community and as citizens of the planet Earth—will define us. As people of faith, we will continue to do our part to be resilient, to care for creation, to pray for a more equitable world, to seek justice for the most vulnerable, and to offer compassion and assistance to all those in need. This new reality calls us to reconsider how we integrate those elements of equity, justice, and compassion into action. As Franciscans we must stand with the most vulnerable and make our voices heard while listening to the voices of the scientists to confront climate change and future pandemics as well as work to “dismantle systemic racism in all its forms.” (Pax Christi)

The Office of Corporate Social Responsibility's advocacy for a just society through corporate engagements and community development investments will continue

to address the many environmental and social challenges that have afflicted our world.

Collaboration leads to success which is generally evident in our shareholder work as members of coalitions. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, the Investor Environmental Health Network, and Investors for Opioid and Pharmaceutical Accountability have allowed its members to leverage the group's collective expertise and resources to maximize our influence on corporate decisions. Recently a willingness to consider socially responsible principles by some of the world's largest institutional investors has led to conversations with Blackrock, State Street, and Vanguard. Our hope is that this new level of awareness of the importance of environmental and social issues from mainstream investors will lead to more responsible behavior at the corporate level.

One important component of our Annual Corporate Report is to highlight some of the over 100 corporate engagements that took place over the past 12 months. You can read the full report on our website: <https://osfphila.org/corporate-social-responsibility/corporate-engagement/>.



## In Memoriam

Sister Anne Dorice DeFebbo, OSF  
May 18, 2020

Sister Aletta Dorothy Donahue  
(formerly Sister Charles Francis)  
June 11, 2020

Sister Annette Marie Lucchese  
June 13, 2020

Sister Mary Hugh Black  
June 21, 2020

Sister Frances Marie Calhoun  
(formerly Sister Joseph Therese)  
June 29, 2020

Sister Patricia Kidd  
(formerly Sister St. Jude)  
June 30, 2020

Sister Anne Miller  
(formerly Sister Mary William)  
July 1, 2020

Sister Mary Catherine Gurley  
(formerly Sister Margaret Patrice)  
August 6, 2020

Sister Dorothy Franz  
(formerly Sister Edward Miriam)  
August 7, 2020

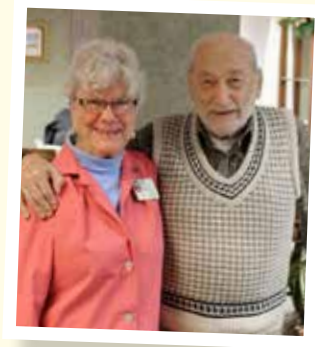
Sister Margaret St. Hugh Keenan  
August 13, 2020

Sister Marie Cecilia Irwin  
August 17, 2020

Sister Bernard Helene McGuire  
August 26, 2020

Sister Eileen Walsh  
(formerly Sister Patrick Mary)  
September 20, 2020

► Dominic and Kris Sama enjoy the 2019 staff Christmas party at OLA. They both plan on retiring (again!) this year after many dedicated years of service with the sisters.



# FoCUS

## DOMINIC & KRIS SAMA

"DOMINIC AND KRIS HAVE FRANCISCAN HEARTS AND SPREAD JOY WHEREVER THEY GO. THEY HAVE A WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE WHICH THEY WILLINGLY AND GRACIOUSLY SHARE WITH ALL OF US."

—SISTER ELEANOR MOORE

Kjerstin (Kris) Berglöf and Dominic Sama met in 1960 in the poorly-lit basement of Flower Hospital in Toledo, Ohio—the location of the hospital's new physical therapy department. Kris, a graduate of Lund University in Sweden, came to the United States in 1958 as a visiting exchange student. With four weeks remaining on her visa, she met Dominic and a whirlwind courtship began. Before she returned home, Dominic proposed. The couple were married on Easter Sunday, 1962, in Kris' hometown in Sweden.

Over the years Kris has worked in many nursing homes in Delaware and Chester counties and in West Philadelphia. When she turned 65 and retired in 1997, she began volunteering at Assisi House. Every Tuesday for the past 23 years, Kris has helped with the activities there—assisting sisters with crafts, transporting them to and from their rooms, and accompanying them on outings. Mary Stover, former activities coordinator, said, "Kris is so full of energy and life. She is a very sweet woman and she really loves coming to Assisi House."

Dominic worked for N.Y. Central Railroad and then for many years served as a sportswriter before becoming a member of the grounds crew at Our Lady of Angels (OLA) in 2001. Kevin Turner, grounds manager at OLA, said, "Dominic is dedicated. He is here rain or shine every Tuesday to care for the property. I can't recall one instance when his mood was less than positive. He always takes time to chat with the sisters and guests while performing his duties and surely shares his smile. He is a good friend and an inspiration to the guys with whom he works."

During the past 50 years, the couple have traveled back to Sweden more than two dozen times. Along with volunteering at various places, they share a love of the outdoors and have had many adventures together, including raising their three daughters, Birgitta, Charlotta, and Helena.

They also have three granddaughters.

"Dominic and his wife Kris are truly friends of the Sisters of St. Francis," Sister Eleanor Moore expressed. "Both are wonderfully outgoing, positive people whom we welcome and enjoy." In recent years, Dom and Kris were honored for their service with a memorial brick that was installed at Station 7 along the prayer path behind the motherhouse.

► Kris loves her Swedish heritage and enjoys sharing it with the sisters at Assisi House. Here she is, along with her granddaughter Ella, dressed in traditional Swedish attire to celebrate the Feast of St. Lucia.



▲ Dominic and Kris Sama with their three granddaughters, Linnea, Elsa, and Ella.





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 Red Hill Farm, Aston PA



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**Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia**



**SrsofStFrancis**

Link directly to our pages from our website homepage: [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org)

## SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS FOUNDATION

# Every Gift is Love in Action

As 2020 comes to an end, you are, no doubt, reflecting on the best way of making financial and tax plans. We hope you will consider helping us so we can help others in need. Most gifts to the Sisters of St. Francis at year-end are gifts of stocks, checks, or cash. Donations are tax deductible to the extent the law allows.

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▲ In challenging times—such as these during the Covid-19 pandemic—we all need to change and adapt to our circumstances. What we used to do and how we used to connect with people is not possible right now. So how can we stay connected? How do we stay grounded and mentally okay with the way of the world? How do we keep our faith and hope alive? Sometimes what it takes is a compassionate hug from a family member or loved one to let us know that everything is going to be all right. Sometimes relief comes by way of community members reaching out with a bag of food or giving a gift to a graduating senior. Sometimes it is having a spiritual guide just a computer click away. What matters most during times like these is that we adapt and do the best we can for each other. Learn how some of our sisters and ministries are adapting to the “new normal” of today on page 4.

## Stand for Justice and Peace



Societal issues have taken a menacing turn in today's world. Terrorism, human trafficking, gun violence, racism, and other horrendous trends point to a society that has pushed aside and perhaps even lost the necessary ingredient of being human—caring for one another. As children of our loving God, we have been entrusted with caring for all of God's creation.

In our world today, that task assumes even greater significance. Justice and peace initiatives, along with caring for creation, involve using our voices to stand up against the injustices in our community and in the world. Help us to continue to work for change in our world. We must stand together to make a difference! Consider joining our cause with action and/or by giving a monetary gift. [www.osfphila.org/donate-now/](http://www.osfphila.org/donate-now/).

## Discernment Franciscan Style

Are you aware that there is more than one style of discernment? We are offering a Franciscan process for discernment on our website and through various workshops and retreats. Visit [www.osfphila.org/discernment-franciscan-style/](http://www.osfphila.org/discernment-franciscan-style/) to learn more. In our Franciscan theology and discernment, we see the whole situation and begin from a place of beauty, love, and a desire to return to balance and harmony. Life is not a puzzle to be figured out piece by piece but a practice of following the heart as led by the Spirit. Other styles of discernment work for some of us but not for all, and they have a different focus. Enjoy discovering an alternative form of discernment. Use it for yourself, share it with others, and include it in your workplace and family decisions. If you would like assistance with this exciting and meaningful process, you might consider contacting one of our spiritual centers or one of our spiritual directors through one of the centers: Franciscan Spiritual Center in Aston, Pennsylvania, [fsc@osfphila.org](mailto:fsc@osfphila.org) or Franciscan Spiritual Center in Milwaukie, Oregon, [info@francisspctr.com](mailto:info@francisspctr.com).



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