

# *Alive*

WITH THE CALL OF THE GOSPEL

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## St. Joseph: Protector and Patron

BY DONNA O'LOUGHLIN

In St. Joseph Chapel, we find stained glass representations of stories we've read in the Bible as well as much-beloved saints. In this window of the Holy Family, Joseph takes the supporting role, as he so often does in Scripture and art.

Joseph's gaze and the gesture of shading Mary and baby Jesus from the elements are both practical and metaphorical. A humble carpenter with a young family to raise, he was their protector. After God commanded him in a dream not to forsake Mary, Joseph obeyed and took up the ultimate evangelical torch: He became the adoptive parent of God's Son and thereby ensured the fulfillment of the Great Promise.

St. Joseph Chapel was named to honor Joseph, the protector of virgins and children. Even before our foundresses crossed the Atlantic, Mother Alexia's devotion to St. Joseph was resolute. She called him her intercessor when she begged door to door in behalf of an orphanage in Germany. He was the saint who directed our foundresses' sights to Wisconsin. Due to her confidence that St. Joseph would make things right, Mother Alexia courageously signed a contract for the construction of a new women's academy in New Cassel in 1874, though she herself had only seven cents in her pocket. In good humor, it has been reported that she



*St. Joseph Chapel window*

named the convent after St. Joseph “to honor him, but also to remind him graciously that it was not yet completed nor completely paid for.” Finally, in 1914, Mother's devotion to St. Joseph emboldened her to establish homes for the physical and spiritual care of university women in Germany without ready funds.

Both Mother Alexia and St. Joseph lived in uncertain times, albeit 1,800 years apart. With Mothers Alfons and Alexia's reliance on St. Joseph, St. Joseph Chapel was consecrated in 1917. It has since provided 100 years of formation, blessings, kinship, and more for our sisters. Here, thousands of young women have been received as they dedicated their lives in the service of God and neighbor.

These sisters took up the roles of teachers, nurses, social workers, pastoral care staff, administrators, lawyers, accountants, artists, and musicians. In God's Holy Name, they continue to pray, advocate for social justice, and provide schools and housing for the marginalized. Their mission to

spread the message of love that Joseph's Holy Family shared with the world 2,000 years ago transcends national boundaries. St. Joseph Chapel is the congregation's prayer home, inviting all to worship here, enjoy St. Joseph and our sisters' openness to grace, and engage with the past, present, and future Church.

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**DONNA O'LOUGHLIN** is coordinator of outreach events for the School Sisters of St. Francis' United States Province.

# from our leadership

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#### FRONT COVER

St. Joseph Chapel was consecrated  
March 19, 1917, the Feast of St. Joseph.  
Visit this historic worship space  
and join with our congregation as we  
celebrate many special events and liturgies  
throughout the centennial year.

#### BACK COVER

In the Adoration Chapel, sisters pray daily  
in front of the Blessed Sacrament.

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For 100 years, the St. Joseph Chapel has stood as a visible sign of the commitment of our foundresses to the centrality of our spiritual life as consecrated religious women. Maintaining our relationship with God, through prayer and Eucharistic celebration, is at the very heart of the life of love and service we seek to live as Sisters.

Mother Alfons long had a dream of a fitting house of prayer for the Lord, and her goal was to imitate the very best in the cathedrals of Europe. In the book *He Sent Two*, which tells the early history of the congregation, her care during the three years and seven months of the construction process is described vividly on page 180:

**“Crawling over rubbish and under ladders, standing with her hands characteristically clasped together, she had to make certain that every bit of bricklaying, plastering, tiling that was done was as humanly perfect as she could have it.”**

In this issue of *Alive*, you will find many reflections and memories commemorating the centennial year of the Chapel. We hope you will be inspired to attend one or more of the many events to be held during this special year of celebration. A special public event featuring Mass, Chapel tours, and a concert will be held on June 3, so see our “News and Views” section on page 6 for more information.

Our centennial year theme is “Sacred Space, Open Doors,” so it is fitting that you will see evidence of the fruits of our prayer and service in stories about our ministries, our associates, and our donors. The work of Assisi School in Bangalore, India, touches the lives of special needs students and their families, who are often neglected by society. Similarly, the Sisters Program-South, in the U.S. Province, provides hope and healing for women hurt by human trafficking. We are grateful for those who walk with us as associates and donors/partners in mission.

Our Chapel celebration will, of course, spotlight the beauty and grandeur of the physical place that Mother Alfons built. But we also celebrate the less visible meaning of this place as a symbol of our lives: welcoming all, joining to Christ as our spiritual center, and going forth with strength to serve God’s people around the world.

Gratefully yours in Christ,

*Sisters Mary, Maureen, Elsa Paul, and Francitta*

International Leadership Team  
School Sisters of St. Francis



## Building New Foundations in India

**Facing government challenges in education, sisters respond with confidence**

BY YOUNG KIM

Nearly 27 million people in India live with a disability. In this ancient and multi-ethnic culture where survival has traditionally depended on one's ability to work and earn a living, a physical or mental disability often means being resigned to a life of poverty.

Compounding this reality is the traditional belief that a condition such as Down syndrome or cerebral palsy is caused by deficient family genetics, or is the result of a family member's wrongdoing—even in a past life.

Given the prevalence of these beliefs, families who have special needs children find themselves socially isolated. Disabled children languish at home. They rarely receive an education because few schools are equipped to address their needs.

In the face of these tremendous obstacles, but recognizing a great, unmet need, the School Sisters of St. Francis opened Assisi Special School near Bangalore in 2009. They started with four special needs students, offering professional rehabilitative care and therapy. The children were taught how to speak, walk, read, and care for themselves, and received vocational training. As word spread about the sisters' inspiring work, the school's attendance quickly reached its current capacity of 65 children.

To accommodate the growing student population, in 2010, the special school was merged with the sisters' school for non-disabled children to form the Assisi Integrated School. But last year, the government's main accrediting body announced that the school would lose its accreditation if there were two separate schools in the same building.

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**YOUNG KIM** is director of foundation giving for the International Office of Mission Advancement.

4 *School Sisters of St. Francis*

SSSF PHOTO



*Our sisters work with students of all abilities near Bangalore, India.*

The congregation has responded to this logistical challenge by buying a half-acre of land nearby, and has begun planning a new school building. With the can-do positivity of our congregation's foundresses, the sisters are determined to turn this setback into something that will benefit both schools for years to come. Construction is scheduled to begin this year and the building will be ready for students in 2018.

“We believe that God's providence and our benefactors' kindness may help us build an even better home and school, bringing hope to families without hope,” said Sister Francitta Pazhukkathara, vice president of our international congregation. “May all of us – the givers and receivers – enjoy the promised treasures of God.”

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**Your gifts bring new hope and new meaning to the lives of the children served by our sisters at the Assisi schools. To expand these opportunities to even more children in need, please use the donation envelope in this issue, or donate online at [www.sssf.org](http://www.sssf.org).**

[www.sssf.org](http://www.sssf.org)

**Our mission is to witness to the Good News of Jesus and the presence of the reign of God as we enter into the lives and needs of people, especially those who are poor.**

# mission in action

## Bringing Hope to Trafficking Victims

### Sisters' collaborative initiative helps women escape the sex trade

BY SISTER RUTH HOERIG

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has had a longstanding problem with street prostitution, and the situation has escalated in recent years. An FBI raid in 2015 uncovered a vast underground sex trade economy, and the city has become a notorious national hub for human trafficking. In response, local authorities have been seeking stiffer penalties for traffickers, and more services to assist sexually exploited women.

With a crisis unfolding literally on its St. Joseph Center doorstep, the School Sisters of St. Francis have begun collaborating with five other religious organizations to address the problem on Milwaukee's south side. Together they have established a day program known as the Sisters Program-South.

"The revolving door of arrest-incarceration-release back to the streets does little to impact the problem, or to personally affect the lives of the women," said Sister Linda Szocik. Sister Linda, a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis, is a nurse practitioner employed by the School Sisters of St. Francis. She also serves on the advisory board of Sisters Program-South.

One of the sisters' partners in the initiative, the Benedict Center, operates Sisters Program-North, an intervention program that has been assisting women involved in street prostitution on Milwaukee's north side since 2011.

"The Sisters Program-South extends the Benedict Center's diversion program," Sister Linda said. "The

women can avoid the penal approach of a ticket and fine—or even jail—by participating in counseling and group sessions that help them address problems of addiction, abuse, housing and other needs."

Sister Carol Rigali, Provincial for the U.S. Province, said that the Sisters Program-South was officially initiated three months ago when the lease was signed to secure a temporary home for the program on Milwaukee's near south side.

"Access to safe housing is paramount," Sister Carol said. "The women can stop by anytime during the day to take a nap, shower, do their laundry or have something to eat. This collaborative ministry also provides a great opportunity for our sisters to meet the needs of the times through their volunteer work."

Health professionals help the women cope with health or medical problems, and spiritual counselors help them make appropriate faith connections in the community. Women who have completed the diversion program can play an important role going forward.

"We plan to engage our 'alumnae' as part of our outreach support staff," Sister Linda said. "Once a woman has moved beyond life on the streets, others can learn from her success and succeed as well."

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**Your generous support can help the Sisters Program-South in its efforts to rescue exploited women from human trafficking and prostitution. To make a gift or to learn more, contact Pamela Mueller, Director of Mission Advancement, at 414-384-3334.**

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**SISTER RUTH HOERIG** is co-editor of *Alive* magazine and social media content developer for the School Sisters of St. Francis. She has served in a variety of ministries for more than 60 years.

## Reaching Out to Those Without a Homeland

The emotional toll endured by refugees is unimaginable to us who live securely. A refugee's sense of loss goes beyond the tangible, according to resettlement worker Mary Flynn, who addressed sisters, associates, and board members of our sponsored ministries at a "Refugees 101" presentation in December.

Mary is program manager of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services for Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. Our U.S. Province feels blessed to partner with Lutheran Social Services in the resettlement of our first international family from Iraq—a mother, a father, and five daughters—who are currently residing in our Maple Street house in Milwaukee.

Mary described the intensive screening process that can drag on for years with continual re-interviewing; the inability to choose a free country even where there are family members; the fear of living side-by-side with known terrorists in refugee camps; the inherent danger of simply being young and female in these places; and the lack of running water and other basic necessities. The odyssey of a refugee's search for a new homeland can leave them clinging to human dignity.

Mary and her staff are among the resettlement workers preparing to welcome 409 of the expected 50,000 total refugees entering the United States in 2017. "This is just a drop in the bucket when there are 55 million refugees worldwide," she said. That number is also a huge dropoff from the 200,000 refugees admitted to the United States in 1979.

The State Department works with Mary's staff in the resettlement process. Once here, the understanding

is that refugees have permanent legal status, are authorized and expected to work, are eligible for benefits granted workers, and may vote after becoming naturalized citizens.

Please pray for the family our sisters have welcomed, and all refugees. May they find safety, opportunity, and happiness in their new homeland.

## Celebrate Our Chapel Centennial on June 3

We are excited to extend an invitation to our friends, donors, volunteers, and other partners in ministry to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the consecration of St. Joseph Chapel with our congregation on Saturday, June 3. It will be a wonderful opportunity to worship with our sisters and associates, and then take part in a special fundraising event that will include an exclusive evening concert in the Chapel.

Everyone is welcome to join us for Mass in the Chapel at 4 p.m. Following the Eucharist, event registration will open for guests, with an admission of \$50 to support the maintenance of this sacred treasure. Attendees will enjoy delicious food selections and beverage options, and can take part in fun silent auction opportunities as they socialize. Chapel tours will also be available. Then, beginning at 6:30 p.m., the breathtaking acoustics of the Chapel will be on display when the Children's Choir of St. John Berchmans Parish in Chicago, under the direction of Scott Arkenberg, will join our own community's Chapel Singers for a one-hour choral performance of works specially commissioned for the Chapel centennial.

Mark your calendar now and watch for registration information coming soon, or call our Mission Advancement Office today at 414-384-3334. Sponsorship opportunities are also available. Contact Young Kim to learn more at [ykim@sssf.org](mailto:ykim@sssf.org).



# celebrating our legacy

## Lifting Hearts to God for 100 Years

### Sisters mark the centennial of St. Joseph Chapel

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BY DONNA O'LOUGHLIN and MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN

*I suppose you are now beginning with the new chapel, that is, drawing up the plan? In 1913, it is supposed to be built and paid for. We must pray for God's blessing and protection. Building causes worries, even when all goes smoothly. How will dear Mother Alfons' nerves hold out until all is in order?*  
--Mother Alexia

It is easy to understand why Mother Alexia, who had returned to Europe in the early 1900s to establish a foundation of the congregation there, was concerned over the colossal project being planned in her absence in Milwaukee. It was important to build a new chapel, and Mother Alfons, who was second-in-command at the time, had big ideas for it.

How did she imagine such an ambitious design that would require not only acquiring debt but also some skill in haggling with builders? Her vim and determination surpassed all expectations. She reportedly visited the work site every day, "crawled over rubbish, under ladders, and checked the bricklaying, plastering and tiling."\*

Over the course of three years and seven months, much of her attention was directed at overseeing the building's progress. She probably learned construction jargon on the job, sitting in meetings with Milwaukee church architects Peter Brust and Richard Philipp. She surely spent more than a few sleepless nights deciding whether to purchase white Carrara (Italian) marble and Austrian stained glass windows and mosaics by the Tyrolese Art Glass and Art Mosaic Company of Innsbruck.

**DONNA O'LOUGHLIN** is coordinator of outreach events for the School Sisters of St. Francis' United States Province.

**MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN** serves as the congregation's director of marketing and communications.



Remarkably, St. Joseph Chapel was completed in under four years.

With World War I raging throughout Europe, it is a wonder that all the imports managed to arrive safely by ship, and that there were available craftsmen who had not been conscripted for the military. From day one of construction on August 25, 1913, to before the Chapel's consecration on March 19, 1917, tension over the planning, engineering, and cost had to have been palpable.

After all, the whole city of Milwaukee was watching. According to the January 31, 1915, issue of the local German newspaper, *Sonntagsbote*, "St. Joseph Convent is putting the roof on the new chapel, 210 x 127 feet, at the cost of \$225,000." The magnificent Chapel would be listed among the architectural triumphs of Brust and Philipp who had ventured to Europe to

\* Barbaralie Stiefermann, OSF. *Stanislaus...with feet in the world* (Baltimore, Gateway Press, Inc., 1990), 75.

borrow ideas from cathedrals there. Their elaboration on Italian Romanesque Revival style resulted in soaring ceilings, glittering mosaics, marble floors and railings, and 115 art glass windows.

St. Joseph Chapel far exceeded people's ideas of what a "chapel" looks like—perhaps even more so today. Most people do not realize that "chapel" simply means a worship space inside another building. The term has no bearing on how resplendent or ascetical its appearance might be.

Mother Alfons pulled out all the stops on this project. Her perfectionism is found in all the details, according to historian and author Sister Barbaralie Stieffermann. "The brightness of the stained glass windows coupled with the muted colors of the Stations of the Cross that were ordered from Switzerland are so harmoniously rendered. I'm sure Mother Alfons had a lot to do with that," she said.

### Connecting with the Past

There is very little documentation on the actual building of the Chapel. For example, we do not know whether mosaic artisans were brought in from Austria for the installation or were recruited locally.

SSSF ARCHIVES



*Sister Clarissima conducts breathtaking choral music in the 1940s.*

But Sister Barbaralie came face to face with a direct link to the Chapel's past. A few years ago, she met an elderly gentleman who was part of a tour group. He introduced himself as a native of the Layton Boulevard West neighborhood and described how, as a child at the time the Chapel was being erected, he had the job of bringing in buckets of water for the workmen.

"I myself was 14 years old when I came to the convent," said Sister Barbaralie, who arrived in Milwaukee in the late 1940s when the Chapel had been around only three decades. "All the significant milestones of my life are intertwined in the Chapel. That's 71 years of seeing change."

Some of those changes have been aesthetic. "Before the 1960s, the Chapel was dark and monastic, with a catacomb look of dark green and rose," Sister Barbaralie recalled. "We have Mother Clemens to thank for having it repainted and cleaned up, lightening and really opening up the space."

Other changes have opened the chapel in other ways. She remembers well the days when every pew was filled with young women in formation as well as professed sisters. There would have been no room for lay people, she said. Until the 1960s, only sisters, clergy, and altar boys worshiped in St. Joseph Chapel regularly. Today, all are welcome.

"Mother Alfons would be delighted to see the beautiful concerts we hold in Chapel, too, and having it opened up to the laity," she said. "Every metamorphosis has been a joyful, productive time. Some of these changes have been dramatic, but beneficial to our growth."

### Opening the Doors

Today, thousands of people visit annually for numerous events in St. Joseph Center. First-time and returning visitors often ask for a chance to behold what had been one of Milwaukee's best-kept "secrets" for many decades.

Holding the doors open to this sacred space is St. Joseph Center's facility director, Sister Nedine Ferris. From daily Masses to special liturgies, Holy Hours, retreats, concerts, solemn celebrations, funerals, and tours, she is well aware of how dearly loved and busy the Chapel is. School groups, parish youth, artists and photographers come for arranged





*Sister Rosalia Zachman points out Chapel features to enraptured Doors Open visitors.*

SSSF ARCHIVES

tours. Sister Nedine and volunteer docent Sister Rosalia Zachman are at their service.

St. Joseph Chapel draws the biggest crowds during Historic Milwaukee's "Doors Open" open house weekend each September, which invites the participation of more than 125 notable venues citywide for tours. Hundreds of people visit St. Joseph Chapel for self-guided tours. Author and stained glass expert Eileen Grogan will offer a special presentation at this year's "Doors Open" event on Saturday, September 23. (Visit [www.sssf.org](http://www.sssf.org) for event details.)

Sister Nedine said the hard work to keep the Chapel clean and safe for visitors is all worth it when she hears, "This is absolutely gorgeous, and there's such a peaceful atmosphere here." She shared a letter from a high school teacher who wrote, "You and your beautiful Chapel had a profound effect on these wonderful teens."

Many visitors are local but a good number come from across the nation and even abroad. Sister Nedine noted that the international connections of our congregation became evident when one woman visiting as part of a tour group from China was delighted to realize she was acquainted with two of our Chinese sisters.

### **Ringling Throughout the Rafters**

Besides sightseers, St. Joseph Chapel attracts musicians. In fact, what really fueled Mother Alfons' desire to build such a sublime chapel was her love for the arts. She wanted a feast for the eyes as well as an acoustical marvel. St. Joseph Chapel has been the host site for world-class musicians like organist and composer Marcel Dupré, the vocal ensemble Anonymous 4, and Philomusica String Quartet, as well as popular local groups like Bel Canto Chorus, Bach Chamber Choir, and Milwaukee Master Singers.

The sounds of gospel and Spanish-language folk groups have raised the Chapel roof, and the music of our German and Indian sisters has brought added richness.

Sister Mary Jane Wagner, director of Music Ministry, and associate director Sister Bernadette Luecker, carry on the congregation's great lineage of finely trained musicians, leading the Chapel Singers, Sisters Schola, and performing at special liturgies and events. Sister Mary Jane also plans the monthly "Beatitudes" Taizé-style prayer and concert series, held every first Wednesday at 6 p.m. She invites outstanding soloists and small ensembles from the area to extend the meditative tone of the prayer service.

Sister Mary Jane noted that given the place of music in the life and legacy of the congregation, it seemed fitting to highlight the centennial through music. A music committee decided on three new commissions and held a national competition to produce a setting for Sister Irene Zimmerman's text, "This Holy Place" (See the back cover of *Alive*.) These four works will be premiered at the March 19 Eucharistic Liturgy in St. Joseph Chapel.

Each Wednesday at noon, sisters and staff join together to focus their attention and prayer on peace making. This is in keeping with the Chapel's mission: "To provide a sacred environment that supports communion with the Divine for all people of faith." It also is just one more example of how this venerable place of worship is a spiritual center, from which the community goes out to serve in ministry worldwide.

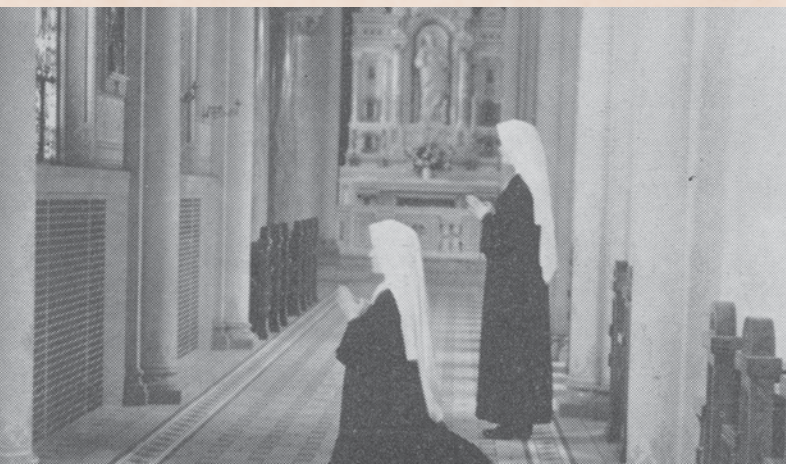
"St. Joseph Chapel was consecrated as a sacred place, not just for the moment but for the future," said Sister Barbaralie. "We are charging forth with our Franciscan mission."

## Chapel Memories



Oh, how I remember Pentecost Sunday, June 13, 1943, in Chapel, my class Reception. Father Klink wore a new chasuble for the occasion. We wore new white veils, which kept slipping down, and knelt on the lower step before the Sanctuary. I was anxious about what my new name would be. Low and behold! I received a name my aunt, Sister Elsa Herda, had suggested that was my brother and mother's name combined. Our class was the first to be able to submit a name. I never changed it. (Sister Leanne Herda)

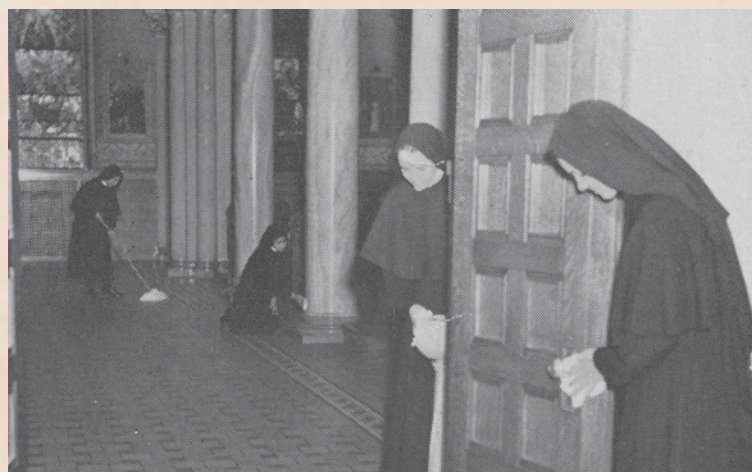
There is an attic atop the high Romanesque ceiling and we had permission to go up to the narrow catwalk, maybe three feet wide, with a railing on one side. Just looking ahead and down shown the smooth arch of the ceiling. Not a wrinkle or lump of cement was left there. It was a tribute to the workers who understood the finishing touch is as important as the shining other side seen from the pews and aisles. As we reached the cupola at the end of our walk, so high, the reverence of the space around the dome was felt. It still inspires me today.  
(Sister Rose Marie Peters)



Adoration with 24-hour prayer tested the endurance of the two novices assigned to pray a Holy Hour in the middle of the night. One night I left my partner at 11:30 p.m. to awaken the two scheduled for midnight. When I returned from the fourth floor dormitory, I saw Sister Theodore Marie (Sister Virginia Handrup) frantically swinging a broom at a bat in erratic flight. Franciscan joy! We couldn't stop laughing! The next shift walked in, aghast at our irreverent behavior. (Sister Marjorie Ann Eisenmenger)

For most of our sisters, St. Joseph Chapel holds unforgettable memories. We invite you to pray, laugh, and cry with them as they pay tribute to their prayer home. (Visit [www.sssf.org](http://www.sssf.org) to view more remembrances and messages from each of our worldwide provinces.)

On June 21, 1956, 72 second-year novices of the Class of 1954 prostrated on the cold terrazzo floor of St. Joseph Chapel between the altar rail and the front pews. Covered by an enormous black pall that covered the novices and extended to the far right over a sister in a wheelchair, they prayed faced down. Sister Thomas Mary Joyce (Patricia) sat in her wheelchair under the pall and renewed the vows she had recently proclaimed because no one but God knew she would still be alive that day. She died on September 6, 1956. (Sister Marcian Swanson)



As novices, we dusted everything in Chapel, even the large angel above the tabernacle in Adoration Chapel. One special cleaning event, I volunteered to climb the ladder, which was placed rather precariously on the altar, to dust this heavenly creature. I don't remember all the promises I made to this angel to get me down safely, but I'm sure I never completed all of them. Now when I visit Adoration Chapel, I wonder how I ever had the nerve to go up there. (Sister Fran Hicks)

On the day I made final vows, there was a period of time before the ceremony and the Mass were to begin. When I went up to the second floor level of the Adoration Chapel to spend some moments of being present to God, to whom I was about to make a life commitment. It was a sacred time. And so it remains, a blessed few minutes in a forever-sacred place.  
(Sister Connie Halbur)

# donors

## partners in our Franciscan mission

## Dedicated to Making a Difference

### Support for sisters' missions inspires donors' creativity

BY MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN

Since its founding, our congregation has been blessed by thousands of generous donors who have sustained our sisters' ministries. Behind each donation are both a personal connection and a belief in the community's mission. In some cases, that combination can lead to amazing and inspiring creativity.

"We continue to be honored by the incredible partnership in mission these wonderful friends have been to us over the years," said Pam Mueller, Director of Mission Advancement. "Their creativity in how they invite others to join us in mission is truly humbling, and we are so very grateful!"

#### A Musical Gift

Mary Pautz initiated the Richard R. Pautz Lifelong Learning Foundation in 1995 to honor her husband's memory a year after he died of leukemia. "At first, the events—grief lectures, scripture reflections, and music concerts—were completely free, but people who attended insisted they wanted to make donations. I eventually made suggestions they could 'pay it forward' to charities that I designated. The School Sisters of St Francis are one of my four special beneficiaries."

A former sister from the Class of 1960, Mary has a lifelong love of music. "I was blessed to receive my college education at Alverno, studying with such greats as Sisters Theophane Hytrek, Mary Hueller, Marion Verhaalen, and others," she said. "My greatest joy as a music educator has been to invite students of all ages to love and enjoy music. What better way than to invite them to the intimacy of my home to hear beautiful music played?"

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**MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN** serves as the congregation's director of marketing and communications.

MARY PAUTZ PHOTO



*Mary Pautz (left) brings joy to music lovers with recitals that benefit our sisters.*

While all of these live performances are free and most are held in Mary's homes in Florida and Wisconsin, she said, "It was a special joy for me last fall to have two of the concerts by brothers Johnny and Chris Rice in St. Joseph Hall, and to invite retired sisters to come and enjoy."

Mary loves watching the faces of the audience as the music is performed, and calls her concerts a "win-win-win." "I honor my husband, who loved music; the audience has a unique musical experience in the intimacy of a home; and the School Sisters benefit."

#### A Lifelong Friendship

Anthony and Christine Speiser started their family foundation in 1997 for the support of children's wellness, education advancement, and improving the quality of life for those in need. The Speisers' foundation has been extraordinarily generous to our sisters' work, thanks to a personal history that goes back to Christine's childhood.



*The Gramblings' open house has brought friends together for 20 years in support of our sisters' Guatemalan mission.*

PHOTO SSSF ARCHIVES

“Sister Kate Brenner was my first and second grade teacher,” Christine recalls. “With enthusiasm, joy and happiness, she taught me to read and write, she prepared me for the sacraments, and taught me how to examine my conscience with confidence and purpose. Later, as a teacher and a mother myself, I tried very hard to pass those lessons on to my students and my own children.”

Christine’s mother and Sister Kate worked together for 40 years. “I want to honor Sister Kate by living a life that makes her proud. Whatever financial help I can give pales in comparison to her life of service and devotion to others.”

The Speiser Family Foundation has supported many special projects, most recently a fundraising effort for a specially equipped van to improve the mobility of our retired sisters.

“My advice to donors is to give to the organizations that share your personal mission and that you trust wholeheartedly,” Christine said. “I am confident that every dollar that we have donated to the sisters has been used as we intended.”

### **Power of Immersion**

Chris and Lori Gramling first connected with the sisters’ missions in Guatemala in 1997 when Lori volunteered with other Alverno College alumnae and students to help children traumatized by the death

of their parents during the country’s long civil war. When she returned, the family sought to continue making a difference there.

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**“It gives me a chance to get my hands dirty, to feel physically involved.”**

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“I had been talking with a friend about hosting a large dinner party, where we could have friends come together and raise money for a great cause,” Chris recalls.

They’ve now hosted the annual fundraising get-together for 20 years in support of our sisters’ Latin American mission. Chris said that while the idea of organizing a party for 60 people initially seemed daunting, the couple found that the ongoing help of friends and the pleasure of reconnecting with fellow supporters makes it all worth while. “It gives me a chance to get my hands dirty, to feel physically involved. In our case, we’re getting our friends together and having a great party! Knowing that it’s for a great cause just makes it even more special.”

Chris is delighted that his and Lori’s advocacy for the children served by our sisters has inspired some of their friends to visit Guatemala and volunteer at Hogares children’s home as well.

“We want to pay tribute to the important work that the School Sisters have been doing all these years in Guatemala,” Chris emphasized. “They started the work, caring for the victims of the war. We’re just helping to support the sisters in that work.”

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**If you have an idea for a fundraiser on behalf of the sisters, we’d love to hear from you. Please share it with Pamela Mueller, Director of Mission Advancement, at 414-385-5338.**

# associates

partners in our Franciscan mission

## A Franciscan Spirit of Service

**Associate strives to make the biggest possible impact through health care**

BY MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN

Dr. Eleanor Fleming was pursuing her ambition of becoming a lawyer at Vanderbilt University when the Franklin, Tennessee, native encountered two people who became mentors that changed the trajectory of her life in dramatic ways.

"I majored in political science, with a double major in African American studies," she explained. "In one of the religious studies courses, my professor, Dr. Lewis Baldwin, asked what my plans were after college. He told me that I should consider going to graduate school and getting a Ph.D. I took his words to heart."

She followed that path and, while in graduate school at Vanderbilt, started attending St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church in Nashville. It was there that she met School Sister of St. Francis Arlene Welding.

"Sister Arlene encouraged me to work with the parish's outreach with Catholic Charities," Eleanor said. "In the process of sorting clothes and stocking the food pantry, I started to think more critically about my career path and life. I saw the outreach clients coming in with such extreme needs."

At about that time, Eleanor heard former Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher speak about oral health disparities, which exposed her to the world of public health and minority health.

"Listening to him speak, thinking about my experiences with Sister Arlene, and wanting to be of greater service to people, I found myself writing my dissertation by day and working on prerequisite classes for dental school at a community college in the evening," she said. "I thought I would be a dentist in

a community health center, single-handedly tackling oral health disparities one mouth at a time!"

But once she began studies at Meharry Medical College, Eleanor realized that clinical dentistry was not her calling, and saw that working in public health would allow her to make the impact she sought. Today, she works in Washington, D.C., where she is a Lieutenant Commander in the United States Public Health Service.

"I work for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where I am the dental officer for the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. My job focuses on the collection and analysis of survey data. I hope the work I do in research and with data can be translated into policies and practices

*Sister Arlene Welding inspired associate Eleanor Fleming to pursue a life of service in healthcare for the vulnerable.*



ELEANOR FLEMING PHOTO

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**MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN** serves as the congregation's director of marketing and communications.

that address oral health disparities and create more equitable health care delivery systems.”

“I became a dentist to live the social Gospel that the faith teaches; to follow the example of service that I learned from Sister Arlene and the other members of religious communities that I saw at my parish; and to do work that matters.”

### Formed by the Catholic Faith

It was in high school that Eleanor really started exploring what faith means for her, and in her freshman year of college, she enrolled in the RCIA class at the Cathedral of the Incarnation in Nashville. Today she is a member of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Washington, D.C., but “regardless of where I live, my heart will always be at St. Vincent de Paul,” she said.

Praying the Daily Office is a spiritual practice that Eleanor said sustains her life. “Sister Arlene taught it to me and another parishioner at St. Vincent, Ms. Kitty,” she recalled. “We would gather on Sunday mornings before the 8:30 Mass and recite the morning prayers. When I moved from Nashville, Ms. Kitty and I continued our prayers over the phone. The time that I spend on Sunday mornings with Ms. Kitty keeps me going through the week.”

In 2015, Sister Arlene asked Eleanor to consider Associate Relationship with our community. She was living in Raleigh, North Carolina, at the time and worked with Sister Jane Elyse Russell, a professor at Belmont Abbey.

“In reviewing the materials about the community with Sister Jane Elyse, I realized that the Associate Relationship to the community was exactly what I needed in my life,” she said. “I needed to be connected

to people committed to the same values and ideals that I believe in, doing the work of serving God, living the faith, and serving our brothers and sisters with their work.”

Franciscan spirituality “has given me a new lens through which to see the world, to think about my place in the world, and to see my work,” Eleanor said. “While my work is, at its basis, about doing no harm, I interpret that in much bigger terms now. I should do no harm in my interactions with people, the tone in which I speak, the ways in which I handle conflict and difficult situations that arise in life. Being an associate has broadened my heart. I love more now. I see things with clearer eyes.”

“ I needed to be connected to people committed to the same values and ideals that I believe in, doing the work of serving God, living the faith, and serving our brothers and sisters with their work. ”

In putting her faith into practice, Eleanor said she follows Sister Arlene’s example and serves on the parish leadership committee. “When Sister Arlene was at St. Vincent, she was always doing good work to speak for those without a voice and in need. I try to do this in my life. I have worked with the

priest at St. Anthony to get the parish engaged in connecting the vulnerable members of our community with services and social support. I also am involved with the music ministry—my newest adventure in support of the School Sisters focus on the arts—and I am a lector and an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist. I enjoy using my voice to share the Word of God.”

“What I enjoy most about Associate Relationship now happens when I visit St. Joseph Center. I love meeting the sisters and hearing their adventures of teaching and working in different parts of the world, reading their poems, and seeing the sparkle in their eyes when they talk about the faith. Each visit restores me, nurtures me, and leaves me with so much hope and joy. I cherish the time I spend with the sisters, and value my Associate Relationship.”

# volunteers

## partners in our Franciscan mission

### Going the Distance to Serve

#### A Sister's daughter-in-law goes the extra 1,700 miles

BY DONNA O'LOUGHLIN

Noble, selfless, and dedicated are not how Lori Egan would describe herself. But anyone in the know would agree that these descriptors aptly characterize her. For the last nine Octobers, she and her son Sam have flown in from Tucson, Arizona, to volunteer for our community's biggest fundraiser, the annual Pancake Breakfast and Fall Festival.

Mission Advancement staff member Bev Howe, a principal coordinator of the Pancake Breakfast, has tremendous regard for Lori and Sam. "They do the hard jobs: waiting tables, serving, dishwashing, hauling away garbage. They are great!"

"Volunteering is fun. I've done it my whole life," Lori said. "Volunteering for the festival also gives me an opportunity to visit with Mom and see the fall colors again."

"Mom" is Lori's mother-in-law, Sister Joan Egan, who became a School Sister of St. Francis after raising a family. Sister Joan's son James Egan died unexpectedly in 2010. "The outpouring of love and prayers when my wonderful husband died is something I remember," said Lori. "I want to support my mother-in-law and the community she is part of."

"Every time I go to Milwaukee, I am reminded of how the School Sisters of St. Francis live as a community. Always supportive, they say hello and ask how Sam and I are doing. They are interested in our life. I look for ways to take that spirit back with me and give a little light to someone else when I go back to Tucson."

Lori is succeeding in doing just that, judging by Sam's life choices. He'll turn 21 this month and is a junior at Arizona State University (ASU), where

he majors in business communications. He performs 30 hours of community charity work each semester, and his role as the public relations chairman of his fraternity is an important contribution. Lori was proud to share that this group of well-intentioned young men were named philanthropy winners at ASU last semester.

Lori herself works hard at Tucson Medical Center. She has been an RN for almost 30 years, trained in oncology and hospice nursing, and is currently a prep nurse. She said she had time to catch her breath from her busy life when she recently stayed in a Maria Linden guest room for the expressed purpose of visiting Sister Joan. "It is like a mini retreat for me. It feels like a holy place. I get restored."

Another blessing for which she is grateful to our sisters is Associate Relationship. "After professing my commitment in St. Joseph Chapel two years ago, I became an associate. It was powerful."

As a health professional and woman of faith, Lori subscribes to the lifestyle of staying involved and finding ways to help others. "The sisters are an example of how not to stop working at 65! Not everyone keeps exercising such gifts when they retire. I have always been impressed by how they keep going, working, and giving."



*Lori Egan calls her son Sam "my greatest blessing." Likewise, they are a gift to our community!*

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**DONNA O'LOUGHLIN** is coordinator of outreach events for the School Sisters of St. Francis' United States Province.

To learn about our many volunteer opportunities, visit [www.sssf.org](http://www.sssf.org)

## St. Joseph Chapel *Celebrating 100 Years*



### *This Holy Place*

*Here in this holy place,  
this beautiful house we built for You,  
we raise our voices praising You,  
God, Artist-BUILDER of the universe.*

*You are at home with us here,  
You whose holy presence  
the world cannot contain.  
We are Your people, a mosaic  
formed like many colored stones  
into community.*

*You nourish us with Word and Food  
at this table,  
as You send us forth to share  
the daily Bread  
You offer to a world hungry for  
Your love.*

*Young and old, we sing our joyful  
praise to You  
for centuries of days  
in this holy place where You are  
at home.*

*- Anthem text by Sister Irene Zimmerman*