

# Alive

WITH THE CALL OF THE GOSPEL

School  
Sisters  
of  St. Francis



Our New  
**Leadership Team**  
is Here!

# Put Out Into Deep Water

BY SISTER MAUREEN JERKOWSKI

Jesus was standing by the shore of Lake Gennesaret. The large crowds were pressing in on him to hear the Word of God, so Jesus borrowed one of two boats near the shore. The Gospel writer tells us, “He got into the boat, the one belonging to Simon,” and “remaining seated, he continued to teach the crowds from the boat.” Sitting was the usual teaching position.

The boat, in the Gospel, is frequently a symbol of the church community and a symbol of what is to come in the near future. Jesus tells Simon to go out into deep water and start fishing. “Master, we have been hard at it all night long and have caught nothing; but if you say so, I will lower the nets.”

The nets were hardly in the water when they were filled with fish. Simon, who was arrogant and all knowing, is totally overcome. He knew there were no fish, so this man is someone special. “Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man!” Simon’s reaction is that of a person in awe of the presence of God’s overwhelming power and goodness.

Jesus reassures Simon and his companions, “Do not be afraid.” He is calling them to the work of building his Kingdom, a sign of a much greater “catch” of people to be made by the new community.

Simon and his companions depended on their boats and nets for their livelihoods. Their families’ security was at stake. But they left everything. This is faith. This is trust.

Perhaps the most important thing we need to learn is that it is safe to trust. As an international congregation, we trust Mother Alexia’s words that “the needs of the times are the will of God for us.”

One current need of our times is to address the refugee crisis. People of faith are displaced due to conflict, climate change, natural disasters, persecution, violence, poverty and inhumane living conditions.

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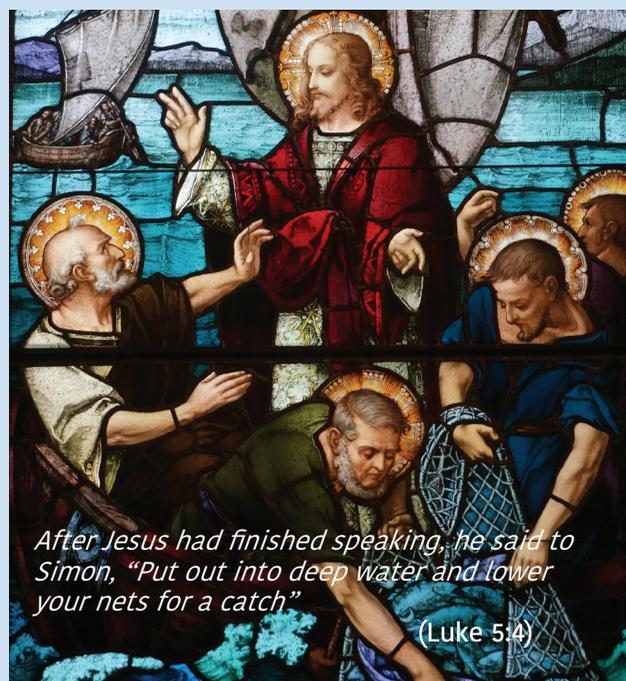
**SISTER MAUREEN JERKOWSKI** is lead clinician at Maryville Academy, Des Plaines, Illinois.

They literally leave everything behind as they search for a better life, trusting that God will provide.

Pope Francis advocates a shared response to this crisis by the political community, civil society and the church. He said that response efforts could be described with four verbs: welcome, protect, promote, and integrate.

Today, our community is responding by offering a home in Milwaukee to two newly arrived families fleeing persecution. In ministry at Maryville, Illinois, sisters provide shelter to unaccompanied refugee children. These children trust that God will take care of them on their journey, and they risk everything for a better life. They leave behind their homeland and their parents. They are far from loved ones, and arrive with nothing but the clothes on their backs. They are vulnerable and need our protection.

As people of faith, we are continually asked to let go, and to trust that it is safe to let ourselves put out into the deep waters and fall into stronger and safer hands than our own. God will provide.



## From Our Leadership

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FRONT COVER  
Sisters Mary Diez, Lucy Sister Kalapurackel,  
Barbara Kraemer, and Tresa Abraham  
Kizhakeparambil in St. Joseph Chapel in  
Milwaukee at the start of their four-year  
term on the congregation's International  
Leadership Team. (John Kimpel photo)

BACK COVER  
Sisters pray with associates and staff  
outside St. Joseph Center in Milwaukee  
in March 2018 as they remember victims  
of violence in schools. The event was  
organized by the Justice and Peace Office  
of the U.S. Province.  
(Michael O'Loughlin photo)

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As members of the International Leadership Team, we have so many eye-opening experiences when we travel in the 11 countries where our sisters live and serve. Our goal is that the articles you read in *Alive* magazine capture some of those moments and bring you closer to our sisters and their ministries.

In this issue of *Alive*, you'll learn about our clinic in Goreghat, India. On a recent visit to the mission, our team watched the contexts change as the miles flew by: from sleek buildings to rubber plantations to nomad camps. The journey to Goreghat took seven hours by train and another eight hours by jeep. Along the way, we saw farming done the way early American pioneers farmed—one man, one animal, and a plow. Hay was being harvested by a group of people with scythes, and each carried home a share of the harvest.

When we arrived at the Goreghat mission, it was clear that many of the children are both at home in their context and also keenly aware of opportunities a world away. They were eager to welcome us and ask questions. Their learning has put them in touch with life beyond their village and many new roles to which they can aspire.

Another mission you'll read about is the Rieti Healing Center in San Marcos, Guatemala. Traveling to San Marcos from our sisters' orphanage in Santa Apolonia takes most of a day on winding mountain roads. Passing on the curves of narrow roads full of trucks and buses is a cause for prayer!

At Rieti, our sisters offer counseling, holistic healing and herbal medicines. The stories of the people who find help and wholeness at Rieti are very powerful, and we saw the life-changing impact of the sisters' interactions. What a joy it is to meet someone whose pain has been replaced with energy!

These are just two examples of the visits we have recently made to support, encourage, and learn from our sisters around the globe. Our new International Leadership Team took office this summer, and we look forward to every opportunity to visit our missions and celebrate the impact of the sisters who work with the people in those places. Our congregation's service in these communities around the world would not be possible without your generous support. On behalf of our sisters and the thousands of people in need with whom they minister, we offer our heartfelt thanks!

Gratefully yours in Christ,

*Sisters Mary, Tresa Abraham, Barbara, and Lucy*

International Leadership Team, 2018-2022  
School Sisters of St. Francis



# A Blessed Ministry of Healing

## Sisters offer health and wholeness to India's underserved, rural poor

BY SISTER RUTH HOERIG

Our St. Francis Province in India began a new ministry in the diocese of Jabalpur in 1992, when the late Bishop Theophane invited our sisters to staff the diocesan-owned mission in Goreghat. Located in Madhya Pradesh, India's poorest state, it serves impoverished tribal people who often travel by foot from great distances to receive the help they need.

"We are continually looking for ways to advance the mission of our congregation," said Sister Elsa Paul Chiriyankandath, who recently completed a second term on the congregation's International Leadership Team. "Because of the large number of poverty-stricken people living in the state of Madhya Pradesh, the sisters in our province determined that a mission in Goreghat would be a good place for us to promote 'new life, new meaning and new hope' among those who need it most," she said.

The Goreghat mission has two parts: a clinic that serves an average of 35 people each day from 25 villages in the region, and a diocesan middle school. The clinic and school are staffed by Sister Rosilin Arimboor, Community Animator (coordinator); Sister Sunita Armo, Registered Nurse at the dispensary; and Sister Rosmin Anthikkatt, the school's Head Mistress.

Critical health services are provided by the dispensary, which is open seven days a week from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. If an emergency occurs outside business hours, the parish priest is contacted and asked to accompany the patient in need, to safeguard the sisters' safety. "Our healing ministry is offered to anyone who has no access to treatment elsewhere," Sister Elsa Paul said. "They may be suffering from malaria, typhoid, tuberculosis, snake bites and bone fractures."

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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 her community in a variety of ministries for more than 60 years.

Sister Sunita, the only nurse at the clinic, studied for three years at St. Philomena College of Nursing in Bangalore to earn her degree as a Registered Nurse. "The work is very challenging," she said. "Since we only have access to a doctor once a month, the nurse at the dispensary is responsible for the health care of all the patients who visit the dispensary. But we are happy and grateful to God to see how the health of our patients improves after receiving the medical care we provide."

The work of the sisters often involves making the best of very difficult and unexpected situations. Recently, the clinic received a computer to allow the nurse at the clinic to Skype with doctors who could help with the diagnosis and treatment of more difficult cases.

"Unfortunately, this plan has not worked out for us yet because we do not have an internet connection in our region," Sister Sunita said. "But we have been able to function fairly well with the help of one of our sisters,

SSSF PHOTO



*Sisters of our St. Francis Province with students at the Goreghat mission school.*

SSSF PHOTO



*Many villagers travel long distances to be served by our sisters at the Goreghat mission.*

Sister Alphy Thaikadan, who is a doctor for our province at Jabalpur.”

Sister Alphy visits the clinic every month to help Sister Sunita with complicated cases that need more specialized diagnosis. When necessary, she refers patients to the medical college where she works as a staff doctor.

“Though the work is hard, our faith and trust in God is a strong support for us,” Sister Sunita said. “Each day we start our daily routine in the dispensary with prayer and Bible reading. Some of the patients request that we pray over them. This practice not only comforts the patients who ask for our prayers, but it also increases our faith as healing ministers. We believe that Jesus the Divine Healer truly does heal the sick and needy.

“What could be more in line with the Gospel than welcoming people as they are and seeing them as children of God, deserving of everything good the world can offer?,” Sister Sunita said. “This way of thinking about the people we serve, I believe, is vital to our success.”

By remaining faithful to daily prayer, the sisters have found that God blesses their ministry in significant

ways. “One of our patients, Mr. Jawaher, experienced an amazing cure,” Sister Sunita recalled. “He had been in good health and was a very active member of our parish. One day, his blood pressure went out of control, causing him to be bedridden for six months. We visited him daily, gave him medical care and prayed over him. After our prayerful support and encouragement, he gradually recovered and is now back to his healthy self.

“In all of this, I learned that by relying on the goodness of God, signs of God’s providence and care are evident all around us,” Sister Sunita continued. “This is especially true of our donors who bolster our work by their generosity and partnership with us. They have our highest gratitude and appreciation.

“It is such a comfort to know that we are not alone, that there are many generous people who care and support our ministry. We pray that God may bless all these good donors and their families for their generous hearts.”

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**Your donation makes a life-changing impact through our sisters’ ministries around the world. Use the enclosed donation envelope or make a secure donation online at [www.sssf.org](http://www.sssf.org).**



*Sister Maureen*



*Sister Elsa Paul*



*Sister Francitta*

## A Wealth of Experience

### International Leadership Team members reflect on their years of service

BY SISTER RUTH HOERIG

At the end of June, three of the four International Leadership Team members completed their terms of office. Sister Elsa Paul Chiriyankandath and Sister Francitta Pazhukkathara each served for eight years; Sister Maureen McCarthy served one term of four years. (Sister Mary Diez began her second term as President in July.) Before leaving office, they reflected upon their experiences serving as an international team.

#### What aspects of leadership did you find most rewarding?

**S. Elsa Paul:** Being part of the International Leadership Team helped me get a bigger picture of the community and afforded me a better understanding of the overall mission of our congregation.

**S. Francitta:** For me, it was the good relationships I experienced with the sisters with whom I lived and worked at St. Joseph Convent. I have a growing

appreciation for the values and cultural differences of each province.

**S. Maureen:** I valued the opportunity to visit the various provinces, learning about their cultures and the challenges they face.

#### What aspects of leadership did you find most challenging?

**S. Maureen:** It was heartbreaking to observe the effects of government oppression around the world, such as the extreme poverty in Latin America, and inadequate infrastructure and hostility towards Christians in India.

**S. Francitta:** I found it hard to see how difficult it was for the sisters to “let go” of a mission that could no longer function due to a lack of resources, especially with fewer sisters.

**S. Elsa Paul:** It was quite challenging to adjust to a different style of communication, like relying more on written communication and less on direct verbal exchange. I had to use more elaborate, in-depth explanations to ensure accurate understanding when relating across cultures.

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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 her community in a variety of ministries for more than 60 years.

### Are there particular mission visits that stand out in your minds as most memorable?

**S. Elsa Paul:** The poor living conditions in the *colonias* of El Paso, and the lack of emphasis given to education and problem-solving in alleviating poverty in Latin America amazed me. On the other hand, I was awed by the risk, dedication, and generosity of the sisters who minister to HIV patients in South India.

**S. Maureen:** Like Sister Elsa Paul, the subhuman living conditions in the *colonias* of El Paso and the gang violence in Latin America sickened me beyond measure. But the compassionate care given to children with exceptional needs and destitute women in India really captivated my attention.

**S. Francitta:** I was fascinated by the similarity between Peru and India: the way the sisters work among the poor under extreme hardship, and the fact that the pioneers of that mission came from the United States and nurtured vocations who now serve their own people.

### What knowledge or experiences do you feel you will carry with you in your next missions, and share with the people who will serve with you there?

**S. Maureen:** I know that we need to “walk the talk” and help to create unity among ourselves interculturally, so that we can move forward together.

**S. Francitta:** We can be of better service to others by working together as a team, by perceiving an area of ministry as “ours” rather than “mine.”

**S. Elsa Paul:** I have learned to slow down before making judgments, taking time to see the larger picture. I also understand the importance of planning for the future, of looking at things from multiple perspectives, of respecting boundaries when working across provinces, and of maintaining confidentiality when dealing with others.

### What impact do you feel your leadership has had in your own home province?

**S. Elsa Paul:** I believe there is less of a gap now between the Generalate and the North India province,

and a sharper focus on our congregational mission. I think there is also a better understanding of, and sensitivity to and respect for, individual differences.

**S. Francitta:** We will develop a more systematic way of operating, such as setting criteria for making decisions. We’ll also make *Response in Faith* [our congregation’s rule of life] more central to our community life and our intercultural life and mission.

**S. Maureen:** We need to give stronger support for our mission to enter into the lives of the poor by being a voice for the poor, finding resources and speakers to do that.

### What will you miss the most?

**S. Maureen:** The depth of sharing and level of trust we built as a team has been a great gift.

**S. Elsa Paul:** I will miss St. Joseph Chapel, the community of sisters, the International Team members, and the generous help given by the team’s support staff.

**S. Francitta:** I will miss the Motherhouse community of sisters and the fun we had playing cards; my prayer group, which included Spanish-speaking and African-American lay people; and the change of seasons – the lovely flowers and apple blossoms of spring, and the colorful leaves in fall will all be missed.

### Can you compare your feelings now, in your final days in leadership, to your first days when you joined the team?

**S. Elsa Paul:** Being in the Generalate seemed very strange and intimidating at first, but now I feel this is my home.

**S. Maureen:** Looking back now, I think we grew in our effectiveness as a team because we prayed together from the start and because we divided our responsibilities according to our strengths.

**S. Francitta:** I now have an “attitude of gratitude,” grateful to God for all the blessings I have received. I find it easier to let go now, perhaps because I am more able to take a long-range view of life and see what is really important.

# A Time of Peace and Beauty

**For eight years, the Beatitudes series has been a monthly chapel tradition**

BY CYNTHIA LORENTZEN

Since December 2010, the School Sisters of St. Francis' Music Ministry has offered the Beatitudes prayer and concert series on the first Wednesday evening of each month in St. Joseph Chapel. Using the prayer style of the ecumenical Taizé Community in France, each offering includes a meditative service of readings, songs, silent reflection, and prayers of intercession that focus on one of the Beatitudes, the blessings found in St. Matthew's Gospel.

Sister Mary Jane Wagner, Director of Music Ministry, said the community had been seeking an event that would bring people to St. Joseph Chapel on a regular basis. She worked with a visioning committee and developed the idea for Beatitudes as a way to combine a prayer event with the School Sisters' tradition of music for a unifying community impact.

"The Beatitudes outline a way of life for Christians and provide a guide to lead us to eternal life," Sister Mary Jane explained. "Because the event offers ample time for reflection, the prayer style is appealing to many people because it slows one down. Being silent with others has a powerful potential to heighten awareness of God's presence among us.

"The concert extends the time to reflect on the nature of the Beatitude that is the theme of the program and adds variety to each month's event," Sister Mary Jane said. "We have had many instrumental soloists as well as vocal and choral offerings, with soloists, duets, chant scholas, parish choirs, and vocal ensembles."

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CYNTHIA LORENTZEN is a communications professional in Franklin, Wisconsin.



*Sister Bernadette Luecker (left) assists Sister Mary Jane Wagner in presenting Beatitudes each month.*

## Musically and spiritually meaningful

As a cantor, professional vocalist William Erickson participates in the Beatitudes series by singing and leading the prayer portion, which lasts about 35 minutes. He prepares for each service by reviewing the music and text, doing some vocal warm-up and practicing moments of silent reflection.

"The chapel is a marvelous visual and aural treasure," he remarked. "The experience is especially distinctive because of the vibrant acoustics that enhance and really become an essential sonic dimension of any instrument, including the voice." In addition, Bill is grateful for the opportunity to sing from the heart, and the power of song. "Singing sustains me and is a life-giving source of energy," he said. "If my singing helps to sustain others, this too is meaningful to me.

"Beyond singing and performing, I am grateful for the opportunity to hear the voices of others who provide leadership in the introductions, readings and prayers," he continued. "I applaud in my heart their ongoing actions to continue to build the loving 'kingdom' of Beatitudes – of peace, hope, joy, justice, and consolation."

The Beatitudes series is live streamed and archived for people who are out of town or unable to take part. (A link to the community's Ustream channel is found on our website homepage: [www.sssf.org](http://www.sssf.org)).

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**If you would like to know more about the Beatitudes series, please contact Sister Mary Jane at 414-385-5246, or email [mjwagner@sssf.org](mailto:mjwagner@sssf.org).**

# Holding You in Prayer

Our sisters feel tremendous gratitude for those who support our congregation's ministries. We want to share, in their own words, these reminders that you are in their prayers each day.



As I begin my 89th year of life and 69th year as a School Sister of St. Francis, my heart is full of joy and gratitude. I have had the privilege of ministering with our Mission Advancement staff for the past 17 years. I am constantly aware of the love, care, and support shared with and received from our families, friends, former students, and countless other benefactors. I hold each of them in prayer, believing that God will so enlarge our hearts that we will see all that we truly are, and live with one another in God's love.

**Sister Kate Brenner**



Donors have supported my ministry in Kentucky significantly, and they continue. My gratitude is best expressed in prayers for them. Prayers are powerful. They made—and still make—a difference in the lives of the poor for basic needs and health care.

**Sister Leanne Herda**



It is with a heart filled with gratitude that every day I thank God for the gift of donors to our Mission Advancement office. I hope they can feel the gratitude I have in my heart, and I know the good Lord is also pleased with their generosity. I fold, seal, and stamp the thank you letters written by our wonderful, dedicated director Pam Mueller and her staff. This is not a mind-boggling task, and as I perform it, I can talk to God and ask him to bless our generous donors. I also take the opportunity to stop in chapel and include a thank you to Jesus for the gift of faithful donors, and request his blessings on each of them. They are in my prayers and in my love!

**Sister Rosalia Zachman**



On Thursday afternoons, you will find me signing my name to our faithful, generous donors. Indeed, you are partners with the School Sisters of St. Francis. To the poor and needy, your kindness makes a difference in our broken world. I will hold each donor in my ministry of prayer, and hope you will keep the sisters in your prayers as well. May God bless you and keep you! May he look upon you with kindness and grant you his peace!

**Sister Mary Helen Bissen**



I have always felt that one of the most important things in my life was to give thanks to others. When I am able to sign cards of gratitude for our benefactors, I do it with a grateful heart because I believe that they sacrifice for our community's outreach to others in need. Those benefactors' names remain in my mind and I pray for them, even those whom I have not met personally.

**Sister Gwen Floryance**



Each letter that I sign is written to someone we are related to. The letter that was composed with love in our office affirms our community prayer for our donor. I learned from another sister to send a blessing each time I write my name. Sometimes I recognize the name at the top of the letter, sometimes the place. Each one is someone special who knows one or many of us sisters and joins us in our mission, or someone who needs a prayer and took a chance that we might pray for him or her. I send my blessing prayer before I write my name.

**Sister Julia Rice**

# Ministry Partners Aid Children with Special Needs

## School and parish raise \$17,000 for Assisi Special School

BY MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN

Holy Apostles School in New Berlin, Wisconsin, and Assisi Special School in Bangalore, India, are 8,500 miles and ten time zones apart. But for the past seven years, the bonds of love and compassion have surmounted that distance, thanks to a partnership between the schools and the School Sisters of St. Francis.

“Holy Apostles has been a ministry partner of the sisters since the mid-2000s, organizing a Lenten fundraising campaign nearly every year,” said Catherine Alexander, Special Appeals Administrator for the congregation’s International Office of Mission Advancement. “Funds have been raised by students at Holy Apostles School and through the parish’s religious education program.”

In recent years, the beneficiary of these campaigns has been Assisi Special School, where our sisters provide more than 60 children and teens with physical and mental challenges with physical therapy, and vocational and self-care training.

Sister Jodene Zehren, now a substitute teacher at the school, has been part of the partnership from the beginning. “My role is to be the School Sister presence in the school and to support the connection between the children of Holy Apostles and the children of our School Sisters’ missions,” she said.

Beginning in 2015, South India province Sisters Merlin Vazhappilly and Elizabeth Ponthokkan, who minister in Milwaukee, have traveled to Holy Apostles to speak with the students about Assisi Special School.

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**MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN** is the School Sisters of St. Francis' Marketing and Communications Director.

SSSF PHOTO



Sisters Merlin (left) and Elizabeth speaking to the children.

Their presence has made a profound impact on everyone they encounter.

“What has brought me the most joy is being able to proudly introduce Sisters Elizabeth and Merlin to the children of Holy Apostles as fellow School Sisters, and to see the joy on the faces of the children as they gave their attention to the sisters from India,” Sister Jodene said. “The personal connection with the sisters from India has made a significant difference.”

“Sisters Elizabeth and Merlin have presented for three Lenten seasons at the school,” Catherine said. “The children are so attracted to the sisters’ authenticity. They are fascinated with their stories and photos.”

Fourth grade teacher Mary Schweiso has served as a liaison between Holy Apostles faculty, the sisters, and the Mission Advancement office. She agrees that the Indian sisters’ participation is a valuable part of the partnership. “Having the sisters come visit us makes the service project even more meaningful because they are able to share their firsthand experience with the students and answer the many questions the students have,” she said.

Sister Jodene, who was Mary’s teacher partner before her retirement, said she is also happy that the project has expanded beyond the grade school to the parish’s Child and Family Ministry and Youth Ministry. During Lent 2018, it was extended to the entire parish.

“Everyone in the parish was encouraged to pray, fast and give alms for Assisi Special School,” Sister Jodene said. “The theme was ‘Building Hope – Pray, Fast,



*Speak with students at Holy Apostles School.*

Give with Assisi Special School.' This parishwide effort resulted in raising more than \$17,000 to benefit Assisi Special School!"

Catherine attributed this phenomenal result to "everything being beautifully woven together. The timing of this fundraiser also coincided with the opening of Holy Apostles' new Adoration Chapel. The parish tied in the element of prayer and meditation with the children of Assisi Special School."

"Communication from our Mission Advancement Office about the needs of the children in the missions we serve has been very important," Sister Jodene said. Mary said that, from her perspective as a classroom teacher, the partnership with the sisters and their ministry is a natural fit with the school's mission.

"Part of our school's mission is to advance the educational ministry of the Catholic Church by creating a compassionate atmosphere that promotes faith, knowledge, and service by its students," she said. "We try to live out this mission statement by participating in several schoolwide service projects throughout the year. Our Lenten Penny Drive to benefit the students attending Assisi Special School is one of those projects."

Catherine is eager to connect with schools and parishes who would like to establish a similar relationship with the congregation this school year. For more information about a mission partnership, Catherine can be reached at 414-385-5343 or at [calexander@sssf.org](mailto:calexander@sssf.org).

## JOIN US FOR FALL EVENTS

You are invited to join our sisters, associates, and friends for three special events at St. Joseph Center in the coming months. For more details on these gatherings, please call 414-384-3334.

### **Pancake Breakfast/Fall Festival Sunday, October 7, 8:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m.**

For more than 50 years, neighbors, friends, students and relatives have come together for this daylong community event and fundraiser. All-you-can-eat pancakes will be served with all the fixin's from 8:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m., and a sloppy joe meal available from 12:00-2:00 p.m.

Try your luck with our 50/50 raffles and games, bid on more than 100 silent auction baskets, and don't forget our famous homemade bakery! There'll be crafts, imports, live polka music from Vern and the Originals, and much more. Mass will be celebrated at 9:00 a.m. with Chapel tours available after Mass. Breakfast cost is \$8 for adults, \$5 for children 5-10, and free for children 4 and under.

### **Candles of Love Mass Thursday, November 1, 6:30 p.m.**

Join the sisters in St. Joseph Chapel for a beautiful, candlelight All Saints Day liturgy. The Candles of Love Mass includes a litany in which we remember our deceased sisters, associates, family members, friends, and benefactors. Watch your mail for an invitation to send us the names of your loved ones to be included in the intentions of this Mass, and throughout the month of November.

### **Bilingual Mass and Fiesta Saturday, November 10, 4:00-7:00 p.m.**

Our community's sixth annual Bilingual Mass and Fiesta begins with Mass celebrated in English and Spanish at 4 p.m., with Milwaukee Auxiliary Bishop James Schuerman presiding. The choirs of St. Rafael and St. Adalbert parishes will lead us in song. After Mass, from 5 p.m.-7 p.m., enjoy Mexican cuisine available for purchase, live dance music provided by Chicago's Son Monarcas Latin folk/pop band, and a "Day of the Dead" exhibit in our Alfons Gallery. We'll also have games for all ages, raffles with amazing prizes, face painting, and fun family portraits. It's an evening of fun, food, and friendship!



# An Innovative Path to Healing

## Guatemalan sisters follow in our foundresses' footsteps

BY YOUNG KIM

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the School Sisters of St. Francis had a reputation as the purveyors of one of the finest therapeutic spas in the country, if not the world. Wealthy patrons with chronic aches and pains were drawn to Sacred Heart's baths and other therapies. Mother Alexia used the revenues to expand the congregation's national and global reach. (See the sidebar for more about this initiative.)

By the 1940s, our sisters were serving in 157 elementary and 20 parochial high schools across the United States. Twenty-six sisters were ministering in Central America, and the roots of today's St. Francis and Assisi Provinces in India were just getting established.

One hundred twenty five years after Mother Alexia's visionary entrepreneurship, Sister Inés Albizures of our Latin American Region is following in her foundresses' footsteps by using new technology to provide life-changing healing ministries in Guatemala. Sister Inés was intrigued when she learned about the growing popularity of bio-electromagnetic energy regulation (BEMER) therapy, a technique that stimulates flow in our smallest blood vessels, many of which are four times smaller than a human hair. BEMER therapy has been proven to support the body's own self-healing and regenerative processes, and is used to alleviate the effects of arthritis and back pain, as well as speed the healing of wounds, bone fractures, and torn ligaments.

The Oasis Franciscano Rieti Healing Center in San Marcos is now one of only two facilities in Guatemala equipped with BEMER microcirculatory therapy machines. The therapy is attracting patrons to the healing center who can afford the full price of treatment, thereby creating a new income stream and making the mission more self sufficient.

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**YOUNG KIM** is Director of Foundation Giving for the School Sisters of St. Francis.

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The center's core purpose remains unchanged, however. The sisters who serve there continue to fulfill the foundresses' vision of meeting the needs of the times by providing physical and spiritual healing to impoverished people in rural Guatemala.

### Mother Alexia's Vision

In 1892, Mother Alexia Hoell, co-foundress of the School Sisters of St. Francis, conceived the idea of establishing a sanitarium adjacent to the convent's motherhouse in Milwaukee. While she was in Europe to recruit sisters, Mother Alexia hired Dr. I. H. Hirschfeld, a German physician, and as he acquired patients, Mother Alexia obtained diocesan approval to construct the Kneipp Water Cure Institution in 1893. It was later renamed Sacred Heart Sanitarium.

In 1900, Dr. Hirschfeld was succeeded by Dr. Stephen Stack, who is credited with making Sacred Heart Sanitarium nationally famous for its use of the latest medical therapy and physiotherapy, which were subsequently adopted by more than 100 European and American sanitariums.

This modern sanitarium succeeded in attracting wealthy patrons who came to take in the waters, and provided the School Sisters with the income needed to educate their members, so that they could serve the growing number of immigrants in the state.

- Sister Barbaralie Stieffermann

# Planned Gifts Make a Lasting Impact

## Legacy gifts offer many benefits

BY PAM MUELLER

For generations, the School Sisters of St. Francis have inspired us with their devotion. Whether empowering lives through education, meeting the needs of the poor, or lighting the way for the lost and alone, our sisters have left an indelible mark on countless lives.

*Years ago, a young boy struggled to survive in his lonely, chaotic world. With little support or structure at home, he felt lost and unloved. Just when the future seemed darkest, a beacon of light appeared. With loving hearts and open arms, the School Sisters of St. Francis entered his life—bringing the caring presence and inspiration he so desperately needed. With their help, he found the power to become a strong, successful, honorable man—the man he always wanted to be.*

This story has unfolded thousands of times, perhaps even in your family's life. Today, through a planned gift, you can honor the sisters' legacy while creating a living legacy of love of your own.

In addition to estate and income tax benefits, a planned gift to the School Sisters of St. Francis could help you meet your personal financial goals and secure your family's future. Best of all, you'll experience the deep personal reward of helping others. Your gift can:

- Safeguard the future for our retired sisters by providing housing, healthcare, and a simple, yet comfortable, quality of life.
- Meet the basic needs of impoverished people by supplying clean water, food, housing, and medical care.
- Empower lives through education—bringing a brighter future to children, adults, and individuals with disabilities.

In light of the recent tax changes, there are two ways that non-itemizers can give and still receive tax benefits.

**IRA charitable rollover.** Individuals age 70½ or older can make a gift of up to \$100,000 from their IRA and do not have to claim the distribution as income. The gift counts against their required minimum distribution for the year. Although no tax deduction is taken, this strategy provides a nice tax benefit because it helps to reduce income by avoiding the personal distribution.

**Legacy gift.** A second strategy is to give a legacy gift in the form of a charitable gift annuity (CGA) or charitable remainder trust (CRT). An individual can make a gift to the School Sisters of St. Francis to fund a gift annuity, receive lifetime payments, and benefit our ministries with what remains after all the payments have been made. Creating a CGA with gifts of appreciated property or stock allows an individual to avoid capital gains tax and defer them also for a period of several years.

Your long-term commitment ensures our ability to carry on our ministries, which is why we ask you to prayerfully consider becoming a member of our Covenant Society by making a planned gift to the School Sisters of St. Francis. Your help today is our hope for tomorrow!

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To receive information and a free financial planning workbook, contact Pam Mueller, Director of Mission Advancement at 414-385-5338 or [pmueller@sssf.org](mailto:pmueller@sssf.org).



## Sustaining Spiritual Connections

*Sister Connie Taylor with Associate Robert Mansell, Jr. at My Good Mourning Place*

### Associates nurture their special bond with our sisters

BY CYNTHIA LORENTZEN

Each year, lay women and men from all over the United States choose to carry the mission of the School Sisters of St. Francis into the future by beginning or renewing Associate Relationship with the community. Sister Rosemary Reier, Coordinator of Associate Relationship, said that what this diverse group of 160 associates holds in common is a desire for a deeper spiritual connection and an opportunity to make a difference.

During a time of preparation, prospective associates partner with a sister or another associate to learn about the history, spirituality, mission, and ministries of the congregation. They also choose how they would like to get involved based on their availability, interests, and talents. For some, participation includes helping sisters with fundraising activities such as the Pancake Breakfast/Fall Festival and Joseph Bowls Supper. Others join community service efforts like baking Christmas cookies for the women and men served by St. Ben's Community Meal program.

Another important way some associates stay active and connected to the community is by visiting our

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**CYNTHIA LORENTZEN** is a communications professional in Franklin, Wisconsin.

retired sisters and participating with the sisters in their ministry of prayer and presence. This might include volunteering at occasional social gatherings, like the sisters' recent "Christmas in July" party at Sacred Heart, or simply visiting regularly to chat and pray with a particular sister whom they have known for years.

**Cherie Esposito** of Aurora, Illinois, attended retreats facilitated by Sister Rosemary Rombalski, the U.S. Province's Director of Life and Ministry, for nearly two decades. That experience inspired her to become an associate over a year ago.

"Being an associate is an honor for me," Cherie said. "Hearing about how the sisters meet the needs of the times encourages me to keep growing in my ministries and serve others to a greater degree."

Cherie assists Sister Rosemary when sisters need to relocate. She helps them pack for their move, unpack in their new homes, and later visits with them. She also enjoys serving the sisters at the Jubilee luncheon as they celebrate milestone anniversaries of their commitment to service.

**Robert Mansell, Jr.**, of Milwaukee has had a life journey with sisters and religious orders, which began in his formative years when he lived in an orphanage run by sisters. Robert received vocational counseling

and training to become a nurse's aide at Sacred Heart Rehabilitation Hospital, where Sister Judeen Schulte encouraged him to continue his training in nursing school.

Years later, Robert met Sister Connie Taylor while attending a liturgy in St. Joseph Chapel, and was motivated to join her in ministry at My Good Mourning Place, a bereavement center on Milwaukee's south side where children, teens and their families can grieve and heal. Robert became an associate in 2016 and meets with Sister Connie, his contact sister, each week in their shared ministry.

"The spirit of God continues to be instrumental in my life's work as I facilitate groups and participate on the board of My Good Mourning Place as the president," Robert said. "I am blessed to be a companion in the community's mission and values."

**Mary Schweitzer** of Milwaukee grew up knowing the School Sisters of St. Francis through her school and parish, St. Alphonsus in Greendale, Wisconsin. Mary has fond childhood memories of accompanying her father when he would drive the Milwaukee sisters to a convent in Illinois for a visit and dinner. She also recalls meeting Sister Margaret Ann Arnold at Sacred Heart Rehabilitation Hospital, where her father volunteered for over 15 years.

"Sister Margaret Ann and I remained friends and she later consented to be my contact sister," said Mary, who became an associate in May 2004. Mary loves helping the sisters by assembling and selling Easter baskets, assisting at rummage sales, addressing Christmas cards for sisters at Our Lady of the Angels Convent, and serving as a greeter at Masses.

"My life was touched in a very special way when Sister Mary Hauke called me in 2013 and asked if I would be interested in volunteering at Our Lady of the Angels as a sacristan," Mary said.

Like Mary, **Audrey Peterson** has lived, worked and played with School Sisters of St. Francis most of her life. Forty-five years ago, she was part of a group of young women who became the original core of Associate Relationship. After Audrey retired and moved to Milwaukee in 2013, Sister Noel Le Claire became her contact sister and continues to be part of Audrey's life.

"I find mutual affirmation, support and encouragement to be an important aspect of Associate Relationship," Audrey said. She joins the sisters for lunch at the motherhouse, volunteers at Clement Manor, visits sisters at Our Lady of the Angels, drives sisters to medical appointments, and assists them with shopping.

**Phyllis Ramseth** has been a member of Queen of Angels Parish on Chicago's north side for 55 years. In addition to her parish ministry as a Eucharistic Minister and lector, she volunteers with the St. Vincent DePaul Society and at Chicago's Bonaventure House, where she helps individuals diagnosed with AIDS. Since she became an associate in 1987, Phyllis has been caring for the retired sisters.

"I spend two weeks each year at a retirement center/nursing home attending to the sisters," she said. "These women are God's children, and they have dedicated their lives to God's service. I also send birthday cards and letters so no one is forgotten. God is very good at allowing me to be part of these sisters' lives as they near their eternal life with God."

PHYLLIS RAMSETH PHOTO



*Associate Phyllis Ramseth visits sisters every year*

**For more information about Associate Relationship, please contact Sister Rosemary Reier (414-385-5270 or [rreier@sssf.org](mailto:rreier@sssf.org)) or Associate Rosaura Solano (414-385-5253 or [rsolano@sssf.org](mailto:rsolano@sssf.org)).**



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# MAY YOUR PEACE BE WITH US

Jesus Christ,

May your peace *descend upon us,*

May your peace *fill us,*

May your peace *make us restless,*

May your peace *accompany us  
in dark times,*

May your peace *teach us to trust,*

May your peace *give us courage  
to be peacemakers.*



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From the sisters of the European Province

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