

Alive

WITH THE CALL OF THE GOSPEL

Caring for
Our Retired Sisters

Providing Girls with
New Opportunities

Compassionate Care
at the End of Life

This May, We're Movin' 4 Missions!

**CAN WE COUNT ON YOU TO COUNT
YOUR STEPS FROM MAY 1 TO 31?**

The School Sisters of St. Francis invite you to take part in our first-ever Movin' 4 Missions step challenge fundraiser!

Every step you take in the month of May is a step forward in our sisters' ministries of education, social justice, care of retired sisters, and other ministries. You can register as an individual, start a team or join one. Then encourage your family, friends, co-workers, and parishioners to sponsor you as you start movin' toward your step challenge goal in your official Movin' 4 Missions shirt!

Can't physically step with us in May? You can step up in spirit and support us as a sponsor or donor!

**OUR WEBSITE WILL HAVE ALL THE DETAILS STARTING MONDAY, APRIL 5.
SIGN UP, THEN STEP UP IN SUPPORT OF THE SISTERS!**

COMPLETE EVENT DETAILS AT WWW.SSSF.ORG



2021 BEER GARDENS

St. Joseph Center - 29th St. & Orchard St., Milwaukee

DRIVE-THRU BEER GARDENS

Saturday July 10 and August 14

10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

CRAFT BEER AND ROOT BEER TAKEOUT • LIVE MUSIC

Proceeds support sisters' ministries that care for the environment.

SAVE THE DATE:

IN-PERSON OKTOBERFEST CELEBRATION

Sunday September 12

11 a.m. - 3 p.m.

CRAFT BEER • WINE • FOOD • LIVE MUSIC • GAMES



OUR WEBSITE WILL BE UPDATED WITH THE LATEST DETAILS: WWW.SSSF.ORG

ALIVE | Spring 2021
VOLUME 11, ISSUE 2

ALIVE is published
by the School Sisters of St. Francis
an international congregation of
Franciscan women religious
headquartered in
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
Copyright reserved.

EDITORIAL BOARD
Sister Mary Diez
Sister Kathleen O'Brien
Pamela L. Mueller

Co-Editors
Sister Ruth Hoerig
Michael O'Loughlin
Design and Production
Betty Lewis

For address changes, reprint
permission or other questions
School Sisters of St. Francis
Office of Mission Advancement
1501 South Layton Boulevard
Milwaukee, WI 53215-1924
Telephone (414) 384-3334
Email: communications@sssf.org

FRONT COVER

Sister Martina Steinhart, age 91, recently
moved to her new home in an assisted living
facility in Erlendbad, Germany. While it was not
easy for her to leave the nearby motherhouse,
Sister Martina observed, "All of life means
saying goodbye. I cannot say I am missing
anything; a person can be really satisfied."
Your support for our retired sisters ensures
that wherever they live, they receive loving and
excellent care and can live out their religious
vocation in the company of their sisters.

PHOTO: SISTER MARGITA REUTHER

VISIT US AT OUR WEBSITE

www.sssf.org



www.facebook.com/schoolsistersofstfrancis



www.twitter.com/sssfcommunity

From Our Leadership

Staying connected to each other is important
during these challenging times. In this pandemic
year, our leadership team has remained close to
our sisters by holding all of our international
meetings through video conferencing.

One of our Zoom meetings was with
our Congregational Ongoing Formation
Committee, whose charge is to look at how we
support the growth of our sisters through all
the stages of life. This committee has been looking
at the important issue of how we nurture our charism,
that is, the spirit that continues to inspire our mission.



Since the time of our foundresses, that spirit has been brought
to life by the ways our sisters respond to the needs of the times.
Recently, our team asked four of our prior congregational
presidents to share their perspectives. Sister Joan Puls remarked,
"Mother Alexia had her feet firmly planted on Earth, but her
vision was on the horizon. She prompted us to ask: What is God
bringing to birth in our age and culture?"

Sister Fran Cunningham observed that the Spirit helps us keep
mission central to our community life, sharing a comment from
a friend: "You are not afraid to respond to a new challenge!"
Sister Kate Brenner, when considering such challenges, pointed
to our newest project, the Chapel Garden Apartments, which
will transform St. Joseph Center to provide affordable housing
for seniors. Sister Kathleen Kluthe also gave examples from our
worldwide missions, pointing to Asha Bhavan, a home for destitute
women, and Assisi Special School, which serves children with
cognitive disabilities.

In this issue of *Alive*, you will find more examples of our
congregation's response to changing needs, including a new hostel
for school-age girls and a new palliative care clinic serving people
with limited means. Even in the midst of a global health crisis, our
sisters are spreading the Gospel in new and creative ways.

The needs of the times continue to be met through your faithful
partnership in our mission. We are grateful to you and all our
donors who have, throughout our history, responded with our
sisters to the call to meet the needs of the times.

Sisters Mary, Tresa Abraham, Barbara, and Lucy

International Leadership Team
School Sisters of St. Francis

Honoring Lives of Fidelity

Retired sisters receive compassionate care after decades of faithful service

Our sisters' commitment to their vocation is for life, physically and spiritually. Sisters in the United States and Europe often stay employed or continue to volunteer well into their 80s, never waning in their dedication to ministry.

Understandably, when it is time to retire and say goodbye to those with whom they have actively ministered, sisters can experience a flood of varying emotions. Whether a sister is living in the United States or Europe, these feelings can be heightened when she leaves her current living group to join other sisters who have moved to a facility of care.

Adjustment to communal living and new acquaintances can be challenging for senior sisters. But the great compassion and expertise of nurses and other staff can make this transition

much easier. Sisters draw strength from prayer, their inner resources, personal creativity, and quality wellness plans to stay engaged and upbeat. Those who minister to the sisters feel blessed to anticipate and provide for their daily care.

Sister Rosemary Rombalski, life and ministry director for the U.S. Province, explained one aspect of the Philosophy of Care of Sisterhood.

"We believe in the goodness and potential of all sisters throughout their life course," Sister Rosemary said. "We invite sisters to develop a long-range retirement plan long before it needs to be put into action. This provides them time to consider options and ways to continue to use their talents.

"One sister recognized five possible options before moving to Sacred Heart, and the move was difficult," Sister Rosemary recalled. "But after a few weeks in her new home, she informed friends back home, 'I don't know why I didn't come here a long time ago. They take care of everything for me. Everyone is so good here.'"

Prayer, Art, and Service

Perhaps that buoyancy comes from being Franciscan, although it surprises even the sisters. "When I first retired, I thought, 'What will I do?' I have always been active. But I didn't have to worry," said Sister Nedine Ferris, a resident at Maria Linden Apartments in Milwaukee. Once a school principal and most recently the facility director at St. Joseph Center for 20 years, she was surprised at how much she welcomed a "freedom to choose." Without the busy-ness of managing the many activities at St. Joseph Center, she began to appreciate a slower pace.

Sister Betty Reinders receives the first dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine at Sacred Heart in February.

PHOTO: BETTY LEWIS



“Now I have more time for prayer, Mass, and rest,” Sister Nedine said. “I take daily walks and enjoy creation, time to reflect on God and my life. I like to read, take pictures of nature, and make cards of my photography to give to others.”

Arts and crafts are a source of great joy for many sisters. “I enjoy watercolor painting and card making,” said Sister Kathleen Kunze, a Maria Linden resident who served as teacher, principal, and in provincial leadership. Two years ago, she led card making workshops at Maria Linden for her neighbors. “Retirement brought me a great appreciation for the use of time and ways I want to use my energies.”

Sister Marjorie Ann Eisenmenger recalled the pre-pandemic years when workshops were offered on the contemplative benefits of basketry and watercolor painting. “I like to learn,” she said simply. She worked for 10 years in the library of a theological seminary, so it’s no wonder she enjoys writing and taking advantage of communications technology, as she stays connected through email and Zoom calls.

Those who know Sister Joan Brede as the affable personal services director at St. Joseph Center, a post she held after many years as a teacher and principal, might be surprised that she enjoys quiet knitting projects. However, she also loves playing cards, watching sports, walking in the convent garden and, of course, socializing.

Sister Gwen Floryance, a lifelong teacher, is being honored for 75 years of consecrated life this year. “Each day at Sacred Heart I can use my personal time to do oil painting,” Sister Gwen said. “Formerly, I did not have so much time. Now I do it often and it is so fulfilling to me. I constantly look for new ideas and techniques.”

Many sisters who live independently on campus have been involved in small and big ways with fundraising initiatives like the Pancake Breakfast and Fall Festival, Joseph Bowls Suppers, and the



New Beginnings in Germany

Our Mission Advancement Office raises funds to support retired sisters in each of our provinces and region around the world. In November, our European Province held a “topping out” ceremony, an important milestone in the construction of the sisters’ new convent in Erlenbad, Germany. As is customary in Germany, a small evergreen tree was placed on the roof of the new building for good luck.

The building will house the province offices and have 10 nursing beds for sisters. It will replace the sisters’ large, historic convent, which is no longer practical for the care of our sisters there.

“Our Rule of Life states, ‘Our focus is giving, healing and defending life,’ as a community and for the people who come to us with their needs,” Sister Rita Eble, provincial superior, said at the public ceremony. “We are happy that we have a new home for our future here in Erlenbad...to continue serving the people of this region as Franciscan sisters.”

recent beer gardens. These events have sustained U.S. and international ministries and brought volunteers and other friends of the sisters to the campus for fellowship.

Sisters also participate in volunteer opportunities that are less public, but just as important. Sisters drive other sisters to and from medical appointments, are present with each other during illness and dying, and write heartfelt messages to donors on behalf of the Mission Advancement Office.

For all these women of wisdom, prayer is the foundation of their day. "I focus on praising God. I embrace the gift of being back home here," Sister Marjorie Ann reflected. "St. Joseph Chapel, a veritable wellspring, refreshes my spirit."

"It is rewarding to be living with other sisters who have lived a life of service to others. That is fidelity," Sister Gwen said. "I am also grateful to our community leadership and our benefactors for their insight and caring in providing such a wonderful place of retirement here at Sacred Heart."

Sister Joan's prayer life follows a rhythm. "Much of my joy comes in the early morning," she said. "I spend much of this time praying the Franciscan Office, centering prayer, and praying for my family, friends, and the needs of our world."

More Than Financial Support

These extraordinary times have brought unprecedented challenges to the world, especially to senior living facilities. In the past year, our congregation gratefully received financial assistance from SOAR! (Support Our Aging Religious) for personal protective equipment in response to the pandemic. This gift to our community was in addition to a magnanimous donation for new kitchen countertops and sink repairs at Our Lady of the Angels.

"Keeping sisters like the School Sisters of St. Francis safe is at the core of the mission of SOAR!," said Sister Kathleen Lunsmann, IHM, the organization's president. "We pray for the sisters who have spent their lives in the service of others, and we are honored to assist in providing for their care."

The ministry to care for our senior sisters is bolstered by such major gifts, as well as donations and legacy memorials from generous friends and families. Associate Barbara Kluka, a retired judge, said because our sisters shaped her whole adult life, they mean the world to her.

"I met our sisters when I was a high school student and then again at Alverno College," Barbara recalls. "I received an excellent education. As mentors, they gave their lives for us. By offering financial support for the care of retired sisters, I intend to express my gratitude and commit to share a part of my life with them as they have with me."

"From my days as a teacher and throughout my legal career, I have been grounded in the Franciscan values they live by," she said. "They inspire me to seek a deeper understanding of the spiritual life and live it faithfully."

You can read more about how our facility directors at Sacred Heart, Maria Linden Apartments, and Our Lady of the Angels work to ensure the health, safety, and well being of every sister in their care. Visit our website Media Room to learn more from Jane Morgan and lay associates Cathleen Kelling and Tina Rawlins: <https://www.sssf.org/SSSF/Media-Room.htm>



Please prayerfully consider making a tax-deductible donation today in honor of our retired sisters around the world. Use the enclosed envelope or donate online at www.sssf.org.

Giving with an Open Heart

Donors are inspired by sisters' selfless ministry among the neediest

Like many of our supporters, veterinarian Maggie Regner first connected with our community in a grade school classroom decades ago. Sister Sylvia Leonardi was Maggie's third-grade teacher at St. Mark Elementary School in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

"She was the first sister I ever had in school, and she was so very supportive, loving, and kind," Maggie said. "I also remember Sister Virginia Handrup, who was an incredible example to us; Sister Madeleva Metten, who taught English; and Sister Mary Yanny, our awesome principal."

Maggie's husband, David Hodge, was introduced to Sister Sylvia a generation later, when Sister taught their daughter in third grade at St. Joseph Catholic Academy. As they've gotten to know our congregation better, both Maggie and David have been particularly impressed with our international ministries, especially in India.

"I am amazed at how the sisters bring the Word of God to the very poor, giving them hope, love, joy, and a sense of dignity," Maggie said. "The sisters seem perfectly content living their vow of poverty, and they do it with an open heart."

"We know that the money we give to the sisters will go where they say it will go," David observed. "It is like the parable of the talents [Matthew 25:14-30] where our talent is invested tenfold. It is good to be part of that good work."

Recently David took his investment to another level by joining the advisory committee for the

congregation's International Office of Mission Advancement. "I was looking for a way to give back to the sisters," he said. "I see this as a good way to support their work around the world."

"Our relationship with the sisters has strengthened our faith and hope in life," Maggie said. "David and I have been inspired to care for our family, just as the sisters take care of God's family. We learned from the sisters how to be focused and disciplined, which has helped us parent our four children: Michael, John, Benjamin, and Emelia. We can't forget that they helped us get there."

David concluded that the sisters' example has also helped their family to be intentional with their giving. "I am continually inspired by how the sisters work in the neediest places in the world, and continue to be vibrant, alive, and growing."



We invite you to make a gift of gratitude for our sisters' loving lives of ministry and service. You may use the enclosed envelope or make a donation on our website, www.sssf.org.

The Hodge family and friends pose for a pre-COVID holiday photo. Back row: sons Michael and Ben, Maggie and David, and son John. Front row: Michael's fiancé Emily, daughter Emelia, and John's girlfriend Joelle.



Bridging the Education Gap in India

St. Francis Hostel supports girls' learning and prayer

In India's North Garo Hills, the natural beauty of tropical rainforests, limestone caves, and wildlife sanctuaries belies the struggles of tribal residents.

Farmers in this region in the state of Meghalaya—one of the wettest places inhabited by humans—are invited to workshops that teach them how to optimize profits and crop yields. Despite these development programs, economic challenges remain for most of the historically disadvantaged Garo tribe.

In the Kharkutta district, the Garo people live in remote farm villages with limited transportation and communication networks. Schools are few and far between, making travel to such institutions inconvenient any time, especially during the monsoon season. Only 36 percent of the Garo Hills students graduate from high school, and tribal girls are at highest risk of illiteracy and exclusion from professional development.

To give these girls a chance at an education and inspire them along a career path, four of our sisters are welcoming girls from pre-kindergarten through high school to their St. Francis Convent Hostel. Twenty-five girls ages five to fifteen from 18 villages currently reside there, avoiding arduous and hazardous daily travel along hills and rivers to get to their parish school.

"We foster a community spirit," said Sister Marina Pulikkottil. "The girls like being together, so dormitory living presents no difficulties for them. They sleep in bunkbeds and enjoy their ethnic foods of rice, vegetables, meats, and fish."

The girls' tribal language is also represented in the classroom. At Christ the King School, they are taught Garo, English, and Hindi, in addition to math, science, social studies, health, computer science, and religion. These students come from struggling families, and this educational opportunity would be out of reach, were it not for the generosity of donors who pay the

Girls living at the hostel receive the sisters' care and guidance.



students' full tuition. Families trust our sisters to nurture the spiritual life of their girls, promote a moral upbringing, and serve as role models for living out their caring ministry.

A study room in the hostel helps the girls focus on schoolwork. The sisters offer academic coaching and plan extra-curricular activities that include art, games, snack time, and socializing. Instilling the importance of housework, gardening, and hygiene is also part of the daily regimen. Mass is celebrated each morning, and the girls pray the Rosary and participate in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the evening. Reconciliation and time for reflection are offered each month. From this schedule, it is clear that the girls live full, productive days from morning prayer at 6:15 a.m. until lights out at 9:00 p.m.

Sister Tresa Abraham Kizhakeparambil, vice president of the School Sisters' International Leadership Team, commended the work of the sisters.

"Our sisters went out of their comfort zone to serve the Garo villagers in Kharkutta and are agents of change there," she said. "To borrow from Mahatma Gandhi's wise words, 'The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.' Our sisters are doing that. They are offering a hostel that provides holistic education to young girls, and also assist the pastor by visiting families unable to travel the far distance to church."

We invite you to prayerfully consider making a tax-deductible donation to help our sisters empower young women living on the margins around the world. Please use the enclosed envelope or donate online at www.sssf.org.



Sister Marina with Sengrimchi Sangma and her father.

Sister Marina described the plight of one 10-year-old student, **Sengrimchi Sangma**, who comes from the village of Tegabari, about 20 miles away. "Sengrimchi has four brothers and one sister. Her mother died after giving birth to her, and her father is blind and unable to earn a living wage.

"Sengrimchi does well at her studies and enjoys singing and dancing," Sister Marina said. "Her favorite subjects are science and English, and she shows talent in art as well. She already has plans to become a teacher so she can provide for her family."

St. Francis Convent Hostel is offering girls like Sengrimchi vital access to education that improves their future while sparking interest in a life of service. The life-changing difference our sisters are making in Meghalaya is possible because of the generosity of our donors.

"Our donors are helping us provide the best atmosphere that ensures the girls thrive in their studies and grow into responsible citizens," Sister Marina said. "As we all know, education is critical to the success of any community."

"Our sisters, the students, and their guardians are thankful for the love, prayers, and support they receive from our congregation's global family," Sister Tresa Abraham said. "The time, energy, and resources our sisters share ensure a brighter future for struggling families like the Sangmas. May God be glorified through this work, and may it continue through God's blessings and the generosity of each donor."



Sister Enelly assisting a breast cancer patient at the pharmacy.

Franciscan Spirit Burns Bright in Chicagoland Parish

20 Years of Sharing Love with a Honduran Mission

During her nearly 20 years as spiritual director and associate pastor of St. Luke Parish in Carol Stream, Illinois, Sister Barbara Rowan started the Council of Catholic Women (CCW), and later served as its moderator and link to a beloved mission. That group's decades-long response to a call for assistance in Honduras has continued, grown, and today provides a safe haven for people of all ages.

Santa Ana Mission and Clinic in the town of La Libertad has been the grateful recipient of generous gifts from St. Luke's parishioners, with the untiring leadership of the CCW International Committee. This "twinning parish" relationship has engendered mutual affection and deeper intercultural understanding.

"It truly is a personal connection," said Barbara Tabor, a past president of the CCW. "Our entire parish looks forward to annual letters from La Libertad, with an update on all the events of the year."

The CCW helps parishioners picture life in La Libertad, a community of about 25,000 people. Families get by on \$2.50 or less per day, and children must often choose between attending school or working to support the family. The sick and the elderly also need looking after. Thanks to our sisters' Santa Ana Mission and Clinic, begun in 1962, residents have a place close by to turn to for medical care. And the mission answers prayers that go well beyond its original scope.

"The needs of Santa Ana change and evolve," Barbara said. "We have watched it grow from a small clinic with the help of the entire community, and with funds from St. Luke Parish and the sisters. The clinic has become more self sufficient, with a focus on the care and education of special needs groups. It is our hope to grow and change along with the community."

St. Luke Parish has funded many immediate needs of La Libertad, including a birthing table, medical supplies, health educator training, a

computer, access to clean water, plumbing repairs for the Santa Ana Convent, scholarships for children and university students, and services for special needs children.

“We request a ‘needs list’ each year from the mission,” she said. “We have sent a portion of funds earmarked for clinical supplies, and have sent dozens of boxes filled with medical supplies on military transport, thanks to the coordination of a parishioner in the Illinois Army National Guard.”

Parish youth also get involved, taking home small boxes to fill with coins. “We were so delighted that their collection of change contributed an additional \$5,500 during our 20th anniversary serving La Libertad,” said Carole Ellermeier, the group’s current president.

Parishioners have been particularly interested in providing scholarships. “We have followed the progress of some of the students, especially that of a young seminarian, Angel Noe,” Carole said. “We have received letters from the students, as

well as their biographies and photos. These help lead to a very real connection.”

In a letter of thanks, Angel wrote, “You have sustained my vocation with your prayers. When I see your efforts to serve the Church with love, it gives me motivation to give myself with generosity to the call that God has made to me.”

This shared faith is what draws St. Luke’s and La Libertad together, Carole said. “We are a small parish with dedicated members who have generous hearts. We can relate to the struggles of others.”

“We express our deep appreciation for the support we have received during these years,” said Sister Enelly Ortiz, who ministers at Santa Ana Mission. “With the parish’s efforts, we have been able to respond to the needs presented to us in our mission, providing care at our clinic and medicines to people with limited resources.”

Sister Kathy Chuston, Special Appeals Administrator, noted that when the pandemic struck last year, the CCW went above and beyond, sending extra money in case the mission had unexpected expenses. “We are most grateful to St. Luke’s for their many years of dedication to the people of La Libertad,” she said.

Sister Barbara, the one who started it all, is delighted that the light of Franciscan charity has blazed brightly across 2,000 miles for over 20 years, and said, “I was simply the match that lit the fire for the CCW of St. Luke Parish and invited the Spirit in.”

Seminarian Angel Noe receives twinning parish support.



To learn more about twinning parish opportunities with our missions, please contact Sister Kathy Chuston at 414-385-5343 or kchuston@sssf.org.

Compassionate Care for Those on Life's Final Journey

Sisters provide comfort and peace

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, has said that “the level of civilization of an era is measured by the way we treat those who are weaker and more fragile.” That spirit inspires the sisters serving at Assisi Clinic in Kanjikode, India, where they minister to “the weaker and more fragile” who suffer from serious health problems and have no one to care for them.

When our sisters arrived in 1977 to this very poor region of the Palakkad diocese, “there were no hospitals, no schools, or transportation facilities around,” said Sister Mercy Mathew Macheril, the clinic’s ministry coordinator. In response, the sisters started two ministries: a kindergarten, which rapidly grew into a higher secondary school; and Assisi Clinic, a small dispensary that grew into a large-scale, 100-bed hospital.

The people served by this healthcare facility are desperately poor, without the ability to pay for services. In recent years, the rising cost of technology and medical staff salaries made operating a full-service hospital financially unsustainable, so the sisters pivoted to reimagine the facility as a regional clinic. Here, doctors are able to provide primary care to meet the basic medical needs of the local people.

“When our operation as a hospital was discontinued, our province decided on a plan for using the hospital building,” Sister Mercy Mathew explained. “One part of the building provides for the needs of the school and a women’s college. Another part of the building is used for the clinic, and we decided the remaining



“WE BELIEVE THAT THE PEOPLE WHO RECEIVE THIS CARE WILL BE BLESSED WITH THE COMFORT THEY DESERVE AND EXPERIENCE A GREATER SENSE OF HOPE AND PEACE.”

SISTER MERCY MATHEW MACHERIL

part of the building would be renovated and used for a palliative care unit.”

Palliative care provides comfort and compassion for patients during their last days. There is a critical need for this type of care in Kanjikode because there are many elderly people who are critically ill and struggling to survive.

“Palliative care is a way to respect life in a situation where nothing else can help,” Sister Mercy Mathew explained. “The patients’ children are not able to look after them because they need to earn their own livelihood. Consequently, as the elderly approach the end of their lives, they

experience extreme loneliness, isolation, fear, and helplessness.”

The sisters are now undertaking renovations of patient rooms and bathrooms, as well as other infrastructure updates, to equip the new unit to meet the needs of up to 20 patients. “We will serve cancer patients and those with other chronic diseases who are not able to be taken care of at home,” Sister Mercy Mathew said.

“We are very fortunate that one of our own sisters, Sister Jeas Maria Mavungal, is a doctor,” Sister said. “She is currently working among the people of Assam for one year. When she returns to her ministry at Paalana Hospital in Palakkad, she will also be able to care for the patients who will be admitted to the palliative care unit in Kanjikode.”

Sister Mercy Mathew said another benefit of starting the palliative care unit is that the sisters will be able to offer hands-on training in Auxiliary Nursing Midwifery (ANM). The ANM program enables students to provide basic medical care and treatment to individuals and families from conception to death. It requires a two-year diploma in medical nursing.

“An ANM is a village-level health worker who is the first contact person between the community and health care services,” Sister Mercy Mathew explained. “ANM students will be able to gain the experience they need through our palliative care unit and help us care for our patients.”

While the facility is undergoing the needed renovations, sisters are engaging in compassionate outreach. “We no longer admit patients; instead, we go to patients’ homes to care for them, providing them with necessary

medication and treatment,” Sister Mercy Mathew said. “Because of their condition, we prepare these patients for a peaceful death, offering them spiritual nourishment and our prayerful support.”

One of the nursing staff, Mr. John, gratefully recalled the wonderful service his mother received when she had cancer. “The sisters came to our house once a week to care for her,” he said. “This kind of personal care gave her the will to prolong her life.”

“Our palliative care relieves the suffering of our people by identifying, assessing, and treating physical, psychosocial, and spiritual problems,” Sister Mercy Mathew said. “We believe that the people who receive this care will be blessed with the comfort they deserve and experience a greater sense of hope and peace.”

Your financial support enables our sisters to care for and comfort those who have nowhere else to turn. We invite you to make a gift today using the enclosed envelope, or make a secure donation online at www.sssf.org.



Sister Tresa Jose Thressokaran comforts a patient at Assisi Clinic.

Partnership in Mission, Rooted in Spirituality

Lay associates find connection to our community

Belonging to something greater than ourselves is recommended by medical professionals, spiritual directors, and life coaches as a way to feel less isolated and more spiritually fulfilled. During this pandemic, many people are searching for a way to connect with a community that accepts and welcomes their gifts, ministries, and the ways they express their faith.

Associate Relationship is an opportunity and invitation that our sisters extend to lay men and women to join in “a partnership in mission rooted in spirituality.” Among the more than 160 lay associates in the United States, Latin America, and Europe are women and men who have decades-long histories with our congregation. Other associates have only recently connected with our sisters.

How and why did they decide that the time was right to enter into this relationship? Three of them—Terri Johnson, Bridget McCullough, and Stephani Richards-Wilson—kindly shared reflections on their own journeys.

Terri, a coronavirus survivor, has deepened her commitment to serving God’s people to an extraordinary degree. “In March 2020, when I was working part time for a non-profit organization in the Chicago area, I contracted COVID-19,” she said. “I was critically ill and remained hospitalized for nearly a month. During my hospital recovery, God allowed me to clearly see my path of ministry.

“Associate Relationship constantly reminds me how vitally important it is to continue in selfless



Terri Johnson volunteering at a Chicago food program.



Stephani Richards-Wilson presenting in St. Joseph Hall.

service to God's people," Terri continued. "God is depending on me, and so are God's people. I will not disappoint either of them." She now devotes herself to full-time ministry, including distributing food for a hunger program.

For Bridget, a former sister from the class of 1963, "Christ is our center, and everything flows from him." She said Associate Relationship makes a daily difference in her caring profession as a nurse. "It has made me consciously aware of bringing Christ's love and compassion to the patients I treat, and to all my interpersonal contacts."

Stephani, a faculty member and MBA Program Director at Alverno College in Milwaukee, said she was "so impressed with how kind, compassionate, and generous the sisters and associates were. I was also humbled to see how hard working and genuine everyone is in their interactions with others. I am inspired by their ongoing activism and ministries."

The proximity of the college to the motherhouse has made it possible for Stephani to see her contact, Sister Barbaralie Stieffermann, and be present at many events and meetings. She has assigned her graduate students to write strategic plans for Associate Relationship as part of their course work, and was a guest speaker for the U.S. Province sisters' outreach efforts.

Bridget also has an Alverno connection. She said her chemistry instructor there gave her encouragement to persevere when passing chemistry felt insurmountable. That mentor was Sister Marilyn Brodd, who is now her contact sister.

"I knew Associate Relationship was an affiliation I wanted

and needed, but it took about two years for me to complete the process because I thought I wasn't worthy enough," she recalled.

Fifty years since her first encounter with our sisters, Bridget felt at home when she returned to Milwaukee from the East Coast to participate in the sisters' Spirituality Conference in 2019. "Even though I was not officially an associate, I was welcomed with warmth. The joy and peace I experienced was immediate and has continued. Although I cannot physically be present for volunteer activities in Milwaukee, I know I'm connected through prayer and offerings."

Terri, too, is grateful for the support she receives from her relationship, particularly from her contact, Sister Maureen McCarthy. "We see each other via Facetime," Terri said. "I'm thankful to God for placing her in my life."

Terri also participates in her area community meetings via Zoom video conferencing. "I love seeing everyone's beautiful faces," she said. "I have been troubled by multiple post-COVID occurrences, so my heart is made glad each time I receive a phone call or a card. It's a great feeling to have people to whom I am connected show such acts of kindness."

Stephani also feels the sister and associate community's investment in people every day. "Associate Relationship has deepened my commitment to my ministries and teaching," she said. "I have been motivated and educated by what I've witnessed and learned, and for that, I am eternally grateful."

Since 1972, nearly 500 men and women have enjoyed Associate Relationship with our community. To learn more, email associates@sssf.org.



Bridget McCullough lives out her vocation in health care.



(PHOTO: SISTER BETH SCHMITZ)

Nurturing A Love Of Reading

Since the 1980s, Albert Whitman & Company has supported our community by providing funds to purchase books for children and young adults. The latest recipients were these second graders in Sister Beth Schmitz's class at Christ King School in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, who were excited to receive their new books in March.

The School Sisters of St. Francis are so grateful to the Albert Whitman Trust, whose generosity has touched the lives of generations of young readers in our sisters' classrooms, libraries, and after-school programs.