



School Sisters of St. Francis



# Alive

WITH THE CALL OF THE GOSPEL



# FAX: to JOSEPH

by Sister Kevin Robertson



*Statue from the original chapel of the  
Provincial House in Erlenbad, Germany*



Dear silent one  
through whom God  
filtered David's line;

O gentle Jewish  
spouse whose hesitance  
to hurt unlatched  
an angel's tongue;

decisive foster-parent,  
gather to your  
harboring all lost  
longing children of  
our crippled world.



*150 years*

*1874 - 2024*

## From Our Leadership

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EDITORIAL BOARD  
Sister Deborah Fumagalli  
Sister Kathleen O'Brien  
Amanda Ferguson  
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](mailto:communications@sssf.org)

FRONT COVER  
As our congregation observes the  
150th anniversary of our founding in  
April 1874, we share a small sampling of  
the faces and places that capture moments  
of our ministries and missions across the  
United States and around the world.  
You'll find the stories behind these images  
throughout this issue, with many more  
available on our website: [www.sssf.org](http://www.sssf.org).

PHOTOS: SSSF MINISTRIES

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From the earliest days of our congregation 150 years ago, the School Sisters of St. Francis have had a special devotion to St. Joseph, as is evidenced by the naming of our convents, and our landmark chapel in Milwaukee. He appeared at unexpected moments and provided our foundresses with what was needed to further the cause of missions and projects for the congregation. Joseph, our spiritual patron, exemplifies generosity beyond measure.



In her book *Yearning for God*, Sister Rosalie King wrote, "Neither hardship nor lack of funds deterred Mother Alexia from understanding works to relieve human need. When obstacles seemed insurmountable or when the last penny had been spent, she turned to her favorite saint, St. Joseph. Her confidence in St. Joseph, the holy foster father of Jesus, was unshakable."

St. Joseph took on the role of nurturing, protecting, and caring for Jesus. Being a just and holy man, he was obedient to God's will, regardless of the hardships involved. In every situation, Joseph declared his own *fiat*, much like Mary at the Annunciation. His unconditional acceptance of Mary and his decision to safeguard her good name, dignity, and very life serve as ideals for us today.

Following St. Joseph's example, our foundresses served those who were in need, and cared for and protected the orphans and the migrant populations of their time. Today, many of our sisters are confronted by psychological, verbal, and physical violence in their villages, towns, and cities. In each of the countries where we serve, people risk their lives to escape religious fundamentalism, poverty, misfortune, and hunger.

How can we respond to these situations? Let us turn to St. Joseph for guidance, support, and protection. St. Joseph, patron of the universal Church, continue to intercede for us!

*Sister Deborah Fumagalli*  
President, International Leadership Team  
School Sisters of St. Francis

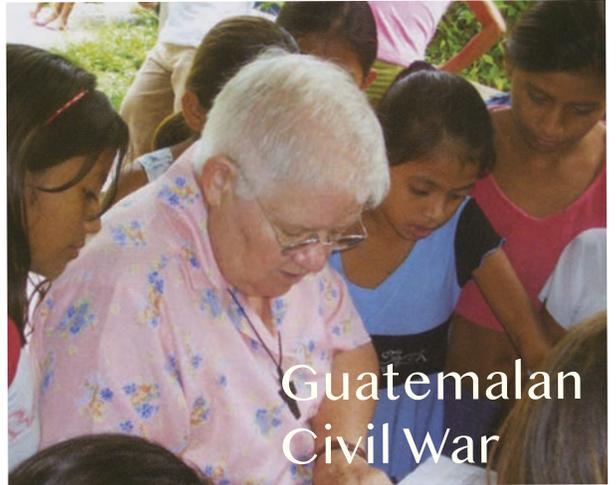
# Striving for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity

## Our sisters respond to God's call to enlarge mercy within our world

"How do we get to the roots of injustice?" Sister Patricia Pechauer asked nearly a half century ago in an essay for *New Dimensions* magazine. "Through prayer, reflection, and assessment – institutional and personal – we sisters are addressing this question. We are engaged in a determined struggle to make a difference in society on questions of justice. Each one of us – whether she be in India or Germany, Honduras or Chicago, Appalachia or Whitefish Bay – is committed to be present to society in a way that promotes justice."

Our sisters' struggle has continued and expanded. Responding to the needs of our time, sisters in each of our provinces and regions are on the front lines confronting violence, inequality, religious persecution, political extremism, and the devastating effects of climate change. In doing so, they follow in the footsteps of our foundresses and the thousands of women of faith who came after them.

These snapshots are just a few of the countless ways our sisters have been – and continue to be – present to society as promoters of justice, freedom, and peace.



*Sisters Joannes Klas, Ana Maria Noth, and Mary Garcia are among the sisters who spent many years living and ministering in refugee camps with survivors fleeing the brutality of the decades-long civil war in Guatemala. Sister Ana Marie went on to initiate the Oasis Rieti Spirituality and Healing Center which, for more than a quarter century, has offered holistic and integrated therapies to heal the wounds of war and trauma.*



*Asha Bhavan, "the abode of hope," was founded by our sisters in 1997 to provide refuge to a growing number of impoverished, elderly, and disabled women in Bangalore, India, who have been abandoned and mistreated by their families. Our sisters continue to provide daily love, food, shelter, nursing care, and spiritual support to 26 women.*



*When the closest school is 20 miles away, most tribal girls in rural India find that education is simply out of reach. That's why our sisters opened Maria Sadan hostel in Bichhiya in 2003. Our sisters provide a home away from home for nearly 100 girls each year, offering food, shelter, companionship, tutoring, and counseling so they can attend school and prepare for a brighter future.*

# y of Creation



Casa Alexia

Forty years ago, our sisters undertook many ministries on the El Paso–Juarez border, including a residence for homeless women, clinics, and pastoral care for isolated families and children. In time, the U.S. Province and Latin American Region established Casa Alexia as a joint mission on the border. For more than a decade, they provided essential groceries each month to 100 Juarez families challenged by poverty and violence.



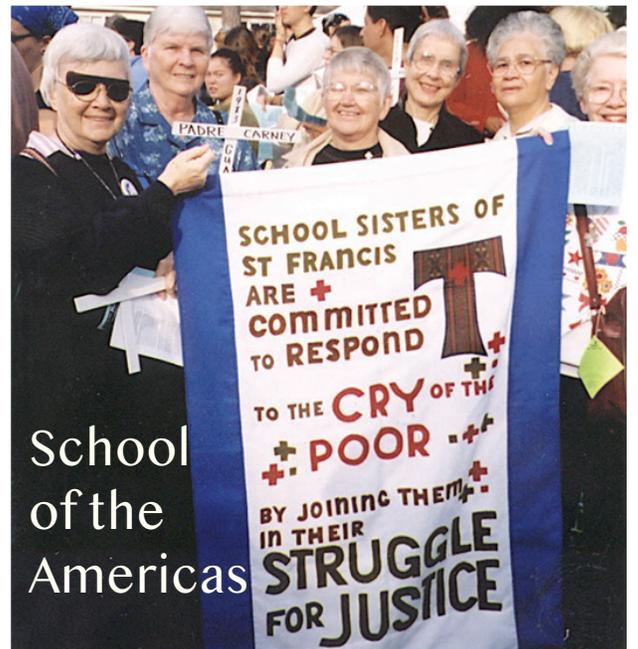
Sister Maria Rosa

Sister Maria Rosa Leggol dreamed of being able to provide a mother's love to the many orphaned and abandoned children in her native Honduras. She established her first children's home in Tegucigalpa and tirelessly partnered with others to expand the scope of her services to youngsters in need. In her half-century of ministry, more than 50,000 children were rescued from poverty by "the Mother Teresa of Central America."



Mariahof

Six sisters of our European Province arrived in Hufingen, Germany, in 1920 to administer the Mariahof campus for boys needing special education assistance. They completely transformed the institution into a loving home with family-style education groups. More than 1,600 boys ages 6–15 benefited from our sisters care and mentoring, transitioning more easily into adulthood with knowledge, skills, and a strong faith.



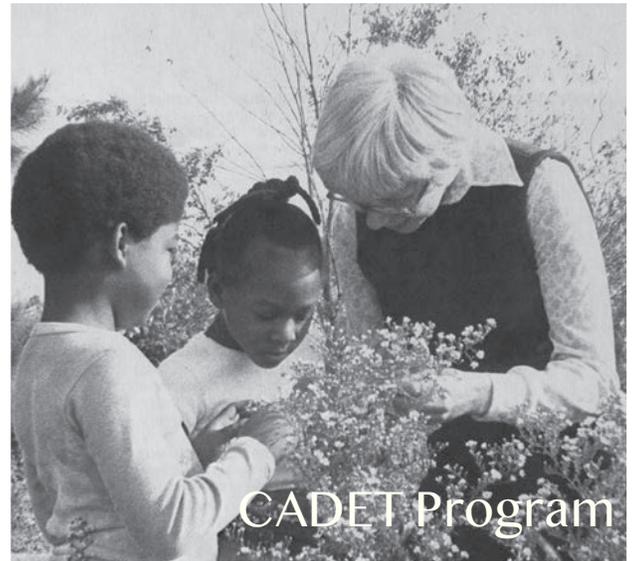
School of the Americas

For decades, our sisters participated in an annual protest at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (the School of the Americas) in Fort Benning, Georgia. Their witness raised awareness and scrutiny about the violent techniques taught to young soldiers from Latin American countries, which played a role in several countries withdrawing their military personnel from the training program.



## Civil Rights Movement

*Throughout the 1960s and '70s, many of our sisters participated on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement, including service at Mississippi missions that offered educational opportunities to Black children for the first time. Sisters ministering in the north also were active in promoting racial equality, both as educators and as activists. Our sisters' work and reflection to become an anti-racist congregation continues today.*

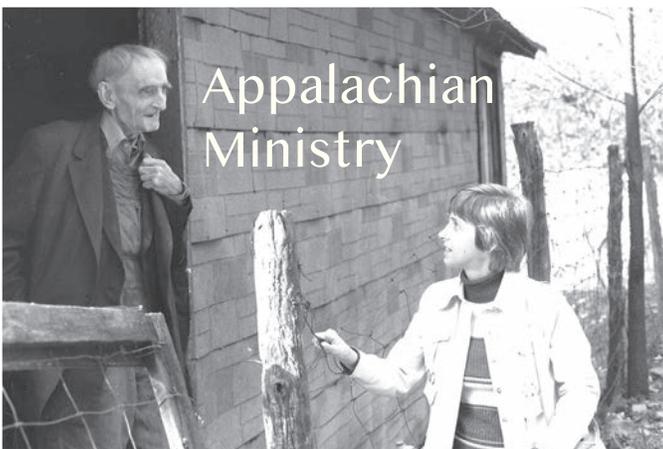


## CADET Program

*Our sisters partnered with the Sacred Heart Southern Missions to open the comprehensive and ecumenical CADET (Christian-Aided Development through Extraordinary Training) program for underserved people in Holly Springs, Mississippi, in 1969. Gifts to the community included a childcare center, school, health center, and thrift store.*

*"Today, God calls people to serve justice and to enlarge mercy within our world. It is not an easy call. The Gospel, our Response in Faith: Rule of Life, our tradition, and our common beliefs open us to hear the hard questions, to say what must be said, to do what must be done."*

—Sister Patricia Pechauer



## Appalachian Ministry

*Our sisters' presence in Appalachia began as summers of faith-sharing and friendship in the late 1960s and expanded quickly to offer year-round ministry. Our sisters earned the trust of the local people — many of them isolated and impoverished — by offering healthcare, education, spiritual accompaniment, services for new mothers, and an array of social services.*



## Santa Apolonia

*For more than three decades, our sisters ministering in Santa Apolonia, Guatemala provided loving care for orphans at Guadalupe Homes. When government policy changes in recent years dramatically reduced residential services for children, our sisters pivoted to offer much-needed nutrition education, vocational training, and scholarships for vulnerable young women.*

# How Can I Keep From Singing?

Music ministry is an inestimable part of our congregation's story

When the St. Joseph Convent Conservatory of Music opened in 1924 under the direction of Sister Cherubim Schaefer (later to become the Alverno College of Music), music had already been a significant part of our congregation's identity and focus for its first half century.

Music and the arts were forms of prayer for Mother Alfons Schmid, and she cultivated them from the time she, Mother Alexia, and Sister Clara founded the community. It was her passion for music and beauty that led her to build St. Joseph Chapel with a particular focus on constructing a worship space with outstanding acoustics. It also inspired her to place a sister musician at every School Sister mission.

She wanted those musicians who went out to minister in schools and parishes to have

every advantage, so within a few years of the community's founding, she hired John Singenberger, a well-known composer, music teacher, editor, and publisher, to teach the sisters music.

One of his students was Sister Cherubim, who became a prolific composer and arranger. In addition to directing the conservatory, she helped form the Sisters' Orchestra at a time when it was unusual for women to play in orchestras.

Sisters Xaveria Friedrich and Clarissima Neumann followed her as directors of the music department and continued its reputation for excellence. Sister Xaveria is remembered as an exceptional administrator who became the first vice president of the National Catholic Music Educators Association. In 1949, she began Alverno's music therapy program, placing the college in the vanguard of a movement which was to grow over succeeding decades.

Daily choir rehearsal was a part of the formation program when Sister Clarissima led the program, and she was both a fine organist and an exacting director. She taught a refined singing of Gregorian Chant because the sisters sang the Mass propers in Chapel every day.

Sister Agnes Meysenberg told *New Dimensions* magazine, "Those of us who entered the community in the late 1920s and '30s became students in a well-established department that was beginning to be felt as a major influence in the national field of church music and music education."



*Sister Eugenio Dalbec's classroom experience was instrumental in her development of a music readiness program for younger children.*

## Serving the Church Across America

Sister Marion Verhaalen, a renowned music teacher and composer who also wrote extensively about the community's history, noted that even in those early years, well-trained liturgical musicians were ministering in rural and city parishes all over the country. "They were providing wonderful liturgical experiences, really serving the Church," Sister Marion wrote.

Sister Xaveria was directing music education for the community when Sister Claire Pink entered the convent in 1944 at age 15. After Sister Claire's violin performance exam at the end of one semester, Sister Xaveria told her that she would not be continuing in music education. Sister Theophane Hytrek intervened, asking her to give Sister Claire a chance.

Sister Xaveria relented, and it proved to be a wise choice. Sister Claire went on to minister as a music teacher and liturgical musician in schools and parishes in the Archdiocese of Chicago for more than half a century, including nearly four decades serving St. Matthias Parish and School.

Sister Jeannine Weidner, who ministered for many years as a music teacher, pastoral musician, and liturgist, was influenced by the sisters' musical tradition well before she entered the community.

"The School Sisters of St. Francis provided an important path to a music career for me from the time I began piano and voice lessons with them in third grade," Sister Jeannine said. The sisters' modeling and mentoring were the examples that I passed on to my own students as a teacher and liturgy coordinator."

Sister Jeannine still sees the impact of those gifts that she shared. "In my later years, I am frequently astonished when I am contacted by former students who have made music their career, or passed on their love of music to



*In addition to conducting vocal ensembles like the Fine Arts Society Singers (above), Sister Laura Lampe established the critically acclaimed "Alverno Presents" fine arts series.*

their students and children, and thank me for mentoring them," she said. "In my second career as pastoral care and liturgy director in our retirement home at Maria Linden in Rockford and at St. Anne's Center, music was an important part of my journey with the older sisters and residents. I used music to pray, as well as entertain and bring joy to others."

Dr. Sheri Masiakowski, the community's Music Archivist, remembers the prodigious parish music ministry workload of Sister Bernadelle Mehmert as being typical of what many sister musicians were required to do.

"At St. Matthias Parish in Milwaukee, Sister prepared music for six weekend Masses, funerals, weddings and various devotions; taught all the school music; and practiced with choral groups during the noon hour recess," Sheri said. "Outside of school hours, she gave private music lessons after school, led adult choir practice on a weekday evening, and taught music in CCD classes.

"Sister Bernadelle was a dynamo as a music teacher, church musician and woman of God," Sheri said. "I remember her saying, 'Because I've always been rather energetic by nature, I apologize to those of you whom I simply made tired when observing me.'"

## Changing Lives Through Music

After Vatican II, many sisters continued to make a national – and even global – impact on music ministry, music education, and music therapy.

Sister Josepha Schorsch, a graduate of Alvernia High School in Chicago, continued her childhood music studies at DePaul University in Chicago. While undertaking her graduate studies, she joined the faculty of Alverno College. Drawing on her experience using music to help children with disabilities, she followed in Sister Xaveria's footsteps and joined the National Association for Music Therapy, eventually becoming the association's president. She collaborated in writing *Music Therapy: Diverse Approaches*, a seminal work on the subject, and was often honored for her pioneering work in the field.

A voice teacher to hundreds of students, Sister Laura Lampe founded and conducted the Alverno College Chorus, Fine Arts Society Singers, and the Madrigal Singers, leading the ensembles on tours across the United States and Europe. In 1960, before Milwaukee had its own symphony orchestra or ballet company, she founded the Society of Fine Arts, which went on to become Milwaukee's longest-running performing arts series. Later renamed Alverno Presents, Sister Laura remained the driving force behind the series for decades, introducing Milwaukee audiences to such shining stars as Joshua Bell, the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, and Mexican acoustic guitar superstars Rodrigo y Gabriela.

Sister Theophane, an internationally renowned composer and recitalist, taught at Alverno College and was among those who saw a need for Church music written in the vernacular. She

helped initiate a 1982 symposium for musicians and liturgists that allowed them to collaborate and exchange ideas about the impact of the liturgy on the spoken and sung prayer of the people. The symposium met five times over 10 years, making a significant contribution to the field.

In 2022, Sheri began preserving, preparing, and publishing musical works of our sisters through the newly established Heritage Music Collection, including several of Sister Theophane's organ works. "The preservation of these creative works, their publication, and bringing the music back to the mainstream are the focus for this collection,"

Sheri said. "The contributions of our sisters are not only historical, but also very useful."

Our congregation's sesquicentennial year is also the 50th anniversary year for both the Chapel Singers in Milwaukee and the Chicago Area Singers. These groups of liturgical musicians re-established the tradition of sisters gathering to lead the music of the Mass in their respective metropolitan areas.

These reflections are just a few of the names and stories of sisters who used their musical gifts to God's glory, from serving in schools and parishes in America's heartland to breaking new ground in education, therapy, and composition. The remarkable musical legacy of the School Sisters of St. Francis continues to enrich millions of lives around the world.

*Our thanks to Sister Mary Jane Wagner, Sheri Masiakowski, Sarah Stefanko, and Sister Jeannine Weidner for their significant contributions to this article.*



*Sister Josepha Schorsch instructs a student with disabilities as part of the nationally recognized Alverno College music therapy program.*



# Histories Intertwined, and Mutually Enriched

55 sisters have hailed from one Iowa town, pop. 129

BY SISTER IRENE ZIMMERMAN

In *First Century of Service: The School Sisters of St. Francis*, archivist and author Sister Joann Euper observed, “In 1872 and 1873, nearly 300,000 Germans migrated to the United States and many settled in farming areas of the Midwest.” A strong factor in their decision to uproot themselves and come to America was the *Kulturkampf*, a bitter conflict between the civil government and Catholic religious authorities.

Our congregation’s foundresses – Mother Alexia, and Mother Alfons, and Sister Clara – were among those immigrants who arrived in America in 1873 and searched for a welcoming place to renew their religious vows. After facing challenges that others might have found discouraging, if not impossible, to overcome, the sisters arrived in the small town of New Cassel where, in the glaciated hills of southeastern Wisconsin, they founded the School Sisters of St. Francis congregation.

Also among that influx of immigrants in the 1870s were Catholics from the Westphalen province

of Germany. In spring of 1873, my paternal grandfather, Emil Zimmerman, Sr., arrived on the treeless prairie of southwest Iowa and began construction of a tiny, one-room dwelling. It was only the third such house in the township. This was the beginning of my tiny hometown of Westphalia, the first of five historic German Catholic colonies to spring up in that area.

Within months, more immigrants from Westphalen arrived, including Grandpa Emil’s parents and siblings. Settlers bought land from the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad Company, paying about \$5 dollars an acre, 50 cents of which was set aside for the construction of a Catholic church. A small, temporary wooden church was built almost immediately and just eight years later, St. Boniface parishioners raised an imposing, 126-foot tower over the Iowa grassland and rang its bell to summon the faithful to Mass.

Our foundresses, believing that “the needs of the time are the will of God,” determined that the

*Dozens of women religious and priests from Westphalia gathered for the town's centennial reunion in 1972. Many School Sisters of St. Francis were in attendance.*

PHOTO: SSSF ARCHIVES

crying need in America was to educate children. They immediately set out to do so. By the end of the first decade of the congregation's existence, Mother Alexia's sisters were serving in 29 missions, many of them located in rural areas. Westphalia was one of them.

In fall of 1884, three sisters arrived in Westphalia to begin a parochial school at the request of the pastor, Father Weber. Two were teachers and one did the housework. Father Weber had helped to construct the small, two-room schoolhouse and a convent for the sisters, using lumber salvaged from the original church building.

That first year, a gentleman still taught the older boys in the public school building. But in 1885, Sister Laurentia came to replace him and also to take charge of the church music. The public school soon disappeared from Westphalia. Now that the sisters had arrived, there was no need for a public school in this rural, all-Catholic community.

The work of the sisters who served in Westphalia rapidly increased. Children of large rural families

crowded into the two-room schoolhouse of 1884, to which a third room was added in 1890. Among the children taught by the sisters at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century were my father and his ten siblings, as well as my mother's two younger siblings. Six young women from those two families – my aunts – followed their teachers to become School Sisters of St. Francis.

In 1927, an imposing brick school building was erected. Two students comprised the first high school graduation class of 1929. By December 1931, the school received accreditation from the Iowa Board of Education. My nine siblings and I all received 12 years of top-quality Catholic education there, taught by the School Sisters of St. Francis.

By the 1940s, the number of sisters in Westphalia had increased to nine, with seven full-time teachers, one full-time musician, and a homemaker. The names of the sisters were familiar not only to their students, who respected and admired them, but to the students' younger siblings, who listened to stories about them.

The "cook sister" was a favorite of children who received a cookie in return for delivering a message from their teacher. Music teachers were appreciated by both children and adults. In addition to teaching singing and some music theory in the grade and high school classrooms, the music teacher spent dinner and after-school hours giving private lessons to aspiring students of piano, voice, and band instruments. In Westphalia, their training of the four-part adult choir brought remarkable results, and the small town became known for its choir.

Throughout their histories, the School Sisters of St. Francis and the Westphalia parish mutually enriched each other. From 1884, when the first three sisters arrived in Westphalia, to 1996, when St. Boniface School closed its doors, 55 young women from Westphalia heard the call to become School Sisters of St. Francis. I am happy to be one of them.

*St. Boniface's spire rises 126 feet above the Iowa prairie.*



PHOTO: DAVID GAUL



## Welcome In!

Our sisters' fairs and festivals have delighted thousands of guests

*Sister Kate Brenner models one of the hats for sale at the sisters' fall festival; Associates Mary Foscett (left) and Mary Ellen Meyer flank Sister Jeanette Wodzinski as they decorate in preparation for "The Sale."*

For the past five years, our sisters' Mission Advancement Office garnered headlines and large audiences for hosting the Sister Water Beer Gardens in the St. Joseph Center garden. The novelty of Catholic sisters serving craft beers with names like "Ale Mary" and "Our Lager" sparked interest in what has grown to be a popular summertime attraction, introducing our community to a new generation of friends and supporters.

Many beer garden revelers were also long-time attendees at the sisters' Pancake Breakfast and Fall Festival. For decades, hundreds of sisters, associates, friends of the community, and neighborhood guests attended the sisters' biggest fundraiser, held each October. They filled St. Joseph Chapel for Mass, filled up on a pancakes-and-sausage breakfast (those who arrived at lunchtime enjoyed Irene Tretow's famous Sloppy Joe

sandwiches), then filled bags with homemade bakery, crafts, imports, and silent auction baskets.

The success of this daylong event took months of organizing and planning by the entire Mission Advancement staff, the involvement of dozens of sisters, and a small army of volunteers including associates, family members, and students from local high schools. Some dedicated helpers, like Darleen Jurczyk and Jean Zeller, spent many days in the upper reaches of the convent, preparing auction baskets and crafts for the big day.

"Whatever they needed, I came over and did," Jean told *Alive* magazine. "I never felt like it was much of a job because I had so much fun."

Associates Mary Ellen and Jim Meyer began volunteering in the late 1970s, about the

time that the festival became a one-day event. Prior to that, the fundraiser was a multi-day craft, food, and fun fair known as "The Sale." Jim helped by baking bread for sale, learning the sisters' recipes from head baker Sister Luciann Schulte. After Sister Luciann's death in 1999, Jim coordinated a team of a dozen bakers who baked hundreds of loaves in many varieties.

"It was a thrill to bake such a large volume, and then seeing them all sell," Jim told *Alive*. "The bakers functioned as a team. The same people would come back each October, and it was like a reunion of old friends. "That spirit kept Jim and Mary Ellen coming back to volunteer each year, even after they had relocated to California. "We received so much love that it filled us for the year!" Mary Ellen said.

Another faithful volunteer was Associate Mary Foscett,

who said that her memories of The Sale begin with the tireless work of Sister Jeanette Wodzinski. “For months and months prior to The Sale, she would be sprucing up items and pricing them,” Mary recalled. “A week before the event, she would give us the go-ahead: ‘St. Joseph Hall is available. We can get the key.’”

The first task was to transfer large, heavy boxes of sale items from the convent’s fifth floor to St. Joseph Hall. “As the day progressed, new items from many wonderful donors kept arriving,” Mary said. “There were beautiful crafts created by the Zander sisters, gorgeous jewelry made by Sister Connie Halbur, knitted quilts and baby blankets donated by Sister Frances Wagner, and stuffed animals given by Associate Pat Essmann.” Mary herself would light the hall’s stage with dozens of her handmade Christmas wreathes.

On The Sale’s opening day, guests were greeted by Mary Ellen’s young violin students, who strolled the convent. Mary Ellen played too, dressed as a clown, and she was joined by three sister clowns Theresa Nett, Noel Le Claire, and Rosalia Zachman. “The polka music played by Vern Tretow’s band had people dancing in the main lobby,” Mary recalled. “A spectacular carnival atmosphere was created.”

*Associate Mary Ellen Meyer and her students perform in St. Joseph Hall.*

Mary noted that The Sale and fall festivals were important fundraisers, but just as importantly, they were a joyous time for reunion and reconnection. “This was a treasured time for sisters to see family, friends, and other sisters,” she said.

“My life has been greatly enriched by my nearly 50 years of Associate Relationship, including the 40 years I baked with the sisters,” Jim shared. “I became friends with sisters of all professions, especially homemaker sisters, some of whom traveled great distances to bake over 3,000 loaves of yeast breads and coffee cakes. We worked in three shifts, around the clock for three days using the original recipes. The lives of these sisters are examples of Franciscan spirituality that I hope I have applied to my own life.”

PHOTO: MARY FOSKETT



## Save the Dates!

### Sister Water Beer Garden Saturday, June 1 4 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Our summer fundraiser will feature live music, outdoor games, delicious food, and our famous craft beers, along with wine and soft drinks.

### Oktoberfest Saturday, September 14 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Our German-inspired Oktoberfest celebration includes live polka music, a 50/50 raffle, crafts and imports for sale, and delicious bakery available for donation. Come early for the apricot-filled cookies!

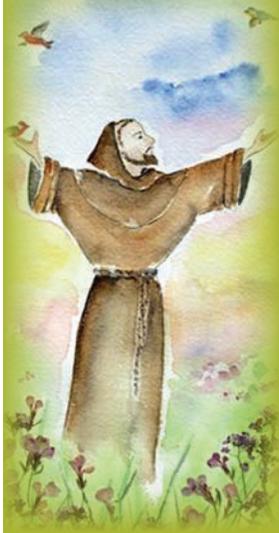
# Associates Reflect on Relationship with Sisters

*For this anniversary issue, we asked associates to share ways that Associate Relationship with the School Sisters of St. Francis has enriched and added meaning to their spiritual life.*

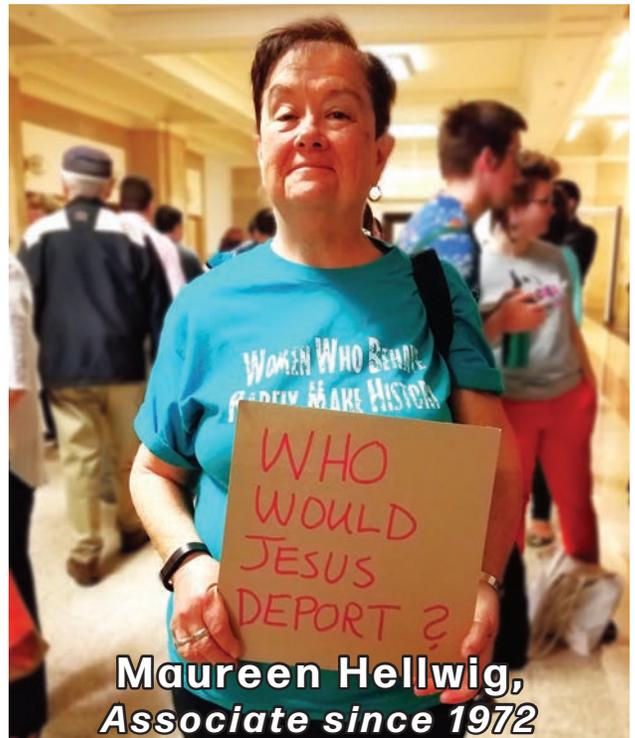
## Mary Ellen Meyer, Associate since 1976

The Franciscan charism of joy, hospitality, and simplicity has inspired and helped shape my lifestyle. Recently a young inmate in Solano (California) State Prison, where my husband Jim and I volunteer, asked me what type of car we drive. I explained how our Franciscan lifestyle affects our choice of car. He was fascinated.

Seeing his interest, I shared a page of inspiring Franciscan quotations that I found online and a bit about the life of St. Francis. He was particularly moved by Francis' reverence and care of the earth, which he shared with others in his housing unit, which is a building where service dogs are being trained. This led the group to clean up the yard around their building.



In our prison Centering Prayer group, an older man was moved to tears as he shared his awe for the greatness he found in St. Francis' life, especially his humility. These tears have led me to even greater gratitude.



## Maureen Hellwig, Associate since 1972

It is now more than 50 years ago that the School Sisters of St. Francis approved a new way of connecting with them in community and through mission. I was part of the group of sisters and others who asked for this "relationship," and I have been grateful all these years for their "Yes", as my relationship to the community has continued to enrich my life.

I pray with these sisters, play with them, and work on committees with them. Most recently, they honored me with their trust to write some of their stories. I have embraced their witness to social justice in my work with immigrants and refugees in Chicago. I give thanks for them every day for teaching me so well, from kindergarten through graduation from Alverno College.



**Mary Ruzinski Smith,**  
*Associate since 1984*

Around 1969, I had a chance encounter at a guitar Mass with Sister Noel Le Claire. We have been connected ever since. As she and other sisters established a mission in Kentucky, I followed her there as much as I could while choosing to teach in the Milwaukee Public Schools, be married, and raise a family.

Fifteen years later, I became an associate with Sister Noel as my contact. My commitment to Associate Relationship has deeply enriched and added meaning to my spiritual life through service and prayer. I met many sisters while volunteering at Maryhill, and that led to even greater involvement. Over the years, I wrote a poem/prayer for a Provincial Assembly, sang with the Chapel Singers, and created children's Easter Baskets with another associate. I belonged to a sisters' prayer group for decades. Now I am one of the two "Brat Babes" serving at the Sister Water Beer Gardens.

I am committed to my "ministry of availability" through all phases of my life. I consider it a gift and a blessing to celebrate my 40th Jubilee of Associate Relationship this year.

*Read all the associate reflections on our website:  
[www.sssf.org](http://www.sssf.org).*

## **Tina Rawlins,** *Associate since 2014*

Franciscan spirituality breathes through me in who I am and what I do, the charism I learned through growing up around the School Sisters of St. Francis. The mentors who influenced me, and the experiences they offered me, helped guide me to become the person I am today.

My spirituality comes alive through the passion of my work. I admit that I don't attend church regularly and forget to pray formally, but despite this, my relationship to God is deeper and closer through my hands and heart. In my work in home care and hospice, I meet and care for many people in need. I relieve suffering for the dying, comfort the grieving, and celebrate with those who overcome illness. I am proud to be an associate, inspired by those who came before, and pray that my healing ministry will make a difference.

## **Kathleen Kovatovic,** *Associate since 2020*

My Associate Relationship with the School Sisters of St. Francis has brought me many blessings. If I had to pick the one that has the most impact, it is the sisters' willingness to share the meaning of their charism with me. I have been inspired by how the sisters have lived their charism by being fully present, and involved in the issues of today, whether that is education, social justice, or care of the planet.

The sisters have led me to understand that spirituality is not just the part of religion that focuses on the "inner life;" it can be found in everyday activities. Their example has encouraged me to educate myself on these needs, and given me the courage to get out of my comfort zone and do my part.



## Heritage Room Brings History to Life

Our Archives recently unveiled a comprehensive exhibit highlighting remarkable people and events from our foundresses' first Atlantic crossing to today's ministries around the world. This innovative learning experience allows visitors to learn our sisters' stories using a tablet with an interactive photo display program, complete with narration.

The exhibit showcases the history of the congregation through a variety of photos, multimedia presentations, and artifacts like the key to our first convent in Campbellsport, and Mother Corona's walking stick from her travels to China. The display is in the newly remodeled Heritage Room, located on the second floor of St. Joseph Center, just outside St. Joseph Chapel.

The exhibit is open weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., with last entrance at 3 p.m. Two tablets are available, so please reserve your time by calling the St. Joseph Center receptionist at 414-385-5302. If interested in a Saturday visit, please contact Archivist TaraDawn Knull at 414-944-6031.

**We look forward to sharing our sisters' stories with you in this interesting and entertaining new way!**