

Volume 16, Issue 1 | Fall 2025

Alive

WITH THE CALL OF THE GOSPEL

School
Sisters
of  St. Francis

2024-2025
Gratitude Report

Putting Mission
Into Action

In the Footsteps
of St. Francis





Autumn Psalm

by Sister Irene Zimmerman

In the stillness of an autumn afternoon
we sit in quiet communion. Before us,
hills and valleys yawn, spreading wide
their yellow and green, ochre and gold
harvest of hay, beans and corn.
All summer long the fields drank daily
offerings of dew and sunlight.

We listen to the hush of hills, a hawk
above us riding thermal winds,
the drying corn nearby whispering
Praise! Praise! Praise!, the grass
beneath our squeaking swing
chanting, sotto voce, Thank you, God.

Everything around us whispers shhh.
And when we do, we hear the holy
breath of God bringing forth the world.

Autumn Scene

Sister Bernella Decker

SSSF U.S. Province Collection

Sister Bernella Decker

From Our Leadership

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FRONT COVER
Sister Alphy Thaikadan (left), a medical
doctor, and Sister Monica Minj, a nurse,
travel by foot to make home medical
visits in rural Madhya Pradesh, India.
These sisters from our St. Francis Province
(North India) are based in Goreghat at the
area's only medical clinic, offering care and
healing to underserved and economically
disadvantaged people throughout the region.

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SEE, I AM DOING A NEW THING! NOW IT SPRINGS UP; DO YOU NOT PERCEIVE IT?

(Isaiah 43:19)

Each of our sisters around the world recently received a newly updated copy of *Response in Faith: Rule of Life*, our international congregation's rule and constitution. For the first time, the book's preface contains a charism statement: "In accord with our founding spirit, we discern the will of God in the needs of the times, responding wherever the Spirit leads us."



Beginning with our foundresses Alexia, Alfons, and Clara, and continuing for more than 150 years, our sisters have been – and continue to be – responding to life's unexpected opportunities, living our faith in our own local contexts.

As you read through the pages of this issue and our annual Gratitude Report, you will see that the same Holy Spirit that inspired those young German women to cross the Atlantic Ocean in 1873 is at work in every remote village and teeming city, every mountain outpost and island mission where our sisters serve today:

- Young women continue to respond to the call to minister in religious life, as evidenced by the need to open our congregation's third formation house in Tanzania.
- The gospel mandate to perform the corporal works of mercy is being carried out daily at Asha Bhavan, our "house of hope" in Carmalaram, India, where abandoned and disabled women are fed, clothed, sheltered, nurtured, and loved.
- A "sister parish" relationship initiated by our sisters decades ago continues to be an ever-more-fruitful partnership that enriches the lives of participants in Guatemala and Wisconsin.
- Our Lady of the Angels, our co-sponsored retirement center for sisters who can benefit from memory care, is now welcoming elderly sisters from five religious communities, beautifully enhancing the lives of all the convent's residents.

Each day we encounter challenging news about war, turmoil, division, and discord, and it can be overwhelming. But we can take heart that, despite every obstacle, God will always break through the darkness with new expressions of God's infinite love. Thanks to your prayers and loving support of our sisters' work, "new things" are springing up!



Celebrating the opening of St. Joseph Formation House in Chengena.

Cultivating Joy in Religious Life

Tanzanian formation house shapes future faith leaders

A woman's eight- to twelve-year journey of initial formation is a time for her to discern her identity in religious life. These first steps on the path to becoming a sister are opportunities for profound spiritual growth, deepening her relationship with God, learning to serve others, and preparing to live out her vocation.

For the first time, that journey is unfolding in the village of Chengena, Tanzania, home to the newly built St. Joseph Formation House. Chengena is a quiet, rural village that is full of potential. Surrounded by nature and far away from the distractions of city life, it offers the perfect setting for reflection, prayer, and formation. Here, the simplicity of life fosters a sense of humility and peace.

The community has long prayed for a religious presence, and the arrival of two professed sisters and seven young women in formation has been received as a true blessing. The women teach

at the local kindergarten, offer health services, lead at-home prayer services, and support nearby parishes. They come from various regions of Tanzania and bring with them a diverse mix of backgrounds and experiences that enrich their shared life and service to others.

A direct connection to life in Chengena is central to the mission of these women. Sister Rosebell Ponthakkan, provincial leader of our Assisi Province in South India, said the house "has become a center of hope, education, and faith in Chengena. The sisters' presence has uplifted the community spiritually, and the ministries they offer are filling vital gaps in education and pastoral care."

The formation house in Chengena is Assisi Province's third Tanzanian mission. It is about 30 miles from our first house in the city of Songea, and 200 miles from our house in Dar es Salaam, East Africa's largest city.

Prayer and Action

A typical day starts at 5:30 a.m. with morning prayers, followed by Mass, chores, and formation classes. Apostolic work includes teaching at the kindergarten and leading catechism lessons. The day ends with evening prayers, reflection, and rest. The rhythm of each day is designed to balance prayer and action, learning and serving.

“One of the most inspiring aspects of working with new formees is witnessing their spiritual growth and transformation,” Sister Rosebell said. “Moments like a formee leading her first catechism session, or courageously speaking in a village prayer service, show how God is shaping them.”

As the women serve, they’re also discovering which ministry they feel most called to. Many were drawn to religious life after witnessing the compassion of women religious who visited their parishes and schools. That inspiration helped shape their path.

“Several of the formees have shown a strong inclination toward teaching, especially young children,” Sister Rosebell said. “Others are drawn to pastoral care and home visits, finding deep fulfillment in connecting with families and praying with them.”

Resilient Women

Building the formation house – which includes a dormitory, chapel, and recreational areas – was not without its difficulties. Poor roads made it difficult to transport materials, some of which came from over 600 miles away. Access to clean water, electricity, and transportation was – and still is – limited.

“Despite enormous challenges, our vision for a formation house has become a beautiful reality,” Sister Rosebell said. “It stands as a living testament to faith, resilience, and the power of community.”

The house still has pressing needs. Additional furnishings, a rainwater harvesting system, and a reliable community vehicle are top priorities.

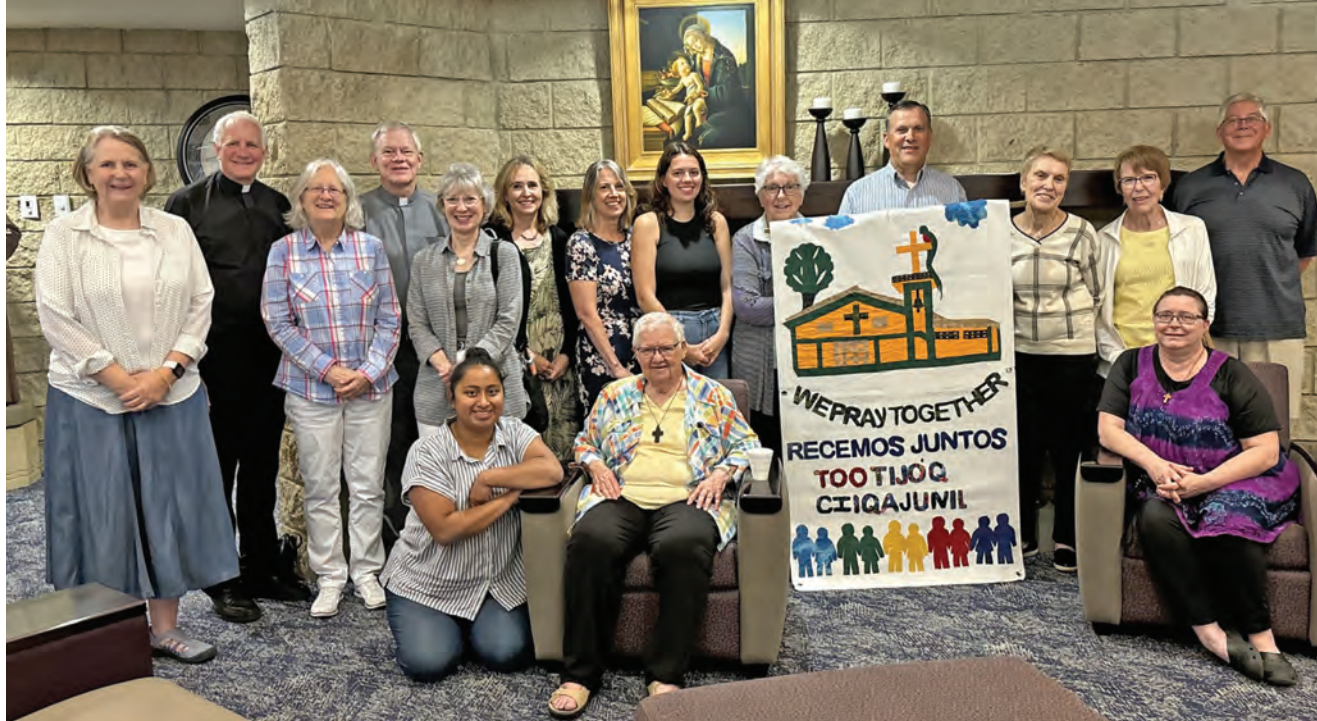
“Even though we face challenges, especially with transport, our hearts are at peace here,” shared one of the women in formation. “We are growing in our vocation, and this house truly feels like a home where we can serve and be formed at the same time.”

The sisters greatly appreciate the generosity of our donors, who have made this mission possible.

“We are deeply grateful for the prayers, support, and encouragement of our wider family,” Sister Rosebell said. “With God’s providence and the intercession of St. Joseph – who has guided us from the very beginning – we move forward with hope and trust, continuing to serve, form, and grow in this sacred mission. We offer our prayers for you and your family members in thanks for your kindness and generosity.”

A young Chengena villager greets our international President, Sister Deborah Fumagalli. She was joined by (from left) Vice President Sister Tresa Abraham Kizhakeparambil, Sister Rose Poonelil, and Sister Ancy Kizhakkekara.





Sister Joannes Klas (seated at center) visits with sister parish supporters at Saint Patrick Catholic Community in Hudson, Wisconsin.

Meeting Great Needs with Great Love

Sister parish bonds yield remarkable benefits

For more than 25 years, parishioners at Saint Patrick Parish in Hudson, Wisconsin, have nurtured a unique and enduring partnership with the people of the parish and village of San José El Tesoro Parish near the town of Yalpemech, Guatemala.

Known as a “sister” or “twinning” parish relationship, the bond between these communities began as an effort to provide aid to survivors of Guatemala’s three-decade civil war. Now, their collaboration has grown to include support for education, healthcare, infrastructure, and spiritual growth. For the people of both communities, this partnership represents a shared journey of faith, resilience, and collaborative change.

Sister Joannes Klas has been at the center of this twinning relationship story from its inception. Sister Jo, as she is lovingly known, spent nine years living and working in a Honduran refugee camp with about 200 Guatemalan villagers as an international observer and teacher. Sister Jo

accompanied the families when they returned to Guatemala, helping them settle on land in the north central region of Alta Verapaz. She remained there for a quarter century, helping to establish a thriving village.

“We decided to call our village San José, because we arrived in March and that is the month of the feast of St. Joseph, and El Tesoro, because the people are ‘the treasure,’” Sister Jo explained.

A Heart for Mission

The Saint Patrick connection to this tiny village 3,000 miles away came through the late Sister Bernadette Kalscheur, a former teaching colleague of Sister Jo. She knew about the villagers’ daunting challenges and recognized their great need, as well as the generosity and capacity of her fellow parishioners in Hudson. Sister Bernadette helped organize inaugural mission trips and volunteer projects. Her efforts laid the foundation for what would become a beloved tradition of regular mission trips that

bring volunteers and much-needed support to the community of San José El Tesoro.

Over time, the parish has adopted a system of organizing trips into two groups, each spending a week in Guatemala. Week one is usually a medical mission, followed by a project-focused mission in week two. A priest accompanies one of the groups. These trips allow volunteers to directly help the community and contribute to its day-to-day success.

For example, Saint Patrick parishioners were instrumental in bringing electrical service to the village. The process required careful coordination with local organizations and generous funding from the Hudson parish.

Another monumental project was the *estufas mejoradas* (“improved stoves”) building project. This was undertaken to address the health and safety needs of villagers, who had been cooking over open fires inside their homes. This exposed their families to smoke for many hours each day.

“Following the model of the Hudson Rotary Club, they built stoves for families and also taught the local people how to build them,” Sister Jo said. “The stoves use much less wood, and they keep the smoke out of the house.”

Rick Huebsch, a parishioner and longtime volunteer, said the success of this project was evident when he returned on his most recent trip earlier this year. He discovered that the villagers had built an additional 120 stoves.

“It was gratifying to see the progress made by the people of San José in both the electrical upgrade project and the stove building project,” Rick said. “They took the initiative to make significant progress on both projects.”

To address another essential need – access to clean water – each home in San José has received a cement water storage tank. Other agricultural projects funded by parishioners’ donations include raising cattle and cultivating sugarcane.

Meeting Changing Needs

Healthcare and nutrition have long been important aspects of the mission trips. Doctors travel on each trip to provide direct medical support to the community. “From the medical mission work this year, the team reflected on the need for more nutrition education, particularly to address growing issues with pre-diabetes,” Rick said.

Volunteers bring medications, vitamins, and other essential supplies with them. In Sister Jo’s case, she also has brought her own medical team!

Mission trip participants helped villagers to build stoves that make cooking healthier and more sustainable.



Father Dan Tracy's participation and sacramental care were greatly appreciated by the community.





Mission trip participants have grown lasting friendships with the people of San José El Tesoro.

“One year, two of my doctors came with us: my heart specialist and my primary care doctor,” Sister Jo recalled with a laugh. “I told the team, ‘In case something happens, don’t worry about me. I have two doctors, and a priest in case I die!’” It’s not surprising that a mission organized by School Sisters would make education a priority. Today, San José’s school has expanded to over a dozen classrooms, and Saint Patrick parishioners have helped to fund scholarships so village children can obtain vital vocational skills.

Father John Gerrits, the parish’s pastor, has been a wholehearted supporter of the Guatemalan mission, and this year, Associate Pastor Father Dan Tracy participated in his first trip.

“It was an incredible gift to serve the community of San José El Tesoro as a spiritual father,” Father Dan said. “As a priest serving a Hispanic community in Wisconsin, it was truly eye-opening to experience first-hand the great love and devotion that the Guatemalan people have for the Lord Jesus and the Catholic Church.”

“My own faith life has been immeasurably enhanced by my participation in this ministry,” said Claire Zajac, another longtime volunteer. “I am constantly reminded that our shared Catholic faith is truly universal, and that I should slow down, slim down, and live in the moment as God has planned for me.”

Maintaining Relationships

Sister Jo, now age 90, continues to make time for her friends in Hudson and Yalpemech.

“We still rely on Sister Jo and her deep connection in Guatemala to assist us, and she continues to travel with us to the village each year, thanks to the generosity of our parishioners,” Claire said. Sister Jo also receives assistance from her congregation, and the Office of Mission Advancement helps make financial arrangements, which are often difficult in Guatemala.

In San José, Sister Elena Josefina Felipe, a Guatemalan sister who is fluent in Spanish and the local Q’che Mayan language, has been instrumental in managing the village’s daily operations. When Sister Jo returned to the United States in 2017, Sister Elena stepped up to maintain programs, oversee projects, and ensure that all the initiatives continue. Rick noted, “Sister Elena has played a vital role in sustaining the parish of San José and the sister parish relationship with Saint Patrick.”

In addition to returning to Guatemala, each year Sister Jo visits Hudson, participating in parish meetings and inviting parishioners to volunteer and donate towards the San José mission. These annual visits help bolster the parish’s support of San José’s projects.

“Our parishioners consider themselves partners with the School Sisters of St. Francis in supporting the mission at San José,” Claire emphasized. “We look forward to many more years of close collaboration.”

Read about Sister Jo’s remarkable vocation and her decades of ministry in many death-defying circumstances in an article on our community website’s Media Room: www.sssf.org.



"Light Threads," a watercolor by Sister Elaine Hirschenberger, was displayed at a recent Womanspace exhibition.

Transforming Lives for 50 Years

At Womanspace, spirituality, art, and personal growth intersect

Just one year after her congregation celebrated its 150th anniversary, Sister Elaine Hirschenberger is celebrating another extraordinary milestone: 50 years of creating, connecting, empowering, and transforming lives through the interfaith center she co-founded, Womanspace.

Today, Womanspace offers art studios, gardens, a prairie, a labyrinth, and community spaces, all on a beautifully wooded, seven-acre campus in Rockford, Illinois. It's a far cry from its humble beginnings: an unused room above a convent boiler room where Sister Elaine and the center's co-founder, Sister Dorothy Bock, dreamed of building a retreat center and spiritual resource where spirituality, art, and personal growth could intersect. Their mission was – and has remained – connecting, empowering, creating, and transforming our world, one woman at a time.

Sister Elaine vividly remembers the earliest days, when the two former high school teachers started to spread the word about programs like consciousness-raising groups for women. "A lot of women flocked to our place!" she recalled. "We



Sisters Dorothy Bock (left) and Elaine Hirschenberger, co-founders of Womanspace.

had 20 to 25 women talking intensely long into the evening, and in the back room, we had the beginnings of a little library. It became obvious that there was a hunger for this kind of thing."

Interest and attendance grew as the center's programs became a beacon of hope for women of all backgrounds. When the center celebrated its 25th anniversary, Womanspace moved to a new home on the campus that had been the motherhouse for the sisters' Mount Assisi Province in the 1960s.



Sister Elaine has been a joyful presence at all Womanspace events, including their famous “Glitzy Garage Sale” fundraiser.

Sister Elaine is profoundly grateful to her religious community for the opportunities she has experienced in consecrated life. “School Sisters have opened a world for me that I never dreamed possible,” she reflected. “When I entered the order, my world expanded like I could never have imagined. I fully expect that I will continue to reflect on the belief in sisterhood, and the belief that together, we can do so much more than we could do alone.”

Sister Elaine said Womanspace has always emphasized inclusivity. “We made a conscious decision to be an interfaith center,” she said. “We set out to be inclusive, and that has been an ongoing commitment for us from the beginning.” Many of the center’s offerings are also available to men, and the calendar also includes programming for children and young people.

Womanspace has presented a wide array of hands-on classes, small group sessions, retreats, workshops, and other opportunities for growth. Its featured speakers and presenters have included thought leaders and best-selling authors

such as Anne Wilson Schaef, Francis Rothluebber, Carolyn Myss, Jan Phillips, and Parker Palmer, among many others. Their words and spirit have empowered women who attend to explore healing, creativity, and leadership, and inspired and nurtured them as they make a difference in their communities.

Emma Lai is a lifelong friend of Sister Elaine and literally grew up at the center: Her mother Pat has been on Womanspace’s staff for decades.

“While growing up, the Womanspace community helped me discover and embrace my strengths by providing wisdom and examples I could emulate,” Emma said. “Now 26, I am exploring how that self can impact the world. Even though I am older and my questions have changed, Womanspace continues to offer a physical and metaphysical space for me to begin to reflect and answer life’s most difficult questions.”

“It is extremely difficult to build community in a disjointed and isolated world, but Womanspace is



The Womanspace labyrinth and gardens are free and open to the public daily during daylight hours.



Sister Elaine (with hat, back to camera) chats with visitors at Womanspace's "Bloomfest" event in May.

one of the few places that continues to provide a real connection without pretense or expectation," Emma continued. "Womanspace remains a safe space for individuals to grow, connect, and transform."

Sister Elaine cited the example of a former Methodist minister who, after her own healing and growth at Womanspace, established an innovative program in a western state dedicated to listening and supporting people through life's dramas. Other students have gone on to start art galleries, open an employment agency to aid homeless people, and many have become published authors. "People take what they have learned and say, 'How do I maximize my own healing and make life better for other people?'" Sister Elaine observed.

Dr. Catherine Forslund, who serves as vice president on Womanspace's board, said the center has remained relevant for a half century by responding to women's changing needs and roles.

"There are core elements of the work, like art classes, that are constant in many women's lives,

but some of the creative expression styles have changed, and we keep changing, too," Catherine said. "I've heard Sister Elaine say multiple times, 'People seem to find Womanspace when they need it.' That was true for me, and I think that's true of many folks who are members here. Womanspace gives something to everyone who's engaged here, and it makes you feel good to be here. It's nurturing, and who doesn't like to feel that?"

Today, Womanspace's vision is being carried forward by a new generation of leaders. Nicole Landreth, who has served as Sister Elaine's co-director for the past year, now leads the center following Sister Elaine's retirement on August 31. Sister Elaine is excited to see how Womanspace will expand its programs, deepen its interfaith approach, and continue to welcome women from all walks of life.

"I have every confidence that Nicole will carry the vision forward," Sister Elaine said. "We have the same roots, and now, new flowering."

Nicole expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to lead the center. "It has been the learning opportunity of my lifetime to mentor under Sister Elaine," she said. "She has taught me so much about leading with compassion and faith, to trust in your team, your community, and the fibers that connect us. The connection is deep among the women who have found personal transformation and friendship here."

"One of the most important lessons I've learned from her leadership is to always be grounded in and connected to the mission," Nicole concluded. "I hope to carry forward the transformative work that Sister Elaine and Sister Dorothy began 50 years ago, rooted in our enduring mission and reaching toward a more just, creative, and hopeful future."

To read more about Sister Elaine's retirement plans, and Nicole's journey and vision for Womanspace's future, please see the stories in our website's Media Room: www.sssf.org.

Sanctuary of Hope and Healing

Sisters at Asha Bhavan are inspired by saints, and led by love

Located in the Bangalore suburb of Carmelaram, Asha Bhavan stands as a beacon of compassion, resilience, and hope. This home for destitute women was established more than a quarter century ago in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi – patron saint of the outcast – and guided by the charism of our congregation's foundresses.

Asha Bhavan was born out of urgent need. Since the home's inception, our sisters have sheltered women who have been literally cast aside by society through poverty, abandonment, abuse, or mental and physical disability. Many arrive under traumatic circumstances. Some have been left on the streets, others have faced severe emotional or physical abuse, and still others are simply ignored by their families and communities.

In each case, Asha Bhavan opens its doors wide, offering shelter, food, medical care, and – most importantly – unconditional love. It is a community built on trust, dignity, and healing, where residents are treated as members of a large family: seen, heard, and valued.

Asha Bhavan currently cares for 19 women, each with her own story of pain, loss, and survival. Within its doors, each woman is embraced with dignity and respect, treated not as a patient but as a beloved family member. Physical, emotional, and spiritual needs are met with patience and understanding by the sisters and caregivers who serve them.

Sisters Jyothi Porathur and Savitha Lakkara serve fulltime at the home, joined by four sisters who are pursuing their General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) certifications at a local hospital while also serving as the residents'



Sisters ministering at Asha Bhavan ensure that residents receive regular medical exams and prompt care when needed.

companions, nurses, spiritual guides, and friends. The sisters are assisted in their work by a nurse and two resident staff members who help with housekeeping, cooking, and daily care.

Nearly all the residents experience some form of depression and in response, the sisters pray with the women, listen to their stories, and hold their hands, figuratively and literally. Other residents suffer from limited mobility, hearing and speech impairments, and chronic illnesses like diabetes and high blood pressure. These medical issues require regular care, medication management, physical assistance, and frequent monitoring by the sisters, the nurse, and support staff.

The sisters ensure that each woman receives healthy, well-prepared meals suited to her dietary and medical needs. Asha Bhavan offers clean and comfortable accommodations, with special attention given to bedridden residents or those needing extra assistance with daily routines. Doctors from St. John's Medical College visit Asha Bhavan monthly to check on the residents and prescribe necessary medications.

Spiritual needs are also tended, with daily spiritual exercises and common prayers offered for everyone. Catholic residents are invited to participate in twice-weekly Masses, weekday Eucharistic Adoration, and monthly sacramental reconciliation.

Inspired by Christian Duty

Sister Jyothi has been ministering at Asha Bhavan for the past year. Though new to the mission, she said her heart already feels connected to the lives of the women she serves.

"I feel true joy and happiness when I serve these women," Sister Jyothi said. "Most of them are mothers, and they still carry so much love in their hearts. That gives me the motivation to love them even more."

Following the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi, the sisters and staff of Asha Bhavan nurture an atmosphere of peace and prayer that surrounds the home and its residents.

"We believe we are continuing the mission Jesus began, to bring love and healing to those people the world has forgotten," Sister Jyothi said. "When we serve these women, we are reminded that every person, no matter their condition or circumstance, carries the image of God and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect."

"This ministry is more than social work, it is also a calling," Sister Jyothi continued. "My prayer time, the Eucharist, and the support of my religious community give me the strength I need to continue. When I look into the eyes of these women, I see Christ in his most suffering form. I am always looking for new ways to bring them joy and make them feel more loved. Here, no one is forgotten. Everyone belongs."

Read the moving story of Gouri, a woman who found safety and solace at Asha Bhavan, in our website's Media Room: www.sssf.org.

Sisters ministering at Asha Bhavan treat the women like a family, where everyone is seen, heard, and valued.





Volunteers enjoyed a celebratory meal at the conclusion of their Mississippi mission trip.

JEAN HOFFMANN PHOTO

Associates Cultivate Connections

Service projects in Mississippi help forge new friendships

For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, 19 associates, sisters, and friends from the Upper Midwest traveled in March for a Lenten mission trip to Holly Springs, Mississippi. The city of 6,500 people has been home to our sisters' ministry for more than 85 years.

Over the course of a week, participants immersed themselves in the city's history, offered their service with open hearts, and forged meaningful connections with one another, with the sisters, and with the community they were serving.

"I wanted other people to be able to experience what I had experienced," said trip coordinator and Associate Mary Ann Wiznerowicz, who visited Holly Springs on a mission trip in 2019. Reflecting on this year's journey, Mary Ann said, "Nobody felt uncomfortable. Everybody got to know each other, everybody got very close. You could tell they wanted to genuinely and sincerely get to know each other."

Participants divided into activity groups to best meet the area's needs. At Holy Family School in

Holly Springs and Sacred Heart School in the nearby Memphis suburb of Southaven, volunteers conducted student assessments, assisted in after-school care, and taught the Stations of the Cross. Other participants headed over to the Garden Café, serving meals to those in need, or sewed blankets for children and adults.

Other groups tackled yard work, scraped and painted shutters, cultivated gardens, and refreshed statues at St. Joseph Church and at the residence of Sisters Ramona Anne Schmidtke and Julene Stromberg.

"I was expecting to do manual labor and to build community with the other missionaries," said first-time participant Rob Hoffmann.

"The mission trip exceeded my expectations. I experienced new community, not just with the other volunteers but with the people of Holly Springs and the surrounding area. I was able to experience renewed spirituality with the people, rather than the projects."

For many participants, the variety of work was part of the fun. “There were different levels of service available, so I hope everyone was able to find something they could do and feel good about,” said Associate Jean Hoffmann. “We were all impacted by feelings of usefulness when we had meaningful opportunities to serve.”

For Rosaura Solano, a coordinator of Associate Relationship, this was also a long-awaited first. “The group of associates who had been to Holly Springs in 2019 often spoke about their experience there,” she said. “This was my first mission trip, and it was an incredibly rewarding experience. One particularly touching aspect was how welcomed my mom felt, despite not speaking much English. She never felt left out or uncomfortable, which is a testament to the Franciscan hospitality and the kindness and inclusivity of the associates.”

The week also gave participants a deeper appreciation for the longstanding ministries of Sisters Ramona Anne and Julene, who have served in the region for 61 and 46 years, respectively. “Visiting the places where they have been serving, and meeting the people they serve, was truly inspiring,” Rosaura said. “The community in Holly Springs holds the sisters in high regard. Everybody knows them, which

Associate Barb Kluka worked in the classroom, helping students at Sacred Heart School in Southaven.



speaks volumes about their dedication and active presence.”

Many of the week’s most unforgettable moments occurred during breaks. Shared meals, morning prayer, and nightly reflection gave participants opportunities to connect over their shared experiences.

“Most memorable was getting to know other associates, family, and friends who were participating,” Jean said. “I got to be of service, but better than that, I learned a lot on this trip.”

Barbara Kluka, celebrating her 40th anniversary as an associate this year, said she found the final night’s group meal particularly moving.

“We started out as strangers, but became close by the end,” she said. “There was a real sense of community.”

The trip’s closing ritual, which Rob deemed “the group hug,” was especially meaningful as well. “We gathered in a circle to share our reflections on the week,” Rosaura recalled. “We blessed one another with the traditional School Sisters of St. Francis blessing and exchanged hugs.”

The Holly Springs trip has inspired its participants to build on what they started. Mary Ann hopes to make the trip an annual opportunity and to explore more of the area’s history and sisters’ deep roots there. Jean has kept up the friendships she forged during the week.

“I have been to a few functions since March and have had the opportunity to reconnect with some people whom I did not know prior to the trip,” she said. “Living and working together for a week definitely allowed us to deepen relationships.”

By the time the volunteers returned home, they carried with them a renewed sense of what it means to serve together. The heart of a mission is not only the work accomplished, but the connections formed with each other, and the spirit of generosity that endures long after the trip ends.



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Sisters Embrace a New Mission Field: INDONESIA

On the 151st anniversary of our congregation's founding, our International Leadership Team had a joyful announcement: The sisters of our St. Francis Province in North India have opened a new mission in Maumere, Indonesia.

After meeting with provincial leaders, Bishop Ewaldus Martinus Sedu of the Diocese of Maumere invited our sisters to serve there. We are delighted to announce that Sisters Sunita Armo (far right) and Francy Tharakan (second from right) accepted this missionary call and arrived in Maumere in early June. Since that time, they have been diligently learning the local language and culture as they prepare to begin their active ministry. They are pictured here with their language tutors.



Maumere is a town of about 78,000 people on Indonesia's Flores Island. The Catholic diocese was established there just 20 years ago in what is the world's most populous Muslim-majority country. Please join in our prayers for Sisters Francy and Sunita as they undertake this bold initiative!