Volume 17, Issue 1 | Fall 2026

Alive

WITH THE CALL OF THE GOSPEL

School Sisters of St. Francis



2025 – 2026 Gratitude Report

Meeting Urgent Needs Globally

Compassionate Care: A Franciscan Tradition

Pope Leo's Prayer to St. Francis for Peace

Saint Francis, our brother, you who eight hundred years ago
went to meet Sister Death as a man at peace,
intercede for us before the Lord.

You recognized true peace in
the Crucifix of San Damiano,
teach us to seek in Him the
source of all reconciliation
that breaks down every wall.

You who, unarmed, crossed
the lines of war and
misunderstanding,
give us the courage to build
bridges where the world
raises up boundaries.



Detail of tapestry by Sister Helena Steffensmeier, OSF

In this time afflicted by
conflict and division,
intercede for us so that we may become peacemakers:
unarmed and disarming witnesses of the peace that comes
from Christ.

Pope Leo XIV's prayer delivered to mark the opening of the 2026-2027 Franciscan Jubilee Year, the 800th anniversary of the Transitus of St. Francis.

From Our Leadership

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FRONT COVER
Our international congregation's Assisi Province, based in South India, is now in its second decade of missionary work in Tanzania. Our sisters have already made a tremendous impact in Africa, encouraging vocations among young women and providing much-needed education in underserved areas. Sister Lissa Thomas Kunnapally (left) is joined by Assisi Provincial Leadership Team members Sisters Rosebell Ponthakkan (center) and Francitta Pazhukkathara in planting young coconut palms that will support our sisters and those with whom they minister.

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Guided by the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, our congregation's foundresses - Mother Alexia, Mother Alfons, and Sister Clara - laid a strong foundation rooted in faith, humility, service, and love, especially through education and the care of others. Their trust in God, willingness to serve without reservation, and commitment to forming minds and hearts continue to inspire us.

Across the country and around the world, our sisters continue to nurture faith, promote wisdom, and serve God's people with compassion and dedication. Countless lives have been shaped and strengthened by this Christ-centered work, and you make that work possible thanks to your support and partnership with our community!

Across the country and around the world, our sisters continue to nurture faith, promote wisdom, and serve God's people with compassion and dedication.

Our community's focus is to stand for truth and to speak up for the marginalized as our Holy Father Pope Leo XIV has modeled for us. We must allow ourselves to be disturbed by the realities of our present world. While the specific risks and challenges we are called to meet today differ from those faced by our foundresses, the strength required to face them with passion comes from the same source: We must make the sentiments of Jesus our own in all circumstances.

Each of us can call to mind a particular School Sister of St. Francis who touched our life as she carried out her mission with courage and fidelity. Today, let each of us commit ourselves to living out that same spirit of service, unity, and trust in God. When we do, we can celebrate a vibrant, faith-filled charism that is shaped by history, grounded in the present moment, and animated by a vision for the future.





Sister Mary Tirkey with ninth grade students at Raisen School.

Embodying Christ Through Joyful Service

Sisters serve through education, faith formation, and compassionate outreach

For the eight sisters serving at St. Francis Convent in Raisen, India, ministry extends far beyond the walls of their convent or school. Their days take them into classrooms and churches, nearby villages, family homes, and a home for destitute elderly people — all with the shared purpose of making God's love visible through service.

"The ministry at St. Francis Convent is a beautiful blend of education, pastoral care, faith formation, and social outreach," said Sister Archana Akkarapattiekkal, animator at St. Francis Convent. "Whether in the classroom, the parish, the villages, or the old age home, our desire is to be a living witness of Christ's love through humble and joyful service."

Education is a cornerstone of the Raisen mission, which is part of our St. Francis Province (North India). St. Francis Convent School serves approximately 3,000 students under the direction of about 140 teaching and non-teaching staff members. "We strive to provide quality education while nurturing Christian values, discipline, and compassion in every child," Sister Archana said.

But the sisters' ministry doesn't end with the school day. They regularly visit Catholic families in nearby villages, praying the Rosary and leading family prayer services. They also offer spiritual guidance and help families strengthen their faith.

"Our presence in Raisen is important because we are called not only to educate but also to evangelize, accompany, and serve," Sister Archana said. "We seek to build communities rooted in faith while responding to the educational, social, and spiritual needs of the people."

Growing in Faith

Parish ministry plays a significant part in the sisters' daily lives. They assist in the sacristy, prepare the altar and liturgical celebrations, and participate in many parish activities. This year, the parish church was declared a Franciscan pilgrimage site by the Bishop of the Sagar Diocese to help mark the 800th Jubilee of St. Francis of Assisi. The sisters are helping to welcome pilgrims and coordinate spiritual activities associated with the Jubilee Year. "Being able to contribute to this historic moment

through our pastoral and liturgical service is a privilege and a source of great joy for our community," Sister Archana said.

Faith formation also reaches people at many stages of life. The sisters teach catechism, prepare children for First Communion and Confirmation, and offer leadership programs, retreats, value education, and faith-sharing opportunities for young people.

"We encourage our youth to become responsible and committed members of the Church and society," Sister Archana said. "We also organize separate meetings and formation programs for adults, helping them deepen their spiritual lives and actively participate in the life and mission of the parish."

Meeting the Needs of the Community

The people whom the sisters serve face significant challenges. Sister Archana said that poverty, unemployment, limited educational opportunities, family struggles, and changing values affecting young people can place considerable pressure on individuals and families.

"Many children require additional educational support, while families long for deeper spiritual formation and stronger community life," Sister Archana said. "We believe that true transformation begins by touching both hearts and minds, enabling people to experience God's love in their daily lives."

The sisters' work touches people of all ages. For example, Sister Archana noted that many children from economically disadvantaged families can benefit from additional educational support. In response, the sisters operate after-school programs called "tuition centers," providing academic assistance and personal encouragement. They also serve elderly men and women in a home for the destitute, offering compassionate care rooted in respect and dignity.

"By teaching children, forming youth, visiting families, accompanying the elderly, and encouraging active participation of men and women in parish life, we become instruments of God's compassion and peace," Sister Archana said. "Our Franciscan presence reminds people that the Church is a living family where everyone is welcomed, valued, and loved."

For Sister Archana, some of the most meaningful results of the sisters' ministry cannot be measured in numbers. They are found instead in changed lives and deepening relationships.

"One of the greatest blessings of our mission has been witnessing the spiritual and personal growth of the people entrusted to our care," she said. "Seeing children grow in faith as they prepare for the Sacraments; watching young people become active leaders in the Church; and experiencing the renewed participation of families in parish life are deeply rewarding."

Sister Archana is especially grateful for the prayers and generosity of donors that sustain the sisters' work.

"We are deeply grateful to all the readers of *Alive* magazine for your constant prayers, encouragement, and generous financial support," Sister Archana said. "Your kindness enables us to continue our mission of educating children, reaching out to villages, supporting underprivileged students, and caring for the elderly with compassion and dignity."

"Every prayer you offer strengthens us spiritually, and every contribution you make becomes a blessing in the lives of countless people we serve," Sister added. "Together, we become partners in God's mission of love and hope."

Hometown Heroes

Sisters celebrate a decade of life-saving ministry in Milwaukee

On Milwaukee's South Side, the work of the Benedict Center's Sisters Program South initiative begins before most of the city is awake. Outreach bags are assembled and lined up by the door, vans are warming outside, and staff are preparing to meet women exactly where they are. In that early quiet, there is a shared understanding that this work starts with presence.

The Benedict Center is an interfaith, nonprofit agency working to achieve a system of justice that is fair and treats everyone with dignity and respect. Their Sisters Program South collaborative is guided by a simple but radical commitment: show up and respond with care to women who are survivors of the street-based sex trade. For nearly a decade, their team has walked alongside Milwaukee women who have experienced years of homelessness, substance use, and trauma by offering street outreach, a welcoming drop-in center, advocacy, and partnerships.

Nine congregations of women religious now serve as collaborative partners with the Benedict Center, including our sisters' United States Province. "Women caught in the sex trade are marginalized by society," said Sister Carol Rigali, the province's director of sponsorship services. "As women religious, we're called to move to the margins."

At the heart of Sisters Program South is the Benedict Center's harm-reduction model, one that recognizes lasting change begins with trust.

"Harm reduction is about meeting women where they are," said Jeanne Geraci, executive director of the Benedict Center. "In our case,



Jeanne Geraci, the Benedict Center's executive director (Michael Sears/Milwaukee Journal Sentinel photo).

we're literally going into the neighborhoods where women need us, rather than waiting for police to arrest them and courts to refer them to our program for services."

Rather than requiring women to be "ready" for treatment before receiving help, Sisters Program South removes barriers to support.

"Harm reduction also means offering nonjudgmental help and support without conditions," Jeanne said. "That way, women can begin taking their first steps toward health and safety, even if they're not ready for a complete abstinence treatment program."

Street outreach teams provide meals, hygiene supplies, clothing, naloxone (a medication to reverse the deadly effects of opioids), fentanyl test strips, and other lifesaving resources. At the South Side drop-in center, women can shower, enjoy a warm meal, rest in a

safe space during the day, and connect with advocates who help them navigate housing, healthcare, recovery, and other services.

"Our first goal is that people stay alive because every life has value," Jeanne said. She has seen firsthand how small acts of support can become the beginning of lasting change. "There are women in recovery today because they started with harm reduction resources."

Housing Changes Everything

For women experiencing homelessness, finding recovery, maintaining employment, or simply planning for tomorrow often feels impossible. That has shaped the Benedict Center's advocacy for a housing-first approach, a nationally recognized model that Jeanne described as "harm reduction applied to housing."

In the past, housing was often viewed as something a person had to earn. "Housing was seen almost like the reward after you stopped using drugs, got an education, or found a job," Jeanne said, which she said asks people to build a future without first giving them a foundation. "It's really hard to work on recovery, go to school, or hold onto a job when you don't have a home."

Stable housing also offers safety for women victimized on the streets. "For women experiencing the street-based sex trade, where physical and sexual assault happen so frequently, having walls and a door is probably your best line of defense," Jeanne said.

Sisters Program South is not a housing provider, but Benedict Center staff work alongside housing partners to help women navigate available resources, advocate for greater access across Milwaukee, and build a foundation for healing.

"If we can provide people with housing first – without requiring sobriety or that they already have a job – they very naturally begin taking the next steps toward their own health and safety," Jeanne said. "We've seen firsthand how women who receive housing vouchers are able to make incredible strides toward living a better life."

In the decade since Sisters Program South first opened its doors, the collaborative continues to grow its compassionate, unwavering commitment to accompany women on their journey toward healing. It's a commitment that informs every meal that is served, every outreach visit, every conversation, and every relationship that is built. It is grounded in the belief that every woman deserves dignity, safety, and the opportunity to begin again.

"Nothing is harder than working with a woman who is asking for shelter or drug treatment if those resources are not readily available," Jeanne said. "Our staff will never give up."

Learn more about the founding of Sisters Program South, and our sisters' involvement throughout the past decade, on our website's Media Room: www.sssf.org.



Women can shower, enjoy a warm meal, rest and connect with advocates at the South Side drop-in center.

GALA 2026

An Evening of Gratitude and Grace

Mark your calendar for a memorable evening celebrating the people whose generosity, friendship, and compassionate service have touched the lives of the School Sisters of St. Francis and those we serve around the world.

On Saturday, December 5, the School Sisters of St. Francis will welcome friends and supporters to Saint Kate–The Arts Hotel in downtown Milwaukee for our 2026 gala, "An Evening of Gratitude and Grace."

From 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., guests will enjoy cocktails, dinner, an auction, a special program, and live musical entertainment. Award-winning emcee and auctioneer Yve Rojas will return to guide us through the festivities, and we are grateful to welcome back Associated Bank Private Wealth as our presenting sponsor.

At the heart of this year's gala will be a special tribute to remarkable women whose generosity and service exemplify the evening's theme.

We will remember Dr. Peggy House, a former sister whose extraordinary generosity continues to bless our community. Dr. House donated more than $5 million to the congregation to help provide care for our retired sisters in the United States – a remarkable legacy of gratitude for the community that played such an important part in her life.

We will also celebrate the Alvernia Alumnae Association, whose members have remained devoted friends of the School Sisters of St. Francis. Through their annual luncheons, participation in congregation events, and generous support of our sisters and ministries, the alumnae demonstrate the enduring bonds created by the sisters' educational ministry.

Our third tribute will honor the extraordinary legacy of Sister Maria Rosa Leggol, affectionately known as the "Mother Teresa of Honduras." Sister Maria Rosa devoted her life to creating opportunities for orphaned, abandoned, and disadvantaged children in Honduras. The programs she established helped more than 87,000 children escape poverty and build brighter futures – an example of compassion that continues to transform lives.

Together, these honorees remind us that grace can take many forms: a transformative gift, friendships sustained across generations, or a lifetime devoted to children who desperately need someone to believe in them.

Most importantly, the gala will offer an opportunity to gather as a community – to celebrate friendships old and new, remember lives of extraordinary generosity and service, and support the School Sisters of St. Francis as we continue to sustain and expand our ministries around the world.

Watch for your formal invitation coming this autumn, or express your interest in attending by emailing us at events@sssf.org.

We look forward to welcoming you on December 5 for a joyful evening filled with celebration, gratitude, and grace!



Sister Tresa Abraham (front row, far left) attended the Final Profession of Sisters Christy Johnson Edathiparamban and Wimi Wilson Thermadam (wearing roses) in Assisi Province last year.

Growing in Experience and Joy

Sister Tresa Abraham Kizhakeparambil reflects on eight years of congregational leadership

After serving eight years on the School Sisters of St. Francis' International Leadership Team, Sister Tresa Abraham Kizhakeparambil has now stepped away from her role as vice president. She does so with deep gratitude for the journey.

Elected in 2018, Sister Tresa served her first four-year term alongside President Sister Mary Diez and vice presidents Sisters Barbara Kraemer and Lucy Kalapurackal. In 2022, she was elected to a second term with President Sister Deborah Fumagalli and vice presidents Sisters Matilde Maravi and Jincy Vilayappilly. As she concluded her service at the end of June, she reflected on the people she met, the lessons she learned, and the ways God continued to shape her throughout those eight years.

"Looking back on these eight years in international leadership, I feel a deep sense of gratitude above all else," Sister Tresa said. "It has been a privilege to work alongside people from different cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives, all united by a shared purpose."

While she is grateful for what the leadership team accomplished together, it is the relationships she formed that remain closest to her heart.

"When I look back, I don't think first about milestones or achievements," she said. "I think about the people, our purpose of mission, and the opportunity to serve. Those are the memories that rise most clearly to the surface."



Sister Tresa Abraham, center, participates at a Spirituality Conference.

She also describes this chapter of her life with a sense of humility. Serving in congregational leadership continually reminded her that there was always more to learn. The successes were meaningful, she said, but many of her greatest lessons came through challenges that tested her resilience, broadened her perspective, and strengthened her faith.

Prayer, she said, was at the heart of the leadership team's ministry. Every meeting began in prayer, creating space for reflection and discernment before decisions were made. The team also participated in a facilitation program that strengthened their relationships and helped them grow together.

"It brought more of a sense of unity and purpose," Sister Tresa said. "Our prayer with the staff had such a positive impact on us as a team, and also for me personally."

That spirit of discernment shaped the way Sister Tresa came to understand leadership. Earlier in her ministry, she had been accustomed to making decisions quickly. International leadership taught her that some of the most important decisions require patience, careful listening, and creating space for every voice to be heard.

"The pace of international leadership is different. It's much more reflective," she said. "This means that all voices are heard in an open, safe space."

Meeting with provincial and regional leadership teams throughout the congregation also deepened her appreciation for the many ways the Franciscan charism is lived around the world. "The greatest joy in serving for eight years was getting to know about the provinces and regions, with their ups and downs," she said. "I realized that our congregation's charism is not lived out in the same way in each country."

Listening to sisters share their experiences helped strengthen Sister Tresa's appreciation for the congregation's intercultural nature. She was especially inspired by the openness she encountered among sisters from different countries and cultures, whose commitment to learning from one another strengthened the congregation's shared mission.

"Genuine listening requires setting aside assumptions, being curious about another person's experience, and recognizing that every culture has insights and gifts to offer," she said.

"Unity is not the same as uniformity," Sister Tresa continued. "People can come from different countries, speak different languages, hold

Top: Sister Tresa Abraham attends the Profession of Tanzanian sisters; Bottom: Sister visits our Latin American Region with the 2018-2022 leadership team.





different customs, and approach problems from different perspectives, yet still be deeply united by a shared mission and common values."

As her ministry continued, Sister Tresa found herself changing. She said she became less reactive and more prayerful in her decision-making. "Leadership is less about directing and more about listening, discerning, and accompanying others on the journey," she said.

Challenging Circumstances

Those lessons became especially meaningful during difficult moments. Visa challenges kept Sister Tresa geographically separated from the other leadership team members for more than a year during her second term. Collaboration was more difficult because of distance and time differences. Sister was unable to participate in important gatherings, including the disappointment of missing the congregation's 150th anniversary celebration in Milwaukee.

Even those experiences became opportunities for growth, Sister Tresa said. "I learned to let go of the need for control and to accept my own limitations. The challenges deepened my appreciation for collaboration and the wisdom that emerges when we journey together as a team."

Below: Sister visits the European Region with the 2022-2026 leadership team.



Some memories remain especially vivid for Sister Tresa. She recalled with joy the chance to witness the Profession of the congregation's first two Tanzanian sisters. She also treasured accompanying the European Province through its transition to region status. She sees initiatives like the conversion of underutilized motherhouse space into the Maria Linden Apartments and Chapel Garden Apartments as a continuation of the congregation's legacy of caring for others.

"These sacred encounters gave me hope that wherever God is leading, we are in good hands," she said. "They made me proud of our sisters and increased my love for the congregation."

As she prepared to conclude her ministry, Sister Tresa expressed heartfelt gratitude for the congregation's sisters, leadership teams, and staff members who supported the work over the past eight years. She credits every accomplishment to the dedication of those who served alongside her. "Whatever I could do is only because of the team and the staff members," she said.

Sister Tresa said her advice to the new team is to build strong relationships from the very beginning, recognize one another's gifts, and create opportunities for every member to flourish. She also hopes the congregation will continue adapting its founding spirit to meet the needs of today's world, while strengthening the unity that connects sisters across cultures, generations, and countries.

Looking back, Sister Tresa says the greatest gift of these past eight years has been found in the opportunity to journey with others in service. "It has been a privilege to serve," she said. "The relationships and the lessons these years brought me are what I will carry with me most."

Making Charitable Gifts from IRAs

Retirement account distributions can support the organizations you value most

The money we set aside for the future can do much more than we might realize. An individual retirement account (IRA) is one way that individuals can secure their families' futures. It can also support the charities and ministries they cherish the most, both during their lifetimes and as part of their legacy.

There are two ways in which funds in an IRA can become a charitable gift: through a distribution during the donor's lifetime, or by the donor naming a charitable organization as a beneficiary after their passing.

A qualified charitable distribution (QCD) allows an eligible IRA holder, age 70½ or older, to direct money from a traditional or Roth IRA directly to a qualified organization. The gift can also satisfy all or part of the donor's required minimum distribution (RMD), which is the amount certain retirement account holders are required to withdraw each year.

Naming a charitable organization, like the School Sisters of St. Francis, as the beneficiary of an IRA designation does not restrict the account holder from using the account during their lifetime. The gift only goes into effect following their passing. The organization can be named as the beneficiary of all or a portion of their IRA, with the rest being allocated to family members or other recipients.

"Whether giving through an IRA, a will, or another method, many donors are motivated by a desire to care for both their loved ones and the organizations they trust," said Kim Peterson, Director of Planned Giving for the School Sisters of St. Francis. "Ultimately, donors view this as a way to balance providing for their family, while



also strengthening organizations that reflect their values."

Giving a charitable donation from an IRA comes with added benefits. A QCD can be a tax-efficient way to give, particularly for those who do not need their RMD or who do not itemize deductions on their tax returns. Rather than withdrawing money from an IRA, paying income tax on that distribution, and then donating the money, an eligible donor can direct the money straight to their charity of choice.

"If you are eligible to use the QCD, it means that instead of receiving a taxable distribution and using it to make a charitable contribution,

you make the contribution directly," explained Jason Kohout, a partner practicing with Foley & Lardner LLP, in Milwaukee. "That way, you do not have to worry about the taxable income from the distribution or obtaining the charitable income tax deduction."

Jason noted that a charitable contribution may or may not be entirely deductible based on the donor's income level and use of the standard deduction.

For those considering what assets to allocate to family and organizations, an IRA can offer another unique advantage. When an individual inherits an IRA, distributions are usually subject to income tax; charitable organizations do not face the same consequences. As a result, an IRA can be a useful tool when planning a charitable bequest.

Expert Help is Available

Donors do not have to navigate this process alone. School Sisters of St. Francis staff are available to answer questions, talk through giving options, and help donors take the next step when they are ready.

"We are always happy to talk with people who are exploring their giving options and to answer questions," Kim said. "It is also important for them to consult with a financial advisor and/or tax professional to learn about specific steps involved in making a charitable gift from an IRA or other appreciated assets, and to understand what makes sense for their unique situation."

In general, making a QCD involves contacting the financial institution holding the IRA and requesting that the gift be sent directly to the organization. The organization will typically require the recipient's legal name and tax identification number (The School Sisters of St. Francis' ID is 39-1594407). For charitable bequests, it is as simple as updating the IRA's beneficiary designation.

Kim said the sisters encourage donors to inform them when a planned gift is established because they would welcome the opportunity to thank the donor, discuss their wishes, and encourage them to complete a gift intent form. A gift can support the sisters' retirement fund, international ministries, and more.

"This information is extremely helpful in ensuring that the donor's intentions are honored," Kim said. "We are also happy to talk about giving options with donors if they are unsure about where to direct their gift. Many choose to leave their gift unrestricted, giving the sisters flexibility to address the congregation's most pressing needs."

Supporting a religious organization that you already know and trust can be impactful, both to the organization's mission and to the donor, Kim said. "Donors know they are contributing to a mission that is close to their heart. Frequently it is one they grew up honoring, cherishing, and respecting. For most people, tax advantages serve as an added benefit; their primary motivation is the impact of the gift."

If you have questions or would like more information about making a gift from an IRA, please contact Kim at 414-944-6019 or kpeterson@sssf.org.



Sai Pavan, left, receives speech therapy from a teacher at Assisi Special School.

Developing Skills, Celebrating Progress

Sisters strive to help each child reach their potential

At Assisi Special School for children with intellectual and developmental challenges, progress looks different for every student. For Sai Pavan, a 10-year-old boy diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, it started with learning to communicate.

Being completely non-verbal, it was difficult for Sai to connect with others, and he would often appear overwhelmed or withdrawn. His parents felt helpless and, due to economic struggles, could not afford outside specialized care.

At Assisi Special School, Sai received speech therapy and attended special education classes. Thanks to the understanding and patience of the staff, he had a breakthrough. Today, he can make eye contact, use words to express himself, and communicate with those around him. His mother joyfully shared, "This school gave me my son back. I thought he would never speak. Now he says 'Amma' (Mom) every day."

Sai's story is just one of many that have been made possible through the dedication of those serving at Assisi Special School, where fostering the independence, dignity, and agency of every child is their goal.

"True success in this ministry is not defined solely by numbers, but by the growth in the sense of dignity, confidence, and joy seen in each child," explained Sister Francitta Pazhukkathara, a member of the Assisi Province (South India) leadership team. "When a non-verbal child utters their first word; when a withdrawn child learns to interact with others; or when a family begins to dream again, that is our true measure of success."

The school, located in Bangalore, was founded in 2009 with only two students enrolled. That number has now grown to 80, and the school's ability to serve the varying needs of its students has increased as well. What started as a place to help children with special needs develop basic

self-help skills, such as eating and brushing their teeth, has expanded into a learning center where children can benefit from a wide range of educational services and therapies.

Students receive individualized education in areas including reading, writing, math, communication, and motor skills. Speech, occupational, physical, and applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapies are integrated into daily school life. Older students have the opportunity to develop vocational skills through gardening, kitchen work, and tailoring, to name a few.

"These children benefit from special education, therapies, vocational training, and life skills tailored to their individual needs," Sister Francitta said. "They grow in confidence and skills, and their families experience healing and dignity."

Sister Francitta emphasized that the school's ministry benefits the families, and the wider Bangalore community as well. Parents are encouraged to participate in training sessions and to be involved in therapies, and the staff maintains regular communication with them about their child's needs and progress.

Students pursuing college degrees and women in religious formation are also getting involved through volunteer work. They gain firsthand experience working with children with special needs. "They also learn the values of inclusion and compassion, reducing social stigma and promoting gospel values of love, service, and human dignity," Sister Francitta said.

Providing this comprehensive care requires significant resources. Most students come from economically disadvantaged families, and many cannot afford outside therapies. The ever-increasing size of the student body also creates a need for more staff and specialized services. To provide sufficient therapies and the exceptional care the school strives for, donor support is crucial.

"Low student-teacher ratios and support of the therapists are vital for the development and independence of the children, but that involves significant recurring expenses, including professional salaries and specialized equipment," Sister Francitta noted. "Consistent salary support is also very much needed to retain experienced staff."

"Our hope is to continue providing high-quality, holistic education and therapy to children with intellectual challenges," Sister Francitta continued. "For this purpose we must ensure that our staff are supported, respected, and retained through fair salaries. Each bit of help is very much appreciated!"

Through the generosity of donors, the school can continue to be a place where children are given the chance to discover their abilities and the wonderful gifts they can share with the world. Every new skill, connection, or milestone reached is a reminder that all children deserve dignity, respect, and the opportunity to grow. At Assisi Special School, each achievement is a celebration of who a child is, and all that they can become.



Students learning in a classroom at Assisi Special School.

School Sisters of St. Francis

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Sisters Elect New International Leadership Team

On March 19, the feast of St. Joseph, sister delegates at our 2026 General Assembly elected a new International Leadership Team that will guide our congregation for the next four years. The newly elected International Leadership Team members are:



President—Sister Deborah Fumagalli, from the United States Province, was elected President of the congregation in 2022 and will serve a second four-year term.

First Vice President—Sister Jincy Vilayappilly, from St. Francis Province (North India), has served the congregation as vice president since her election in 2022.

Second Vice President—Sister Matilde Maravi, from the Latin American Region ULAF (Latin American Union of Franciscans), has also served the congregation as vice president since her election in 2022.

Third Vice President—Sister Ann Celine Alapattukunnel, from Assisi Province (South India), was received into the community in 1982. She previously served her province on its leadership team and most recently was a counselor and preacher.

The election took place near the culmination of the 14-day assembly, held at Haus der Kirche retreat house in Bad Herrenalb, Germany. Delegates from every province and region of our international community participated in setting the congregation's direction for the 2026-2030 term.