

Alive

WITH THE CALL OF THE GOSPEL

School
Sisters
of  St. Francis

**Sisters Bring
FARAWAY
Parishes
TOGETHER**

**A Safe Place
to LEARN
and GROW**

**Sisters Elect New
International
Leadership Team**



perspectives of faith

Jesus and the Children

BY SISTER MADELYN GOULD

How fortunate are we to have Jesus and the children right in our midst. We only need to walk down the long terrazzo corridor leading to our magnificent St. Joseph Chapel.

Once inside the vestibule, look left to be inspired by four beautifully detailed stained glass windows depicting the ministries of the School Sisters of St. Francis. The second panel from the entrance illustrates Jesus warmly welcoming the little children.

“Let the children come to me,” Jesus insists. His message has echoed through the years in the hearts and lives of the School Sisters of St. Francis. Three young women, destined to become the foundresses of the School Sisters, heard Jesus’ message when they joined a small religious community in Schwarzach, Germany. The group gathered to care for orphans, a common practice in the mid-19th century with its many social needs. Emma Francisca Höll (Sister Alexia), Paulina Schmid (Sister Alfons), and Helene Seiter (Sister Clara) were among those who followed Jesus’ injunction to let the children come to them. They radiated Jesus’ care and compassion.

Because of the political unrest in the 1860s, Sisters Alexia, Alfons and Clara chose to follow the many Germans immigrating to America. Great was the need for teachers of those children. The three sisters found a home in New Cassel, Wisconsin, now part of the Village of Campbellsport. Within 21 days of their arrival, two orphans were dropped at the sisters’ doorstep to be educated. Once again, the gospel passage of “Let the children come to me” echoed in the hearts and lives of those sisters. From this small beginning sprang many schools in diverse places and on several continents. While educating youth is undeniably a significant way of leading



children to Jesus, we are invited to expand our notion of “children” to include all who are like children in their trust and dependency on God. To these, too, Jesus says, “Come.” He wishes to fill all childlike individuals—you and me—with His peace, His compassion, His vision for our world.

Envision yourself in the face of one of the little ones nestled close to Jesus. Let the Holy One enfold you in his arms. Recall the individual School Sisters who have touched your life through their ministry of education, by their gifted ways of enfleshing the familiar gospel passage, “Let the children come to me.”

Pause again upon exiting our chapel to remember how you, too, have lived this gospel message. Consider how many children we as devoted sisters have been blessed to serve throughout the nearly 150 years that our religious community has thrived. Add to that inestimable number all the adults influenced by our roles. Give praise and thanks for the continuing ministry of education embraced by the School Sisters of St. Francis from the welcoming of those first two orphans in Wisconsin.

SISTER MADELYN GOULD is pastoral associate at St. Margaret Mary Parish in Naperville, Illinois where she has served since 1983.

from our leadership

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FRONT COVER

Claire Zajac enjoys spending time
with a young Guatemalan friend. A member
of St. Patrick Church, Hudson, Wisconsin,
Claire has made five trips to Guatemala
in the past ten years with her
fellow parishioners.

BACK COVER

Magnolias in bloom on the
St. Joseph Center grounds in
Milwaukee. (Khala Sampson photo)

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Pope Francis has encouraged us as women religious to
“look to the past with gratitude, to live the present
with passion, and to embrace the future with hope.”

As we celebrate our Foundresses each year on April 28, our gratitude deepens for the legacies they left us in tangible and intangible ways. For example, during the Centennial of St. Joseph Chapel, we have been reminded of how they built this soaring structure in 1917, with the ships bringing marble, stained glass and mosaics across the Atlantic amid the dangers of a world at war.

By the stories of this and other early decisions of our foundresses, we can infer the less visible gifts for which we are grateful: prayer as the center of our lives, art and music as special expressions of Franciscan joy, and a vibrant mission focused on people's needs.

When Mother Alexia left us the guidance that “the needs of the times are the will of God for us,” she set us on a path for her time, for our current time, and for the future that awaits us. At our General Assembly, just concluded in Bangalore, India, we pledged to “weave together a new heart for intercultural life and mission.” We discerned our call to be transformed through contemplation so that we can identify and respond to the most urgent needs of our contexts by entering into the lives of people, especially on the peripheries. We also expressed our commitment to act on our Franciscan spirit, by joining in the struggle for justice, peace, and integrity of creation in collaboration with others and the local Church.

In this issue of *Alive* magazine, you will find sisters' vocation stories, as memories of the past that show their integration of spirituality and mission in answering their call to religious life over time. You will discover how Tau Volunteer Sarah Johnson's work with the marginalized in the city of Milwaukee, and Associate Pat Day's involvement in many aspects of parish life in Rib Lake, Wisconsin, are inspired by our sisters, and the spirit of our foundresses.

We are so grateful to have partners who are helping us to ensure a future for our mission. Our recently redesigned website will help us share their stories, and to present the many facets of our congregation's life and ministry in colorful, compelling ways. We invite you to visit the site regularly to keep pace with all that is happening: www.sssf.org.

Gratefully yours in Christ,

Sisters Mary, Maureen, Elsa Paul, and Francitta

International Leadership Team
School Sisters of St. Francis



celebrating our legacy

God Is Always Close

Sisters reflect on the challenges and blessings of consecrated life

BY SISTER RUTH HOERIG

Consecrated life as a Catholic sister is a decidedly countercultural life choice. In discussing their vocation stories, several School Sisters of St. Francis reflected on the decades they have spent as vowed women religious. While not without challenges, each of these women of faith has found her life to be filled with joy and blessings.

SISTER DOROTHY HOFER

“Living with people who share the same values and who mutually accept and respect one another has had a very positive impact on my life,” said Sister Dorothy Hofer. “We were often encouraged to take on responsibilities we never dreamed of and relied on an ever-deepening relationship with God to see us through.

“As I reflect on my life, I know that God desires each of us to find a path that will help us to ‘act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God,’” Sister Dorothy said. “For me, religious life has been that path.”



SISTER MARY BOYD

Sister Mary Boyd, who served for 52 years as a teacher and principal, said she, too, has found religious life to be very rewarding and life giving.

“It is replete with opportunities to serve others, and encourages us to be ourselves and to establish meaningful relationships with our sisters and associates,” Sister Mary said. “Living community life with remarkable women is a wonderful way to minister to the needs of others while making our world better.”

SISTER SUSAN WEINHEIMER

Sister Susan Weinheimer said she has never regretted her decision to become a sister. “The words of Psalm 23 express my feelings well: Religious life truly did fulfill all my wants and desires.

“For any woman considering a call to religious life, I would encourage you to seek out someone who can accompany you and guide you along the way,” Sister Susan advised. “Pray about it and remember: God is ever faithful.”



SISTER RUTH HOERIG is co-editor of *Alive* magazine and social media content developer for the School Sisters of St. Francis.



SISTER CLAIRE PINK

Over the course of her religious life, Sister Claire Pink served at four Chicago parishes. “It was my first opportunity to work with people from other cultures, and the 1960s were an exciting time to work in the Church,” she recalled. Now retired, Sister Claire said, “I am so grateful for the time we now have for prayer, retreats, and spiritual growth. Our community life is a wonderful source of comfort and grace.

“As I look back now, I can see how richly God has blessed me,” she said. “Even though some of those blessings came through challenging times, I have found deep satisfaction in the good we are able to do for others as women religious in the Church.”

SISTER LARINA WILLIAMS

During her 45 years in education, Sister Larina Williams taught all levels at St. Martin’s, St. Clare, St. Killian’s, and Holy Angels schools in Chicago.

“My 61 years in religious life have been filled with graces all around,” Sister Larina said. “Many former students of mine have done well with their lives. The sisters I live with exude an inner joy that lights up my day.

“Anyone considering a vocation today will find religious life most rewarding if they are capable of making a commitment that will sustain them through a lifetime. God is always close, inviting us to keep ourselves open to His continual help in new and surprising ways.”



SISTER PAT MCCARTHY

For the past 20 years, Sister Pat McCarthy has served in an acute care/trauma hospital. She finds her ministry in critical care to be especially energizing.

“The diversity of the people I serve—all ages, races, faiths and economic backgrounds—has been a most rewarding experience for me,” she said. “I am learning—even from the young—to live with mystery, accepting the circumstances of life as it unfolds, realizing that God is ever present and faithful to us in our suffering.”



Living in a religious community of sisters has been a strong support for Sister Pat. “We are all connected with one another, inspired by the charism of St. Francis. He witnessed extraordinary respect and gratitude for all of creation, especially the poor. This is what gives us hope. It spurs us on to help build a better world.”

A Safe Place to Learn and Grow

Sisters at Maria Sadan hostel ensure student security

BY SISTER RUTH HOERIG

In the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, literacy and education rates for women remain extremely low for tribal families. The only schooling available to young girls has been a substandard primary education.

“Government-supported primary schools do not hold regular classes because they lack the necessary staff,” explained Sister Naveena Kulathingal, former principal of Vidya Jyoti Diocesan School. A recent study found that even after attending school through the 5th standard, only 48 percent of Indian girls are literate enough to read a single sentence.

Girls who wanted to advance their studies to the 12th standard in higher secondary school, sometimes called “second year junior college,” needed to travel to Bichhiya, which is more than 20 miles from some of the tribal areas. Many of the parents did not want their daughters to live away from home because of safety concerns.

Though boys have had access to government-sponsored boarding hostels in Bichhiya, there were no such accommodations for girls—until 2005. That’s when the School Sisters of St. Francis’ Assisi Province saw a need and an opportunity. They purchased five acres of land and opened Maria Sadan, a boarding hostel for girls in the Diocese of Jabalpur.

SISTER RUTH HOERIG is co-editor of *Alive* magazine and social media content developer for the School Sisters of St. Francis. She has served her community in a variety of ministries for more than 60 years.

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Girls who board at Maria Sadan enjoy a new level of security thanks to a boundary wall around the hostel grounds.

Now in its 13th year, Maria Sadan hostel is a home away from home for girls attending Vidhya Jyothi Diocesan School, which provides classes for all levels of education. It gives the girls a safe, supportive home environment along with meals, clothing, instruction in self-care, and spiritual enrichment. More than 100 girls from 55 villages now are able to continue their education beyond the primary grades.

Recently, however, a problem arose when the boys who lived in nearby hostels were disturbing the girls by knocking on their windows at night, throwing stones at the building, and being a nuisance when the girls were outside in daytime. With generous support from our donors, the sisters erected an attractive security wall to protect the girls’ safety, allowing them to study and have recreation in peace. Donor support also allowed the sisters to replace six broken toilets, a step toward better serving the girls’ hygiene needs.

By their remarkable service, dedication and commitment, the School Sisters of St. Francis in India address the needs of those who are poor, being for them “a source of new life, new meaning and new hope.”

Our sisters are empowering and inspiring young women around the world. You can support their work by using the envelope in this issue, or donate online at www.sssf.org

www.sssf.org

Sisters Complete Solar Installation

Sacred Heart rooftop system is among Milwaukee's largest

BY MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN

In January, the congregation's United States Province completed a 375 kilowatt solar system, one of the largest institutional rooftop solar installations in Milwaukee. Beginning in September, an array of 1,086 solar panels was installed on the rooftop of Sacred Heart, the sisters' continuum of care residence. The project will offset more than 12 percent of the electricity consumed at Sacred Heart, or 480,000 kilowatt-hours, and save the sisters tens of thousands of dollars in annual operation costs.

Sister Carol Rigali, Coordinator of the province leadership team, said that the project will benefit the province, the residents of Sacred Heart, and the Earth. She noted that in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis specifically mentioned installing solar panels as one way to care for creation.

"This solar energy project will enable us to lessen our energy consumption and to invest in our care of the Earth," Sister Carol said. "It is very much in keeping with the way that our province is living out our Congregational Direction, by joining with others to raise a common voice for the good of all creation."

The panels were supplied by Seraphim Solar USA Manufacturing, Inc., a manufacturer of high-efficiency, photovoltaic modules, based in Jackson, Mississippi.

"We are very pleased that Seraphim Solar, our panel supplier, is based in Mississippi," Sister Carol said. "Our sisters have been ministering with the people of Mississippi for more than 50 years. Our love for the people there is exemplified by Sister Margaret Held, and we feel that this relationship is a small tribute to her lasting legacy."

Sister Carol said the project further honored Sister Margaret through the participation of the Great Lakes Community Conservation Corps, a Southeastern Wisconsin-based service corps that helps disadvantaged young adults develop job skills.

Sister Carol said that over a 25-year period, the congregation will save \$1.5 million from its \$550,000 investment. Savings to the environment will include 15.9 million pounds of carbon dioxide, 6 million trees, 193 million gallons of water, and over 300,000 pounds of greenhouse gases.

"The School Sisters of St. Francis are making an important statement with this project," said Ed Zinthefer, President of Arch Electric, the company that installed the panels. "They understand the global climate, the energy debate, and the need to educate both the population they serve—and the greater audience with whom they minister—about clean, renewable, and affordable energy."

The project achieved full production capabilities in January, and the sisters celebrated the project's successful and safe completion with their project partners at a March blessing ceremony.

MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN is director of Marketing and Communications for the School Sisters of St. Francis.



associates

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Taking God's Marching Orders to Heart

Pat Day delights in lifelong service to humankind

BY DONNA O'LOUGHLIN

Working in what has traditionally been considered a "man's field" did not discourage associate Pat Day from sticking to her dreams. This retired Naval lieutenant exemplifies Franciscan *joie de vivre*, simplicity, and charity.

Pat is a widow, grandmother, philanthropist, and church volunteer. Almost by default and through her generous volunteerism, she helps care for the Good Shepherd Parish property in numerous ways in Rib Lake, Wisconsin, because she lives "over the shop." She purchased the 1898 rectory next door to the church 30 years ago, after retiring from the service. She also volunteers at a pregnancy center, teaches religious education to sixth graders, proclaims the readings at Mass, and performs sacristan duties.

Living in a town of fewer than 1,000 people, however, was far from what the Baltimore native was accustomed to. Stationed over the years in Philadelphia, Guam, and Japan, Pat and her late husband Gary had never lived any place longer than two years before they bought their house. Even though Gary had warned her she probably wouldn't like small-town living, Pat just shrugged off the notion because she knew she would soon be living in Milwaukee and checking into Alverno College dormitories. Alverno was where she would earn a teaching certificate that would allow her to teach middle school and high school students.

Pat has always been an insatiable learner, both before and after retirement. She graduated high school at age 16, so she enrolled in the Dominican-operated Barry University in Miami, Florida, until she was old enough at 18 to pursue her life goal in the military. She has an Associate of Arts degree in

general studies, a Bachelor of Science in psychology and sociology from the University of Maryland, a master's in health care administration from the University of Oklahoma, a master's in special education from Cardinal Stritch University, and a Ph.D. in history from the University of Wisconsin in Madison. She has also completed programs in lay ministry in the Diocese of Superior, Wisconsin, and in servant leadership through Viterbo University.

Together, Pat and Gary raised his 10-year-old son David and six-year-old daughter Theresa, sharing custody with Gary's ex-wife. With solidarity and love, the children blossomed. David, now 53, earned a



DONNA O'LOUGHLIN is coordinator of Outreach Events for the School Sisters of St. Francis' United States Province.

Pat Day and her Associate Relationship contact, Sister Leanne Herda, have been close friends for more than 20 years.

degree in electrical engineering, an MBA, and a CPA. "I swore David into the Navy myself," boasted a proud Pat. "He retired from the Navy after 21 years."

Carrying on Pat's tradition of serving in health care, Theresa, age 50, is a hospice care nurse.

Faith was always a big part of Pat's life. Perhaps it was inevitable that her father, a man who had run away from his orphanage to join the Army and then survived Army stints during both world wars, would instill faith in his own children. "I went to Catholic schools throughout my life," said Pat. While at Barry University, Pat learned from a Navy veteran/Dominican sister that enlisting could actually increase her closeness to God during midnight-to-2 a.m. watches. "These turned out to be a good time to meditate. I pondered things in much the same way our sisters in Milwaukee pray Adoration."

Her studies at Alverno College introduced her to Sisters Margaret Claire Rangel and Marie Elizabeth Pink, who were both on the faculty. Inspired by the sisters, Pat was a Tau Volunteer, serving first in Honduras in 1990 with Sister Rose Zander, and then in Kentucky in 1992 with Sister Leanne Herda.

In 2010, Pat learned that in Guatemala, there was great need for sewing machines on which housewives created handmade items they sold at market. She has been flying there annually ever since to deliver brand new sewing machines, as well as to check on a young family whose children she supports financially.

Pat became an associate two years ago. The four-and-a-half-hour drive from Rib Lake to Milwaukee is now routine for her. She enjoys staying with our sisters in Maryhill Convent, just two blocks from the motherhouse.

"I really clocked in to the Franciscan way of life," Pat said, "and I repeatedly return to Gandhi's saying, 'Live simply so that others may simply live.'"

To learn more about Associate Relationship with our community, contact Sister Rosemary Reier at rrreier@sssf.org



Pat's memories of her June 1985 service as squad leader for a medical unit in Okinawa, Japan, include the enormous mosquitoes that swarmed their camp.



Pat loves that she can still slip into her Naval uniform after more than 30 years away from the military.

volunteers

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Providing the Human Touch

Art, healing, and community are part of Tau Volunteer's journey

BY SARAH STEFANKO

Sarah Johnson discovered the School Sisters of St. Francis's Tau Volunteer program through the Catholic Volunteer Network after she completed her degree in social work at the State University of New York-Buffalo. She has been ministering at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in downtown Milwaukee, and living with a group of sisters on the city's southwest side since fall 2016.

"The first things that appealed to me about the Tau Volunteer Program were the uniqueness of the opportunity at the Cathedral, and living somewhere new," she said.

Sarah's work at the Cathedral began with serving at its Open Door Café, an outreach ministry that provides hot lunches, bag lunches, and hygiene kits each weekday to those in need. She now spends most of her time working with Cathedral Squared Enterprises, a women-focused nonprofit that transforms plastic bags into something new and beautiful.

"We cut the bags into loops, tie those together, and roll that into a ball of plastic yarn that we then crochet with," Sarah explained. "I lead workshops on the process for women in the program, manage the social media and web presence for it, and help sell our products at local festivals and markets."

Women who participate in the program have the opportunity to earn a small stipend for learning the process, and each artist receives 50 percent of the profit when one of her items sells.

SARAH STEFANKO has been an associate of the School Sisters of St. Francis for 11 years.

"I love that everything is so focused on healing, and giving people dignity," she said. "In surveys done with the guests of the Open Door Cafe, many people said that one reason they love coming for lunch, and come back, is that while they are here, they feel human. It hurts me that people don't feel human, and aren't treated as human, but I am so happy that they have a place where they know they are going to be treated like they matter."



BETTY LEWIS PHOTOS

Sarah helps women whose lives are in transition to transform plastic bags into something new and beautiful.

Sarah works with one of the participants in the Cathedral Squared Enterprises on a crocheted accessory.

"It's beautiful to watch the community that forms during these crochet workshops, and the mentorship that develops among the women," she continued. "

Those community bonds are something Sarah's supervisor, Shelly Roder, sees Sarah helping to create. "One of our artisans referred to Sarah as 'my little sister' the other day," Shelly said. "There's something very familial about her. She has a natural ability to connect with and support people." Shelly noted that this makes Sarah a wonderful addition to the Cathedral's program.

"A lot of women we work with are in transition: from divorce, the death of a loved one, a lost job, a lost home," Shelly continued. "The hardest part of those experiences is the way they impact relationships. Building kinship is the core of helping people heal, and Sarah embodies that."

Nurturing kinship within a living group is also part of the Tau Volunteer experience, and living in community with the School Sisters of St. Francis has been a blessing for Sarah.

"The idea of living with sisters scared me a little at first," she admits. "But it was also something I was looking for, something that would push me out of my comfort zone. From day one, the sisters accepted me exactly as I am. I love living with my sisters! We're a little family; we are always learning about each other and from each other."

She has learned a lot about herself, too. "This has been such a growing experience, personally and professionally," Sarah said. "I have done things I never would have dreamed of, and have met amazing people. When I compare the way I was when I first came to the way I am now, I see so many great transformations. Being a Tau Volunteer has changed the course of my life, and I am so glad for it."

"We had not considered a two year service term until Sarah asked if she could stay for a second year at the Cathedral," said Irene Perez, Tau Volunteer program



coordinator. "That opened a whole new door for us, as well as for Sarah. Sarah has made such a strong impact at her service site, encouraging other women to take new opportunities, step out of comfort zones and make a difference. I have experienced Sarah's growth into a strong, well-balanced, caring and community-engaging young woman, and that has been her personal gift to all of us."

Shelly has seen this change in Sarah, as well, and the effect it has on other people. "She has bloomed so much here! I love watching her discover her creative gifts, which she might not have known about before, and then use them to help empower these women."

Do you know a post-graduate woman who may be interested in sharing service, community, and spirituality with the School Sisters of St. Francis? Learn more from Tau Volunteer Coordinator Irene Perez at 414-385-5255 or iperez@sssf.org.

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Small Towns, Big Hearts

Sister Parishes Bridge 3,000 Miles

BY DONNA O'LOUGHLIN



The St. Patrick Parish mission team enjoys a Guatemala sunset.

With glad hearts and ever-flowing generosity, a significant number of parishioners of St. Patrick Church in the Minneapolis suburb of Hudson, Wisconsin, have been putting their faith into action by supporting missions in Latin America. Their story provides a humbling lesson on how God's love can move a congregation to personally bring education, medicine, the arts, and companionship to two communities in Guatemala: Yalpemech and Santa Apolonia, the location of Los Hogares Santa Maria de Guadalupe children's home.

By aligning with San José El Tesoro Parish in Yalpemech in 1998, St. Patrick's established a formal twinning relationship. They were guided by Sister Joannes Klas, who was ministering in Guatemala at the time, and the late Sister Bernadette Kalscheur, pastoral minister at St. Patrick's. Love and grace have

continued to grow since then, inviting new enthusiasts to the work, while retaining experienced volunteers.

A Different Kind of Vacation

Some parishioners have traveled to Guatemala on numerous occasions, using precious vacation time to help transform the lives of families there. Even while forgoing the comforts Americans are accustomed to when traveling, they are exhilarated by the gratitude of the Guatemalan people and the seeds of change being planted.

"I have been to our sister parish in Yalpemech five times over the last 10 years," said Claire Zajac, St. Patrick's parishioner and contact person for these expeditions. "These mission trips were one week long. On two of the trips, we also traveled to Santa Apolonia and visited the children's home there.

"The accommodations at the parish in Yalpemech are basic," Claire explained. We take up residence on the

DONNA O'LOUGHLIN is coordinator of Outreach Events for the School Sisters of St. Francis' United States Province.

church/convent grounds. The women sleep in the main convent building with the sisters, and the men sleep in an outbuilding on the grounds. Everyone has a story about finding a scorpion or tarantula. There are no hot showers, and we pitch in with preparing simple meals.”

Sister Parish Committee Chair Greg Young, M.D., has traveled just as often on mission in the Yalpemech region and once to Los Hogares. “During the first trip to Yalpemech, we were surprised to see such sustenance living—very meager huts. They have very little, and the infrastructure is minimal.”

Claire described in further detail how the villagers live. “The homes are cement blocks with one big room and an open fire in the middle for cooking.”

Love Comes in Many Packages

St. Patrick parishioners bring with them loads of items, depending on the focus of the mission trip, which varies, according to Claire. When medical personnel, like Greg, are among the group, they open and run a clinic for the villagers, who see government doctors very infrequently. Besides medical care, the children receive dental supplies, eye glasses, basic medicines and vitamins.

Greg hopes that more healthcare professionals will take an interest in supporting these types of missions. “I am called with medical talents to serve those in need and to spread the word among all my fellow parishioners that there are people in need for whom we can make a difference,” he said.

“Some of our parish mission trips have focused on education and companionship,” said Claire. “We have sent high school and college students to the village to work at the parish day care center and tutor the children in English, as well as an art teacher and musicians to give instruction.”

Youth also benefit from a scholarship program begun eight years ago by benefactors at St. Patrick Church. Directing the scholarship program is Rick Huebsch, who was excited to report that the list of students and

sponsors has quickly grown from four to 30. “St. Patrick’s has been able to recruit 25-30 families per year to each sponsor a student. A couple of families sponsor two students.”

These scholarships help students pay for 50 percent of tuition, while the students’ families cover the other half. “Sister Joannes was insistent that the students pay for at least 50 percent, so that they would value the education they received and feel the sense of earning it,” he said.

The awards go toward middle and high school tuition, vocational training, junior career diplomas, and occasionally a university education. Sponsorships are typically \$360 per year per student. Rick estimates that in the eight years since the scholarship program’s inception, St. Patrick’s families have given \$50,000 to 120 students in Yalpemech.

“One key to the scholarship program is the financial administration provided by the School Sisters of St. Francis, not by St. Patrick’s,” Rick explained. “For the past few years, Special Appeals Administrator Catherine Alexander has coordinated this. Each family contributes sponsorship dollars directly to the International Office of Mission Advancement, which then directs the pool of sponsorship money to the appropriate sister parish accounts in Guatemala.”

“It is such a pleasure to work with Rick and the many others from St. Patrick Parish,” Catherine said. “This group is an excellent model of mutuality for other parish groups looking to make a difference.”

Cultural and Age Barriers? No problem

Clearly, the connection to our sisters has been key to keeping up the twinning parish relationship’s success. “Sister Bernadette traveled abroad many times with us,” Claire said.

“Sister Joannes was always present to host us in Yalpemech before she returned to live in the United States last year. She often translated for us, too. On most trips, we have a Spanish speaker and occasionally have hired a translator to accompany us.



Dr. Greg Young's check-ups are his offering to God and God's children.



St. Patrick Parish pastor Father John Gerritts performs a sacramental anointing during a home visit in Yalpemech.

"Very few people in Yalpemech or Santa Apolonia speak English, so communicating is a challenge," Claire continued. "In Yalpemech, the indigenous people speak a form of Mayan called Q'che and might not speak Spanish at all. There is a lot of sign language and smiling in order to make friends and get comfortable with each other. Mass is said in Spanish."

Greg said, "We have daily prayers and Masses there that help us connect in our universal spiritual life."

Claire noted the "vibrant faith life" of Guatemalan families. "They love coming together to worship and appreciate everything the Church has to offer them. In the midst of all of this are the sisters, who are the glue. The sisters serve this community selflessly."

Father John Gerritts, pastor of St. Patrick's, has made several trips to Guatemala, and most recently returned in February.

"No one returns from visiting Guatemala unchanged," Father John said. "The relationship helps all to realize that we are a part of a universal church, and while we may have significant needs of our own, we must help others who have needs even greater than our own."

Committed to deepening his own children's understanding of God's purpose for them, Greg has had his kids volunteer alongside him numerous times. His son Isaac (now 18 years old) first joined his dad when he was only 8 years of age. Daughters Ella and Kira have also given years of service there.

"Rick has brought his family, too" said Claire. "Kids connect across culture and language barriers."

Gratitude All Around

Villagers receive all these gifts in a spirit of gratitude. From scholarship recipients come "impassioned thank you notes," according to Rick. "Many of them are young women who would not be able to go to school beyond eighth grade. Several sponsored students have put their education to work locally in the village, including as teachers and accountants. They want to be able to be successful enough with their degree to sponsor other young students."

Their U.S. friends dream of the same for them and feel blessed to know them. Claire said. "I get more from our sister parish activities than I ever give away. We all want the same thing for all the children there: good health, good education, good economic opportunities. I hope the children will be able to attain these and continue to live joyful lives the way their parents and grandparents have. I believe the School Sisters of St. Francis are making a difference in their lives, and I am grateful to have experienced it."

To learn how your parish can become a twinning parish, please contact Catherine Alexander of the International Office of Mission Advancement Office at 414-385-5343 or calexander@sssf.org.

SISTERS ELECT NEW INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAM

The School Sisters of St. Francis elected a new International Leadership Team during the congregation's General Assembly, held in February at the Nirjhari Conference and Study Centre at Carmelaram, in Bangalore, India.

Sister Mary Diez from the United States Province was re-elected as the congregation's President. Received into the community in 1963, she served many years as a teacher at Alverno College in Milwaukee. Supporting Sister Mary will be:

First Vice President: Sister Tresa Abraham Kizhakeparambil from St. Francis Province, North India. Received into the community in 1980, she served as the Provincial of St. Francis Province and currently is a community coordinator and teaches at Mother Alexia Convent School.

Second Vice President: Sister Barbara Kraemer from the United States Province. Received in 1960, she was a Vice President of the Congregation and Provincial of the United States Province; she currently teaches at DePaul University in Chicago.

Third Vice President: Sister Lucy Kalapurackel from the Assisi Province, South India. Received into the community in 1984, she is a nurse by profession, served as the Provincial of Assisi Province, and currently works as a community coordinator.

The sisters will begin their four-year term in office on July 1.



A RECEPTION OF GRATITUDE

On Sunday, November 19, 85 donors and friends attended the International Office of Mission Advancement's donor appreciation brunch held at St. Joseph Center in Milwaukee. The event was a celebration of all the many individuals, foundations, business and religious orders who support our international mission with their prayers and financial support.

The morning began with a liturgy with our sisters, donors and international leadership team, then moved on to a delicious brunch and program. A beautiful slideshow presentation that highlighted the more than 30 different ministries funded this past fiscal year was presented to our special guests to show how their generous support continues to make a forever difference in countless lives.



To thank them for their faithful support, each guest was presented with a gratitude plate, handmade by School Sisters of St. Francis and staff, along with a take home container of our signature apricot cookies. We plan to continue this tradition every November. We hope you can join us for next year's celebration as we work together to bring God's love to all we serve. We are so very grateful for your partnership in our mission!



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When Magnolias Bloom

At evening the bees
fly dizzily home
from pink all-day picnics
buzzing in languages
learned from magnolia tongues.

—Sister Irene Zimmerman