

Volume 29, No. 1
Spring/Summer 2011

Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania

Journeys



Graces of a
Desert Experience

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania



SSJ Leadership Team (l-r): Moira Sullivan, SSJ;
Mary Ellen Dwyer, SSJ; Joyce Lowrey, SSJ.

From the Leadership Team

This has truly been a year of graced experiences for all of us as we bring to a close the celebration of our 150th anniversary in the Erie Diocese. For me, personally, it also brings to a close the two terms I have served in leadership for our Congregation, a graced experience for which I am most thankful. In this issue, Sr. Nancy Fischer shares a retrospective of our celebrations as we connected and re-connected with so many of you, and made new friends along the way.

You're invited to share in the graced experiences of Sister Rosemary O'Brien while on sabbatical in the desert southwest. Though it is one woman's story, as Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, we were taught that *wherever one of us goes, we all are*. Sister Rosemary's presence among the Native Americans and subsequently among people she presently ministers, represents all Sisters of St. Joseph... *being and acting as one*.

We feature eight Jubilarians in this issue who, through their collective 475 years of ministry, have been graced by those they have served. Each of them, individually, has represented our collective presence to God's people. Through them and throughout their years of service, you have made lasting impressions on us. We are blessed and grateful.

We are fortunate that our mission has attracted several non-vowed, lay partners who choose to work for our Congregation and in our sponsored ministries. These relationships are invaluable and give us confidence in the future of our mission of *unity of neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God*.

In July, it becomes where thousands of us go, we all are, as Sisters and Associates gather in St. Louis for the U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph national event. The theme, *Zeal for Healing the Neighborhood of God's Sacred Universe*, will be the focus throughout our days together as we seek to enflame our own zeal. Reflecting on the times and rooted in the gospel, we will move together in prayer and celebration, exploring the essential and healing power of our mission of active, inclusive love in the neighborhood of the universe. We will also gather peacefully for a public witness to call attention to the serious issue of human trafficking. Sr. Mary Claire Kennedy educates us about this topic in this issue.

As we close our 150th anniversary, we are, as Fr. Marius Nepper, SJ once described us, "standing on tiptoe, eyes alert, ears attentive, sleeves rolled up" ready to serve the dear neighbor for years to come.

We invite your feedback and comments on this issue of *Journeys*. Please send an email to prdir@ssjerie.org or feel free to send a note in the enclosed envelope.

God's blessings,

Mary Ellen Dwyer, SSJ

On behalf of the Leadership Team

A REFLECTION ON OUR 150TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

by Nancy Fischer, SSJ

I will never forget that feeling of pride as I watched Sisters and Associates in our Congregation process into St. Peter's Cathedral to officially begin our 150th anniversary celebration. Led by our Leadership Team, they came forward into a church filled with family and friends and joined in a liturgy led by Bishop Donald Trautman, STD, SSL. The excellent music, provided by Sr. Lucille DeStefano, SSJ, Bill Herring, and many others, filled the Cathedral with a "joyful noise" that echoed through the pillars. Bishop Trautman's homily reminded us that the courage of Mother Agnes Spencer and her four companions, together with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, led to countless ministries spanning 150 years and 13 counties. Sister Mary Ellen

Dwyer's sentiments of gratitude were met with words of appreciation from Bishop Trautman and led to a spontaneous standing ovation from those present. The applause was overwhelming and we felt the deep appreciation for the work this Congregation has done. The reception that followed at the Bayfront Convention Center was enhanced by a beautiful spring day complete with sail boats passing by on the bay, as though placed there for our enjoyment. I wondered if anything else could top this and "dayenu," the Greek word meaning "it would have been enough," came to mind.

But the beginning would not be the end. Over the course of the next year, we were blessed with many gatherings enabling us to touch the past and be propelled into our future. In June, local politicians graced our home as they joined us for brunch and shared "proclamations" reminding us that God, working through our Sisters, had not only impacted the life of the Church, but also the city and surrounding areas in the Diocese. That same day, Bishop Trautman blessed our new Administration building. As we gathered, we thanked God for this gift and prayed that it might enhance our ability to bring the Gospel to those we serve.

The celebrations throughout the 13 counties of the Diocese were all we hoped they would be. Family, friends, former co-workers, those we served, and those we served with joined us for prayer, liturgy, food and companionship. In Ridgway and Bradford, students made congratulations cards that touched our hearts with their honest and sincere messages. We will long remember

the kind words of Fr. Gramata at St. Agatha's and Fr. Galina in Bradford. We encountered former students and others who asked about the teachers who had long ago influenced their lives and their faith.

The joy we experienced in welcoming home former members filled our conversations and laughter permeated our home to a degree that Fr. Jerry Simmons said he had never before heard at

the Community Living Center. Others joined us in celebration at Villa Maria Academy to enjoy music and popcorn at two Bruce Morton Wright Concerts. Our Circle of Friends celebration brought us together with family, friends, benefactors and

co-workers for liturgy, a picnic, duck races and to try our skills at "Boogie Bodies!" Amy

Roloff, star of the Learning Channel's, *Little People, Big World* joined us at our Spirit of Courage dinner to honor those whose courageous lives inspire others. We were honored

in March at the dedication of Villa Maria Academy's new Chapel and Conference Room where we also announced a legacy gift to the Academy to demonstrate our continued commitment to Catholic education for young women, our earliest ministry in the area. With a few events still to come, we gathered on May 1, the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, to formally close the celebration. We shared memories, popcorn and a picnic while we viewed the year in pictures. Subsequently, we celebrated with other women religious from the Diocese, were honored by students from Villa Maria Elementary School at an Erie Art Museum event and re-connected with friends in Clearfield County. As this issue reaches you, we will be celebrating our anniversary and the 50th anniversary of Notre Dame School with friends in Mercer County, the last of our gatherings.

As I look back, I am again reminded that this jubilee event was not about any one of us, but rather the collective ministry of all of us. It was about the generosity of a God who cared so much about the people of Northwestern Pennsylvania that for 150 years he called our Sisters to meet the needs of the "era and area." For what we can see now, it does not appear that God is finished. I hope I am still around to celebrate the 175th.



With this article, we begin a series about the valuable relationships the Sisters of St. Joseph have with non-vowed, lay partners in ministry. First we'll examine how these collaborations have evolved and their increasing importance to the Sisters' mission. The next issue of Journeys will introduce you to some of the Sisters' lay partners in ministry and experience how they are carrying the SSJ mission torch.

Until about ten years ago, you would have always found a Sister of St. Joseph in the CEO's chair at Saint Vincent Health Center in Erie (though unlikely she would sit for long if there was hospital work to be done!) In addition, it was Sisters conducting the business and administrative functions of the Congregation and serving as principals and deans of its schools. That began to change in 2000 when the first non-vowed, or lay persons, were hired to serve the Congregation as Director of Communications and Director of Finance. Since then, lay partners have joined the staff as Development Director, Associate Co-Directors, Administrative Assistant, CFO, and Human Resources Manager.

Partnering in mission with non-vowed persons is nothing new to the Sisters of St. Joseph; such collaborations are traceable to the Congregation's earliest days in 17th century France. With the aid of Father Jean Pierre Médaille, a Jesuit missionary and spiritual director, six women founded the Sisters of St. Joseph with determination to join together to more closely follow Christ. Fr. Médaille envisioned a collaborative effort of vowed and non-vowed religious promoting unity, reconciliation and service.

Years later, the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) reinforced Fr. Médaille's vision of lay associates as part of a religious extended family when it directed religious to "...hold lay apostolic works in high regard and...help in promoting them in accordance with the spirit and rules of their institute." (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, ch. V, no. 25; p. 791). That decree lent itself to the establishment of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania's Associate Program in 1982 for non-vowed Christian men and women to share in the mission and spirituality of the Sisters. Presently, there are 237 SSJ Associates in the Erie Diocese.

Sisters are increasingly employing lay partners in leadership positions in sponsored ministries (see box). In 2001, C. Angela Bontempo became the first non-vowed President and COO of Saint Vincent Health Center, one of the Congregation's sponsored ministries. In recommending Bontempo, Catherine Manning, SSJ, then president and CEO of Saint Vincent Health System, the hospital's parent organization, recognized the

important role of lay people. She referred to Catholic lay people as being very capable of carrying on the Catholic tradition and said they are blessed by the Holy Spirit just as much as those who belong to religious orders.

Religious congregations throughout the world are seeking lay professionals to head ministries and serve in staff positions; the trend is not unique to Northwestern Pennsylvania. At the time of Bontempo's hiring, Sister Catherine noted that more and more lay people were leading Catholic Hospitals. Within the St. Joseph Health System – a system of 15 hospitals, various medical groups,

Partners in Ministry:

Home Health and Hospice sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph in Orange, California, almost all of the key positions are held by laity. Following Sr. Catherine's retirement in 2002, Bontempo was named CEO of Saint Vincent Health System, a role she fulfilled until her retirement in 2010 when Scott Whalen, Ph.D. was named CEO, and became the first male lay person to head the ministry.

Beyond healthcare ministries, the Sisters of St. Joseph in Boston, for example, employ partners in education ministries serving as President of Regis College in Weston, MA; as Head of School for its Montessori Schools; and Head of School at Fontbonne Academy in Milton, MA. In an article titled, *From C.E.O. to Mission Leader* (*America Magazine*, July 18, 2005), John O. Mudd, senior vice-president of Providence Services, Spokane, WA and

chair of the board of trustees of Ascension Health, the nation's largest Catholic health care system, states that forty years ago, most of the presidents of Catholic Hospitals in the United States were Catholic women religious. Today, those hospitals are nearly all led by lay people.

Other SSJ sponsored institutions have employed lay persons in leadership positions. Geri Cicchetti served as President and Cynthia Martone as Principal at Villa Maria Academy. Damon Finazzo is currently in his second year as Principal of Villa Maria Elementary School and, most recently,

SPONSORSHIP (Canon Law Society)

Sponsorship of a recognized institution or ministry is a formal relationship between a Catholic organization (Sisters of St. Joseph) and a legally formed entity entered into for the sake of promoting and sustaining the Church's mission in the world. Through sponsorship, the Sisters of St. Joseph lend their name and Catholic identity to a ministry, the most tangible manifestation of the Sisters' gift to the Church and the people of God.

SSJ Sponsored Ministries:

Saint Vincent Health System
Saint Mary's Home of Erie
Villa Maria Elementary School
Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network
St. Patrick Haven
St. James Haven

Rosmari Graham was hired as Executive Director of the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network. Sister Phyllis McCracken, SSJ continues to serve as President and CEO of Saint Mary's Home of Erie, but lay persons, including Audrey Urban, Administrator of Saint Mary's at Asbury Ridge, serve in other key positions.

SSJ Associates are the Administrators of both St. James Haven and St. Patrick Haven.

A number of factors contribute to this trend. The declining number of Sisters and their advancing age minimizes the number of available Sisters with the highly-specialized education and experience needed for these positions. Also, Vatican II brought increased involvement of the laity and an abundance of new opportunities for Sisters in social service areas including ministries serving women, children, the poor, and missions abroad. These new opportunities allowed Sisters to respond to the dear neighbor more directly, an important component of apostolic ministry.

Despite declining numbers and advancing age, men and women religious can be found starting new ministries among the most desperate and forgotten of peoples: immigrants, gang members, the homeless, the mentally ill, persons with HIV/AIDS, and so on. Their life commitment not only supports but

In Mudd's article, he recognizes the uncertainty in knowing what the success will be in passing on the heart and soul of these ministries. That underscores the importance for sponsoring congregations and lay leaders to ask themselves whether they can be confident that a generation from now its Catholic ministries will still know where they came from and why they exist. That question must be at the forefront as the Sisters seek the right persons to further the mission.

For the Sisters of St. Joseph, mission is about the charism (see box) and great effort is put forth to ensure that lay persons who are hired have a sense of both the mission and the charism. "The gift, or charism, that has been identified publicly by a particular group of (vowed) women, is also in the hearts of many others who don't even know it," said Rosemary O'Brien, SSJ. Though becoming an Associate of the Sisters of St. Joseph is not a requirement, it seems no coincidence that many employees either are – or become – SSJ Associates.

The emerging concept of lay leaders in ministry and staff positions presents challenges. Mudd says that the challenge for

Charism

The word "charism" owes its use in religious language to St. Paul. "It is a supernatural gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit for building up the body of Christ. A charism is a gift which has its source in the charis – grace or favor – of God and which is destined 'for the common good' (1 Cor 12: 7)."

W. Harrington, *Charism*, in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A. Lane (editors), 1987.

carrying the mission torch

by Stephanie Hall Cabelof, SSJA

also encourages a deep availability to serve Christ in the poorest of the poor. (www.oblatevocations.com/news_010610.html)

What does it mean for the future of the mission – uniting neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God, without distinction – as lay partners assume more of these leadership positions? A Sister understands the importance of the mission. Will a non-vowed, lay person understand as well? The move to these partnerships didn't come without concern for the Congregation.

"It was a tremendous step in our history," said Ricarda Vincent, SSJ who, as past President of the Sisters of St. Joseph, was in office when the first non-vowed persons were hired to staff positions. "Though the Congregation had mandated this, it was nonetheless a risky step. It was imperative that whoever we hired would reflect the mission of the organization and the spirit of Fr. Médaille. In addition to the usual job qualifications, would we be able to discern through the interview process someone who would embrace our charism? That needed to be evident to us. Ultimately, God and the Holy Spirit would bring us together with the right persons."

the sponsoring Congregations as well as those in leadership is to reinforce the institutions as both Catholic and excellent. For the Congregation, the challenge is to find the right persons and trust they will embody the mission and the charism in their work. Congregations realize that for a sponsored institution to continue responding to needs, it has to remain sustainable. The leaders of these institutions have to be at the forefront of their fields in terms of knowledge, depth of experience, current trends, funding opportunities, effective stewardship and regulations. He or she must have expertise in all these areas and have a sense of mission as well. Without mission, it won't work.

Lay partners are challenged to successfully manage the operations of the ministry, or fulfill the responsibilities of a position, while understanding and embracing the language and nuances of the Sisters and ensure that the SSJ mission remains at the heart of what they are doing. Mudd points out that lay leaders are increasingly aware that they cannot think of themselves solely as leading businesses while leaving to the Sisters the mission aspects of the work. It brings a whole new set of responsibilities to their positions.

Continued on page 15

Jubilee Joy!



Bernardine Pais, SSJ
75 years

Ministry Highlights: Sister Bernardine ministered in education for 34 years. She taught at St. John School, Erie; St. Peter Cathedral School, Erie; St. Mary's School, Reynoldsville; St. Bernard School, Bradford; and Holy Rosary School, Johnsonburg. She also served as principal at Sacred Heart School in Erie. Sister Bernardine continues in active ministry serving as resident floor supervisor at Saint Mary's Home of Erie.

"I first heard the call to religious life when I was in Theresa Neumann's room (in Germany) as she was undergoing the stigmata and a voice seemed to whisper that I should be a nun."



Ann Amen, SSJ
60 years

Ministry Highlights: Sister Ann served at Villa Maria College as professor, guidance director, Sociology Department Head and Chairperson of the Division of Human Behavior. In 1972, she took 8 students on a mission trip to Mexico. She spent nearly 20 years in Australia where she co-founded *Parish Care and Concern* and later, as Director of Parish Social Ministry for Catholic Charities, helped establish the program in 55 parishes and 7 missions in the Erie Diocese. She published *Directory of Social Services in Twelve Counties*, and wrote *Jumpstart Your Parish Social Ministry with Parish Care and Concern*, which has been sold in numerous countries and throughout the United States. In 2006, she wrote *Beyond My Dreams*, a book about her life in ministry.



Leonella Gingenbach, SSJ
60 years

Sister Leonella credits her loving family, and the example of the Sisters of St. Joseph during her 16 years of education, as enabling her to make the decision to freely and joyfully respond to God's call to religious life.

Ministry Highlights: Sister Leonella taught at Holy Rosary School, Erie; St. Bernard's, Bradford; and Villa Maria Elementary School in Erie before spending 20 years as Office Manager and Director of Patient Accounts at Saint Vincent Health Center. She also served as Administrative Assistant and Personnel Director at Spencer Hospital, Meadville for seven years. She was General Superior of the Congregation for eight years which was followed by service in the Congregation's Finance Office and Prayer Ministry.

"I was called to religious life in 1951 after working as a secretary for four and a half years. During those years, I went to mass and communion daily and I believe it was during this time that I heard the call."

Ministry Highlights: Sister Mary Carol taught at St. John, St. Andrew, St. Patrick and St. Joseph Schools in Erie. She was also Principal at St. Joseph School. She also taught at St. Leo's High School, Ridgway; St. Francis High School, Clearfield; St. Bernard's in Bradford; St. Mary's School, Reynoldsville; Seton School, Meadville where she was also librarian; and St. Agatha School in Meadville where she was also rectory clerk. She is a former Principal of St. Brigid's School in Meadville. She also served as a clerk at Saint Vincent Hospital. She currently serves as the Congregation's librarian.



Mary Carol Hoke, SSJ
60 years



"The inspiration and dedication of the Sisters who ministered at St. Bernard High School in Bradford, PA motivated me to listen to the call of the Spirit, even though I resisted at times."

Ministry Highlights: Sister Maria ministered as a teacher aide at Villa Maria Elementary School before teaching at both Sacred Heart and Blessed Sacrament Schools in Erie. She was Licensed as a Nursing Home Administrator by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and ministered at Saint Mary's Home of Erie for nearly 30 years in the positions of secretary, payroll clerk, business manager, assistant administrator and as Administrator for 17 of those years. She presently serves at the Saint Vincent Women's Center.

Maria Onuffer, SSJ
60 years

"The seed of my vocation was watered by a dear friend of my mother who frequently visited our home."

Ministry Highlights: In her service to the Erie Diocese, Sister Barbara Ann was an RN at Saint Vincent Health Center; Principal at Spirit of Christ School; teacher and Principal at St. Ann School, Erie. She also taught at St. John the Baptist School in Erie; served as a housemother at St. Joseph Home for Children, Erie; taught at St. Patrick and St. Andrew Schools, Erie. She also served at St. Leo Parish, Ridgway, where she taught and provided music instruction.



Barbara Ann Zakutney, SSJ
60 years

"I heard the call to religious life when, as a student at Clarion University, I would ride the bus from school to Ridgway. I met Sr. Teresina, SSJ on the bus as she was traveling to her home in Bradford. She told me about the Sisters of St. Joseph. She impressed me very much as she explained religious life to me."

Ministry Highlights: Sister Michele taught elementary and secondary education at St. Andrew's, St. John's, Villa Maria Elementary School and Villa Maria Academy in Erie. She also taught at Notre Dame School in Sharon, PA and Elk County Christian School in St. Mary's, PA. She spent a year as Religious Education Coordinator at St. Jude Parish after which she became a Theology Professor at Villa Maria College. In the early days of the SSJ Associate program, she served as its Director for three years. Currently, Sister Michele ministers as a Theology Professor at Gannon University and for the Erie Diaconate Program. She also serves in a Presence Ministry with seniors at Villa Maria Apartments and is on the Board of HANDS.



Michele Healy, SSJ
50 years

"I resisted the call to religious life but came to a point in my life where I knew I could best use my gifts as part of a larger family, in this instance as a member of the SSJs. The connections in my first two years of college with Sr. Lawrence, and several other young women who were seeking to know God's path for them, resulted in my decision to enter."

Ministry Highlights: Sister Moira's distinguished ministry career in education includes teaching at Villa Maria Elementary School, Our Lady's Christian School, St. Patrick and Sacred Heart Schools in Erie as well as St. Agatha School in Meadville. She also taught and served as Principal at Villa Maria Academy for 18 years. She ministered at the Regional Cancer Center in Erie for 19 years as chaplain, in social service and as a volunteer coordinator. Sister Moira also served her Congregation as Director of Communications and presently serves as one of three members of the Congregation Leadership Team. She also serves on the Board of Erie Catholic Preparatory High School (Villa-Prep).



Moira Sullivan, SSJ
50 years

Welcome to Tohatchi, New Mexico (a Navajo word meaning “where the water is scratched out.”) It was my first Sunday at the small mission church of Saint Mary’s and I was sitting alone and feeling disconnected as the Navajo community gathered for the Liturgy of the Word and Communion Service. The people acknowledged me with a nod or smile, but they were speaking to each other in a language I didn’t understand. My feeling of isolation was real, and I longed for some personal connection. Just before the distribution of Communion, a small Native American boy sitting at the other end of the pew, left the adults he was with and slid toward me. This sensitive child, without a word or a look, slipped in front of me and just stood there quietly. I placed my hands on his shoulders and appreciated his gift of presence. How would I have known that being graced by the presence of these people would lead me to a world of new experiences and encounters where God’s faces are many. Could I ever have imagined “the something new” that God was offering me at that moment?



What brought me to Tohatchi? It was 2008. . . the year of my Golden Jubilee celebrating 50 years as a Sister of St. Joseph. It was also the year of standing on the threshold of something new in my life. Having just completed four years of ministry in Congregational leadership, I asked God: Now what? There was nothing on the immediate horizon, and with an empty page before me, I began some serious soul searching. This was a gift of time and an opportunity to pursue my dream of spending time in a different culture and experiencing the Native American way of life and spirituality. Quite miraculously, contacts happened and doors opened and this dream became a reality. On January 4, 2008, I boarded a plane for New Mexico and the Gallup Diocese where I would spend the next eight weeks “on mission” with the Navajo and Zuni Native Americans, and the women and men religious ‘stationed’ at each of the missions.

For me, this would be a journey of faith. I landed in Albuquerque where I knew no one and had no itinerary or plans of what I would be doing or where I would be staying. For the next eight weeks, I would depend on others who graciously welcomed me and guided me through this mini-sabbath experience.

A minority among people of Navajo, Zuni, and Hispanic cultures, I moved from one mission to another, adapting to their simple life styles. Without enough time in each place to plant roots or nurture relationships, I sensed what those in ‘exile’ must feel... reoriented, redirected, decentered... I also experienced the frustration of language barriers and the importance of being welcomed and welcoming. The words of the Consensus Statement

of the Sisters of St. Joseph resonated within me....a call to openness and inclusivity:

“Stimulated by the Holy Spirit of love . . . the Sister of Saint Joseph moves always toward profound love of God and love of neighbor without distinction from whom she does not separate herself . . .”

It was a time of deepening self awareness regarding my lifestyle and responses to life. The harsh, stark, beautiful desert, the expansive open sky, the incredible rock formations provided the backdrop for the native people and missionaries who were my teachers. Those who did not vow poverty challenged my lifestyle of vowed poverty. I remember the week I spent in Klagetoh, a remote mission accessible by dirt roads. In the winter months, these muddy, deeply rutted roads made it impossible to travel by car. One very early morning, I met a woman who came to the mission to wait for a ride into town. She had walked eight miles through fields that morning before dawn, and told me that she feared the howling coyotes. Most of the native women I met were strong and weathered, and looked older than their years. While at St. Michael’s Mission in Arizona, I met a middle-aged Native

graces of



American woman who came to the door. She walked ten miles to sell a weaving she had just completed. She needed money for her next meal. I wondered how I would survive in such an environment.

Their lives, rich in hospitality and reverence for traditions and rituals, art, beauty, and the earth are guided by the Navajo standard of behavior “to walk in beauty.” This is a very complex idea that lies at the heart of their life in the world—order, harmony, blessedness, everything that is good and to which everyone and

everything strives. This idea is mirrored in our spiritual sayings (Maxims of Perfection):

Love and strive after, especially, the interior gentleness of your soul, living in peace and in the tranquility of all your passions, and outwardly doing all things without over-eagerness... (60)

Never go ahead of grace by an imprudent eagerness, but quietly await its movements, and, when it comes to you, go along with it with great gentleness, humility, fidelity and courage. (84)

Their ceremonial life is devoted to what our culture might call healing. For the Navajo, healing means putting the world right. And this focus of Jesus' mission is embraced by the Sisters of St. Joseph: "That all may be one, as you, Father are in me and I in you. I pray that they may be one in us." (John 17:21) Their language reflects their view that things are constantly undergoing processes of transformation and that the essence of life and being is movement. The Zuni Pueblo people believe that, "Everyone has a role. No one, no matter what, is left behind. That is and always has been, the Zuni Way."



The hermitage, high above Gallup, New Mexico.

emptying love of Jesus. And the question continues to challenge—how much can you leave behind? Perhaps it means leaving non-essentials behind in order to be radically available...to God and to the dear neighbor I meet every day.

The graces of the desert experience continued to unfold

when I returned home to Erie. For certain, I was a different person with a much wider perspective on reality, and a deeper understanding of my call to live as a Sister of St. Joseph, and our mission of unity and reconciliation. Having found life and energy in the multicultural settings of the southwest, I was drawn even more to minister among the people in Erie... especially those marginalized by economics and politics... the struggling poor and persons who are refugees. And once again, a door opened.

My new ministry as the Pastoral Associate/Evangelization at St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Church in Erie gave me the opportunity to encounter people of diverse backgrounds and cultures. First among them was being a part of the process to unite two faith communities.

a desert experience

by Rosemary O'Brien, SSJ

The spiritual thrust of these traditions of unity, respect and healing connect deeply with my spiritual tradition as a Sister of St. Joseph. We actively promote unity and reconciliation with and among people and the earth and celebrate the oneness of all creation. Inspired by our SSJ tradition of always moving toward profound love of God and the 'dear neighbor,' my desire to be more attentive and open to God's Spirit as modeled in Mary's life became more alive. I depended on this Spirit to lead me to the next step on this journey in the desert. My journal entries throughout this time, and especially when I lived in a hermitage high above Gallup, NM, reflect the call to transformation through letting go. One of my 'desert' questions became: "How much can you leave behind?" after I read these words: (David Rensberger – Weavings 6/2001)

"The desert so sparse and desolate encourages and in fact requires us to strip off all that is non essential about ourselves so that in the end we realize that "only one thing is necessary." (Luke 10:42)

Words of our Constitutions challenge me to live the self-

St. Mary's Parish (1847) with deep German roots and Immaculate Conception Parish, founded in 1947 to serve African American Catholics became one in September 2009. Throughout the process, I witnessed the courage and faith of members of both communities as they struggled with the challenges of letting go of the familiar to allow something new to be born. I am now blessed to share a ministry of presence with this new community of faith, as we strive to be welcoming and a beacon of hope to those who live and work in the center city neighborhood.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops' pastoral statement (Nov. 15, 2000) "Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity" inspired me to be more attentive to seeing/meeting God in each person. I met God in the sensitivity of Pedro, a migrant worker who, in gratitude for assistance we were able to offer him, appeared at Mass one Sunday with a rose for the Blessed Mother, and one for me, along with a small box of chocolates. I met God in the joy of the Nepal family who, despite the hardships familiar to

Continued on page 14

Mother Agnes Spencer, SSJ

Legacy Society Luncheon

The Mother Agnes Spencer, SSJ Legacy Society, named for the Congregation's foundress, is an association of forward thinking individuals who share a commitment to advancing the mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Estate gifts are an opportunity for *you* to make a lasting impression. Your gift enables us to continue being responsive and strategic in making the world a better place for all.



2011 Inductees

Paul L. Daley+

Leo I. Davis+

Rita I. Finigan+

Carolyn Ann Gustafson

Robert Mace, Jr., Th. M.

Mary M. (Peg) McConnell, SSJA+

Constance Nowak+

+Denotes deceased.



Sister Anastasia Valimont, SSJ with Carolyn Gustafson, one of this year's inductees.

We are honored to recognize our legacy benefactors. All members of the society are invited to a special annual luncheon in recognition of their generosity. At the luncheon, they have an opportunity to learn about the latest developments and happenings at the Sisters of St. Joseph and our ministries. Guests can also view the donor appreciation display where names of legacy benefactors, who agree to be recognized, are listed.

If you have named the Sisters of St. Joseph in your estate plans, or are planning to do so, we would like to welcome you into the Mother Agnes Spencer, SSJ Legacy Society. As a member, you:

- Leave a personal legacy
- Help continue the Sisters of St. Joseph mission by contributing to the future
- Establish financial benefits for you and your family
- Attend special events



Sister Mary Alice Reed (center) with Pat Quirk (left) and Mary Margaret Scypinski.

For more information about planned and estate giving contact our Development Office at (814) 836-4202 or kristina.huber@ssjerie.org

Your personal consultation will be held in strict confidence and without obligation.



LASTING IMPRESSIONS

2010-2011 SSJ Appeal

During this milestone year, we have uncovered many wonderful tidbits about our history and we have been energized to hear from so many of you who want to share stories about our Sisters. We are touched to hear so many of you talk about the lasting impressions our Sisters have made. The reality is that *you* have made the impression upon us.

We strive to be good stewards of your gifts by living simply and investing wisely. We are fortunate to be able to continue ministering and supporting the organizations who share our mission of unity.

We are grateful for you and the many people who support us through friendship, prayer and gifts. We are humbled by all those who have made an impression on us.

Thank you.



A simple way to give...



If you have a smart phone, scan this QR code to give a gift to the Sisters of St. Joseph. To download a free QR code scanner visit:

www.mobile-barcodes.com/qr-code-software/

*Please consider a gift to the SSJ Annual Fund.
Your support makes a difference.*

- **Sisters in Ministry** - helps Sisters who serve in ministries and receive little or no compensation, thus saving thousands of dollars for the communities in which they live and work.
- **Sisters' Benevolent Care** - helps Sisters who are unable to minister because of medical limitations. For decades, these women earned minimal wages without retirement benefits. Many continue to minister through prayer and spiritual direction - Sisters never really retire!
- **Ministry Support** - helps SSJ sponsored ministries and other organizations that reflect our mission.

The Sisters of St. Joseph designation as a Diocesan congregation signifies a spiritual and ministerial relationship with the Diocese of Erie. The Congregation is responsible for supporting itself.

15TH ANNUAL SSJ SPIRIT OF COURAGE



Since 1997, we have recognized nearly 70 people for their inspirational spirit of courage. Each fall, we recognize our newest honorees and share their stories at a special dinner.

Please join us

Tuesday, October 4, 2011

Individual dinner tickets \$35

(You must RSVP to guarantee seating)

Sponsorship Opportunities

PARTNER ~ \$10,000

(2 Honoree tables and 2 personal tables)

PATRON ~ \$5,000

(2 Honoree tables and a personal table)

BENEFACTOR ~ \$2,500

(1 Honoree table and a personal table)

SUBSCRIBER ~ \$1,000

(One table)

DONOR ~ up to \$999

Please submit sponsorship gift payment or pledge by September 2, 2011

2011 Honorees will be announced in early July.

Nominations are accepted throughout the year.

The application may be completed online at:

www.ssjerie.org

or

mail a nomination to:
SSJ Spirit of Courage
c/o Sisters of St. Joseph
5031 West Ridge Road
Erie, PA 16506



by Mary Claire Kennedy, SSJ

When members of the U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph gather for national events, they are invited to join in a corporate public witness or vigil. This allows for Sisters of St. Joseph from across the country to *be and to act as one* in bringing attention to issues of global and national importance. This tradition will continue in July when thousands of Sisters and Associates will meet in St. Louis and bring attention to the issue of human trafficking and slavery.

Although it is estimated that there are 27 million people in the world living in slavery, the issue has only gained widespread attention in the last 10-15 years. Most significantly, the United States government enacted the Trafficking Victim Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000 and amended and strengthened it in 2003. This has made the U.S. a worldwide leader in recognizing and combatting slavery. In addition, in 2001, international and U.S. organizations of Catholic religious women and men made a commitment to work in solidarity to oppose trafficking and educate others about the magnitude, causes and consequences of these most egregious violations of human rights. The collaborations and coalitions formed as a result are, in large part, responsible for the increased awareness to this issue. Sisters of St. Joseph across the country have spearheaded efforts and

formed coalitions that have been successful in effecting public policy change and in providing services to victims.

In 2005, we played an important role in a local coalition brought together by Cynthia Purvis, to bring Kevin Bales, President of Free the Slaves and author of the classic, *Disposable People*, to the Erie area for a series of presentations.

For the last 18 months, a similar collaboration has been preparing for the St. Louis event. Sisters, event consultants and personnel of the St. Louis Millennium Hotel, have met tirelessly to establish anti-trafficking policies and procedures within the hotel. The positive results of this approach will be presented and discussed at the meeting. It is hoped that the lessons learned will be taken by those present and translated into action in their local neighborhoods.

The global nature of trafficking necessitates that the U.N. play a central role in international efforts and thus established the U.N. Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, (GIFT). The presence of the Congregations of St. Joseph as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) at the U.N., accredited by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), allows our voices to be heard globally through our representative, Gloria Martinez Morales, CSJ, Mexico.

Human Trafficking and Slavery

- After drug dealing, trafficking of humans is tied with arms dealing as the second largest criminal industry in the world, and is the fastest growing.
- In the U.S. alone, 14,500 to 17,500 people are trafficked each year.
- 80% of trafficked people are women and girls.
- 50% of trafficked people are under 18 years of age.
- There are approximately 27 million people being held in slavery today.
- Slaves may work up to 20 hours a day, sometimes more, up to 7 days a week, and 365 days a year.
- \$90 is the average cost of a human slave around the world.
- We can end slavery in our lifetime. Everyone has a role to play -- government, business, international organizations, YOU.

UN.GIFT – Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking and Slavery

- The goal is to implement the objectives of the UN Protocol on Human Trafficking, to prevent and combat trafficking, to protect and assist victims and to promote member States cooperation.
- Developed handbook on combatting forced labor to give guidance to businesses and organizations.
- Promotes greater coordination among international organizations and innovative public-private partnerships.
- Promotes and assists member states to implement the Protocol by developing a model law on trafficking in human persons.
- Has fulfilled an important gap as a platform for facilitating inter-agency cooperation in anti-human trafficking efforts at the global level.

Two excellent web sites that provide current information can be found at www.stopenslavement.org/index.html and www.freetheslaves.net.

DISCERNING THE CALL

by Linda Fusco, SSJ

Kelly Jean Smock entered the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania as a candidate during a Rite of Entrance ceremony on January 9, 2011. Kelly, the daughter of Peter and Dorothy Smock of Springboro, PA, attended Conneaut Valley Elementary School and High School. She graduated from Edinboro University in 2003 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Work. Kelly has worked at Rolling Fields Nursing Home as a caregiver, CHAPS as a Life Skills coach, and the infirmary at the Sisters of Mercy in Erie. Currently, she works at Blair Corporation. Kelly's family includes her twin sisters, Holly and Julie.

As a member of Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Edinboro, PA, Kelly has served as a lector and assisted in the parish's religious education program. In 2003, Kelly became an Associate of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, which she credits with helping her to understand more about the Sisters of St. Joseph. "I think I have been blessed to have begun my journey with discernment of becoming an Associate," she said. "It allowed me to learn about the Sisters of St. Joseph and allowed the Sisters to get to know me."

In 2005, Kelly attended a discernment retreat in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania near Philadelphia to connect with other young women asking the same questions. There she realized she was

truly called to our charism of unity. A year and a half ago, I started working with Kelly to begin the Pre-Entrance process which has been a real privilege. Kelly is a woman of deep faith who desires to live and minister out of our charism of unity. Asked about the discernment process, Kelly says, "... it was necessary to help me develop into a more whole person so that I could fully open my hands and heart to say yes to the call God had placed in my heart."

After completing the Pre-Novitiate stage of formation which can last up to two years, Kelly will enter the novitiate of the Sisters of St. Joseph. This will be a time of intense study during which she will also participate in the SSJ Federation Novitiate Program in Chicago. There, she will complete some of her studies as well as continue discerning the next step to temporary commitment.



Linda Fusco, SSJ (left) and Kelly Smock

THE FORMATION PROCESS

Frequently asked QUESTIONS

Q. Do you have to be Catholic to be a Sister?

Yes, you must be a baptized Catholic.

Q. How long does it take to become a Sister?

There are three stages of initial formation; the entire process takes a minimum of six years.

Q. What is the hardest thing about becoming a Sister?

The hardest thing is probably the change in lifestyle. It's not easy to leave your home and possibly your place of employment to begin something new.

Q. Do you go to school to become a Sister?

You undergo a process of immersion in a life of prayer, living in community, and continued service while learning and experiencing what it means to be a Sister of St. Joseph. The Formation process involves a year of more intense study with women from around the country who live together to learn our charism, spirituality, prayer, history and other formation topics.

Q. Why don't you wear a habit?

In mid-seventeenth century France, it was unacceptable for a woman to be in public without a male escort unless she was a widow. In order to minister, our Sisters dressed as widows. Clothing customs changed over time, but our Sisters' dress did not; it became their habit. After researching our roots, we discovered that we are to dress in the manner of the people we serve.

What STEPS do I take?

Pre-Entrance

While living independently, you are introduced to our charism, prayer and ministries. You explore where the Spirit may be leading you as you discern your call to religious life.

Pre-Novitiate

During this time, you share community living and prayer with a group of Sisters for nine months to two years, while continuing to discern your call.

Novitiate

As a novice, you live in a formation house for two years. With direction, you continue to discern while growing in love of Scripture, the Gospel counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, and knowledge of our spirituality and history. You begin to integrate all aspects of community life and ministry. After your novitiate, you commit to vowed life for one year.

Temporary Commitment

During this time of deepening integration, you live interdependently in community, share faith and deepen your relationship with Jesus through prayer, study, and varied apostolic ministry experiences. This process continues for 3-6 years as you continue to discern and assess your ability to live as a vowed member of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

refugees of often being separated from family members, unfamiliar with the language and customs of this new country, and depending on others for basic needs of resettlement, opened their hearts and homes to me. Their familiar greeting, “*namaste*,” (acknowledging the divine spark within each person) and their gifts of hospitality and joy reflect the beauty of their Hindu faith. The face of God is everywhere... in the unemployed man picking up his weekly supply of food from the neighborhood outreach center, in the Muslim women who gather together to sew and quilt, as they adapt to the new language and culture and encourage each other, in the two new families to our parish from Africa, who have the courage to wake up each day to deal with the challenge of learning new customs, new language, and new people and situations.

I realize more and more how my experience in the southwest prepared me for the diverse backgrounds of the people I meet today. Not that I have answers or solutions to the challenging needs they might have, but I have had the privilege of encountering God in new ways—a humble and vulnerable God—through their stories and being able to walk with them through the labyrinth of social and cultural systems.

Jesus’ familiar prayer, “That all may be one,” is foundational to the Sister of St. Joseph’s vocation in the world today. I have been blessed in my ministry today to help shape, and be shaped by, this reality. And I believe that God is doing something new among us as we search out and undertake whatever may best bring about unity. “See I am doing something new. Do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19)

ASSOCIATES LIVING THE MISSION

by Jane Zawacki, SSJA

Serendipitous events, as he calls them – perhaps more precisely, the movement of the Holy Spirit – seem to shape many of the paths SSJ Associate Alan Hannibal takes in life.

Alan was welcomed as an Associate in 2010, but has had connections with the Sisters and has been living the SSJ mission of unity for much longer. He has always been impressed with the care and concern the Sisters show for people. He was drawn to their charism, which complements his involvement with several programs aimed at caring for others.

One of those programs was the reason for Alan's recent trip to India to visit several orphanages. The events leading up to this trip go back several years and involve the Spirit in many ways.

Four years ago, Alan listened to a Mission Sunday appeal at his parish, Holy Cross, in Fairview, PA. The speaker, Cecil Daniel, described an orphanage in India that was caring for 180 children, mostly girls. In an attempt to break the cycle of poverty, the woman who ran the orphanage, Sister Anne, was trying to secure sponsors to help the older children attend college. The idea appealed to Alan and eventually he was connected with Renuga, 17, and just graduating from 12th grade.

Most of the people Alan encountered did not speak much English. To help them learn, Alan arranged for an English Learning Center at the orphanage. A TV, DVD player, and DVDs of programs like Sesame Street, Leap Frog, and easy-to-understand movies were provided. The Sisters were taught English first so that they could teach the children.

In 2010, Alan began contemplating another trip to India. Sister Anne had been named prioress of her order and was now



SSJ Associate Alan Hannibal with children from the orphanage in India.

responsible for over 1,000 children in several orphanages. She was also in the process of trying to build a nursing college. As with the early SSJs, this dream was not coming easily, and was dependent on God's graces and the good will of others. Plans are progressing, but the project remains a work in progress. Alan was interested in seeing what had been accomplished thus far.

At Mass one day, Alan expected a certain

priest to be the celebrant, but instead Fr. Mike DeMartinis was there. In conversation after Mass, Alan discovered that Fr. Mike was looking for a place with which to establish a mission relationship. Alan told him about the situation in India, and Fr. Mike was eager to see for himself.

Joining Alan and Fr. Mike on this trip at the end of January, 2011 was another member of the group of sponsors of the orphanage, Hannelore Ranft.

On this trip, they found that all the Sisters and children spoke at least some English; some rather well due to the success of the English Learning Center. Everywhere they went, they were greeted by eager, smiling faces and hands that reached out to touch and be held.

The travelers had many experiences, too numerous to recount here, but the journey is one that none of them will forget. As for Alan, he continues to be open to the next "serendipitous event" that is sure to occur in his life. For as he says, this is not the end of the story, it's just the beginning.

And though Sisters may not be in as many leadership positions or as involved in the day-to-day operations, they remain committed and maintain an important presence wherever possible to ensure the continuance of the mission. Sisters of St. Joseph retain seats on the boards of the ministries and actively participate in the recruitment, interviewing and hiring process for leadership positions.

Sister Ann Marie Cappello, SSJ serves as Mission Effectiveness Coordinator for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania. Her primary responsibility is to ensure that the mission and charism are fully integrated into the sponsored ministries and among the Congregation's lay staff. When a person is hired, Sister Ann Marie begins a formal mission orientation process. "It is important that all employees, especially those who represent the Sisters in key positions in our ministries, know who we are and what we are about," Sr. Ann Marie said. "That will influence and provide the framework for their decisions and actions which must reflect our mission and charism." Sister Ann Marie incorporates prayer services, special events and Mission Day celebrations into everyday life for the Congregational staff.

We Remember...

Marie Claire Kearney, SSJ
She was very proud of her Irish heritage.



Marie Claire Kearney, SSJ, 87, died on February 11, 2011 in her 69th year of religious life. Born in Bradford, Pennsylvania on January 15, 1924, the daughter of the late Genevieve and William Kearney, she entered the Sisters of St. Joseph from St. Bernard Parish, Bradford on February 2, 1943 and professed her final vows on August 15, 1948.

As she celebrated her 60th Jubilee in 2002, Sister Marie Claire attributed the powerful influence of the Sisters of St. Joseph when they taught her at St. Bernard School in Bradford, PA as what led her to join the Congregation. Sister Marie Claire had strong loyalties to family, her Irish heritage, Saint Vincent Health Center and her Congregation. She traveled four times to Ireland and especially loved visiting Kate Kearney's cottage. Her wit was well known and much appreciated.

Sister earned a diploma in nursing from Saint Vincent School of Nursing and a bachelor's degree in nursing from Villa Maria College, Erie. She studied at the Medical Ethics Institute at St. John University, New York, NY. She also studied and received certification in purchasing and materials management at St. Louis University; hospital logistic management and central service management from the American Hospital Association; cardiovascular management and inhalation therapy management and techniques at The Cleveland Clinic; operating room management

and techniques at St. Mary's Hospital, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, NY, and studied at the Psychiatric Nursing Institute at Seton Institute, Baltimore, Maryland.

When a Sister is not in the leadership position, larger institutions often have their own mission person on staff, including Saint Vincent Health Center, where Sister Carol Morehouse, SSJ serves as Senior Vice President of Mission Integration. When asked about the increasing role of lay partners in the ministry, Sr. Carol replied, "Our mission and the SSJ charism are what make us unique – and they remain constant. The ministries will continue as long as we are able to find persons who have the charism and mission in their hearts."

Regardless of whether there is a Sister in the principal's office or behind the CEO's desk, there is certainty that the mission and the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph is present in the sponsored ministries of the Congregation, and efforts will continue to ensure that. The Sisters often speak of "standing on the shoulders" of their Sisters who came before them when referencing moving forward with the mission, the charism, and the legacy of the Congregation. As they stand today, they are shoulder to shoulder alongside the many non-vowed, lay partners who are carrying the mission torch into the next generation.

Sister Marie Claire served at Saint Vincent Health Center, Erie, for 52 years in various capacities: senior vice-president, assistant administrator and director of the operating room and central supply/inhalation therapy. While in charge of the operating room physicians knew 'she ruled' and were compliant rather than disagreeing with her!

She served the Congregation as councilor for personnel; a past member of the formation team; a councilor for community life and was active in several Chapters of Affairs. In addition, she spent 10 years teaching at Villa Maria College, Erie. Sister Marie Claire retired from active ministry in 1996 and most recently resided at the Villa Maria Community Living Center in Erie.

She served the Congregation as councilor for personnel; a past member of the formation team; a councilor for community life and was active in several Chapters of Affairs. In addition, she spent 10 years teaching at Villa Maria College, Erie. Sister Marie Claire retired from active ministry in 1996 and most recently resided at the Villa Maria Community Living Center in Erie.

We remember prayerfully
SSJ Associates who recently died:

- Grace Starr - August 19, 2010
- Ardrienne Windahl - October 1, 2010
- John Danowski - October 12, 2010
- Mary (Peg) McConnell - October 28, 2010
- Helen Knecht - March 1, 2011
- Thomas Fuhrman - March 15, 2011
- Marlene Shellito - May 19, 2011



**SISTERS OF
ST. JOSEPH**
OF NORTHWESTERN
PENNSYLVANIA

Connecting with God ✚ Connecting with You

5031 West Ridge Road | Erie, Pennsylvania 16506-1249

PHONE (814) 836-4100 | FAX (814) 836-4277

WEBSITE www.ssjerie.org



Ever striving for unity
of neighbor with neighbor
and neighbor with God.



Do we need to correct your name, title or address? Did you receive duplicate copies of *Journeys* or do you wish to be removed from our mailing list? Please let us know by faxing the mailing label with corrections to 814-836-4277 or mail it to us at 5031 West Ridge Road, Erie, PA 16506-1249.

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Erie, PA
Permit No. 228

Circle of Friends Celebration

Saturday, August 27, 2011

Sisters of St. Joseph Community Living Center

5031 West Ridge Road

Erie, Pennsylvania

4:00 p.m. Liturgy

5:00 p.m. Picnic Dinner

6:00 p.m. Duck Races, games and fun!

RSVP by August 19, 2011 (814) 836-4100 or www.ssjerie.org

**Bring the
whole family!**

