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Commitment Statement
We recommit ourselves to “rebuilding the Church” by living the passtime of the Gospel in the discerning spirit of our Franciscan charism and tradition. We are willing to take the necessary risks to be a healing, compassionate presence in our violent world especially with women, children, and those who have no voice.
We desire to reflect this commitment in our dialogue with the entire Church, in our own governing structures, and in our relationship with one another as sister.

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The purpose of Good News is to further the Gospel mission of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia by sharing the good news of our congregation with our friends, family, companions, and sisters. Through this publication, we hope to share the charism of our congregation and invite others to become involved in our mission.
Good News is published three times a year (spring, summer, winter) by the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. We welcome your feedback and comments; correspondence should be addressed to Good News at address above.
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Celebrating History...

2009 began with the historic inauguration of our 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama. In his pre-inauguration days, he appointed many of the members of his cabinet and staff. Together they have committed to a movement toward change, to make life better for the people of the United States, and to improve our standing in the international community.

As Franciscans we also celebrate a special historic event this year. 2009 is the 800th anniversary of the birth of the Franciscan Movement. In 1209, St. Francis of Assisi and a few of his followers presented themselves before Pope Innocent III to ask for the approval of their form or rule of life. Francis wrote many years later in his Testament:

And after the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me.

Men from many walks of life continued to join Francis. A few years later, he welcomed a sister named Clare. When lay men and women expressed a desire to follow his way of life, Francis created a new Order designed especially for them, taking into consideration their family commitments. From these humble beginnings in Assisi, Italy, the followers of Francis and Clare have multiplied to bring good news and a healing, compassionate presence to people in nearly every country in the world. They go out as brother or sister to share God's love with people and all of creation.

The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia are a part of this worldwide Franciscan movement. Since our founding by Maria Anna Bachmann in 1855, over 2,200 women have dedicated their lives to live as sister with one another, with the entire human family, and with all of creation. They respond to the needs of others, especially the economically poor, those on the margins of society, and those who are oppressed.

In this edition of the Good News, the directors of our vocation and formation programs share how they invite women to come and see our way of life and to discern whether they feel called to our particular congregation. Their primary goal in these discussions is to assist the women in determining how best to live a purposeful and meaningful life and to be a compassionate presence in a violent world.

In this edition also, we see this healing, compassionate presence lived out in the ministry at Drexel Neumann Academy. The academy, a unique collaboration between the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, Neumann College, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and St. Katherine Drexel Parish in Chester, Pennsylvania, offers a quality education and an environment conducive to learning for children who otherwise may not have this opportunity. Many of the students live with violence on the streets and in their neighborhood.

The president, faculty, and staff are engaged in a movement to improve the lives of the students. Board members, supporters, and the greater community lend their expertise and support. Students are encouraged to live the Franciscan charism by being caring and compassionate to each other and by reaching out in service to others. Parents have expressed appreciation for the difference they see in their children. For them, Drexel Neumann Academy is a “saving grace.”

St. Francis said at the end of his life that he had done what God had called him to do. He prayed that God would teach each of us what is ours to do. I echo Francis’ hope that we will do what is ours to do to improve the lives of others and to make our world a better place.

The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia keep you and your families in prayer. May God give you peace and all good!

Sister Esther Anderson, OSF
Congregational Minister

On the cover: President of Drexel Neumann Academy, Sister Maggie Gannon recognizes the importance of knowing students personally and has sought out a friendly encounter with Robert Thompson.
Keli Johnson grew up in a modest, close-knit neighborhood of working families in Chester, a small town of 37,000 on the outskirts of Philadelphia. She was educated in public and Catholic schools. “When we left high school, we were prepared for college,” said Keli, an executive secretary for a healthcare facility. She still lives in Chester with her husband Rob, who owns his own telecommunications business, and their two children. Her family lives nearby.

But Chester hasn’t fared well over the years. During the last several decades, businesses have left Chester—and with the good jobs they provided—and the town is “fairly poor” now, according to Keli. In fact, Chester’s public school system ranks among the lowest in Pennsylvania for academic achievement. Keli and Rob despaired of finding good, safe schools in the neighborhood for their son Brien, 12, and his six-year-old sister, Anyae.

A charter school that seemed to offer promise for her son proved disappointing—no textbooks or science and social studies classes. “I was appalled by it,” Keli said. “I was determined he would not go back. Young people today graduate without being able to formulate a simple paragraph. Without an education people are bound to get in trouble. When they can’t get jobs, some resort to violence and drugs to make ends meet.”

Then a friend told Keli about Drexel Neumann Academy. The academy is the result of a unique collaboration among the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, Neumann College, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and St. Katharine Drexel Parish in Chester. The archdiocese once operated five elementary schools and a high school in Chester but lack of enrollment and financial difficulties over the last 15 years forced the consolidation and closure of all but one elementary school—St. Katharine’s. Five years ago the decision was made to close St. Katharine’s, too.

That’s when Sister Lynn Patrice Lavin, OSF, and Dr. Rosalie Mirenda, president of Neumann College, approached the archdiocese and the parish to discuss ways to keep Catholic education alive in Chester. Prayer, discussion, and collaboration yielded the idea of working in partnership to create Drexel Neumann Academy, an independent Catholic school with a Franciscan charism. Each of the four partners brought their own gifts, perspectives, and resources to the relationship and the collaboration allowed them to do something together they could never have done alone. Drexel Neumann Academy—housed in St. Katharine’s and sporting a new paint job—opened in
The children love it! Sisters Cathy McGowan, OSF (far right) relishes sharing lighter moments to mingle socially with students.

Reading can be fun as laughter between Colleen Ingelsby and fourth-grade student Kayla Brown attests.

Franciscan Presence

The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia not only help keep Catholic education alive in Chester, but they also have a strong presence in the school. Accompanying Sister Maggie on her mission to help the youth of Chester are the following sisters:

Ruth Bernadette O’Connor, OSF
Marguerite O’Beirne, OSF, Chair of Trusteeship Committee
Marie Agnes Connolly, OSF
Esther Anderson, OSF
Board of Directors
Ann David Strohminger, OSF, Treasurer,
And Families

Being Present For Children

Sister Margaret Grace Gannon, OSF, is the president of the school and is responsible for insuring the integrity of the mission and its future. She works closely with the school principal, Sister Cathy McGowan, a Sister of St. Joseph. “We’re a good team,” she said. “We’re both focused on the mission.”

Sister Margaret Grace—or Sister Maggie, as most people know her—is very much aware of the world in which many of her students live. Street violence, relatives disappearing into prisons, needles and condoms in the parks—these children have seen it all. They live with it every day. Some children have seen family members shot. “We try to be present in the world they live in,” Sister Maggie said. “Because we live close by, we’re very connected—there’s that proximity.”

“We have beautiful, talented students with great parents. But our families have a lot of struggles and few opportunities,” Sister Maggie said. More than two-thirds of all of Drexel Neumann’s families get by on less than thirty thousand dollars a year. Many children come to school without having eaten breakfast. Sister Maggie remembers a student who reported matter-of-factly that her mother didn’t have bus fare to come for her after school. “They’re rich in many ways but they still struggle,” she explained. “The parents are trying to provide their children with the best opportunities available and they make sacrifices to send them to our school.”

Learning Begins In The Classroom

Social studies and religion teacher, Ann Marissa Ambacher, admits that she didn’t enjoy studying history herself until she learned to teach it. “Now I bring history right into their world. We talk about slavery, about being a nation of immigrants. It opens their eyes to the world beyond,” she said. Ann also shares her own personal experiences with students every day. She has traveled to Kenya and Mexico and can tell stories about how people live in other parts of the world. “The walls between teacher and student come down,” Ann explained. “They step inside my world and, in turn, let me into theirs.” She acknowledges that her students teach her as much as she teaches them. “I learn about their neighborhood and daily lives from their stories—stories of drugs, crime, guns,” Ann said. “The majority are not even allowed out once they get home. But they are full of life and have new eyes and new ears in the world. They catch what I miss.”

Ann’s students were particularly interested in the 2008 presidential election so she used it to teach civics and social studies. “They look at Barack Obama as a role model,” she said of the largely African American student body. “They saw Obama and Hillary Clinton running for president and it made them feel I could do that one day.” They felt part of history. Ann admits, however, that what’s going on at home in the children’s lives often spills over into school, making teaching a challenge. “But they choose to be here nine hours a day,” she said. “They come with smiles and high energy. They keep me on my toes. I’m where I’m meant to be, although I can’t see it everyday.”

A Prayerful Foundation

At Drexel Neumann, prayer is an important part of the school day. Although 80 percent of the students come from non-Catholic households, the Franciscan charism of a living gospel expressed through compassion and service toward others infuses their education. Students pray in the morning and before meals. Ann Ambacher often asks students in her religion class if there is anyone who needs prayers—healing for a grandmother in the hospital, courage to pass a test, comfort for a friend who is having a hard time. If they are shy or uncomfortable saying their prayers aloud, they are encouraged to hold them as a silent attention. As one way of broadening her students’ world, Ann taught them to say the Hail Mary in both Spanish and French.

A kindergarten student Tyshawn Ferguson proudly displays his artistic accomplishment.


Keli Johnson’s daughter Anyae, a first-grade student at Drexel Neumann, noticed a difference between practices at her family’s Baptist church and those at school. “I tell my children that the religion is a little different but we pray to the same God,” said Keli. “It’s just that at school you get an extra dose of it. As long as it’s done with love and respect for God, it’s all good.”

**Kindness, Love, And High Expectations**

Keli and Rob Johnson’s son Brien, now in his second year at the academy, is in seventh grade. Keli has already seen improvement. “I’ve seen him take on a lot more responsibility for his academics and his behavior,” she said. “He’s matured and he talks about being a role model for his sister.” Expectations at the school are high and all students are held accountable for abiding by the rules. “They promote kindness; they don’t tolerate fighting or bullying,” Keli explained. “When there is a need for discipline, they do it with love and kindness and talk to them to make sure they understand what they did wrong. For me, it’s like leaving my children with family.”

With so much going on in their young lives, Drexel Neumann students find a much-needed foundation and a safe haven in prayer, in a strong educational program, in the efforts of a caring faculty, and in the extra study time that the school provides. The school day ends at 2:30 but Drexel Neumann offers an extended day for its students, including a late afternoon snack and time for enrichment, reinforcement, and supplemental activities until 4:30. The extra time allows them to study or catch up on school projects in a quiet, safe environment. “Many of them have responsibilities at home, like taking care of younger siblings. This gives them a little time away from that,” Ann Ambacher said. Students also attend a mandatory three weeks of summer school every year.

And, of course, there are sports. Sister Maggie and Sister Cathy attend most of the school games and know all of the parents—like Keli and Rob Johnson—by name. Brien Johnson plays on the school’s championship basketball team and his parents often help set up for games and sports banquets.

**Saving Grace**

Keli is pleased and grateful that she found Drexel Neumann Academy and that both of her children are doing well there. “It’s a warm, friendly environment,” she said. The faculty and staff are all very personable and extremely dedicated to providing an education to these children. Anyae loves it; she reads everything. And Brien—I’ve really seen him grow.”

Brien is no exception. In the midst of a very tough neighborhood, Drexel Neumann Academy is a saving grace for families who otherwise would not have been able to offer their children a good education in a safe environment. “We hope we provide a moral compass that guides them through life. We remember St. Francis’ saying, ‘Preach the gospel at all times; use words when necessary.’ That’s how we try to show our children what might be possible in their future and in their world.”

Ann Ambacher concurs with Sister Maggie’s vision. While her students may be too young and too busy living life to see the path Drexel Neumann Academy has set them on, that path holds endless possibilities. “When they graduate and look back, that’s when they’ll really get it,” Ann said.

For more information or comments on this article, contact goodnews@osfphila.org.
Who are the ‘Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia’? Through this section we hope to share a glimpse of our congregation and the individuals who make real its mission.

LOUISIANA

Representing the congregation’s Committee for Corporate Responsible Investment, Sister Miriam Eileen Murray visited New Orleans to participate in the launch of the Isaiah Fund. The fund is a collaborative project of Catholic, Jewish, Mennonite, and Baptist institutions whose mission is to rebuild New Orleans home by home and street by street. Working in affiliation with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (of which the Sisters of St. Francis are members), the Isaiah Fund is believed to be the first national interfaith fund for long-term domestic disaster recovery. They have already raised money to create two disaster relief funds that will help affordable-housing projects close financing gaps, assist small businesses to get back on their feet, and support the development of community centers on the Gulf Coast. Following Sister Miriam Eileen’s visit, the Committee for Corporate Responsible Investment approved a loan to the Isaiah Fund. “Members of the fund are some of the most passionate, committed people I have ever met,” Sister Miriam said. “Have no doubt that they will be instrumental in the rebuilding of large parts of New Orleans and other cities along the Gulf Coast.”

NORTH CAROLINA

Companion Val Cummings welcomed Earth Hope Directors Sisters Marya Grathwohl, OSE, and Helen Prejean, CSA, and board member Joanna Stott to the Outer Banks. They spent time in prayer and planning for the future of Earth Hope, a community whose goal is “to inspire, teach, and create mutually enhancing human-Earth relationships within the sacred web of life, made bold by the compassion of Jesus for the world.” The agenda included a review of Earth Hope’s recent activities, among them a weekend presentation at Chestnut Hill College, where both Val and Companion Director Kathy Boehm offered a supporting presence. Plans were also set in motion for Kathy and Val to join Helen and Marya at Mt. St. Agnes College in Baltimore to speak to women interested in forming Earth Hope Support Circles. The weekend also provided time for streamlining the administration of the Earth Hope office; refining the marketing efforts for Camp Earth Hope, a summer experience for high school girls set in Wyoming; and the development of an online newsletter. For more information concerning Earth Hope, visit their website, www.earth-hope.org.

NEW YORK

Angela of Foligno? For those who know little or nothing about this 14th century Franciscan woman, the Franciscan Institute’s summer session at St. Bonaventure University is a great place to start. Sister Diane Tomkinson will be presenting a one-week, one credit course. It will be of particular interest to those who participated in the “God’s Extravagant Love” program which included a brief introduction to Angela of Foligno’s contributions to Franciscan spirituality and theology. Using Angela’s writings, Sr. Diane will examine perspectives on various Franciscan themes: prayer, poverty, creation and incarnation, suffering, relationships in community, and the mystery of Triune love as revealed in Jesus. The summer session also provides participants with the experience of sharing with the broader Franciscan community, not only in class but also in prayer, at meals, and in social activities.

WASHINGTON

Like most high school students, the young women and men at Kennedy High School in Seattle make good use of the library. What many of them may not know is that some of the library’s 14,000 volume collection once graced the library of Our Lady of Angels Convent in Portland, Oregon. When the former novitiate and province office at Palatine Convent in Portland, Oregon. When the former novitiate and province office at Palatine Hill closed and the property was sold to Lewis and Clark College, the library collection was donated to Kennedy High School. The collection boasted of a variety of genres, including language arts, theology, science, and history. Kennedy librarian, Kay Crane, sorted and catalogued the collection. Volumes that Kennedy already possessed were shared with other schools. Crane discovered that some of the volumes were very valuable. Many had been out of print for years. She continues to remind the sisters that the books—which she describes as rare finds—are still being used and that this one act of generosity has enhanced many library collections.
Sister Dolores Macdonald’s many years of dedicated service to persons suffering with HIV/AIDS recently earned her the honor of being named Board Member Emeritus of the Delaware HIV Consortium Board of Trustees. She first began her work in 1988 when Wilmington’s Catholic Charities pro- posed a program that would run for eleven months—months that stretched into almost twenty years. Sister Dolores’s ministry with persons with HIV/AIDS included creat- ing support groups for men, women, and families as well as bereavement support groups. She worked with Dr. Eppes at the Wilmington Hospital, helping pregnant women and their babies, and also with Dr. Skinner who assisted her with the men’s groups. At one point, Sister Dolores was also named to the governor’s task force for pediat- ric HIV/AIDS issues.

The Sisters of St. Francis were among the many who attended “Human Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery,” a program cospon- sored by the Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center (IPJC). One of the congrega- tion’s cosponsored ministries, IPJC scheduled programs in Seattle, Spokane, and Portland. Each of the regional workshops provided opportunities for personal reflection and group discussions, which included two days in Rome and four in Assisi, proved a blessing for all involved. The pilgrims, diverse in age and background, journeyed from California, Washington, and Oregon. They represented various faith tradi- tions, including an Episcopalian priest and a Methodist minister. Several of the congre- gation’s companions also joined the group. The pilgrims found that the opportunity to visit—to experience first-hand—the places where Sr. Francis and Clare actually lived, worked, and prayed had a profound effect on their own lives. Visit the center’s web- site, www.francisspctr.com, to learn about upcoming events.

When she was asked by Mary Erickson, direc- tor of the Franciscan Spiritual Center-West, to serve as spiritual guide for a pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi, Sister Mary Jo Chaves welcomed the invitation. The pilgrimage, which included two days in Rome and four in Assisi, proved a blessing for all involved. The pilgrims, diverse in age and background, journeyed from California, Washington, and Oregon. They represented various faith tradi- tions, including an Episcopalian priest and a Methodist minister. Several of the congre- gation’s companions also joined the group. The pilgrims found that the opportunity to visit—to experience first-hand—the places where Sr. Francis and Clare actually lived, worked, and prayed had a profound effect on their own lives. Visit the center’s web- site, www.francisspctr.com, to learn about upcoming events.

Carrying their congregation’s banner and crosses bearing the names of people who have been murdered or “disappeared” by graduates of the School of the Americas, twelve members of the Sisters of St. Francis were once again among those who gathered at the gates of Fort Benning, Georgia, calling for the close of the SOA/Whitow. During the solemn procession, the names of these victims were read aloud. Participants responded, “Presente,” raising the crosses to symbolize the presence of these individuals at the gathering. The continued presence of the sisters at this yearly gathering is a way of concretizing the congregation’s commitment to be a healing compassionate involvement in the world and to become a voice for those who have no voice.

When the Archdiocese of Hartford held a party celebrating Sister Loretta Francis Mann’s retirement, guests came from every diocese in New England. Sister Loretta had ministered in the archdiocese for 30 years, first as Curriculum Coordinator and, for the last 20 years, as Assistant Superintendent of Schools. Life in “retirement,” however, will continue to blend Sister Loretta’s 58 years in education and her love of children. Three days a week she ministers as Mission Coordinator for Education for the Holy Childhood Association, educating archdioc- esan school personnel about the concept of “children helping children.” Each Monday and Friday finds her volunteering at the neonatal unit at St. Francis Hospital. As part of the Cuddler Program, Sister Loretta works with premature babies. “This is a very rewarding experience for me,” she said. “These babies are so medically fragile and it is a joy to bundle them up, cuddle them close, and sing songs and hymns to them.”

For Sister Dorothy Franz and the people of St. Paul Parish in Ellict City, 2008–2009 has been a special time. During the Church- designated Year of St. Paul, the parish has been named the official pilgrimage church for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. In addi- tion to hosting pilgrimage groups, they held a number of special events to celebrate this special status. In her role as Parish Catechetical Leader, Sister Dorothy has been actively involved in planning and implement- ing these activities. In January, as part of a celebration of the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, she arranged a special showing of the film, One Body, Many Parts: St. Paul in His Own Words, at a local theater. After the movie, folks returned to the parish for an afternoon retreat. Sister Dorothy also arranged for a performance of the play I, Paul for both the middle-school students and par- ish adults. Throughout this special year, she has served as a tour guide for pilgrim groups who visit the parish.

Sister Emma Mary Steckel Champions of the Community Award Phoenixville Community Health Foundation, Pennsylvania

Sister Albertina Manzo was honored recently by the parishioners of St. Anne Parish in Jersey City for her more than twenty years of service in the parish. At this year’s parish festival celebration, parishioners dedicated a Franciscan garden in her honor. In the center of the garden stands a statue of St. Francis with Sister Albertina’s name inscribed on the base. Her years of dedication and service are re- flected in the many activities she has either initiated or directed: religious education pro- grams, the Rainbow Program, vacation bible school, Lenten scripture studies, adult forma- tion groups, parish picnics, retreats, dances, trips, socials, and flea markets.
To live good and holy lives—to be the best person I’m meant to be—that’s our baptismal call.

Women today have many more choices than their mothers or grandmothers had but those choices don’t always bring satisfaction. In a world where sex, power, and money are the measure of worth, some women are taking a fresh look at what religious life has to offer.

I have always felt proud to be a member of this great Franciscan congregation. In the spiritual, educational, and material needs, I feel blessed, privileged, and truly humbled by all the community has done for me. When I say “community,” I mean all the truly wonderful women who have been a part of my journey. I truly hope I have responded in kind, to both the Lord and community. It has been a pretty amazing ride—bumps and all.

Sister Esther Stewart, OSF

When I heard the call into religious life, I was searching for a path to fill a spiritual yearning. The Sisters of St. Francis awakened those hunger in my heart. It was a call to holiness—not a “holier-than-thou” attitude, but rather a call to a wholesome, genuine, and fully committed life based on gospel values.

Sister Florence Petch, OSF

CURRENT SISTERS

Norma Herrera, a Franciscan Companion, works with Norma Hrenna, a Franciscan Companion, to make sure everything they put on display works properly.
Sisters

Listening For God

Retreats and prayer groups offer women a way to move more deeply into their lives and their relationship with God. Sister Patricia is involved with Busy Person Retreats for college students in the Northwest to help them carve out quiet time and to learn how to pray. The retreat offers a half-hour of prayer and a half-hour of conversation with a spiritual companion over a period of four days.

“I’ve asked them, ‘How many of you take five or ten minutes a day for reflection?’ Their lives are full of text messages, TV, radio, iPods, cell phones. Prayer and discernment—how a person tries to know where God is calling him or her to be—is almost foreign to them,” said Sister Patricia. “For young people even to think this could be a life they might choose—a celibate life lived in relationship, a life of continuous conversion and of active contemplation—that’s not at all the way they move in.”

Discerning A True Vocation

That was true for Sister Patty Kerezsi. She grew up in Aston in the shadow of the motherhouse and attended Catholic schools. Throughout high school and college, she felt drawn toward religious life. “But my head kept saying, ‘No, you want to get married and have children,’” she explained. “That’s what people are supposed to do.” She worked as a nursing assistant and teacher and enjoyed a busy social life with friends and family. But something kept tugging at her. She had gotten to know some of the sisters and eventually joined the Franciscan Companions in Ministry program for men and women who want to express their faith in service. “I thought I’d give a year of my life to a project in Appalachia and that’d be it,” she said.

After her year of service, she decided to study for a master’s degree in pastoral counseling at Neumann College. “A lot of that was about getting clients to look deeper into their own lives and I thought, ‘I need to do that myself,’” she said. “We had to really think about who we are and do our own work in counseling.”

Sister Patty discovered that she had gifts but lacked confidence. “I found out that you don’t have to please and that it’s not all about what everyone else would think or say,” she said. She had feared that people would think she was “crazy” if she chose religious life but it turned out they’d been just waiting for her to see it. After what she describes now as “twenty years of discernment,” she followed her calling and joined the Sisters of St. Francis in 2003.

Changes Inside And Out

Life in Catholic religious congregations has changed radically over the years. Perhaps the most obvious change is in the declining number of people entering religious life. In the 1940s and 50s, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia welcomed fifty or sixty new women each year. By the 1990s that number had fallen to one or two a year; one of the last woman to join the Sisters of St. Francis was Sister Patty Kerezsi. Since 1965, the number of Catholic sisters in the U.S. has fallen from nearly 180,000 to just over 67,000. Their average age is 69.

Sister Diane Tomkinson, OSF, is director of formation for the Sisters of St. Francis. She continued on page 10

A Compassionate Presence in a Violent World

Becoming a Sister of St. Francis of Philadelphia has opened worlds to me: worlds of opportunity, of challenge, of relationships, of grace. How can I explain a lifetime of God’s love? Of friendship and encouragement from sisters? Of continual support from those with whom I minister?

Sister Margaret Cammiffi, OSF

Life as a Sister of St. Francis of Philadelphia excites me. It always has. I was professed in 1954 and always felt that I was working for God and with the people of God. However, in the past 24 years, my spirituality has grown into a deeper companionship with God and this relationship gives me life each day. My companionship with God excites me.

Sister Damian Marie Jackson, OSF

For the past 50 years I have witnessed a community of women religious who know how to celebrate God’s wonderful gifts.

Sister Mary Hugh Black, OSF

Our sisters “walk their talk,” of the meaning of being “sister to one another.”

Sister Carmel Gregg, OSF

My journey challenges me to go deeper within myself to learn who God is calling me to become and to recognize who God becomes for me. My experiences as a vowed religious enabled me to make a home in God while God made a home in me.

Sister Florence Hes, OSF

The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia keep the doors open for young women who are considering religious life or are simply searching for ways to attend more deeply to their spiritual life and to connect with other women on the same path. Contact our vocations directors for more information or visit our website to view upcoming events.

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(610) 558-6789

St. Patricia Novak, OSF
Portland, Oregon
(503) 233-1878

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A mental health counselor with the Ministry of Caring, Sister Patty Kerezsi (left) interviews Shanelle Saunders as part of the admissions process for Hope House I in Wilmington, Delaware. Residents at this shelter for homeless women range in age from 18 to 75.
21st Century Sisters
continued from page 9

describes her congregation as "not atypical of the arc in the U.S., in the 50s and 60s when second and third generation Catholic immigrants were entering the orders in large numbers." In the late 60s and 70s, sisters and priests left their congregations in significant numbers and fewer joined. Sister Diane points to the upheaval in the Church and society in general, as well as changing roles and opportunities for women as reasons for the decline. Families' attitudes have changed also. Sister Patricia Novak remembers her mother saying that she'd be thrilled if one of her daughters entered a convent. Now parents are apprehensive or even baffled about the choice—at least until they see that their daughter is happy in religious life.

In the last decade there has been a small up tick in the number of women joining religious congregations again. These women, according to Sister Diane, are looking for "community; for counter-cultural witness that moves away from consumerism toward simplicity and poverty; and for a life of prayer, joyfulness, and meaning—something deeper than She-Who-has-the-Most-Stuff-Wins."

For anyone considering a vocation, Sister Patricia Novak recommends getting to know as many sisters as possible and building relationships and connections with others making the same decision. "Today's young woman has to have a brave heart," she said. With fewer women entering, those that do cannot count on the same kind of lifestyle that typified the past. Many of the 600+ Sisters of St. Francis live in small households or even alone. "Religious life is changing now and we don't know what that means and where that leads," Sister Patricia said. "It's exciting to invite young women in to help us reshape the future."

While driving down the freeway in Portland recently, listening to news of the war in Iraq, murder, and havoc, she experienced a moment of grace. "I could hear so plainly: Our world needs this way of life. We can be a healing compassionate presence in a violent world. We don't have the corner on that, but high key on generosity."

"TOM BRUDER IS LOW KEY ON WORDS BUT HIGH KEY ON GENEROSITY."

For more information or comments on this article, contact mkehoe@sophila.org.

ST. THOMAS A. BRUDER

In 1971 Thomas A. Bruder, Jr., received a phone call from Bishop Edward T. Hughes with an invitation to join the Board of Trustees of Our Lady of Angels (now Neumann) College. Thirty-seven years later, Tom is still an active member of the board, as he says, "The sisters won't let me go!" Reflecting on the past four decades and the many changes the college has undergone, Tom expressed admiration for all that the Sisters of St. Francis have accomplished: "I never imagined that Neumann College would come this far."

As a graduate of the University of Notre Dame, the father of six, and the grandfather of 18, Tom recognizes the value of education, particularly Catholic education. Over the years he has consistently advocated for quality education at an affordable price. Tom applauds Neumann's efforts to keep tuition reasonable out of fairness to parents, especially those with several children: "I always stressed focusing our niche and remaining within our financial means." For Tom that niche has meant remaining relatively small and cultivating close relationships among faculty, administrators, and students.

During his 37 years as a member of the Neumann College board, Tom has served as chairperson of the Development Committee and a member of the Trustee Committee. Through his generosity the college was able to expand the Life Center, Athletic Center, and athletic fields. Tom received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws Honoris Causa from Neumann College on May 17, 2003. In appreciation for his outstanding leadership, dedication, and service, the college renamed the Life Center the Tomas A. Bruder, Jr., Life Center in March 2008.

Sister Corda Marie Bergbauer, former congregational minister of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, served with Tom on Neumann's board from 1971 to 1978 during a critical time in the history of the college. She described him with affection:
Celebrating Past and Present

Sisters Rosa Carmichael, Mary Teresa Carmichael, and Helen Martin recently attended a reunion celebrating the 60th anniversary of their graduation from St. Joseph Hospital School of Nursing in Baltimore. Because of the great need for nurses during WWII, student nurses joined the Cadet Corps and following graduation were required to give two years of military service. Fortunately the war ended and the Class of 1948 was the last Cadet Corps class. Sister Mary Teresa recalled the many changes in nursing and in healthcare since her graduation. In the 1960s St. Joseph’s moved from the original hospital on Caroline Street to its present location in Towson. Although the hospital is no longer one of the congregation’s sponsored ministries, the Franciscan spirit is strong and the healing ministry is carried on by a dedicated staff. Recently many of the Sisters of St. Francis attended the dedication of the new entrance, new facilities for the already well-established Heart Institute, and the newly renovated chapel. The Heritage Wall, which graces the lobby, traces the hospital’s history and serves as a visual reminder of its Franciscan roots. The new rotunda houses the Cardinal William H. Keeler Spiritual Center, within which are found the chapel, an interfaith prayer room, a meditation garden, and the spiritual care department. A large San Damiano crucifix in the chapel gives further witness to the facility’s Franciscan heritage.

Anna’s Place...Where Sisterhood Happens

Anna’s Place, a new ministry sponsored by the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia and named in honor of their foundress, Maria Anna Bachmann, has opened its doors in Chester, Pennsylvania. Originally designated as a hospitality/drop-in center, Anna’s Place has taken on a new focus to address the current needs of the neighborhood in which it is located. In the spirit of Jesus and in the tradition of Sts. Francis and Clare of Assisi, the staff—both sisters and volunteers—seek to offer hospitality to women who desire to

- relate as sister to one another through an experience of exchange that is mutually respectful and supportive of the presence and giftedness each extends to the other,
- avail themselves of opportunities for personal and holistic growth that integrates body, mind, and spirit,
- provide an environment for their children that is nurturing and loving, as well as growth-filled and challenging,
- become “Instruments of Peace” in their neighborhoods, their churches, and the wider civic communities in which they find themselves,
- offer themselves in loving service to the people of Chester.

To learn more about Anna’s Place, call (484) 361-5900 or visit us at Second & Norris Streets. We occupy the second floor of the former Immaculate Heart of Mary School. Interested in volunteering? We are presently in need of computer literacy tutors, early childhood activities facilitators, and data-base processing assistance.

Join FAN

The Franciscan Action Network (FAN) continues to grow. During the past year, the organization has increased its membership on both congregational and individual levels. Members have taken public advocacy action on issues like the economy, peace-making, and immigration. During this current year, FAN is attempting to bring their Franciscan-inspired message of social transformation to a new congress and a new presidential administration. The 2009 theme, Enough for All Creation, offers the opportunity to more effectively live out our call to be stewards of the earth. FAN’s website and resources at www.franciscanaction.org consider becoming one of the Franciscan-hearted people working to make a better world.

Sharing Our Heritage

As one way to implement the congregation’s Chapter 2008 Directional Statement, “To live as sister with one another, with the entire human family, and with all creation by calling ourselves to greater inclusivity by welcoming all who journey with us, especially our companions,” one group of sisters extended an invitation to the companions to join them for a day of retreat. The group of 15 companions and 15 sisters met at the motherhouse in Aston and viewed the DVD presentation, “One Thing Necessary,” by Sister Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ. The presentation focused on the TOR Rule and the theological teachings of John Duns Scotus. Prayer, faith sharing, and, of course, lunch allowed all attending the retreat to exchange ideas and to get to know one another a little better. Companion director, Kathy Boehm, expressed her gratitude for this experience of Franciscan hospitality, calling it a “beautiful visitation.” Hopefully similar gatherings of sisters and companions will continue to enrich both groups, providing yet another way of “challenging ourselves to find creative ways to move the Franciscan charism into the future.”

Walking For Others

In September, 14 of our sisters joined the 4,500 men, women, and children who gathered at Rockford Park in Wilmington to take part in AIDS Walk Delaware. People came from various areas—churches, religious congregations, schools, organizations and corporations, friends and relatives of those who have died from HIV/AIDS. They all had one purpose—raising money to help those suffering with HIV/AIDS obtain the services necessary to live a healthier and more wholesome life. Of course, no one could help but be impressed by the 400-foot red ribbon that, hopefully, will earn its place in the Guinness Book of Records. The rain, which had soaked the area the day before, held off until almost the end. After about a third of the walkers returned, a few drops began to fall, then quickly became a deluge—but the rain could, in no way, ruin our parade!

In Memoriam

Sister Imelda Catherine McGrail
1/12/09
Sister Annette Marie Finlayson
(Sister Imelda Joseph)
11/5/08
Sister Ann Mercedes Miller
11/19/08
Sister Eugene Mary Delany
12/3/08
Sister Alice Ignatia Ackerman
12/4/08
Sister Mary Agnes Brennan
(Sister Mary Serena)
1/10/09
Sister Ethelwina Molloy
1/6/09

See more good news at www.osfphila.org

— Anne Frank (adapted)
Mission Statement

We, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, choose to live the Gospel in the prophetic spirit of Francis of Assisi and our Foundress Mother Francis Bachmann. With Jesus Christ as Brother, we live as sister with one another, with the entire human family and with all creation. Calling ourselves and one another to continuous conversion of heart, we commit ourselves to a life of contemplation, poverty and humility.

As vowed women of the Church, we respond with diverse gifts in a spirit of collaboration and of mutual service to the needs of others, especially the economically poor, the marginal and the oppressed. Seeking to participate in the Spirit’s action in the world, we direct our personal and corporate resources to the promotion of justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Filled with trust in the goodness of God, we move forward.

Exciting Changes Take Place with the Good News

Starting with the summer 2009 issue, some exciting changes will take place with the Good News publication. Good News will have a new format/design! We are anxious to share our smaller format, full-color version with you. It is set to arrive in your mailbox in July. Also, our long-time feature writer, Kathryn Hunt, will be leaving us. It has been a pleasure to work with Kathryn and we wish her the very best in all future endeavors. We welcome Elena Perri who will become our new feature writer with the summer issue. Your feedback is welcomed and appreciated. Please forward any comments to goodnews@osfphila.org.

Success Times Two

Two of the 2008 fundraisers proved very successful. Combined net proceeds from the Fourteenth Annual Golf Tournament and the Seventh Annual Fall Raffle totaled $189,800. The entire amount benefited the sponsored and cosponsored ministries of the Sisters of St. Francis.

- Fourteenth Annual Golf Tournament
  September 15, 2008
  $103,000

- Seventh Annual Fall Raffle
  November 25, 2008
  $86,800

Thanks to all the sponsors, donors, golfers, and raffle participants who helped to make these two fundraisers so successful. Visit the sisters’ website at www.osfphila.org for information about the golf tournament and raffle winners.

In the 1950s and 60s, after spending one year as a postulant—the young women choosing a life of service participated in an investing ceremony—dressed in all white, wedding-like attire. They emerged in the full habit and white veil as novices. After two more years as novices, they professed vows and received a black veil. Times have changed drastically since then and many of the old traditions of the vocation process are just a memory—as are the days of the large groups of sisters entering the congregation. Read more about how times have changed and what is being done to attract more young women to a life of loving service, see page 8.