

REFLECTIONS
&
Connections

NOVEMBER 2015

STORIES OF MISSION
& MINISTRY



CSA

Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes
Promoting Justice, Building Community

Greetings,



Giving thanks is the theme of this season. Nature obliges us with a beautiful array of color visible all around. Earth's bountiful harvest gives us the plenty we enjoy on Thanksgiving Day. As we give thanks for all that God has done for us, we take time to ponder those who struggle to provide for the needs of their families and friends and who may be migrating the globe to find a safe place to be in a new welcoming environment.

It is in this context – a mix of plenty and need – always surrounded by the love of our God that Pope Francis has proclaimed a Year of Mercy. As he so eloquently states, “Jesus is the face of God’s mercy...Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions and his entire person reveals the mercy of God.” In this Year of Mercy, December 8, 2015, through November 20, 2016, we are encouraged to ponder the mystery of mercy as a “wellspring of joy, serenity and peace.”

Mercy is at work when we recognize our need for one another in the ordinary and extraordinary tasks of our lives. Our society and world cry out for mercy as we gaze on the plight of those living in cities riven by racism, poverty and unrest or on those driven from their homes and homelands by polarization, a clash of ideas and strife leading to violence. When we as a human family reach out to the vulnerable we are in the territory of mercy.

The CSA Constitutions reminds all sisters, associates, partners in ministry, and friends that as we participate in the mission of Jesus Christ we recognize that “...we, too, are among the needy and are enriched by those we serve.” (2) Through the tender mercy of our God we claim that, “The love of Christ has gathered us together, and it is this love that binds us to one another and forms us into an apostolic community, striving to bear one another’s burdens and to do God’s will.” (39)

What more can we ask or imagine?

In the peace and love of Christ,
Sister Jean Steffes, CSA
General Superior

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Gospel Women

Embracing the Essence of Leadership

BY SISTER EDIE CREWS, CSA, USA VOCATION DIRECTOR

A wonderful opportunity recently opened up for sisters under the age of sixty to participate in a Collaborative Leadership Development program. Four Sisters of St. Agnes, Sisters Madeline Gianforte, Jane Jaszewski, Vicki Wuolle, and Edie Crews, responded to the invitation to attend the first session at Mercy Center in St. Louis, Missouri, in September. Forty-eight sisters and associates from around the world met to listen, to grow, to question and to grapple with the essence of leadership in self, ministry and community. Since this is an ongoing program, the attendees have been grouped into cohorts of five or six members, with the expectation that each one will select a personal mentor with whom to reflect regularly during this entire process.

Sister Jane found that “the experience helped me redefine leadership as drawing out the Creative Divine in self and others, toward greater wholeness.”

For her response to the experience, Sister Vicki offers a string of three haiku poems woven through a recurring statement among the Sisters of St. Agnes.

At the heart of who we are...

*Gospel women rise
call forth sister faith
substance of our lives*

is the desire to connect...

*sybiotic charge
experienced in wave and moon
confluence of Love*

at the level of the sacred.

*gather our heart fire
in restoration of hope
whole no matter what*

Sister Vicki Wuolle, CSA



L to R: Sisters Madeline Gianforte, Vicki Wuolle, Jane Jaszewski, Edie Crews



L to R: Sisters Wilhelmina Schoch and Peg Spindler

Sojourner Truth House

Gary, Indiana

BY VALERIE GRACZYK, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Sojourner Truth, an African American, is one of the most notable and highly regarded American women of the nineteenth century. She dedicated her life to end slavery and opened doors for all people, especially women and children.

Sister Peg Spindler and Sister Wilhelmina Schoch, members of CSA, have followed in the footsteps of Sojourner Truth and have opened many doors

to homeless women and children – many African American – in Gary, Indiana, at Sojourner Truth House.

Sister Wilhelmina, who is newly retired, focused on the food and clothing distribution for over 90 households a day. “ We purchased food from the Food Bank and local grocery stores. We received some products from the government as well as

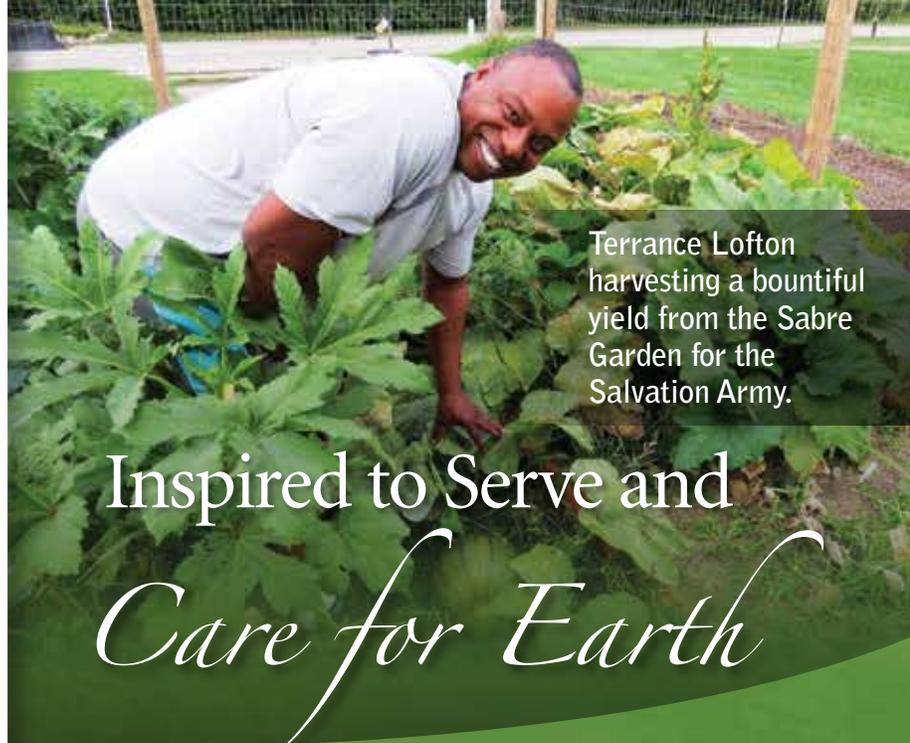
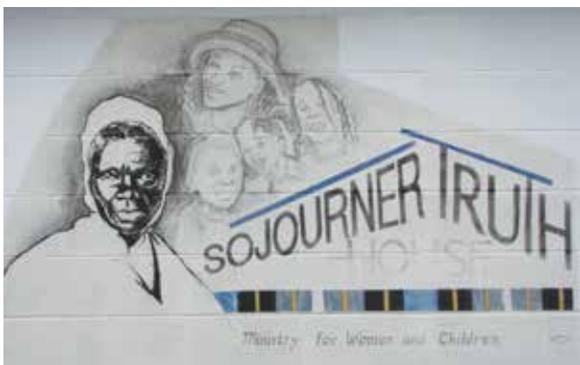
private donations. Unfortunately, we did not have fresh fruits and vegetables to give out.”

Sister Peg Spindler a native of Gary, Indiana, stated, “I was born and raised in this area, and I taught for fifteen years at the parish school I had attended as a child. I left Gary to pursue other ministries but then returned; coming home again was right for me,” shared Sister Peg, Executive Director of Sojourner Truth House for the past eighteen years.

Gary has a poverty rate of 41%. In one month Sojourner Truth House works with 2,164 clients including children. Food is distributed to over 25,000 individuals and 9,000 families a year. Part of the services offered to the clients is a wide variety of personal enrichment courses. The goal is to assist them in their own growth toward self-sufficiency; for each woman that may be different.

With Sister Peg’s entrepreneurial leadership, a committed board, generous donors, willing staff, hundreds of volunteers, and the strengths of each woman all combined together, successes are seen every day.

“The sisters are beautiful people; they are dedicated and stay focused on the mission. They hold within them the strong spirit of hospitality and welcome. They are hard working and truly hear the needs of the poor,” said a former staff member.



Terrance Lofton harvesting a bountiful yield from the Sabre Garden for the Salvation Army.

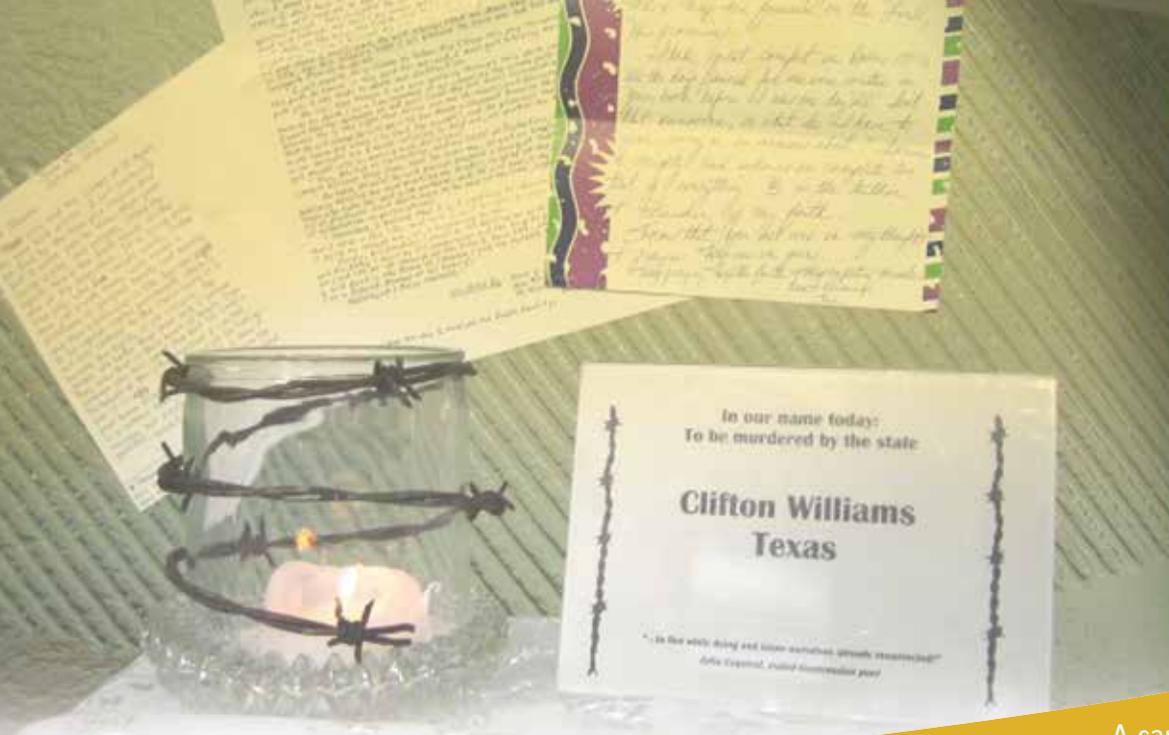
Inspired to Serve and *Care for Earth*

BY SISTER MARY NOEL BROWN, CSA
EXECUTIVE LEADER OF SPONSORSHIP

Marian University stands with Pope Francis’ plea in *Laudato Si’* for educators to broaden environmental education by “developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility, and compassionate care.” The *Sabre Garden*, initiated in 2013, is a student-led endeavor that is an excellent example of Marian’s serving this call to action by demonstrating sustainable organic growing methods, while producing healthy food for the Salvation Army Food Pantry. This summer the garden was used as a learning laboratory for high school students participating in the university’s *Upward Bound Math and Science* program. Biology education major Terrance Lofton did his senior research project to develop and assess a garden-based learning curriculum under the direction of Professor John Morris.

Lofton commented, “It was awesome and rewarding for all of us to share the fruits of our labor with the Salvation Army. The class was thrilled to give freshly-grown vegetables to families who have less than they do. On a personal level, I became more inspired about the relevance of Marian’s values of social justice and service. As a future educator, I have a moral responsibility to teach my students how we all are accountable to care for Earth and share what we have with those in need.”

Marian University recently received a grant from the International Paper Foundation that will provide funds to install a drip irrigation water system, build raised-bed gardens and make other improvements. The university is sponsored by CSA.



A candle and letters on display for those on death row.

The Holy Year of Mercy and Capital Punishment

BY SISTER SALLY ANN BRICKNER, OSF, JUSTICE COORDINATOR

Pope Francis announced that the Catholic Church will celebrate the Holy Year of Mercy from December 8, 2015, to November 20, 2016. “No one can be excluded from the mercy of God,” he stated.

During the Holy Year of Mercy it would be fitting for the Catholic Church in the United States to reinvigorate its efforts to promote ending use of the death penalty. Since its reinstatement in 1976, over 1400 executions have taken place. During that time, more than 150 persons have been released from death row due to evidence of their innocence. In his book *Just Mercy*, Bryan Stevenson writes compellingly of the many injustices in our country’s implementation of capital punishment. Recent calls for reform of the criminal justice system may not extend to our federal and state government’s use of the death penalty.

In 2006, the Sisters of St. Agnes took a corporate stance against the death penalty. Acting on this commitment, members of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

Committee correspond by letter with prisoners on death row whose execution dates are imminent. Sometimes inmates send moving responses as you see in the quotes below.

William Shakespeare wrote in the Merchant of Venice (Act 4, Scene 1) that mercy is an attribute of God, and that earthly powers show likeness to God when mercy seasons justice. In this forthcoming Holy Year of Mercy let us urge state and federal government officials to end the use of capital punishment in the United States.

“I want you to know that your loving words, and prayers, lifted my spirits here in the death house on the eve of my execution.” From William Van Poyck, 25 years on death row, executed in 2013.

“I really appreciate the love of God shining through you in reaching out to me in compassion during this time. Your prayers are helping to strengthen me and keep me focused on the Lord, His promises.” From Kimberly L. McCarthy who died by lethal injection in 2013.

In Memoriam...

Walking with God



Sister Virginia Murphy, formerly known as Sister Patrick

September 19, 2015

A native of New York City, New York, Sister Virginia Murphy was the oldest in her family of four girls and four boys. She made her first profession of vows on November 11, 1950. She was an elementary school teacher for 31 years and she also served as a principal for 12 of those years in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Indiana.

Beginning in 1995 Sister Virginia was appointed as Local Coordinator for the sisters who resided at Nazareth Heights Infirmary. Later Sister Virginia's ministry and care were devoted to the residents of the Alzheimer's Unit of St. Francis Home. She had a special gift for helping those with dementia and she assisted the staff as a volunteer until December 2013.



Sister Amalie Milot, baptized Frances

September 27, 2015

Sister Amalie was born in Haverhill, Massachusetts. She was one of eleven children. She made her first profession of vows on August 15, 1961. After receiving a B.S. degree in Education from Marian College she taught elementary and middle school. She then earned an M.A. in Education from Fordham University in New York City and taught special education for 13 years. She continued to take courses with emphasis on dementia and spirituality of the elderly. Up to the present she was a volunteer at Hospice Hope.



Sister Mary Beth Wilhelm, formerly known as Sister Donelda

September 29, 2015

Sister Mary Beth was born in Tiffin, Ohio. She was one of twelve children. She made her first profession of vows on August 15, 1942. She received a B.S. in Education from Marian College and an M.S. in Education from Marquette University, Milwaukee. She taught in elementary schools for 41 years in the Midwest. For 18 years she served in pastoral ministry to the homebound and hospitalized. For 10 years she was full-time pastoral minister among St. Patrick's Catholic community, Hudson, Wisconsin. She was also involved in the Fond du Lac Grandparent Program while tutoring at St. Joseph School in Fond du Lac.

For full obituaries go to www.csasisters.org. Memorials can be sent to the CSA Development Office or through the website.



Sister Mary Christine works with a client.

Journey Out of Poverty

BY SISTER ANITA HENNING, CSA
GENERAL COUNCILOR

If you were renting a trailer-home filled with mold, your baby was sick, and you were beginning to feel the effects of such a stressful situation, what would you do? In addition, if you were on a limited income, had a poor credit rating, and were unable to afford a down payment and first month's rent on a home, what could you do?

This is the situation faced by one of the first families who sought assistance from Sister Mary Christine Fellerhoff, director of CHANGE AMORY, an organization in Amory, Mississippi. The purpose of this agency is to help people move out of poverty. As director, Sister Mary Christine was able to help the family find a house and pay the rent. Other member churches supplied needed furniture. When the mother and father first came for assistance, the grandmother had custody of the two older children.

Fast forward two years. . . . The entire family is now living together and has begun to pay back the "loan" they received. After learning about budgeting from CHANGE AMORY, the mother bought a ledger and now keeps a careful budget for the family.

Sister Mary Christine has walked with the family along the way. They no longer need financial assistance from the organization, but they continue to receive some support services as they journey out of poverty. Recently, the mother called for help in finding a new house with an additional bedroom so that she could maintain custody of the two older children. She said that Sister had become a second mother to her and was a woman she could trust and whose opinions she valued. Sister Mary Christine lives the CSA Mission "to respond to those whose faith life and human dignity are threatened."



CSA

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Ways to connect with CSA:

CSA web site:

<http://www.csasisters.org/>

Adelante Mujer/Advance Woman

<http://www.womanadvance.com/>

(in the front page of our web site)

Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation

<http://justicepeacecsa.blogspot.com/>

(in the front page of our web site)

Just Saying

<http://csajustsaying.blogspot.com/>

(in the front page of our web site)

Streams 'N Stirrings, Sister Jean:

(in the front page of our web site)



<http://www.facebook.com/sasisters?sk=wall>

(in the front page of our web site)



[http://www.youtube.com/user/](http://www.youtube.com/user/TheCSAChannel1)

TheCSAChannel1

(in the front page of our web site)

Associates Serving in *Parish Ministry*

BY CAROL BRAUN, DIRECTOR OF ASSOCIATE RELATIONSHIP

CSA Associates Molly Sheehan, Pauline Pluhar and Mary Beth Osiecki live among scenic rolling hills in New Jersey, the Garden State. They are engaged in ministries at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church in West Milford, guided by their call as associates of CSA.

Molly, Pauline and Mary Beth see the mission and ministry of CSA as the “fit” for how they witness to the Gospel. “Being an associate is important in my life because it keeps me spiritually grounded and provides companions for my journey. Associates and sisters support me in the life I lead, but also challenge me to grow and expand my world view in many different ways,” states Molly. An associate since 2003, in the past Molly was a parish youth minister and volunteer at the parish food pantry; now she prays for those who are ill, dying or have passed on.

Pauline visits two nursing homes and serves on the parish Liturgy Committee. Pauline reflects on how being an associate of CSA has been a help in her ministry, “You can’t go out to care for and help others if you don’t have a supportive group of people to come back to for enrichment and to remind you of why you do your ministry.”

Mary Beth shares her enthusiasm and leadership abilities as an associate of CSA and, at Our Lady Queen of Peace, as the coordinator of ministries and evangelization. She especially enjoys women’s ministry. “I am dedicated to empowering women to discover God’s great love for them,” says Mary Beth. Twelve years ago, she initiated a Women’s Cornerstone Retreat at the parish that still continues to this day. Mary Beth offers spiritual direction and facilitates book discussions on a variety of topics. “It is in ministering to others that I, too, am nourished,” adds Mary Beth.



L to R: Associates Mary Beth Osiecki and Molly Sheehan, Sister Carole Gurdak, Associate Pauline Pluhar