

## CSA Out 'n About!

By Sister René Backe, CSA

Greetings!

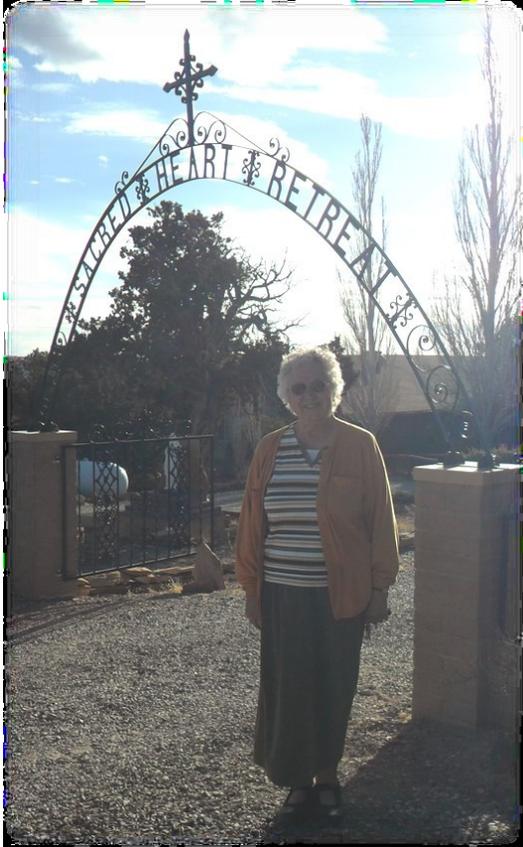
Yaatahey! Buenos días! Hello! Greetings from Gallup, New Mexico, in the three main languages of our tri-cultural diocese - Navajo, Hispanic, and Anglo. New Mexico is called the Land of Enchantment. And indeed, enchantment is in the air, in the loveliness of the people and their character and spirit, in the climate and in the natural surroundings of this mountain desert. I have let myself be enchanted. I love living in this mountain desert beauty.



My name is Sister Rene Backe, and I have been living and ministering in this Land of Enchantment for 27 years. I was born and raised in Crown Point, Indiana, and educated by the Sisters of St. Agnes at St. Mary's School there, then at St. Agnes High, and Marian College (now University) both located in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. I have been a Sister of St. Agnes for 58 years and my life as a sister has been so blessed and enriched. I began my ministerial life as an elementary teacher, then principal, then director of religious education in Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, and Kansas. In all of those ministries I enjoyed meeting so many wonderful people and have been inspired and energized by the commitment to our Catholic faith of so many teachers and catechists and students.

My main ministry now is as director of Sacred Heart Retreat Center for the diocese of Gallup. [http://dioceseofgallup.org/pdfs/sacred\\_heart\\_retreat.php](http://dioceseofgallup.org/pdfs/sacred_heart_retreat.php) A retreat center is a place where people can get away from their "usual" and connect with God. People come here and say, "It's so quiet and peaceful here." For me it's a chance to animate our CSA charism of hospitality, to make conditions as conducive as possible for folks to encounter the Divine, to sense God's presence and come to realize God's intense and overwhelming love for them. My goal as a spiritual director is to serve the relationship between God and people. That has been my sacred privilege for the past 25 years. Most times it's listening, sometimes it's inviting them to just be here and breathe and open their senses to nature.

My second ministry now is to be academic director of the Deacon and Lay Ministry Formation Program. In doing that I arrange classes and provide instructors for those seeking ordination as a permanent deacon or serving in other ecclesial lay ministry so that they can serve God's people in their parishes as wisely and lovingly and fruitfully as possible. Again, I perceive such genuine goodness and sincerity in people who want to serve God and others with their God-given gifts and talents. They "get" Christ's words in the gospel of Matthew: "Freely have you received; freely give."



**Sister René at the entrance to the Sacred Heart Retreat Center**

A third ministry of mine is that of being vicar for religious, being the bishop's delegate in the lives and ministries of the religious of the diocese. I am grateful that our bishop has great respect for our vocation to the consecrated life. This job description involves communication and presence and sometimes advocacy. I am so grateful to God for my call to our consecrated life that it is a pleasure to serve my sisters of so many different communities and charisms. They are so joyful and generous in their lives of service.

Life is such a precious gift from God. I often sing (to myself) Abraham Heschel's words: "Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy." May my life continue to sing God's goodness all my days.