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Section **A**

## Sharing the gift of mission: CSA's legacy of service to FDL community



**Sr. Joann Sambs, CSA**  
General Superior, left, along with the many sisters of CSA devote their lives to serving the needs of the community through their unique faith-based mission.

Photo by: Patrick Flood

**By Maggie Sales**  
Simply walk down the halls of any school or hospital founded by the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes (CSA) or visit any of the places in which they work and volunteer, and you will find an unmistakable spirit of hospi-

talinity, humility, and stewardship. Over the course of its 153-year-plus history, the congregation has built and staffed schools and hospitals, educated and cared for multiple generations, and created an enduring legacy of service in the Fond du Lac community and beyond.

empower others to embrace the gospel message in their work, their families, and their lives.

"The core of our mission is to transform lives, and our presence in the community of Fond du Lac has helped to plant the seed of faith and hope, which continues to grow and increase through the lives of the people and through the organizations which the congregation has founded and then passed on to lay personnel to carry on the mission."

According to Sister Joann, all of the institutions founded by the congregation are now independent entities bearing the imprint of mission implanted by the work of the Sisters, but operating as financially autonomous organizations. While the congregation continues to ensure the incorporation of mission in these facilities, revenues generated from services are used solely within the organizations for operations.

"Through careful stewardship and sharing of our resources, our sisters were able to build and staff these facilities, working and sacrificing to build schools and a hospital for the future of the community," explained Sister Joann. "Now they are in the hands of lay leadership who share our vision for building stronger families and community through faith-based services for people of all faith traditions. Our connection to our sponsored ministries, like St. Agnes Hospital

and Marian University, is purely consultative and spiritual. Our goal is to ensure that the healing mission of Jesus is carried on through these institutions that we founded so many years ago. The congregation's role is to advise and to guide."

The work of the Sisters in the Fond du Lac community in the areas of education, healthcare, social justice, advocacy, and spiritual leadership helped to lay the foundation for a strong tradition of faith-based organizations in the community. Currently, there are more than 42 sisters who either work or volunteer at 14 different locations in Fond du Lac. From prison ministry and hospice care to grief counseling and tutoring struggling students, the sisters continue in their ministries well into their aging years. Those who are unable to serve in active ministry due to age or illness devote their daily ministry of prayer to remembering the

special intentions of others.

"The Sisters operate as a conscience for our community, constantly reminding us of our responsibilities," observed Dr. John Lent, long-time resident of Fond du Lac and member of United Hearts for Health, a medical mission group whose roots in Latin America began with the work of the Sisters of St. Agnes in the area. "Wherever they go, we see the footprints of their work. They truly see the face of Jesus Christ in the people that they serve, wherever they are. Their impact on our community is not just in their work, but in the people whose lives have been changed, especially the poor."

Along with their active ministry in the area, as well as throughout the United States, many of the sisters also serve on the boards of charitable organizations and nonprofit and educational institutions. In addition, much work has been done through the Office of Justice, Peace, and Ecology, including efforts to promote systemic change for economic justice and to end human trafficking. Despite expanding their outreach to social and pastoral ministries, many of the Sisters still continue to teach at all levels, from preschool to graduate courses in educational and parish settings, as well as through community outreach and spiritual direction.

"Today, St. Mary's Springs Academy -- the Catholic School system - K-12, Marian University, and Agnesian HealthCare stand tall in this community as a testament to the sacrifice, dedication, and collaborative spirit of the Sisters and all who continue to partner with us to provide these enduring ministries," concluded Sister Joann.

"Our ministry focus changes and evolves depending upon the needs of the times. Yet, at the heart of who we are is our love for God, for religious life, and for being women of deep faith and shining hope."

### The feast day of St. Agnes of Rome - January 21

St. Agnes of Rome, for whom founding father of the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes, Father Caspar Rehrl, had a special devotion, was born in the fourth century B.C. and was martyred at the age of 13 for refusing to deny God and rejecting the advances of a wealthy Roman suitor. She is honored as one of the four great virgin martyrs of the Roman Catholic Church, and her shrine in Rome, Italy, is known as the Basilica of St. Agnes Outside the Walls.

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The statue of St. Agnes stands in front of the CSA Motherhouse (St. Agnes Convent) located on County Road K, east of Fond du Lac.

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