

A photograph of two Cedar Waxwings perched on a branch with clusters of red berries and snow. The bird on the right is holding a red berry in its beak. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white, suggesting a snowy day.

FEBRUARY 2024

REFLECTIONS & *Connections*

STORIES OF MISSION
& MINISTRY

A stylized purple flower logo with five petals, positioned to the left of the CSA text.

CSA

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

Dear Friends,

We live in the midst of a wounded world. We are ever conscious of its suffering and pain. Yet, we are still called to be a people of hope and a presence of Love in this world.

Perhaps as we journey through the season of Lent, we may use this sacred time for reflection and prayer, ever deepening our relationship with the Divine. The Cosmic Vision of God's Creation is illuminating in that it helps us realize that we are all held in an immense and unimaginable Love.

So, we invite you to walk with us through these sacred weeks of Lent. Together may we continue to be concerned about the dignity and faith life of all peoples, to be compassionate and understanding, to be strengthened and filled with hope. May we each hear the Divine's voice urging us to be open to transformation so we can be Love in the midst of all the polarization and collective trauma.

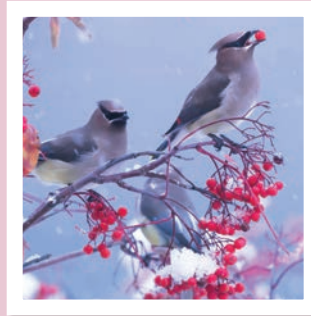
Maybe this Lent we can experience "... standing still and learning to be astonished..." ("Messenger" by Mary Oliver. 2006. *Thirst*) by the enormity of God's love.

With Caring and Grateful Hearts,

Sisters Sharon Pollnow, Peg Spindler, Madeline Gianforte, and Lael Niblick



Pictured L to R: Sisters Sharon Pollnow, General Superior; Lael Niblick, General Councilor; Madeline Gianforte, General Councilor; and Peg Spindler, General Vicar



ON THE COVER:

A cedar waxwing finds nourishment during a late fall snowstorm at the CSA motherhouse.

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Editorial Board Members:

Sister Jeremy Quinn, Sister Jean Perry, Dusty Krikau, and Mary Christopherson

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The Journey of *Discerning Call*

By Kelly Robe



Kathy Koepsell

CSA Associate Kathy Koepsell was once on a path to becoming a vowed member of CSA. She felt a call that needed to be answered and religious life felt like the right response. She loved the aspirancy, where one hundred girls lived together and learned responsibility, independence, and how to manage time and studies with a scheduled prayer life. It was a different life than that of the average high school girl. As a postulant, she learned about the community, was involved in faith-sharing, and never felt she was giving up anything but rather looked at what she was gaining.

As a junior novice, Kathy questioned whether religious life was right for her. One day, while hearing the voices of children, she felt how much they filled her heart with joy. Was she being called to be a physical mother versus a spiritual one? She always had a desire to have children which would be hard to surrender. During a retreat, Kathy felt she was being called away from religious life. It was hard to embrace, yet she felt that message needed to be explored.

Her decision to leave religious life brought an inner peace that reassured her leaving was the right choice.

However, the pull of religious life and Kathy's love of community and praying together lingered. Why wasn't she being called to something for which she felt such love? "It was difficult to see classmates move on to something which I had wanted so strongly. Religious life is beautiful, and it was hard not to keep running after that." The old vision she held for her life and God's plan for her life were not the same. Eventually Kathy discerned a call to associate relationship.

Why is one called in one direction but not another? Why do we sometimes feel drawn by that to which we're not really called? While participating in retreats, finishing college, and praying with scripture daily, it became clear God was leading Kathy to a new direction. "I reached an actual letting go and acceptance that this is God's call, not mine. Whether we are lay people or vowed, we are called to live the mission of Jesus through our baptismal call."

Learn more about the associate relationship
by visiting www.csasisters.org/associates



Taking a Stance *Against Racism*

Sisters of St. Agnes have been working to reduce the impacts of racism and bigotry in various ways for many years. As early as 1850, CSA Founder Father Rehrl opened schools to all children regardless of background or religion. In the 1960s, many sisters took part in fair housing marches in Chicago and Milwaukee. In 1983, CSA opened Unity House in inner-city Chicago

as a haven for those seeking cross-cultural immersion through residential living. These are a few examples of activities that contributed to CSA receiving the MLK Spirit Award from Marian University in 2020. Today, CSA continues this long-standing culture of justice and call to action with their adoption of the CSA Corporate Stance on Anti-Racism.

During the last half of 2023, the sisters and associates spent time intentionally studying racism and how to be actively anti-racist on a day-to-day basis. Each month, sisters and associates spent time researching individually and in small groups focusing on topics of defining race and racism, how to be an anti-racist, recognizing personal bias and bias in media, racial inequities in housing, education, and criminal justice systems, exploring white privilege, white fragility, and public fear around critical race theory and white replacement theory, and finally delving into healing, repair, and justice. A small group also gathered for an intergenerational discussion with local high schoolers on Martin Luther King Jr. Day in January.

In early February, the entire congregation voted to issue an official corporate stance on anti-racism. CSA has issued six corporate stances since 1987 with the following rationale:

“As CSA, our promise has, from the start, been to follow and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have done so through teaching, care of the sick,

the aged, orphans, and wayfarers. As global realities have become increasingly apparent, so also has our awareness been heightened to issues regarding the dignity of persons, human rights, and justice; the need for structural change; efforts at ‘simplicity of life’ and a greater appreciation of the gifts of creation. The concerns that we pray about and the causes that we pray for have grown.

“That is not enough. We must use all the power we have, first in areas where we have direct impact, through the services we ourselves provide or through our sponsored ministries, then through wise use of our power as shareholders in significant corporations and membership in significant organizations with a social justice agenda. After appropriate study and discussion, we can make public statements of our convictions in areas of major or global importance and concern. These statements, our corporate stance, help create the positive pressure that can lead to a more just society.”

- *CSA Policy on Corporate Stances*

CSA CORPORATE STANCE ON ANTI-RACISM

Reaffirming our commitment to those whose faith life or human dignity is threatened in any way, the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes (CSA) opposes racism in all forms, encourages education, and supports actions to eliminate racism, bringing understanding of our complicity, prejudice, bias, and privilege to the forefront.



Exploring Your *Spiritual Journey*

*T*he Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes welcomes attendees to a morning of exploring the landscape of spirituality with other women from the community. Led by five spiritual directors from the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes, the interactive event is respectful of all belief systems and spiritual journeys and will invite personal reflection on prompts such as, “What is the central question of your life right now?”

Breakfast with Women: Energizing Spirits will be held on March 7, 2024, in Fond du Lac, WI, in downtown's historic Hotel Retlaw. Panelists are Sisters Rhea Emmer, Jean Hinderer, Patrice Rog, Susan Seeby, and Jomarie Zielke. Each sister brings a personalized approach to spiritual direction and spiritual companionship informed by years of training and experiences in diverse settings.

The event will start promptly at 8:15 a.m. with presentation, discussion, and panel questions until 9:30, after which attendees are welcome to stay for continued reflection and to connect with others in the room until 10:00 a.m.

Check-in and breakfast will be available beginning at 7:30 a.m. Breakfast with Women: Energizing Spirits is respectful of and welcomes all who identify as women to energize their spirits. The cost to attend the breakfast is kept minimal to increase access. Tickets are \$15 per person when purchased prior to March 1 (\$25 after).

Visit csasisters.org/breakfast for more details and tickets.

Breakfast with Women: Energizing Spirits will also serve as the first Sisters & Seekers gathering for 2024. Future gatherings will continue this intergenerational, multifaith conversation around spirituality and individual journeys of self-discovery. Sisters & Seekers is always open to new participants.

Reach out to edieofgod3@gmail.com for more information about joining these ongoing gatherings.



CSA Heartbeats

Presented by the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes

The “Heartbeats” monthly video series includes words and images designed for spiritual renewal and uplifting reflection. Listen to the call of your caring heart, valuing presence and mutual relationships as a way of life. Activate your compassionate heart, responding to ecological, ecclesial, societal, and global challenges. With each heartbeat, learn more about the congregation and more about yourself.

So far, the series has featured videos from three CSA Associates and Sister Pat Hayes’s video was released just this month. Topics range widely from a contemplative exploration of nature to a personal Magnificat to internalizing the lessons of poetry and parables.



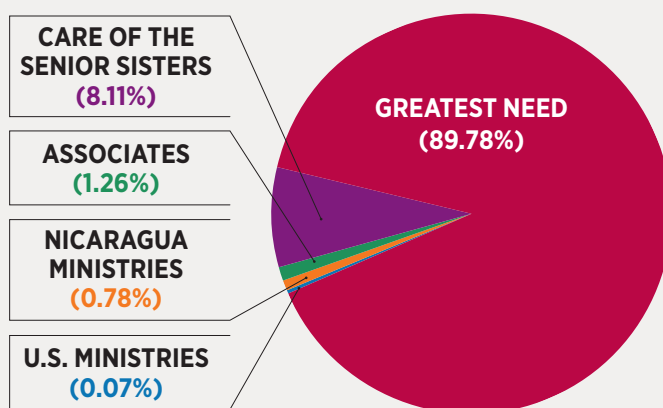
Check the website or the YouTube channel on the 15th of each month to see what new reflection awaits!

Details and Videos:
www.csasisters.org/heartbeats

Annual Report Now Available

Your donations, both large and small, are what allow CSA to continue participating in the mission of Christ by joyful service in the Church, always aware that we, too, are among the needy and are enriched by those we serve. All donations go to funding the ministry of your choice. The full annual report is now available at csasisters.org/donate

Donation Designations from October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023





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subscription preferences at
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Or email us at **csaadm@csasisters.org**

Or call **920-907-2300**

Save the *Date*



*J*oin us for the 2024 Earth Day Fair on April 27 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the CSA Motherhouse (320 County Rd K, Fond du Lac). Enjoy exhibitors, tours, presentations, and the opportunity to spend time in God's creation. Last year attendee Tiffany Brault shared, "Our family had a wonderful time at the Earth Day Fair. It was so exciting to see so many vendors who are taking on different actions to care for the planet we all share. Sometimes

environmentalism can seem so daunting, because there is so much to do, and we are all just a tiny piece of the puzzle. Seeing so many others who have found ways to make a difference is so heartening."

Get more information at:
csasisters.org/earth