

REFLECTIONS  
&  
*Connections*

FEBRUARY 2016

STORIES OF MISSION  
& MINISTRY



**CSA**

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

# Dear Friends,



**O**n December 8, Pope Francis opened the holy doors of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome to usher in a year of mercy. With the proclamation of this holy year, doors are opened to remind us to open up and let God's mercy and compassion enrich our lives. An open door signals an atmosphere of welcome. Open doors are a reminder to us of the importance of hospitality and compassion. How often have I been delighted when someone opened a door for me when I was loaded with packages or opened another kind of door when I needed an entry point to someone whose expertise was needed for responding to a problem or situation? Those kinds of openings are a manifestation of mercy in action. This year of mercy calls us to open doors for one another as we go about our daily lives. The challenge is to reflect the mercy and compassion of God in all our encounters.

In his letter introducing the year of mercy, Pope Francis shows us mercy as central to the nature of God and as the very foundation of the church. The idea is not to be perfect but to show love. The following quotes unfold this understanding.

In short, the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this is a 'visceral' love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy. (6)

Without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weakness and struggles of our brothers and sisters. (10)

Living with compassion and mercy brings us closer to the God who has made us. Mercy given and received makes our faith come alive. Our CSA Constitutions are a powerful reminder 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)

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

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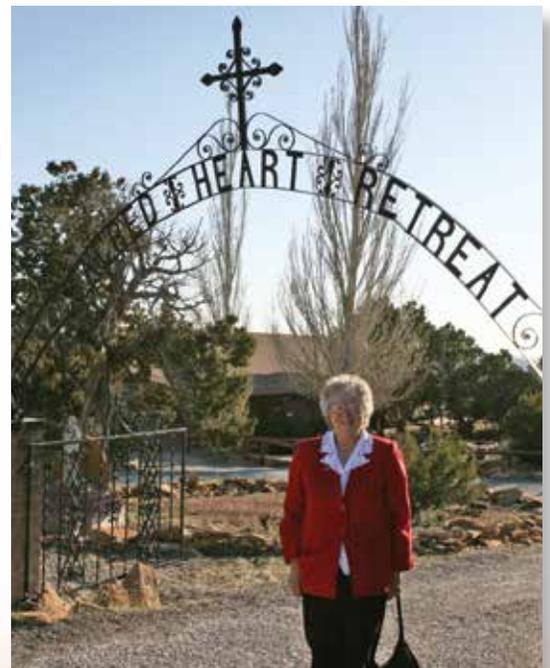
# A Ministry of Many Hats

BY SISTER ANITA HENNING, CSA, GENERAL COUNCILOR

Sister René Backe feels at home in New Mexico where she has ministered for 28 years. The Diocese of Gallup, which encompasses over 55,000 square miles (roughly the size of the state of New York), straddles both New Mexico and Arizona. The diocese was founded for the spiritual care of the seven Native American tribes within its boundaries. Although economically it is the poorest diocese in the United States and the landscape is barren, the people and nature bring a beauty to one's heart. With 70% of the population unchurched, there is great potential for evangelization.

Currently, only 72 religious from various communities minister in the diocese. In her roles, Sister René wears many hats. As director of Sacred Heart Retreat Center she prepares retreat talks, prayer services, and anything else needed for groups who use the center. She is responsible for maintenance - always grateful when the electricity, heat, internet and plumbing are working, and the roof is not leaking. As director of deacon formation in the diocese, Sister René teaches and arranges programs and speakers. She is part of the RCIA program (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) at a local parish. Four years ago she initiated a women's prayer group which continues to meet weekly. She serves as Vicar for Religious in the diocese and provides spiritual direction for those who request it.

Sister's work among the people feeds her soul. Over the years she has been inspired by the people she serves, especially as she learned and adjusted to the cultures of the people who call this "home." She trusts that her work is God's work.



Sister René Backe at the entrance  
to the retreat center



Sister René with Native American  
women of the diocese



Sisters of St. Agnes gathered to celebrate the 70th anniversary of CSA's arrival in Nicaragua.

# The 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of CSA Presence in Nicaragua

BY VALERIE GRACZYK, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

The 70th anniversary of the congregation's presence in Nicaragua was observed on December 20 in Nicaragua. Sisters Jean Steffes and Jomarie Zielke of the CSA leadership team were among the participants at this special event. A liturgy of celebration took place on December 20, 2015, at Centro Santa Inés, home to CSA's retired sisters in Managua. Presiders for the liturgy included

Bishop Paul Schmidt, Bishop David Zywiec, and Capuchin Friar Francis Solanus Fary.

The sixteen CSA members who live and minister in Nicaragua were also present. This included retired Sister María del Carmen Avendaño who has been professed for over 62 years and vividly recalls the early days of missionary work when CSA began a school and a clinic in Waspam.

“This was a significant day of celebration for the congregation,” shared Sister Jomarie who had served in the 1980s as a nurse in the Waspam clinic. “CSA was invited by the Capuchin order to partner with them in Latin America in 1945. We have not wavered over 70 years in our commitment to our sisters and the people of Nicaragua. We have ministered among three very different cultures: Hispanic, Miskito, and English speaking people. Our members learned new languages and customs.

During these seventy years, the North American and native Nicaraguan sisters have worked to become one CSA community. These experiences have provided welcome and ample opportunities to share the Nicaraguan culture, to learn from one another, and to see the beauty and goodness of each other’s culture and way of life. We are graced and enriched as we journey together to further the mission of Jesus.”

## CSA Offers Spring Programs



### Women’s Leadership Breakfast,

Thursday, March 3, 7:00 to 8:30 a.m.,

Fee \$25

Author of *My Last Step Backward* Tasha Schuh will inspire you with her personal story of transformation. At age 16 she fell through an open trap door on stage and landed on a concrete floor. Her remarkable story will captivate you. Today she travels the U.S. in a wheel chair, encouraging her audiences to embrace life’s obstacles and shine.

To register go to [www.csasisters.org](http://www.csasisters.org) or for more information call Tammy at 920-907-2336.

### Wholing the Heart,

Saturday, March 5, 9:00 a.m. to Noon

Presenter Sister Patrice Rog, spiritual director and retreat director shares, “We all have holes in our hearts that prevent us from living fully. This will be a time of reflection to step back for God to heal us allowing our hearts to become *whole*.”

To register please call 920-907-2300. A suggested free will offering of \$25 will be appreciated. Refreshments included. Location of program is at Founders Hall, Sisters of St. Agnes Convent, 320 County Road K, Fond du Lac.

### Qigong, The Healing Art of Meditative Movement,

Sunday, March 13, 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Instructor Katherine McCabe is certified to teach Medical Qigong, has traveled to China and studied in Traditional Chinese medicine.

Qigong is easy to learn and allows the body to breathe in a way that frees and relieves. It works on the same principles as acupuncture in that it tends to the meridian system in its ability to move stagnant energy thus providing many of the same benefits of acupressure and acupuncture plus meditation for the nervous system. It can be done in a seated or standing position. Qigong provides ongoing relaxation and renewal for your body allowing enormous benefit in stress reduction.

To register call 920.907.2300. Suggested free will offering of \$135. Location of program is at Founders Hall, Sisters of St. Agnes Convent, 320 County Road K, Fond du Lac.

### Mindfulness,

Saturday, April 9 and April 30, 9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Interested in developing a more centered, peaceful view of life?

In the midst of life’s busyness and struggles, how do we discover a deep sense of God’s presence? The answer is simple. Develop a spirit of mindfulness or prayerfulness. This simplicity requires learning a practice that will bring an awareness of God into everyday life. Join Sister Patrice Rog, CSA, as she presents the practical steps from ancient wisdom and psychology for creating a more centered, peace-filled life. The sessions will be held in Founders Hall, Sisters of St. Agnes Convent, 320 County Road K, Fond du Lac. A free will offering will be appreciated. To register please call 920-907-2300.

## Stance on Peace and Non-Violence

### We are women...

- ...committed to living the gospel values of love and forgiveness.
- ...committed to being peacemakers.
- ...who have lost three of our members to acts of violence in Nicaragua, yet remain committed to nonviolence.
- ...who believe as citizens of a democracy, it is our responsibility to add our voice to the public discourse.
- ...who protest our government's training of terrorists and have demonstrated and advocated for closing the School of the Americas now known as Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC).
- ...who believe we are called to treat all people with value and dignity.
- ...who pray for our country, our leaders and for all the victims of terrorism and their families.
- ...who pray for our enemies and seek deeper understanding of the struggles that generate enmity.
- ...who believe the United States needs to assess those foreign, economic and ecological policies that continue to widen the gap between the wealthy and the poor.
- ...who believe our nation spends too much on making war possible and far too little on creating and empowering just societies in the world.
- ...who strive to hear the cry of the poor and respond globally, nationally and locally with our presence and our resources.
- ...who are committed to the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church and engage in legislative advocacy to promote the common good.
- ...who embrace diversity of race, gender, religion, culture and work to eliminate prejudice and discrimination, both locally and globally.
- ...who join with people of goodwill to pray for peace and to become peacemakers.

The Sisters of St. Agnes  
January 20, 2002



# Commitment to Peace and Nonviolence

BY SISTER SALLY ANN BRICKNER, OSF, JUSTICE COORDINATOR

Each year as January 1 arrives it is a day to recall the anniversary of the deaths of Sisters Maureen Courtney and Teresa de Jesús Rosales Dixon, members of CSA. In the 1990s three members of CSA were killed during the civil war in Nicaragua. These tragedies, together with the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on U. S. soil, heightened the sisters' consciousness of violence both at home and abroad.

Instead of retaliation, CSA members expressed their continued commitment to living the Gospel values of forgiveness and love. They oppose war as a means of resolving conflict. They advocate for public policy that addresses the political, social and economic and environmental causes of violence. They consistently support the closing of the School of the Americas (now

known as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) because its graduates have committed atrocities against their fellow citizens in Latin American countries, including in Nicaragua. The sisters support nuclear disarmament, embrace diversity and promote dialogue and understanding as a way of eliminating prejudice and discrimination.

Hanging outside Founders Hall at St. Agnes Convent is a large, framed statement titled "Peace and Nonviolence" with signatures of over 250 sisters and associates.

In the Beatitudes Jesus proclaims, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Jesus urged his followers to love their enemies. During this Jubilee Year of Mercy, CSA's commitment to peace and nonviolence continues to be embraced in a society that views peacemaking as counterculture.

# Chaplain to the Imprisoned

BY VALERIE GRACZYK, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Imagine spending twenty years of your life working behind bars, locked gates, and barbed wire fences. Sister Patricia Weidman has done just that during her correctional chaplaincy ministry in four institutions. After working as a teacher and as a pastoral care chaplain, she found the skills she learned could be transferred to prison ministry. “To prepare myself I studied major world religions and correctional chaplaincy. There are over 15 different faith groups that meet weekly at my institution. I am one of four full-time staff and 30 trained volunteers serving the spiritual needs of 1,400 inmates. We are full-service chaplains who provide for all the faith groups and inmates,” shared Sister Patricia. “The inmates respect and appreciate what I do. During my weekly rounds I offer support to inmates as they cope with death in a family or with other emotional issues. I believe in the goodness of each person regardless of the harm they have done or the faith group to which they belong.”

She continued, “I am committed to promoting nonviolence at every opportunity.” She facilitates and coordinates two reentry programs, which prepare inmates to return to family and society. The first is a faith-based, spiritual reentry program with a focus on self-improvement and strengthening their faith connections to God, others, the environment and self. The second reentry program addresses alternatives to violent actions by teaching skills of communication, listening, and peacemaking.

Sister Patricia is supported and motivated by the mission statement of the Sisters of St. Agnes, “always aware that we, too, are among the needy and enriched by those we serve.”



L to R: McKenna Rohan, Halle Castonia, Claire Kalas, Kirsten Heier-Strutz and Lexi Brost

## The Joys of Mutuality

BY SISTER EDIE CREWS, CSA  
USA VOCATION DIRECTOR

Last fall several students from Marian University and two Sisters of St. Agnes began meeting twice a month to share faith and to participate in service projects. They named the group “Marian Sisters and Students.”

Students, McKenna Rohan and Lexi Brost, are the co-founders of the group along with Sisters Edie Crews and Alice Ann Pfeifer. The purpose of the group is to allow the young women to get to know CSA better and to learn how the sisters pray and minister in church and society. In turn, sisters get to know the young women, their ways of praying and their view of life. McKenna recently stated, “Marian Sisters and Students’ is a beautiful group in the way it brings us together and creates mentoring relationships between the sisters and students. I can feel the constant love shared within the group as we interact. God is so good!”

Sister Edie commented, “These women have taught me so much. They are dynamic and spiritual. They see the good in others and offer much to the world through acts of service and prayer.” They have also given a “millennial perspective” to the sisters involved in vocation ministry for the Congregation. Acting as a youth review board, they have provided the Vocation Office with valuable suggestions for more appealing brochures and better use of the internet to inform and promote religious life.

During this Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis, the group intends to participate in group and individual prayer experiences and interact with the sisters at the motherhouse. Sister Edie believes that these young women are very forgiving of the world in which they live out their faith and respond to God’s call.



# CSA

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320 County Road K  
Fond du Lac, WI 54937

## 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/TheCSAChannel>

**TheCSAChannel**

(in the front page of our web site)

# Blessed Are the *Merciful*

BY CAROL BRAUN,  
DIRECTOR OF ASSOCIATE RELATIONSHIP

“God put us here to love and care for each other,” said Rose Mary Detlaff in a recent interview. She and her husband Jerry of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, are conscious of the need for mercy and healing in the world. Their charitable actions show love, kindness and unbounded generosity to others each day.

Jerry, who was employed for 47 years at St. Agnes Hospital, now volunteers in a variety of ways in the community: driving residents at St. Francis Home to doctors' appointments, taking his neighbors grocery shopping, caring for their dogs and doing handy work around their homes. Jerry responds in action to anyone who expresses a need.

After 17 years working at St. Agnes Hospital, Rose Mary spent 35 years at ARC, an organization that empowers people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to become independent and integrated into the community. Though she recently retired, the relationships with these special people are still important and valued by Rose Mary.

Together, Rose Mary and Jerry assist at the St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Store and the Loaves and Fishes meal program. They distribute Eucharist to the homebound and elderly, and are actively involved in CSA and associate activities. They enjoy meeting people and working together as a couple to bring God's mercy, hope and healing to others.

“CSA's dedication to God and community and seeing God in the people with whom we come in contact each day are reasons for answering the call to become associates of the Sisters of St. Agnes,” shared Rose Mary and Jerry. “Interacting with the sisters and associates has strengthened our faith life, helped us to see God more clearly and has helped us to be at peace with ourselves. We are truly blessed.”



Jerry and Rose Mary Detlaff