

REFLECTIONS

MAY 2018

&
Connections

*My BEing proclaims the
Spaciousness and
Graciousness of God!*

*"Magnolia Magnificat"
– Doris Klein, CSA*

STORIES OF MISSION
& MINISTRY



CSA

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

Dear Friends,



It is springtime in Fond du Lac. All around us is awakening with new life – nature, the birds, the animals, and the beauty of our motherhouse grounds. Over the years, our motherhouse, “the heart and home of the congregation,” has been in several locations in Wisconsin – first, Barton, then Fond du Lac at 390 E. Division St., 475 Gillett St., 1755 E. Johnson St., and now 320 County Road K. Our current location resonates with the early days of our founding.

While the sisters were still living in Barton, Father Rehrl returned from a missionary journey and said to the sisters:

Today while walking from Calvary, I saw a most beautiful tract of country. One comes upon it suddenly when coming down a high hill about three miles east of Fond du Lac. I strolled through the grounds admiring the natural beauty of the surroundings. Suddenly I discovered a rushing spring of delightfully cool water . . . As I continued to look around I discovered spring after spring. Oh, how I wish that the Sisters of St. Agnes might someday live on this beautiful tract of land watered by these prolific springs. Naber, *With All Devotedness*, 134

How prescient were his words. In 1899, when 410 acres of good farmland and wooded ledge property became available, Mother Agnes had the foresight to buy the property and changed the name from Cold Springs Farm to St. Joseph Springs. Her thought was to provide produce, dairy products and meat for the kitchens of local convents and the hospital. At the time, land was also set aside for a cemetery for the sisters. Later, St. Mary’s Springs Academy was located on the property.

Since 2002, this lovely land, so significant to Father Rehrl and Mother Agnes, graces St. Agnes Convent with residences for our sisters and offices for our administration. We bask in the beauty by which nature surrounds us so generously, season after season. Our Founders Hall provides a welcome space not only for our gatherings, but also for many like-minded groups whose mission so often resonates with ours. We share the natural beauty with retreatants who seek a place of silence and solitude to deepen their spirituality in four hermitages dotting the Niagara escarpment on our land.

The heritage with which we have been blessed continues to grace our lives as well as the lives of others who sojourn with us in the sacred space and place. As our CSA *Constitutions* state, “The spirit of our founders challenges us to respond to life with wholeheartedness and joy, to manifest unassuming simplicity in all our relationships, and to receive with genuine hospitality all who come to us.” (#5)

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

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Conserving and Protecting the *Gift of Water*

BY SISTER RUTH BATTAGLIA, CSA
COORDINATOR OF JUSTICE, PEACE,
AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Did you know that by 2050 there will more plastic than fish in the world's oceans; that it takes 1,500 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef, 650 gallons for a cotton T-shirt, 40 gallons for a bag of potato chips; that millions of women and children spend hours every day walking miles to collect water; that only one percent of the planet's water is available for human consumption?

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis stated, "Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity."

In the spirit of Pope Francis' encyclical and CSA's corporate commitment to care for Earth, the community's *Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Committee* is focusing on conserving and protecting the gift of water by raising awareness and committing to live a more just and sustainable lifestyle. Each person needs about 21 gallons of water a day for a reasonable standard of living. In the world's poorest countries, people use just two and a half gallons a day to wash, clean, and cook. In the United States, the typical lifestyle requires 100-150 gallons. Individuals can calculate their own water footprint at www.waterfootprint.org.

Protecting water requires more than conserving our personal usage. On a local level it may mean learning about lead in water pipes or acting to save a wetland from development. Promoting legislation that regulates the use of chemical fertilizers and the spread of animal manure may be required at the state or national level. It may also require supporting clean, renewable energy in place of underground mining for coal, mountaintop removal mining, and the building of oil and natural gas pipelines beyond our US borders.

For greater awareness of personal consumption or conservation of water, consider the following:

- The next time you brush your teeth, take a drink of water, wash your clothes, or eat a hamburger, be aware of the preciousness and vulnerability of water.
- Think of ways that you can reduce its waste and over-consumption.
- Pray with St. Francis, "Praise to you, my Lord, through Sister Water, so useful, humble, precious, and pure."

A group of women are on a gondola in Venice, Italy. They are wearing raincoats and are smiling. In the background, a gondolier is visible, and the canal is surrounded by historic buildings.

Sister Josephine Goebel, (on right with red hood) with friends in Venice, Italy

Sisters Do Experience Life After

Retirement

BY VALERIE GRACZYK, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Is there new life for sisters after retiring from full-time active ministry? Several Sisters of St. Agnes who have recently left their primary ministries and have transitioned into “retirement” shared their responses to this question. They identified retirement as a time for change, a time for reflection and flexibility, a period of major transition to a new phase of life. Continuing the mission of Christ is a lifelong commitment for each of them.

Sister Josephine Goebel announced her pending retirement a year prior to her leaving the position as parish administrator in Houck, Arizona. “I knew there would not be a sister to replace me and that lay people needed to be trained to take my place. St. John Evangelist is a small Navajo parish of generous faith-filled parishioners who

took on the new responsibilities. After living for thirty years among the beautiful Navajo people, I returned to Fond du Lac where I am enjoying more prayer time, service as a hospice volunteer, and many other new opportunities I have here.”

Sister Carla Crave, former elementary teacher, college professor, and tutor, at the Dominican Center in the heart of Milwaukee’s inner city. She recently reflected on her work there: “Every one of these students has a story of difficulty, often severe hardship, but each is a person of deep faith in God’s love and care. These women and men inspire me with their energy and perseverance: one takes three buses to reach the Center and never missed a day during the snowy winter; another, who works long hours at a hotel, comes to



Sister Carla Crave prepares Darrien Tramel to move onto the HSED program.

class exhausted on her day off ‘because I want to learn’; and another, who is in her fifties raised not only her children but also her sister’s children, and now wants to do something for herself – obtain a high school diploma.”

After forty-six years as an elementary school teacher, **Sister Mary Menke** responded to a call from the Spirit to work among the poor. “In tutoring at the Dominican Center, I can serve people who are hungry, people who have suffered trauma in their lives, people who did not have opportunities to learn. Through working with individuals, trust is established, and learning happens at the person’s own pace. This ministry offers an opportunity



Sister Mary encourages Jovernita and Minnie while they practice reading skills on the computer.

to be an encourager, a listener, and sometimes, a confidant. My world has expanded, and I am deeply blessed.”

Sister Patricia Weidman, retired prison chaplain: “Ministry as a federal correctional chaplain at three institutions for 20 years was both challenging and gratifying. Chaplaincy is a privileged conversation with both inmates and staff. After retiring, I participated in a sabbatical program at a spirituality center. I enjoy the time I have for personal renewal, travel, exercise,



Volunteers facilitate the Alternatives to Violence Project at both federal and state correctional institutions. L to R: Gloria, Rick, Sister Trish, Wilda.

and attending enrichment programs. Currently, I also facilitate an ‘*Alternatives to Violence Project*’ at a state correctional institution and am developing a bereavement program for my parish church.”

Sister Diane Bauknecht, former teacher, administrator, and general vicar of the congregation: “One of the greatest things for me in retirement is having my own schedule. When I retired, I took a brief time off, made a directed retreat, and then began a part-time volunteer ministry with *Adelante Mujer*, using my talents to promote the education of women studying to become doctors in Nicaragua. This new phase of life provides more time to pray and reflect on the most important part of my journey that is yet to come. I am so grateful.”

L to R: Samantha DeToro, (Marian student),
Marissa Nothem, (Marian student), Jennifer
Farvour, Kate Candee, Severa Krueger



Women and the Power of *Positivity*

BY SISTER ANITA HENNING, CSA
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Do you wish there were less stress and frustration in your life? Could you use a little more happiness in your day? Tina Hallis, Ph.D., this year's speaker for the Women's Leadership Breakfast, addressed these questions and more. Tina is a professional speaker and founder of The Positive Edge. Over 150 women gathered at Whispering Springs to network, have a delicious breakfast, and to be inspired by Tina's words.

Tina shared that the path for positivity has five stepping stones:

- Understand why it is hard
- Realize we can change
- Notice our thoughts
- Practice tools to change
- Remember to choose

Research shows that there are many benefits to spending more time in positive emotions, including

making better decisions, greater motivation, creativity, resilience, and better relationships. We can retrain our brains to make it easier to be positive, to notice the good, causing us to enjoy greater peace and well-being.

Tina gave the participants simple tools to help retrain their brains and to choose positivity:

- Stop often throughout the day and take deep breaths
- Choose music that energizes or calms
- Connect with people
- Help someone else
- Laugh
- Smile

Remember moments that were positive, loving, and peaceful, and focus on them rather than on a negative thought.



Tina Hallis, Ph.D.



Sisters Mary Noel Brown, Susan Seeby, and Cyndi Nienhaus

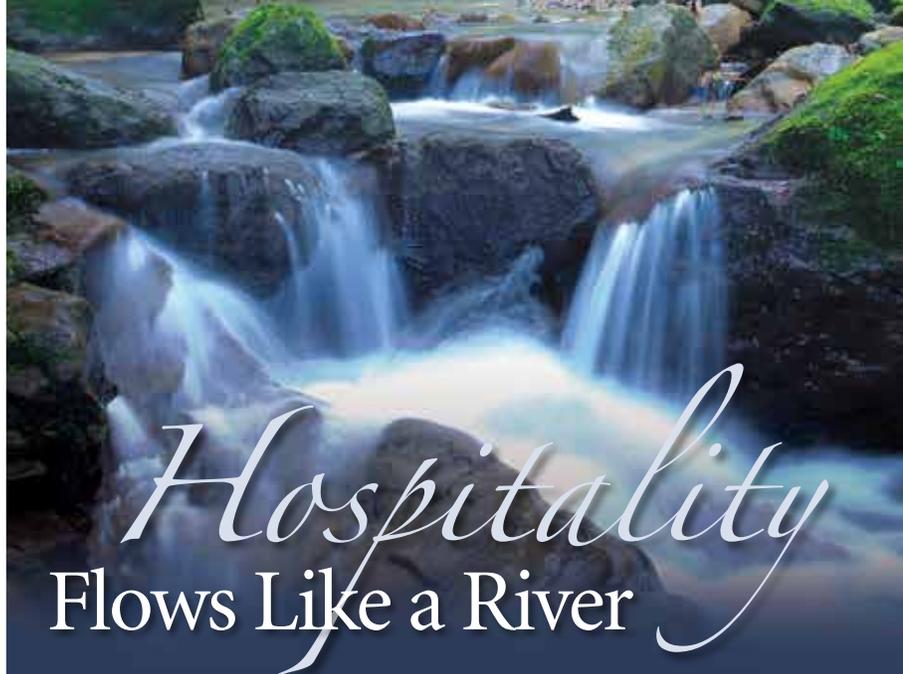
Each participant received a copy of Tina's book, *Sharpen Your Positive Edge*. The book gives short, practical, and easy to use strategies to apply in daily life.

The ripple effect of being more positive can have a profound change on a community. Imagine now the power that goes forth as more than 150 women practice positivity in their lives!

An added ripple effect is that the proceeds from this event go to Marian University's Working Families Grant. This grant serves families by awarding tuition and stipend grants to economically disadvantaged single parents with dependent children – parents who possess the desire and determination to achieve a four-year undergraduate degree. For more information on this grant and/or to donate go to www.marianuniversity.edu/academic-programs/special-programs/working-families-grant-program/



Sister Susan Seeby, Tina Hallis, Ph.D., and Sister Jean Steffes



Hospitality Flows Like a River

BY CAROL BRAUN,
DIRECTOR OF ASSOCIATE RELATIONSHIP

In her younger years, Associate Agnes Breitzman raised five children, helped her husband in his business, and worked as a legal secretary. After her husband died and her children were grown, Agnes felt the need to start a new life. She decided to expand a cottage that she and her husband owned on the Mecan River, turning it into a Bed and Breakfast.



Agnes Breitzman at Mecan River House Bed and Breakfast.

That Mecan Riverhouse is now a caring, comfortable place for people to unwind and to find a peaceful respite from the everyday cares of life. Because of her gracious hospitality, Agnes draws people from far and near, becoming friends with many of her visitors.

Agnes enjoys people and life in her small-town community. She is a member of the Historical Society, Ice Age Trail Alliance, Wisconsin Business Network, and Bed and Breakfast Association. She is a master gardener, belongs to two book clubs, and helped in the renovation of her parish church. She was awarded "Outstanding Business Person of the Year" in 2016 by the Waushara County Chamber of Commerce.

"My sister Joan Fisher, is a Sister of St. Agnes, and my sister Harriet Weisenberger, living in California, is an associate of the congregation of St. Agnes. A joyful spirit and sincere interest and care for people are the qualities that characterize the Sisters of St. Agnes, and it is these characteristics that led me to become an associate too," said Agnes. During this interview with Agnes, who remains so active at 89 years young, I came to admire these same qualities shining through her!



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320 County Road K
Fond du Lac, WI 54937

Ways to connect with CSA:



Advance Woman!

BY SISTER DIANE BAUKNECHT
AND SISTER ANN MCKEAN

Although the Sisters of St. Agnes are no longer present in Bilwi/Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, where our congregation ministered for 63 years, the influence of CSA continues through Adelante Mujer/Advance Woman! This ministry, initiated in 2009 by Sister Ann McKean, CSA, provides financial aid through funds from generous donors to help young women become doctors to serve in Nicaragua's poorest region of the North Atlantic coast. Without this assistance, these students would be unable to pursue their dreams of becoming medical doctors.

Nicaragua is a beautiful but very poor country of Central America. Second only to Haiti in poverty, most Nicaraguan families are forced to survive on an annual income of about \$2,000. With 80 percent of the income needed for food, there is little option for young persons to pursue higher education. One of the goals of Adelante Mujer is to help to change that economic reality.

Adelante Mujer is focused on financially assisting women. For women, earning a medical degree not only enhances their personal and professional status; it also extends their expertise



Sister Diane Bauknecht, Assistant Director of Adelante Mujer, with several Adelante Mujer medical students.

to a population where maternal and infant mortality rates are among the highest in the hemisphere. Adelante Mujer students and doctors also promote healthy eating and hygiene among pregnant women and maturing teens throughout the areas where they serve.

To date, Adelante Mujer has provided financial aid to 31 medical doctors who are alleviating the deplorable lack of accessible health care in a country where there is only one doctor per approximately 9,000 people. An additional 38 students currently receive funds from Adelante Mujer to complete their study in the 9-year Intercultural Medicine Program at URACCAN University. Each has her own story of need and her own depth of gratitude for an opportunity that seemed beyond her hopes. Through the ministry of Adelante Mujer, hope lives on for the young women in Bilwi/Puerto Cabezas.