

REFLECTIONS

&
Connections

MAY 2020



STORIES OF MISSION
& MINISTRY



CSA

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

Dear Friends,



The late winter and early spring of 2020 has all of us traversing previously uncharted waters as we struggle to find ways to stay connected and safe during the COVID 19 global pandemic. A recent article from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious calls us to pray for the whole earth community. Elise García, OP writes,

How might our prayers and intentions be joined across congregations for the common good of the whole Earth community to help lift the spirits of a people, especially in the wake of closed churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship? What would happen if elder Catholic sisters ... were to unleash the power of their lifetime of prayer and contemplative practice to hold the safety and protection of all peoples across the world as a sacred intention?"

— from “A Call to Spiritual Bonding.”

We are in times that require us to dig deep and find spiritual, psychological, and social resources that barely skim the surface of our consciousness in “ordinary time.” Our faith tells us that when challenged with difficulties, grace abounds more. Though there may be challenges, the graces often come in unexpected ways: a robin singing outside our window, an unexpected call from a “forgotten” friend, a poignant memory, an exhilarating walk, or a smile from someone I have never met. At a time when we are asked to practice social distancing, we must find new ways to stay connected. In the dailiness of life we begin to recognize the importance of every minute and each encounter.

The uncharted waters we experience make us aware of the preciousness of the gift of life and of our relationships. Parker Palmer speaks of the importance of embracing everything – what we got right and what we got wrong – as we make our way without the usual “maps.” In a recent book, he quotes Florida Scott-Maxwell, an elderly psychologist: “You need only claim the events of your life to make yourself yours. When you truly possess all you have been and done... you are fierce with reality.” In these days, so fierce with reality, let us live the mission to respond in our own times to those whose faith life or human dignity is threatened.

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

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Editorial Board Members:

Sister Jeremy Quinn, Sister Jean Perry,
Sister Susan Treis, Sister Cyndi Nienhaus,
Dusty Krikau, and Suzanne Flood.

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***“I will heal my people and
will let them enjoy abundant
peace and security.”***

JEREMIAH 33:6

To the medical personnel, hospital staff, and administrators who have placed themselves at the service of our communities during this crisis.

We are grateful and hold you in our prayers.



Celebrating Our *History*



The history of Fond du Lac is inextricably linked with the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes. In 1870, when the sisters first moved from Barton, Wisconsin, to a plot of twelve city lots on East Division Street, Fond du Lac was the state's second largest city and a major railroad hub. Mother Agnes Hazotte knew that Fond du Lac offered sisters the opportunity to teach in the city's parish schools while also continuing to teach in the towns surrounding the city. Within days of their arrival in Fond du Lac, she set up a school in a rented house in the city. The congregation would later establish St. Agnes School of Nursing, St. Mary's Springs High School, and Marian College (now University).

The sisters, and particularly Mother Agnes, in partnership with civic leaders and doctors, were also instrumental in bringing modern healthcare to Fond du Lac. After repeated requests from the city, the sisters opened a hospital. Relying on their faith, administrative skill, and \$55,000 in seed money from the *Fond du Lac Business Man's Association*, St. Agnes

Hospital opened on July 1, 1896. While the earliest sisters focused almost exclusively on bringing healthcare to Fond du Lac, others took their expertise to different states and countries. Over the years, their healthcare ministry expanded to care for the elderly, help people in addiction recovery, and support survivors of domestic and sexual abuse.

In the mid-60s, when Vatican II encouraged religious orders to reexamine their role in the modern world, the congregation expanded its areas of ministry. In 1990, their current mission statement was written to include "a broad commitment to systemic change for the quality of life, justice for the economically poor, furtherance of the role of women in church and society, and mutuality, inclusivity, and collaboration." Through their collective voices, they have issued corporate stance statements on women (1989), peace & nonviolence (2002), the death penalty (2006), human trafficking (2007), and care of the earth (2016). Additionally, the sisters, recognizing the interdependence of environmental, economic,



First motherhouse in Fond du Lac, 1870-1877.



Sister Joyce Braun with pupils at St. Mary's School, Fond du Lac, c. 1950.



Sister Clarence Schmelting serving a patient at St. Agnes Hospital, mid-1960s.

scientific, social, and cultural systems, strive to be peacemakers and stewards of the natural resources entrusted to the congregation. To further these goals, a Justice, Peace, and Ecology Committee was formed in 1990 which led to the creation of a full-time position: Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Coordinator.

In the past few years, as immigration dominated headlines, CSA held demonstrations to oppose the immigrant family separations and the proposed Muslim travel ban. They met with government representatives to advocate on immigrants' behalf, helped to organize the public prayer gathering in support of the LGBTQ+ community following the Pulse nightclub shooting, hosted a Trans-Forming Love workshop to assist people in understanding the transgender community, and sponsored numerous local events to end violence against women and girls. CSA currently hosts monthly meetings of *Fond du Lac Pax Christi*, a group that promotes non-violence, peacemaking, disarmament, and reconciliation locally and throughout the world.

Other notable impacts in Fond du Lac include:

- working with *ASTOP* and *Agnesian Healthcare* to provide counseling to survivors of sexual and domestic abuse;
- supporting the establishment of the *Blandine House*, named after Sister Blandine Eisele, a pioneer in the treatment of alcoholism;
- helping establish the first hospice program in the city, first at St. Agnes Hospital and eventually becoming *Hospice Home of Hope*;

- partnering with the *Sophia Foundation (now Sophia Transformative Leadership Partners)* to support leaders to learn and practice servant leadership;
- modeling sustainable energy by installing 880 solar panels; the largest solar array in the county when it was installed in 2016;
- advocating equity in sports and supporting Title IX legislation;
- addressing the needs of local, low-income single parents by establishing the Marian University *Working Families Grant Program* which provides funding for tuition, rent, childcare, and food for the families;
- and serving victims of domestic abuse at *Bethany House of Hospitality (now Solutions Center)* through volunteer & board work.

The work of the sisters has rippled beyond the city's borders to have similar impacts around the globe. With the support of the Catholic community, city leaders, and local citizens, the sisters have ministered to the Fond du Lac community in the spirit of their founders with simplicity, hospitality, and missionary zeal for 150 years.

Current plans for the anniversary celebration are for a traveling exhibit featuring the stories of our past, present, and future in Fond du Lac which will be on display throughout the community in 2020.

- July 1-July 31: Exhibit at Fond du Lac County Historical Society
- August 3-August 28: Exhibit at St. Agnes Hospital
- August 29-August 30: Exhibit at Holy Family Parish
- September 1-September 30: Exhibit at Fond du Lac Public Library
- October 1-October 30: Exhibit at Marian University
- November (Dates TBD): Exhibit at St. Mary's Springs Academy



Sister Deb Golias working with Marian University students, 2011.



Aerial view of CSA motherhouse in 2016.



Sister Susan Seeby explains how CSA's solar panels work to a group of students from St. Mary's Springs Academy, 2019.

Ordinary Sisters: A Story of the Sisters of St. Agnes in Latin America 1945–1995

BY SISTER DIANNE BERGANT, CSA

Ordinary Sisters: A Story of the Sisters of St. Agnes in Latin America 1945-1995 is not the last chapter in the history of the congregation. It is actually the middle chapter, enlarging the section of the original book where the Latin American mission is reported.

Though this second book focuses on one aspect of the congregation's life and ministry, it throws light on the entire congregation's concern for and support of this ministerial project.

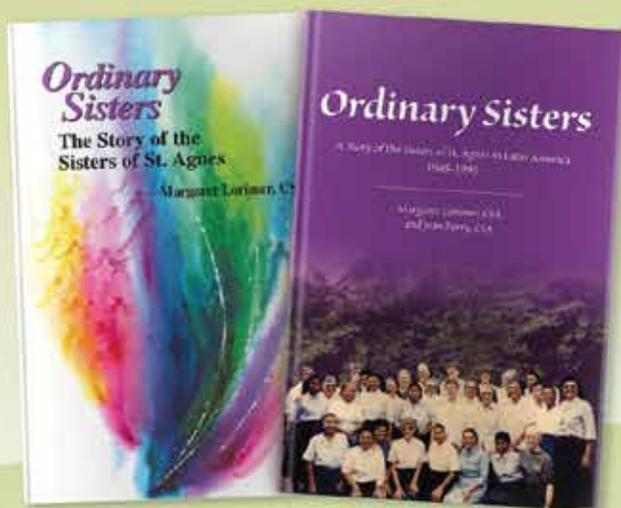
The data unearthed by Sisters Margaret Lorimer and Jean Perry have made this chronicle a page-turning story. One cannot but be amazed at the commitment and courage of the Sisters who responded readily to the call to minister to underserved sisters and brothers, first in Nicaragua and

then in the broader Latin American countries. The first women to venture out were trained teachers and nurses. However, they were almost immediately called upon to establish the very ministry sites they had been sent

to staff. Their letters home and the mission chronicles they wrote convey the excitement they felt, the mutual love that blossomed as they moved from place to place, and the appreciation for the simple pleasures of life that they came to know with the people. These written documents as well as the stories that circulated in both Latin America and the States honestly described the difficulties they experienced

as well: lack of resources, periodic opposition of local and national groups. Most distressing was the ever-present reality of war. Despite the constant danger they faced, there was no thought of returning to the States. They chose to stay with the people.

The story of the Latin American mission shows that the spirit and enthusiasm of Mother Agnes Hazotte and her Sisters continues to inspire and motivate the Sisters of St. Agnes. They might be *Ordinary Sisters*, but their commitment continues to be extraordinary.



◀ Sister Jean Perry watches as the new book is printed.

In Memoriam... Walking with God



Sister Helen Renzelmann, CSA
March 20, 2020

Sister Helen Renzelmann, formerly known as Sister Gregory, was born March 23, 1921, in Sheboygan, WI, the oldest of five girls. She entered the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes in 1938 and made her profession of vows on August 15, 1941. Sister Helen received a BS in Education from Marian College, Fond du Lac, WI and an MA in History from Loyola University, Chicago, IL. After teaching for sixteen years in both elementary and secondary schools in Wisconsin, New York, Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania, she served for five years as Campus Minister in Louisiana and for twenty years in parish ministry in Kansas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Arizona, and New Mexico, followed by seven years as grant researcher in the Development Department at Marian College. In her later years, Sister Helen dedicated herself as a volunteer in numerous programs and organizations in the Fond du Lac community including St. Agnes Hospital, Fond du Lac Area Information Referral (FAIR), and the Fond du Lac Center for Spirituality and Healing. She died peacefully at Nazareth Center on March 20, 2020, and was buried at St. Joseph Springs Cemetery.



Sister Ann McKean, CSA
April 11, 2020

Sister Ann McKean, formerly Sister Corona, was born in Adams County, Indiana, on August 1, 1935, to a family of one brother and three sisters. She made her profession of vows in the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes on August 15, 1957, in Fond du Lac, WI. Sister Ann received a BA in Education from Marian College of Fond du Lac, an MA in Theology from Fordham University, and a PhD in Historical Theology from Vanderbilt University. She was an elementary school teacher for eleven years in Wisconsin, Illinois, and New York, after which she served as a professor of religion, scripture, Christian spirituality, religious history, and world religions at various universities, including the University of Texas, Sacred Heart Seminary in Hales Corners, Marian University, and St. Norbert College in Wisconsin, followed by twenty-five years at Christian Brothers University in Tennessee. She was also the founder of *Adelante Mujer (Advance Woman)*, a non-profit organization which provides financial assistance to women in Nicaragua preparing to become doctors. She died peacefully at St. Agnes Hospital on April 11, 2020, and will be buried at St. Joseph Springs Cemetery.

For full obituaries go to www.csasisters.org. Memorials can be sent to the CSA Mission Advancement Office or through the website.

Nuns and Nones

On March 5, immediately following the 16th annual CSA Women's Leadership Breakfast, the new Fond du Lac chapter of Nuns and Nones had its first gathering. The name of the group, taken from the national organization, references gatherings between women religious ("Nuns") and spiritually-diverse attendees who may not fit into a specific religious identity ("Nones"). Six Sisters of St. Agnes joined seven "Nones" to reflect on spaces of sacred hospitality, the national Nuns and Nones mission statement ("*We create prophetic communities of care and contemplation that incite courageous action.*"), and the constant need for self-reflection. The conversation was lively and, while attendees were looking forward to another gathering, the plans for connecting in person were scuttled. They now look forward to reconnecting virtually.

Individuals interested in learning more about joining future Fond du Lac Area Nuns and Nones gatherings can find details at csasisters.org.



Sister Marie Scott (left) shares a story with Judy Goldsmith at the inaugural gathering of Nuns and Nones.



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Welcoming New Associates

ON SUNDAY, MARCH 1, THREE NEW ASSOCIATES ENTERED INTO ASSOCIATE RELATIONSHIP WITH CSA.



◀ Sister Josephine and Associate Carol Ann Rawlins

“I trust by being an associate my life will continue to be nourished spiritually and I will grow in courage and do what is helpful to all I meet, for mutual growth in God’s love.”

Sister Janet and Associate Arletta Allen ▶

“It is my intent as an associate to serve and to offer love and guidance to all I am blessed to encounter. I want to be in relationship with sisters and other associates to share the charism that belongs not to us but to the world.”



◀ Sister Katie and Associate Patricia Stucke

“I see myself joyfully reaching out, listening to those in my little world and community. May I treat others with honesty, respect, compassion and love and offer those in need a helping hand and gentle touch.”

