

# REFLECTIONS & *Connections*

NOVEMBER 2019



*On September 23, 2017, Bishop Jerome Listecki presided over the installation of the General Council of the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes. The General Superior and the three General Councilors work together on governance and administration of the congregation, but also guide the members toward unity and mutuality.*

*The council's term extends for four full years and is currently at its midpoint. This issue of Reflections and Connections provides a glimpse into some of the activities of the congregational leadership team during its first two years along with some of the hopes for the remaining two years.*

◀ **L to R:** Sisters Susan Seeby and Cyndi Nienhaus, General Councilors, Sister Jean Steffes, General Superior, and Sister Rhea Emmer, General Vicar

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## STORIES OF MISSION & MINISTRY



### CSA

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

# Dear Friends,



*In our day, a new awareness of the magnificence of Earth as a small planet hospitable to life is growing among people everywhere. This living planet, with its thin spherical shell of land, water and breathable air is our home, our only home in the vast universe.*

— Elizabeth Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*

As I was recently walking in our prairie on the Niagara escarpment, I could not help but reflect on how blest we are by the beauty that surrounds us at St. Agnes Convent, our Motherhouse. Each season brings its wonders, whether it is the milkweed ready to break open or the swaying goldenrod in the fall, the crisp white snow of winter, the tender blossom and flowing streams of the spring, or the lush beauty of the summer. The largesse of nature is there to bestow its beauty to anyone who will take time to notice. Because we have chosen to keep some of our land as natural prairie, we can enjoy the bounty of our Creator in each and every season.

Care for Earth has become a primary concern for many in our world today. In a recent article by environmental journalist Oliver Milman, we learn that two-thirds of Americans believe climate change is either a crisis or a serious problem. A majority of US citizens wish for immediate action to address global warming and its dire consequences. In his encyclical of 2015, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis points to the “intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected... the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate . . . the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.”<sup>(16)</sup> In an unplanned synchronicity, Pope Francis’ words coincided with CSA’s 2016 statement on Care for Earth: “In light of the growing impact of climate change on the global community, we, the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes, honoring our interdependence with all of creation and in a spirit of nonviolence, personally and communally renew and recommit to care for Earth, home of all living creatures.”

The beauty we have on this earth and in this cosmos requires each of us to consider the precious treasure we have in the universe, our solar system, our country, state, neighborhood and our own back yards. We have received this bounty and it is our responsibility to ensure its fruitfulness for future generations.

When you are in the area, I invite you to visit. We would gladly accompany you on our grounds to walk our labyrinth, ponder our streams, and luxuriate in the loveliness of nature. It is ours to share.

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

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## From the Desk of Sister Jean Steffes,

# General Superior

**O**ur CSA Statement of Mission boldly proclaims that we are committed to transformation of the world, the church, and ourselves through promoting, among other initiatives, systemic change for the quality of life and mutuality, inclusivity and collaboration. The glue for this formidable commitment is the love that binds us as we share our lives and our faith in community as Sisters of St. Agnes.

Since Chapter 2017, there have been many opportunities for living these commitments. In 2018, we transferred sponsorship of our healthcare ministry from CSA to SSM Health. SSM Health has a substantial footprint in Wisconsin, and by uniting our ministries with theirs, we hope to ensure the continuance of vital, effective, innovative, and values-based healthcare for the Wisconsin locales we have been privileged to serve – Fond du Lac, Monroe, Waupun, Ripon, and Mt. Calvary. As the days since the formal transfer occurred, I see evidence of the blessings inherent in the process. The mission of Catholic healthcare has been strengthened and given strong impetus for the future. This experience has been part of the paschal mystery which calls us to let go so that what is new can emerge and grow. We have also completed a major renovation at Nazareth Court to update our home for our sisters who continue in the CSA mission at a less intense though extremely effective pace.

The Sisters of St. Agnes are founding members of the Wisconsin Religious Collaborative. Planning began in 2015 and the organization was formally launched in 2018 to provide a sustainable membership organization that promotes good stewardship by sharing resources and professional expertise in finance, management, pastoral care, governance, and other areas in order to sustain mission and meet the needs of individual religious institutes in Wisconsin and their members. With the hiring of Lyn Korte as executive director in January of 2019, activities have begun in such areas as staffing and management, healthcare, social justice, archives, and information technology.

I would also like to mention broad congregational involvement in future planning using a process of collective wisdom in such areas as corporate statements, relationships in our regions of the United States and Nicaragua, structures of governance, stewardship of our land and other resources, and vision into the future. Through a variety of conversation circles recently established, all members of the congregation in Nicaragua and in the United States are involved in dialogue regarding our response in the present and our path towards the future. Together as community we are able to do and be so much more than we would as individuals, always finding ourselves enriched by those we serve.



Left to right: Sisters Mary Noel Brown, CSA; Kathy Buchheit, FSM; Jean Steffes, CSA; Ms. Jennifer Grantham Stein during the healthcare sponsorship transition.





Sister Rhea Emmer,  
General Vicar

From the Desk of Sister Rhea Emmer,

## *General Vicar*

### **Cognitive Impairment Initiative**

During the past two years, I have had the privilege of working with Sister Jomarie Zielke, CSA, Lisa Schuler, Health/Wellness Nurse for CSA, and the regional coordinators, in engaging the sisters in a new initiative to raise awareness of cognitive impairment, from short term memory loss to all forms of dementia. With the assistance of experts from the Alzheimer's Association of Southeastern Wisconsin, CSA began a 2-year educational process to increase our understanding of the cognitive impairment spectrum and to identify skills which could improve communication and best practice responses.

An initial educational assessment of our sisters and lay staff at Nazareth Court and Center led to the design of two educational sessions in late Fall 2018 entitled: *Healthy Living for Brain and Body: Effective Communication Strategies and Understanding and Responding to Dementia-related Behavior*. The response of the sisters was very positive, and a 6-month support group process was designed to provide a safe environment for sisters to share their day-to-day lived experience in light of what was learned in the educational sessions. These small group sessions were facilitated by Sister Jomarie Zielke, CSA, Sister Georgeann Roudebush, CSA, and Lisa Schuler. The

follow-up sessions have proven to be essential to the learning process.

Educational sessions for the sisters on mission in the U.S. region were completed throughout the Spring and Fall of 2019.

### Associate Relationship

The associate relationship with CSA continues to evolve under the leadership of Carol Braun, Director of Associate Relationship-U.S. The U.S. associates have developed an *Associate Identity Statement* which recognizes them as “a community of women and men called to embody the charisma, mission, and spirituality of the Sisters of St. Agnes.” Associates support one another in ongoing spiritual development inspired and strengthened by the CSA charisma and mission and in relationship to sisters and one another.

The associate community has a strong mission commitment to *Love in Action* that includes:

- Stone Soup – serving meals to homeless, along with social interaction
- Adopt-a-Highway – a cleanup of trash 3 times per year as commitment to care for earth
- Financial donation to *Adelante Mujer* – supporting women who are studying to become physicians in rural Nicaragua

In Nicaragua, Sister Dulce María Rodríguez, CSA, Director of Nicaraguan associates, leads a monthly meeting of 40-50 associates in Belén for faith sharing, spiritual growth, and pastoral outreach. Recently, they completed their goal of planting 700 sapling trees as part of a reforestation effort in response to studying Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

Ministering with and to Carol and Sister Dulce María is a graced-filled part of leadership.

## *In Memoriam...* Walking with God



### Sister Colette Hartman, CSA

August 8, 2019

Sister Colette Hartman, CSA, formerly Sister Donald Marie Hartman, was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania, on July 31, 1928. She entered St. Agnes Convent in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and pronounced her first vows in the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes on August 15, 1950. Sister Colette received a bachelor’s degree from Marian College and her master’s degree in education from Marquette University. From 1950 to 1962 she served as an elementary school teacher in Watertown, Fond du Lac, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and in Elmhurst, Illinois. In 1962 Sister Colette was sent to Managua, Nicaragua, where she served as a teacher and missionary for the rest of her life. Sister Colette is remembered for her great passion for the poor and for the promotion of human rights and the dignity of those with whom she lived and served. Her last ministry was at Cantera, a center in Managua for promoting education, growth and development among the people. She died and was buried in Managua in August 2019.

For full obituaries go to [www.csasisters.org](http://www.csasisters.org). Memorials can be sent to the CSA Office of Mission Advancement or through the website.



Sister Susan Seeby,  
General Councilor

## From the Desk of Sister Susan Seeby, *General Councilor*

### Maintaining a World View Through Collaboration

Since its foundation in the 1850s the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes has experienced the meaning and importance of collaboration. As a community we recognize not just one person as founder, but three founders – Father Caspar Rehrl, Mother Agnes Hazotte, and Father Francis Haas, OFM Cap. Throughout these one hundred sixty years, we have continued to work collaboratively in many ways. In my role as general councilor, I am aware of my collaborative role as a member of two special programs – one brand new and one in which the congregation has participated since the program began.

#### ***The Catholic Coalition for Migrants and Refugees***

The new collaboration is a response to a call from Pope Francis, the U.S. Bishops, and the Wisconsin Conference of Bishops to Catholic leaders to reject hateful or inaccurate portrayals of immigrants and to work for compassionate, humane immigration policies. This group, *The Catholic Coalition for Migrants and Refugees*, recently formed in the Milwaukee Archdiocese to be in solidarity with those who have fled their homelands and to advocate for immigration policies that reflect Catholic values. The group seeks to educate concerned Catholic individuals and parishes about immigration issues as

well as to directly advocate on behalf of migrants and refugees through e-mail, regular mail, phone calls and direct meetings with our government representatives. Through our collaborative efforts, we hope to grow the number of participants so that the Catholic perspective on immigration will be heard.

#### ***UNANIMA, United Nations NGO***

In the second collaborative effort, I serve as a board member of *UNANIMA*, a non-governmental organization (NGO) at the United Nations which advocates on behalf of women and children living in poverty, as well as for immigrants, refugees, and the environment. *UNANIMA*'s unique membership consists of 20 congregations of Roman Catholic sisters whose 20,000 constituents work in over 80 countries. *UNANIMA* brings to the United Nations, through the voice of CSA and the voices of other congregations, their concerns and experiences as educators, health care providers, social workers, development workers. As a member of CSA, I am privileged to advocate for those, "whose faith life and human dignity is threatened" as our charism calls us to do. The staff members of *UNANIMA* work primarily at the United Nations headquarters in New York, where *UNANIMA* and other members of civil society aim to educate and influence policymakers at the global level. In solidarity, *UNANIMA* works for systemic change to achieve a more just world.





Sister Cyndi Nienhaus  
General Councilor

## From the Desk of Sister Cyndi Nienhaus, *General Councilor*

### **Vocation Ministry: A Promise and a Risk**

In his 2019 World Day of Vocations address, Pope Francis reminded us that “every vocation is a summons not to stand on the shore, nets in hand, but to follow Jesus on the path he has marked out for us, for our own happiness and for the good of those around us.”

In my two years as vocation liaison to the general council, I have encountered many women of various backgrounds and ages interested in exploring a possible call to religious life or to the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes. Each story is unique, as each call from God is unique. I am in awe at how God’s promise of a future full of hope is at work in people’s lives as well as how people discern through prayer what God is asking of them as they face the risks their response demands. Currently, I am heartened to know that there is an increase in the number of women in both the United States and Nicaragua who are professing final vows in a religious community.

I am also grateful for the prayers offered for the women who are seriously discerning a call to CSA and its mission. It is through prayer and discernment that they will hear God’s personal call and ultimately find happiness in whatever way God leads them.

### **Office of Mission Advancement: CSA Responds to Changing Times**

The Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes often describes

its charism as “responding to those whose faith life or human dignity is threatened, aware that we, too, are among the needy and are enriched by those we serve.” (*Constitutions*, #1, 4). At our annual CSA Days, sisters and associates reflected on the suggestion of Sister Teresa Maya, CCVI, that we are to be “charism carriers” as vowed religious women or as members of a community of people committed to a specific relationship with CSA. The Sisters of St. Agnes also recognize other men and women as “charism carriers” even as they live out their own distinct vocation in life as associates, CSA staff, faculty, or others dedicated to deepening their spirituality.

Recently, the Office of Mission Advancement for the congregation was created to better coordinate areas of development, communication, and technology for sharing the mission and charism of the Sisters of St. Agnes. As a model for CSA mission advancement, the office was expanded and restructured to work collaboratively among the various offices and personnel in advancing the mission. To lead this effort, Dusty Krikau was recently hired as the Director of the Office of Mission Advancement. Working collaboratively with her are staff members: Chelsea Koenigs, Motherhouse Receptionist and Social Media Specialist; Dena Rose, Database Manager & Diversified Support Specialist; and Mary Christopherson, Video and Digital Media Specialist. It is hoped that through this collaborative structure, the stories of the lives and ministries of Sisters of St. Agnes will remain alive, visible, and enduring.



320 County Road K  
Fond du Lac, WI 54937

## Ways to connect with CSA:

CSA web site:  
[www.csasisters.org](http://www.csasisters.org)

 [www.facebook.com/csasisters](http://www.facebook.com/csasisters)  
[www.facebook.com/AssociatesofCSA](http://www.facebook.com/AssociatesofCSA)

 [www.youtube.com/TheCSAChannel1](http://www.youtube.com/TheCSAChannel1)

Update your contact information by emailing us at [csadm@csasisters.org](mailto:csadm@csasisters.org) or calling 920-907-2300.

# Welcoming New Associates

On Friday, August 23, three new associates entered into Associate Relationship with CSA.



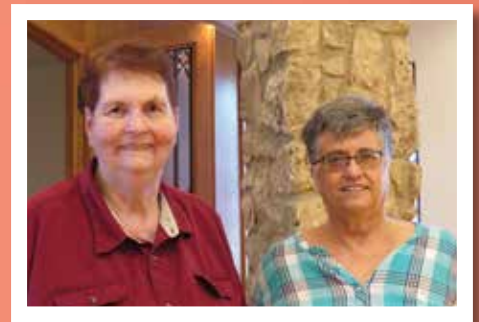
Sister Mary Noel and Associate Anthony Koffman

*“Going through the associate discernment process enabled me to become more aware of moments where I felt the Spirit guiding me to who I am today and calling me to respond. It is my intent to continue embodying CSA’s mission, charism and spirituality in my various roles: familial, spiritual, professional, social, and academic.”*



Sister Rose and Associate Barb Foster

*“Discernment is a journey and I have enjoyed this delightful journey of discovery with my mentor. I have found a wonderful friend and a truly kindred spirit. I am thrilled to become part of this extended community of sisters and associates.”*



Associate Carol Cooper and Sister Alice Ann

*“As an associate, I hope to learn more about the Gospels and CSA; I have already learned much from the sisters. I will continue to volunteer with CSA sisters and associates at St. Vincent de Paul, Stone Soup and the hospital. I will continue as a member of United for Diversity, All God’s Family, and a monthly drumming circle.”*