

REFLECTIONS

&

# Connections

NOVEMBER 2020



STORIES OF MISSION  
& MINISTRY



**CSA**

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

# Dear Friends,



“Asking only that we love,” is a phrase we sisters pray periodically as a responsory in our daily Christian Prayer. The words are so simple and yet the request is beyond profound. As we live out each day, we are asked to be loving in all our encounters. As the days of the pandemic continue to mount, the challenge is to find ways to be loving rather than cranky, and to respond to the needs of others rather than to concentrate solely on our own concerns. Wearing a mask in public, limiting social contacts with larger groups, and practicing social distancing may get “old,” but these practices are a way of loving others as we love ourselves. Since there is no predictable schedule for the pandemic to run its course or for other current

social and natural circumstances to change for the better, it is important for us to recognize these new ways of being a good neighbor.

During the month of November, we are bookended with the holy days of All Saints Day on the 1st, All Souls Day on the 2nd and the secular holiday of Thanksgiving on the 26th. The very structure of this month provides us ample opportunity to remember those who have gone before us and whom we held dear, while also providing us with an occasion to give thanks for the many though sometimes hidden blessings that mark each day of our lives.

Excerpts from the Book of Wisdom that are shared on All Souls Day provide a glimpse into what it means to love and be loved by our Creator. “The souls of the just are in the hand of God and no torment shall touch them. ... In this time of their visitation they shall shine, and shall dart about as sparks through stubble. ... Those who trust in [God] shall understand truth and the faithful shall abide with [God] in love.” Reiterating the words with which I began, “Asking only that we love,” I know that we, too, shall be like “sparks through stubble” as we live into the fullness of reality that is ours for today and for all our tomorrows.

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

## Contents



### **Editorial Board Members:**

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

- 3 The Motherhouse Welcomes New Residents
- 4 Celebrating 75 Years in Latin America
- 6 45 Years of Associate Relationship
- 7 CSA Recognized with Proclamation
- 7 In Memoriam... Walking with God
- 8 Welcome New Staff

# The Motherhouse Welcomes

## New Residents

With the closing of Holy Family College in Manitowoc this spring, the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes received a request from two Vietnamese sisters who had been attending Holy Family regarding continuing their education at Marian University.

Sister Mary Gam Thi Phan, OP, from the Dominican Congregation of Bac Ninh and Sister Tuyen Phung from the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Hung Hoa have transferred to Marian University to complete their bachelor's degrees and CSA has welcomed the sisters into the community life of the Motherhouse.

"Since I moved to Fond du Lac, I have found many things that please me," said Sister Tuyen. "Most importantly, the sisters are very caring and friendly. I have been asked by every sister I have met, about my studying and whether everything goes well for me. That always brings me the feeling of living community like I have lived in my own community. I also enjoy the quiet, natural beauty, fresh air, and peace I experience when I take frequent walks on the motherhouse grounds."

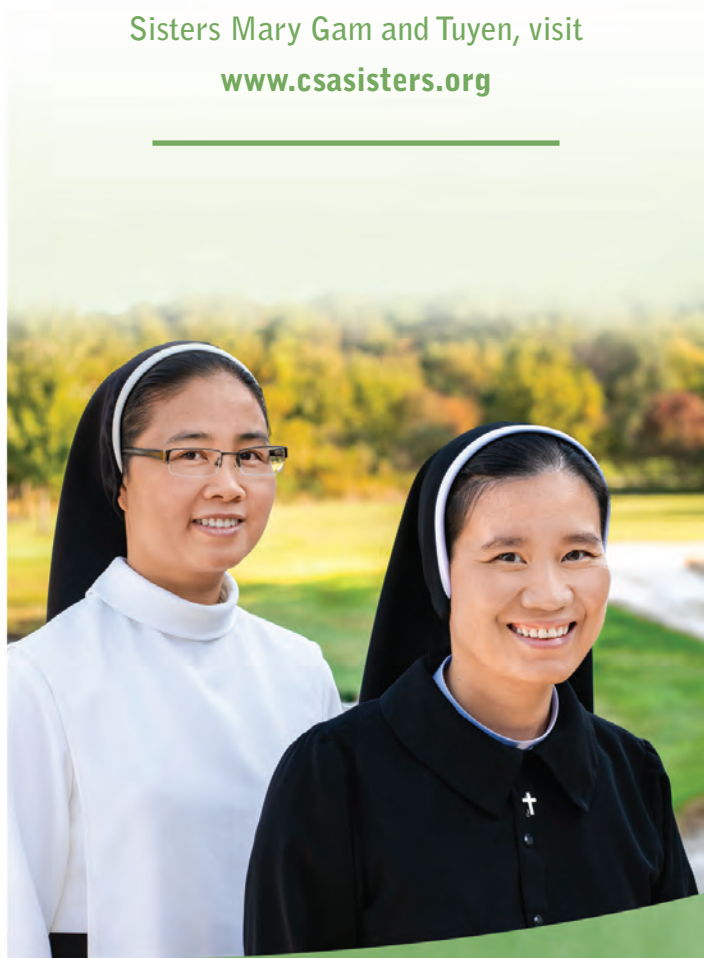
Sister Mary Gam's experience is similar: "Besides gathering knowledge at school, I am also learning many practical and spiritual life experiences from the sisters here. ... Whenever I talk with the sisters, I feel in them a very deep and unique spiritual life. Each sister's way of practicing the spiritual life infuses me with a new and strong spiritual vitality. I am grateful for the wonderful grace God has given me through the hands of the Sisters of St. Agnes."

Both visiting sisters will graduate within the next 18 months and intend to return home to put their expertise to work. Sister Tuyen said, "I hope to share what I have learned with the sisters in my community to help them in their ministries, especially with youth. Also, I hope to work in my convent's kindergarten, with children who need to develop skills for emotional and psychological growth."

"My dream is to become proficient as a psychologist," said Sister Mary Gam. "Since my vocation is to serve people from different backgrounds, religions, ages, genders, and social classes, I desire to gain knowledge of psychology to better serve others with respect, understanding, and empathy."

CSA is grateful for this opportunity to share hospitality with the visiting sisters and the sisters look forward to long-lasting friendships.

To read additional reflections from Sisters Mary Gam and Tuyen, visit [www.csasisters.org](http://www.csasisters.org)



L to R: Sister Mary Gam Thi Phan, OP, from the Dominican Congregation of Bac Ninh and Sister Tuyen Phung from the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Hung Hoa are living at the motherhouse in Fond du Lac, WI while they finish their bachelor's degrees.



# *Celebrating 75 Years* in Latin America

**I**n 1945, Mother Angeline Kamp and her council agreed to send sisters to minister to the Miskito who lived along the Río Coco in northern Nicaragua. Of the many sisters who volunteered, four were selected — Sisters Mary Agnes Dickof, Francis Borgia Dreiling, Pauletta Scheck, and Agnes Rita Fisette. They spent ten days with the Sisters of Charity in New Orleans, where they learned about tropical diseases, and then the pioneer sisters embarked on their missionary journey to Nicaragua on September 22, 1945.

After three long months in the city of Managua, on December 20, 1945, the four sisters were welcomed by nearly 500 Miskito people as they arrived in the village of Waspam on the Río Coco.

Sister Zorelia Chavarría, CSA, was born and raised in Nicaragua. She writes, “Our Nicaraguan Church, the people of God, has been enriched by the CSA Charism



Sisters Eileen Mahony, Anabel Torres, and Dulce María Rodríguez López outside of CANTERA, a non-profit working toward a more just, equal, and sustainable society in Nicaragua.

for the past 75 years. The Sisters of St. Agnes, with their blessings, walked together with a people rooted deep in faith and intelligence, beginning in Waspam, Río Coco. By the grace and will of God, leaders were formed and emerged, such as: directors, teachers, medical doctors, nurses, lawyers, catechists, priests, writers, poets, homemakers, and families with solid homes; today they are the protagonists of their own stories that enrich both their families and their own people and communities. We would need an entire book to write all their testimonies.”

While Nicaraguans have countless testimonies of the impact of the sisters, the relationship is one of mutual inspiration and education. Sister Anne Jude Van Lanen, CSA, reflects on her many years in Nicaragua as an opportunity to learn from those around her. “When I felt vulnerable and overwhelmed in a foreign land, my Sisters in Nicaragua taught me: how to celebrate in the midst of oppression, pain and war; how to value relationships beyond borders; how to live by deep faith in God when faced with unsurmountable odds; and how to walk with one another through the tragic death of three of our Sisters resulting from war. I have yet to reap the fullness of what that missionary experience has meant to me and to the Sisters of St. Agnes.”

Sister Zorelia speaks to the grace of God impacting both Latin and North American Sisters over the last 75 years: “Our sisters were also transformed and many of their lives changed, not only by speaking the language or living the culture, but by the deep faith and intelligence professed by our peoples. They learned and let themselves be guided.

After these 75 years, we continue to respond with the zeal and courage of our founders — by the missionary zeal of Father Caspar Rehrl, the courageous initiatives of Mother Agnes Hazotte and the spiritual influence of Father Francis Haas — we continue to walk with our people, in the midst of their sufferings and joys of our Nicaraguan Church.”

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Over the next several months, the testimonies and stories of the Sisters of St. Agnes in Latin America will be shared on the CSA website and social media channels. We invite you to join us as we explore how these two cultures have come together and walked side-by-side for the past 75 years.



North American and Nicaraguan sisters work in partnership with the community to provide quality education.

Associates and Sisters in Nicaragua work together on sustainable agriculture projects.

# 45 Years of Associate Relationship

Over the past 45 years, the CSA Associates have served as companions to the Sisters of St. Agnes and to one another in their search for self, for wisdom, and for God. The CSA associate relationship began in 1975 based on the theology of common call as religious and laity to Christian discipleship. The Sisters of St. Agnes welcomed the first Nicaraguan associates from the city of Belén in 1989.

Mutuality in the relationship between the associates and the congregation became a cornerstone when an associate was named as co-director of the relationship the next year. Jan Parker, reflecting on her 29 years as a member of the associate community, said, “I appreciate the opportunities offered in the relationship to gather for sharing of faith and the opportunities to work together to make the world a better place.”

Caroline Coughlin Lampereur, an associate for 12 years, entered the associate relationship as it continued its emphasis on leadership development with educational and spiritual formation. She appreciates the growth that comes from working with others; “Associates are on a spiritual walk that can be done alone but walking together as a community offers so much more. Living out the mission and charism as associates sends ripples into our communities.”

Now in its 45th year, the Associate Community carries on the healing mission of Jesus, being people of hope and love.

Kelly Robe, an associate since 1994, sums up the relationship in this way,

“This is a wonderful community of spiritual beings who model love in action, presence, and being.” Associates carry on Mother Agnes Hazotte’s commitment to serve where needed, incarnating the CSA charism and mission in their own lives and times.



Associates and Sisters gather three times during the year to care for creation by cleaning up the highway.

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Interested in learning more about the associate relationship?

[www.csasisters.org/be-an-associate](http://www.csasisters.org/be-an-associate)

or email Carol Braun at [cbraun@csasisters.org](mailto:cbraun@csasisters.org)

Sisters Rhea Emmer (left) and Cyndi Nienhaus were present to receive the Proclamation.

## CSA Recognized with Proclamation

On August 26, 2020, CSA was awarded a Proclamation by Fond du Lac City Council president, Brian Kolstad. The Proclamation marked the 150th anniversary of the move of the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes to Fond du Lac. Quoting from the CSA Statement of Mission, President Kolstad publicly acknowledged CSA's longstanding dedication and contribution to the city of Fond du Lac. In her remarks, Sister Rhea Emmer enumerated some of the ways in which CSA and the people and city of Fond du Lac have partnered historically to meet the educational and healthcare needs of the local community and surrounding rural areas as well as some of the efforts of the partnership in the 80s and 90s to address unmet social needs such as serving victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence, supporting houses for recovery from addiction for women and men and establishing the first Hospice program in the city. Sister Rhea concluded with the acknowledgment that the work of the partnership is not done and that we can work together to address issues of systemic racism, care of earth, and homelessness, especially among youth in Fond du Lac. The congregation's call to minister to those whose faith life and human dignity is threatened remains dynamic and relevant in our day.

## In Memoriam... Walking with God



Sister Mary Dennis McMahon, CSA  
September 22, 2020

Sister Mary Dennis, CSA, baptized Mary Therese, was born in Chicago, Illinois, the oldest of five surviving children. When her mother died, Mary Therese was only fifteen years old. She finished high school at Immaculate Conception

High School in Elmhurst, IL and helped her father raise her siblings. Having sensed a call to religious life, and inspired by the spirit of the Sisters of St. Agnes who taught her, she entered St. Agnes Convent, Fond du Lac, WI in 1946 and made profession of vows as Sister Mary Dennis on August 15, 1949. For more than fifty years, Sister excelled as a gifted teacher and principal in elementary and high schools in New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Indiana, and as Associate Superintendent of Schools of the Fort Wayne-South Bend diocese. Upon retiring from her educational ministry in 2001, Sister Mary Dennis provided childcare for two adopted children in Chicago, IL. In 2005, she moved to Fond du Lac as a resident at Nazareth Court and Center where she assisted other sisters as she was able. She died peacefully at St. Agnes Hospital on September 22, 2020.

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



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# Welcome New Staff

CSA is pleased to welcome Kathy Koepsell as the Assistant Director of Associate Relationship. Kathy has been actively involved in the associate relationship in Fond du Lac and brings a compassionate presence and collaborative spirit to the position. Her responsibilities include assisting Carol Braun in some of the daily operations of the associate office including oversight of specific programs, events and maintaining files. Kathy was an elementary education teacher for 45 years and since retiring enjoys being out in nature walking her dog and working during the garden season at Haentze Floral. She volunteers in prison ministry, at assisted living homes, and at Loaves and Fishes. Kathy is very close to her daughter, Lisa, spending time together sharing life values.

