

REFLECTIONS

MAY 2023

&
Connections

STORIES OF MISSION
& MINISTRY



CSA

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

Dear Friends,

“The Spirit teaches us to go first to those places where community and creation are most obviously languishing, those melancholy places where the cry of the people and the cry of the earth are intermingled. [There] we meet Jesus, who goes before, in solidarity and healing” (Granberg-Michaelson, 1992). In this issue of Reflections & Connections, we enter a few of those melancholy places that are also places of hope because Jesus is there.

Jules Renard once wrote, “On earth, there is no heaven, but there are pieces of it.” In this issue, we are sharing with you little glimpses of heaven amidst both sadness and joy; pain and healing; fear and hope.

- ~ We raise up a tragic journey to prison execution yet enveloped in the compassion of accompaniment.
- ~ Moved by Pope Francis’ recent rejection of the Doctrine of Discovery, we recognize both the ongoing results of unbridled colonization and treasure our indigenous brothers and sisters and all they offer through the wisdom of their cultures.
- ~ Our eyes open to the plight of refugees and immigrants and to the love and hope offered by those who reach out to them—a presence of Christ.
- ~ During an amazing breakfast gathering, Sister Dianne Bergant, CSA, energized the spirits of women both personally and professionally while presenting the inner dynamics present in human growth and relationships.



Pictured L to R: Sisters Sharon Pollnow, General Superior; Lael Niblick, General Councilor; Madeline Gianforte, General Councilor; and Peg Spindler, General Vicar

~ A native American proverb says, “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.” Deeply committed to preserving Earth for future generations, CSA held a special event on Earth Day drawing together many who are trying to make a difference, saving not only Earth but the people, animals, and plants that inhabit her.

Finally, we present our recently deceased Sisters, each life a unique witness to Justice, Peace, and Love. As they are laid to rest in this our Earth home and their beings join the myriad Sisters of St. Agnes who have gone before, may their witness bless us with a little piece of heaven.

Sisters Sharon Pollnow, Peg Spindler, Madeline Gianforte, and Lael Niblick

CSA General Council

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Dusty Krikau, and Mary Christopherson

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Sister Janet *Offers Dignity*

BY SISTER RUTH BATTAGLIA, CSA

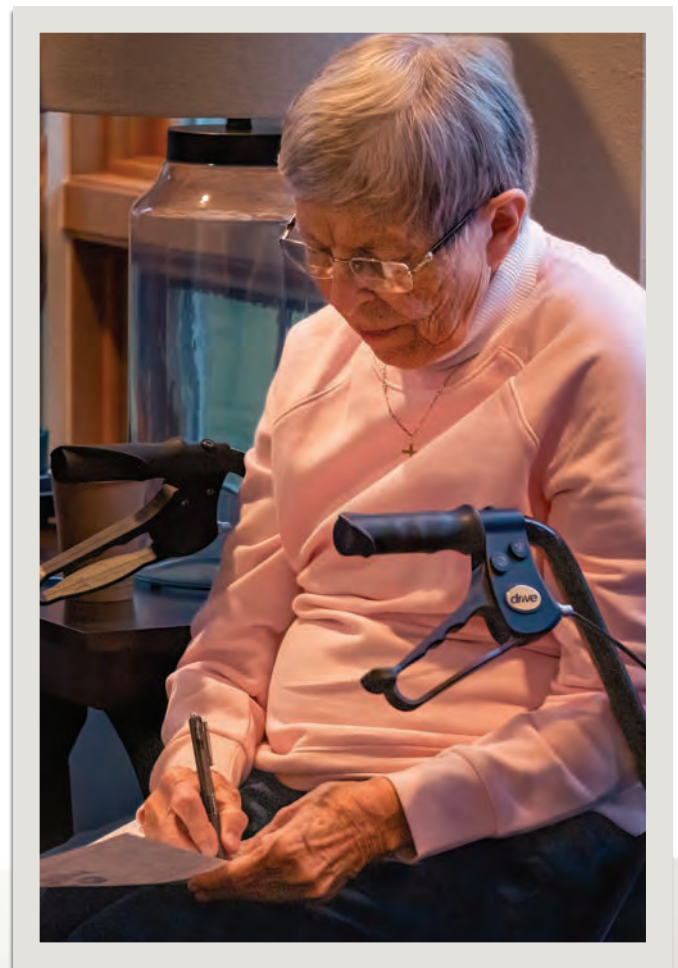
*W*hile serving in a L'Arche community in Mobile, Alabama, Sister Janet Ahler, CSA, was invited by two staff members to visit Holman prison in Atmore, the holding prison for men awaiting execution. In the CSA spirit of “pastoral concern for those whose faith life or human dignity is threatened” (CSA Constitutions # 4), she was soon a regular visitor with James Bill Hubbard. James consistently held that he was innocent of the murder for which he was charged and condemned.

At the time of James' sentencing, if a person had an IQ of 70 or less in Alabama, he was not sentenced to death. James had an IQ of 71. James was simple and straightforward. “You are like a mother to me,” Sister recalls James saying to her during one of her visits.

The day prior to his execution, Sister Janet joined members of Kairos in visiting and praying with James. Kairos is a lay-led, interdenominational Christian ministry in which men and women volunteers bring Christ's love and forgiveness to prisoners and their families. James' daughter served as the witness of the execution. It was a memory that Sister Janet said she did not need, though she accompanied another man on his last day. Meeting with his family and with members of Kairos, she offered comfort to his family by relating the good this condemned man had done in prison, shielding people new to the prison from being taken advantage of by others, and aiding them in preparation for court procedures.

Since this interview, Sister Janet has succumbed to cancer. Up to that time she had been corresponding with a man on death row in Ohio. She had always promised to pray for him, but said in her last letter to him, “It is your turn to pray for me.”

For years, Sister Janet took turns with sisters and associates writing to the people whose execution dates were drawing near, promising the prayers of the CSA community for them. The Sisters of St. Agnes have taken a public stance in opposition to the death penalty in line with the teaching of Pope Francis and the Catholic Church.



You can join this ministry by learning more at www.csasisters.org/dignity

Learning About Harm



On March 30, 2023, the Vatican issued a statement repudiating “those concepts that fail to recognize the inherent human rights of indigenous peoples, including what has become known as the legal and political ‘doctrine of discovery.’” It also affirmed the UN’s work to protect the “rights of indigenous peoples as well as facilitate their development in a way that respects their identity, language and culture.”

A month later, in the early evening of April 21, 2023, an interfaith group of 60 people gathered together to learn about indigenous history, legacy, and traditions, and the struggles, harm, and injustices arising from colonization. Led by the Alliance for Justice and its Wisconsin indigenous leaders, attendees began by sharing a meal provided by the Brothertown Indian Nation featuring foods that would traditionally have been found in the local area but are now few and far between. In a disturbingly parallel experience, the content of the activity which followed the meal showed how a once massive population of people were

systematically eliminated, extirpated from their original lands, and taken from their families and culture by force.

Sister Jomarie Zielke said, “The Blanket Exercise left me stunned. I had known scattered bits and pieces of the atrocities experienced by native Americans, but to learn the extensive history of the cruelty they actually lived over the years was heart breaking.”

“Alliance for Justice’s Blanket Exercise was amazing. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn directly from indigenous individuals willing to share their personal and generational realities,” said attendee Kristel Lougher. “The trust that the leaders put forward was powerful: from sharing food and its history to the immense tragedies that have occurred for multiple centuries and ending with the connections made at the listening circles. It was all so transformative. I truly hope that more non-indigenous individuals in Fond du Lac can take part in this unique experience.”

Learn about hosting your own event by emailing tabler@csasisters.org

Welcome *New Arrivals*

BY SISTER CHRISTI ANN LAUDOLFF, CSA



In the Epistle of St. James, there is a line that says it doesn't do much good to say to someone, "Goodbye and good luck; keep warm and well fed," if you do nothing to help the person. This is a foundation of the James Place Ministries of the Elmbrook Church in Brookfield, WI. One of the James Place ministries is James Place Immigration Services with offices in Waukesha and the south side of Milwaukee.

When I arrived in Milwaukee searching for a volunteer ministry, I happened upon James Place through an online volunteer site. I called and found, much to my surprise and relief, people at James Place were doing what I had done at We Are One Family in Bisbee, Arizona.

In both Milwaukee and Bisbee, we provide people with immigration resources at an affordable rate for the poor.

James Place in Waukesha meets many DACA people who are renewing their status until a permanent solution is legislated by congress. In Milwaukee, our main service is to refugees of Afghanistan, Syria, Myanmar (formerly Burma), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Many other agencies have helped with the resettlement of the refugees and their families. After one year in the United States, the refugees can apply for lawful permanent residence. Four years later, if they meet the civics, history, and language requirements, they can apply for naturalization and become citizens here.

As of January 6, people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela can apply for a two-year period of parole in the United States due to upheaval in their own countries. Many of these people have also graced our office.

When people come to James Place, our mission is to build a relationship with them and to be a presence of Christ to the people. Hopefully, our presence and demeanor will preach more forcefully than anything we say.

Check with your local service agencies and churches to find ways that you may be able to help immigrants or refugees at a very vulnerable time in their lives.



Protecting *God's Handiwork*

In his *Laudato Si'* encyclical, Pope Francis shares that encountering Jesus Christ necessarily impacts our relationship with the world around us. He states, "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience." (#217)

As joyful protectors of God's handiwork, CSA welcomed more than 150 people to the motherhouse grounds in Fond du Lac to celebrate Earth Day on April 22, 2023. 20 Earth-focused exhibitors showcased opportunities to care for our common home in many different ways, including each of the seven goals highlighted in the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform. More than 30 individuals took advantage of guided tours of the solar array and conservation easement,

and several learned how to join Wisconsin's Bumble Bee Brigade to monitor and protect native bumble bees.

The day concluded with a screening of *The Letter*, a new documentary about how spiritual values unite us in the face of a planetary emergency. *The Letter* builds on the teaching of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis's encyclical on care for our common home, which itself stands on the catechism of the Catholic Church and teachings from popes over the last five decades.

Attendee Tiffany Brault shared, "Our family had a wonderful time at the Earth Day Fair. It was so exciting to see so many vendors who are taking on different actions to care for the planet we all share. Sometimes environmentalism can seem so daunting, because there is so much to do, and we are all just a tiny piece of the puzzle. Seeing so many others who have found ways to



Tour Groups *Welcome*

*T*he Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes (CSA) welcomes groups, including schools, corporations, families, and private organizations, to request a guided tour of the CSA solar array or the conservation easement.

Guided tours of the solar array require 30-45 minutes and are a great way to introduce concepts around solar energy. Tours of the array address a wide range of topics, such as how solar photovoltaic cells work, the jobs created by the solar industry, and why the sisters chose to invest in solar energy.

The solar array sits on part of the 237-acre conservation easement owned by CSA. In addition to the 880-panel solar array, the property includes forests, prairies, wetlands, farm fields, a cemetery, a labyrinth, nature trails, and three streams running down the Niagara Escarpment. Guided tours of the full easement require at least two hours to provide adequate time to access most areas of the property.

Tour registration and additional information about CSA's property can be found at www.csasisters.org/earth or call 920-907-2300.



make a difference is so heartening.” She continued, “Our kids' favorite ... experience was the chance to explore the grounds. We didn't make it very far, but they were entranced by the stream running through the property. They found sticks, and named them, and then followed their journeys as they floated down the water. Our oldest, Lucy, enjoyed stopping to listen to the different sounds the water makes. We found a sense of spirituality by getting to explore nature in a beautiful space.”

Enjoy spiritual renewal in nature any weekday by checking in at the main entrance of the motherhouse for a visitor badge between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.



On the morning of March 16, 2023, more than 100 women came together for breakfast at CSA's Breakfast with Women: Energizing Spirits. Sister Dianne Bergant, CSA, provided an inspiring keynote presentation that led to deep conversations during and after the event. The reflections of attendees highlight the impact of the event:

Dana Pollom, a student in Marian University's Working Families Grant program, shared, "I was in a funk prior to attending the breakfast and this state of mind was diminishing my life as I knew it. Sister Dianne Bergant gave words to my emotions and left me with an energizing hope that I am capable of self-preservation. This event gave me a chance to look within, in a safe and inviting environment. Also, it allowed me to reconnect with influential wonderful women from my recovery journey and it is all in God's timing."

CSA Associate Jennifer Favour stated, "Sister Dianne's talk exceeded my expectations. Not only was it invigorating and energizing; I found the concepts of

self-preservation, self-adaptation, self-dissolution, and self-transcendence as excellent tenets to use for pondering issues personally and professionally. The highlight of using our own inner strength to transform ourselves and transcend situations in our lives was inspiring. I feel blessed to have been in attendance and will strive to transcend and be heroic!"

Sister Jean Perry, CSA, was unable to join in person, but found the video to be just as impactful as the in-person attendees did. "I was inspired by Sister Dianne's description of the dynamics present in every human interaction or relationship. I am challenged to recognize and use the daily experiences that life provides of dying, disappointment, or diminishment as opportunities for self-transcendence."

Experience it for yourself by visiting
www.csasisters.org/breakfast

Please Join Us



Jubilee Mass Livestream

Sunday, June 25, 2023
2:30-3:30 p.m. CDT

The livestream of the Mass celebrating our 2023 Jubilarians will be available to view at www.csasisters.org/jubilee



Art of Storytelling

Third Fridays; May through November
11:00 a.m. CDT/CST
51 Sheboygan St., Fond du Lac

This monthly series at Thelma Sadoff Center for the Arts is sponsored by CSA as part of a commitment to develop mutual relationships through awareness of culture, history, and politics. Monthly speakers will share their stories at free, in-person gatherings. Open to the public. More information at thelmaarts.org



Oak Savannah Walk

Tuesday, July 18, 2023
6:00-8:00 p.m. CDT

Join with members of the Fond du Lac County Audubon Society and naturalists from Glacial Lakes Conservancy to explore the half-mile trail in CSA's oak savannah on the Niagara Escarpment. As time allows, the group will also explore the beautiful blossoms of the prairie. Attendees of all ages are welcome; no pets, please.



Pollinator Walk

Saturday, August 12, 2023
9:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m. CDT

Learn about the importance of pollinator diversity and prairie plants through exploration in the CSA prairie. This walk is part of Wisconsin Land Trust Days and will be led by DNR expert, Jay Watson. Attendees of all ages are welcome; no pets, please.

The event is organized by Glacial Lakes Conservancy and is limited to a total of 20 attendees. Free for GLC members; \$10 cash at door for non-members. Email isabel@glaciallakes.org to reserve your spot or visit glaciallakes.org for more information.

In Memoriam... Walking with God



Sister Jane Remondino, CSA

Sister Jane Remondino, CSA, died peacefully April 2, 2023, at St. Francis Home, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Jane was born August 16, 1931, in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, where she grew up with two sisters

and two brothers. Jane attended Holy Angels Academy in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1948, she entered St. Agnes Convent in Fond du Lac, earning her high school diploma through St. Agnes High School. She made her first profession of vows in the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes as Sister Mary Charles on August 15, 1951.

After a year of classes at Marian College, Sister Jane embarked on a life of service to her sisters as the homemaker for large CSA communities in Yonkers, New York; Elmhurst and Evanston, Illinois; Decatur, Indiana; St. Mary's Springs Academy, Marian College's Regina Hall, and St. Agnes Convent, all in Fond du Lac. From 1979 to 1984, she ministered as assistant to the Director of Religious Education in Elmhurst, Illinois. Returning to Fond du Lac, she lived and served at St. Agnes Convent in various roles: driving sisters to appointments and family visits and managing the mailroom and printing needs of CSA's administrative offices. Sister Jane enjoyed creating greeting cards for every occasion for sisters' use, while also developing her computer skills and researching family genealogy.

In August of 2016, Sister Jane retired to Nazareth Court and Center. She was admitted to St. Francis Home on January 30, 2023, receiving loving care until her death on April 2, 2023.



Sister Janet Ahler, CSA

Sister Janet Ahler, CSA, formerly known as Sister Jean Vianney, died peacefully March 31, 2023, at Nazareth Center, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. She was born on October 30, 1932, in Burlington, Wisconsin, the first of five daughters. Janet attended St. Joseph elementary school in Lyons, Wisconsin, and Immaculate Conception High School in Burlington, Wisconsin. She entered St. Agnes Convent in 1950 and made her first profession of vows on August 15, 1953, in the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, as Sister Jean Vianney. Sister Janet earned a nursing diploma from St. Agnes School of Nursing and a BSN from Marian College, both in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and a Master of Nursing Education from St. Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri.

Sister Janet ministered as hospital nurse in Kansas and Wisconsin, missionary in Ecuador, nurse educator at Marian College, and CSA healthcare Apostolic Councilor. In 1986, inspired by the work of Jean Vanier in houses for persons with mental and physical disabilities and their caregivers, Sister Janet dedicated her healing care to the L'Arche community in Mobile, Alabama. In 1998, she returned to Fond du Lac to be Local Coordinator and Wellness Coordinator at Nazareth Court and Center. She retired to the St. Agnes Motherhouse in 2015.

Throughout her life she brought a bright smile, healing touch, and comforting presence to the sick, the anxious, and the dying. On February 14, 2023, Sister Janet was admitted to Nazareth Center in Fond du Lac, with a diagnosis of terminal cancer. There, until her death, she received the loving care she had so often given to others.



Sister Grace Ann Feldbruegge, CSA

Sister Grace Ann Feldbruegge, CSA, baptized Joanne, died peacefully February 18, 2023, at St. Francis Home, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Joanne was born February 27, 1942, in Waunakee, Wisconsin, the youngest of seven children.

Joanne attended St. John's Elementary School in Waunakee, staffed by the Sisters of St. Agnes. After graduating from Waunakee High School in 1960, she entered St. Agnes Convent in Fond du Lac where she made her first profession of vows on August 15, 1963, as Sister Grace Ann.

Over her years in ministry, Sister earned a BS in Elementary Education from Marian College, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, an MS in Education from St. Francis College, Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and a Masters in Ministry from Seattle University, Seattle, Washington. Her commitment to the mission of the Sisters of St. Agnes and her professional studies prepared her to serve as a teacher for nineteen years in Kansas, Indiana, Michigan, New York, and Wisconsin. In Mobile, Alabama, she taught for five years and also served there as a caseworker and advocate for the disadvantaged at Mobile Catholic Services, after which she accepted a position providing pastoral care and presence at Providence Hospital. Sister Grace Ann returned to Fond du Lac in 2002, living at the CSA Motherhouse and serving as a clerk in the congregation's finance office. She retired to Nazareth Court and Center in 2013 and when her health required more care, Sister Grace Ann moved to St. Francis Home where she participated in CSA community life and activities as she was able until close to the time of her death.



Sister Mercedes Geib

Sister Mercedes Geib, CSA, baptized Lois Catherine, died peacefully March 13, 2023, at St. Francis Home, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Lois was born March 25, 1922, in Barton, Wisconsin, and grew up one block

from the original motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Agnes. She attended St. Mary's Springs Academy in Fond du Lac for two years before entering St. Agnes Convent where she completed her high school education. She professed vows in the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes as Sister Mercedes on August 15, 1941.

Sister Mercedes was a gifted educator, musician, organist, liturgist, and pastoral minister. She received credits in music from Alverno College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and St. Norbert College, DePere, Wisconsin, as well as certification as a choirmaster from St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota.

She received a BS in Education from Marian College, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and an MST in Teaching from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh.

Sister's active ministry included elementary school teacher, music teacher, principal, religious education coordinator, parish minister, liturgist, and organist in Wisconsin, Kansas, and Indiana. In 1993, Sister Mercedes moved to Ohio where she spent twenty years as pastoral minister at Good Samaritan Hospital and Our Lady of Victory Parish in Cincinnati, and at St. Joseph Parish in Circleville, Ohio, where she was active in the Ministry of Neighboring at St. Joseph's Parish.

In 2013, Sister Mercedes joined the community of sisters at Nazareth Court and Center in Fond du Lac, sharing her love for music and her compassionate presence with her sisters. Frail health necessitated her move to St. Francis Home in 2020 where she received loving care until her death, just 12 days before her 101st birthday.



Sister Rita Kramer, CSA

Sister Rita Kramer, CSA, formerly Sister Sara, died peacefully January 26, 2023, at St. Francis Home, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Rita, the sixth of twelve children, was born in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, on December 1, 1943.

She grew up on the family farms in Dotyville and Armstrong, Wisconsin. She attended high school at St. Mary's Springs Academy in Fond du Lac where she first met the Sisters of St. Agnes and felt a call to religious life. Rita made her first profession of vows in 1966 as Sister Sara. She earned a BS in Elementary Education from Marian College and a Masters in Religious Studies from Marygrove College in Detroit, Michigan. After 14 years ministering in parish elementary schools and religious education in Wisconsin and Illinois, Rita received certification as a nurse aide and served at Nazareth Heights, St. Agnes Hospital, and Hospice Hope. In 2013, she joined the community of CSA sisters at Nazareth Court and Center where she assisted in numerous ways to enhance the life of the sisters with loving service and hospitality. Sister Rita was admitted to St. Francis Home in November 2022 where she received loving care until her death on January 26.



320 County Road K
Fond du Lac, WI 54937

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Or email us at **csaadm@csasisters.org**

Or call **920-907-2300**

CSA Associate Relationship

CSA Associates are women and men who choose to have an intentional relationship with the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes. Associates respond to their baptismal call and walk in solidarity with CSA within their vocational call and lifestyle.



Watch the video at
youtube.com/@csasisters
to learn more about discerning
a call to associate relationship.

