

REFLECTIONS

NOVEMBER 2023

& *Connections*



STORIES OF MISSION
& MINISTRY



CSA

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

Dear Friends,

The seasons of creation invite us to embrace the transformative journey of life both personally and communally.

“Autumn is a place where words fall short. It is a magic that must be felt, breathed, experienced, and treasured.”

— Laura Jaworski

As we celebrate the season of fall and gently make space for winter, let us embrace the full landscape of our personal and communal lives. The beauty that we see in the vivid colors of our autumn canvas is a reminder of the sacredness of each life. And as the leaves take flight, we are gifted with the unobstructed vision to see the essence and complexity in all of life.

Pope Francis so exquisitely gives voice to the wholeness of life when he says: **“Each of us shines like a star in the heart of God and in the fulfillment of the universe. At the same time though, we are called to form constellations that can guide and light the path of humanity, beginning with the places in which we live.”**

During this holy season, how might the *Divine* be calling each of us to respond to the most vulnerable within our families, our communities, and our world?

With Caring and Grateful Hearts,

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



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



ON THE COVER:

On July 27, 2023, the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes was honored to receive the Catholic Climate Covenant's first ever "U.S. Laudato Si' Champions Award" in the "Religious Order" category. In recognition of the honor, CSA received a hand-painted St. Francis statue.

Contents



- 3 Associate Recommitment & New Director
- 4 Shelter From the Cold
- 5 Nuns Against Gun Violence
- 6 Recognizing Visionary Leadership at Marian
- 7 Obituaries
- 8 Engage With CSA

Editorial Board Members:

Sister Jeremy Quinn, Sister Jean Perry, Dusty Krikau, and Mary Christopherson

Associate Recommitment & New Director

Each year in late October, the associate community comes together to recommit themselves to an ongoing relationship with the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes. They began their day by bringing food donations for the Mother Agnes Pantry at Marian University, before focusing on the day's theme: *Blessings and Hopes—A Deeper Look*. Together, the group reflected on the blessings and hopes that had been identified during their June Visioning Day and committed to manifesting them while also remaining open to an unfolding future.



Maria Miller, Campus Ministry Club President; Alli LeFevre, Campus Ministry Service Coordinator; CSA Associate Kerry Strupp, Dr. Joshua Clary, Vice President for Student Life & Diversity, CSA Associates Kathy Koepsell, and Joanne Sheridan.

Just a few weeks earlier, the new Director of Associate Relationship was named. Kelly Robe has served as a home circle leader, member of the Coordinating Body, leader of the Associate Social Justice Circle, member of JPIC, solar array docent, adopt-a-highway volunteer, and member of the CSA Days planning committee. She felt drawn to being an associate after attending an Associate Fair at the Norbertine Center for Spirituality in De Pere and learned about this community of people who wanted to deepen their

spirituality and connected with CSA's mission, charisma, and spirituality.

She brings a background in coaching, project work, training and development from 20 years of experience in a corporate environment. Kelly earned her bachelor's degree in English from Drake University before quitting law school to care for a relative



Kelly Robe

with cancer. She is a life coach, certified integrative nutrition health coach, and certified Infinite Possibilities trainer. In her personal time, she enjoys swimming, reading, growing avocado plants, and spending time with friends and family.

Amid increasing uncertainty, she believes associates are called to be leaders and protectors of love. "Never underestimate what God can do with a small group of committed people!"

The timing of Kelly's hiring allows her to begin in the role with a renewed commitment from all associates and with clarity from the October gathering, where associates clearly identified a desire "to experience more fully the richness of the mission, charisma, and spirituality of CSA, to deepen understanding of what it means to be in relationship with CSA, to welcome others who are called to be associates, and to open ourselves to our unfolding future and growth."

Learn more about the associate relationship by visiting www.csasisters.org/associates



Shelter from the

Cold

Many entities have come together to bring about the Holy Family Warming Shelter, which was announced in late September, including government grants, private contributions, and corporate donations.

The Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes joined the effort by providing a very generous donation. These funds will help with myriad costs associated with opening, operating, and future renovations of the warming shelter to care for individuals who find themselves unhoused in the Fond du Lac area.

Prior to opening, numerous renovations took place to ensure that the former downtown office building was ready to provide up to 30 individuals a warm, clean place to sleep; hot, nutritious meals; and access to community resources every night from November 15 through April this year. Additional renovations in 2024 will ensure clients have access to on-site showers.

The groups, organizations, and volunteers are what make the warming shelter possible on a day-to-day basis. The Fond du Lac Family YMCA, which is located a few blocks

from the new warming shelter location, has agreed to provide access to showers throughout the winter, and local organizations are signing up to offer nightly meals or to purchase items from the shelter's wish list. Staffing the shelter is also a partnership: St. Vincent de Paul and Holy Family each hired full-time staff people to work together to direct shelter operations year-round. Holy Family has also hired one full time seasonal position for the months when the shelter is in use.

The underlying causes that lead to the need for the shelter are also not going unaddressed. A consortium of community partners are coming together to find solutions to reduce the number of unhoused individuals in the community and make lasting impacts to improve access to housing. Sister Peg Spindler, CSA, who worked with similar populations in Gary for the past 20 years, now brings her expertise to Fond du Lac. "Homelessness is a systemic problem which can only be addressed through systemic solutions. It's been inspiring to me to see so many individuals and agencies come together to make this a real communal, systemic effort. It's a privilege to participate."

Nuns Against Gun Violence



In 2002, the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes released a statement of belief on peace and nonviolence. The 14-point statement included numerous calls to participate in public discourse and legislative action to promote peace and nonviolence. With that statement in mind, the congregation made another commitment to nonviolence by joining Nuns Against Gun Violence, a coalition of more than 60 congregations of Catholic sisters and their allies throughout the US.

Founded in April 2023, Nuns Against Gun Violence meets bi-weekly to discuss advocacy efforts and with the mission to affirm the value of human life through prayer, education, and advocacy for common sense, evidence-based, gun violence prevention.

As part of this effort, Tracy Abler, CSA's Justice Coordinator, joined with other anti-violence action groups on September 21, 2023, in Madison, Wisconsin, for Gun Violence Prevention Day of Action. During the morning, legislators heard from experts and advocates who shared grim statistics regarding the constant and rapid increase in gun violence and deaths during the past three years. That afternoon, attendees met with legislative staffers to discuss five bills waiting to be brought to the floor.

In addition to advocacy, the congregation continues to pray for peace during their annual Peace Tree ceremony and throughout the month of December as individual sisters and associates join local vigils and events held each year to mark the anniversary of the Sandy Hook shooting.

There are many ways for you to join the effort against gun violence:

- Host a prayer vigil using the "Lifting Our Light in the Darkness" service provided by Nuns Against Gun Violence
- Take time to become familiar with legislative bills in your state and call your state senators and representatives to demand they take the time to thoroughly read, understand, and support these life-saving policies.
- Pray a novena for peace during the advent season
- Sign up as an ally of Nuns Against Gun Violence or another peace building organization.

By uniting our voices and prayers, we can make an impact on the gun violence crisis.



Tracy Abler with Tim Hall, JPIC Coordinator for the Racine Dominicans. Many attendees wear orange shirts, a traditional hunting color indicating, "Stop; don't shoot."



Recognizing Visionary Leadership at



Marian

Michelle E. Majewski, President of Marian University, has been named a 2024 Wisconsin Titan 100. The Titan 100 program recognizes Wisconsin's Top 100 CEOs & C-level executives. "The Titan 100 are visionary leaders that inspire the Wisconsin business community. These preeminent leaders have built a distinguished reputation that is unrivaled and preeminent in their field. We are humbled to recognize the Titan 100 for their efforts to shape the future of the Wisconsin business community," said Jaime Zawmon, President of Titan CEO.

Joining Marian University in 1987 as a faculty member of the Psychology department, Dr. Majewski later became program director, department chair, and the dean of two different schools within Marian University. She was awarded the James Underkofler Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching award along the way and enjoyed a long career in which she thoroughly enjoyed teaching undergraduate and graduate students. Following her retirement in 2018, she rejoined the University in 2020 at the start of the pandemic in her new role as Acting President. Six months later, she was named Marian's 17th president.

"This is an amazing honor, one that is reflective of the work of my talented team of colleagues at Marian University, along with the outstanding work and dedication of our Board of Trustees. I am so fortunate to have the privilege to lead Marian University, the only Agnesian university in the world, to support her mission, to work with all of our dedicated faculty and staff and to support our students and over 21,000 alumni," said Dr. Majewski.

"We are honored and blessed to have Michelle Majewski, a brilliant visionary woman with great wisdom and leadership, serve as President of Marian University, a CSA sponsored ministry. Dr. Majewski is passionate about furthering the mission and core values, educating the whole person to be of service in this world, and striving tirelessly to creatively sustain Marian's future. CSA is immensely grateful for Dr. Majewski and for the recognition she so very much deserves," said Sister Sharon Pollnow, CSA General Superior.

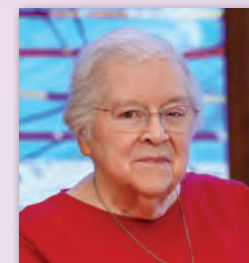
President Michelle E. Majewski, will be honored at the annual Titan 100 awards celebration on January 18, 2024, at Fiserv Forum, Milwaukee, WI.

In Memoriam... Walking with God



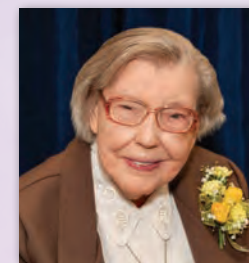
Sister Jean Steffes, CSA
August 22, 2023

Sister Jean was born in Ada, Oklahoma, November 14, 1943, the daughter of Louis and Vincentia Steffes. After her father died, the family moved to Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin, and then to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where Jean was educated at St. Joseph School, St. Mary Springs Academy, and Marian College. While attending Marian, Jean responded to a call to religious life and entered St. Agnes Convent where she professed her vows as Sister Louisa on August 15, 1967. Her educational pursuits included a BA in English from Marian College, an MA in English and an MA in Human Services/Counseling from DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, and an MA in Theology from the University of San Francisco's Phoenix Campus. Always devoted to her CSA sisters and the mission of the congregation, Sister Jean was recognized as a gifted educator. However, after fifteen years teaching at St. Mary's Springs High School and Immaculate Conception High School, Elmhurst, Illinois, she began twenty-five years of courageous and visionary service in CSA leadership as novice directress, regional coordinator, and general superior. After completing her first two terms as general superior, Sister Jean ministered in the Diocese of Phoenix, Arizona, as Director of the Office for Religious and Director of the Office for the Propagation of the Faith. In 2004, she was appointed Chancellor of the Diocese, a position she held until 2013 when she was again elected to serve the congregation as general superior. In August 2022, having completed her fourth term as CSA general superior, Jean was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She faced the diagnosis and treatment with the same courage, faith, and determination that exemplified her entire life and died peacefully on August 22, 2023, at Nazareth Center in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.



Sister Josephine Braun, CSA
August 20, 2023

Sister Josephine Braun, CSA, baptized Patricia Jean, was born February 16, 1940, in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, the second of seven daughters of Albert and Marie Braun. After graduating from Kohler High School, Kohler, Wisconsin, Patricia enrolled in St. Agnes School of Nursing, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where she met the Sisters of St. Agnes who were her teachers. After one year of nursing school, she entered St. Agnes Convent and on August 15, 1962, made her first profession of vows as Sister Josephine in the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes, Fond du Lac. She completed her studies to become a registered nurse, and earned a BS in nursing from Marian College, Fond du Lac, and an MSN in rehabilitation nursing from Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts. Sister Josephine served as a staff nurse at St. Agnes Hospital and at St. Anthony Hospital, Hays, Kansas. Returning to Marian College, she was nursing instructor for the School of Nursing for twenty years. In 1991, Sister Josephine studied to become a certified massage therapist, and established Healing Touch Massage in Fond du Lac, a ministry she continued for thirty years. In May of 2022, Sister joined the community of CSA sisters at Nazareth Court and Center. There, courageously facing her terminal illness, she received loving care until the time of her death on August 20, 2023, at Nazareth Court, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.



Sister Mary Ellen Johnston, CSA
October 31, 2023

Sister Mary Ellen Johnston, baptized Bridget Philomena, died peacefully October 31, 2023, at St. Francis Home, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. She was born in Ireland, October 23, 1920, and grew up on the family's farm with her six sisters and eight brothers. When she was seventeen, Bridget was invited by her aunt to return with her to Chicago, Illinois, to find employment. There she finished high school, enrolled in business classes, and secured a secretarial position. Although Bridget's attraction to religious life began at age thirteen, it was later, while working as a secretary, that Bridget began to consider becoming a sister and first learned of the Sisters of St. Agnes. She entered St. Agnes Convent in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, in 1948 and made her first profession of vows as Sister Mary Ellen on August 15, 1951. Sister Mary Ellen earned a BS in Education from Marian College. For thirty-three years, she ministered as a teacher, principal, tutor, and school secretary in Wisconsin, Indiana, and Illinois. She also used her secretarial skills for many years as office assistant for the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes, St. Francis Hospital, Evanston, Illinois, and St. Augustine Parish, Tucson, Arizona. She later volunteered as parish visitor, tutor, and in other programs, including Marian College and the CSA Office of Justice, Peace, and Ecology. In 2003, Sister Mary Ellen joined the community of sisters at Nazareth Court and Center in Fond du Lac. There she spread her light, shared her Irish wit, visited the sick, and engaged in community prayer and activities. She moved to St. Francis Home in 2021 where she received loving care until the time of her death.



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Engage with *CSA*



Breakfast with Women: Energizing Spirits

8 a.m. - 10 a.m., March 7, 2024
Hotel Retlaw, Fond du Lac

Join us in an exploration of your own spirituality and discussion of spiritual resources and journeys that are respectful of all belief systems. Five spiritual directors from the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes will guide us in exploring the landscape of spirituality.

Details and Tickets: **www.csasisters.org/breakfast**



CSA Heartbeats

The “Heartbeats” monthly video series includes words and images designed for spiritual renewal and uplifting reflection. Listen to the call of your caring heart, valuing presence and mutual relationships as a way of life. Activate your compassionate heart, responding to ecological, ecclesial, societal, and global challenges. With each heartbeat, learn more about the congregation and more about yourself.

Details and Videos: **www.csasisters.org/heartbeats**