

REFLECTIONS

FEBRUARY 2025

&
Connections

STORIES OF MISSION
& MINISTRY



CSA

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

Dear Friends,

Pope Francis declared 2025 as a Jubilee Year of Hope, beginning his letter doing so with Romans 5:5: *“Hope does not disappoint.”* In a climate of dangerous and disappointing division, polarization continues, wars refuse to end, marginalization of and violence against various groups grows, creation cries out for healing, inequity soars and the common good is dwarfed by out-sized individualism. But, in Hebrews 6:18-20, it says, *“We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor...”* What is that anchor? That anchor is God’s love. Where are the signs of that tender but powerful upholding love?

We only need to look around to see: Children in Gaza or Israel who somehow find the joy to play games in bombed out streets. A neighbor in Ukraine wiping a tear from a widow whose home has no heat. A community of folks in Sudan who gather to rebuild a house and cook a meal. Members of a family here in the U.S. who Zoom together to support each other in the shock of losing election 2024. Parents who circle round their LGBTQIA+ children to defend them. Educators, librarians, and members of communities who attend school board meetings to defend the right to read widely. CNAs who tenderly turn the elderly in their beds. Green shoots, finding their way



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

through the ashes and rubble of destruction. You, our readers and donors, making the work of CSA possible, the work of the Gospel, in many small ways so that *“Hope does not disappoint.”*

Thank you.

ON THE COVER:

“Hands Holding Heart”

This sculpture symbolizes the support associate relationship has had and continues to have. From the beginning, associates have been supported at the right time, in the right place, by the right people. They have been held by the sacred and supported in their spiritual growth, in the discernment of their call, and how they support the mission of Jesus and live out the charism of CSA, together. They have been called by the Spirit for 50 years and continue to be supported on their evolving journey.

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Editorial Board Members:

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

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A Response from the Sisters of St. Agnes to These Times

CSA's Mission Statement (1990) states that we "respond in our own times to those whose faith life and human dignity are threatened." These threats are always around us, but recent rhetoric has increased them by implying that only specific groups of people are entitled to be treated with dignity. This is not true. We see inherent human dignity in everyone: people of color, people with cultural traditions different from our own, LGBTQIA+, immigrants, people with disabilities, believers of all creeds, those with mental illnesses, people suffering from addiction, people experiencing homelessness, people experiencing poverty in rural or urban settings who feel they cannot seem to get ahead, and those pushed out of their countries because of climate or power. To them and any who are feeling marginalized, we address the following:

You are safe with us because we believe in your innate dignity as human beings. You are safe with us because we believe you are images of God. Jesus gladly gathered with you and so do we. Jesus celebrated with you and so do we. Jesus built community, the Kingdom of God, with you and so do we. Jesus challenged the systems and structures that oppressed people and so have we and we will continue to do so.

We call on all people of every class and nation, of every religion and tradition, of every way of life and belief to recommit with us to the common good of all, the healthy wholeness of Earth, our common home, and to the diversity among us that weaves the most beautiful of tapestries ever imagined. Let us lay aside the swords of hatred, division, and greed and fashion the powerful plowshares of love and mercy, the only strengths that have ever changed anything.



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF CSA ASSOCIATES

Called *by the* Spirit

A Letter from Kelly Robe, Director of Associate Relationship

From Vatican II emerged a universal call to holiness for all people that prompted a new sense of responsibility for the mission of Jesus. In 1974, Melva Olson approached Sister Rachel Doerfler, vicar general at the time, and asked if the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes would be open to inviting people to become associates. Never doubting that one person can make a difference, Melva persisted for a full year and became the first CSA associate in 1975 on the Feast Day of St. Agnes. Fifty years later, we are a community of 103 associates and prayer partners living gospel values in varied ways as lay people, in service to the mission of Jesus and CSA charism.

This year marks a milestone of our faithful commitment to expressing love in action, presence, and being through

spiritual growth, hospitality, and courageous initiatives for justice and peace. That may not sound like a media-worthy, epic feat like crossing the Gobi or climbing Everest. But living intentionally to be present and loving as a charism carrier in our world is not simple or easy. When considering political polarization, wealth disparity, immigration, human trafficking, etc., perhaps Everest is a less demanding goal, one that doesn't require vulnerable open-heartedness, spiritual growth, or seeing Christ in everyone.

Here's to the beautiful lay people who have discerned their call to associate relationship, the charism carriers who live and love intentionally, the light-filled and hope-filled serving mission and charism. Cheers!



1965

Vatican II issues a universal call to holiness for all people



1974

Melva Olson approaches General Vicar Sister Rachel Doerfler about replicating associate relationships that have begun with congregations in Milwaukee



1975

Melva Olson becomes the first CSA associate on January 21, the Feast of St. Agnes



Associate Vision Statement

We, CSA Associates, are a community of women and men called by the Spirit to embody the charism, mission, and spirituality of the Sisters of St. Agnes.



We express love in being, presence, and action through spiritual growth, hospitality, and courageous initiatives for justice and peace.





HARC: CSA Archivist Jenny Lukomski and Sisters Sharon Pollnow, Peg Spindler, and Hertha Longo attended the groundbreaking ceremony to represent the Sisters of St. Agnes.

Sharing Archives for the Future

A groundbreaking ceremony for the new Heritage and Research Center (HARC) at Saint Mary's, which will house the rich histories and collections of at least nine congregations of women religious, took place on Friday, July 26, 2024, on Saint Mary's campus, Notre Dame, Indiana.

HARC is set to open in late 2025. The life stories of thousands of Catholic sisters will now be in one place where all can come together to study, research, and apply initiatives and models to lead communities, parishes, organizations, schools and centers. The extensive collection will shine a light on the sisters' models of leadership and organization and their processes for growing community development and advancing social justice. These approaches to living

justly can serve humanity well, and the archives will ensure that they can be shared more broadly.

"We're excited for this opportunity because our collections will complement and be complemented by the archives of the other member congregations," said CSA Archivist Jenny Lukomski. "Future researchers will benefit from the wide scope of primary source materials available in this one location."

HARC will feature storytelling, artifact exhibits, archival preservation and digitization. Learning rooms, group dialogue and classes will also share the history of women religious. Together, these resources will present role models of women that can help guide others—today and in the future.

In Memoriam... Walking with God



Sister Angela Behen, CSA

Sister Angela Behen, CSA, formerly Sister Bennett, was born September 7, 1941, in Chicago, Illinois. The family moved to Burlington, Wisconsin, where Angela graduated from Burlington High School. Desiring to become a teacher, Angela enrolled at Marian College of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where she met the Sisters of St. Agnes. Having discerned a call to religious life, she entered St. Agnes Convent in 1961 and made her profession of vows as Sister Bennett on August 15, 1964.

Sister Angela (Angie) earned a BS in Education and English at Marian College and an MA in Education and Public Relations from Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. For 42 years, she served in varied ministries: teacher in Wisconsin, Indiana, and Illinois; public relations at St. Mary Springs High School and Marian College, Fond du Lac, and St. John's Rest Home, Victoria, Kansas; receptionist at St. Agnes Convent and Nazareth Heights Infirmiry, Fond du Lac; development and religious education minister in Chicago parishes; social service worker, taxi dispatcher, co-director of associates of CSA, as well as involvement and volunteer membership in local organizations in the Fond du Lac area. In 2006, Sister Angie joined the sisters at Nazareth Court and Center, Fond du Lac. She also volunteered there until 2024 when failing health required admission to St. Francis Home where she received loving care until her death on November 7, 2024.



Sister Stella Marie Karls, CSA

Sister Stella Marie Karls, CSA, baptized Rita Emma, died peacefully December 9, 2024, at Nazareth Court, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Rita was born on September 16, 1930, in Waunakee, Wisconsin. After graduating from eighth grade at St. John the Baptist School in Waunakee, she delayed her high school education to assist her ailing mother and to work for several years as a telephone operator. In January 1953, Rita entered St. Agnes Convent in Fond du Lac where she attended high school. She made her first profession of vows in the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes as Sister Stella Marie on August 15, 1957.

Sister Stella Marie received a BS in Education from Marian College, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and dedicated thirty-seven years as an elementary school teacher and as a building principal. Throughout her years in ministry, she continually updated her professional skills through courses in education, scripture, and pastoral ministry. She taught in parish schools in Illinois, New York, and Wisconsin. Her last seventeen years of teaching were at St. Joseph School, Fond du Lac.

After retiring in 1995, Sister Stella Marie continued to serve at St. Joseph and Holy Family Parish as Minister of Care, visiting and bringing Holy Communion and loving presence to the homebound or those in nursing homes. In 2016, she joined the community of sisters at Nazareth Court and Center where she engaged in community life and received loving care until her death.



Sister Dennis O'Connor, CSA

Sister Dennis O'Connor, CSA, baptized Doris Julia, was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on May 15, 1923. She attended St. Florian Catholic School where she met the Sisters of St. Agnes. In 1939, she entered St. Agnes Convent in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and earned her high school diploma from St. Agnes High School. On August 15, 1943, Doris made her first profession of vows as Sister Dennis.

Sister Dennis spent most of her years of ministry as a homemaker, driver, or parish pastoral minister, serving the sisters in local communities in Pennsylvania, New York, Indiana, and Wisconsin. Beginning in 1986, she found her greatest joy when she was asked to serve the retired and infirm sisters at Nazareth Heights in Fond du Lac as assistant to the local coordinator. In 1998, Sister Dennis helped prepare and carry out the move of the sister-residents to Nazareth Court and Center. At that time, she herself became a resident there, while also assisting wherever she was needed. She is especially remembered for her seven years of companionship and devoted care of Sister Claude Feldner, CSA, who died at the age of 109. Even when her own health declined, Sister Dennis remained engaged in the life of the community and became a source of ongoing support for the sisters and staff until her death on January 27, 2025.



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Engage with *CSA*



Breakfast with Women: Energizing Spirits

On March 6, Sister Doris Klein will reflect on her published work, “Risk the Sacred Journey,” focusing on how we can trust in the unfolding journey, even when the path ahead feels uncertain. Afterward, each participant will explore their own sacred journey using “spiritual mirroring.”

Details and Tickets: www.csasisters.org/breakfast



CSA Earth Day

Join us for the 2025 Earth Day Fair on April 26 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the CSA Motherhouse (320 County Rd K, Fond du Lac). Enjoy exhibitors, tours, presentations, and the opportunity to spend time in God’s creation.

Details: www.csasisters.org/earth