

REFLECTIONS

MAY 2025

*&
Connections*

STORIES OF MISSION
& MINISTRY



CSA

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

Dear Friends,

"I still consider myself a missionary.

My vocation, like that of every Christian,

is to be a missionary, to proclaim the Gospel wherever one is."

(Pope Leo XIV—words in a Vatican News Interview)

With all that is transpiring in our world, we are blessed to have a Pope who will always be a missionary. He reminds us that we are also missionaries and that our world needs to hear the Word of God—the Word of Love.

Through the quality of our relationships with both people and the Earth, we strive to be true witnesses of the Risen Christ, "especially to those whose faith life or human dignity is threatened." (CSA Mission Statement) Together with you, may we have the courage to offer hope where there is despair, to give comfort to those in sorrow, and to foster peace in our divided world.

Our world needs all of us to be the presence of Christ and to radiate the love of Christ so others will believe, hope, and assist with the transformation of all that is.



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

Thank you for being graced companions on this sacred journey of life.

With grateful hearts,

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

CSA General Council

ON THE COVER:

Shooting star (*Dodecatheon meadia*) flowers were discovered when a small grassy area of the motherhouse grounds was left to grow during No Mow May in 2023. Mowing is now delayed in this area each year to provide these early spring food sources for the just-awoken bumblebees.

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Editorial Board Members:

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

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Welcoming New Associates

On April 6, 2025, the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes and their associates celebrated the formal commitment of three new associates. 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. Committing to the associate relationship includes a year of discernment with a spiritual mentor and concludes with a prayer service during which the associates offer a personal statement.



I have more opportunities to pray since I started the associate discernment process, and they warm my heart. I have never stopped praying. - Lynette Duley



Captured by the charism and mission of CSA, I am basking in the graces of participation, open to join with sisters and associates in creating awareness and contributing positive momentum to change that will be necessary for the survival and flourishing of what is good, striving toward building the dream of love that cares for the disadvantaged, marginalized, abused, belittled, rejected people and places both in the world around us and deep within each of us. - Doug Stadler



I feel called to share my light with others. I want nothing more than to be such a beacon for those I meet. I long to reflect the love of God which I have received. - Kathy Grochowski

All are invited to find out more about what it means to enter into an associate relationship with CSA.

Explore at

CSASISTERS.ORG/ASSOCIATE-RELATIONSHIP

A Vision for a Future *Full of Hope*

To Our Dear Neighbors,

*A*s Catholic Sisters, vowed women religious, we deeply value the relationships and encounters we have with so many of you while serving in schools, hospitals, parishes, retreat centers, nursing homes, food pantries, and outreach centers. Even if we do not know each other personally, we feel compelled to reach out to you today to express our heartfelt sadness, grief, and lament as we witness sudden and devastating changes severely impacting people in our communities — people we know, love, and who are our neighbors.

Many actions we observe in our nation today seem to contradict values that underlie our shared humanity, values which we have nurtured and endeavored to embody in our actions — although not always successfully — over our lifetimes as Catholic Sisters. Love, compassion, empathy, radical hospitality, and mercy are central to our lives. These values shared among all the world religions make us genuinely human. We firmly believe these values must ground us as a nation if there is to be a future full of hope for ALL generations to come.

Reflect

How does it feel to be asked to “live these values with courage”?

Connect

How can you create a personal connection with your elected representatives to defend the dignity of persons, justice, peace, care of Earth, healthcare, education, and other issues?

We believe that:

- *Every person is an expression of God. All life is sacred.*
- *We must prioritize the needs of those who are the most vulnerable.*
- *There is dignity in all work, and the rights of all workers must take precedence over profit.*
- *Earth is God's gift to us, and we have the privilege to cherish, defend, and protect her for future generations.*
- *Justice is the path to lasting peace.*

Imagine a future centered on principles that allow for the full flourishing of all humanity and our common home, Earth. We know these principles as Catholic Social Teaching. Although you may use different words, the essence of this teaching transcends faith traditions and resonates in the lives of all people of goodwill. Adopting these principles can guide us in the days ahead. Today, we ask you to join us in living these values with courage. Love our neighbors! Welcome the stranger! Care for the most vulnerable among us! Speak the truth!

Work for justice! Only when “We the people” lead with compassion and empathy will a future filled with hope for all generations be possible.

May God continue to bless us on this journey.

With love and hope,

Sisters of St. Agnes





The view from Sister Sharon's location in the Piazza.

At the Vatican: A Personal Account

By Sister Sharon Pollnow

*H*ow blessed I was to be in Rome on May 8, 2025—a day I will hold in my heart forever. When I woke, I looked out the window at the moon over Rome. I just knew that this was the day the world would have a new Pope. That feeling grew more intense until at 5:15 p.m., and still at the UISG Conference, I urged my two traveling companions, Sisters Theresa and Linda, “I think we should go now,” and they concurred. We were getting into an Uber when some Oblates came running out yelling: “White smoke.” We were on our way—along with the whole city—headed for the Vatican. There was such excitement about the possibility that we could actually be there when the Pope would be announced.

Standing in the Vatican Square with over 150,000 people of God waiting for history to be made was surreal. I was actually there. It was electrifying. The smiles, dialogue, kindnesses, and hope of so many strangers—yet so unified in the anticipation of a new Pope—are a treasured memory I will always hold. A tall young man standing in front of me even invited me to lean my arm on his shoulder in an attempt to capture a photo as the curtains opened.

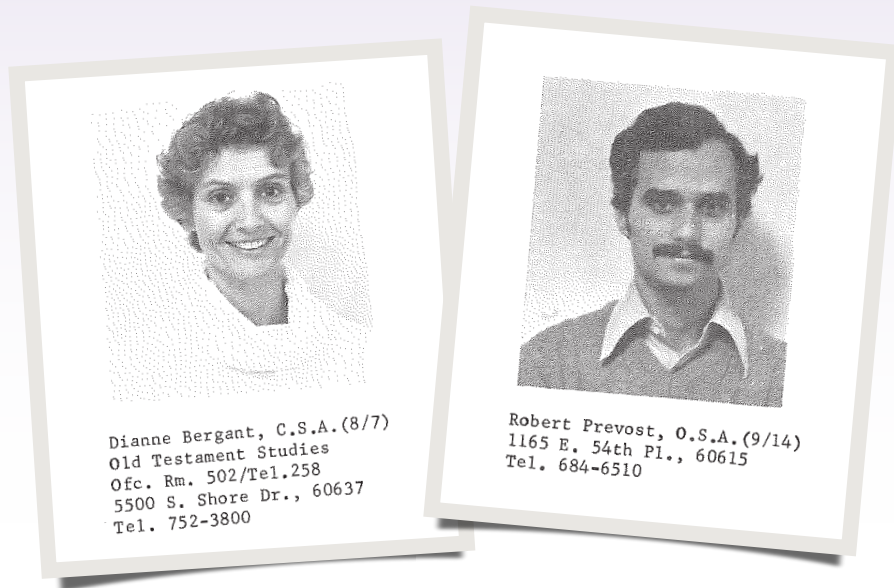


Filled with joy in the Piazza after the announcement. L to R: Sisters Sharon Pollnow, CSA, Theresa Sandok, OSM, and Linda Szocik, SSJ-TOSF

While standing with the crowd, an Italian informed us that all cellphones were jammed for security. Just then my brother, Wayne, who lives in West Allis, WI, sent a text that I read aloud: “American, Robert Prevost, From Chicago, Pope Leo XIV, Missionary Priest.” I then said: “An American. That’s impossible. I don’t know if it’s true. My brother is a jokester at times. Maybe this is a joke.” But it wasn’t! Then out came Pope Leo XIV. My feelings flooded in immense joy and gratitude. It was unbelievable—and an American Pope. The people were speaking in many languages, but I understood: “Papa.” How blessed we are at this time in history to have a Pope who is a missionary and a consecrated religious committed to fostering love, care, and the dignity of all people.

A Papal Reflection

By Sister Dianne Bergant, CSA



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For forty-five years, I was Professor of Old Testament Studies at Catholic Theological Union, a seminary/school of ministry in Chicago. Our priesthood candidates all belonged to various religious communities of men: Capuchins, Divine Word Missionaries, Comboni Missionaries, Augustinians, to name a few. It was in this capacity that Robert Prevost, a young Augustinian, enrolled in my classes. Who would have imagined that he would someday be known as Pope Leo XIV?

I have been asked, “What was he like?” That was forty-five years ago. Still, I remember him as very reliable, somewhat reserved, but for all practical purposes, a normal young man in his twenties. I know for sure that he was a good student who fulfilled all the academic requirements of the courses I taught. I know this because I have never discarded the grade records of any student. I have the original record of his seminary experience with me.

Over the years I would see him occasionally when he was back from Peru for the ordination of brother

Augustinians. Our exchanges were brief, but warm. The last time I saw him was about ten years ago, at an Augustinian ordination over which he presided. When he was named cardinal, I sent him an email thanking him for his ministry that caught the eye of Pope Francis and for his willingness to take on a new and heavy responsibility. His immediate response was signed “Fraternally, Bob.” I sent another email after his election to the papacy, again promising daily prayers for him, this time joined with the entire church. I received an immediate response, signed “Leo XIV.”

When I had him in class, did I recognize his potential? No more nor less than the potential of others who were committing themselves to lifelong ministry to the people of God. At issue is not that he was always special. Rather, he appeared quite ordinary, but he grew into someone special. I was sure then that he would be good at whatever he did. By the grace of God and his own dedicated work, this is what he has become.



Left to Right: Reverend Tom Paul,
Sister René Backe, Sister Lucy Brault, Bishop
Ronald Hicks, Sister Jean Braun, Reverend
William Conway, Sister Christi Ann Laudolff

Celebrating 125 Years of Catholic Education

*S*aturday, May 10, Immaculate Conception Parish in Elmhurst, Illinois, celebrated the 125th anniversary of the grade school. Sisters Lucy Brault, René Backe, and Jean Braun, former teachers at the school, took a special overnight trip to celebrate with the congregation. The primary celebrant for the liturgy was Bishop Ronald Hicks.

Reverend Tom Paul, pastor at Immaculate Conception, said, “Immaculate Conception Grade School began with a strong foundation—the foundation contributed by people who believed there was need for Catholic education. . .How blessed we are that the Sisters of St. Agnes came here—taking the risk to come to a new

mission, willing to travel here to this unknown place of Elmhurst, Illinois, to begin teaching students in a one-room schoolhouse with a curtain dividing down the class. . .And how fortunate we are that three of the former teachers are with us today.”

Following Liturgy, a reception was held in the gym. The legacy of CSA was posted on boards along one side of the room, including census reports dating back to 1900. Many photos of the sisters, class pictures, and candid photos served to spark memories and much conversation. Over and over, people expressed their gratitude for the service of the sisters and the legacy of the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes.

CSA's Lasting Legacy

at Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church



Left to right: Sisters Brigid Layden, Leanne Sitter, Marianna Frigo, Jeannine Funk, Luigi Frigo, Joann Sambs, Sharon Pollnow, Mary Ann Scherer, Father Phil Schoofs

On October 20, 2024, Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church offered a Mass honoring the Sisters of St. Agnes for more than 100 years of service in Hortonville; on the same day the parishioners also dedicated the newly renovated former convent, now named “Saint Agnes Center.”

Sister Joann Sambs, who grew up in the parish, spoke to those gathered, “Since 1908 our community lived and served among you. They were teachers, administrators, some were organists, sacristans, religious ed. directors, and, I hope, your friends and spiritual guides. Sister Janice Funk. . . was the last of our sisters to live and serve in Hortonville, and she returned to Fond du Lac in 2012, thus marking 104 years of presence and service to this community. . . Our sisters loved serving here. I am a Sister of St. Agnes today because of the witness and

encouragement of the sisters who lived here when I was growing up. . . Whenever you walk by, or drive or stop by the Agnes Center in the days ahead, remember us in prayer and know that our CSA Sisters are praying and doing the same for you.”

In his final blessing, Father Phil Schoofs prayed, “. . . In your goodness you have favored us with a unique, special, and loving gift: the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes. Help us always treasure that gift and truly live the service that that congregation showed to each one of us. . .”

Sister Sharon Pollnow, General Superior of the congregation, encapsulated the feelings of the day, “As we state in our mission, ‘we are enriched by those we serve,’ truly our sisters have been enriched by all of you in Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church.”

In Memoriam... Walking with God



Sister Mary Rose Meis

Sister Mary Rose Meis, CSA, baptized Shirley Ann, was born in Hays, Kansas, on November 15, 1937. She was taught by the Sisters of St. Agnes at St. Joseph Elementary School and at Girls Catholic High School. In 1955, Shirley entered St. Agnes Convent in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and professed her first vows on August 15, 1958, as Sister Mary Rose. She received a B.S. in Education from Marian College, Fond du Lac, and an M.A. in Elementary Education from Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa. Sister Mary Rose is remembered for her generous and devoted service as a teacher and principal in elementary schools in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Indiana, and Mississippi, and for

her many years of community service to the sisters as a Regional Coordinator, Local Coordinator at Nazareth Court and Center, and Administrator at St. Agnes Convent Motherhouse.

After a sabbatical in 1999, she became a familiar face in the Fond du Lac area supporting and volunteering in justice and peace issues, Stone Soup, Ebony Vision, United for Diversity, Senior Center, Center for Spirituality, Grief Relief, ASTOP, Simple Blessing Gift Shop, or even through her membership in the Red Hat Society! Sister Mary Rose was present wherever she saw a need and remained a faithful volunteer for countless CSA activities and events until her retirement to Nazareth Court and Center in 2024. She died peacefully at Nazareth Center, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, on February 11, 2025.



Sister Emily Schug, CSA

Sister Emily Schug, baptized Mary, was born June 30, 1931, in Yonkers, New York, the youngest of five children of John and Frances Schug. She was taught by the Sisters of St. Agnes at Sacred Heart Elementary and High Schools. After graduating from high school in 1949, Mary entered St. Agnes Convent in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, joining her older sister, Sister Mary Frances. Mary pronounced her first vows on August 15, 1952, as Sister Emily. She earned a B.S. in Elementary Education at Marian College, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and began her first years of teaching in elementary schools in Altoona and Nanty Glo, Pennsylvania. She soon felt a call to service in the CSA Latin American

missions. After preparation in the language and culture of Latin America, Sister Emily began a ministry of twenty-five years in Quito, Ecuador, and Rosita, Puerto Cabezas, and Matagalpa in Nicaragua. She served with love as teacher and catechist and preparing lay catechists along the Río Coco. A manual for teachers, which she authored, is still used by catechists in Nicaragua.

Returning to Fond du Lac in 1991, Sister Emily served as translator for the congregation while also ministering to the Hispanic people in Fond du Lac, especially for sacramental preparation of children. She also used her language skills by welcoming visitors or translating at St. Agnes Hospital. In 2013, Sister Emily retired to Nazareth Court for needed care and then to St. Francis Home where she died peacefully on March 5, 2025.



Sister Grace Buckreis, CSA

Sister Grace Buckreis, CSA, baptized Lucille Phyllis, died peacefully April 25, 2025, at St. Francis Home, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Phyllis was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania, on July 6, 1936, where she grew up in a family of ten children. After graduating from Altoona Catholic High School in 1954, she entered St. Agnes Convent in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and made her first profession of vows as Sister Grace Imelda on August 15, 1957.

Sister Grace received a B.S. in Nursing from Marian College in Fond du Lac and spent forty-three years as a nurse at St. Agnes Hospital, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, St. Anthony Hospital, Hays, Kansas, and St. Thomas Hospital, Colby, Kansas. After four years caring for a brother suffering from cancer, she returned to Fond du Lac, where she volunteered in a variety of services at Nazareth Court and Center until her health declined and she became a resident there herself. In 2019, Sister Grace was admitted to St. Francis Home where she received loving care until her death. She is remembered by all who knew her for her warm smile and excellent and compassionate nursing skills. Sister Grace was preceded in death by her parents, four brothers, and five sisters. She is survived by nieces, nephews, their families, and the Sisters of St. Agnes with whom she lived and served.



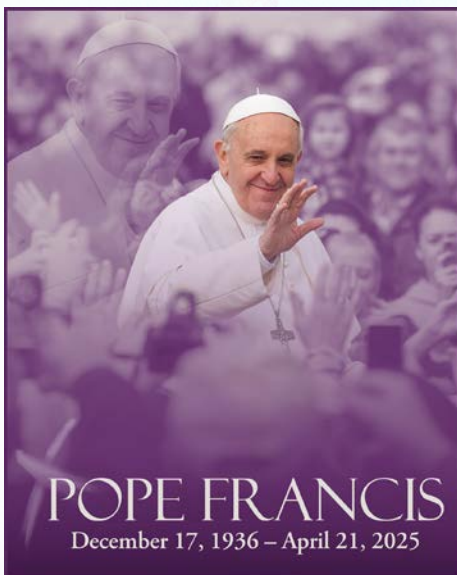
Sister Kathleen Ries, CSA

Sister Kathleen Ries, formerly Sister Eugenio, died peacefully May 4, 2025, at St. Francis Home, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Kathleen was born April 28, 1941, in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and grew up on the family milk farm with her sister and five brothers. She was taught by the Sisters of St. Agnes at St. Peter Claver School in Sheboygan and, after one year at St. Mary Academy in St. Francis, Wisconsin, Kathleen entered St. Agnes Convent, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. She graduated from St. Agnes High School, continued her formation in religious life, and on August 15, 1960, professed her vows as Sister Eugenio, in the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes. Sister Kathleen received a B.S. in Elementary Education and Social Studies from Marian College, Fond du Lac, and an M.A. in Education from Marygrove College, Detroit, Michigan. A lifelong learner, she was an educator and promoter of justice throughout her entire ministerial life, serving as a teacher or a principal in Wisconsin, New York, Indiana, and Mississippi for thirty-three years. Her passion for social justice and advocacy for those in need then led her to a variety of other positions and volunteer opportunities within the congregation and among diverse cultures serving in roles of administration, hospitality, and advocacy for social justice. In 2018, Sister Kathleen retired to the motherhouse in Fond du Lac until health needs required further care. She joined her sisters at Nazareth Court and Center and in March 2020 she moved to St. Francis Home where she received loving care until her death.



Sister Laverne Miller, CSA

Sister Laverne Miller, CSA, baptized Marlene Agnes, died peacefully May 7, 2025, at St. Francis Home, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Marlene was born in Decatur, Indiana, on June 21, 1936. She grew up on her family farm with three brothers and two sisters. After graduating from Decatur Catholic High School, Marlene entered St. Agnes Convent, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and made her profession of vows as Sister Laverne on August 15, 1957, in the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes. As a novice, she spent one year as a dietary aide at St. Clare Hospital in Monroe, Wisconsin. After her profession, she became a registered radiology technologist, a ministry she continued for forty-six years serving at St. Clare Hospital, Monroe, Mt. Sinai Hospital, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and for thirty-two years at St. Agnes Hospital, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. While at St. Agnes Hospital, she worked part-time as an ultrasound technician at Ripon Memorial Hospital, Ripon, Wisconsin. After retiring from full-time ministry, Sister Laverne volunteered at Henry Boyle Catholic Home for the Aged and at St. Francis Home where she cared for the chapel, prepared for all religious services, and managed the gift shop. She responded to the needs of the residents and staff with a gentle, joyful, and caring presence until August 2014 when she joined her CSA sisters at Nazareth Court and Center. In September 2020, she moved to St. Francis Home where she received loving care until her death.



The Sisters of St. Agnes mourn the passing of Pope Francis while celebrating the legacy he created within the Catholic Church. He invited the people of the world to be more caring, compassionate, contemplative, and courageous. His efforts were transformational, and his impact will live on in our hearts and actions.



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Earth Fair *Inspiration*

Sister Diane Bauknecht was energized by an Earth Fair activity focused on reusing shredded paper (which is not recyclable in most jurisdictions). She said, "Working in schools and offices over many decades, I have used innumerable reams of paper. Though I have always been grateful to the trees that provided my mode of communication, and I have always been one to save and recycle paper, I have never deliberately tried to relieve trees of their sacrifice to supply me with paper. That changed at the CSA celebration on Earth Day on April 26 when I made paper, thanks to the pulp and teaching offered by Dena Rose Kryzanowski and Dusty Krikau, reliable CSA employees who love Mother Earth!



Some of Sister Diane's "new" paper was
used as part of a gift to a friend

The papermaking experience at the Earth Fair and the continued experimentation with pressing repurposed shredded paper into raw paper has been fun beyond my expectation. And, sometimes, I think I hear a tree thank me!"