



REFLECTIONS  
&  
*Connections*

MAY 2015

STORIES OF MISSION  
& MINISTRY

DORIS KEIM, CSA



**CSA**

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

# Dear Friends,



*W*e are in the midst of the Year of Consecrated Life declared by Pope Francis to celebrate the lives of vowed religious sisters, brothers and priests. As this year unfolds I am reminded of how important consecration is in all of our lives. By virtue of creation, there is not a scrap of heaven or earth that is not holy. All we need to do is to look around and see the beauty that is everywhere.

How can we not enjoy and treasure as well as protect and nurture this beautiful gift of creation for future generations? The plant and animal “kingdoms” provide us with a seemingly endless source of beauty, sustenance, companionship as well as nourishment. Human life shares the original blessing of our Creator, and Baptism, for those professing the Christian faith, consecrates our lives to the God of Love. The very act of living, growing and developing leads each of us to further life choices – and ways in which we can deepen our primal consecration. In this Year of Consecrated Life, I give thanks for all the ways people choose to live out the goodness that is their birthright.

As a Sister of St. Agnes, I am profoundly grateful for my own call to this particular way of life marked by vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Likewise, I give thanks to all who through their own way of life give witness to Divine Beauty. In words from our CSA Constitutions: *Through our efforts to share vision, worship, life and love, we grow in the spirit of the early church where believers were “of one mind and heart”.* By God’s grace, striving to be of one mind and heart with one another and all of creation is, indeed, living a consecrated life.

Sister Jean Steffes, CSA  
General Superior

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Cover art: “Rest in My Wings,” © Doris Klein, CSA

*The watercolor was inspired by an image used in the scriptures of many faith traditions of a God who longs to gather us and support us in a winged embrace. It is a reminder that this Sacred Space is a place where all can be held in the comforting, supporting, and healing embrace of the Divine.*



# Beauty In The Desert

BY CAROL BRAUN, DIRECTOR OF ASSOCIATE RELATIONSHIP

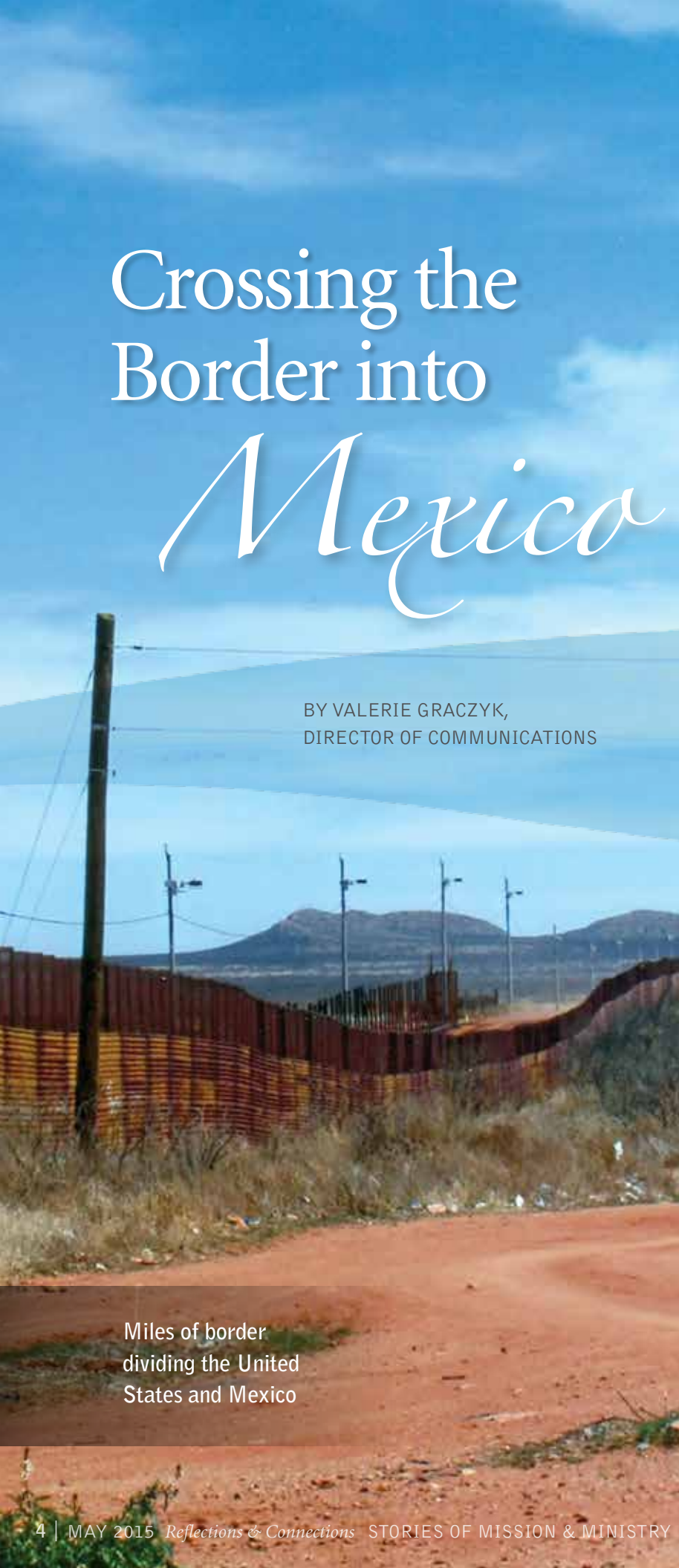
Traveling in Arizona I marveled at the unique and dramatic beauty of canyons, towering sandstone features and mountains, and the ancient cactus like silent sentinels in the remote desert. At the same time, I encountered the beauty of associates and Sisters of St. Agnes working in partnership with many different individuals and organizations, building relationships and understanding across borders.

Within this intersection of mountain and desert, associates in Arizona are involved in ministries helping the poor and immigrants, staying connected to the Sisters of St. Agnes through prayer and networking. Mary Pat Waldmann provides opportunities for the economically poor in the Phoenix area through education and her church. A longtime resident of Bisbee, Kathleen Gammon volunteers in prison ministry and the food distribution program at St. Vincent de Paul, while Kay Bircher works for peace and justice with an emphasis on inclusiveness and care for creation.

Canadian volunteer, Elaine Moll, came to Bisbee several months ago and was introduced to border ministries by Sisters Mary Rose Obholz and Marilyn Bever. Elaine is networking and connecting with the spirituality and mission of CSA as part of our expanding relationships. She began teaching English in a primary school in Mexico and volunteers at the Migrant Center where humanitarian aid is offered to immigrants who have recently been deported. Elaine enjoys sharing spirituality and camaraderie with the sisters, associates and other volunteers. She appreciates the cooperation across cultures and faiths – all working towards a common goal of helping those in need; all believing we are equally created in the image of God.



Kathleen Gammon, associate



# Crossing the Border into *Mexico*

BY VALERIE GRACZYK,  
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Miles of border  
dividing the United  
States and Mexico

How many times have you heard friends and relatives share their wonderful winter getaway to an all-inclusive resort in Mexico? It sounds like the perfect way to get out of the winter doldrums and enjoy beautiful beaches, sightseeing, and sun. United States travelers having a passport can easily cross the border into Mexico without a thought. For some people that is not the case. They do not have passports for the United States, but still they cross. Many of them are picked up by the Border Patrol. Some die crossing the border.

On a recent visit to Naco, AZ, a group of CSA members and associates walked in a prayer vigil carrying white crosses and saying the names of over 300 people who died trying to get into the United States. Some bore names of women and teens; some were nameless.

Why would people risk everything to try to cross illegally into the United States? According to Sister Susan Kolb who has lived on the border for the past 25 years it is for many reasons: the border divides families; many people have siblings or a parent on the United States side and they want to be reunited; some come for the employment opportunities, and others for a dream of a quality of life where they can feel safer from drug cartels and violence.

Four members of CSA live and minister in the shadow of the border. They are Sisters Susan Kolb, Mary Rose Obholz, Marilyn Bever and Kathy Cook. They experience the crossing into Mexico through different eyes. When they look out their front window they see the wall, and day or night the Border Patrol cars whiz past their home.

Sister Susan Kolb is a lawyer who specializes in immigration law for low-income people on both sides of the United States-Mexico border. She has handled over 100 cases since 2013 for her nonprofit organization called "All One Family." Its goal is to unite families, improve community relationships, and help bring positive change to the border environment. "After working in





Border on the Mexico side with painted murals.

immigration law for 25-plus years, I retired and am devoting my time to supporting families who find themselves divided by the border wall. I am called by the need to support the human dignity of these people,” said Sister Susan.

Sister Mary Rose shared, “I cross the border four or five times a week. It is easy for me to cross; I show my United States passport, have my car searched and off I go. I am committed to CSA’s stance on being and building community. My work involves families who have members on both sides of the border and are separated. CSA was founded as a religious congregation to serve the German immigrants in the Fond du Lac area. Caring for the immigrant is part of the fiber of who we are as Sisters of St. Agnes.”

Sister Mary Rose (center) shown with a family separated by the border: this grandson and grandmother live legally in the United States; the woman’s daughter and her family cannot enter the United States.



## Introducing *SisterStory*

Left to right: Sister Edie Crews, Kelsey Westcott, Soledad Theel, Crystal Sales

BY SISTER EDIE CREWS, CSA, USA VOCATION DIRECTOR

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation funds SisterStory and St. Catherine’s University in St. Paul, Minnesota, sponsors it. This project allows college women and religious sisters to build one-to-one relationships that culminate in an oral history conducted and filmed by the students for preservation in a national archive. Sisters Edie Crews and Alice Ann Pfeifer went to the training in Minnesota and, with the help of Sisters Cyndi Nienhaus and Marie Scott, brought together six Marian University women and six CSA sisters to be a part of the project.

The students meet weekly with their sisters and weekly with Sisters Alice Ann and Edie to learn all the steps involved in preparing an oral history. The filmed interviews will take place later in the semester after the student-sister pairs have grown comfortable with each other. Transcripts of the interviews will be sent to the archive for permanent preservation and, with each sister’s permission, videos will be posted online at [sisterstory.org](http://sisterstory.org).

When deciding which sister to pair with which student, the SisterStory team assembled for the Marian University site engaged in much thought and discussion. They wanted to match up students and sisters with similar interests to allow ease and continuity in their weekly discussions. One graduate student studying thanatology, for example, is paired with Sister Anne Jude Van Lanen. Both women are nurses with a strong commitment to serving the needs of the dying.

“We are excited about sharing our lives as sisters with these bright and caring students, and we hope our interactions will create a positive ripple effect that just keeps getting bigger and bigger,” said Sister Edie Crews, USA Vocation Director.



Left to right: Jenny Roehl, Sister Edie Crews, Katie Boehm, Carol Wardlow

Left to right: Maggie McCullough, Lu Scheer, Marian Sheridan, Jennifer Menke



## Women's

# Leadership Breakfast

BY SISTER ANITA HENNING, CSA  
GENERAL COUNCILOR

**O**n March 5, the ninth annual Women's Leadership Breakfast was held. This year's event celebrated women's leadership in action. Mother Agnes Hazotte, our first elected general superior, was a pioneer leader in Fond du Lac and the surrounding area. She had a passion for mission. She made things happen in collaboration with the sisters and Fond du Lac community. Today CSA continues to carry out the mission. Women leaders in the Fond du Lac area are part of that legacy as well. Each has a passion to be a leader, an advocate for mission. This year's breakfast celebrated these women.

Four women's common mission was recognized at the breakfast. These women shared a passion and mission that moved them to action. They helped put a face on the ordinary women and children who are homeless.

Maggie McCullough was the keynote speaker and a panel participant. Maggie most recently was the interim director of Solutions Center, an agency in Fond du Lac County

that provides shelter, support and advocacy for victims of domestic violence and persons experiencing homelessness. Panelist Lu Scheer works as affordable housing director for ADVOCAP whose mission is to create opportunities for people and communities to reduce poverty and increase self-sufficiency. Another panelist Marian Sheridan, the coordinator of school health and safety programs for the Fond du Lac school system, has been instrumental in helping many understand the plight of homeless children. Completing the panel was Jennifer Menke who works in the Working Families Grant office at Marian University. She spoke from her experience as someone who has worked her way from homelessness to being a university graduate with a career.

The presentations not only put a face on homeless women and children, but put a face on women leaders and the tremendous difference they can make in the lives of others.



# The *Legacy* Endures

BY SISTER MARY NOEL BROWN, CSA  
EXECUTIVE LEADER OF SPONSORSHIP

**A**gnesian HealthCare (AHC) recognizes that ongoing formation is imperative to continue the healing ministry of Jesus and the mission of the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes, their sponsor. AHC has had a formal leadership formation process since 2002.

Desiring to integrate mission more deeply throughout the system, AHC invited fifty associates to participate in *Mission: Day by Day*®, a three-year formation program that is both in-person and on-line. These associates represent different hospitals, clinics, long-term care, and numerous home-based and outpatient services across AHC's three-county service area.

Of different faith traditions, they embrace the culture, mission, and values of the Catholic health ministry and claim their responsibility to continue the legacy of CSA. In their words:

- *I realize more deeply we are all called, entrusted, and responsible to continue the mission and tradition of service of the Sisters of St. Agnes.*
- *In addition to learning more about the ministry, mission, and values of AHC, I have learned more about myself and my faith. My faith has deepened through the daily [on-line] readings and postings from my cohort.*
- *Through our sharing, we are steadily making progress toward becoming a tighter knit community of mission-driven ministry leaders.*
- *It is imperative to pause and listen to the call. To use my God-given skills to instill dignity in someone who has little. To instill hope in someone who has none. To provide care that makes a patient smile who previously had only tears. Providing compassionate care is a calling, a vocation, a blessing.*



*Mission: Day by Day*® co-facilitators: Angie Mattheis (left), Jim Salasek, Mike Feudner and Peggy McArdle.



Left to right: Sister Sally Ann Brickner, OSF, and Mark Immel

## *Planting Hope*

### One Tree at a Time...

BY SISTER SALLY ANN BRICKNER, OSF  
JUSTICE COORDINATOR

**R**ecent tree planting on the Sisters' property east of the Motherhouse has magnified the gurgling sounds of the springs so beloved by Father Caspar Rehr. The reforestation project begun about six years ago by Jim and Mark Immel rejuvenates nature in multiple ways. Air quality is improved. Water filters deeper into the soil, thus reducing erosion. The streams gradually grow stronger. Wild life flourishes. "Soon, the forest will begin to re-plant itself," Mark Immel hopes.

But that cannot happen without a great deal of initial hard labor each spring. Jim and Mark begin by eradicating invasive species such as buckthorn, honeysuckle, box elder and stinging nettle. Then, through Sheboygan County they obtain a variety of native seedlings including various types of oak (burr, pin, red, white, and swamp), sugar maples and black cherry. Using a posthole digger they break open the rich soil and slip in the seedlings, creating row upon row of baby trees. They surround each with plastic tubing to strengthen the trunk and prevent wildlife from nibbling on the tender branches. If rainfall is scarce, they use water from the springs to nourish the roots. As a final touch to the landscape they lay a walking trail so that retreatants from the nearby hermitages can contemplate the beauties of nature.

As a result of their arduous labor about 250 new seedlings dot the ledge above the city. Because of Mark and Jim's skillful forestry 80-90% of them have survived. The Sisters deeply appreciate Mark and Jim's initiative in this reforestation that protects the forest, water, and land commended to their care.



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## Ways to connect with CSA:

CSA web site:

<http://www.csasisters.org/>

What's Happening at the UN:

<http://whatshappeningattheun.blogspot.com/>

(in the front page of our web site)

Streams 'N Stirrings, Sister Jean:

(in the front page of our web site)



<http://www.facebook.com/sasisters?sk=wall>

(in the front page of our web site)



[http://www.youtube.com/user/](http://www.youtube.com/user/TheCSAchannel1)

**TheCSAchannel1**

(in the front page of our web site)

# Sister Zorelia Chavarría

BY VALERIE GRACZYK, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Sister Zorelia has served as regional coordinator for Latin America for the past six years. In this capacity she is involved in the daily lives of sixteen sisters who live and minister in Nicaragua. She serves as the liaison between the general council and the sisters.

"I feel the Lord has called me to his service. I pray with the sisters, work with them, and have learned to appreciate each one of them," said Sister Zorelia. "The sisters work in an environment where the reality is dire poverty, lack of education, and where people's dignity is compromised. It is where we serve. In that context our sisters live the mission of Jesus. Sometimes it can be very difficult, but our love for God helps us to overcome the obstacles we face."

"Part of my work is to collaborate with other religious congregations to continue the mission of Jesus. I work with them as well as with CSA members." Sister Zorelia continued, "Pope Francis has called us to learn from the elderly; I appreciate our retired sisters who live here with their years of experiences and wisdom. Pope Francis also called us to support the lay people who are doing a great deal of the pastoral work of the Church. We as religious welcome them and are humbled by their leadership."



Sister Zorelia (far right) with members and friends of CSA.

## CSA Book Debut

*You are invited to attend the book debut of **Called to Serve ~ Ministry Stories of the Sisters of St. Agnes in Latin America and Russia.***

*Celebrating seventy years of ministry in Latin America and seven years in Russia, this compilation of heartwarming and inspiring stories from CSA members is ready to be shared with friends, family members, associates, and the Fond du Lac community.*

*Come and meet the authors, hear a reading of a few stories and celebrate the rich history of CSA's pioneering spirit.*

*Wednesday, June 24, 2015*

*Stayer Center  
Lobby at Marian  
University*

*6:30 – 7:30 p.m.  
Dessert and  
beverages  
will be served.*

