

Volume 13.1 Spring 2010

NEWS

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A Publication of THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA



Love *for* Education
Meets the
Franciscan Spirit

Commitment Statement

We recommit ourselves to “rebuilding the Church” by living the passion of the Gospel in the discerning spirit of our Franciscan charism and tradition.

We are willing to take the necessary risks to be a healing, compassionate presence in our violent world especially with women, children, and those who have no voice.

We desire to reflect this commitment in our dialogue with the entire Church, in our own governing structures, and in our relationship with one another as sister.

Mission Statement

We, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, choose to live the Gospel in the prophetic spirit of Francis of Assisi and our Foundress Mother Francis Bachmann. With Jesus Christ as Brother, we live as sister with one another, with the entire human family and with all creation. Calling ourselves and one another to continuous conversion of heart, we commit ourselves to a life of contemplation, poverty and humility.

As vowed women of the Church, we respond with diverse gifts in a spirit of collaboration and of mutual service to the needs of others, especially the economically poor, the marginal and the oppressed. Seeking to participate in the Spirit’s action in the world, we direct our personal and corporate resources to the promotion of justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Filled with trust in the goodness of God, we move forward.

POINT OF VIEW

A Tradition of Caring

Last July I had the opportunity to visit the “Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America” exhibit in Cincinnati, Ohio. This traveling exhibition depicts the history of sisters since their arrival in America nearly 300 years ago until the present day. It illustrates through photographs, artifacts, and documentary material how sisters built schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, homeless shelters, and other ministries, many of which continue to this present day.



**Sister Esther Anderson, OSF
Congregational Minister**

The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, founded in 1855, contributed their Franciscan spirit to this national endeavor. These faith-filled, innovative, and hard-working women, moved up and down the east coast and traveled to the far west to educate, heal, care for orphans, and minister to people who were in need. Wherever they went, they established a tradition of caring.

While the “Women & Spirit” exhibit evokes a great appreciation of and some nostalgia for the past, it also highlights how the tradition is being carried out in the contemporary lives and ministries of sisters today. Sisters continue to demonstrate that same faith, dedication, and innovation in meeting the needs of today’s immigrants and people who are poor, marginalized, and underserved.

St. John Vianney School in Orlando, Florida, continues the Franciscan legacy of education with a tradition of caring. The school blends the Franciscan ideal of being brother and sister to all with academic achievement. Sister Elizabeth Murphy, Sister Maria Gross, the faculty, and staff have proactively initiated a chain reaction of kindness and compassion to counteract any violence that might occur in the school.

This same tradition of caring is evident in Sister Maggie Greco’s ministry to persons who are homeless in Center City Philadelphia. Sister Maggie brings two important gifts to her ministry: a background in healthcare and her Franciscan spirit of caring. Her expertise and compassion touch the often forgotten people in our country.

As Franciscans, we are called to be a healing and compassionate presence in our world today. While we honor our past, we are committed to keeping the tradition of caring alive in our world today.

Sister Esther Anderson, OSF



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*Dedication to a quality education,
willingness to embrace the future,
and a long tradition of Franciscan
beliefs are what make St. John
Vianney Catholic School flourish
in a time of uncertainty.*

Written by Elena Perri

Photography by Andrea Cipriani-Mecchi

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*Treating the whole person is
what Sister Maggie Greco, a nurse-
practitioner at Mary Howard Health
Center, commits to do. She not only
provides critical medical care, but
also provides food and clothing to
some of the poorest individuals in
Philadelphia.*

Written by Elena Perri

Photography by Andrea Cipriani-Mecchi

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The purpose of *Good News* is to further the Gospel mission of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia by sharing the good news of the congregation with our friends, family, companions, and sisters. Through this publication, we hope to share the charism of our congregation and invite others to become involved in our mission.

Good News is published three times a year (spring, summer, winter) by the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. We welcome your feedback and comments; correspondence should be addressed to *Good News* at address above.

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On the cover: Preschoolers (L-R) Maxwell Mills, Hannah Santiago, and Geissler Noelsaint greet Sister Elizabeth Murphy, principal of St. John Vianney School in Orlando, Florida. Sister Elizabeth says the "highlight" of her day is visiting the preschool.

► Students at St. John Vianney School in Orlando, Florida, sign a commitment to Rachel's Challenge, a program that encourages students be tolerant of the differences in others. Sister Elizabeth Murphy initiated this program because the school has more than 600 students who come from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Love *for* Education Meets the Franciscan Spirit

✧ "A KEY TO THE SCHOOL'S SUCCESS IS THE EXPECTATION
THAT EVERY STUDENT CAN SUCCEED ACADEMICALLY AND
THAT THEY WILL BE PREPARED FOR HIGH SCHOOL."

While a number of Catholic elementary schools in the United States have experienced declining enrollment or even closure, many continue to thrive. One such flourishing school is St. John Vianney in Orlando, Florida, with an enrollment consistently exceeding 600 students. "A key to the school's success is the expectation that every student **can** succeed academically and that they **will** be prepared for high school," said Sister Elizabeth Murphy, principal for the past 16 years. "There's a history here and a real sense of credibility," she said. "By no means would I say that we have children who are geniuses. They are simply children who love to achieve and that love for learning has been instilled in them. Our students are well prepared; they can go anywhere."

The school opened in January 1962, staffed by a lay faculty. However in September 1963, when the school expanded, leadership transferred to four Sisters of St. Francis. The school's continued emphasis on academic achievement was integral to its earning the prestigious Blue Ribbon School of Excellence award from the U.S. Department of Education in 2005. The award is based on the school's high academic scores in math, science, reading, and language arts, along with its advanced academic curriculum that meets the needs of all students. St. John's has maintained its Blue Ribbon status for the past four years.

Sister Elizabeth added that the school's reputation for excellence has spanned the generations. "Many

of today's students are children of former students," she said. "They come back with their children. There is a real pride in the students and pride in the school itself." In addition, several of the teachers and staff members are graduates of St. John's and, in turn, have children who are currently enrolled or who are graduates of the school.

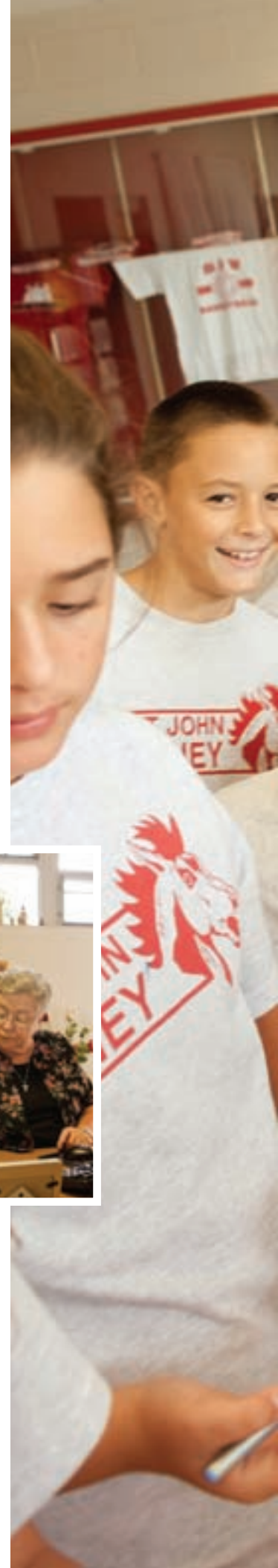
Always an Educator

An educator for 47 years, Sister Elizabeth began her time at St. John Vianney as a teacher in 1976 and continues to be passionate about educating students. "Education is in my blood," she said. "I love teaching and whenever I get an opportunity, I will still go in and teach a class. For me it has never been a job; it's always been a ministry."

Linda Phelan, the school's development director and a former teacher, relies on Sister Elizabeth's rapport with students and their families. "Her ability to recall students is why I need her next to me," said Linda. "The things that are shared by families are things she takes to heart and doesn't forget, especially if they're going through tough times." *continued on page 6*



Linda Phelan and Sister Elizabeth discuss the progress of the school's Annual Fund campaign.







Students observe bacteria and virus smears under microscopes in the state-of-the-art science lab at St. John Vianney School. The lab, which was designed by Sr. Elizabeth, includes a computer for each student to use. The school's emphasis on academic achievement was integral to its earning the prestigious Blue Ribbon School of Excellence award from the U.S. Department of Education in 2005.

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An important part of Sister Elizabeth's ministry is offering guidance to teachers. "I've often said that the day I forget that I am a teacher first, that's the day that I will leave as principal," she explained. "You really have to walk

in the shoes of teachers because it's not easy." Linda Phelan attests to the support Sister Elizabeth provides for the faculty. "She is one of those forward-thinking people. She goes to principals' workshops and comes home brimming with ideas," Linda said. "I really respect her judgment about whether a program will fit with our school. She will not try everything that comes down the pike."

Truly Multicultural

One of the unique aspects of St. John Vianney School is its culturally diverse student population, which includes children who are Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian, Hindu, and Muslim. "It is totally diverse, truly multicultural," Sister Elizabeth said. "You walk from classroom to classroom and see faces of all different kinds of people. It's special here—almost like a crossroads. We have children from everywhere and this is where they learn and

become these wonderful people who bring about the reign of God."

Non-Catholic students do attend religion class and Mass but are also encouraged to share their own faith traditions in school. "If students come from another religious belief, we open it up for discussion and allow them to share where they're coming from," Sister Elizabeth said. "I think that's an important part of learning the whole sense of diversity. We're not all the same but we can still be brother and sister to one another. That is what I believe to be true. When I look at prejudice, I don't think of the color of people's skin. I think of all the idiosyncrasies that we have."

Taking Rachel's Challenge

Given the diversity of the school's population and the need for students to be tolerant of the differences in others, Sister Elizabeth decided to introduce the Rachel's Challenge



Two alumnae of the school, Michelle McCabe (right), president of the school's Parent Teacher Organization, and Sole Caplen (left) meet in the school's media center. Each woman has two children currently attending St. John Vianney.

“THEY ARE CHALLENGED TO BRING ABOUT KINDNESS AND COMPASSION AND THAT, IN TURN, CREATES A CHAIN REACTION.”



▲ *Computers in the classrooms at St. John Vianney are a vital part of helping students achieve academically. The school has maintained this status by continuing to emphasize an advanced academic curriculum that meets the needs of all students.*



▲ *Sister Elizabeth (right) talks with middle school students about the Rachel's Challenge assembly.*



▲ *Middle school students listen to a presentation about Rachel's Challenge during an assembly. Through this program, Sister Elizabeth says students are encouraged to demonstrate kindness and compassion toward others.*

program to the students. “St. John’s is no exception when it comes to bullying,” she acknowledged. “Children are children and are very quick to pick up differences. Rachel’s Challenge is really about learning to accept the differences in others.” The program focuses on “starting a chain reaction of kindness and compassion” and creating “a safe learning environment for all students by delivering proactive antidotes to school violence and bullying.” It was introduced last October and the response from students and their parents has been positive. Students are encouraged to do five actions—or challenges—every day: eliminate prejudice and always look for the best in others, dare to dream and set goals, choose positive influences, use kind words and show little acts of kindness, and start a chain reaction.

“Every student and teacher has signed that challenge,” Sister Elizabeth said. “They are challenged to bring about kindness and compassion and that, in turn, creates a chain reaction.” To reward students who participate, a challenge box has been placed in each classroom. When students are “caught” implementing one of the actions, either by a student or a teacher, their names are put in the box. Once a month one of the names is picked and that student will receive a certificate. *continued on page 8*



Students play soccer during recess outside school. All children are encouraged to participate in physical activities during their recess periods.



Sister Maria Gross (right) and Sister Elizabeth take a walk in the garden outside St. John Vianney School. Sister Maria, who served as assistant principal of the school for 10 years, now works part-time helping Sister Elizabeth with day-to-day activities at the school.

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Parents were invited to attend a separate presentation about the program. Many left in tears because it touched them so greatly. Sister Elizabeth also received several emails and phone messages from parents who expressed appreciation for the program. “The parents realize that these acts of kindness and compassion need to happen every day,” she explained, “not only at home, but also on the playing field and in the workplace.”

Binding Parish and Community

Another factor contributing to the success of St. John Vianney School is the spirit of support, mutuality, and collaboration that exists between the school and the parish. In fact, it was the parish that requested that sisters come to Orlando and begin the school, a request that seemed to embody both a hope and a trust in the future. In 1961 Father Vincent E. Smith, then pastor of the Florida parish, wrote to Mother Mary Agnes, congregational minister of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia: “The people have made tremendous sacrifices to build a new school and convent which is a sign of the conviction and faith that God will provide the sisters necessary to staff the school.”

That trust continues to maintain the bond between parish and school. Father Paul Henry, pastor of St. John Vianney Parish for the past 16 years, agrees that one positive aspect of the school is its mainstream role in the parish. “It’s probably best described as the principal ministry of the parish in terms of its budget and number of employees but it’s very well integrated into the life of the community,” he said. “It’s an excellent school. Thank God it’s flourishing in the midst of a very difficult economy where many other schools are struggling with enrollment. I’m sure it has a lot to do with its Catholic identity and its reputation for a quality education as a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence. We’re very blessed to have Sister Elizabeth as principal. She’s dynamic and visionary—highly respected in our diocese. She has a wonderful reputation as a leader.”

Sister Elizabeth herself is very involved in parish activities. In addition to her duties as principal, she assists with the parish religious education program and serves on the parish council. Father Paul sees her as an important voice in shaping the spirituality and direction of the community. “She’s very involved with policy setting and the establishment of the vision and goals for religious education for the parish,” he explained. “She has a special heart for the makeup of our parish.”

Strong Franciscan Presence

Sister Elizabeth is not the only Sister of St. Francis currently ministering at St. John’s. Sister Maria Gross has worked at the school for 16 years. She served as the assistant princi-

pal for 10 years and now helps Sister Elizabeth as needed with the day-to-day activities at the school. She continues to be a valued member of the school and parish staff. "The pastor will not let her stop being a part of the staff," Sister Elizabeth said. "He truly respects her and will look for her opinion on different things that are going on in the parish. He always says, 'This is a wise woman.'"

For Sister Elizabeth, working with Sister Maria has been both a privilege and an honor. "She has a really wonderful sense of humor and she brings laughter to the school," Sister Elizabeth said. "She literally touches the lives of every teacher on a daily basis. She makes sure to visit them in the teacher's lounge or she will meet them in the hallway. She really is someone who brings a sense of life to our school."

During St. John Vianney's 50-year history, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia have played an important role as educators. "We've been blessed with Franciscans in the parish from almost the beginning," Father Paul said. Sister Elizabeth agreed that her sisters have truly made their mark at St. John's. She noted that the parish community center was dedicated to the Sisters of St. Francis

of Philadelphia who served there. "When I think about the early sisters, I always think of Franciscan joy," Sister Elizabeth said. "I know they had a happy time here and that spirit has been here ever since."

St. John's —A Safe, Loving Place

That Franciscan spirit of joy and a willingness to move into "new territory," combined with the school's reputation for excellence, are why St. John Vianney's continues to flourish. The Franciscan sisters have a long tradition as educators and Sister Elizabeth's dedication to St. John's is one example of how that tradition is lived out. Sister Maria agrees, citing the impact that Sister Elizabeth's love for education and for the students at St. John's has had on the school. "She's a passionate worker and a great educator," Sister Maria said. "She's a great advocate for children—she really cares about them."

And Father Paul, capturing the spirit of Franciscan presence, notes that Sister Elizabeth has created a wonderful climate in the school. "It's a very safe and loving place to be," he explained, "It's a very Catholic Christian place to be." ■

For more information or comments on this article, contact goodnews@osfphila.org.

HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Donate in-kind gifts such as computer and office equipment, printer paper, or office and school supplies.
- Support Catholic school fundraisers in your community.
- Volunteer as an aide or lunchroom helper in your local Catholic school.
- Volunteer to teach religious education classes or assist with the religious education program in your parish.
- Sponsor a student so he or she can attend a Catholic school in your area.

Share with us the good news of what you did!

Call or email us with the action(s) you took: (610) 558-7726, goodnews@osfphila.org.

"IT'S AN EXCELLENT SCHOOL. THANK GOD IT'S FLOURISHING IN THE MIDST OF A VERY DIFFICULT ECONOMY WHERE MANY OTHER SCHOOLS ARE STRUGGLING WITH ENROLLMENT."



◀ *Second graders at St. John's line up to play basketball during a recess period.*

▼ *Sister Elizabeth Murphy (center), Linda Phelan (left), and Father Paul Henry share a light moment while discussing upcoming events at the school.*

▶ *Hannah and William, members of the preschool program for three year olds at St. John's, get ready for story time in their class.*



PEOPLE & PLACES

► The retired sisters at Assisi House enjoyed a visit from newly installed Bishop Timothy Senior.



▲ Bishop Timothy Senior entertained the sisters at Assisi House with a medley of their favorite songs.

INDIANA

Companion Director Kathy Boehm and Companion Val Cummings were part of a gathering at the Franciscan Retreat Center in Oldenburg. Their purpose—to continue to explore the issue of Care for Creation. The 30 participants joined in spirit and solidarity with people from 181 countries for the 350 International Day of Climate Action. Val led participants in an introductory reflection on Teilhard deChardin's *The Mass on the World*. The weekend also included personal reflections by Sisters Helen Prejean, CSJ, and Marya Grathwold, OSF.

▼ Sister Helen Prejean, Companions Val Cummings and Kathy Boehm, and Sister Marya Grathwold used their *Earth Hope* message as the basis of the 350 International Day of Climate Action in Oldenburg.



PENNSYLVANIA

The sisters at Assisi House, the congregation's retirement residence in Aston, had a special treat when newly installed Bishop Timothy Senior paid them a visit. Bishop Senior knew the Sisters of St. Francis from his high school days at Lansdale Catholic. During his visit to Assisi House, he spent time chatting with the sisters. A gifted musician, he also entertained them with a piano recital during lunch.



WASHINGTON

Sisters Donna Fread and Carmel Gregg participated in a pilgrimage for immigration reform that began in Bellingham and ended at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma. The pilgrimage began with 11 walkers, completed the first three-mile leg with 30, and by the end of the two-week program recorded approximately 500 pilgrims from more than 20 parishes. When the journey began, pilgrims carried symbols which were used often throughout the journey—a globe, a statue of a South American woman, Hebrew Scriptures, and an African cross. Some of the groups joining the pilgrimage along the way also carried crosses. Throughout the journey, the pilgrims stopped at various parishes for prayer, sharing, food, and rest. The pilgrimage was but one step in the long journey toward immigration reform—but it was a step. The Tacoma detention center constituted a realistic symbol typifying the need for reform. Originally constructed to accommodate 800, the center currently houses 1,000 immigrants.



NEW YORK

Although Holy Family School in Brooklyn closed last June, the parish's Last Dance Reunion made it clear that the Franciscan charism as lived by the sisters who ministered there for so many years was alive and well. Sisters Matthew Cola, Alberta Manzo, Apollonia Morelli, Donna Jo Repetti, and Annette Lucchese were on hand for the October celebration and accepted a certificate of appreciation for the work of the sisters (formerly the Franciscan Sisters of Ringwood) who had served the parish since the 1940s. Sisters Francis Paul Torre, Marie Cimino, and Berard D'Amato were among the seven sisters who opened the parish school in 1950. Prior to that time the Franciscan sisters had served in parish ministry.

Who are the
'Sisters of St. Francis
of Philadelphia'?
Through this section we
hope to share a glimpse of
our congregation and the
individuals who make real
its mission.



▲ Sisters Diane Tomkinson, Mary Beth Antonelli, and Patricia Novak met in Oregon and discussed ways to involve members of the congregation in encouraging vocations.

OREGON / PENNSYLVANIA

The congregation's formation team has been on the move—as usual. In October Sisters Diane Tomkinson, Patricia Novak, and Mary Beth Antonelli spent several days planning and dialoguing at Rockaway Beach. They also hosted evenings of “Dessert and Conversation” in both Aston and Portland. The get-togethers provided opportunities to share their vocation activities with sisters and companions on both the east and west coasts, answer questions, and solicit ideas. In November Sisters Mary Beth and Patricia attended the National Congress of the Religious Formation Conference in Denver.

ITALY

Four Neumann University students spent part of their winter break in Assisi. Melanie DeMaio, Anastasia Anderlonis, Tahirah Stevens, and Nicole Husbands were chosen last spring to represent Neumann on the

annual Association of Franciscan Colleges and Universities' pilgrimage. During the fall semester, the four students met at the motherhouse twice monthly for dinner and sharing. At the close of the first semester, they received the blessing of the campus community at the closing liturgy. Neumann sees the pilgrimage as an opportunity for students to deepen their understanding of the Franciscan values that undergird the university's philosophy. The women's expectations confirmed that belief. “It's a different experience learning about St. Francis in class and actually going to Assisi,” Anastasia said. “Everyone I've talked to says you can really feel St. Francis' presence there!” Melanie expressed similar expectations. “I hope this experience can open my eyes to the world,” she said. “I hope I am able to connect with others spiritually and can find something inside myself that I may not have seen before.”



▲ (Bottom row L-R) Assisi pilgrims Nicole Husbands, Melanie DiMaio, and Anastasia Anderlonis received the blessing of the university community. (Top Row L-R) Sisters Mary Ann McCarthy, Marguerite O'Beirne, and Patricia Hutchison prepared the students for the pilgrimage. (Not pictured: Tahirah Stevens)



◀ Standing from left to right: Srs. Francis Paul Torre, Marie (Gerard) Cimino, Paschal Benziger, Berard D'Amato, Gemma Cascio. Seated: Clare Italia, Principal, Msgr. Vincent Genova, Pastor and Anne Italia, Superior.

Sister Maggie Greco, a nurse-practitioner at the Mary Howard Health Center in Center City Philadelphia, checks the heart rate of Sonia Joseph.



Healing the Homeless:

More than Just Medicine



Sister Maggie Greco (right), discusses a patient's medical treatment with fellow nurse-practitioners, Dorothea McGlaughlin (left) and Carol Goldrin. Staff members at the center often collaborate to ensure that their patients get the medical and social services they need.



Sister Maggie and Dorothea McGlaughlin change the dressing on the right hand of walk-in patient Damon Moody, who came to the health center with a severe cut that needed immediate attention.

It's easy to understand how the homeless can feel forgotten, convinced that nobody cares about them. We see a woman pushing an overflowing shopping cart down a city street or a man sleeping on a steam grate at night. We see individuals begging in front of a convenience store. And routinely we pass by, rarely saying hello or offering to buy them food or give them a blanket.

That's not the case at the Mary Howard Health Center in Center City Philadelphia, where more than 1,400 clients are treated for physical and mental health problems each year. The center was named for a Philadelphia woman who suffered from schizophrenia and whose ever-present smile and positive attitude touched all who knew her. Like so many who are homeless, Mary died from health conditions compromised and worsened by life on the city streets.

The center, the only nurse-practitioner-staffed health center specifically for people who are homeless, opened in 1997 and is managed by the Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC). With three full-time and two part-time nurse-practitioners, a full-time social worker, and a psychiatric nurse-practitioner, the center cares for older, sometimes hard to reach clients, whether they are on the street, in a shelter, or in transitional housing. Its comprehensive primary care services include rapid HIV testing and counseling, referrals to additional health and social service providers, enrollment in insurance and public benefit programs, treatment for STDs, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and health education. Funding for PHMC programs comes from hundreds of state and federal agencies.

Since 2005 Sister Maggie Greco has been a vital part of the healthcare team offering medical and psychiatric care to those who visit the center. She brings with her two important gifts: her background in healthcare and her Franciscan spirit. As an adult nurse-practitioner, Sister Maggie is trained to evaluate, diagnose, and treat patients with acute and chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and infections—medical problems for which a patient might normally visit a family doctor.

Her Franciscan spirit is something that underlies her own life and that she shares with those with whom she ministers. "As a Franciscan, I definitely have the heart for caring for those who are poor, marginalized, and underserved. This had been my dream for some time," Sister Maggie explained. "This clinic epitomizes what I wanted to do as a nurse-practitioner."

Treating the Whole Person

During her visits with patients, Sister Maggie takes a comprehensive approach to addressing their needs. "You're not only treating their physical condition; you're also helping the whole person," she said. "I can bind up their wounds and patch them up but our clients have other needs as well." She finds practical ways to meet those needs. Many clients don't have adequate food so she keeps packs of peanut butter crackers in her exam room at the clinic. For clients whose clothing might be soiled or even bug-infested, she has a supply of clean clothing and sturdy plastic bags on hand.

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“YOU'RE NOT ONLY
TREATING THEIR
PHYSICAL CON-
DITION; YOU'RE
ALSO HELPING THE
WHOLE PERSON.”



Sister Maggie meets with patient Albert Robinson, who suffers from emphysema and requires special breathing treatments. Albert participates in the Ready, Willing, and Able program, which provides job training, housing, and support services to homeless men in Philadelphia.

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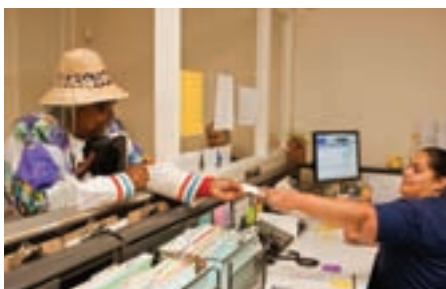
It's this opportunity to minister to the whole person that underlies the main difference between Sister Maggie's work at the center and her former position in a multi-specialty group practice for seven years. "I appreciate the experience I had with the private practice because where I'm working now, there's no back-up physician on-site," Sister Maggie said. "The center is staffed only by nurse-practitioners but we have a collaborating physician who is a phone call away." As a primary care

ma, but are also trying to help each person with something to eat or a coat to wear. "It's so rewarding to be able to treat the whole person—not just making a diagnosis and then rushing them out the door because you have to move on," Sister Maggie explained.

Caring About Clients

Sister Maggie's coworkers are quick to point out both the quality of care and the personal attention she gives to patients. According to Jenny Villegas, the full-time social worker

Sister Maggie (center) works closely with her coworkers to ensure that patients receive the healthcare and social services for which they are eligible. Sister Maggie talks with social worker Jenny Villegas (left) and patient Donna Dobbies who was recently able to get an apartment in West Philadelphia.



Sonia Joseph (left), a walk-in client at the Mary Howard Health Center, checks in with staff member Lillian Molina at the reception desk.

nurse-practitioner, Sister Maggie exercises autonomy in the scope of the practice and treats patients according to established clinical guidelines.

The main difference, however, lies in the relationship between patient and staff. In a for-profit setting, there is pressure to see patients, diagnose them, give them what they need, and move on. At the center, however, healthcare providers are encouraged to take time with each person, aware that they are not only fixing diabetes, bronchitis, or asth-

ma, but are also trying to help each person with something to eat or a coat to wear. "It's so rewarding to be able to treat the whole person—not just making a diagnosis and then rushing them out the door because you have to move on," Sister Maggie explained.

at the center, Sister Maggie goes above and beyond to help clients. "She comes in early and stays late," Jenny said. "I've seen her take every patient who is sent to her and never turn anybody away." She added that Sister Maggie has a very good bedside manner, a quality that her patients appreciate. "She is very caring and they know it," Jenny said. "I think that's what keeps them coming back to her. If they feel someone doesn't care about their problem—no matter how minor—they won't want to come back. She gives her full



▲ *Tony Reid (above), a patient of the Mary Howard Health Center, has lived on the streets for seven years. Tony, who considers himself a writer, pauses to read one of his journal entries.*

► *In his walks through Center City Philadelphia, Tony usually greets passersby and stops to chat with vendors.*



attention, no matter how minor the problem. They feel that and they insist on coming back to see her."

Rhonda Carter, the center's psychiatric nurse-practitioner agrees. "What her clients love about her is that each of them has the sense that she *truly* cares about *them*," Rhonda said. "She takes her time and she's thorough with her patients."

Sound Clinical Guide

In addition to providing critical medical care for patients, Sister Maggie is a valuable resource to the clinic staff. "What Maggie brings to the clinic is her sound clinical judgment," Rhonda said. "We look to her because she's on top of everything. She's our clinical guide."

"She is a really good nurse who knows her stuff," Jenny agreed. "She's able to diagnose fast. Clients come in with a problem and she immediately either figures out what it is or sends them to specialists so she can find out."

Good Listener with a Caring Heart

But it is, of course, the clients who can best speak to the value of Sister Maggie's ministry and, by extension, to the value of the center. Calvin, homeless since 1993, has been a patient of Sister Maggie's for four years. "She addresses your problems and she listens to you. That's the most important thing,"

he said. "She'll be the first to tell you if she doesn't know something but she refers you to someone who might know. That's one of the good things about coming to Mary Howard—I get help here."

Equally important, Calvin trusts Sister Maggie's judgment. "If Maggie prescribes something for me or she's concerned about my health, I follow through on it," he said. "She keeps me healthy, keeps me on the right diet, and tells me when my blood pressure is up or down."

Donna, another client, now lives in an apartment but still sees Sister Maggie at the clinic. "She's got a really good heart, a really gentle soul, and she listens to you and talks to you more than other people do," Donna said. "She's always there when you need her and she'll make time. I tell people to go to Mary Howard and ask for 'Dr. Maggie.'"

Tony, a client who has been homeless for seven years, first met Sister Maggie after he suffered a stroke and heart attack. He particularly appreciates her honesty. "If she doesn't like something, she's not going to mislead me," Tony said. "I can believe what she says."

Like many clients, Tony finds in Sister Maggie more than just the person who checks his blood pressure. "She became my friend more than my doctor so I confide in her," he explained.

HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Pray for the homeless and those who serve them in your community.
- Support legislation that helps the homeless.
- Volunteer to help the homeless by serving meals at a soup kitchen or shelter.
- Donate cash, clothing, blankets, coats, etc., to homeless organizations in your community.

*Share with us the
good news of what you did!*
Call or email us with the action(s) you took:
(610) 558-7726, goodnews@osfphila.org.

A Match Made for Healthcare

All in all, the Mary Howard Center and Sister Maggie are well matched. Clients appreciate both the cleanliness, safety, and atmosphere of the building and the service and care given by the Mary Howard staff. Similarly, agencies who work with Philadelphia's homeless population are quick to acknowledge the center's value. As one case worker noted, "I am thrilled to have a healthcare agency I can trust with my clients—where they can get immediate care in a wonderful environment."

And what does this relationship bring to Sister Maggie? Working at the clinic fulfills her desire to use her God-given talents to serve the homeless and, despite the challenges, she's found it a mutually enriching ministry. "They're so grateful for the little things that you do for them," she said. "I feel very blessed to be able to work with this population." She also finds that ministering at the Mary Howard Health Center is a way for her to live out her congregation's mission. "This ministry just blends right in with our commitment to be a healing, peaceful presence in a violent world," she said. ■

For more information or comments on this article, contact goodnews@osfphila.org.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Everyone has within a piece of good news.

—Anne Frank (adapted)

See more good news at www.osfphila.org



▲ *These women were able purchase and care for the cows that would provide milk for their children and additional income for their families.*

▶ *Through a grant this woman was able to purchase supplies to make and sell “idly,” a popular rice cake.*



◀ *This woman's grant and training enabled her to set up a “petty” shop where she can sell home-grown vegetables and other food products.*



Small Grants with Big Results

The early members of the congregation struggled to provide for their own needs and those of the people they served—the immigrant population of Philadelphia, the children they taught, the sick they nursed, the orphans they mothered. At times they begged for goods and for money to meet those needs. And always Mother Francis Bachmann reminded the sisters: “As long as God does not stop giving to us, we will not stop giving to the poor.” Today the Sisters of St. Francis continue to live out those words. One concrete way they do so is through Social Justice Grants. Funds are set aside yearly to help organizations who work for systemic change. Funds are limited and amounts

awarded range from \$1,000-5,000.

But the ways in which those funds are utilized is nothing less than miraculous. Take for example the Society for Women and Education and Economic Thrust (SWEET) in Taminladu, India. In 2008 they received a \$4,000 grant to assist rural women who are poor and who live in hopeless situations. SWEET conducted empowerment training programs and taught the women how to raise goats, cows, and chickens; to plant gardens; and to operate small shops and businesses. The funds were used to provide interest-free loans to 25 women on a revolving basis. With the funds the women purchased goats

and cows, bought sewing machines so they could make garments to sell, grew vegetables and made items to sell in “petty” shops, and made and sold small rice cakes called idly. Still others became sellers of fish and mutton. The women learned to work in groups and to plan, implement, and evaluate their projects. One more positive side effect was lower child labor and school drop-out rates.

Good News Enters Cyberspace

SHARE | [f](#) [t](#) [v](#)

In addition to our website, www.osfphila.org, the congregation is using a variety of social networking systems to share the good news of who we are and what we're all about. We have at least 50 sisters on Facebook. Who knows—you might reconnect with a former teacher or coworker there! We also have a “Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia” fan page on Facebook. If you're a Facebook user, why not check it out and become a member? Our YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/user/SrsOfStFrancisPhila, has segments from our congregational DVD, footage from our 2009 jubilee celebration, and a number of “favorites” that reflect the issues we support. We also have several sisters blogging. Why not give them a visit? You can sign up as a follower and blog updates will be delivered right to your computer.

- <http://nunotherthanafranciscansister.blogspot.com>
- <http://simplebeautyandcontemplation.blogspot.com>
- <http://www.franciscanlife.blogspot.com>
- <http://nunsense1.blogspot.com>

In addition, we also now have a page on Twitter, <http://twitter.com/SrsOfStFrancis>. Where will we venture next in cyberspace? The possibilities are endless and the rewards are still unknown. We will continue to seek out and explore every avenue that helps us spread the “Good News.”

History Brought to Life

Sister Marie Juliana Damhosl shared a bit of the congregation's history with the children from St. Stanislaus School in Lansdale—a history that had strong links with the Lansdale parish and school. At a school gathering, she donned the traditional habit of the Sisters of St. Francis and, assuming the role of Mother Stanislaus Bittenbender, shared the story of how the school received its name. Speaking as Mother Stanislaus, Sister Marie Juliana told the children that as a young sister she had come to the mission church in Lansdale every Sunday to play the organ and teach religion. When she became superior general, she sent four sisters to teach in the elementary school. When she later learned that there would be a new parish, she suggested the name “St. Stanislaus Parish” because Stanislaus was the patron saint of Catholic youth.



▲ Mother Stanislaus Bittenbender (AKA Sr. Marie Juliana Damhosl) shared a bit of Franciscan history with the children of St. Stanislaus Parish in Lansdale, Pennsylvania.



In Memoriam

Sister Mary Martha DeMarzo
(Sister Martha of Jesus)
November 10, 2009

Sister Agatha Pazourek
November 18, 2009

Sister Mary Philomena McDonagh
(Sister John Philomena)
November 25, 2009

Sister Veronica Anne McAuley
November 30, 2009

Sister Marcia Marie Burger
December 3, 2009

Sister Marie Margaret McFadden
December 29, 2009

Sister Francis Lorraine Chrusoskie
January 10, 2010

Sister Catherine Hunt
(Sister Mary Martha)
January 12, 2010

Sister Madonna Marie Cunningham
January 20, 2010

CELEBRATING JUBILEE AS SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

Congratulations to Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia celebrating milestones in religious life! This year, these sisters will celebrate Diamond and Golden Jubilees. Join with us in congratulating them on many years of service to the people of God as Sisters of St. Francis.

75 years
Professed 1935
DIAMOND JUBILARIANS

SISTER FRANCIS PAULA BADER
SISTER ANNA COSGROVE
SISTER GRACE PIERRE FORRESTER
SISTER ANNE LAWRENCE
SISTER ANN NEDEROSTEK

70 years
Professed 1940
DIAMOND JUBILARIANS

SISTER ALMA FRANCIS COLLINS
SISTER MARY BERARD D'AMATO
SISTER RITA FRANCIS FIEFHAUS
SISTER ELEANOR FRANCIS FILIST
SISTER IRMA FRANCIS GODSIL
SISTER MARGARET HUDON
SISTER KATHRYN MILLER
SISTER ALICE FRANCIS O'CONNOR

Recognize a name? Would you like to reconnect or send a congratulatory note? Send communications to Florence Smith, 609 S. Convent Road, Aston, PA 19014, communications@osfphila.org

50 years
Professed 1960
GOLDEN JUBILARIANS

SISTER BARBARA ANN BECK
SISTER DOLORA MARIE CURLEY
SISTER MARIAN WILLIAM FITZGERALD
SISTER DOROTHY FRANZ
SISTER MOIRA FRAWLEY
SISTER MARIE COLETTE GERRY
SISTER KATHLEEN MARIE HALPIN
SISTER ELIZABETH ANN HUGHES
SISTER BARBARA JACKSON
SISTER DORIS JOHNSON
SISTER CATHERINE THERESE KELLER
SISTER PATRICIA KIDD
SISTER MARY ELIZABETH KILLORAN
SISTER ROCHELLE LIU
SISTER BARBARA ANN LUCAS
SISTER MARGARET MARY MCCARTHY
SISTER REGINA CARMEL MCMONAGLE
SISTER JEAN O'CONNOR
SISTER DONNA ROCCIO
SISTER JOAN MIRIAM RODDY
SISTER JEAN RUPERTUS
SISTER JUDE MARIE SEAMAN
SISTER CAROLINE SWEENEY
SISTER ELAINE ANN THADEN
SISTER BARBARA MAUREEN THOMAS

FoCUS

DR. CLAUDIA KOVACH

“COMING TO NEUMANN
OPENED UP ANOTHER
VISION OF FRANCIS AND
FRANCISCAN... THEIR JOY,
LOVE, AND PLAYFULNESS
ARE ATTRACTIVE TO ME”

► Dr. Claudia
Kovach, Professor of
English and French at
Neumann University
is steeped in the
Franciscan charism



▼ Claudia Kovach and her husband Ron enjoy
encouraging Francesca and Chiara to seek out
and explore their native Chinese heritage. Here
the family poses in front of the Great Wall on a
recent visit to China.



I t's hard to hide a Franciscan influence when your children are named Francesca and Chiara, literally Francis and Clare in Italian. But Dr. Claudia Kovach, former dean of the Division of Arts & Sciences at Neumann University, has no desire to hide the influence. Rather she thanks God for the road that led her to Aston in 1980 and searches for ways to support and share the Franciscan charism.

A product of Catholic schools, this Fayette County native knew only the “generic” view of St. Francis when she applied to Our Lady of Angels College. “I knew he was kind to animals,” Claudia said sheepishly (pun intended). “Coming to Neumann opened up another vision of Francis and Franciscan.” Likewise, she had been around sisters for years but they didn’t quite prepare her for the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. “Their joy, love, and playfulness are attractive to me,” Claudia confessed, “especially their playfulness.”

Currently serving as Professor of English and French, Claudia started as an adjunct instructor. She was mentored by Mother Everilda Flynn, one of Neumann’s founding forces and first president. “She was retired but still roaming the hallways, very present and very involved,” she explained. Over tea, Mother Everilda shared her vision of vocation and education. “Wonderful discussions would follow,” Claudia remembered.

So impressed was the young instructor, she searched for ways to bring her students into deeper contact with the sisters. “I would customize writing assignments,” she smiled, “for that very purpose.” A process essay, for example, demanded a trip to the book bindery and a demonstration from Sister Vincentine. A descriptive essay brought students to the Crystal Room to hear Mother Everilda paint word pictures.

As Claudia’s career advanced, the influence of the sisters deepened. As dean she tried to embody what she perceived as the Franciscan style of leadership. “Always collaborative,” she explained, “and gentle. It inspires people and usually evokes a positive response.”

The Kovach’s Kennett Square home is always open to the sisters; many are good friends to Claudia and her husband Ron. And Francesca and Chiara? They asked two sisters to be their confirmation sponsors. The Franciscan influence continues.



◀ Much like St. Francis of Assisi, Claudia embraces
all of creation. Her excitement and joy overflow as
she holds a live Panda Bear.

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What do you think of our new look? We are interested in your thoughts/comments:

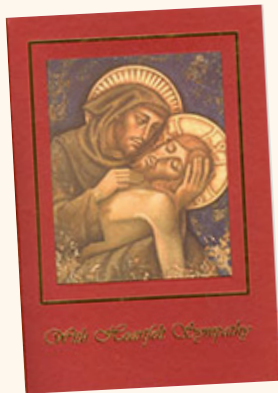
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Order Memorial/All-Occasion Cards

Recipients are remembered in prayers offered monthly at the celebration of the Eucharist at Our Lady of Angels Convent in Aston, Pennsylvania, and the congregation's retirement homes in Aston, Pennsylvania; Tacoma, Washington; and Ringwood, New Jersey. For more information call: (610) 558-7714 or visit our website, www.osfphila.org.



St. Francis and Christ Memorial Card

This special card is made of a crimson linen cardstock with beautiful gold foil imprint and comes tied with a thin gold cord. The front of the card features a cut-out through which to view the St. Francis and Christ artwork of Piero Casentini. Inside is a quote from the "Canticle of the Sun" by St. Francis of Assisi, "Be praised, O God, for all that you have made... and for Sister Death, happy those whom your love calls home."

\$25 Donation Please send me _____ cards.

Be Praised, O God Memorial Card (The Canticle of the Sun)



This card is meant to express the compassion you feel in your heart and the faith you have

in a loving and caring God. **\$10 Donation**

Please send me _____ cards.

Multi-Occasion Cards: Prayer of St. Francis



A remembrance in prayer is a great way to celebrate a birthday, anniversary, confirmation, or get-well. Its versatility even provides using it for a deceased loved one. **Amount of gift decided by donor.**

Please send me _____ cards.

Happy All-Occasion Cards: God's Love Shines Through You



A picture of the beautifully colored stained glass window designed and crafted by Sister Christopher Marie Wagner, OSF, graces the cover of our newest card creation. **\$10 Donation**

Please send me _____ cards.

Please tear out this page and mail completed to:

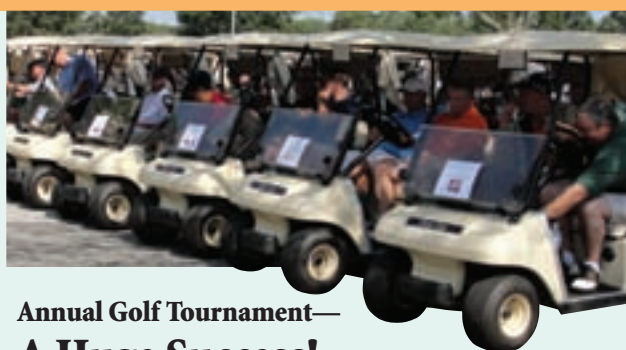
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Annual Golf Tournament— A Huge Success!

In a year of economic stress when people are losing jobs and homes, the Sisters of St. Francis 15th Annual Golf Tournament netted an amazing \$100,000+ through the generous and continuing support of our sponsors, donors, golfers, committee members, and volunteers! A new element of this year's event was a special appeal that raised \$3,000 toward a van for Anna's Place in Chester, Pennsylvania.

Sisters Call for Closure of the SOA!

In November the Sisters of St. Francis were once again among the thousands gathered at Fort Benning calling for closure of the School of the Americas and for a dramatic shift in U.S. foreign policy. Despite awareness of hundreds of documented human rights abuses connected to the school and the 1996 disclosure that training manuals advocated torture, extortion, and execution, no independent investigation has taken place. Sister Dominica LoBianco, one of the seven congregational members who participated in this year's gathering, said, "Despite a shocking human rights record, this school continues to operate with U.S. taxpayer money. Closing the SOA would send a strong human rights message to Latin America and the world."

▼ People of all ages gathered at Fort Benning in November 2009, calling once again for closure of the School of the Americas.



Photo by Al Viola

▲ Sister Dominica LoBianco was one of seven Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia who attended the 2009 School of Americas Watch gathering at Fort Benning.



Photo by Al Viola

◀ The Sisters of St. Francis have ministered in healthcare since Mother Francis Bachmann provided nursing care for Philadelphia's poor—first in her home and then in St. Mary's Hospital. Since that time, the sisters have been providing quality care and sound medical advice wherever needed throughout the nation. Read about Sister Maggie Greco providing healthcare for those who are homeless in Philadelphia on page 12.

