

Volume 16.3 Winter 2013

NEWS

A Publication of THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

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- People & Places
- Sharing the Good News

Campaigning *for a* Cure:

Determined to Make a Difference

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

Changing Minds and Hearts

Last summer I attended the annual Franciscan Federation Conference. This event enabled speakers and participants to dialogue regarding the rapidity of change that we are experiencing in our lives and in our world. We reflected upon and discussed how we might continue to live our values as we move into an advancing technological world.

Life is about changing. We experience personal change often. Considering the changes



**Sister Esther Anderson, OSF
Congregational Minister**

that have occurred in our lives, we become aware that some were joyous and occasions for celebration while others caused loss and radically changed our lives. Some of the resulting transitions may have evoked excitement and adventure while others resulted in sadness and grief. All are part of the transformations that are an inevitable part of life.

In this Good News, we encounter Sister Maggie Lopez, a legislative campaign director for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network in New Jersey. Her role is to convince legislators to pass legislation and to approve budgets to fund cancer research. She works tirelessly to help prevent new cases of cancer and to increase access to healthcare for all in distress. Sister Maggie, aware of the urgency and enormity of the task, trains volunteers to lobby. We meet Alecia Joy Bloom, a volunteer who credits her survival to the work of the American Cancer Society. Sister Maggie is dedicated to changing minds and hearts. Although often faced with resistance, she and her volunteers are reenergized when they meet the growing number of cancer survivors.

When the Archdiocese of Philadelphia decided to merge schools, Our Lady of Fatima and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Schools formed a new entity which was named Our Lady of Angels School. Sisters Debbie Krist, principal, and Karen Pourby, vice-principal, worked together with all involved to acknowledge the loss of the old identities and to facilitate the emergence of the new. This transition involved changing minds and hearts. The result is a stronger school with deep Catholic roots, rich faith development, strong academics, and extensive educational opportunities.

In the face of change, we continue to be encouraged by the conclusion of our Mission Statement, “Filled with trust in the goodness of God, we move forward.”

St. Esther Anderson, OSF



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Sister Maggie Lopez has been battling cancer for the past 25 years. Although not a survivor of the disease herself, she is very passionate about finding a cure. Her job is to convince legislators to pass budgets and legislation that will fund cancer research, help prevent new cases, and increase access to healthcare. Sister Maggie is at the forefront of the effort to turn the tide against one of the biggest killers of the age.

Written by Deb Litman
Photography by Andrea Cipriani-Mecchi

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When two parish schools—Our Lady of Perpetual Help and Our Lady of Fatima—merged to form a new school, Our Lady of Angels (OLA), Sister Debbie Krist and other Sisters of St. Francis helped to make the transition a smooth one. With an emphasis on instilling strong religious and moral values in their students and by weaving in elements from each school, OLA is indeed a shining example of success.

Written by Deb Litman
Photography by Andrea Cipriani-Mecchi

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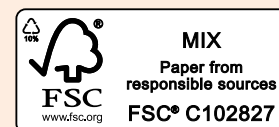
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The purpose of *Good News* is to further the Gospel mission of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia by sharing the good news of the congregation with our friends, family, companions, and sisters. Through this publication, we hope to share the 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: Passionate about the fight against cancer, Sister Maggie Lopez's ministry is a constant campaign for a cure for this killer. As legislative campaign director of New Jersey for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Sister Maggie lobbies legislators to fight the disease with public money to fund cancer research and increase access to healthcare for those with the disease.

New Jersey assemblyman Thomas Eustace and assemblywoman Connie Wagner listen as Sister Maggie talks about an upcoming piece of healthcare legislation. Known throughout the state for her knowledge and dedication to the cancer lobby, Sister Maggie is well respected among New Jersey legislators. The rapport she has with political figures helps her get her message to those in control of government dollars.



Campaigning

Enter any oncology unit and you'll discover a community. The people there are from all walks of life. They are from different neighborhoods and backgrounds, different races and religions. Some are so frail that they are being wheeled in by loved ones, some so robust that it is hard to believe they are the ones being hooked up to IVs. Whether they would have been friends in the out-

side world or not, they are all fighting for their lives and they are all rooting for one another. Cancer has brought them together, united in a struggle against a disease that the American Cancer Society (ACS) estimates will kill 1,600 people a day in 2013.

For Sister Maggie Lopez, that fight is her fight. Although not a cancer patient or survivor herself, she has been battling the disease in her own way for a quarter century.

Her passion for the cause began 25 years ago in October 1988 when she started as a Patient and Family Services Director for the ACS. In that position she helped families coping with the illness find transportation, respite care, and other services. In 1993 she became Hudson County Executive Director and in 1999 she was named Advocacy Director in the newly formed Government Relations Department: American Cancer

▼ In her more than 25 years with the American Cancer Society, Sister Maggie has made great strides in cultivating the dialogue between politicians and advocates for cancer funding.



for a Cure: *Determined to Make a Difference*

“WE ARE IN THE BUSINESS OF SAVING LIVES AND
I AM A FIRM BELIEVER THAT POSITIVE CHANGE
WILL HAPPEN BECAUSE OF GRASSROOTS EFFORTS.”

Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN). In 2011 she became the State Legislative Campaign Director. In this position it is her job to convince legislators to pass budgets and legislation that will fund cancer research, help prevent new cases, and increase access to healthcare for those with the disease.

Sister Maggie's ministry echoes the work of the original members of the Sisters of

St. Francis who took bold action to aid the sick and vulnerable of their time. Those early sisters cared for the ill during the smallpox epidemic of 1858 and opened the congregation's first hospital, St. Mary's in Philadelphia, in 1860 to address the lack of adequate services for the sick poor in the city. Like them, Sister Maggie is at the forefront of the effort to turn the tide against one of the biggest killers of the age.

Advancing an Agenda

“We are in the business of saving lives and I am a firm believer that positive change will happen because of grassroots efforts,” said Sister Maggie. As an integral part of those efforts, Sister Maggie works on a yearly legislative agenda, taking the lead from the American Cancer Society's D.C. office on federal matters and determining which
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“WE ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT HEALTHCARE AND CANCER FUNDING AND WE LET CANDIDATES KNOW THAT WE WILL MAKE THIS ISSUE AN ELECTION ISSUE.”

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budget and policy issues are most important at the state level. Top priorities on the state level for 2013 include a campaign for cancer research funding, tobacco control, and support for a bill that would prevent children under 18 from indoor tanning.

If you get Sister Maggie talking about one of these issues, you immediately hear in her voice the fervor she feels in her heart. “Lung cancer is the number one cancer killer and yet it is the most preventable cancer. The direct link between cigarette smoking and cancer is clear,” says Sister Maggie with a sense of urgency.

To combat this, ACS CAN is urging New Jersey legislators to increase tobacco control funding to \$30 million annually. Sister Maggie knows this may be a protracted struggle but that is something she’s used to. Up until the early 1990s, smoking was allowed everywhere in New Jersey. Then in 1993, a movement began that would eventually prohibit smoking in indoor public places and workplaces. “It took 13

years of hard work to get the legislation passed,” said Sister Maggie. “There was party pressure and fear of affecting businesses. Meetings sometimes got heated. But we kept fighting and the Clean Indoor Air Act finally went through in 2006. The day that act was passed was a proud moment for all of us.”

Sister Maggie speaks with equal passion about the Teenage Indoor Tanning Bill which seeks to raise the legal age for indoor tanning from 14 to 18. “It has been shown that individuals who use indoor tanning devices before the age of 30 increase their risk of melanoma by 75%,” said Sister Maggie. “The impact on young people is devastating. When I went to Trenton to testify on the issue, I encountered so many young people who had been diagnosed with melanoma. One young woman in her twenties was in tears as she talked about the effect the disease has had on her.”

The issues don’t stop there. Other legislative priorities include lobbying for screenings, seeing that the state continues to



Knowing there is strength in numbers, Sister Maggie trains volunteers to meet with local legislators on both the state and federal level. These constituent activists are a powerful force in urging political allies to sponsor and support life-saving bills.

A Light Amidst the Darkness



"My attitude with patients is that if one truly believes and prays, God will truly heal," said Sister Margaret. "It may be physical healing or it may be spiritual healing and acceptance of God's plan in our lives. But we must always be people of faith and hope."

Sister Margaret Lewis sits in the reception room of Riddle Hospital Cancer Center holding the hand of a patient awaiting chemotherapy or radiation treatment and sometimes offering a snack. They talk quietly—at times serious, then more lighthearted. It is a common scene here at Riddle where Sister Margaret volunteers 15-22 hours a week. She serves as a support, a sounding board, and a companion for what is often the most painful and difficult experience of people's lives.

Even with aggressive lobbying, research, and progress in cancer treatment, millions of people each year are diagnosed with cancer and many succumb to the disease. Sister Margaret walks with patients so they are never alone in their journey. "One woman told me that her husband and her daughter were in denial, leaving her without the support she needed. I told her that she was not alone. She and I were walking together with the Lord," Sister Margaret said.

Sister Margaret knows of what she speaks. She herself is a patient at the center where she receives chemotherapy and radiation for metastatic bone cancer. She is also a 15 year survivor of breast cancer. In addition, she lost her father, mother, brother, and niece at the hands of the disease.

Even for those who have come to the end of their battle, Sister Margaret provides great comfort. She recalls one man whom she met as he was leaving the center. "See you next week," she said. The patient responded, "I'm finished." When Sister Margaret took him aside, he told her nothing more could be done for him. He had three months to live. She explained that he had just received a gift from God. "So many people die suddenly without any warning," she told him. "You have the opportunity to tell your spouse and your children how much you love them and how important they are to you. That will always be a bright light in their lives even though they miss you." When the patient died six weeks later, his wife called Sister Margaret telling her what an inspiration she had been for her husband and invited her to speak at his wake service.

A source of strength and solace for so many, Sister Margaret says she gets her fortitude from her work with patients and from her fellow sisters. "When I am there working with patients, I don't know my own pain," said Sister Margaret. "When I go home, I know very well the pain of metastatic bone cancer but even then I have no fear because I have a community of praying sisters who are my source of infinite hope. I hope that I pass some of that magnificent support on to the patients with whom I walk."

provide adequate funds for Medicare and Medicaid, and increasing patient access to adequate pain treatment and management. Sister Maggie is also responsible for fund-raising efforts in New Jersey that support ACS CAN activities and campaigns.

Changing Hearts and Minds

Getting the word out is one important part of the effort. More than 20,000 people receive Sister Maggie's frequent emails,

alerts, and calls to action. She keeps up with research, puts out flyers, attends lobby days, and gives testimony at budget hearings.

In addition, face-to-face time with individual legislators is essential on both the state and federal levels. Sister Maggie meets with state legislators and members of Congress on a regular basis. She provides them with the latest research relevant to upcoming budget or legislative decisions. She coaxes allies to sponsor bills and appeals to opponents to reconsider their positions.

Although she doesn't always come away with the commitment for which she was hoping, Sister Maggie is always certain to remind legislators that she will be checking back with them. "Sometimes if we are asking them to cosponsor a bill or to vote 'yes' for additional cancer funding, they will need more time before they can commit," said Sister Maggie. "Still, I always leave the meeting by letting them know I will be following up, saying something like, 'I will call

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In addition to her official duties with the ACS, Sister Maggie volunteers a great deal of time helping with fundraising events for the organization. Here Sister Maggie greets participants at the registration table for Relay for Life in Hoboken, New Jersey.

by the end of next week and I hope you will support us.”

Even when she is disappointed with the outcome of a visit, Sister Maggie never gives up hope. “You never know—maybe a year from now that same legislator will have had some encounter or experience that will make him or her more receptive to our message. ‘Don’t worry,’ I tell them. ‘I’ll keep coming back.’”

Guiding Volunteers

In addition to meeting with legislators herself, Sister Maggie trains volunteers to do the same. “If I don’t live in a particular district, I don’t have much impact with the legislator there,” said Sister Maggie. “So I train volunteers who do live in those districts. I teach them how to prepare for the visit, how to approach their legislators, how to sway them.”

Sister Maggie and her team of legislative ambassadors generally only have about 30 minutes for each meeting so it is important that they make the most of their time. She instructs volunteers to write down what they need to discuss, to bring someone who can tell a personal story, and to ask the legislator to take a specific action.

“You have to walk in knowing their track record,” said Mary Vecchio, a volunteer who has worked with Sister Maggie for several years. “You have to do your homework; you have to be careful not to be taken off topic; you have to let them know you are knowledgeable and you are serious.”

Sister Maggie role plays with volunteers to prepare them for their visits. She trains them to be quick on their feet and to combat resistance. She shows them how to approach legislators in a calm, mature,

respectful fashion so that they always are welcome back for another meeting six months or a year down the road.

Alecia Joy Bloom is another one of Sister Maggie’s group of volunteers. Alecia Joy was 27 years old when she was diagnosed with cervical cancer. At the time, she says, it didn’t faze her too much. “I was young. I had some surgery, went back for check-ups, but I honestly didn’t give it much thought,” she said. Then, 11 years later, she was faced with a second diagnosis. This time it was breast cancer and tests showed that it was triple negative, a form of the disease found in only 10-20% of patients and having a lower rate of survival. “That was when I knew I had to fight back—for myself and for everybody faced with this disease,” said Alecia Joy.

Alecia Joy became involved with the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life



▼ *Marian Cicala helps her granddaughter post her homemade sign to sell M&Ms for their Relay for Life team.*



◀ *Hoboken's well-known Cake Boss has donated a cake to the local Relay for Life for the past 10 years.*



▼ *Joseph Cicala leads Relay for Life, "Team M&M," dedicated to his sisters Marion and Marie.*



fundraiser and before long was asked to volunteer with ACS CAN where, as she puts it, she "was blessed with meeting Sister Maggie Lopez."

"You can feel Sister Maggie's drive and her passion immediately," said Alecia Joy. "When someone enjoys her own life as much as she does and is fighting for the lives of others as hard as she is, that is a huge inspiration," said Alecia Joy. "It compels you to do more." Now ten years out from that second diagnosis, Alecia Joy credits her survival to the work being done at ACS by people like Sister Maggie.

Shaping The Debate

Sometimes influencing legislators begins even before they are elected. "We ask questions about healthcare and cancer funding and we let candidates know that we will make this issue an election issue," said Sister Maggie. "We give questionnaires to the candidates and publish their responses in voter guides."

When members of the New Jersey legislature were up for election recently, Sister Maggie and a group of volunteers attended debates, forums, and town hall meetings

wearing t-shirts that read "We care about cancer and we vote."

"At one campaign breakfast, a candidate came up to a group of us wearing the shirts and said 'Wow, you people are everywhere.' That thrilled me," said Sister Maggie. "We want politicians to know that we are everywhere and that we have friends, family, and neighbors we can influence."

It is those same friends, family members, and neighbors Sister Maggie is thinking of when she goes to work each day trying to eradicate the disease that will affect so many of them. "I believe that the collective effort is really making a difference," said Sister Maggie. "We've made such strides. I've seen the number of survivors in the United States alone grow from six million in 1988 to over 13 million in 2012. My proudest moments are when I go to a rally in D.C. and see the growing number of people wearing purple survivor shirts. I hope that in some way I have made a small contribution to the fight against cancer." ■

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

HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Pray for patients living with cancer and for the families and caregivers who aid them in their struggle.
- Support a family dealing with cancer. Help with transportation to and from appointments, child care, shopping and meal preparation, and household maintenance.
- Contact your legislator about funding for cancer research, screening, and care. Public officials pay close attention to communication from their constituents.
- Start an advocacy group. Organizing a letter-writing campaign or staffing an information table at a local fair or festival is a good way to encourage others to get involved in the fight against cancer.
- Participate in an existing cancer fundraising event in your hometown. Most areas host a Race for the Cure, Relay for Life, or similar event. If no such opportunity exists where you live, get something started.

PEOPLE & PLACES

The bikes—a truckload of them—have arrived and the young women and men of Lawson School anxiously wait to take possession.



KENYA

A recent issue of *News on Nyumbani* indicates that our sisters' influence on the Nyumbani ministries in Kenya is still very evident. On March 18, an award ceremony was held at the Nyumbani Children's Home for "mums and uncles" who had completed a long training program in childcare skills. The training program was initiated by Sister Julie Mulvihill who has ministered at the home since 2004 and whose work there still continues.

The article also acknowledged the work of Sisters Frances Cassidy and Rose Monica Katusz in establishing Lawson High School in Nyumbani Village. Although both have returned to the states, their presence is still evident—and in some ways their contributions continue. Sister Frances held a flea market in the motherhouse parking lot in the spring. Her main objective was to purchase bikes for the students who lived a distance from the school. The effort was—by anyone's measure—definitely a success!



OREGON

For folks in Pendleton, the weekend of November 15-16 held special significance—the opening and dedication of the new St. Anthony Hospital. The celebration began on Friday evening with a pre-event reception and ribbon cutting followed by the opening celebration and tours of the new facility. On Saturday morning, the hospital community enjoyed an open house after which the facility was opened to the broader community. At 5 P.M. Bishop Liam Cary was on hand for the official blessing and dedication. With the opening of the new hospital, St. Anthony's is once again beginning a new chapter of its 112 years of dedicated service to the people of Pendleton.



As the new St. Anthony Hospital nears completion, administration and staff prepare for the grand opening.

WASHINGTON, DC

In September a group of Neumann University students participated in the Franciscan Earth Corps Training and Launch. The program is a national network of young adult servant leaders engaging in Franciscan spirituality and in social and ecological justice. The program was hosted at the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America. Franciscan Action Network is coordinating the program, providing organizing training, spiritual resources, and collaboration among Franciscan Earth Corps members and the broader Franciscan family. Visit www.FranciscanEarthCorps.org for additional information and updates.



When Sister Joan Roddy (left) and Sister Rochelle Liu (right) attended the canonization of St. Marianne Cope, they met a Modoc American Indian woman who was there to celebrate the canonization of St. Kateri Tekakwitha.



ROME/HAWAII

When Mother Marianne Cope was canonized this past year, we felt a special connection with the event. First of all, there was the connection with St. Marianne's congregation, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Community which was originally part of our congregation. Secondly, two of our sisters were present at the canonization—Sister Rochelle Liu, a native of Hawaii, and Sister Joan Roddy. At the time both sisters lived and ministered in Honolulu. In addition to being present for the actual canonization, the sisters participated in a number of events—both in Rome and back home in Hawaii. They took part in a made-for-television film about the event and were invited by Miguel Diaz, the

U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, to attend a special reception in the Vatican Gardens. When they returned to Honolulu, they were invited to join the Franciscan Sisters of the Neumann Community for a special interfaith/civic celebration on the lawn of the Royal Palace to welcome the relic of St. Marianne back to the islands. Also present at the ceremony were Bishop Silva, Gov. Abercrombre, U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye, mayors from the other islands, and the Episcopal Bishop of Honolulu.



NEW JERSEY

June 23 marked a special day for Sisters Alberta Manzo and Dominic Piscotta as they bid farewell to Jersey City. Both were natives of Jersey City and both have lived and ministered in the city for many years. Sister Dominic worked at St. Aloysius School—first as teacher and later as a clerical assistant. Initially she lived at the parish convent but later moved to St. Ann Convent. Sister Alberta lived and ministered at St. Ann Parish for 30 years as a pastoral associate and director of religious education. The June celebration began with a special liturgy presided over by Bishop Thomas Donato and followed by a celebratory dinner in the parish hall. Family, friends, and a number of our sisters were on hand to share memories and to wish the sisters well in their new ministries. Sister Dominic will be ministering at St. Francis Medical Center in Trenton and Sister Alberta will be serving in prayer ministry in Assisi House in Aston, Pennsylvania.



Both parishioners and public officials shared official proclamations citing the sisters' many contributions to the people of Jersey City.



◀ *On one of their July farm visits, DNA students check the progress of their plants, investigated various herbs, planted and harvested beans, and reviewed what made an organic farm different.*

PENNSYLVANIA

A number of families in Delaware County, especially in the Aston/Media area, are familiar with Red Hill Farm and many have shares in this community supported agricultural farm. This past year, however, Joanne Rosenbaum, our farm education coordinator, decided to broaden community awareness of the farm—particularly with children. In her initial endeavor, Joanne focused on Drexel Neumann Academy's third grade class. From April through July, she held sessions at the school. Other times the 23 students and their teacher, Cindi O'Hanlin, traveled from Chester to the farm in Aston. Joanne developed a detailed plan outlining the topics and activities for each of the sessions. Classroom topics included learning about how plants grow, planting seeds, making hummus, and learning nutritional information about food groups and the sugar content of drinks. At the farm, students planted the seedlings they had grown and learned about chickens, bees, and how organic food is grown. They also studied both soil and bugs under the microscope. Next year Joanne hopes to be able to share the program with schools in the Aston School District.



DELAWARE

On May 17 the First State Community Loan Fund (CLF) celebrated its 20th anniversary. Through our community development loans, the Sisters of St. Francis were the first group to make a loan to CLF and, as a result, we received special recognition at this anniversary celebration held in Wilmington—including a special page and article in the anniversary book. In the article, Sister Nora Nash describes CLF as "the kind of organization that is 'rowing upstream,' meaning that they are pushing ahead and taking people along with them for the better." Sister Nora, together

with Tom McCaney and Sisters Marijane Hresko, Albertus Dougherty, and Marie Lucey, attended the celebration.



Nine Neumann students spent their spring break in Camden with campus minister Michael Martin. They worked in a thrift shop, tutored at a local school, and spent two days working in a community greenhouse.



PENNSYLVANIA

Neumann University has been named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for the second consecutive year. The university's community service project involved 2,382 students in a combined 46,686 hours of service in Camden, New Jersey; Chester, Aston, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Wilmington, Delaware. Neumann's president, Dr. Rosalie Mirenda explained that the service benefited both the communities served and the student volunteers. "The university's mission is to educate a diverse community of learners based on the belief that knowledge is a gift to be shared in the service of others," she said.



Sister Debbie Krist greets students in the hallways of Our Lady of Angels.

“THERE WAS SO MUCH EXCITEMENT THAT [FIRST] DAY,” SAID SISTER DEBBIE. “WE HAD 510 STUDENTS STARTING A NEW ADVENTURE TOGETHER.”

When students lined up outside the doors of Our Lady of Angels School (OLA) in Morton, Pennsylvania, on September 5, 2012, it was both the end of a chapter and the beginning of a new one. After receiving news the previous January that their two parish schools—Our Lady of Perpetual Help (OLPH) and Our Lady of Fatima (OLF)—would be merged to form the new regional school, students, parents, and

faculty had had a bit of time to get used to the idea. But as prayers were said and the ribbon on the front doors was cut that Wednesday morning, the proposal became a reality.

That first day of school was, in many ways, like any other. Children showed off their new backpacks. Old friends delighted in reuniting after a summer apart. But there was also much to get used to. For some there was a new building; for most there

were new faces; and for all there was a new identity.

As principal of the regional school, Sister Debbie Krist was front and center, welcoming everyone. Having served as principal at OLPH for six years before the merger, she was a familiar face for many. Along with her stood Sister Karen Pourby, a newcomer herself, who was joining OLA as vice-principal. Those first few hours were full of energy. Children from the different



Sister Deb talks with Monsignor John Savinsky, one of the two pastors on the governing board of the school.



Vice Principal Sister Karen Pourby enjoys working directly with students as she pays a visit to a second grade class.



OLA students play in the school yard during recess. Students from the two schools have adapted well to changes.

Regional School: Greater *than the* Sum of its Parts

parishes started getting to know each other right away—sharing stories and happily munching on soft pretzels made into the shape of the letter “A” (for “Angels”). “There was so much excitement that day,” said Sister Debbie. “We had 510 students starting a new adventure together.”

The Road To Merger

The move toward the creation of Our Lady of Angels began in December of 2010 when Cardinal Justin Rigali established a Blue Ribbon Commission for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and charged it with charting a future course for Catholic education in the archdiocese. In recent years, many Catholic schools in the Philadelphia region had struggled to survive. At the time the commission was convened, there were 156 elementary schools within the archdiocese, at least 40 of which were facing operating deficits, insufficient enrollment, and an inability to keep up with the demands of a 21st century curriculum. In response, and after much study and reflection, the commission recommended closing or merging a significant number of parish schools in order to strengthen those that remained.

In addition to Sister Debbie, several Sisters of St. Francis help shape students’ lives at Our Lady of Angels School during the first all-important transition year.

Sr. Karen Pourby
Vice Principal

Sr. Margaret Klein
Librarian

Sr. Angela O’Connell
Part-time Aide

Sr. Joan Rehiel
Kindergarten Aide

Sr. Patricia Wickenheiser
Office Staff/Aide

Sr. Mary Teresa Coll
Part-time Office Staff

Sr. Mary Griffin
Kindergarten Aide

The resulting closures and mergers brought both loss and opportunity. The staff, faculty, and students of OLA came ready to face both.

A New Identity

Sister Debbie, Sister Karen, and officials from the archdiocese worked together to facilitate a smooth transition. “In the spring we had a program for parents where a sister from the Office of Catholic Education came to talk about moving forward positively,” said Sister Debbie. “In the summer we brought faculty together for relationship building.”

Those kinds of interactions helped folks ease into their new situation but change is rarely easy. “It has been challenging for people not to approach things as ‘we have always done it this way,’” said Sister Karen. “We keep reminding everyone that this is not Our Lady of Perpetual Help and it is not Our Lady of Fatima. It is a new beginning.”

As the two school bodies became one, they strove to keep some of the traditions that were unique to each school while establishing new customs that would help bind the communities together. Our Lady of Fatima had held a father/daughter dance each year. OLA decided to continue that but to add something new—a mother/son equivalent.

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Combining Our Lady of Perpetual Help and Our Lady of Fatima into one regional school allowed the two smaller schools to pool their resources to form a more robust and nimble institution. Still built on the bedrock of rigorous academics and strong Catholic values, the new school also gives all students the opportunities they need to face an ever-changing world. Smartboards and computers work alongside traditional blackboards; physical education, media, and band programs supplement the traditional core subjects.

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The wine and cheese BINGO that had been a fixture at OLPH for years continued as well, this year incorporating many first-time participants.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the children at OLA seemed to make the transition more easily than the adults. “The students have done marvelously well with the changes,” said second grade teacher Sarah Walkowiak who had taught at OLF for five years before the merger. “They were open to whatever was coming next.”

Shared Catholic Roots

One thing the two schools already shared was an emphasis on instilling strong religious and moral values in their students. That commitment remains evident in countless aspects of life at OLA.

Regular times for communal prayer are woven into each school day—in the morning, at lunchtime, and as students finish in the afternoon. Individual classrooms include prayer spaces and students celebrate the sacraments and participate in a variety of prayer services and retreats throughout the year.

Students are also encouraged to bring their faith to life through service assignments and outreach projects that allow them to understand that faith and action are not separate entities—a message they seem to have internalized. After the tragedies in Boston and Oklahoma, students collected money to send to those affected, often donating dimes and nickels from their own piggy banks. “Many times it has been the children who have come to the adults with ideas about how we can help,” said Sister Karen.

Though tragedy often spurs action, students at OLA are taught that it is not just in the extraordinary times that they have a responsibility to care for others. “We talk a lot about the idea of spreading the peace at all times,” said Sister Karen. “Being respectful of ourselves, our surroundings, and others is something that we practice daily—at every moment.”

In addition to a strong Catholic identity, the atmosphere at Our Lady of Angels reflects a strong Franciscan presence. At a time when an increasing number of Catholic schools are operating without any sisters in their buildings, OLA is blessed with eight Franciscan sisters working in a variety of capacities at the school. “I often remind the students of St. Francis’ message to ‘Preach the Gospel at all times, using words only when necessary,’” said Sister Debbie. “We try to live that here.”

HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Pray for the students, faculty, and parents faced with the challenge of transition. Catholic dioceses throughout the country are looking at regionalizing schools in order to strengthen those that remain.
- Volunteer your time at a local school. Public or private, many schools welcome extra help in the office, the copy room, even the classroom. Why not put your time and talents to work guiding the next generation?
- Be open to new ideas. It is easy to fall back on the way things have always been done—whether at home, at work, or in your community. Keep an open mind. A fresh perspective can breathe new life into even the most tried-and-true endeavor.
- Learn to embrace positive change in your own life. Letting go can be difficult but the rewards can be great.

Enhanced Opportunities

One of the most significant outcomes of the merger between OLPH and OLF has been the ability to provide more extensive educational opportunities. Services that had only been available to children at one school—or in some cases not at all—are now available to everyone.

Our Lady of Perpetual Help, for example, did not have a physical education teacher, a librarian, a band program, or a resource room for students who needed extra help. OLA has all four. Our Lady of Fatima was without an honors math program or a school newspaper club. OLA offers both. From smart boards to science labs, piano keyboards to webcams, combining resources has meant expanding opportunities. “Being a merged school means you can combine the best aspects of one school with the best of another school to make one awesome school,” said Sarah Walkowiak.

One area of instruction in which Our Lady of Angels has excelled is technology. Nancy Perone serves as a dedicated technology teacher, instructing students in computer basics, internet research, video editing, and social networking. Students from the youngest grades on up incorporate technology into their assignments, utilizing resources on the internet, making PowerPoint presentations, and recording videos.

Students at OLA also are using computers to begin their exposure to a second

language. Nancy, who is herself fluent in Spanish, teaches the language to students in every grade, using a series of interactive computer programs as a foundation. “Introducing technology and a foreign language early is essential,” said Nancy. “These are skills that children will take with them, skills that will give them a head start in everything they do whether it is in their own neighborhoods or as part of the global community.”

An Eye To The Future

With the first year completed and a second one on the horizon, the OLA family is proof that good things can grow out of difficult situations.

“Some parts of the process were difficult and sad,” admits Sarah. “But as both an educator and a parent, I know that Catholic schools needed to go in this direction in order to be sustainable. I believe in Catholic education and I want that for my children.”

That sentiment is one that is echoed by many parents and teachers, even those who may have struggled with the loss of their individual parish schools. “There has been sacrifice on everybody’s part but we have the future of these

children in our hands,” said Sister Debbie. “In addition to strong academics, the added components of faith development, values, discipline, and structure that we stress here are so important to cultivate.”

For all the hard work going on behind the scenes, the children still see OLA rather simply. It is their school—the place that they come to learn and to grow, to pray, and to play. “I look forward to coming to school every day,” explains Kelly Nillan who was entering seventh grade when OLA opened its doors. “It feels like home to me.” ■

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



▲ Our Lady of Angels is fortunate to have a total of eight Sisters of St. Francis working in the school in some capacity. Sister Patricia Wickenheiser, shown here with Marina Ferry (left) and Emma Kearns (right), volunteers in kindergarten.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Everyone has within a piece of good news.

— Anne Frank (adapted)

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Rebuilding After the Storm

One of the areas that sustained severe damage from Hurricane Sandy was Long Beach Island where Sister Patricia McNiff ministers as a pastoral associate at St. Francis Church in Brant Beach. The church is actually one of a four-church parish. Damage to the Brant Beach component included the church, the parish center, the friary, and the convent. Parish members were displaced for months and parish staff were on partial or full-time unemployment. Parishioners had to travel to nearby towns for services. However, in some areas the pastor, Father Steve, felt that from the chaos of the storm emerged a new sense of creativity. The formation team developed plans for home instruction and devised a program that brought parents and children to Mass and instruction together. Senior services, counseling services, food pantries, and other services formerly based in the parish center had to be outsourced to regional service centers. Currently the church is reopened, classrooms are cleaned and furnished through donations, the playground is leveled and sifted, and employees are back to work. There remains much to do—air conditioning replaced, fencing repaired or replaced, and repairs are ongoing. But the heart of the parish is strong because that heart lives in the people who constitute the Brant Beach “Church.”



For months St. Francis Church (above) was out of commission after the devastating effects of Hurricane Sandy. Today St. Francis Church (left) is brimming with a sense of pride and community once again as evident in the packed pews during the return celebration Mass.

Assisi House Transformation Begins

Big doings with our retired sisters at Assisi House in Aston. For many years Assisi House has operated under a “medical model.” The facility is now going to be moving to a “person-centered model” and the physical changes are directed toward increasing the independence of the sisters, allowing the sisters to become more involved in their care, and improving the quality of community life. The first phase of renovation is in the entrance area. For better security the reception desk will be moved closer to the door. A closed-in visiting area will provide privacy for sisters who are entertaining guests. The hair salon and library will be moved to this area, allowing for more space and greater accessibility. There will also be a larger gift shop. In this social space sisters will be able to gather around a hearth area to socialize and to relax. The second phase of renovation will focus on the living units. The nurses’ stations will be removed—although staff will be close at hand to care for the sisters’ needs. Sisters will have access to a country kitchen where they can gather for a cup of tea and a snack or even prepare a late breakfast for themselves. Each unit will also have a larger laundry room where sisters who are able can do their own laundry. A large living room will provide space for sisters to watch TV, gather for a meeting, or just relax and chat.



Foundation chair Sharon Coleman and Sisters Esther Anderson and Jane LaManna don yellow hard hats indicating that change is underway!



Sister Sara concluded her profession of vows by saying, "In a spirit of continuous conversion, I bind myself in fidelity and love closer to Christ and to the Church."

Sister Sara Marks Professes First Vows

On August 11 our motherhouse chapel was filled with our sisters and with family and friends who had come to witness Sister Sara Mark's first profession of vows. During the Eucharistic liturgy, congregants were reminded that the vows that Sara was professing were a deepening of the baptismal vows that each of us had professed. When congregational minister, Sister Esther Anderson, asked Sister Sara what she was asking of God and of the Church, Sister Sara replied, "I ask for God's merciful love and a share in this religious community of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia." Later in the liturgy, Sister Sara professed her vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience for one year. After giving Sister Sara copies of the Third Order Franciscan Rule and of the constitutions of our congregation, Sister Esther prayed, "Sister Sara, what God has begun in you, may God bring to fulfillment."

Celebrating Mother Francis Bachmann

June 30 marked a special event in our congregation's history—the 150th anniversary of the death of our Foundress, Mother Francis Bachmann. But it was also a day for celebrating life—the life of this young woman—wife, mother, foundress of a religious congregation that still exists and whose members minister throughout the U.S. as well as in Ireland, Africa, and Haiti. Both our chaplain, Father Cyprian Rosen, OFM, Cap., and Father Alfred Bradley, CSSR, pastor of St. Peter Church in Philadelphia, presided over the liturgy. Sister Anne Amati shared a beautiful reflection on Mother Francis. She portrayed the poverty of Mother Francis' life—a poverty that also characterized her death. After lunch we gathered for a prayer service during which accounts of Mother Francis' death were read. We also listened prayerfully as excerpts from Mother Francis' admonitions were read—words that touched our hearts as they must have inspired the hearts of those early sisters for whom she wrote them.



Sister Esther Anderson accepted a portrait of St. John Neumann, a gift from the Redemptorist community. St. John Neumann played an important role in helping Mother Francis in the founding of the congregation.



In Memoriam

Sister Rita Joseph Knapp
June 2, 2013

Sister Marie Adele Crettol
June 30, 2013

Sister Martina Therese Butalla
July 18, 2013

Sister Clare Marita Pearce
July 22, 2013

Sister Patricia Przybylski
(formerly Sister Robert Michael)
August 27, 2013

Sister Margaret Eugene Beall
September 9, 2013



Sister Ann Nederostek celebrated her 100th birthday on July 20, 2013. She has been a Sister of St. Francis since 1933 and a teacher for over 60 of those years.

► Mary Beard's ongoing commitment to family, parish ministry, and the Franciscan Companions in Mission reflect our Commitment Statement: "Filled with trust in the goodness of God, we move forward."



FoCUS

MARY BEARD

"LED BY YOUR SPIRIT,
MAY I LIVE IN JOYFUL
LOVE WITH ALL MY
SISTERS AND BROTHERS."

▼ The Companions in Faith group frequently help Mary in reviewing the grant proposals, praying for wisdom in the committee's decisions and asking God's blessing on those who seek this support. They see this as an "opportunity to participate in addressing world needs beyond what we can do individually in our little corner of the world."

Mary Beard, a Companion in Faith with the Sisters of St. Francis, acknowledges that her Franciscan heart was unfolded by the sisters at St. Leo's High School in Tacoma, Washington. She initially felt called to be a sister but eventually realized that God was calling her to a different vocation—life with her husband, David, and his young children, Debbie and Ron. Today Mary and David minister in their local parish in Klamath Falls, Oregon—a ministry colored with the spirit of Francis and Clare. "Not a day goes by," Mary says, "without the opportunity to pray and live out the companion prayer—"Led by your spirit, may I live in joyful love with all my sisters and brothers and with all creation so that I may share in building up your Kingdom in justice, peace, and reconciliation."

Even though the Sisters of St. Francis no longer teach in Klamath Falls, Mary feels that the impact of the sisters remains and that the need for their spirit is as strong now as ever. She coordinates a companion faith-sharing group that gathers in prayer and carries the Franciscan spirit into their daily lives. "We're using the Mother Francis reflection booklet we received recently and are also planning to bring the God's Extravagant Love program to the companions and the parish," Mary explained. The group "adopted" Sister Julie Mulvihill—offering prayer and donations for her ministry in Kenya. They also assist Mary in preparing for her work on the Social Justice Grant Committee.

Family time is vital to Mary's life. The extended family shares breakfast together after daily Mass. "After all these years, we still discover new and fun things about one another," laughed Mary. Last summer Dave and Mary visited their son Ron and his family in Alaska. On their return trip, they visited our retired sisters at St. Ann's in Tacoma and Mary's mom, sister, and brothers in her hometown. Daughter, Debbie, "kept the light on" for their return.

Mary claims she has retired but the reality of that is doubtful. The circle begun at St. Leo's continues to widen as Mary's Franciscan heart continues to expand!

◀ Mary relishes spending time with her family (seen here visiting her son and his family in Alaska). The closeness they share is evident in her relationship with her husband David, her son Ron, and her daughter Debbie.



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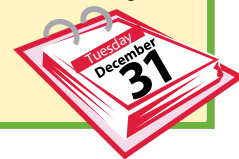
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Honoring the Past

Our sisters have ministered at St. Stephen's Parish in Bradshaw since 1931. This year the parish is celebrating its 150th anniversary. As part of their celebration, the anniversary committee decided to take part in the Kingsville Community Parade. They created a 48-foot float just for the occasion. The float carried a large banner that declared the anniversary theme: "Honor the Past; Live for the Future." Sister Angela DeFontes who has ministered in the parish for many years joined other parishioners on the float. For Sister Angela, both the event and the words on the banner held a two-fold significance—recalling not only the history of the parish and her ministry there, but also the fact that she was also celebrating a special anniversary—50 years as a Sister of St. Francis.



▲ Riding on parish float in the Kingsville Community Parade, Sister Angela DeFontes represented the many sisters who have ministered in the parish since 1931.



Franciscan Federation Honoree: Sister Donna Jo Repetti

Sixteen of our sisters attended the 2013 Franciscan Federation Conference in Pittsburgh. The opening ritual, prepared by Sisters Betty Kane, Julie Keegan, and Rose Mary Holter and participated in by many of the attendees, created an awareness of the gathering's theme—Franciscan Life in Evolution. Presenters Ilia Delio, OSF, and Keith Douglas Warner, OFM, developed and related that theme to both our world today and our own role as Franciscans. During the conference, Sister Donna Jo Repetti received the annual federation award. Sister Donna Jo, through her positive attitude and her openness to change and to the unknown, exemplifies the conference theme in many ways. In her role as director of guidance at Benedictine Academy, she raises awareness of issues today and challenges the students to a creative response. She encourages students to be a voice against human trafficking and to be actively involved in serving others. As a result of the students' ongoing outreach involvement, Benedictine Academy recently received—for the second time—the National Jefferson Gold Award for public service.



▲ Sisters Esther Anderson and Annette Lucchese congratulate Sister Donna Jo Repetti, our congregation's 2013 Federation Award honoree.

Students board a school bus during dismissal at Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in Morton, Pennsylvania—a school that was started by our sisters on August 15, 1936. Today Our Lady of Perpetual Help School has closed its doors—but has also begun anew. In recent years, many Catholic schools in the Philadelphia region have struggled to survive. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia decided that two parish schools—Our Lady of Perpetual Help (OLPH) and Our Lady of Fatima (OLF)—would be merged to form a new regional school. A merger that seemed scary at first has proven successful. Read about acceptance to change and the road to success at Our Lady of Angels School on page 12.