

Good NEWS

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A Publication of THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

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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.

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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.

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POINT OF VIEW

Reverencing relationship...

In the Franciscan tradition we know that the value of relationship was integral to Francis of Assisi’s philosophy of life. Francis embraced all of creation as sister and brother. He continuously revered the dignity of all of God’s creatures, most especially the human person, and revered God dwelling within everyone, especially those that society would consider the least. St. Bonaventure recounts stories of Francis enfolded a leper in his arms and caring for the lepers in their need. Very often when we, the Sisters of St. Francis, are asked what is the primary Gospel value that grounds us, we share that relationship is at the very heart of our mission. Through this mission we are committed to responding to the needs of others, especially those who are poor, marginal, oppressed, and those who have no voice.

This issue of *Good News* highlights the value of relationship and invites us to meet Daniel who found a home at a critical time in his life with the help of Sister Jean Rupertus and the staff of the House of Joseph II in Wilmington, Delaware. Sister Jean is the program director of this permanent residence for men and women living with the advanced stages of AIDS. Here Daniel is cared for by a staff which includes a nurse, nursing assistants, cook, housekeeper, case managers, administrative assistant, and volunteers who attend the residents through all stages of their disease. Let Daniel tell you his story of what House of Joseph II has meant for his life! Relationship and reverence for the dignity of the person are alive and well there!

We’ll also read how important the value of relationship is to the students of Benedictine Academy in Elizabeth, New Jersey. You’ll meet Sister Donna Jo Repetti and her colleague, Linda Michalski, who started the school’s campus ministry program six years ago. Students are encouraged to follow the Franciscan precept to be instruments of peace in their world. You’ll read about Sisters on a Mission, a senior girls’ club that volunteers and cooks for the needy, reaches out to disaster victims, and serves as mentors for the younger girls at school. You’ll also learn about the O Ambassadors Club that grew out of Sister Donna Jo’s inviting students to learn more about the issues of peace and justice that are affecting our country and our world. Their research has led them to become proactive in making a difference in others’ lives by addressing these issues with concrete action. Coming to understand that we are all one global family is a strong endorsement for the power of relationship within and among us!

As each of us moves about in our own corner of the world, let us be challenged by the Gospel value of relationship! Let us reflect on the quality of relationships in our own lives, those that are under our nose as well as those that are beyond the borders of our country. We all have the capacity to reverence the dignity of every human person and to be moved to action so that others might have the basic necessities of life. Let us be instruments of peace in our families, in our workplace, in our community, in our world. We can do it! It’s what the Gospel asks of us!

Be assured of our prayers for you and for your families. May you
all be blessed with peace and good things to come!

Sister Lynn Patrice Lavin, OSF
Congregational Minister

Note to our readers: This is Sr. Lynn Patrice Lavin’s final Point of View, because her tenure as congregational minister has come to a close. Look for a passage from Sister Esther Anderson, newly elected congregational minister, in future issues.

On the cover: Sister Jean Rupertus (left), OSF, director of the House of Joseph II, in Wilmington, Delaware, shares a light moment with Melvina, a resident at the home which serves people living with HIV/AIDS.



House of Joseph resident Percy shares an embrace with his fiancé Cheryl on a recent visit. The support of family and friends can make a big difference to the well-being of people living with HIV/AIDS.

“THIS IS THEIR HOME. WE’RE THE GUESTS; WE’RE PART OF THEIR FAMILY.”

According to the Center for Disease Control, there are 1.2 million Americans living with HIV/AIDS; about half of them are not receiving medical care. House of Joseph II (below) addresses that need by providing quality healthcare and a home for men and women living with the disease.



No Place *Like* Home

A Refuge for People Living with HIV/AIDS

“My biggest worry was that they’d find me in my car, dead, and that I’d die with no one there,” said Daniel who had been living with HIV/AIDS for fifteen years when he lost his home in a fire and became homeless. Daniel lived in his car and in shelters for a while or stayed with friends. But three years without a roof over his head took a toll on his health. In and out of hospitals, he began to despair. “I got to the point where I could barely walk,” he said. “When I looked at myself in the mirror, I looked like a skeleton.”

Daniel was in a hospital when he first met Sister Jean Rupertus. “She came in, sat by my bedside, and reassured me. She just said that we were going to make it through this together,” said Daniel. Sister Jean, a Sister

of St. Francis, is the Program Director of the House of Joseph II in Wilmington, Delaware—the only permanent residence for men and women living with the advanced stages of AIDS with around-the-clock care in the state.

As she sat by his bed, Sister Jean told Daniel about the House of Joseph II. The medical staff is on hand twenty-four hours a day and residents have their own private bedrooms—with TVs. They enjoy three nutritious meals a day as well as the company of other residents, staff, and volunteers. It’s a safe, welcoming place. To Daniel it sounded too good to be true. “I didn’t have a place to go,” he said. “I was afraid I wouldn’t get in. But Sister Jean said she was going to make it happen.”

Coming Home

Sister Jean was as good as her word. Daniel is now one of sixteen people living at the House of Joseph II and—at forty years old—its youngest and newest resident. Once Daniel began to eat wholesome meals and receive medications regularly, he began to recover his health. He also found something else he’d been lacking. “I found family here,” he said. “We stick together and we encourage and look out for each other.”

A diagnosis of HIV/AIDS is overwhelming for anyone but people without a home face added obstacles to their health: no refrigerator to store medicines (if they can afford them), no clock or calendar on the wall to remind them of doctors’ appointments, no supportive network of family and friends to

continued on page 4



Sister Jean Rupertus looks at a family photo with Daniel, a resident. Sister Jean received the Franciscan Federation Peacemaker Award in 2008 for her years of service.

Daniel points out one of his favorite passages of scripture to fellow resident Edward.



A volunteer, Brother Robert Perez, OFM, Cap (above), helps serve lunch in the residence. Volunteers offer friendship to the residents and help with tasks at the House of Joseph.

continued from page 3

drive them to appointments and encourage them through the dark days. The House of Joseph II is dedicated to providing those supports and services for its residents—and more.

“What we really do here is to love life back into them,” said Sister Jean of the men and women who reside at the residence. “When a person is admitted, they often go through quite a time of transition—dealing with the possibility of dying and with guilt and regret about their lives and the people they may have disappointed. We help with medications, doctors’ appointments, and healthy meals. But our commitment is also to be in relationship with them—that’s as important as the medications.”

In the early 1990s, after a career in teaching and school administration, Sister Jean worked in Philadelphia with people who were homeless. She became the director of House of Joseph II in 2004. “They come in pretty broken in body and spirit,” she said. “We try to create an atmosphere where they can be restored to themselves, where they feel loved and can be productive, knowing their lives have meaning. We spend time with them. We go on picnics and visit parks and museums. Most importantly, we listen to their stories. And I have seen them do the same for each other. I think this is the most rewarding part of my ministry.”

Sister Jean works closely with a staff of qualified individuals—a nurse, nursing assistants, cook, housekeeper, administrative assistant, case managers, and volunteers who attend the residents through all stages of their disease. Liz Ramsoram is the nursing supervisor. She sees patients all day, every day. “We provide proper nutrition, medicines, and tender loving care,” she said. “With this diagnosis, you might feel depressed; you might even feel that you don’t want to eat. You need people around you to push you; it’s important to have that support. This is their home. We’re the guests; we’re part of their family.”

Serving The Most Vulnerable Community Members

The House of Joseph II was established by Brother Ronald Giannone, OFM, Cap, in 1997 with the Ministry of Caring, Inc., a nonprofit ecumenical organization devoted to serving those who are poor and homeless. The Sisters of St. Francis of

“I FOUND FAMILY HERE,” HE SAID. “WE STICK TOGETHER AND WE ENCOURAGE AND LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER.”

Philadelphia have supported the Ministry of Caring since it opened its first shelter for women in Wilmington three decades ago; the ministry now sponsors twenty-three service sites in the area.

The House of Joseph II occupies two linked buildings graced by large shady porches where residents can sit and enjoy a flower garden. A vegetable patch offers residents the chance to exercise their green thumbs; fresh food from the garden goes straight to the kitchen for meals. Residents remain as independent and active as their health allows. Some arrive bed-bound or in wheelchairs; all have secondary or opportunistic diseases that slow them down. But everyone is encouraged to take part in any activities that bring them pleasure and offer support. There is a large recreation room, a dining room, snack rooms, and common spaces where residents can play games, use computers, and get to know each other and the volunteers who stop by to spend time with them.

Gabrielle Townsend is a volunteer at House of Joseph II. When she first entertained the idea of volunteering at the residence, Sister Jean encouraged her “to come have dinner, to visit, to just be a friend.” She now spends time there once or twice each week. An information technology manager with DuPont, Gabrielle is active in her church and is helping to create stronger connections between several area churches and the House of Joseph.

“Our generation will be judged by how we deal with this disease,” she said. “HIV/AIDS is a pandemic and it is not slowing down. People don’t want to think about or talk about that. As Christians, we aren’t supposed to turn away. God isn’t afraid to face it. People with HIV are ostracized, turned down for work, even beaten. But isn’t that what Christians are called to do—to reach out to those who are marginalized and ostracized?”

Gabrielle’s work with people with HIV/AIDS has taught her to be open to the suffering of others. “In the process we sometimes find we receive more than we give,” she said. During her visits to House of Joseph II, Gabrielle met and became friends with a resident named Veronica. They had dinner together two or three times a month. “We always had a good time together even



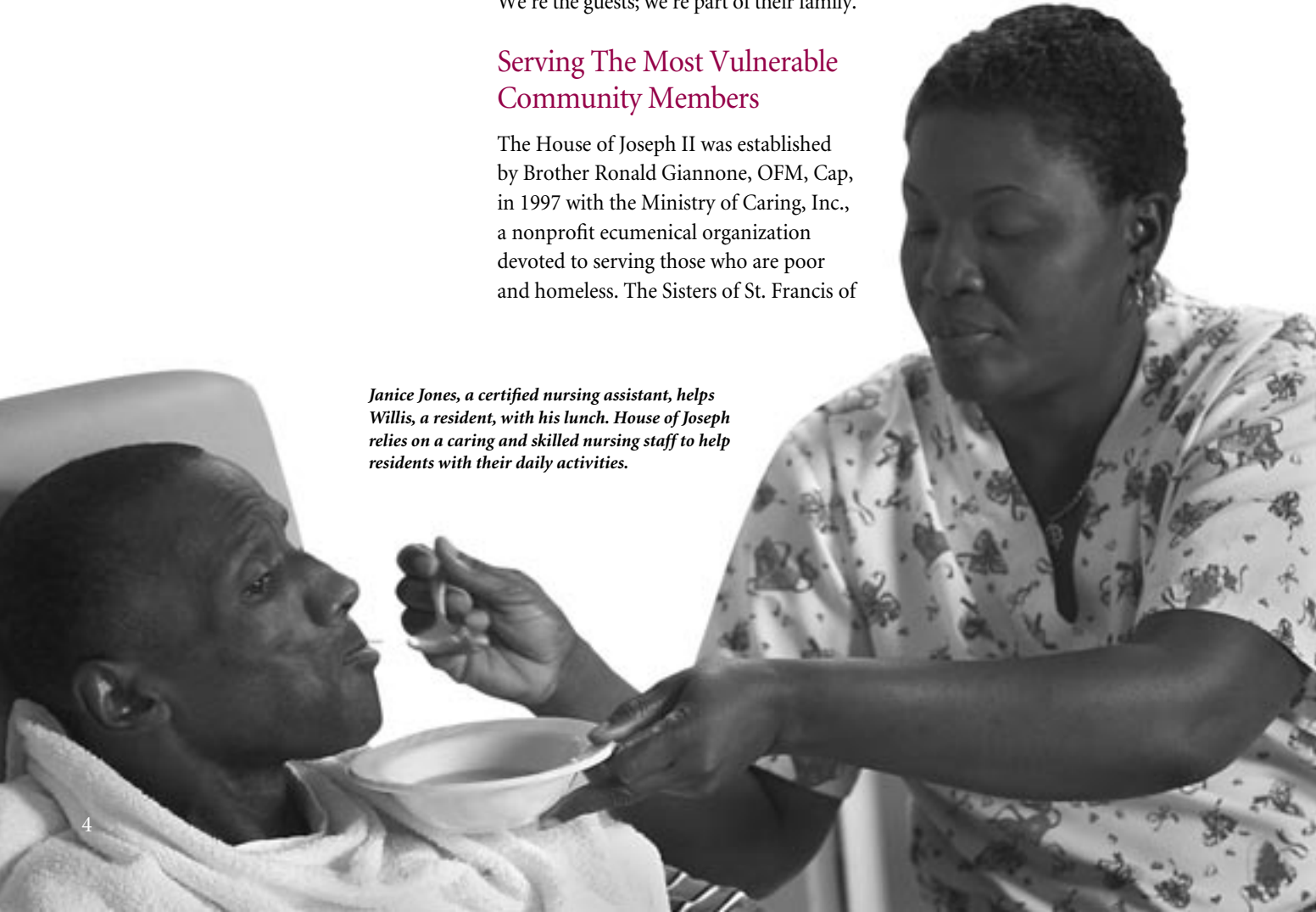
▲ Case Manager Pam Wise reviews paperwork with resident Emanuel.

if we were just sitting on the porch doing nothing,” said Gabrielle. Veronica’s disease had progressed—she was dying—but she made room in her life for Gabrielle. “Even though she knew her time was limited, she took the risk of making a new friend,” Gabrielle recalled.

Ministry of Caring: 1977-2008

- 1977 • Mary Mother of Hope House
- 1980 • Emmanuel Dining Room
- 1983 • Hope House Transitional Residence; Mary Mother of Hope House II
- 1985 • Job Placement Center; House of Joseph I
- 1986 • Arrival of Capuchin Poor Clares
- 1987 • Emmanuel Dining Room South
- 1988 • Mary Mother of Hope House III
- 1989 • Distribution Center
- 1992 • St. Clare Medical Outreach; Child Care Center; Il Cappuccino
- 1995 • St. Francis Transitional Residence; Pierre Toussaint Dental Office; Samaritan Outreach
- 1997 • House of Joseph II
- 1998 • Nazareth House Transitional Residence; House of Joseph Transitional Residence; Immigration Law Office; Guardian Angel Child Care
- 2001 • Sacred Heart Village
- 2002 • Francis X. Norton Center; Bethany House
- 2003 • Il Bambino
- 2004 • House of Joseph III
- 2006 • Sacred Heart Transitional Residence
- 2007 • House of Joseph III re-opens as Maria Longo House

Janice Jones, a certified nursing assistant, helps Willis, a resident, with his lunch. House of Joseph relies on a caring and skilled nursing staff to help residents with their daily activities.





A garden on the grounds of the House of Joseph provides fresh vegetables and flowers to the residence. Brother Robert Perez (left) assesses the summer crop with resident Edward.

Together To The End

Daniel’s greatest fear had been that he would die alone but no one dies alone at the House of Joseph II; that’s the commitment the staff and volunteers make to the residents. When Veronica was dying, Gabrielle and two of Veronica’s other friends took turns keeping vigil. Other residents and staff members joined them. “They all know when someone’s death is near. They all participate,” said Sister Jean. “We go in and sit and talk. We sing; we stand with the family.”

Liz Ramsoram, the nursing supervisor, makes an effort to talk to those who are dying. “We talk about God as they see God, death as they see death, not telling them what we believe but trying to help them come to their own understanding,” she said. After someone has died, the residents, family, and staff hold a service at the bedside. “It lets the other residents see they’re not going to die by themselves either.” The face of the person who has died is left uncovered and, when the funeral director arrives, everyone accompanies the deceased person out of the building. “We never leave the person alone,” said Sister Jean.

Loving Life Back Into People

Each fall House of Joseph II partners with AIDSDelaware.org to sponsor the annual

Delaware AIDS Walk. Residents attend the walk as a show of support. Last year Veronica completed the walk herself. “It was inspirational to everyone,” said Gabrielle who walked with family and friends in memory of Veronica in 2008.

And Daniel? His health is steady now and he feels well enough to go on picnics and outings. “I was afraid no one would be there for me. If I hadn’t gotten in here, I’d probably be dead by now,” he admitted. Instead, he has friends with whom he can enjoy an evening of bingo. He knows the satisfaction of gathering tomatoes from a garden he helps tend. “I know people out there on the streets who need a place exactly like this,” Daniel said. “I think about all those people who don’t have a place to live and are struggling with this disease. There is still a lot of ignorance and stigma. It is a real blessing—going from being homeless to having all this.”

Daniel and his friends found a way to symbolize that blessing. He and a few other residents planted seeds in flowerpots they had painted themselves. “I knew the seeds were going to grow because of all this love here,” Daniel said. And grow they did, their blossoms symbolizing the warm and nurturing spirit that is so much a part of life at House of Joseph II. ■

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

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.

HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- The House of Joseph II relies on public and private funds to provide healthcare, housing, and tender loving care to the men and women who call the residence home. If you would like to help, you can send a check to the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia using the enclosed donation envelope. Your contribution will be forwarded to House of Joseph.
- There are men and women living with HIV/AIDS in every community. If you’d like to be part of the solution, you could begin by joining an annual AIDS walk-a-thon or by volunteering at a local residence or hospice. You don’t need to be an expert or healthcare professional to make an impact. A loving heart and open mind is all it takes.
- Ending AIDS will require sustained action on the part of millions of people around the world. Consider sponsoring a discussion at your church about what you can do together to help address the issue. You could start by viewing the acclaimed film about global AIDS, *A Closer Walk* (www.acloserwalk.com), and then decide what *you* can do to raise awareness and promote a more compassionate response.



Volunteer Tammy Reising (left) calls out the numbers at bingo night, one of many activities at the residence and in the community that residents are able to enjoy.



Volunteer Gabrielle Townsend (left) says, “As Christians we aren’t supposed to turn away.”



Certified Nursing Assistant Juliet Bell helps Melvina, a resident, from her wheelchair into bed.

PEOPLE & PLACES

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.



Members of the congregation's leadership team display the NRCAT banner that hangs outside the motherhouse. (L-R) Sisters Lynn Patrice Lavin, Kate McCarron, Rose Raymond Barba, Virginia Spiegel, Clare D'Auria, and Jeanne Nisley

ASSISI/ROME

Each year our sisters eagerly await the announcement of the lottery—the Franciscan pilgrimage lottery, that is. Sisters who have not yet visited Assisi are invited to submit their names for a drawing. This year our companions who serve on the Companions Advisory Board were also invited to be part of the lottery. The lucky winners were Sisters Marian Leaf and Tina Still and Companions Kathy Boehm, Mary Sprague, and Sandy Bengardino. Although she was not one of the lottery winners, Companion Marge Mikulski also joined the group. Traveling with Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs, our pilgrims traveled to Rome and Assisi, visiting many of the sites that are so precious a part of our Franciscan heritage. For each there were special moments where the spirit of the past came alive in the reality of the present. For some that moment was a visit to the chapel at San Damiano where Francis first heard the call to “Rebuild my Church.” For others, the Portiuncula—Francis’ beloved “Little Portion”—held special meaning. And for still others, the heights of LaVerna where Francis received the stigmata provided an almost mystical appeal. Whatever the site, our Franciscan pilgrims came home touched by and steeped in the beauty of their Franciscan heritage.

PENNSYLVANIA

In June the Sisters of St. Francis joined more than 275 congregations nationwide in displaying an anti-torture banner. The “Banners Across America” initiative, organized by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), allowed local congregations to participate in a nationwide interfaith public witness linked to Torture Awareness Month. The large black and white banner with the message “Torture Is A Moral Issue” was displayed outside Our Lady of Angels Convent, the congregation’s motherhouse in Aston. Seeking to raise awareness about the use of torture and to lift a religious voice of repentance and prophetic witness, the sisters also incorporated an interfaith prayer of recommitment into prayer services during the weekend of June 6-8.



ENGLAND

Over the past two years, teams of sisters have been presenting a series of workshops entitled “God’s Extravagant Love: Reclaiming the Franciscan Theological Tradition.” The program encourages attendees to search the spiritual depths of the Franciscan inheritance; cherish what is unique about the Franciscan tradition; build a common language to communicate this tradition to others; and integrate this theological inheritance into structures of ongoing formation, pastoral practices, and social settings. Thus far the program has been presented throughout the U.S.—as far south as Tampa, Florida; as far west as Tacoma, Washington; and as far north as Newport, Rhode Island. One team even crossed the Atlantic for a program in Dublin, Ireland. In September, another trans-Atlantic trek took Sisters Kathleen Ganiel and Helen Jacobson to the Franciscan International Study Centre in Canterbury, England. The weekend gathered Anglican Franciscans; Secular Franciscans; and Franciscans from throughout England, Ireland, and Scotland. What was particularly interesting about this gathering was that some of the Franciscan sisters attending the sessions will, in turn, be presenting the program themselves in Africa and Asia.

WASHINGTON

In October St. Joseph Family Center in Spokane held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the launching of The Franciscan Place, a new name and a new concept for the center’s spirituality, healing, and hospitality services. The Franciscan Place provides opportunities for guests to focus on themselves as whole beings and to rejuvenate body, mind, and spirit. The center’s environment provides a place of relaxation and renewal for a variety of gatherings—executive day meetings, overnight team-building experiences, week-long group or individual retreats. Whatever the need, The Franciscan Place continues the center’s tradition of hospitality and healing by creating a welcoming place of respite; by fostering the reintegration of mind, body, and spirit; and by living and acting in an integrated way.



PENNSYLVANIA

This year Red Hill Farm, the congregation’s Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in Aston, welcomed a whole new team of farmers. Abygail Wright is the new Head Farm Manager and Mira Kilpatrick the Assistant Farm Manager. They work with a great team: Marcy Magness, full-time seasonal employee; Emily Fero, part-time seasonal employee; and Sr. Josandra Cuicci, full-time seasonal volunteer. Aby’s interest in farming began at an early age when, as a toddler, she helped her grandmother pull weeds and as a young child helped with her mother’s garden. Her friendship with Mira began in high school. Both their friendship and interest in farming continued through their college years with Aby studying environmental science in Amherst and Mira studying biology at Smith College. In 2006 Aby had an opportunity to visit Red Hill Farm and was impressed with what she saw, especially the children’s garden and the fact that the members were so involved. When she saw an ad for a head farm manager, she applied and inquired whether Mira would be interested in the assistant manager position. For Aby every day is a new adventure, whether it involves harvesting, washing, and processing the produce; installing and repairing the irrigation; seeding the field; driving tractors; pushing lawnmowers; or meeting members. And, of course, she has plans for the new season. “Between Mira and me, we have worked on seven farms and visited and volunteered on others. We’ve gathered a lot of information and seen the same things done lots of ways,” Aby explained. “Now we have the opportunity to put the best ideas to work on Red Hill Farm.”



Companions Mary Sprague, Sandy Bengardino, Kathy Boehm, Sister Tina Still, and Companion Marge Mikulski made the pilgrimage to many of the sites connected with St. Francis and the early Franciscan Order. (Not pictured: Sister Marian Leaf)

Sister Patricia Kerezi renewed her vows as a Sister of St. Francis of Philadelphia. In her work with the Ministry of Caring Sister Patricia works with individuals in the shelter system, helping each person advance to the next level of life.



KENYA

Our sisters’ presence in Kenya continues to grow—both on a permanent and on a temporary basis. Sister Julia Mulvihill continues to minister at Nyumbani Children’s Home in Karen, Nairobi, with children orphaned by AIDS. Many of the children themselves suffer with HIV/AIDS and other related medical problems. This summer Sister Victoria Della Valle traveled to Africa to spend her vacation volunteering at Nyumbani. The summer proved an enriching experience for both Sister Victoria and the children and staff at the village. This summer Sister Rose Monica Katusz bade farewell to her ministry in Alaska and joined Sister Frances Cassidy at St. Lucy Raruowa Secondary School in Kandiege, Kenya. Before she left for Africa, Sister



The young women at St. Lucy School in Kenya are ready for a new school term and excited by the arrival of their new books.

Rose used her technology skills to create a website for the school where she will be teaching. To learn more about this school for young Kenyan women, visit www.stlucyskenya.org.

DELAWARE

On August 10 we celebrated with Sister Patricia Kerezi as she renewed her vows. Our Lady of Angels Chapel was filled with sisters, companions, and Sister Patty’s family—all gathered to witness her renewed commitment to living and sharing our Franciscan way of life. A national certified mental health counselor, Sister Patty previously ministered at St. Joseph Family Center in Spokane. This past year she moved east and now works with the Ministry of Caring in Wilmington. Most of her time is spent at Mary, Mother of Hope House I where our sisters have ministered for more than thirty years. Sister Patty’s work involves providing counseling services to residents and clients within the Ministry of Caring. For some that involves dealing with a major crisis; for others it provides help dealing with the challenges of everyday life. For Sister Patty, working with the Ministry of Caring provides opportunities to meet people from many different backgrounds and to work in an environment where the Franciscan spirit is alive and well. “Our Mission Statement is lived out daily in the various shelters, transitional residences, and other places of outreach within the Ministry of Caring,” she explained.

WASHINGTON, DC

Franciscans have been in the forefront of caring for persons who are poor and marginalized for more than 800 years. Today that thrust has become the focus of the Franciscan Action Network (FAN), a grassroots advocacy organization of groups and individuals inspired by the witness of Sts. Francis and Clare of Assisi. The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia are institutional members of FAN and are represented at meetings by Sister

Miriam Eileen Murray. In addition, many of our sisters are individual members. FAN members focus on peacebuilding/peacemaking/conflict resolution, caring for persons who are poor and marginalized, and care for creation. Because these issues involve both domestic and international implications, FAN’s advocacy efforts include U.S. government and Washington, DC-based institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Organization of American States. To learn more about FAN, visit www.franciscanaction.org.

PENNSYLVANIA

The Sisters of St. Francis were well represented at the Convention for the Common Good by six sisters, one companion, and one lay employee. More than 800 persons gathered in Philadelphia in July, representing various faith traditions from across the U.S. Their goal was to create a grassroots movement to work for the “common good” in American political life. Focused on maintaining a non-partisan thrust, convention planners invited politicians from both parties. Pennsylvania Senator Bob Casey attended one session; Senators Arlen Specter and Barack Obama video-conferenced messages. Speakers included Dr. Shawn Copeland, Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ; Bishop Walter Sullivan, and Father Jim Greenfield, OSFS. Using the Preamble to the Constitution as a framework, the convention refined and approved the Platform for the Common Good. Panel discussions focused on several major areas of the platform: globalization, trade and the economy, healthcare, war and peace, immigration, and ecology. Regional groups discussed action steps that would utilize the platform as a means of focusing the 2008 elections on these issues. Even table decorations focused attention on the concept of the common good. Each centerpiece consisted of a collection of food items which were later donated to Philabundance, a Philadelphia-based organization that provides for those who are poor.



Representing the Sisters of St. Francis at the Convention for the Common Good were (Seated L-R) Sisters Joan Schmal, Dominica LoBianco, and Kate O'Donnell; (Standing L-R) Associate Director of Corporate Social Responsibility Tom McCaney, Companion Mary Ellen Blackwell, Sisters Marie Lucey, Miriam Eileen Murray, and Nora Nash.



AWARDS SPOTLIGHT

While we appreciate the many gifts of our sisters, we are especially pleased when those gifts are recognized by the broader community. The following sisters recently received special awards:

Sister St. Joseph Brennion
President’s Volunteer Service Award

President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation, Pennsylvania

Sister Ellen Eugene Callaghan

(On behalf of Native Ministry Training Program)

2008 Distinguished Service Award

National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, Alaska

Sister Joan Dew
Reading Assist Institute Volunteer Appreciation Award

President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation, Wilmington

Sister Rose Marie Lynch
Spirit of Nursing Excellence Award

St. Mary Medical Center, Pennsylvania

Sister Maureen Stout
Reading Assist Institute Volunteer Appreciation Award

President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation, Wilmington

Sister Corinne Wright
Green Power Award

Citizens for Pennsylvania’s Future, Pennsylvania



Longtime friends and colleagues Sister Donna Jo Repetti (third from left), OSF, and Linda Michalski (standing) talk with members of O Ambassadors, a service club of the Benedictine Academy in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Listening with the Heart

“WE WORK WITH THE NOTION OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BUILD COMMUNITY.”

Campus Ministry Program Prepares Young Women for Life

The campus ministry program at Benedictine Academy offers students like Crystal Orr (below) the chance to belong to service clubs like Sisters on a Mission. Crystal is a peer mentor and works with younger students. She holds a Question Ball that helps spur discussion among freshman club members.



Each morning 190 young women and their teachers gather in the gym at the Benedictine Academy in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and spend a few moments together in communal prayer. “We tell them, ‘Don’t forget this wonderful experience,’” said Principal Sister Germaine Fritz, OSB, about the time students spend in contemplation. “‘At any time in your life you can go to that quiet place. You’ll find strength there.’”

For the young women at the academy, the daily practice of prayer offers a refuge from the conflicting tugs of adolescence and from strains at home as well. The high school serves students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, many from families hard-pressed to make ends meet in today’s tough economy. Nearly eighteen percent of families in Elizabeth live below the poverty line (compared with 11.8 percent in New Jersey as a whole). Many residents are first- and second-generation immigrants

from Columbia, Portugal, Puerto Rico, and elsewhere; sixty-seven percent speak a language other than English at home. About half of the students at the Benedictine Academy receive financial aid.

Bringing this rich mixture of young women together in harmony has not always been easy. But the Benedictine Academy’s unique religious education program has given them a place to meet on safe ground. “We work with the notion of what it means to build community,” Sister Germaine said. “We work with the Benedictine idea of hospitality, of greeting each person as a guest—as Christ—and of seeing the Divine in ourselves and in each other.”

Finding Common Ground

The academy’s campus ministry program was founded six years ago by Sister Donna Jo Repetti and Linda Michalski. The two long-time friends and colleagues are responsible for the religious education classes for all

grades, as well as for prayer services, liturgies, and school service projects. While the school is Benedictine, Sister Donna Jo is a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia and Linda is a Third Order Dominican lay woman. The three traditions come together in “a comfortable blending, each one enriching the spirituality of the other, all rooted in the common gospel,” said Linda.

The campus ministry program is founded on prayer and the gospel but it doesn’t stop there. Students are encouraged to follow the Franciscan precept to be the God’s instrument of peace, to move prayer into action.

“We talk to them about what is happening to our brothers and our sisters in other parts of the world,” said Sister Donna Jo. “It draws them out of themselves and that’s when the connections get made.”

Linda and Sister Donna Jo teach their classes by grade and over the years their students have formed service clubs and outreach groups. “Through these groups we spread



Barbara Diogo (left) is an O Ambassador, a service club at the school. She is interested in the environment and tries to educate students and neighbors about the hazards of plastics.

the good news of God,” said Anayah Hall. Anayah graduated in June 2008, attends college now, and plans to go on to law school. She belonged to Sisters on a Mission, the senior girls’ club, a group that started out together as sophomores. Over the years they have cooked food for the local shelters, volunteered at a pre-school, and helped the victims of Hurricane Katrina and other disasters. Eventually they took on the role of mentors to the younger girls at the school.

“Sometimes when you come in as a freshman, you’re scared; you don’t know what to do,” Anayah said. “We met once a week. We talked, laughed, and had fun. You could bring anything to that group—from what was going on at home or at school—and it stayed in that group. It was safe. It’s like we had our own little family.”

Like family, the girls’ didn’t always get along, not in the early days. “They fought like cats and dogs at first,” said Linda Michalski about the girls who eventually founded Sisters on a Mission. “So we took them to the wilderness.” The wilderness trek was made possible by a grant from the Sisters of St. Francis.

Linda and Sister Donna Jo accompanied the students on a guided wilderness course that challenged them to work as a team. “They discovered they had to work together to survive. And they discovered their own strengths. They walked away from that experience with one heart and one mind,” Linda said. After that, the girls found it easier to put their differences aside and began to mature in their spiritual and academic lives. “They became the leaders in the school. The younger girls would say, ‘We want to be like them,’” Linda remembers.

Engaged with the World

That’s what Sister Donna Jo had hoped for all along. “From the beginning it was about bringing the students to the peace of the Lord and standing with them as they develop warm, compassionate hearts and become people of courage,” she said. “We want them to see they can make a difference in the world—to see that we’re all one family globally. That’s the passion.”

Sister Donna Jo talked with her students about issues of peace and justice in her classroom, including human trafficking, an issue that the Sisters of St. Francis have actively addressed in recent years. The O Ambassador Club participates in the O Ambassadors Program—a joint project of Oprah’s Angel Network and Free the Children. The O Ambassador Club is designed for young people who want to make a positive difference in the world. Free the Children is the largest network of children helping children through education.

“I learned that the city of Elizabeth is a high human trafficking area,” said Nicole Andre, a junior and an O Ambassador. “I would never have thought that. But because of the airport and the port of Newark, I guess that’s where they’re brought in—girls and boys as young as thirteen from very poor families. This is actually happening with girls my age! I was in shock.” The O Ambassador Club is raising money to build a school in developing countries such as Africa, Asia, or Latin America where uneducated young girls are especially at risk. Club members hope that having educational opportunities will enable girls and boys to avoid entrapment by individuals and groups who promise jobs but instead force



Teamwork: School President and Principal Sister Germaine Fritz (above) works closely with Vice-President Ken Jennings (below) to enrich the education of students at the academy.



them into slavery and prostitution abroad. It costs approximately \$8500 to build a one-room school house and the O Ambassadors are excited to have reached approximately 60% of their goal. In addition, a team of documentary filmmakers working with the O Ambassador Club has recently completed a short film about human trafficking.

Sister Donna Jo’s students decided to research environmental issues as well. Sophomore Barbara Diogo is also an O Ambassador. Litter and garbage are big problems in her neighborhood. She wanted to help her neighbors understand the environmental impact of household waste and she decided to start with plastics. “Did you know it takes more than 500 years for certain types of plastics to biodegrade?” she said. “It harms Earth and humans, too.” Barbara is continuing to study the problem and plans to work with other students to produce a pamphlet about the harmful environmental

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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.

HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Half of the students who attend Benedictine Academy receive financial aid. Many come from hard-working families that are just getting by in today’s economy and could never afford to send their daughters to the academy without support. If you would like to contribute to student scholarships and financial aid, and make it possible for young women to receive a top-quality private Catholic education, please send a check to the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia using the enclosed donation envelope. Your contribution will be forwarded to Benedictine Academy to support scholarships and financial aid.
- Enrollment is down in Catholic schools everywhere and teachers and administrators must get by with fewer and fewer resources. Consider volunteering at a school in your community or call to inquire about other ways you may be of help.
- In many communities parishes are losing younger people. Consider partnering with a local parochial school to strengthen bonds between younger and older parishioners. Sponsor a field trip or picnic, mentor young people one-on-one, or support a sports team with dollars and game attendance.

Anayah Hall (right, center), a member of Sisters on a Mission, talks with other senior students after home room. (Small photo, below) Student Crystal Orr and Ken Jennings, the academy’s vice-president, address students gathered for the daily morning assembly. The students start the day with prayer, announcements, and the Pledge of Allegiance.





Linda Michalski talks with student members of Sisters on a Mission, a service club. Sister Donna Jo Repetti listens from the doorway. The two women co-direct the academy's campus ministry program "God's hand keeps us together in our ministry," Linda says.

Listening with the Heart

continued from page 9

effects. "I guess I'm kind of scared of what's going to come. People seem to act only when it gets really bad," she explained. "I've always wanted to try to help. This is a great opportunity. Maybe I can do something."

What Students Take with Them

"God's voice is hard to hear in our busy lives," said Sister Germaine Fritz. But at Benedictine Academy, students are invited to quiet their hearts and minds each morning in prayer and to dwell in the embrace of the Divine love within. It's the sense of God's unconditional love and a commitment to prayer in action that Sister Donna Jo and Linda hope their students will carry with them when they leave school.



Two students pray the Hail Mary together in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary.

"It starts here with each other," said Sister Donna Jo. "But then we move forward with this—out of the building and into the local community."

What each young woman gathers and learns during her time at Benedictine's is hers to keep. Crystal Orr, an active member of Sisters on a Mission, also served as Student Council president. She graduated in 2008. "The time we shared together playing and doing events—that's what I'll always miss," she said. "We were from really diverse races and cultures and we got to know each other; we united ourselves. We learned not to pass judgment on each other." The students tried to make a difference in an often troubled and divided world. "We really wanted to do it," she said. "It was very important to all of us."

Sister Donna Jo's and Linda's efforts have indeed awakened in their young students a spirit of service and the willingness to know and respect others. "They love the students and the students know that," said Sister Germaine. "They've taught them to listen with the ear of their hearts." ■

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

Focus

SHARON COLEMAN

When Sharon Coleman was growing up, her family prayed together each evening:

*Heavenly Father, we give thanks for our food
And remember the hungry.*

*We give thanks for our home
And remember the homeless.*

*We give thanks for our friends
And remember the friendless.*

*We give thanks for our freedom
And remember those enslaved.*

*May these remembrances stir us to service
so your gifts to us may be used for others. Amen.*

More than just words, the prayer was a reality in the lives of Peter and Dorothy Coleman, Sharon's parents. Peter participated in the march in Selma in the 1960s and was involved in both early ecumenical movements and racial relationships in Tacoma. Dorothy worked untiringly for foreign students in remedial education. Both the prayer and the example instilled in their children a deep commitment to social justice.

Sharon's own dedication to social justice has been part of her whole life. She brought her dedication for social justice to her work with the Coca Cola Company where, as Director of Communications and Information Programs and Scientific and Regulatory Affairs, she worked on both national and international levels. Representing Coca Cola, Sharon

served as assistant treasurer, branch coordinator, and deputy executive director for over twenty-five years at International Life Scientific Institute (ILSI). ILSI was founded in 1978 in response to government and food industry concern over the need for more and better scientific and technical information on the safety of food and food ingredients. ILSI administers programs that combat two nutritional deficiencies common in developing countries—nutritional anemia and vitamin A deficiencies. They also administer a program enabling American food companies to assist companies in the developing world to produce and distribute food and food products.

Sharon's first contact with the Sisters of St. Francis was as a student at St. Leo High School in Tacoma—a relationship that has continued over the years. She served as chair of Catholic

Community Services and Intercommunity Housing in the Northwest. Currently she serves as board chair of Francis House in Puyallup, Washington. Sister Patricia Michalek, Director of Francis House, described Sharon's efforts in developing a fundraising model for Francis House that tripled income and enabled Francis House to continue functioning. "Sharon really demonstrates her own belief in Francis House," said Sister Patricia. "When she talks to other agencies, she represents Francis House in such a positive manner that it helps everyone at Francis House really believe in themselves. She has been a real blessing to our work of providing for families who are poor, oppressed, and marginalized."



In her spare time Sharon loves playing with her two nieces, Dotty and Emma, sharing her home with friends and different organizations that promote social justice, and staying in touch with her friends around the world. Whenever she has international friends visiting, the flag of their countries fly next to the flag of the United States.

Sharon's relationship with the Sisters of St. Francis extends to lighter moments as well. When she built a new home for her parents and herself, Sharon made it very clear that her home was also a place for the sisters to feel welcome, especially the sisters from St. Ann's. She knew that the inclusion of an elevator would allow them an opportunity to enjoy the beautiful views of Commencement Bay. In addition to the "anytime" visits, Sharon extends special invitations to the sisters to visit on St. Patrick's Day and during the Christmas season, to view the tall ships coming into the bay, or just to relax and enjoy a movie.

Sharon retired early because, as she explained, she "wanted to do more than help sell more Coke." In addition to allowing her time to care for her aging parents, early retirement has also provided Sharon with the time, skills, and money to make a real difference. "Everything seems to have come together in my life to give me total freedom and the resources to do whatever I want," she explained. "And that is primarily to help those who are homeless, destitute, and economically poor."

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Everyone has within a piece of good news.

— Anne Frank (adapted)

See more good news at www.osfphila.org

A Thank You 50 Years in the Making

In her ministry as archivist, Sister Helen Jacobson receives many requests for information. Some ask for historical information about a specific time in the congregation's history or the history of a particular ministry. Others are from individuals hoping to reconnect with a sister who has influenced their lives. Recently, however, Sister Helen received a request that truly touched the hearts of all involved and resulted in a special "Thank You" visit that dated back almost fifty years. The request came from Mary Low who wanted to contact the sisters she remembered from St. Francis Home and Holy Trinity School in Roxbury, Massachusetts. When Mary was five years old, her mother died. Mr. Low felt he was not able to care for three young children. Mary's mother had converted to Catholicism shortly before her death so it was to the priests at Holy Trinity Parish that Mr. Low turned for help. "They found us a 'home' at St. Francis," Mary recalled. "I vaguely remember being told that, even though my mom had died, I now had twenty-six moms!" Mary and her brothers, Philip and Daniel, spent five years at St. Francis, leaving there only after their father remarried. In recent years, Mary felt more and more

the need to reconnect with the sisters who had played such an important role in her early life. "Truly my years at the home were the happiest," Mary explained. And for Mary those recollections urged her to find a way to say "Thank you." An internet search on Holy Trinity Church revealed a reference to St. Francis Home. Mention of the Sisters of St. Francis led her to the congregation's website and a contact form requesting to "Reconnect with a Sister" led her to Sister Helen. Although Mary could not remember the names of all of the sisters from both St. Francis and Holy Trinity, she did recall a few. Sister Helen's search of archival records resulted in a complete list and revealed that only two were still living: Sisters Mary Theresa Cloonan and Miriam Grace Devlin. Plans for a visit were quickly initiated. Mary, her friend Gil, and son Joey met with Sisters Helen and Mary Theresa at Our Lady of Angels Convent. Mary brought flowers and placed them on the graves of the sisters who had so enriched her early years and arranged for a tree to be planted in their memory on the motherhouse grounds. At Assisi House Mary also visited Sister Miriam Grace. That visit resulted in a meeting with a niece of Sister Michael Marie, another of the sisters that Mary remembered from St. Francis. Mary's "Thank You" to the sisters carries with it a promise of ongoing connections. Noticing that the sisters at Assisi House enjoy puzzles, she suggested that she might donate some of those belonging to her family. She also looks forward to future visits with Sisters Mary Theresa and Miriam Grace.

Today Mary Low lives in Maryland and works as a senior analyst at 3M Health Informations Systems.



Mary Low has many fond memories of life at St. Francis Home and Holy Trinity School.



In Memoriam

Sister Rachel Elias
5/16/08

Sister Antonina Bongiorno
(Sister Matilda of the
Blessed Sacrament)
6/9/08

Sister Mary Alice Ashton
(Sister Robert Ann)
6/12/08

Sister Ann Elizabeth Bowler
6/29/08

Sister Alice Catherine Rohe
(Sister Raymond Therese)
7/20/08

Sister Honorata Alcarese
7/28/08

Sister Gerald Marie Smith
8/17/08

Sister Rose Veronica Leisner
8/28/08

Sister Dennis Ann Curran
9/4/08

SENIOR SPOTLIGHT

Our senior sisters gift us with their wisdom, joy, and generosity.

The ingenuity of our retired sisters turned plans for a simple sand sculpture project into the creation of "Our Franciscan Village," a beautifully landscaped depiction of structures named after St. Francis' earliest companions. **Sisters Angela Erhard, Rita Francis Fiefus, Francis Anne Harper, Regina Anne LaSorte, Paula Marie MacDonnell, Viola Marie O'Keeffe, Helen Young, and Carol Zurlo** worked on the project organized by Assisi House activity coordinators **Mary Stover** and **Janay Vancleve**. The sisters mixed flour, sugar, and water, heated it to a pudding-like consistency, and then mixed it with sand. Using molds purchased from a local dollar store, they created sculptures of varied shapes and sizes and arranged them to form a number of larger structures.

The sisters turned the names of the early Franciscan brothers into creative names for their sculptures. Each building is unique. Two castle-like towers stand in the center

of the village, each flying the Italian flag. Also holding a central position in the village is San Damiano Square, easily recognizable by the crucifix rising from its steeple. Clare's Inn is decorated with beautiful colored stones while Brother Leo's Lodge is encrusted with shells. Atop Brother Giles' Cottage perches a small bird, reminiscent of the many swallows that glide through the town of Assisi. Lady Jacoba, who made almond cookies for St. Francis, would have been right at home in Franciscan Village—baking cookies in her own bakery. One can visit Brother Bernard's Bungalow or stop for a snack in Brother Masseo's Café. Although one of the structures underwent a partial collapse before it reached completion, our sister architects were undismayed. They simply identified it as Brother Rufino's Castle Ruins and enclosed it with a wooden fence. A blue river meanders through the village, its shores dotted with miniature sea shells. At two points in its journey through the village, the river is crossed by bridges, each unique in structure.

Of course, no village is complete without residents. Hand-sculpted miniature figures people the Franciscan village—one sporting a wide-brimmed hat, another a cape, and still a third lifting her face to the sun. Another villager is accompanied by his faithful dog. The sisters hope to display the village until October, adding a special touch to their St. Francis Day celebration on October 4.

Envisioning the Future with Hope

More than 300 members of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia gathered for their congregational chapter from June 22-28. The congregational chapter, while it is in session, is the primary authority of the congregation and aims to revitalize the spiritual, communal, and ministerial life of the congregation. Setting direction for the future, the 2008 General Chapter adopted the following statement with accompanying directives for implementation: "Claiming our identity as prophetic Franciscan women and opening ourselves to God's radical hospitality, we move forward communally and personally by choosing to live more deeply, intentionally, and hospitably into the truth of our mission statement." The chapter culminated in the election of a new leadership team that includes Sister Esther Anderson, congregational minister; Sister Marijane Hresko, assistant congregational minister; Sister Anne Amati; Sister Donna Desien; Sister Ruth E. Goodwin; and Sister Annette Marie Lucchese.



The newly elected leadership team, (L-R) Sisters Anne Amati, Ruth E. Goodwin, Donna Desien, Annette Marie Lucchese, Marijane Hresko, and Esther Anderson, assumed office on September 12.

Good NEWS

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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.

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Abygail Wright and Mira Kilpatrick check out Red Hill Farm's crop of blackberries. Shareholders enjoy picking their own berries and wild flowers when they come to collect their week's supply of organic vegetables. Read more about the farm on page 6.



Much like the girls in this 1940s religion class, the young women who attend Benedictine Academy (Page 8) gather knowledge of the Gospel and learn to respect others. They are taught to listen with open hearts and to use their unique gifts to make a difference in the world.



Good NEWS

◀ *Over the past thirty years, many of the Sisters of St. Francis have served with the Ministry of Caring in Wilmington, Delaware. Sisters Jean Rupertus, Assunta Prunty, Miriam Eileen Murray, Kathleen O'Donnell, Bernadette McGoldrick, Kathleen Pollard, and Patricia Kerezsi continue that ministry of service today. Read the story of Sister Jean Rupertus's ministry at House of Joseph II on page 3.*