

Volume 14.1 Spring 2011

Good NEWS

A Publication of THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

Also in this issue:

- St. Francis de Sales:
A Jewel of a School
- People & Places
- Sharing the Good News

Avila Retreat Center

Experiencing God's Embrace

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

Loving What We Do

Recently, I viewed a film entitled *For the Love of It* featuring Dewitt Jones, a National Geographic photographer. In his opinion, we all have the ability to love what we do by honoring our passion, making a contribution to those around us, and expressing gratitude. He believes that, while it is not always realistic for people to do what they love, it is still possible for them to love what they do. The film proceeds to feature people engaged in diverse occupations who work for the love of it and who serve as an inspiration to others.



**Sister Esther Anderson, OSF
Congregational Minister**

Hopefully, we all know people who come to work with a positive attitude and who are so enthusiastic about what they are doing that they inspire people around them. I recently encountered two receptionists in a hotel. They had to provide hospitality for over 200 stranded travelers who had experienced numerous delays due to inclement weather, mechanical difficulties, and lack of airline personnel. Late that night and early the following morning, the receptionists demonstrated extraordinary hospitality to each traveler. It was obvious that they loved their work.

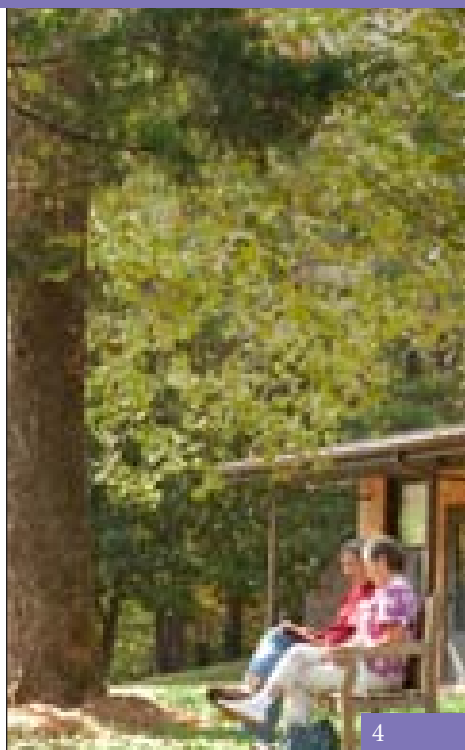
In his Rule, St. Francis of Assisi spoke of work as a grace, a gift from God. Franciscans engage in many types of work. It is the way of working, and not the work itself, that expresses the Franciscan spirit. We seek to form a circle of reciprocal relationships based on mutuality and equality while striving for excellence. We also add a measure of fun.

Good News highlights two of the Sisters of St. Francis who love what they do. Sister Mary Farrell, principal of St. Francis de Sales School, creates a hospitable learning environment based on Franciscan values. The school is a beacon of excellence that has been recognized with a number of awards. At Avila Retreat Center, Sister Damien Marie Jackson welcomes all with southern hospitality and nourishes the bodies and souls of people who come to seek God.

May God bless us with the gift of loving what we do!

Peace and all good!

*Sister Mary Farrell, OSF
Sister Damien Marie Jackson, OSF*



4



12



10

VOLUME 14.1 SPRING 2011

INSIDE *Good* NEWS CONTENTS

Point of View.....2

**Avila Retreat Center:
Experiencing God's Embrace ... 4**

Often called one of Durham North Carolina's "best kept secrets," Avila Retreat Center provides a quiet, reflective environment for anyone who seeks nourishment for the body and soul. All are welcome, regardless of their faith tradition. Many ordinary people have found God there.

Written by Elena Perri

Photography by Andrea Cipriani-Mecchi

People & Places10

**St. Francis de Sales: a Jewel of a
School 12**

Carrying on a more than 100-year Franciscan heritage with the school, Sister Mary Katherine Farrell serves as principal of St. Francis de Sales School in Lenni, Pennsylvania. The success of the school hinges on an award-winning academic program and a commitment to being on the cutting-edge of technological advances.

Written by Elena Perri

Photography by Andrea Cipriani-Mecchi

Sharing the Good News16

Focus.....18

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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: Nancy and Robert Cabello enjoy the picturesque and peaceful setting at Avila Retreat Center in Durham, North Carolina. The couple is among thousands of visitors who travel to Avila every year for spiritually enriching programs, good ol' Southern cooking, and friendly Franciscan hospitality.

The lighted trails and gazebos provide rich spiritual ambiance and a feeling of warmth even at night.



Welcoming the stranger is important to Sister Damian and her staff who personally greet everyone who visits Avila Retreat Center. "I love the people and the staff treats everyone so special," Sister Damian says.



Sister Damian gives a presentation on the Book of Ruth and encourages participants to share their reflections on Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. Preaching is a favorite part of her ministry at Avila Retreat Center.

Avila Retreat

“AVILA HAS EVOLVED FROM BRICKS AND MORTAR AND UNDERBRUSH TO BECOME A SPIRITUAL MAGNET IN THE COMMUNITY.”



A meditation trail, labyrinth, gazebos and hammocks are among the unique features of the retreat center. The property also includes a cemetery for stillborn babies. Sister Damian helps plan funeral services for the grieving families.

What do you get when you combine Franciscan hospitality and spirituality with Southern home-cooked meals? A recipe for a successful retreat center! Thousands of people each year come to the Avila Retreat Center in Durham, North Carolina, to enjoy this fusion of nourishment for the body and soul. Often called one of “Durham’s best kept secrets,” Avila hosts hundreds of affordable retreat programs each year, including married couples and engaged couples retreats; conference, guided, or directed retreats; parish meetings; workshops; business seminars; and renewal days. The center provides a quiet, reflective environment for individuals of all faith traditions.

Sister Damian Marie Jackson has served as Avila’s director for 27 years. Following a career in education, she transitioned into retreat work after

attending a 40-day retreat and deciding to pursue this new ministry. She served for three years at a retreat center in Baltimore, Maryland, before accepting the position of director at Avila in 1983.

Bishop F. Joseph Gossman, spiritual leader of the Diocese of Raleigh, had long dreamed of a diocesan-sponsored site where people could go for retreat. When Sister Damian arrived in Durham, she had her own vision—a retreat environment that would provide a peaceful and prayerful experience for all who visited, regardless of their religious background. Inspired by the Franciscan concept of “hermitage,” Sister Damian’s vision included building cottages among the numerous oak, pine, and holly trees on the 51-acre site, once a Carmelite monastery. “I hired a retired Army officer to help me,” she said. “I designed the cottages—which can accommodate 54 people—on the hill with front and back patios.”

continued on page 6



Center

Experiencing God's Embrace

Cottages provide a comfortable environment for retreatants during their visits at Avila Retreat Center. Visitors also enjoy plenty of delicious comfort food, and some of the recipes used at the retreat center are included in a cookbook called "Heavenly Feasts."

“[AVILA IS] A SIGN OF THE PLACE OF THE LORD IN OUR LIFE, IN OUR JOURNEY, IN OUR STRUGGLE. MANY ORDINARY PEOPLE LIKE YOU AND ME MEET GOD HERE.”

▼ *Sister Cam takes her daily walk around the prayer labyrinth. Volunteers helped create the labyrinth which is used for meditation, prayer, and reflection.*



► *Women gather in the chapel to pray the rosary. Prayer services are held in the chapel and Mass is also celebrated there.*

continued from page 4

After the initial renovations were complete, Bishop Gossman blessed the buildings and the grounds. At the dedication, he credited Sister Damian with “rescuing” the property and described Avila as “a sign of the place of the Lord in our life, in our journey, in our struggle. Many ordinary people like you and me meet God here.”

Later renovations provided a hermitage for anyone who wants a more private stay. The property has a mile-long meditation trail, a prayer labyrinth, meditation garden, and three screened gazebos. While there is plenty of opportunity for quiet reflection, the center also has meeting rooms and dining rooms where retreatants can socialize.

Retreats for Sisters of St. Francis

Among the thousands of Avila retreatants each year are sisters and companions of

the Sisters of St. Francis who have been traveling to Durham for their annual retreat since 1990. The staff enjoys hosting these out-of-town visitors for what they call “Sister Week.” “We look forward to that retreat every year,” said Kathy Biss, program coordinator at the center for 25 years. “The sisters are just wonderful—I love them all.” And for Sister Damian, the week has special significance because it provides an opportunity to share with her own sisters. “It makes me so happy to enjoy the sisters in community,” she explained. “We’re just on fire with the Franciscan charism. That’s what I love.”

To facilitate the journey, Sister Damian charts a bus for the six-hour ride from Baltimore to Durham. When the sisters and companions arrive at the retreat center, they are welcomed with dinner and a party with live entertainment. Among those welcoming the visitors and partici-

▼ *Nancy and Robert Caballo have a special connection with Avila. The couple not only attends retreats at Avila. They were also married there last summer.*



pating in the weeklong retreat each year are Franciscan Companions in Ministry Connie Allegood, Patricia Nielsen, Marie Perrone, and Marie Ranalli who have been volunteers at Avila for 25 years.

Hospitality and Environment: A Winning Combination

Sister Helen St. Paul Herberich, who lives at Assisi House and has made 15 retreats at Avila, is one of the Franciscan sisters who makes the long journey to North Carolina. She finds in Avila a place where the spirit of hospitality and the picturesque environment create an atmosphere that is particularly conducive to prayer. “I love the atmosphere there,” she said. “The people who run the center are very personable. They’re always there to greet us en masse

when the bus arrives and to wave us off when we leave.”

This sense of hospitality is something that Sister Damian has emphasized from the beginning. “In giving birth to the retreat center, I wanted it to be a house of hospitality,” she said. “If there were a neon sign blinking on and off, it would say, ‘Hospitality.’” Bishop Michael Burbidge, who succeeded Bishop Gossman in 2006, has hosted gatherings for priests at Avila and is well aware of that spirit of hospitality. “The staff is so welcoming,” he said. “The spirit of hospitality, which I know is an important ministry for the Franciscans, is very evident there.” The bishop attributes Sister Damian’s sense of ministry as one factor that helps to create that feeling of home. “You can tell this is her passion,” he said. “She sees it as a place of service. She will always say, ‘Welcome to *your* retreat house.’ That’s the way she approaches her ministry.”



Danny Murphy, maintenance worker, rings the bell to call retreatants to Mass, prayer services, and meals at Avila. The staff at Avila are a close-knit group who contribute to the welcoming atmosphere at the retreat center.

For many people, that spirit of hospitality is what brings them back to Avila year after year. “About 82% of the people come back,” Sister Damian said. “One retreatant wrote, ‘Avila has evolved from bricks and mortar and underbrush to become a spiritual magnet in the community.’” Welcoming strangers is at the heart of Sister Damian’s

ministry and it brings her joy. Her innate love of people and her natural warmth move her to offer visitors the best that Avila has to offer.

Joining Sister Damian in welcoming the stranger is Dominican Sister Carol Ann May—affectionately known as Sister Cam—who has served as assistant director, music minister, and liturgist at the center for 25 years. “The one thing that people have grown to love and look forward to is that we are always there to meet and to greet people with a hug or a smile,” Sister Carol said.

Surrounded by Natural Beauty

Many people return to Avila because of its picturesque natural environment. “No matter what day of the week you’re there, it’s beautiful,” said Sister Joan Dew, one of the Franciscans who come to Avila for her

continued on page 8



Avila Retreat Center provides people with the opportunity to be alone with God and also to pray together with others. Here, retreatants gather outside for a Native American prayer and blessing of the earth.

► Volunteers like Francis Ruckert and his wife Lee (below) are vital to the mission of providing retreats “suitable for everyone” at Avila. Together with the cook, Phyllis Clayton (right), they help serve food and then wash dishes afterward. Sister Damian says volunteers have helped with everything from painting to creating the prayer labyrinth and meditation trail on the property.

“IN GIVING BIRTH TO THE RETREAT CENTER, I WANTED IT TO BE A HOUSE OF HOSPITALITY. IF THERE WERE A NEON SIGN BLINKING ON AND OFF, IT WOULD SAY, ‘HOSPITALITY.’”

continued from page 7

annual retreat. “You have to experience Avila to appreciate it. From your comfortable cottage, you can look out at the beauty that surrounds you.”

Sister Helen St. Paul enjoys the quadrangle which has a fountain, benches, and a statue of the Pietà. “The fact that it is enclosed makes you feel cloistered,” she said. “Those four walls are like the arms of the Lord keeping the world at bay while you’re there.”

Bishop Burbidge also attributes the environment with being conducive to prayer and reflection. “As soon as you walk onto the property, you know you’re on sacred ground,” he said. “It’s a great gift to the diocese where people can go and be alone with the Lord in such a beautiful setting.”

A Ministry, Not a Job

And what about those Southern home-cooked meals that are part of Avila’s recipe for success? They’re all part of the loving service provided by Avila’s staff—service that seems to flow from family serving family. “The staff brings the love and the compassion and they treat everyone as special,” Sister Damian said. “To them, this isn’t a job; it’s a ministry. Everything they



do is out of love, whether they’re mowing the lawns, making a cake, or cleaning a bedroom.”

That love is evident to those who attend retreats at Avila and retreatants recognize Sister Damian’s role in creating that sense of family. “Sister Damian treats everyone with respect— from the people who work in the kitchen to those who do yard work,” Sister Joan said. “There’s a community spirit that she brings to her ministry. You can definitely feel part of the family.”

Sister Carol also acknowledged Sister Damian’s influence in creating and nourishing the center’s family-like atmosphere. “Sister Damian is extremely gifted in being

present to people,” Sister Carol explained. “She makes a point of seeing every staff person during the week. People know they can reach out to Sister Damian and she’ll be there.”

Creating that sense of family is important to Sister Damian’s ministry. “We are an extended family,” she said. “We pray together. We laugh together. We cry together. We celebrate together. We have the success that we have because of the staff.”

Volunteers in Service

Helping to round out the Avila family are the approximately 150 volunteers who donate their time to Avila each year. For



HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Spend some time with God by attending a retreat or spiritual program at Avila Retreat Center, (919) 477-1285, www.avila-retreat-center.com. You'll reap the benefits of spiritual nourishment while supporting the retreat center. It's the ultimate win-win! If you can't make it to Avila, perhaps there is a retreat center in your community.
- Volunteer to serve meals or help in the kitchen at a local retreat center. The center staff will appreciate the help and you'll feel good about contributing to a positive experience for the retreatants.
- Support those who can't afford to attend a retreat by sending a check payable to the Sisters of St. Francis Foundation using the donation envelope. Indicate that the donation is for Avila Retreat Center.

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.

one group of volunteers, the experience is an opportunity to both give and to receive. Since the center opened, Sister Damian has welcomed first-time offenders doing court-ordered community service. "It's an important part of our ministry," she explained. "It gives us an opportunity to really live hospitality, compassion, empathy, and service. I never tell anybody they're doing community service—they're volunteers. They appreciate that because they feel they're treated with respect." Sister Damian pointed out that the community-service volunteers have served food, washed dishes, painted, and done electrical and plumbing repairs. "This program has saved us a significant amount of money," Sister Damian said, "But the biggest reward is that some of them come back to volunteer."

Spiritual Companion to People of All Faiths

Although the Diocese of Raleigh sponsors the retreat center, Sister Damian welcomes people of diverse religious backgrounds—another aspect of her ministry where she is

able to both give and receive. The experience has helped her learn more about different faith traditions. "There are very few differences among us," she said. "We're just taking a different path to the same place." Sister Damian's ecumenical outreach has deepened her own spirituality and gives her the opportunity to share the teachings of the Catholic Church and of St. Francis. "We're in the South where a lot of people have never met a sister," she explained. "This ministry has given me the opportunity to dispel a lot of myths about Catholics and nuns and it has opened the doors to ecumenical dialogue."

For Sister Damian, serving God's people by providing them with opportunities and an environment where they can meet and enjoy their God never gets old. "I'm as excited as I was when I began—and I think that is a gift," she said. "God has given me the grace to do this ministry. I'm excited about being a Franciscan and I love being a spiritual companion to God's people." ■

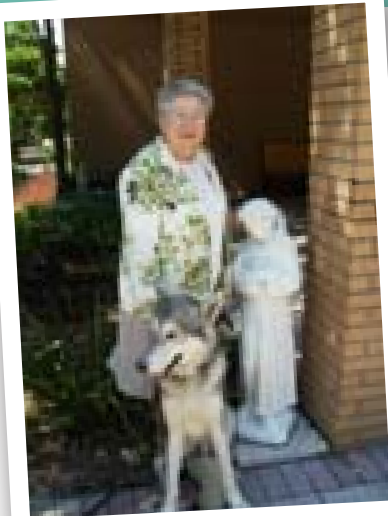
For more information or comments on this article, contact goodnews@osfphila.org.

► *If you want to get away from it all, Avila has the place for you—a hermitage where you can spend time alone with God and nature. When she designed the hermitage and cottages on the property, Sister Damian thought about how St. Francis would like to pray.*



PEOPLE & PLACES

► Sister Elizabeth Murphy was able to use the unexpected visit of a tame wolf to illustrate the story of St. Francis and the wolf of Gubbio and to remind the children of their responsibility to care for nature.



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.

▼ Walkers gathered in Wilmington's Rockford Park for the 2010 AIDS Walk Delaware, intent on raising funds for the House of Joseph II.



WASHINGTON

A number of our sisters on the west coast were present when the Inland Northwest Chapter of the American Red Cross recognized the congregation for its 120 years of humanitarian work with orphans, developmentally disadvantaged children, and teen mothers in eastern Washington. Spokane's mayor issued a proclamation of thanksgiving for the congregation's work and Denise Ashcroft, Director for Major Gifts for the Red Cross Chapter, presented the Humanitarian Award. "As we near the Universal Children's Day observance on November 20," Ms. Ashcroft said, "it is well for us to remember that in Spokane we have among us outstanding examples, such as the Sisters of St. Francis, who epitomize international goals of compassion for the world's children, regardless of their circumstances."

FLORIDA

The children at St. John Vianney School in Orlando had an unexpected—but appropriate—visitor for St. Francis Day. A woman, who actually did not know about the feast or the story of Francis taming the wolf who terrorized the people of Gubbio, visited the school — accompanied by her wolf. The visit provided the perfect opportunity for the children not only to learn about the story of St. Francis, but also to appreciate the beauty of the wolf, a creature which normally would have instilled fear in them.

▼ Our sisters were among those gathered in Spokane's Fairmount Memorial Park. The large commemorative wreath honored the congregation's humanitarian service rendered during our 120 years in the Spokane area.



DELAWARE

Once again in late fall, the Sisters of St. Francis, along with students from Archmere Academy, Neumann University, Padua Academy, the Ministry of Caring staff, and many families and friends joined together to raise \$10,660 as part of the annual AIDS Walk Delaware. The funds will benefit House of Joseph II which provides permanent housing for men and women in the advanced stages of AIDS who have no other housing option. Sister Jean Rupertus, program director at House of Joseph II, was among those helping to organize the event.



◀ Sisters Jean Rupertus (seen here) and Julia Keegan visited La Pequena Comunidad, one of several sites commemorating the lives and death of the four churchwomen in El Salvador.

PENNSYLVANIA

Activities are in full swing at Anna's Place, the congregation's hospitality drop-in center in Chester. A collection at the 2009 Sisters of St. Francis golf tournament established the beginnings of a fund to purchase a van. Monies from a grant provided the balance and the van was purchased in October 2010. A variety of healthcare opportunities are also now available for visitors to Anna's Place, including presentations arranged by Crozier-Chester Hospital Outreach and visits by Widener University nursing students. Guests at Anna's Place also participated in St. Katharine Drexel Parish's health fair—many of them donating blood—and were also able to visit the free eye clinic.



On December 8 Anna's Place hosted a celebratory high tea. During the celebration, Monsignor Joseph McLoone blessed the long-awaited new van. When computer classes resumed in January, guests at Anna's Place were able to reserve a place in the van to get to class.

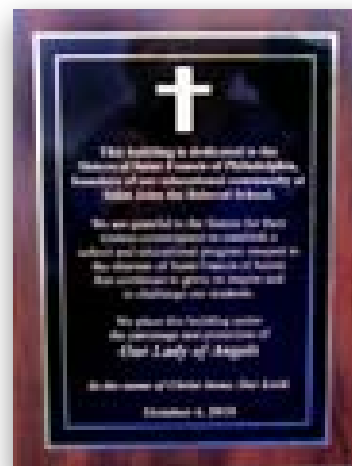
EL SALVADOR

In December Sisters Julia Keegan and Jean Rupertus traveled to El Salvador with a 50-person delegation from SHARE to honor the 30th anniversary of the martyrdom of four churchwomen: Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clark and Ita Ford, Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel, and lay volunteer Jean Donovan. The group visited the site where the bodies of the four churchwomen were found. There they celebrated Mass in a small chapel built by the local people. Other highlights of the trip included meeting with members of the Organization of Salvadoran Women for Peace and enjoying a performance by a folkloric ballet on the history of El Salvador and persecuted communities. "No words can describe the experience of walking with the Salvadoran people for one week," Sister Julie said. "It is transforming."



PENNSYLVANIA

Congratulations are in order for Sister Patricia Kerezsi who received the Alumni Association Recognition Award from Neumann University. A 2002 graduate, she received the award because "her work is the work of God and her dedication to Neumann is profound." The statement announcing the award commented: "The impact of just reading what Sister Patty has accomplished and her absolute humility is powerful in and of itself. . . . she gives of herself unselfishly and embodies the core values of the institution." The statement went on to imagine the founders of Neumann thanking Sister Patricia, not only for choosing Neumann but also for using that education in the service of others.



A special plaque recognized the contributions made by the Sisters of St. Francis to St. John the Beloved Parish.

DELAWARE/MARYLAND

October found two parishes in the Diocese of Wilmington giving special recognition to the long-term service rendered by the Sisters of St. Francis. Immaculate Conception Parish, Elkton, opened a pre-school program for four-year-olds—a move which necessitated the need for more classroom space. These tiniest students remained in the school building and a modular building on the school property became home to the kindergarten and first-grade children. Recognizing the 80 years that the Sisters of St. Francis have served the parish in one capacity or another, Father Joseph Piekarski blessed and dedicated the new building, designating it as the Franciscan Center.

A few miles to the north, St. John the Beloved Parish also honored the congregation by the dedication of the new Our Lady of the Angels Early Childhood Building. St. John the Beloved School was founded 50 years ago and was staffed by the Franciscan sisters. Although Sister Jo Ann McPolin is now the only sister ministering in the school, the Franciscan charism continues to flourish there.

“IT’S IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN TO LEARN
ALL THEIR SUBJECTS BUT I THINK THE VALUES
THEY LEARN ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT. THAT’S
WHY MY GIRLS ARE THERE.”



Helen Kolicius, president of the St. Francis de Sales Home and School Association, says parents are actively involved with the school's fundraising and marketing programs. Her daughters Joy (left) is in eighth grade, and Annie is in fifth grade.

St. Francis de



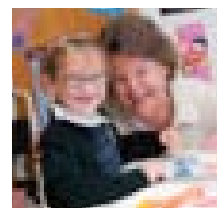
In costume to help set the mood, fourth graders work on their Glogs, an interactive web tool that allows the students to create multimedia web pages. The current project that teacher Arlene Petranani (center) is assisting with is on the sinking of the Titanic.



A student uses one of the SMART Boards to play an interactive color game in Spanish. Sister Mary initiated the SMART Board project a few years ago and each classroom is now outfitted with one. Teachers participated in workshops to learn how to use the SMART Board technology to create a more interactive learning environment which the students seem to love.

Sales: A Jewel of a School

Winding down New Road in Lenni, Pennsylvania, it's easy to overlook St. Francis de Sales School which sits low in the valley along the road. While the school may not be noticeable at first glance, it has served as a beacon of excellence in the community with its challenging academic curriculum and strong emphasis on Franciscan values. In addition to an exceptional academic environment, St. Francis De Sales is special because of the tradition of building relationships within the community. The parents and school staff work together to promote a positive, relaxed learning environment for the children, an effort that has been enhanced by the presence of the Sisters of St. Francis who have staffed the school since 1895. Carrying on the rich Franciscan heritage is Sister Mary Katherine Farrell who has served as principal of St. Francis de Sales for 18 years.



A Franciscan Presence: Then and Now

The presence of Franciscan sisters is important to parents who are considering where to send their children to school. "When we were trying to pick a parish, we were really looking at the schools as well. We found the Franciscans at St. Francis and thought, 'This is where we belong,'" said Helen Kolicus whose daughters are in the fifth and eighth grades. "It just felt right." In addition to academics, Helen appreciates the Franciscan values that are taught during the school day. "It's important for children to learn all their subjects but I think the values they learn are equally important. That's why my girls are there."

Helen, president of the Home and School Association, said she wanted her daughters to be in a safe environment where families are involved in the school. "The school is unique because the parents and the teachers are involved," she said. "I just love the education they get there. There is something special going on in that building."

The school's success is interwoven with the history of the Sisters of St. Francis and Our Lady of Angels Convent. It began in 1895 when, at the request of Reverend Edward O'Reilly, three sisters from Our Lady of Angels Convent came to teach the children. According to the school history, the founding sisters, Sister Mary Philomena Lambrecht, who

continued on page 14

Principal Sister Mary Farrell is right where she loves to be—surrounded by students at St. Francis de Sales School. She says she looks forward to greeting the kindergarten students as they enter school each day.



◀ Integrating technology into the curriculum and classroom activities is a vital part of teaching students at St. Francis de Sales. A SMART Board is an interactive white board that, when used with a computer and large video display, makes the surface of the display become touch sensitive to allow it to be used to control the computer. Sister Stephanie, who has taught at the school for 25 years, joined other teachers in learning how to bring this state-of-the-art technology to her eighth grade math class.



▲ Students enjoy small class sizes at St. Francis de Sales School and the teachers take the time to help students succeed academically. The dedication of the teachers has been essential to the school's success.

continued from page 13

served as the superior in those early years, and Sisters Rita Gould, Flamina Dunn, and Carola O'Rourke, rode a horse and buggy to the school which is about three miles from the convent. When it snowed, the sisters navigated the hilly roads on a sleigh. Students later attended classes at Our Lady of Angels Convent but in 1915 they resumed classes in the basement of St. Francis de Sales Church which had four partitioned rooms. To address the increasing enrollment, the school was built at its present location in 1925. A complete renovation the school took place in 1977 after a fire caused extensive damage to the interior of the building.

"I'm standing on the shoulders of the sisters who have been through this place since the early days," Sister Mary said. "The sisters and this community, along with the alumni of St. Francis de Sales, can feel very proud of the success of this little parish school."

Preparing Students for the 21st Century

While the school has undergone many transformations in its 115-year history, the most significant one in recent years

has been the integration of cutting-edge technology into the classrooms. Sister Mary said that the school recently completed the installation of SMART Boards in all the classrooms. Funding for this project came from the Home and School Association and private donors. Teachers use SMART Board technology to introduce and reinforce skills in all the curriculum areas. Sister Mary added that seventh and eighth grade students will use Skype, an Internet-based software program, to communicate with students in New Jersey and to work on school projects with one another.

"Today's children are born into a technological world," Sister Mary said. "That's why we work so hard to engage them in 21st century skills that will enrich their lives. We may be located in this little hidden valley but we're very much up to date with where education is now and where it is going." This willingness to be on the cutting-edge in faith formation as well as academic rigor and relevance is one of the reasons why Sister Mary has twice—in 2006 and again in 2010—received the Distinguished Principal of the Year Award from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Office of Catholic Education. "I was humbled by receiving the award," said Sister Mary, who also received the John Neumann Alumni

Award from Neumann University in 2007. "It was more of a team effort because we were trying to develop an excellent curriculum for our students. The entire school celebrated that award together."

That celebration continued when Senator Dominic Pileggi, representative for Delaware and Chester Counties, recently recognized the school for its academic excellence and was able to secure a \$45,000 donation from Aetna in Educational Improvement for Tax Credit scholarships.

Commitment to Building Success

Sister Mary acknowledges that others share credit for the school's success. Equally important is the long-term commitment of the faculty. "The teachers are invested in the school because they have been here a long time," Sister Mary said. "It's one of our calling cards." She noted that many of the teachers are graduates of Neumann University or other Franciscan schools. Sister Stephanie Unger, who has taught math full-time at the school for almost 30 years, and Sister Margaret Van Wagenen, who tutors students a few days a week, enhance the Franciscan presence at the school.

While academics are vital to the success of the school, recruiting and retaining students remains an ongoing priority for Sister Mary. "St. Francis has always been small and we've been fortunate in continuing that tradition," she said. To maintain enrollment, she focuses on providing financial support to parents so they can send their children to St. Francis de Sales. Through a grant from the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, Sister Mary was able to start a tuition assistance program called Partners in Education. Through this program, those who have experienced the benefits of a Catholic education are encouraged to make a donation to help Catholic families who want their children to attend school at St. Francis.

Students: The Heart of a Principal's Ministry

The emphasis on academics and the efforts at recruitment have one focus—the students. The students are the heart of the school and the heart of Sister Mary's ministry. "They're the whole reason St. Francis exists and the reason why our place is so special," she said. She keeps a bench outside her office so she can sit there and greet the children as they come in. "The kindergartners are right there and they start my day," she added. "This job has so many hats but the happiest time for me is when I'm present with the children."

Jean Binkley, secretary at the school for 23 years, sees Franciscan values in action while working with Sister Mary in the principal's office. "The children just love coming in here," she said. "There is no fear about coming into this office. They know they're going to be treated nicely." Jean

initially planned on working at the school only until her two daughters graduated but she stayed because of the pleasant work environment. "The camaraderie among the faculty and the administration was a plus for me," she said. "If I didn't have the opportunity to work with Sister Mary, I'm not sure I would still be here."

Sister Mary's presence among the students has also impressed eighth-grader Alexa DeAnnuntis. "Sister Mary makes sure it's a warm and welcoming environment," Alexa said. "She guides the school and makes sure everything goes right. We don't know what we'd do without her." Alexa also appreciates the generosity of the teachers. "Every teacher here is helpful and they'll take time out of their day to make sure you get the best experience," she added.

Sister Mary considers it a privilege to further the Franciscan mission of "rebuilding the Church" one child at a time. "When I think of it, 18 years is a lot of Church!" She added. "When I think of the many years the Sisters of St. Francis have been present here—that's really a *lot* of Church!"

In her ministry Sister Mary said it is the day-to-day ordinary things that give her the opportunity to see Jesus Christ in the heart of another—like putting a Band-Aid on an injured knee after recess, sharing a pretzel at snack time in the kindergarten, listening to an upset parent, or celebrating with a teacher who just heard that she's a grandmother for the first time. "I often think of the words of St. Francis, she explained. "Preach the Gospel at all times—when necessary, use words." ■

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

HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Many Catholic schools like St. Francis de Sales depend on the generosity of donors to provide tuition assistance to students. Consider participating in the school's Partner in Education program which accepts monetary donations, matching gifts from employers, and memorial and honorary gifts. For more information, contact Sister Mary Farrell at (610) 459-0799.
- Share your talents by volunteering at a Catholic school in your community.
- Encourage family members and friends to enroll their children in a Catholic school.
- Express support for school voucher programs or educational tax credits which give parents the opportunity to send their children to better performing schools in their community.

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Sister Mary loves interacting with students, whom she describes as "the reason St. Francis exists and why our place is so special."



Students learn about the Gospel and Franciscan values every day which is why many parents choose to send their children to St. Francis de Sales School. The Franciscan spirit, Sister Mary says, is "part of everybody's heart here."



As principal, Sister Mary wears many hats, including school nurse, when she needs to help a student who scraped her knee in the schoolyard.



SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Everyone has within a piece of good news.

—Anne Frank (adapted)

See more good news at www.osfphila.org

Advancing Education in Africa

The Sisters of St. Francis and Neumann University are part of the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC), a joint effort of four U.S. religious congregations and universities. African countries are rich in vocations but the sisters have received only an elementary education. ASEC's goal is to assist African sisters in gaining the educational levels needed to assume administrative roles in institutions that serve their people. To this end, ASEC supports the Bigwa Sisters Secondary School in Morogoro, Tanzania. Several hundred African sisters representing 22 congregations have studied there. The current enrollment of 300 students includes 50 sisters. Thanks to ASEC's efforts, the school has a new dining hall and a science building is under construction. In the past the school has experienced a high turnover of administrators and demonstrated a low success rate on the national exams. In an effort to bring greater stability to the school and its programs, ASEC asked Franciscan Sister Ann Michele Zwosta to collaborate as mentor with Bigwa's newest principal, Sister Theresia Kessey. Although the mentoring project will be ongoing via email, Sister Ann spent two weeks in Morogoro, visiting the school and learning about the country, the educational system, and the students. One current goal is to find ways to improve student proficiency in English—the language in which all secondary subjects are taught and in which the national exams are administered.



▲ Although Tanzanian schools have a well-defined national curriculum, the Bigwa School lacks curriculum guides for teachers and sufficient texts for students. For example, they have 10 copies of the physics “text book” (a 75-page paperback) for a class of 50.

◀ Before Sister Ann Michele left the Bigwa school, Sister Theresia and the sisters gifted her with flowers and an African style skirt.

Reconnecting 40 Years Later

A chance conversation at Assisi House led to a 40-years-in-the-making reunion for Sister Regina Anne LaSorte. Asked by Sister Helen Veronica Hamill if she had ever worked at St. Francis Hospital in Wilmington and if she had ever worked with preemies, Sister Regina Anne responded “Yes” to both questions. She recalled a set of twins and one very sick preemie named JP. As the conversation continued, it turned out that JP had not only survived but that his mother, Jamie Forren, was a “friend of a friend” of Sister Helen. Contacts were made and JP, his mother, and four of his eight children arrived at Assisi House for a grand reunion.

Janie Forren, JP Forren, and four of his eight children visited with Sister Regina Anne LaSorte at Assisi House.





In Memoriam

Sister Kathleen Anne Carroll
(formerly Sister Mary Cyrilla)
September 21, 2010

Sister Marie Genevieve Stauffer
September 24, 2010

Sister Alice Francis O'Connor
September 27, 2010

Sister Paula Marie MacDonnell
October 16, 2010

Sister Mary Gertrude DeLeonardis
October 21, 2010

Sister Anna Cosgrove
(formerly Sister John Lawrence)
December 1, 2010

Sister Kathleen Frances Carroll
(formerly Sister M. Brian)
December 5, 2010

Sister Rita Mary Mich
January 12, 2011

CELEBRATING JUBILEE

AS SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

Congratulations to Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia celebrating milestones in religious life! Join with us in congratulating them on many years of service to the people of God as Sisters of St. Francis.

80 years
Professed 1931

RUBY JUBILARIAN

SISTER MARY APOLLONIA MORELLI

75 years
Professed 1936

DIAMOND JUBILARIANS

SISTER RITA JOSEPH KNAPP

SISTER COLUMBA MOYNIHAN

SISTER CATHERINE GEORGINE PORTNER

70 years
Professed 1941

DIAMOND JUBILARIANS

SISTER REGINA JOSEPH DEARDEN

SISTER ELIZABETH DOYLE

SISTER ANN JOSEPH HARTMAN

SISTER MARTHA JOSEPH ROONEY

SISTER KATHLEEN TOBIN

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

50 years
Professed 1961

GOLDEN JUBILARIANS

SISTER ELISE BETZ

SISTER ANNE LEO BROADHURST

SISTER IMMACULEE BURKE

SISTER FRANCES CASSIDY

SISTER GERALD HELENE CONNELLY

SISTER MARY ELLEN FARLEY

SISTER ROSE BERNADETTE FITZSIMONS

SISTER BARBARA MELINA FURST

SISTER KATHLEEN THERESA KELLY

SISTER MARY LONERGAN

SISTER ANGELA JOSEPH LOWE

SISTER ROSEMARY NAPOLITANO

SISTER NORA MARY NASH

SISTER MARGUERITE O'BEIRNE

SISTER MAUREEN STOUT

SISTER PATRICIA WICKENHEISER

SISTER CAROL ANN ZURLO

25 years
Professed 1986

SILVER JUBILARIAN

SISTER PATRICIA JANE WALSH

Fall Break at Neumann University

Phase II of the exchange program between Neumann University and Texas A&M International University took place in October. As their NU counterparts had done in Laredo, the TAMIU nursing students had prepared community assessment projects which they presented in Dr. Nancy Laplante's Community Health Nursing class. Attendance in various classes in NU's nursing program was coupled with onsite clinical visits and ministry experiences. In Delaware the students visited the Center of Hope in Newark and spent time meeting with persons suffering with HIV/AIDS at the House of Joseph II in Wilmington. Back in Pennsylvania, they visited Project Salud of La Comunidad, a community health center in Kennett Square. In Philadelphia they met with Sister Leslie Birks whose ministry at St. Francis Inn involves providing meals for people who are homeless. Tours of the Neumann campus and the congregation's motherhouse—and, of course, of Philadelphia—completed the week for the TAMIU students.

▼ TAMIU nursing students, Delta Garcia, Damien Herrera, Pricilla Lujan, Rosario Pacheco, and Belinda Pena, together with their faculty advisor, Professor Gonzalez, were part of an student exchange program arranged by Neumann University's Dr. Nancy Laplante.



Focus

JULIE INTERACTS WITH EACH SISTER WITH A DISTINCT INSIGHT INTO HOW THE SISTER FEELS AND HOW TO HELP HER MAINTAIN HER PERSONAL DIGNITY.

► *As an administrative assistant at St. Ann's, Julie's smile and her spirit of Franciscan hospitality enable her to adapt to the needs and individual personalities of each sister.*



Sisters Martha Joseph Rooney and Bernadette Gardiner often check in with Julie with questions they know only she can answer.

With long brown hair streaming behind her, Julie Jacobs rushes to answer the doorbell. As administrative assistant at St. Ann Convent in Tacoma, Washington, she knows just what instructions to give to the generator repair person who stands at the door. Upon returning to her office to resume her payroll tasks, she finds one of the sisters waiting with a request for assistance with the computer. Twenty minutes later, Julie returns to her office tasks.

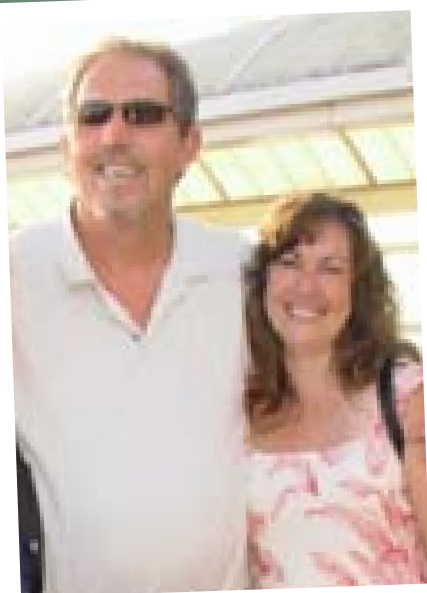
Multi-tasking is just one of the skills that Julie brings to her role at St. Ann's. She is also a capable can-do person who pitches in when an emergency requires—cooking a meal for an absent cook, driving sisters to doctor appointments, and helping to clean up water leaks. Julie has a clear sense of what it means to be a member of the team that keeps a small facility like St. Ann's humming along smoothly.

It is the sisters at St. Ann's, however, who are at the heart of Julie's work. She interacts with each sister with a distinct insight into how the sister feels and how to help her maintain her personal dignity. "I love them all," Julie says. The sisters, on the other hand, not so much through their words as through their actions, have helped Julie understand Franciscan values.

One of the most difficult aspects of Julie's job is saying goodbye when a sister dies. Each sister is a part of Julie's extended family; the loss takes its toll on her. As an important part of the funeral process, Julie helps develop the program for the ceremonies, shares her memories of the sister who has died, and assists in preparing a delicious lunch for everyone after the burial. These are her ways of sharing in the grieving of the local community.

Her children grown, Julie shares an empty nest with her husband Jeff, a local contractor whose beautiful work fills her with pride. She loves joining him on outdoor adventures. Their experience on a recent white-water rafting trip vividly reflects her team spirit at St. Ann's Convent—always doing her part to the best of her very competent ability.

◀ *Julie and her husband Jeff are exploring new interests—camping, fishing, boating—now that their children Erik, 23, and Meaghan, 21, are grown and have moved out of the family home.*



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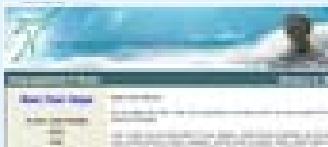
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SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA



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Help Make a Difference.

Today we embark on our first national campaign. The need is to raise four million dollars to support our sisters in retirement as well as to support our ministries.

We are happy to announce that we are well on our way to reaching our goal but we need your support. As we begin the home stretch of the campaign, we need to raise an additional 1.1 million dollars. Are you willing and able to help?

Please complete and return to the **Sisters of St. Francis Foundation, 609 S. Convent Road, Aston, PA 19014-1207**

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Art on Display

For more than a month, Sister Matthew Cola's paintings were on display at the Pequannock Township Public Library in Pompton, New Jersey. Her showing includes a wonderful collection of original landscapes, seascapes, and still life paintings. The story behind the special showing was part of a wonderful article in the local New Jersey newspaper. Check it out at <http://www.osfphila.org/http%3A/%252Fwww.osfphila.org/inthenews>.

Pilgrimage to the Sacred Sites of France

The Franciscan Spiritual Center in Milwaukie, Oregon, is hosting a pilgrimage trip to France in June. In keeping with the mission of the Sisters of St. Francis, this trip is a chance for the center to live the mission by providing different environments, experiences, and resources for all people on their life journey. The center's vision is to support and deepen the contemplative spirit of each person. This trip to France in witness of sacred sites is one avenue the center provides that enables people to meet God in both stillness and activity. Get more information and join us by visiting www.francisSpCtr.com.



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▲ Since the 1800s, St. Francis de Sales School has been a pillar of academic excellence in the Lenni community. That dedication was evident in the 1950s and remains that way today. See article on page 12. The school's Prayer of Promise—"All good and gracious God, I promise to practice the nonviolence of your son, Jesus. Help me to carry out his values and promote peace through my words and actions this day"—shows that the Franciscan values have true meaning in the hearts of the students there.

