

Volume 15.1 Spring 2012

Good NEWS

A Publication of THE SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

CASA Program Gives **Children a Voice**

Also in this issue:

- Franciscans Spread the News of God's Extravagant Love
- People & Places
- Sharing the Good News

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

Hope for the Future

When I began my teaching ministry as a young sister, a mentor gifted me with a poster. It illustrated a diverse group of children holding hands in a circle with a calligraphed quotation from President John F. Kennedy stating: “Children are the world’s most valuable resource and its best hope for the future.” A glance at the poster, particularly on challenging days, provided a constant reminder of the intrinsic value of each child.

Frequently the daily paper and evening news report that many children are not valued and suffer from the often hidden epidemic of child abuse and neglect. Child abuse occurs in every socioeconomic stratum, across cultural and ethnic lines, within all religions,



**Sister Esther Anderson, OSF
Congregational Minister**

and at all levels of education. While the statistics are astounding, our hearts are more deeply touched when we experience a face behind the statistics. In this Good News, we hear first about Vanessa lying cold and neglected in her crib, then later developing into a thriving child when provided with a loving and caring home. Sister Donna Fread, a court appointed advocate or CASA, is assigned to look out for Vanessa’s best interests so that she does not get lost in the legal or social service system. This intervention makes all the difference in the life of a little girl.

We also learn about a retreat adapted for children from a broader program, God’s Extravagant Love, which aims to share the beauty and richness of the Franciscan tradition. Sister Rose Mary Eve Holter uses a variety of creative methods to make God’s love real to children. She models that the most important things in life are “caught, not taught.” In Sister Rose Mary’s adaptation of the program, children experience what it means to enter into God’s heart and to be surrounded with love. This experience leads them to reach out in love to others.

In his letters, St. Paul makes it quite clear that no matter what we accomplish or how spiritual we get, if we fail to love, our efforts are worthless. The greatest legacy we can leave our world is to love children so that they in turn can love God and others.

By Sister Esther Anderson, OSF



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Being a voice for abused and neglected children is the heart of Sister Donna Fread's job as a court appointed special advocate or CASA in Pierce County, Washington. She advocates for what is best for the children, making sure they have a voice in court—a very important role that helps to ensure a safe and permanent home—whether that means returning to the parents or being adopted.

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The God's Extravagant Love program shares the beauty and richness of the Franciscan theological tradition with the wider Church. The program reminds participants that they are cocreators with God and helps them recognize God's Spirit within. This powerful program leads people to share God's goodness with others.

Written by Deb Litman
Photography by Andrea Cipriani-Mecchi

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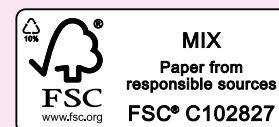
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The purpose of *Good News* is to further the Gospel mission of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia by sharing the good news of the congregation with our friends, family, companions, and sisters. Through this publication, we hope to share the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


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

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On the cover: Vanessa and her great-aunt and adoptive mother, Linda, share a story. Linda and her husband Keith adopted Vanessa in July of 2011 after attempts to reunite the girl with her birth parents proved unsuccessful. During the process of evaluating the best custody situation for Vanessa, Sister Donna Fread served as her court appointed special advocate or CASA.



Sister Donna Fread talks with Linda. "Donna showed such compassion toward everyone involved in the situation while making sure the focus always remained on what was best for Vanessa," said Linda. "I felt fortunate to have her involved."

CASA Program Gives **Children**



a Voice

“IT WAS A COMFORT KNOWING
THAT THERE WAS SOMEONE IN
THE SYSTEM WITH VANESSA’S
BEST INTERESTS AT HEART.”



In May of 2009, Keith and Linda* became great aunt and uncle to a beautiful baby girl named Vanessa. Because Vanessa’s parents—Linda’s niece, Jessica, and Jessica’s husband, Andrew—are both developmentally disabled, Linda had worried during her niece’s pregnancy about the young couple’s ability to care for a baby. As the new family left the hospital after delivery, Keith and Linda wished Jessica and Andrew well and offered the new parents support and assistance should they need it. Two days later, Keith and Linda’s daughter came to Jessica’s home to drive mother and baby to a doctor’s appointment. When repeated knocking at the front door brought no response, the young woman let herself in to find both of Vanessa’s parents asleep and Vanessa lying uncovered in her crib, cold and listless. The daughter wrapped Vanessa in blankets and rushed her to the hospital where doctors told the family that Vanessa had lost an alarming amount of weight and was suffering from advanced hypothermia. Once Vanessa’s health was stabilized, Child Protective Services were called. Vanessa went home with Keith and Linda.



Sister Donna Fread gives a voice to some of the most vulnerable children in Pierce County, Washington, in her role as a court appointed special advocate (CASA).

It was not long after that incident that the family met Sister Donna Fread who had been selected by the Pierce County Washington Juvenile Court to serve as Vanessa’s court appointed special advocate or CASA. As Vanessa’s CASA, Sister Donna was tasked with looking out for Vanessa’s interests

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*Last names were removed to protect the identity of certain individuals.



“I AM ALWAYS LOOKING OUT FOR THE CHILDREN BUT I ALSO TRY TO EMPATHIZE WITH THE PARENTS WHO ARE STRUGGLING.”

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as the case progressed through the court system to determine who could provide the best and safest home for the little girl. Sister Donna got to know Vanessa and her family through a series of visits to Keith and Linda’s home—sometimes with the biological parents present and sometimes without. She interviewed and observed Keith and Linda, as well as Jessica and Andrew, and checked on Vanessa to make sure she was thriving.

It quickly became apparent that helping Vanessa’s parents gain the necessary skills to care properly for their daughter wasn’t an easy task. Although Keith and Linda offered to have Jessica stay with them so she could be with Vanessa, she chose to leave. Both Jessica and Andrew failed to attend court-mandated parenting classes. During their supervised visits with Vanessa, they showed no interest in their daughter. They didn’t hold her or try to interact with her. “Their attention was always on themselves.

They simply weren’t able to go beyond that,” explained Sister Donna. “After a while it became clear that Vanessa could never be safe with her biological parents.”

In July 2011, Keith and Linda adopted Vanessa after her parents chose to terminate their legal parental rights. “These were parents with issues impossible to correct,” explained Sister Donna. “That was sad. But at the same time there was some joy. Vanessa is so loved, so well cared for. She is in a home where she really can blossom.”

Keith and Linda believe that Sister Donna played a big role in bringing about a positive outcome in what, for all parties, was a heart-wrenching ordeal. “Through the whole process she wasn’t advocating for us. She wasn’t advocating for Jessica and Andrew. It was clear that she was there for Vanessa,” said Keith. “It was a comfort knowing that there was someone in the system with Vanessa’s best interests at heart.”

The CASA Program

According to Sister Donna, being a voice for abused and neglected children is precisely what is at the heart of the job of a CASA. Most of the children for whom Sister Donna advocates are in the juvenile court system as a result of drug addiction or domestic abuse on the part of their parents. Many of the children are in foster care. They need a voice in court in order to find a safe, permanent home—whether that means returning to a parent or being adopted. The CASA volunteer provides that voice, sharing with the court both what the child wants as well as recommendations about what the advocate believes is in the child’s best interest. “For me, being a CASA is a way of putting our congregational commitment statement into practice—being a healing, compassionate presence in our violent world, especially with women, children, and those who have no voice,” said Sister Donna.



▼ Judges sit on the bench of the Pierce County, Washington Family Court for two year terms before rotating out. This relatively short cycle helps prevent burnout associated with hearing these emotionally charged cases and fosters judicial objectivity.



◀ Parents attempting to regain custody of their children often face a myriad of challenges in demonstrating that they can and will provide a safe home for their children. Many must go through drug rehabilitation as well as domestic violence and parenting education. In addition, they must show consistency and reliability. For these reasons, cases generally last two years or more.



Sister Donna presents her findings during court proceedings. She reports on whether parents are complying with court orders, whether she believes they are making the necessary progress toward reunification with their children, and what she thinks is in the best interests of the children for whom she advocates.

Sister Donna's job as a CASA starts with investigation of the child's situation and needs. She visits the child at home and at school. She brings together all concerned parties to help create a situation in which the child's needs can be met. She advocates for the child. She monitors whether the orders of the court, as well as the plans of the child protective services agency, are carried out. And she provides judges with written reports on how cases are progressing. "I think the CASA's role is to push the system to work as it should," said Julie Lowery, dependency supervisor at the Pierce County Juvenile Court. "CASAs really have the potential to change outcomes for children because they are looking at the situation from the child's point of view."

Sister Donna carries a heavy caseload for a CASA and is willing to take on sibling

groups, something that is rare because of the complexity and time commitment those cases require. That commitment is making a real difference in the lives of children. "It is really remarkable the sheer number of children for whom Sister Donna has advocated and the care she takes with each case," said Julie. "She is calm and intelligent. She is a good facilitator and she gets to know each child and each situation very well."

Bringing Families Back Together

According to Sister Donna, the focus of a CASA is always on reunification with biological parents if possible. Although the road to that result is often a long one, Sister Donna believes it is one worth pursuing if at all feasible. "Cases usually last about two years because it takes that long for parents

to show that they can be consistent in their ability to care for their children," said Sister Donna. "However, if we can bring families back together, we believe that is the best outcome."

The hope of reunification with her children was Paulia's inspiration during the time she spent in jail following her arrest for operating a meth lab out of her home. Her son and daughter were six months old and nine years old at the time of her arrest. After serving her sentence, Paulia began working to get her children back. While her children remained in foster care, Paulia went for drug treatment, submitted to regular urine analysis, attended parenting classes, and appeared in family treatment court. It was at that family treatment court that Paulia's children were assigned a CASA.

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“IF WE CAN BRING FAMILIES BACK TOGETHER, WE BELIEVE THAT IS THE BEST OUTCOME.”

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For Paulia's daughter Tracy, having a CASA volunteer meant having someone who would listen carefully to her concerns and be her advocate in the system. “Tracy told her CASA that, because she was still in foster care, she thought I must still be on drugs and doing things I shouldn't be doing,” explained Paulia.

In response to Tracy's concerns, her CASA petitioned the court to allow Tracy to

When Reunification Is Not An Option

Unfortunately, not all cases have such a happy ending. In one case, Sister Donna represented a young girl whose mother was dependent on meth. The child was put into foster care while the mother went to drug rehab but before long the mother was using again. Then she became pregnant with a second child.



Today Vanessa is thriving in the loving home Linda and Keith have made for her.

spend the day with her mother on the days Paulia attended family court. This allowed Tracy to see and hear for herself how hard her mother was working to do what was required to allow her and her brother to come home. After ten months, the family was reunited. “If it weren't for her CASA, Tracy's concerns would never have been addressed,” said Paulia.

On the day of a scheduled home visit, Sister Donna knocked on the woman's door. No answer. She telephoned. The woman told her that it wasn't a good time. As Sister Donna drove behind the house, she saw a man going out the back door. A minute later the woman called back to let Sister Donna know she could visit. An assessment of the home indicated that it

contained drugs and that the woman was still using. When the woman's second baby was born, she was immediately taken into foster care. The woman continued to miss scheduled supervised visits with the children. "Month after month we would wait at the public library and she wouldn't show up," said Sister Donna. "That's so hard for the children. No matter what the parents do, the children love them and want to be with them. But addiction is very powerful. Even when people want to change, it takes a lot of hard work. If there is one thing I've learned through being a CASA, it is to be much less judgmental."

Success Through Compassion

That ability—to advocate for the child without judging and condemning the parents—is one of Sister Donna's particular gifts. "She treats the families with respect, something that can be a challenge because a lot of bad things have happened to these kids," said Julie.

"I am always looking out for the children but I also try to empathize with the parents who are struggling," said Sister Donna. "Sometimes those parents just need a wake-up call to change their ways and be responsible parents for their children."

Others aren't able to make those changes and I have to make some difficult recommendations about what is best for the child."

In cases like Vanessa's, when it is necessary to terminate parental rights and allow adoption of the child, the role of the CASA can be especially delicate. "Our family was very fortunate to have had Sister Donna as Vanessa's CASA," said Linda. "She was always looking out for Vanessa but at the same time, she always showed such compassion for Jessica and Andrew. She didn't blame them and her attitude helped remind us that it was Jessica's limitations that stood in the way of her ability to be the mother Vanessa needed her to be."

Today there seems to be nothing standing in Vanessa's way. At 28 months old, she is running and talking and thriving. She is small in stature but big in personality and is hitting the milestones for children her age. Sister Donna is quick to point out what a wonderful home Keith and Linda have made for her. Keith and Linda are thankful that Sister Donna was there to be a voice for Vanessa when she couldn't speak for herself. ■

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

HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- Remember in prayer all those children who have been made vulnerable through abuse or neglect.
- Volunteer to be a CASA in your area. The National CASA Association has a network of 955 local community programs that recruit, train, and support volunteers to represent the best interests of abused and neglected children. CASA volunteers do not have to be lawyers or social workers—a commitment to the welfare of children and some common sense are the only requirements.
- Not sure being a CASA is right for you? Check with your local CASA program to see if there are other ways to help with the effort. Programs often are looking for assistance with newsletters, website design and maintenance, fundraising, and data entry.
- Get the word out. Invite CASA staff to present a program to your church, community, or civic group.
- Many children in foster care lack clothes, backpacks, and other everyday necessities. Donate new or gently used items to an agency that distributes them to children in need.
- Use the attached envelope to make a donation toward ministries that give a voice to the most vulnerable among us.



Sister Donna is responsible for writing reports for each case she is involved in. Her findings are gleaned from personal visits with the children and parents, as well as conversations with school staff, social workers, and any other parties involved in the case.

PEOPLE & PLACES



The guests at the 4th Annual Halloween Party organized by the folks at Anna's Place experienced a wonderful combination of collaboration, fun, good food, and Franciscan spirit.

PENNSYLVANIA

Anna's Place in Chester held its 4th Annual Halloween Party—a wonderful example of collaboration. This year's party was held at Drexel Neumann Academy's gym which provided a spacious venue for the 40+ children who attended. The school's 7th and 8th graders assisted with the preparations and were on hand to help with the children. The Neumann University men's basketball team, coaches, and chaplain assisted with the set-up and delighted the children with Halloween-related games and arts and crafts. The children, ranging in age from infants to 4th graders, enjoyed showing off their costumes and indulging in a variety of refreshments—especially the delicious pizza provided by Kent Drake, owner of Just Pizza. Gus Lugay, a faithful volunteer at Anna's Place, was on hand all day to help. The concerted efforts of this team provided a winning experience for the young trick or treaters!



NEW JERSEY

Saying “good-bye” is never easy and the good-byes are particularly difficult when they involve ministry that carries with it an 85-year-old history. This was our sisters' experience when **Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Convent in Passaic** closed recently. In 1926 the Capuchin Sisters (Franciscan Sisters of Ringwood—a congregation which later merged with the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia) purchased the convent which served as their motherhouse until they moved to Ringwood in 1931. Over the ensuing years, the sisters continued in various ministries in the parish as well as at the neighboring St. Anthony Parish. As Sister Apollonia said, “We did every kind of ministry there was. It was missionary work and we were very successful in our relationships with our parishioners.” With the convent's closure, the four remaining sisters, Sisters Francis Madaio, Apollonia Morelli, Clare Agnes Conforti, and Berard D'Amato, moved on to other ministries. Sister Berard will move to Jersey City and Sisters Francis, Apollonia, and Clare Agnes will live and minister in Aston, Pennsylvania.

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.

WASHINGTON

In late October the **sisters from the Tacoma area** gathered to celebrate the centenary of the Jesuits at St. Leo the Great Parish. Our sisters have been part of the parish history since September 1912 when they opened the school for boys in grades one through four. In the ensuing years, the sisters taught in both the elementary and secondary schools until both facilities closed. Sisters Emily Ann Herbes and Nadine Bennett were honored to be part of the Offertory procession for the centennial celebration.

A large group gathered at Sevilla Restaurant in Passaic, New Jersey, for a farewell party hosted by Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in honor of our beloved sisters. (L-R: Sisters Clare Agnes Conforti, Francis Madaio, Apollonia Morelli, and Berard D'Amato). Photo courtesy of Peter Kueken, Jr.



SOUTH CAROLINA/ PENNSYLVANIA

Each Lent for the past two years, **Sister Christopher Marie Wagner**, an artist and student of iconography since 1999, teaches the writing of icons at Springbank Retreat Center in South Carolina. Last October she also presented similar workshops at the Franciscan Spiritual Center in Aston, Pennsylvania. Each workshop/retreat lasted 5-7 days and focused on the writing of one specific icon such as the Holy Face, Mother of God of the Sign, or Mary Magdalene. Participants represented various walks of life and spiritual backgrounds but all were drawn to the unique imagery which dates back to the earliest Christian works of art. The class incorporated an introduction to the history, theology, and symbolism of icons and moved through various steps and techniques of iconography. The last steps included the naming of the icon and the final circle of white around the halo. The completed icons were then blessed during the celebration of the Eucharist.



PENNSYLVANIA

Sister Thomasann Quinn recently became an honorary inductee into the Blessed Duns Scotus Chapter of the National Junior Honor Society at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel School in Doylestown. Elizabeth Barry, principal of OLMC, spoke of Sister Thomasann's many contributions to the school since she began ministering there in 1985. During those years, she taught science, math, and religion; organized Gummy Bear Runs, Bible Blessings, Forget-Me-Nots, after-school math groups, and lessons on the digital microscope. More recently, she was named Science Teacher of the Year by the Bucks County Science Fair. Currently, Sister Thomasann serves as liturgy and prayer coordinator—and, as Elizabeth Barry says, continues to enrich the OLMC school community “by her citizenship, leadership, service, character, and scholarship.”



The Ministry of Caring Team for AIDS Walk Delaware 2011 was comprised of sisters, staff, family, friends, Archmere Academy students, and Neumann University students. The team raised more than \$6300 for the cause.

DELAWARE

Our sisters continue to be involved in serving people whose lives have been impacted by HIV/AIDS. **Sister Jean Rupertus**, who ministers at House of Joseph II in Wilmington, was once again involved in helping to organize AIDS Walk Delaware and was joined by a number of sisters who contributed time and/or funds to make the walk a success. A donation to the Delaware HIV Consortium in honor of **Sister Dolores Macklin** and her many years of service to those suffering from HIV/AIDS provided financial support for a series of workshops sponsored by AIDS Delaware to help clients living with HIV to begin the process of getting back to work.



COLORADO

The Sisters of St. Francis are proud of their new connection with **Work Options for Women (WOW)**. The Denver-based organization was founded in 1996 with a mission to combat homelessness and poverty by providing unemployed women with the confidence and skills they need to become gainfully and permanently employed in the food service industry. Since its inception, WOW has trained and placed more than 300 women in cooking and food service positions. Thanks to a \$5,000 grant from our Social Justice Grant Fund, WOW can continue impacting women's ability to achieve success for themselves and stability for their families by providing culinary training and job placement programs.

PENNSYLVANIA

As usual **Neumann University** in Aston is busy about many things as it lives out its mission of providing Catholic education in the Franciscan tradition. The nursing students once again hosted students from Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) as part of their exchange program. A new aspect of the program this year involved a first-time visit by students from El Salvador. Both the visitors and the Neumann nursing students benefited from the updated nursing lab facilities with state-of-the-art lab facilities, including “computerized people!” Celebrations of various kinds were also part of this year's homecoming events. At one of these gatherings, Sister Christa Marie Thompson received the Presidential Award. In March Archbishop Charles Chaput, the new archbishop of Philadelphia, will join the Neumann community for the university's annual Charter Day celebration.



For the second year in a row, a group of TAMIU nursing students came to Neumann University as part of a student exchange program arranged by Dr. Nancy Laplante.

Students hug Sister Rose Mary in the heart-shaped doorway that leads them into a retreat centered around the Franciscan theological tradition. The experience, specially designed for children, is an adaptation of the program known as God's Extravagant Love.





Sophia Mueller, 7, finds herself particularly inspired by the Hallway of Love, an area filled with balloons to represent the omnipresence of God's love.



Olivia Myers, 7, reads the Bible with Emma Campitetti, 7. At this station, children "meet" Francis and discuss Scripture focused on Christ.



At the tenth station, children discover rocking chairs in which they are invited to rest and meditate on the idea of God's presence within them.

Franciscans Spread the News of God's Extravagant Love

“THIS PROGRAM HAS THE POWER TO MOVE PEOPLE TO SPREAD GOD'S GOODNESS THROUGH THE WAY THEY SPEAK AND ACT TOWARD OTHERS.”

It is a special day at St. Stephen School in Kingsville, Maryland. The auditorium has been transformed and students are waiting eagerly at an intriguing heart-shaped doorway to see what is inside. As each child enters, he or she is greeted by a man in brown robes who introduces himself as Brother Francis and tells them that they are about to enter God's heart. As they walk through the doorway, a woman receives them. “Welcome to God's heart,” she says.

The children gather at the start of a purple walkway that will lead them through the ten stations of a labyrinth designed to help them experience God in a new and deeper way. At the second station, seven-year-old Sophia Mueller takes her first tentative steps into the Hallway of Love, a corridor that has been filled to brimming with helium balloons tied to strings of different lengths. The balloons represent God's love surrounding us on all sides in everything and in everyone we meet. By the time she emerges, Sophia's trepidation has turned to jubilation. “It was like God was kissing me, kissing me, kissing me all over,” she says, smiling.

Sophia's experience is part of a retreat adapted for children by Sister Rose Mary

Eve Holter—with the creative assistance of Patty O'Brien—from a broader program that aims to share the beauty and richness of the Franciscan theological tradition with the wider Church. That program, known as God's Extravagant Love (GEL), had its beginnings in February 2004 with an initiative to reclaim the Franciscan theological tradition and bring it, not only to Franciscans but to the laity as well. With that goal in mind, Sister Kathleen Moffatt gathered 21 Franciscan sisters to develop a program that would transform people's theological experience. Since its launch in 2007, GEL has been given more than 60 times to over 4000 persons in 29 cities in the United States, as well as in Europe, Australia, Africa, and Asia. It has been presented to religious and laity, adults and children, women and men. And it has been received with a hunger that has surprised even the sisters who designed it.

Not From Outside, But From Within

“People's spirits are craving this in the strongest way,” said Sister Kathleen. “We Franciscans have a different perspective. Our God is a God of overflowing

goodness and we are all born with the goodness of God within us. Typically, Catholics are taught that each person is like a stained glass window that needs the sun from the outside to refract all the beautiful colors within it. In that metaphor we receive God's grace from outside of ourselves. But Franciscan tradition teaches us that we do not need anything from outside. We are a lamp. We are born with the God-Life within us.”

In order to bring that concept home for her students, Sister Rose Mary Eve uses a variety of methods that help the children engage fully in the retreat. At one station, students are introduced to the concept of *Haecceitas*, the indefinable quality that makes each person unique. There the students are surrounded by large boxes covered in colorful paper and tied with ribbons. The children are told that each of them is a gift and that God loves each of them in a very particular way. Next, they are given a Gift Box worksheet and asked to name ways in which they are gifts—to their families, their friends, their church, and their school. “The most beautiful part of this exercise is that when a child gets stuck and can't come up with something, another child will help, saying

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Principal Mary Patrick introduces a group of sixth graders to the San Damiano Cross. The original San Damiano Cross, which hangs in Santa Chiara (St. Clare) Church in Assisi, is the one St. Francis was praying before when he received the commission from the Lord to rebuild the Church. In addition to depicting Christ, it also contains images of other people who have a part in the meaning of the cross. Franciscans cherish this cross as a symbol of their mission from God.



Sisters and lay people attend a recent GEL program in New Mexico. Created by a group of 21 sisters of St. Francis—Esther Anderson, Joanne Brazinski, Helen Budzik, Mary Jo Chaves, Celeste Clavel, Mary Farrell, Kathy Ganiel, MarijaneHresko, Helen Jacobson, Julia Keegan, Annette Lucchese, Patricia Kidd, Marlene Kline, Patricia Larkin, Julie McCole, Arlene McDonough, Rosemary Napolitano, Kathy Osbelt, Patricia Smith, Diane Tomkinson, and coordinator Kathleen Moffatt—GEL has been presented to more than 4000 worldwide.

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‘I know how you are a gift at school or as a friend,’” said Sister Rose Mary.

At the tenth station, the children are presented with the idea that God wants to make a home in their hearts. “Around them is a circle of rocking chairs. Each child goes to a rocking chair to rest in God and to let God rest in them,” said Sister Rose Mary. “There is such stillness and reflectiveness in this exercise—from the youngest child to the oldest.”

According to Sister Kathleen, helping people learn to recognize God’s Spirit within themselves is an essential part of the program even for adults. “It gives persons a reason to hope,” said Sister Kathleen. “We seem not to have enough reminders that even on our worst days we live with the goodness of God within us.”

Sister Christa Marie Thompson agrees. She offers the GEL program to adults and has presented it to a variety of different audiences—from sisters, to secular Franciscans, to a university faculty, to a group of women from a shelter. “When I talk about the dignity of the human person, I present a slideshow of pictures of people’s faces,” said Sister Christa. “I tell participants to look at each face to see God in each and every person. When I did the program at the shelter, I included pictures of all the women who were participating so I could

emphasize that God’s love is not only within others; it is within each of them. That realization brought tears to many eyes and hearts.”

In addition to exercises like that one, GEL incorporates music, videos, poems, and stories. “We use all different methods so that the whole being gets excited,” said Sister Christa. “We know that one thing in particular is going to click in someone’s heart and the person will say, ‘I know what God’s extravagant love is now.’”

Not From Sin, But From Love

For many people, that “a-ha” moment comes during the part of the program that specifically deals with the incarnation of Jesus. “When I give the program, I ask participants, ‘Would Jesus have come even if Adam and Eve hadn’t sinned?’” said Sister Christa. “The Franciscan answer to that is ‘yes.’ It was because of God’s extravagant love that Christ was incarnated and it was what God always intended. It was love and not sin that brought Jesus. He was always coming.”

In Franciscan theology, the incarnation of Jesus is too important, too central, to be caused by sin. Instead, Franciscan theology teaches that the incarnation was always in the mind of God—even before the fact of sin. That concept, that Jesus was always part

Second grade teacher Patty O’Brien leads her class in song at station eight. Patty helped Sister Rose Mary with the concept and execution of her version of the GEL retreat.





To highlight the importance of being active participants in spreading God's love, students first pack care packages for women in prison (left), and then write letters to accompany them (below).



of praise for all creation. The piece presents a series of images layered on top of Francis' words. "One cannot be exposed to this material without being challenged to care for this universe which reflects the greatness of our creator God," responded one sister in Aston after the program.

For the children at St. Stephen's, the call to act on behalf of God's creatures begins with the singing of, "Who Will Speak, If You Don't." It continues with a reflection on God's calling each of them to peace and justice-making and the understanding that each of them is called to be the voice and the heart of God. This segues into an exercise in which the children assemble care packages of toiletries for women in prison. The packages include personal notes containing messages of love and hope. Many times the children incorporate the very ideas they have experienced during the retreat—reminding the women that God lives in each of them.

"This program is powerful," said Sister Christa. "Not only does it have the power to change how people experience God and themselves, but it also has the power to move people to spread God's goodness through the way they speak and act toward others."

Not Just For Some, But For All

As the number of people exposed to the GEL program increases, so does the rate at which the tenets of Franciscan theology are reaching a larger audience.

of God's plan, is a beautiful revelation for many who attend the program. According to Briar Cliff University professor Sister Mary Day, who participated in a GEL program for faculty at this Franciscan university in Sioux City, Iowa, the lay faculty found this message incredibly meaningful. "They loved it," said Sister Mary. "They came away asking 'Why were we never taught this? How come we missed out?'"

They are not alone. According to the sisters who present the program, many participants find this idea groundbreaking while at the same time expressing that they have always carried a sense of this truth in their hearts. "It is like having a cloud lift," said one participant. "Jesus wasn't sent to die on the cross for our sins. He came to show us the face of the Father."

If Not Us, Then Who

The GEL program, both for adults and children, reminds participants that they are cocreators with God. It asserts that God shares His power with us and thus we are responsible for working toward bringing about a better world. This point is brought home in part through a PowerPoint presentation inspired by St. Francis' "Cantic of the Sun," a song

Scholars' Quotes

The God's Extravagant Love program which introduces the three major themes from the Franciscan Theological Tradition—the primacy of Christ and the mystery of love, creation, and the dignity of the human person—has those involved giving praise.

"We have a hopeful word to speak to the concerns present in today's Church and to the crises affecting our society."

– Bill Short, OFM

"The thought of John Duns Scotus may be another support for rebuilding not just the Church but also an entire society, indeed, the entire world."

– Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ

"When the tradition in its view of God's overflowing goodness, its moral decision-making process, its view of a Spirit-filled yet sinful Church ... is presented, it almost always meets with an enthusiastic reception."

– Joe Chinnici, OFM

"The insights lying at the base of medieval, Franciscan spirituality and theology need to be retrieved and brought into conversation with the questions and needs of contemporary people. This would be a way of bringing the wisdom of a great spiritual, theological tradition to bear on the problems of a greatly troubled world."

– Zachary Hayes, OFM

Sister Kathleen likens the fast-spreading enthusiasm to putting a match to a dry bush. "I see the Church moving in this direction. I have been overwhelmed by the response. I never know when the next email or phone call is going to come," she said. "Of course, it shouldn't be a surprise. What could be more wonderful than this message of optimism and hope?" As one scholar put it, "This is a doctrine too fantastic to be false." ■

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

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Everyone has within a piece of good news.

— Anne Frank (adapted)

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Celebrating the Spirit of Assisi

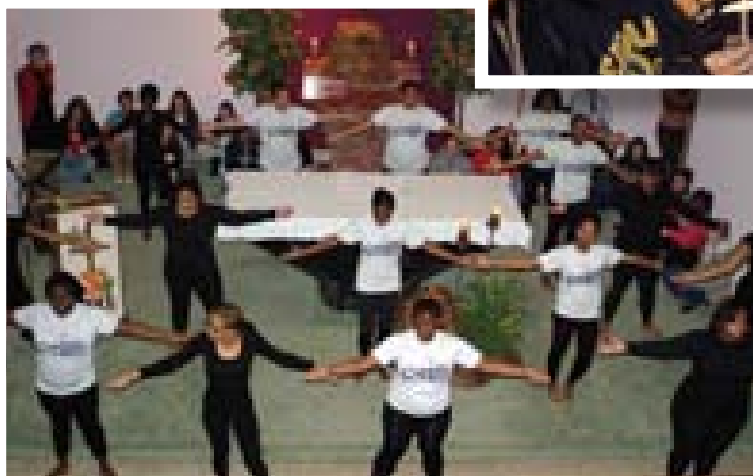
On a Thursday evening in October, more than 150 members of the Neumann University community and the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia gathered to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the first Spirit of Assisi gathering when Pope John Paul II asked world religions to turn themselves into instruments of peace in a world where hate and violence beget hate and violence. The Neumann community gathered in silence—joined in spirit with the thousands gathered in Assisi with Pope Benedict XVI—and processed through the darkened halls with lighted candles as “pilgrims of truth and pilgrims of peace.”

The Neumann University Gospel Choir offered a song of prayer and praise. Members of the student government and the dean of students read excerpts from the Jewish and Christian scriptures, the writings of Francis of Assisi, and reflections from the Muslim tradition. Following prayers of intercession, the Neumann Praise Dancers performed their prayerful plea that God’s peace

would shower down upon all peoples. Before the closing song—the Peace Prayer attributed to St. Francis—participants directed their attention (virtually) to rededicate the Neumann University peace pole which is located on another part of the campus.



Music and dance, prayers of praise and intercession—all had a place as the Neumann community gathered to keep alive the message of the Spirit of Assisi.



Mother Bachmann Maternity Center Celebrates Anniversary



Nurse midwives Mary Woltjen (top) and Tracy Shields (right) examine patients during their prenatal appointments at the Mother Bachmann Maternity Center.



Mother Bachmann Maternity Center in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. Named after our foundress, Mother Francis Bachmann, a widow with four young children, the maternity center is one of the off-campus services provided by St. Mary Medical Center. The maternity center was started by Sister Clare Carty, then administrator of the hospital. Sister Clare was aware that, in spite of the perception that the Langhorne area was a wealthy community, many poor families lived in its shadows. Today the center is the only maternity clinic of its kind in Bucks County. The women who come there have access to the healthcare they need regardless of their ability to pay. Certified

nurse midwives provide obstetrical care. Clients also have access to a variety of services including pre-natal and delivery care by staff members sensitive to multicultural differences, breast feeding guidance, confidential postpartum depression screening, nutrition education, smoking cessation classes, and financial counseling. If needed, clients have access to confidential domestic violence evaluations and resource referrals in partnership with A Women's Place, a nonprofit agency that helps women and families in crisis. In addition, St. Mary's offers emergency housing in 10 local apartments where families receive financial counseling, parenting skills instruction, and computer education to help them in their search for employment.



In Memoriam

Sister Francine McDermott
October 31, 2011

Sister Dorothy Ann Schmitt
November 27, 2011

Sister Clare Immaculate McDonnell
December 15, 2011

Sister Stella Maris Ellis
December 18, 2011

Sister Francis Paula Bader
January 2, 2012

Sister Dolores Alfone
(formerly Sister M. Louise
Infant of Prague)
January 5, 2012

Sister Catherine Ellen Kearney
January 5, 2012

Sister Dolores Ann Macklin
(formerly Sister Catherine Agnes)
January 8, 2012

CELEBRATING

Jubilee

AS SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF PHILADELPHIA

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

75 years
Professed 1937

DIAMOND JUBILARIANS

SISTER ELLEN GLYNN

70 years
Professed 1942

DIAMOND JUBILARIANS

SISTER MARGARET BONNER

SISTER THEODORE KLINGSEISEN

SISTER AGNES SCHILLING

▶ *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 1962
GOLDEN JUBILARIANS

SISTER MARGARET BENDER

SISTER LESLIE BIRKS

SISTER RITA MARIE BURIAN

SISTER ELLEN EUGENE CALLAGHAN

SISTER CONSTANCE DAVIS

SISTER FRANCIS CHRISTI DEMARCHI

SISTER EILEEN DOHERTY

SISTER THERESA KEVIN DONAHUE

SISTER MAUREEN DUIGNAN

SISTER ANN FORREST

SISTER DONNA FREAD

SISTER MARY ANNETTE GRIFFIN

SISTER ELIZABETH ELLEN KANE

SISTER MARY CATHERINE LEWANDOWSKI

SISTER ANNETTE MARIE LUCCHESI

SISTER ELAINE MARTIN

SISTER NORA MCCARTHY

SISTER PATRICIA MCNIFF

SISTER MARY CARMEL MOLLOY

SISTER ELIZABETH PATRICIA MURPHY

SISTER MARIE O'CONNOR

SISTER PATRICIA PRZYBYLSKI

SISTER ANN MARIE SLAVIN

SISTER MARGARET MAUREEN THOMPSON

SISTER MARY VANDERGEEST

25 years
Professed 1987
SILVER JUBILARIAN

SISTER DIANE VERONICA TOMKINSON



Haiti - Still in Need

In her ministry at East Bay Sanctuary, Sister Maureen Duignan has worked with refugees from many countries. One special focus has been with the people of Haiti and with the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund Project (HERF). Recently Sister Maureen traveled to Haiti to visit with and to interview grassroots leaders in various parts of the country to learn firsthand what monies from HERF have accomplished. What she found was a vast difference between donations given through the government and monies channeled through HERF. Much of the money given to the government following the earthquake has not reached the people. HERF, on the other hand, has made very concrete contributions toward relief. To learn more

about HERF's efforts, visit www.haitiemergencyrelief.org. While Maureen was in Haiti, she met Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the democratically elected president of Haiti who was ousted during a coup; spoke with a group of soldiers who had been tortured and brutalized by the old Haitian army; and visited the grave of Father Gerard Jean-Juste who fought for human rights both for Haiti and around the world.

Focus

"HER CONSTANT UNSELFISH SPIRIT AND HER PATIENCE WITH OUR SISTERS IS WITNESSED MANY TIMES THROUGHOUT THE DAY."

► Jaynie was born the year the congregation celebrated its 100th anniversary. Little did she know how much their history and charism would shape her own life!



JAYNIE MURPHY

Although Jaynie Murphy grew up in Aston, she was not familiar with the Sisters of St. Francis. However, in August 1978 a friend told her about this "new place" in Aston that was hiring. That "new place" was Assisi House. After being interviewed by Sisters Anna Cosgrove and Corda Marie Bergbauer, she was hired as a nurses' aide. Eventually Jaynie's duties evolved into working in activities. Still later she began driving the sisters to doctors' appointments. Today her schedule also includes reminding sisters about appointments and updating the appointment book at the nurses' stations. She makes sure that sisters scheduled for surgery get the necessary medical clearance and have their pre-admission testing completed.

In keeping with our Franciscan spirit, Jaynie's manner of accomplishing her work is as important as the tasks themselves. Sister Rose Raymond Barba, assistant administrator of Assisi House, feels Jaynie exemplifies the Franciscan spirit. "Her constant unselfish spirit and her patience with our sisters is witnessed many times throughout the day," Sister Rose said. "Whether it is a scheduled or emergency appointment, Jaynie always maintains her calm, gentle spirit. The needs of our sisters always come first in her mind."

For Jaynie, that Franciscan spirit is also something she tries to carry into her life outside of Assisi House. She describes herself as a "giver." She is a Eucharistic minister at St. Joseph Parish and enjoys visiting the shut-ins in her parish. Her spirit of giving is something that extends to family as well. She enjoys lending a hand to her aunt and uncle—taking them to Mass and to the store. Jaynie also has a very close relationship with her three sisters. She enjoys preparing holiday meals for the family or just getting together to share old memories.

For Jaynie that spirit of giving and of sharing that we claim as Franciscan is an integral part of her life. Sister Rose Raymond captured its essence when she said, "St. Francis told us to preach the Gospel, not only in words but also in our actions. Jaynie Murphy certainly does that everyday at Assisi House."



▲ Jaynie, seen here with Sister Helen Veronica Hamill, drives the sisters to doctors' appointments, switching between car, van, and bus to accommodate the sisters' needs.

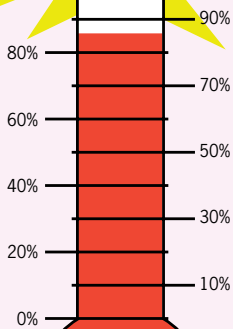


▲ Very family-oriented, Jaynie (far left) enjoys spending time with her sisters (L-R) Patti Zamonski, Beth Sanbe, and Maureen (Chuckie) Mercadante.

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\$ 4,000,000



Since 1855 the Sisters of St. Francis have responded to needs wherever and whenever they were made known. We have ministered on the east and west coasts, in Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Alaska. Beyond the United States, our sisters have responded to our brothers and sisters in Africa, Haiti, Ireland, and the Caribbean.

As a congregation, we have gone from 1200 women religious to 530. Today, our median age is 75 years old. As a result, we no longer have a large enough base of support from younger sisters in active ministry which is why your support is more crucial than ever.

Are you ready to help? Your support will help us to realize our goal and bring our capital campaign to closure on or before the summer of 2012. Read more about our campaign efforts by visiting our website, <http://www.osfphila.org/support/campaign>.

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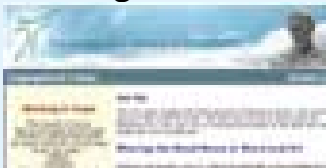
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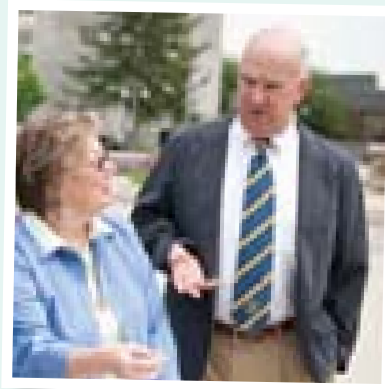
When the founding Sisters of St. Francis began to nurse the sick, they occasionally promised a dying mother that they would care for her children. That promise was fulfilled in the late 1800s when the sisters began staffing or establishing "homes" for motherless children. 1943 marked the opening of St. Anne Children's Home in Spokane. The sisters ministering there served infants, and when possible placed them in homes with carefully planned adoption policies. Today, although our sisters no longer sponsor children's homes, we remain committed to being a "compassionate presence in our violent world, especially to women, children, and those who have no voice." Sister Donna Fread (right) lives out this commitment in her ministry as a court appointed special advocate for children. Read more about Sister Donna's important ministry on page 4.



Truly Good News!

Sometimes we might wonder what impact our *Good News* publication has had. A recent issue on human trafficking mentioned Ron Chance, an adjunct professor at Neumann University

(seen here with Sister Ann Forrest), who has worked against this form of modern slavery. Following the publication of the article, Ron has had numerous invitations to speak about the issue. Over recent months, he has addressed groups at the University of Delaware, Immaculata University, and Chestnut Hill College. In addition, Ron has done a presentation for the IHM Sisters Social Justice Committee and for the Catholic University of America Institute for Policy Research at the request of Franciscan Action Network and Franciscans International. As Ron commented, "This truly is Good News!"



What's Happening In Formation?

After a number of years of faithful service as vocation director on the west coast, Sister Patricia Novak is moving to a new ministry. Sisters Christine Still and Elaine Thaden will share responsibility for vocation efforts on the west coast. Sister Mary Beth Antonelli continues to serve as vocation director on the east coast. Our novices, Sisters Simona Botezatu and Sara Marks, have begun the first phase of their novitiate at the TOR Common Franciscan Novitiate in St. Louis, Missouri. Their time there is divided between classes, ministry, and community life. One of the presenters at the TOR-FCN will be Sister Diane Tomkinson, our formation director, who will give a presentation on Angela of Foligno, an early third order religious leader.

