

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

ome is the dwelling place that is close to the heart of the person. It is where a person ought to experience peace, love, and safety. In my life, memories of the

family home bring me such joy as I recall the gatherings and daily activities where I learned faith, values, and lessons for life from my parents and extended family.

Yet in our world with its violence and poverty, numerous people leave their homelands and seek refuge from the horrific situations of their native lands. Many have come to the United States. In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI called upon the U.S. Bishops to continue to welcome immigrants. He said, "Brother Bishops, I want to



Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty, OSF Congregational Minister

encourage you and your communities to continue to welcome the immigrants who join your ranks today, to share their joys and hopes, to support them in their sorrow and trials, and to help them flourish in their new home."

In this issue of Good News, we read of Sister Dominica LoBianco's ministry as pastoral associate for Hispanic Ministry for St. Laurence Parish in West Philadelphia. For those men, women, and children who have recently arrived in the U.S., Sister Dominica helps to provide their basic needs, assists them in learning English, and helps them to navigate the new culture where they find themselves. In addition to the interaction with immigrant people, Sister Dominica advocates for compassionate immigration reform. In essence, Sister Dominica is there to help them to flourish in their new home.

For our sisters living in Assisi House, our retirement home in Aston, Pennsylvania, being home and feeling at home is essential in their lives as vowed Franciscans. St. Francis encouraged the faithful, "Within themselves, let them always make a home and dwelling place for the one who is Lord God almighty, Father and Son and Holy Spirit." Our sisters in retirement find prayer as their primary ministry, always growing in that intimate relationship with God. Each day, the sisters lift up the needs of our world and the ministries of our congregation in prayer. We were blessed to be able to renovate Assisi House in such a way that the sisters' environment is now more home-like and they enjoy a greater independence in their living. Enjoy the article describing the new and exciting changes in Assisi House.

May you find joy and peace in your homes and let us pray for those who seek a place to call home.

Sites Mary Patheya Suglesty, ase







VOLUME 18.3 WINTER 2015



Helping to Navigate a New Land:	
Immigrants Receive a Warm	
Welcome	4

As pastoral associate for Hispanic ministry for St. Laurence Parish, Sister Dominica LoBianco is charged with assisting immigrants in the area west of Philadelphia by helping them obtain the services, aid, and tangible items they need to survive in their new home.

Written by Deb Litman Photography by Andrea Cipraini-Mecchi

Happiness is Being Home at Assisi House 12

People & Places 10

Known as the "Powerhouse of Prayer," Assisi House in Aston, Pennsylvania, is home to many of our retired sisters. Recent renovations have transformed Assisi House to allow our sisters to do more for themselves. This change has led to a more peaceful, home-like feel, giving our beloved sisters a greater sense of self-worth and pride.

Written by Deb Litman Photography by Andrea Cipraini-Mecchi

Sharing the Good News16

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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: Jenny, age 6, walks with her mother, Glenda, and her brother, Edwin. The three are on their way to sign up for English classes for Glenda. Jenny, a first grader, is already a wonderful interpreter for her mom.



Antonio, an immigrant from Guatemala, knows how essential the help that Sister Dominica and other volunteers at St. Laurence Parish can be for people first coming to the United States. Here, Antonio speaks with volunteer Tim O'Connell who spends countless hours offering encouragement, answering questions, providing translation services, and helping to fill out school and medical forms.

ister Dominica LoBianco pulls up to a small row house in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, to drop off a few items needed by a family who are part of St. Laurence Parish where she ministers. The woman who answers the door breaks into a big smile and enthusiastically invites her inside. Something on the stove smells wonderful and before she knows it, Sister Dominica is being led to the kitchen table by six-year-old Jenny who gives her a napkin and a drink of water to go with the home-cooked meal the girl's mom is already dishing out.

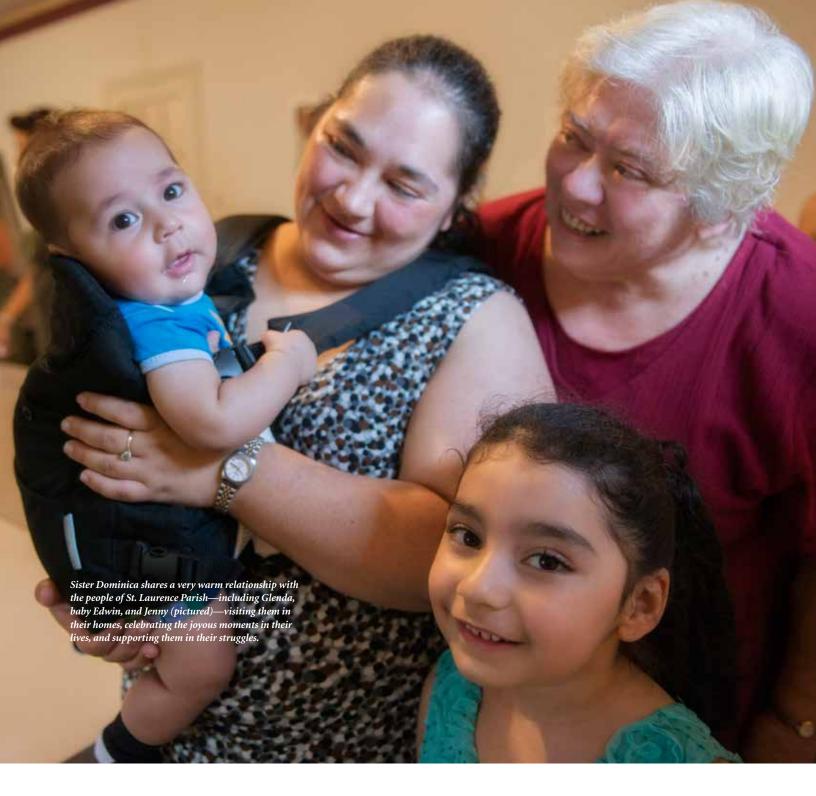
The family is new—not only to the neighborhood, but to the United States as well. Having fled their home country in the hopes of finding a better life for their children, the family

is finding that things are not easy for them. Without the proper papers, work is hard to come by. Medical care is out of reach and the language barrier makes even the most basic interactions a struggle. Still a sense of joy, gratitude, and hospitality spills from their simple home. "They are such a blessing to be with," said Sister Dominica, "So loving and welcoming—even with their struggles, they are happy to have what they have."

As pastoral associate for Hispanic ministry for St. Laurence Parish, Sister Dominica is charged with helping immigrants in the area west of Philadelphia. One of the most diverse communities in the region, Upper Darby is home to people heralding from around continued on page 6



Helping to Navigate a New Land: Immigrants Warm Receive a Value Helping to Navigate a New Land: Manual Land: Ma



 $\widetilde{\mathcal{T}}$ "They come here hoping for a better life for themselves and for their children."

Welcome

"If people could come here legally, they would... These people are in DIRE SITUATIONS. THEY CAN'T WAIT. PEOPLE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT OUR IMMIGRATION POLICIES HAVE A VERY REAL EFFECT ON PEOPLE, ON FAMILIES."



Antonio, his wife Nery, and their two sons, Jerry and Andy, sort items to be sold at the flea market organized by Sister Dominica and held in the church basement. Proceeds from the sale help immigrant families in the parish who need assistance. Antonio and his family have been the recipients of this kind of help and are eager to help give back in whatever ways they can

the globe. Although the majority of the families she assists are from Hispanic countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Ecuador, she works with immigrants from every corner of the world, including Haiti, Sierra Leone, Ghana, the Congo, and Vietnam. Most are recent immigrants; some have resident papers; many are undocumented. Whatever their country of origin, however, they all have one thing in common. "They come here hoping for a better life for themselves and for their children," she said. "They are anxious to have jobs, raise their families, and make this their home."

Getting On Their Feet

For many people who have recently arrived in the United States, material necessities such as clothing and furniture take precedence. Sister Dominica keeps tabs on people's needs, providing warm coats for children and items such as tables, chairs, and beds for those living in empty rooms. In addition to the things she gives free of charge, she scours the region looking for donated items that can be sold at a parishrun flea market that allows people to buy much needed articles at very low prices. Proceeds from the sales go directly back to the community in the form of aid and

services for immigrant families who need assistance.

Winter is particularly difficult for many families since seasonal work often leaves them with little income during the colder months. During these times, Sister Dominica finds herself offering assistance for things like rent and utilities from donations she receives from both the sisters in her congregation and others. Antonio, an immigrant from Guatemala, says his family has been the beneficiary of this kind of assistance many times. "She helps me all the time with whatever I need," said Antonio. "She gives me gift cards for food. Once she paid my rent for several months."

Grateful for all the support they have received, Antonio and his family give every bit as much as they receive. He and his wife collect items to send home to family members still in Guatemala and Honduras, filling large cargo boxes with clothing and household items. Antonio also assists Sister Dominica by picking up and hauling donated items to the parish in his truck so they can be added to the flea market. "Things are by no means easy for them but they still focus on helping others," said Sister Dominica.

Navigating An Unfamiliar System

Beyond the basic physical necessities, learning English is one of the most important components necessary to thrive as a newcomer to the United States. Sister Dominica has instructed hundreds of immigrants on how to speak and read English through the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes she teaches. The classes are conducted entirely in English so people from all countries learn together. "She does a great job with ESL," said Sister Regina Christine, IHM, who works with Sister Dominica at St. Laurence Parish. "She not only teaches the language, but she also helps people begin to understand the culture."

For Antonio, as with many others, knowing English has made an enormous difference in his life, enabling him to move from working minimum wage jobs at fast food restaurants to owning his own landscaping business. "Sister Dominica is why I know what I know," said Antonio.

Sister Dominica trains other members of the community to be ESL teachers as well. She is able to provide this and other services because of a program grant she has received as part of the Mission Fund offered by the Sisters of St. Francis congregation. The grant sponsors and pays for her religious leadership training, educational materials, and tuition assistance. Geraldine Miller is one of the members of St. Laurence Parish who came with an interest in becoming an ESL teacher. She now is one of the regular

volunteers. "I feel honored to be able to help people in this way," said Geraldine.

Like Sister Dominica, Geraldine often goes beyond the regular classroom curriculum to make sure students are getting what they need in terms of language development. In certain instances, nothing can take the place of individualized sessions. One woman in Geraldine's class was working as a housekeeper but wanted to become a nurse's aide. Geraldine collected applications for her, helped her fill them out, and worked with the woman to teach her the specific vocabulary she would need for the job.

For those whose English is not yet sufficient, Sister Dominica and other volunteers also provide translation services and assistance in filling out forms for medical appointments, school enrollment, and legal transaccontinued on page 8



Learning English is often the most daunting, but also most rewarding, hurdle new immigrants must clear. Fortunately there are many volunteers willing to help. (Top right) Geraldine Miller has been tutoring Mariana in English for four years—the first two in a class setting and the last two privately. (Below) Sister Dominica conducts a training session for ESL teachers, all of whom are volunteers.



How You CAN HELP.

- Pray for all immigrants who struggle to make a new life in an unfamiliar country.
- Call, write, or fax your representatives in support of comprehensive compassionate immigration reform.
- Donate your gently used furniture, housewares, and clothing to a church or center that provides items to immigrants.
- Find out where ESL classes are taught in your area and train to become an ESL teacher. Helping people learn the language of their adopted country is one of the best ways to give them a leg up as they look for jobs, help their children with schoolwork, or simply navigate their way through the day.
- If teaching is not for you, there are still plenty of volunteer opportunities at centers that work with immigrants. Many organizations are looking for people to answer phones or help with paperwork. Those with specialized skills can also provide assistance with preparing taxes or dealing with legal issues.

continued from page 7

tions. "For most people, their children are their main concern," she said. "We help them get their children in school. That's a priority for them."

For those parents with children born in the United States, Sister Dominica also helps fill out forms to get the children enrolled in programs for the medical aid for which they are eligible. Children and adults without social security numbers face even bigger hurdles to securing medical care. Although there are a handful of clinics that do their best to provide low-cost care to immigrants, many undocumented people go without care rather than incur bills they can't afford to pay. "For these reasons, people won't seek medical help unless the situation is very serious," said Sister Dominica. This leads to medical conditions remaining untreated which ultimately has a deleterious effect on people's health.

Working Toward A New Life

Although work is a priority for newly arrived families, it is often a significant challenge. Without proper papers, people find it difficult or even impossible to secure stable jobs. For those who do find work, dangerous conditions, exploitive employers, and even difficulty finding reliable transportation present substantial obstacles to steady employment.

Marisabel Isel, president of Centro Comunitario Apoyo (CCA), works closely with Sister Dominica. Through CCA,

Marisabel runs workshops to educate families about their rights as workers. "Some businesses take advantage of undocumented workers," said Marisabel. "Conditions are unsafe. Employers withhold money from them or refuse to pay overtime. The people are afraid of being deported so they don't report it."

The CCA also helps people navigate the complicated process involved with DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) which offers a two-year period of deferred action for people who were brought to the United States as children. In addition, volunteers at the organization assist those who are eligible with the process of becoming a resident or citizen.

Advocating For Change

Observing the many obstacles that exist for immigrants has made Sister Dominica an ardent advocate for immigration reform. She is very active in the Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition and has been to the Pennsylvania state capitol many times to talk to representatives and to educate lawmakers on the importance of establishing a safe and humane immigration system. She also works to inform the public about immigration issues, highlighting the human consequences of the current system.

"If people could come here legally, they would," said Sister Dominica. "Unfortunately, the lines are very long. In Central and Latin America, it can take 10



(Above) Charlene snuggles with her mother, Melissa. (Right) The children talk while their mothers sign up for ESL classes. According to Sister Dominica, women often struggle more than men to learn the language because they tend to stay at home rather than go out into the workforce. It is not until their children get close to school age that many women make it a priority to learn English so they can help their children with homework.



or more years to get the papers needed to come to this country legally. These people are in dire situations. They can't wait. People need to understand that our immigration policies have a very real effect on people, on families."

Other special traditions include gathering in people's homes to pray the Stations of the Cross or to celebrate Las Posadas—a festival preceding Christmas in which participants dramatize the search of Joseph and Mary for lodging. On Christmas Day, the Ecuadoran community sponsors a

Finding A Home

As each family makes its way in their new homes in Pennsylvania, their lives are made easier by having an advocate, ally, and friend in Sister Dominica. For Antonio and his family, she is like family. "We are very



Antonio and Nery meet with Marisabel Isel to talk about taxes. Marisabel works with immigrants to reassure them that paying taxes will not threaten their immigration status and to help them get an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).

Enriching The Tapestry

As they build their lives in America, the immigrants in St. Laurence Parish attempt a balance between embracing the culture of their adopted home and preserving aspects of their own particular cultures. Like the many generations of immigrants before them, today's new arrivals add their own color to the rich tapestry of American culture that has been woven through the years. "It has been a blessing for me to share their experiences of faith which are so deep and so true," said Sister Dominica. "They love to sing. They love praying the rosary. They love gathering together to celebrate."

parade near the parish church. "People decorate their trucks and dress in native clothing or as Mary, Joseph, or angels to witness to what Christmas really means," said Sister Dominica. "Then they gather for Christmas Mass."

There are usually between 600-800 people celebrating the Christmas Mass together in Spanish. Rather than exchanging gifts on Christmas Day, Latin American families focus on the religious aspects of Christmas and celebrate Epiphany with traditions such as gift-giving. Sister Dominica does her part by making sure that every child has presents to open on that day.

close," said Antonio. "We have Christmas dinner with her. I call her all the time and if she doesn't hear from me for a while, she will call just to talk and see how I am."

Antonio's family is not alone. St. Laurence Parish and its surrounding areas are filled with families from around the world who have found help, encouragement, and love in the care of Sister Dominica. "She cares deeply about every person she works with," said Geraldine. "I don't know that anyone else could do this ministry like she does it."

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

PEOPLE&PLACES



On hand for the presentation of the check were (L-R) Shannon Jordan, executive director of the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia; Margaret Lilley, Red Hill Farm manager; Sister Mary Vandergeest, executive director of the Sisters of St. Francis Foundation; and Tammy Tenaglia, chair of the Catholic Foundation Grant Committee.

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.



Sister Ronnie Grier (right) and Jennie Cook Trotter display the Harriet Tubman Award plaque.

PENNSYLVANIA

Margaret Lilley, manager of Red Hill Farm, received the Community Impact Award from the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia. The \$500 award will be used to help fund the Student Farm Project—a project that allows 3rd and 6th graders from Drexel Neumann Academy to learn about healthy eating, plant science and nutrition, and cooking. The farm's education program is implemented by Joanne Rosenbaum. "The Catholic Foundation started the Community Impact Award Program to acknowledge and help organizations in the community who are doing great work for their peers. We wanted to give out an award to an organization that had a focus on the environment so Red Hill Farm was the perfect fit," said Joanne Salsano, marketing coordinator and grant administrator, Mr. Shannon Jordan, executive director of the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia said, "We're so happy to be here and to be giving an award to an organization who's concerned with both the environment and childhood education."



SOUTH CAROLINA

Sister Ronnie Grier received the Harriet Tubman Award at the annual National Black Sisters' Conference (NBSC) which was held in Charleston in July. Since 1984, members of the NBSC have nominated and voted for one of its members to receive the Harriet Tubman Award. In addition to other criteria, the recipient must exemplify the spirit, courage, and charisma of

Harriet Tubman who was called to be a Moses to her people and must have affected the development of Black People. Sister Callista Robinson, OSF, president of NBSC, presented the award, explaining that Sister Ronnie, through her ministry, was, indeed, a Moses to her people. Jennie Cook Trotter, a friend of Sister Ronnie since their days at St. Benedict School in Brooklyn, also shared the impact that Sister Ronnie has had on her life over the years. In accepting the award, Sister Ronnie spoke of the need for making children aware of their importance and their inherent dignity.



Sister Nora Nash received an honorary degree from Neumann University in acknowledgement for her work in advocacy.



PENNSYLVANIA

Sister Nora Nash received an honorary degree at Neumann University's 2015 graduation. The Delaware County Times article covering the graduation referred to her as the "conscience of Wall Street" for her ongoing efforts to expand the concept of corporate social responsibility. "Sister Nora's goal of injecting morality into boardroom discussions doesn't stop with the world of finance," the article stated. "She and ICCR (Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility) associates have met with executives from Walmart, McDonald's, Hasbro, BP, Boeing, General Electric, and others to discuss issues that range from nuclear arms and childhood obesity to farm workers' rights and the minimum wage. She is also very involved with the issues of human trafficking and hydraulic fracturing, advocating passionately on behalf of those without a voice in the legal and corporate spheres of influence."

Paul Kelly, CEO of Console Ireland; Sister Carmel Earls, board member; Frances Fitzgerald, minister for justice and equality; Sister Patricia Kidd, board member; Gerard Keegan, chair of Beacon of Light Board of Managers.

IRELAND

Beacon of Light Counselling Centre in Dublin celebrated a rededication day in May to recognize the generosity of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia for all their support—financial and otherwise—over the years. The day also formally acknowledged that Console National Suicide Charity will be joining with Beacon of Light so that the work of both organizations can be expanded. This venture will include sharing counselling training, use of premises, and fundraising events. Console Ireland has numerous centres around Ireland plus two in London. Their main focus is working with those bereaved by suicide. Beacon of Light offers a wide range of services. The centre's 32 counsellors come from a wide range of psychotherapeutic backgrounds and expertise including family therapy, child therapy, addictions, domestic violence, bereavement, depression, anxiety, bullying, self-harm, and anger management. Counselling sessions vary from three to 20 hours weekly. In 2014, 617 clients came through the centre—representing 5,458 counselling sessions. Every effort is made to match the client's presenting issues with the experience and training of the counsellor. Working with Console is a major step for Beacon of Light because the organization is so highly recognized in Ireland and the United Kingdom. The hope is that this will enable Beacon of Light to acquire stable funding for the centre.



INDIANA

Eighteen of our sisters attended the 2015 Franciscan Federation Conference. The conference began on a Friday evening and over the next three days, speakers developed—both in individual presentations and in discussion—the conference theme, "Responding to God's Love: A Franciscan Moral Vision." Sister Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ, addressed the issue of "An Aesthetic Moral Vision." Father Thomas Nairn, OFM, focused on "The Human Spirit: Searching for Truth, Desiring the Good." He approached the topic from the stance of St. Bonaventure. Father Joseph Chinnici, OFM, addressed the topic from the stance of "Political Economy from Within the Evangelical Life." His thoughts focused on the world in which we live today and the moral implications of the decisions we are called upon to make. Sunday evening attendees gathered for the annual banquet during which sisters chosen by their respective congregations as reflecting the conference theme were acknowledged and blessed by all present.

PENNSYLVANIA

In November the Philadelphia Coalition for Responsible Investment held a Climate Change Seminar at Neumann University. Sister Ilia Delio, OSF, a noted writer, theologian, and presenter, was the keynote speaker. The program also featured concurrent panel discussions on investment policy and grassroots strategies. The investment panelists were Richard Kent, CFA, chief investment officer from Friends Fiduciary Corporation, and Aaron Ziulkowski, senior ESG analyst from Walden Asset Management. Addressing the issue of grassroots strategies were Elowyn Corby, a clean energy and global warming associate from PennEnvironment, and Sister Mary Elizabeth Clark, SSJ, the director of the Sisters of St. Joseph Earth Center. The panel discussions were followed by a question and answer session with all of the presenters.



Our whole group gathered for a photo after dinner. (Standing L-R) Sisters Anne Amati, Marie Lucey, Kathy Dougherty, Kathleen Moffatt, Colette Gerry, Jeanne Nisley, Ann Marie Slavin, Esther Anderson, Mary Farrell, Dominica LoBianco, Patricia Kane, Lynn Patrice Lavin; (Kneeling L-R) Sisters Betty Kane, Sara Marks, Patricia Smith, Diane Tomkinson, Patricia Hutchison, and Maria Orlandini.

Because the renovations to Assisi House were made with both form and function in mind, the changes have succeeded in allowing sisters to be more independent. That means that everyday activities have become a little bit easier for sisters, increasing their autonomy and quality of life.

▼ Sister Magdalen Mary Dunne prepares a snack in the newly updated country kitchen.



▲ Sister Frances Cassidy (right) takes Sister Theresa Mary Mich out for some fresh air.



▲ Sister Angela Erhard pauses for a quiet moment of prayer in front of the Blessed Mother.



▲ Sisters Stella Mary Breen and Sheila Mary Byrne work on a puzzle.



▲ Dina Loizos, CNA, assists in the laundry as Sister Joella Francis Campbell folds her clothes—a task that she was not able to do for herself before the renovations were completed.



Happiness is

*We've not only changed the physical appearance; we've also

CHANGED OUR HEARTS."

Being Home

n any given day, Assisi House is a bustle of activity. You may find sisters gathered in chapel for morning Mass, next to the fireplace on evenings when there is a chill in the air, or under the skylight on summer nights when the sun stays out well past the dinner hour. You may find sisters coming or going on their way to appointments, at the

puzzle table looking for a piece to fit into one of the series of jigsaws always in process, or sharing a cup of tea with the others in

the country kitchen. On

Tuesday nights, you can find Sister Mary Rita Barbernitz playing cards with her friends in the activity room. Like nearly one hundred Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, Sister Mary Rita lives at Assisi House, the congregation's retirement residence in Aston, Pennsylvania. Originally opened in 1976, Assisi House recently underwent a major renovation in response to feedback from congregational members.

Changing trends in senior living and senior care led to initiating a Retirement Committee which explored these developments and others. "The leadership team developed a committee to elicit ideas from the congregation about what they wanted Assisi House to be and look like," said Sister Jane LaManna, administrator of Assisi House. "From that we learned that sisters wanted the facility to be more home-like

✓ Sister Jane LaManna visits with Sister Mary Rita Barbernitz. Sister Mary Rita welcomed the changes to Assisi House, describing the new spaces as "bright and cheerful."





at Assisi House

and that they wanted to see a different model of care." They preferred a model that would allow them to retain their independence for as long as possible and to allow them to make their own choices. The motto that drove the decision-making process was, "nothing about me, without me."

A New Model Of Care

The committee brought the feedback gathered from the congregation to Spiezle Architects who used the suggestions of the sisters to reimagine Assisi House as a bright and comfortable space that evokes a cozy, rather than institutional, feel. However, a change in the philosophy has been as transformative to Assisi House in the past couple of years as the changes to its physical space.

The residence has shifted from a medical model to a more person-centered one. Under this new system, sisters have more

opportunities to personalize their schedules and make their own decisions. "We are working toward involving the sisters in decision-making and planning," said Sister Jane. "We've not only changed the physical appearance; we've also changed our hearts."

Whereas sisters used to be awakened at a certain time in the morning to start bathing and getting dressed, staff members now allow sisters to rise on their own and decide when they want to get ready for their day. Mealtimes have been extended as well to give sisters more choices about when to eat. For those who don't want to go to the dining room, meals can be taken in the new country kitchen located on each of the residential wings.

Even the language used at Assisi House has changed to reflect an effort to respect the dignity of the sisters who live there. "Person first" language is emphasized to maintain sisters' individuality and humanity and to recognize that a sister's challenges do not define her. Staff members might refer to "sisters who use wheelchairs," for example, rather than "the wheelchair bound."

A greater emphasis is also being put on nurturing relationships between sisters and staff members during every part of the day. Even interactions around medication distribution or wound



Sister Angela Patrice Power

care are being more purposefully utilized as opportunities to engage with sisters on a personal level. "Things sometimes take longer that way but the rewards for both sisters and staff are worth the extra time," said Sister Jane.

continued on page 14



▲ Nurse Theresa Burke confers with Anne Gibbons, a nurse practitioner from Mercy Life. As of May 1, Assisi House began a partnership with Mercy Life. Together, the two organizations are working to provide each sister at Assisi House with a more comprehensive care plan.

How You Can Help...

- Pray for the health and contentment of the sisters who have spent a lifetime in service to others and continue to minister as powerful agents of prayer.
- Volunteer at a nursing or long term care facility near you. From spending time one-on-one to entertaining the entire facility, volunteer opportunities can take a variety of forms. Offer to play board games with residents, give a piano concert or perform a singalong, bring your pet in to visit, or teach a skill like scrapbooking, painting, or tai chi.
- Make time for the seniors in your own life. As the losses associated with aging mount, older people can sometimes begin to feel isolated. Call to check in or to chat, invite them to dinner, or bring an elderly friend or neighbor along with you to church or community events.
- Offer to help with simple tasks like changing lightbulbs, replacing smoke detector batteries, or shoveling snow. Such everyday household duties can be difficult or impossible for the elderly.

A Fresh New Look

Visitors need only walk through the front door to see the physical changes that have taken place. A receptionist greets guests at a new station right at the front door. Just beyond that, a spacious parlor provides an inviting place to entertain visitors. Tables, chairs, and sofas are arranged in groups for visiting, playing games, or doing puzzles changes that enhance the concept of community life. A gas fireplace and a skylight give a warm, inviting feel to the space. "The common area is filled with natural light now," said Sister St. Joseph Brennion who came to live at Assisi House just around the time renovations were being completed. "It is really beautiful."

Each of Assisi House's two residential wings has been updated as well. The biggest change is to the former kitchenettes which have been made over into roomy, fully-equipped country kitchens. Walls from the old space have been removed to bring in more natural light and the open space provides accessibility for sisters to gather. "That is one of the nicest changes," said Sister Mary Rita. "Now the kitchen is a lovely, bright space for us to enjoy an afternoon snack together." What makes this area so special is that the sisters who are able now have the ability to prepare themselves a light snack or enjoy special projects like baking cookies.

The living room on each of the two wings also received makeovers. More natural light, a gas fireplace, and new furniture have made the spaces more appealing areas for sisters to relax, gather for prayer, talk with one another, listen to music, or watch TV. Sisters sometimes congregate

here to watch sporting events or movies. On nice days, they can go directly from the living room to an adjacent patio to enjoy the outdoors. In addition, a patio outside the kitchen provides a spot overlooking the garden for sisters to enjoy when the weather is good.

Other renovated spaces throughout Assisi House add to the more home-like environment. An expanded library is more centralized and is filled with books, magazines, daily newspapers, and computers. Yet another positive feature is the laundry room which also received a facelift. With its larger size, new windows, and extra tables and chairs, this previously utilitarian space has become a place the sisters appreciate. The modification enables sisters to do their own laundry—even those in wheelchairs or using assistive devices.

One thing that is unchanged—apart from the fresh coat of paint replacing wood panels—is the chapel which Sister Jane describes as "the heart of the place." There sisters gather for daily liturgy and to pray the office together in the morning and afternoon. In addition, sisters come to the chapel individually to share a quiet conversation with God or to remember the many requests for prayer that they receive. Although they may have retired from their ministries as teachers, hospital administrators, or pastoral associates, the sisters at Assisi House take their ministry of prayer every bit as seriously as they did those earlier callings. They remember each request written in the book of intentions and continue developing their own spiritual life through prayer services, spiritual direction, and personal reflection.





Assisi House's new design enables sisters to be as active as their health allows. Sisters Margaret Appell and Julia Tierney take care of the flower boxes outside Clare Hall (left). Sister Anna Maria Keenaghan takes a minute to socialize with Sister Regina Lanahan in the country kitchen as she works on her knitting (right).



A Place To Call Home

All the changes at Assisi House, whether physical or philosophical, have resulted in an environment where sisters can remain as active and autonomous as possible for as long as possible. Their relationship with other congregational members flourishes as sisters drop in to assist with activities and spiritual opportunities, to help bake cookies, or to simply visit. Residents are able to take full advantage of all the opportunities

to stay involved both within Assisi House and beyond it. Sister St. Joseph, for example, appreciates the ease with which she can attend daily Mass and prayer services. She also takes part in morning and afternoon recreation sessions and enjoys special events. All sisters who are able use the Assisi House shuttle to attend gatherings in the motherhouse, spiritual center, or Neumann University. In addition, Sister St. Joseph travels to the YMCA three times a week for water aerobics.





Sister Marie Joseph Kerr reads the daily paper in the updated community living room area. Medical attention is always only a few moments away. Here Sister William Clare Platt gets her blood pressure taken by Nurse Maria D'Angelo, RN.

The autonomy the sisters at Assisi House enjoy is balanced with the support they need to allow them to feel safe and secure. "I'm not as strong as I used to be so it's good to always have someone around to help," said Sister St. Joseph. "The staff here is so friendly and compassionate. They are here to help us with things that are difficult for us."

Since its beginnings in 1976, Assisi House has always been home for our retired sisters who have spent their lives in service and community. The recent changes have made it seem even more so. "I'm so grateful to our community for providing a place like this," said Sister Mary Rita. "Instead of having to go to a nursing home full of strangers when I got to a point where I needed help with the chores of daily living, I came to what is really another convent filled with my own sisters. I have been very happy here."

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

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Wake Up the World - Celebrating the Year of Consecrated Life



(L-R) Joining in the Day of Service at Anna's Place were Leigh Burton, Jerome Burton, Sister Jean Rupertus, Michal Curry, Sisters Donna Roccio, Doris Johnson, and Maria Orlandini. Photo was taken by Sister Chris Wagner who was also a volunteer.



"I had a great time and would love to go again. Lilley does a great job there. Thank You!" John G. Vernon, volunteer and Franciscan companion since 2001. John also supplied the photos from the day.

Day of Service

As one part of our celebration of the Year of Consecrated Life, we hosted a day of service at two of our ministries: Red Hill Farm in Aston and Anna's Place in Chester. The folks who showed up at the farm enjoyed the sunny outdoors as they harvested onions and arranged them on racks to cure. At Anna's Place volunteers gathered for prayer and a light breakfast, took a tour of the facility and learned a bit about the ministry, and then settled in to clean the second floor! At noon volunteers from both sites met back at the motherhouse for lunch and socializing with the sisters.

Afternoon of Prayer

In September we sponsored an Afternoon of Prayer at our motherhouse in Aston in celebration of the Year of Consecrated Life declared by Pope Francis. The afternoon included midday prayer, a reflection by Sister Anne Amati, an hour of quiet adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and Benediction. To emphasize the theme of this special year—"Wake Up the World"—the prayer service ended with the beautiful new hymn, "Wake the World With Dawning Joy," by Steven C. Warner. We concluded the afternoon by joining our guests for refreshments and a time of socializing.

Herb Garden Dedication

In April the sisters at Our Lady of Angels Convent dedicated the herb garden and planted a tree in memory of our good friend and coworker, Jeff Buckley, a member of our grounds crew who died suddenly last winter. Jeff's family, his fiancée Angela Kidder and her family, friends of Jeff and Angela, and both former and current employees joined us for liturgy. Following the liturgy we moved to the herb garden for the blessing. The dedication was particularly fitting because Jeff had taken such great pride and joy in cultivating this little piece of Earth. The herb garden looked beautiful—the soil fresh, the plants just beginning to blossom, and the trees overlooking the garden showing the first signs of spring after a long winter. Across the pathway from the herb garden was a young tree—newly planted in Jeff's memory. A shovel and fresh soil lay next to the tree and while we waited to move into the dining room, Jeff's family and friends took the opportunity to add additional soil to anchor the tree.



The sisters and guests gathered around the perimeter of the garden for a beautiful prayer service during which Angela Kidder blessed the area with holy water.

First Group of Franciscan Volunteers Arrive

September marked the start of something new for the Sisters of St. Francis. With the arrival of our first four volunteers, our Franciscan Volunteers: *No Risk, No Gain* program was officially launched! The house where the volunteers live is located a short distance from the motherhouse. Thanks to donations of furniture and household necessities from our sisters and friends, the house was ready to welcome the four volunteers: Kathleen

from Manchester, New Hampshire; Mikah from South Philadelphia; Neil from Buffalo, New York; and Sabina from Floresville, Texas. On September 4 they joined with a group of our sisters for a barbeque and then began their introduction to both the congregation and to their individual ministries. Important elements of their volunteer experience will include emphasis on communal living, social justice, and spirituality. Each volunteer will have opportunities to connect with a self-selected "sister sidekick"—perhaps to share dinner, socialize, or just chat. We feel blessed that these young women and men have chosen to journey with us this year—for their willingness to share in our ministries, learn about our Franciscan charism and spirituality, and establish a relationship with our sisters.







In Memoriam

Sister Rose Monica Katusz May 30, 2015

Sister Frances Will (formerly Sister Emily Leo) June 20, 2015

Sister Irene Juras (formerly Sister John Celine) June 28, 2015

> Sister Judith O'Neill June 29, 2015

Sister Marcus Streibig August 21, 2015

Sister Patricia Ellen Cosgrove (formerly Sister Laboure) September 18, 2015

Sister Anne McMahon (formerly Sister Catherine Philomene) October 4, 2015

> Sister Janice Bahl (formerly Sister John Andrew) October 7, 2015

Gathering Day – Sharing More than the Joy of the Gospel

Sisters from east and west, companions, and former members gathered at the Neumann University Life Center in Aston for our 2015 Gathering Day. After a continental breakfast, the program began with prayer and a welcome by Sister Kathy Dougherty, congregational minister. The morning focused on the "joy of the Gospel," a theme developed by Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation. Each of our four presenters explained how he or she experiences the "joy of the Gospel" as a lived reality. Our speakers were Joan DeGregorio, a former member; Kathy Joyce, one of our companions; Sister Nora Nash, our director of corporate social responsibility; and John Kruse, an employee of Neumann University. A midmorning break and lunch allowed time for socializing—always an important part of our gatherings! Following lunch we spent time in quiet reflection and sharing insights on the morning's presentations. The afternoon program offered several options: tours of the motherhouse, presentations on both our new volunteer program and Young Franciscans, and—more time to socialize! At 4 P.M. we



Sisters Helen Jacobson and Ruth Bernadette O'Connor chat with former member, Linda Vonderschmidt-LaStella (center).

moved to the motherhouse for our Eucharistic liturgy during which Sisters Sara Marks and Kathy Flood renewed their vows and our companions renewed their annual commitment. We concluded with a delicious dinner served by our always gracious food services staff.

▶ According to Sr. Marie Barbara McNamara, "Carol loves her work—always doing her best to produce something meaningful and beautiful with great competence, diligence, good humor, and humility."



Fon CUS

CAROL BAIOCCHI

From her wealth of experience as a companion, Carol shares ways to improve and strengthen her local group and enriches the meetings with her presence and contributions.



"I FEEL THAT SHE HAS TRULY CAPTURED THE FRANCISCAN SPIRIT AND SHARES IT WELL WITH OTHERS, BOTH IN THE COMPANION GROUP AND IN MINISTRY."



Born in Philadelphia the oldest of six children and raised Lutheran, Carol Baiocchi grew up surrounded by a host of Catholic friends that influenced her conversion to Catholicism at age 18.

Employed by St. Mary Hospital in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, Carol eventually became secretary for the unit where Sister Barbara Lucas worked. This was Carol's first experience with a sister; her "whole life changed"! Both Carol and her husband Gene started to lector, distribute communion, assist with healing ceremonies, and pray with people. Sister Barbara remembers Carol as a warm, loving, compassionate, caring woman who was always ready to help and go above and beyond.

In 1986 Sister Clare Carty hired Carol for a position in the president's office at St. Mary's where Carol met, assisted, and grew closer to many more Sisters of St. Francis. Then as administrative assistant to Sister Jean Margaret McDevitt, Carol produced prayer services for all occasions and departments, worked at the food pantry in Penndel, helped the Bucks County Housing group, oversaw varied charitable activities for needy employees and children, and became a Franciscan Companion.

After 24 years at St. Mary's, Carol retired to stay home with her husband Gene, travel, and spend time with their seven children and grandchildren but in October 2004—a few months after Gene's death—she was enticed to return to St. Mary's. According to Sister Elizabeth M. Murphy, "Carol is the soul of hospitality in the Spiritual Care Office—never too busy to help." Sister Pat Warman added, "Carol has been a mainstay for our companion group—present at almost every meeting to contribute her insights

and prayerfulness. I feel that she has truly captured the Franciscan spirit and shares it well with others, both in the companion group and in ministry."

Had she been a Catholic from the beginning, Carol might have become a sister herself but believes that the next best thing is being a companion. In her own words, "Sharing with them and being part of their future is wonderful. The Sisters of St. Francis have become part of my life and that of my family. It has been a wonderful 35 years and I look forward to many more."

Carol feels lucky having a very close and large family. She enjoys spending time and traveling with her seven children, their extended families, and friends.

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21st Annual Golf Tournament

The Sisters of St. Francis Foundation Annual Golf Tournament is certainly a major fundraiser for the congregation but more than that, it's also an established tradition. September's tournament marked the 21st anniversary for the event. As usual the day brought many of the same people to the Radley Run Country Club as well as a number of new players. Whether they were engaging in a

game of golf, enjoying the delicious dinner, or checking out and bidding on auction items, both old faithfuls and new friends were quick to say, "We'll be back next September." A number of sisters were also present—chatting with old friends, making new ones, and, in some cases, enjoying a round of golf. For all of the attendees, the tournament has become more than a way to raise needed funds. It's also a way to make and sustain friendships!





Special thanks to all of our golfers and sponsors, especially our Cocktail Sponsor, Ammon/Williams Allstate Agency.

"ALL THE DARKNESS IN THE WORLD CANNOT EXTINGUISH THE LIGHT OF A SINGLE CANDLE." THESE WORDS OF ST. FRANCIS REMIND ME OF THE LIGHT OF ALL THOSE WHO SUPPORT US—NOT JUST A SINGLE CANDLE BUT THOUSANDS! WITH THE LIGHT OF YOUR GENEROSITY, WE WILL BE ABLE TO CONTINUE SERVING THOSE IN NEED."

- Sr. Mary Vandergeest, Sisters of St. Francis Foundation

■ Sister Corda Marie Bergbauer, then congregational minister—surrounded by Mother Agnes MacIntyre; novice, Sister Elizabeth DeWaele; Father Walsh; and many others—shovels the first bit of dirt at the groundbreaking ceremony for Assisi House in 1974. When the sisters broke ground on the building of Assisi House that day, they never imagined the wonderful place of hospitality and prayer that it is today—a home that has changed with the times and a convent that has remained a spiritual haven and home to our sisters through the years. Read about the recent uplift that Assisi House received, not just in appearance but also in philosophy and method of care on page 12. Photograph by Charles F. Sibre