



# Good NEWS

Volume 12.1 Spring 2009

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**Commitment Statement**

We recommit ourselves to “rebuilding the Church” by living the passion of the Gospel in the discerning spirit of our Franciscan charism and tradition.

We are willing to take the necessary risks to be a healing, compassionate presence in our violent world especially with women, children, and those who have no voice.

We desire to reflect this commitment in our dialogue with the entire Church, in our own governing structures, and in our relationship with one another as sister.

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

*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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POINT OF VIEW

Celebrating History...

2009 began with the historic inauguration of our 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, Barack Obama. In his pre-inauguration days, he appointed many of the members of his cabinet and staff. Together they have committed to a movement toward change, to make life better for the people of the United States, and to improve our standing in the international community.

As Franciscans we also celebrate a special historic event this year. 2009 is the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Franciscan Movement. In 1209, St. Francis of Assisi and a few of his followers presented themselves before Pope Innocent III to ask for the approval of their form or rule of life. Francis wrote many years later in his Testament:

And after the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me.

Men from many walks of life continued to join Francis. A few years later, he welcomed a sister named Clare. When lay men and women expressed a desire to follow his way of life, Francis created a new Order designed especially for them, taking into consideration their family commitments. From these humble beginnings in Assisi, Italy, the followers of Francis and Clare have multiplied to bring good news and a healing, compassionate presence to people in nearly every country in the world. They go out as brother or sister to share God’s love with people and all of creation.

The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia are a part of this worldwide Franciscan movement. Since our founding by Maria Anna Bachmann in 1855, over 2,200 women have dedicated their lives to live as sister with one another, with the entire human family, and with all of creation. They respond to the needs of others, especially the economically poor, those on the margins of society, and those who are oppressed.

In this edition of the *Good News*, the directors of our vocation and formation programs share how they invite women to come and see our way of life and to discern whether they feel called to our particular congregation. Their primary goal in these discussions is to assist the women in determining how best to live a purposeful and meaningful life and be a compassionate presence in a violent world.

In this edition also, we see this healing, compassionate presence lived out in the ministry at Drexel Neumann Academy. The academy, a unique collaboration between the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, Neumann College, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and St. Katherine Drexel Parish in Chester, Pennsylvania, offers a quality education and an environment conducive to learning for children who otherwise may not have this opportunity. Many of the students live with violence on the streets and in their neighborhood.

The president, faculty, and staff are engaged in a movement to improve the lives of the students. Board members, supporters, and the greater community lend their expertise and support. Students are encouraged to live the Franciscan charism by being caring and compassionate to each other and by reaching out in service to others. Parents have expressed appreciation for the difference they see in their children. For them, Drexel Neumann Academy is a “saving grace.”

St. Francis said at the end of his life that he had done what God had called him to do. He prayed that God would teach each of us what is ours to do. I echo Francis’ hope that we will do what is ours to do to improve the lives of others and to make our world a better place.

The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia keep you and your families in prayer. May God give you peace and all good!

*Sister Esther Anderson, OSF*

Sister Esther Anderson, OSF  
Congregational Minister

**On the cover:** President of Drexel Neumann Academy, Sister Maggie Gannon recognizes the importance of knowing students personally and has sought out a friendly encounter with Robert Thompson.





*Class breaks frequently find Sister Maggie Gannon (far right) out of her office and in the hall to greet students and get a sense of how their day is going.*



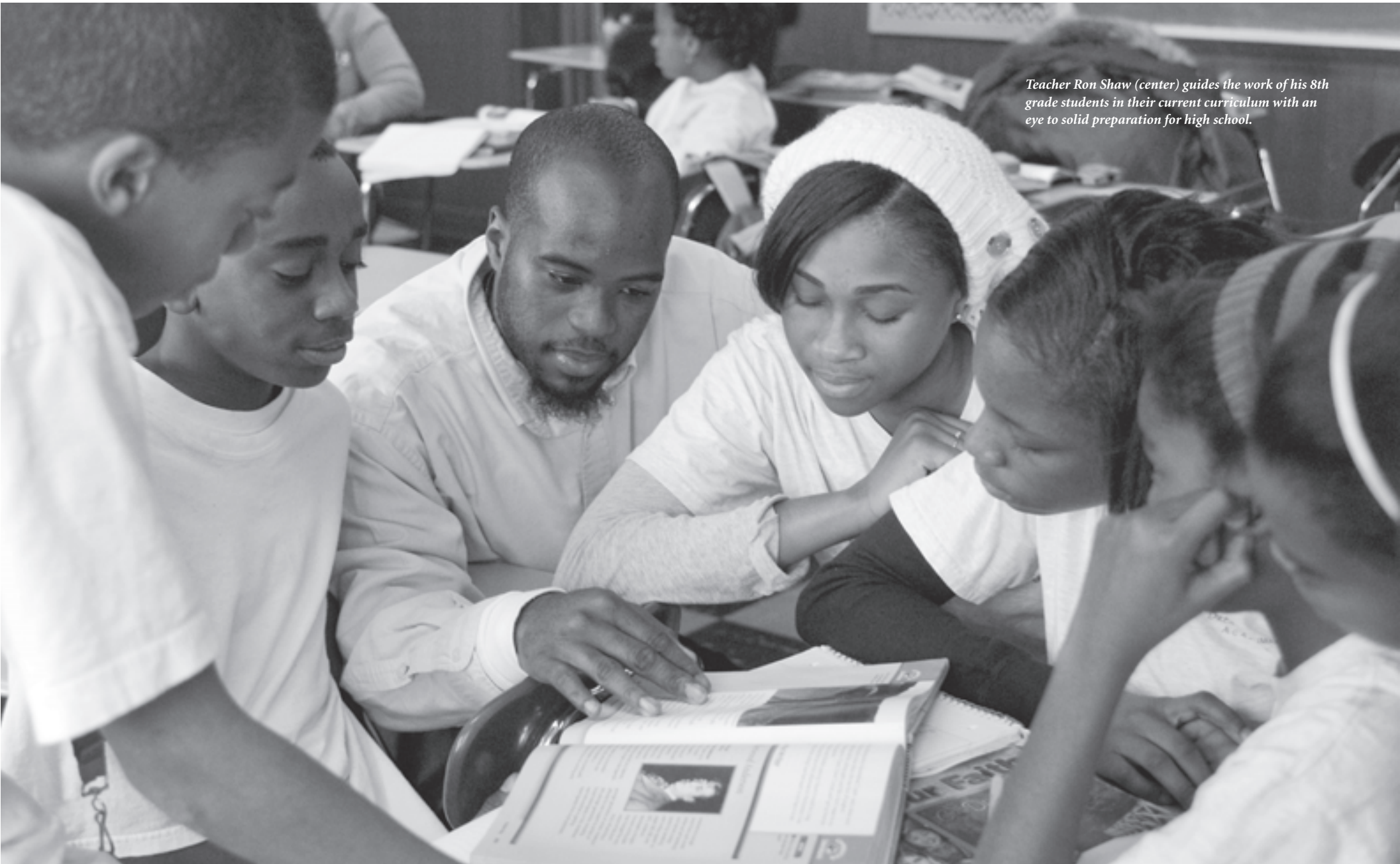
*Fourth grade students enjoy a departure from normal classroom activities by engaging with books during an outing to the school library.*



*Brien Johnson (Keli's son) is really taking his education seriously these days; when he has a question, he is not afraid to approach teacher Ann Ambacher for assistance.*

# Saving Grace

*A Safe Place to Learn in a Tough Neighborhood*



*Teacher Ron Shaw (center) guides the work of his 8th grade students in their current curriculum with an eye to solid preparation for high school.*

“WE HAVE BEAUTIFUL, TALENTED STUDENTS WITH GREAT PARENTS. BUT OUR FAMILIES HAVE A LOT OF STRUGGLES AND FEW OPPORTUNITIES.”



*The Johnson family—parents Rob and Keli with children Brien and Anyae—happily pose near Drexel Neumann Academy's main entrance.*

Keli Johnson grew up in a modest, close-knit neighborhood of working families in Chester, a small town of 37,000 on the outskirts of Philadelphia. She was educated in public and Catholic schools. “When we left high school, we were prepared for college,” said Keli, an executive secretary for a healthcare facility. She still lives in Chester with her husband Rob, who owns his own telecommunications business, and their two children. Her family lives nearby.

But Chester hasn’t fared well over the years. During the last several decades, businesses have left Chester—along with the good jobs they provided—and the town is “fairly poor” now, according to Keli. In fact, Chester’s public school system ranks among the lowest in Pennsylvania for academic achievement. Keli and Rob despaired of finding good, safe schools in the neighborhood for their son Brien, 12, and his six-year-old sister, Anyae.

A charter school that seemed to offer promise for her son proved disappointing—no textbooks or science and social studies classes. “I was appalled by it,” Keli said. “I was determined he would not go back. Young people today graduate without being able to formulate a simple paragraph. Without an education people are bound to get in trouble. When they can’t get jobs, some resort to violence and drugs to make ends meet.”

### A Unique Partnership Keeps Catholic Education Alive

Then a friend told Keli about Drexel Neumann Academy. The academy is the result of a unique collaboration among the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, Neumann College, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and St. Katharine Drexel Parish in Chester. The archdiocese once operated five elementary schools and a high school in Chester but lack of enrollment and financial

difficulties over the last 15 years forced the consolidation and closure of all but one elementary school—St. Katharine’s. Five years ago the decision was made to close St. Katharine’s, too.

That’s when Sister Lynn Patrice Lavin, OSF, and Dr. Rosalie Mirenda, president of Neumann College, approached the archdiocese and the parish to discuss ways to keep Catholic education alive in Chester. Prayer, discussion, and collaboration yielded the idea of working in partnership to create Drexel Neumann Academy, an independent Catholic school with a Franciscan charism. Each of the four partners brought their own gifts, perspectives, and resources to the relationship and the collaboration allowed them to do something together they could never have done alone. Drexel Neumann Academy—housed in St. Katharine’s and sporting a new paint job—opened in

*continued on page 4*



► Every day at lunch, Sister Maggie Gannon (far right) relishes sharing lighter moments with the students by telling a joke or two. The children love it!

▼ Principal Sister Cathy McGowan discovers that lunchtime provides the perfect opportunity to mingle socially with students.



continued from page 3

September 2007. In a neighborhood with few options for young people, the school offers a safe environment and quality education to 210 children, pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. Keli and Rob Johnson’s son Brien was among the young students who walked through its doors the first day.

Being Present For Children And Families

Sister Margaret Grace Gannon, OSF, is the president of the school and is responsible for insuring the integrity of the mission and its future. She works closely with the school principal, Sister Cathy McGowan, a Sister of St. Joseph. “We’re a good team,” she said. “We’re both focused on the mission.”

Sister Margaret Grace—or Sister Maggie, as most people know her—is very much aware of the world in which many of her students live. Street violence, relatives disappearing into prisons, needles and condoms in the parks—these children have seen it all. They live with it every day. Some children have seen family members shot. “We try to be present in the world they live in,” Sister Maggie said. “Because we live close by, we’re very connected—there’s that proximity.”

“We have beautiful, talented students with great parents. But our families have a lot

of struggles and few opportunities,” Sister Maggie said. More than two-thirds of all of Drexel Neumann’s families get by on less than thirty thousand dollars a year. Many children come to school without having eaten breakfast. Sister Maggie remembers a student who reported matter-of-factly that her mother didn’t have bus fare to come for her after school. “They’re rich in many ways but they still struggle,” she explained. “The parents are trying to provide their children with the best opportunities available and they make sacrifices to send them to our school.”

Learning Begins In The Classroom

Social studies and religion teacher, Ann Marissa Ambacher, admits that she didn’t enjoy studying history herself until she learned to teach it. “Now I bring history right into their world. We talk about slavery, about being a nation of immigrants. It opens their eyes to the world beyond,” she said.

Ann also shares her own personal experiences with students every day. She has traveled to Kenya and Mexico and can tell stories about how people live in other parts of the world. “The walls between teacher and student come down,” Ann explained. “They step inside my world and, in turn, let me into theirs.” She acknowledges that her students teach her as much as she teaches them. “I learn about their neighborhood and daily lives from their stories—stories of drugs, crime, guns,” Ann said. “The majority are not even allowed out once they get home. But they are full of life and have new eyes and new ears in the world. They catch what I miss.”

Ann’s students were particularly interested in the 2008 presidential election so she used it to teach civics and social studies. “They look at Barack Obama as a role model,” she said of the largely African American student

body. “They saw Obama and Hillary Clinton running for president and it made them feel ‘I could do that one day.’ They felt part of history.” Ann admits, however, that what’s going on at home in the children’s lives often spills over into school, making teaching a challenge. “But they choose to be here nine hours a day,” she said. “They come with smiles and high energy. They keep me on my toes. I’m where I’m meant to be, although I can’t see it everyday.”



► Kindergarten student Tyshawn Ferguson proudly displays his artistic accomplishment.

A Prayerful Foundation

At Drexel Neumann, prayer is an important part of the school day. Although 80 percent of the students come from non-Catholic households, the Franciscan charism of a living gospel expressed through compassion and service toward others infuses their education. Students pray in the morning and before meals. Ann Ambacher often asks students in her religion class if there is anyone who needs prayers—healing for a grandmother in the hospital, courage to pass a test, comfort for a friend who’s having a hard time. If they are shy or uncomfortable saying their prayers aloud, they are encouraged to hold them as a silent intention. As one way of broadening her students’ world, Ann taught them to say the Hail Mary in both Spanish and French.

Franciscan Presence

The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia not only helped keep Catholic education alive in Chester, but they also have a strong presence in the school. Accompanying Sister Maggie on her mission to help the youth of Chester are the following sisters:

Finance Coordinator  
Joan Cooper, OSF

Wellness Director  
Ann David Strohminger, OSF

Board of Directors  
Mary Vandergeest, OSF - Treasurer,  
Chair of Trusteeship Committee  
Marguerite O’Beirne, OSF  
Ruth Bernadette O’Connor, OSF  
Marie Agnes Connolly, OSF

Board of Members  
Esther Anderson, OSF



Reading can be fun as laughter between Colleen Ingelsby and fourth-grade student Kayla Brown attests.



“WE HOPE WE ARE HELPING THEM DEVELOP A FIRM FAITH FOUNDATION BASED ON THE GOSPEL,” SAID SISTER MAGGIE. “WE HOPE WE PROVIDE A MORAL COMPASS THAT GUIDES THEM THROUGH LIFE.”

Keli Johnson’s daughter Anyae, a first-grade student at Drexel Neumann, noticed a difference between practices at her family’s Baptist church and those at school. “I tell my children that the religion is a little different but we pray to the same God,” said Keli. “It’s just that at school you get an extra dose of it. As long as it’s done with love and respect for God, it’s all good.”

Kindness, Love, And High Expectations

Keli and Rob Johnson’s son Brien, now in his second year at the academy, is in seventh grade. Keli has already seen improvement. “I’ve seen him take on a lot more responsibility for his academics and his behavior,” she said. “He’s matured and he talks about being a role model for his sister.” Expectations at the school are high and all students are held accountable for abiding by the rules. “They promote kindness; they don’t tolerate fighting or bullying,” Keli explained. “When there is a need for discipline, they do it with love and kindness and talk to them to make sure they understand what they did wrong. For me, it’s like leaving my children with family.”

With so much going on in their young lives, Drexel Neumann students find a much-needed foundation and a safe haven in prayer, in a strong educational program, in the efforts of a caring faculty, and in the extra study time that the school provides. The school day ends at 2:30 but Drexel Neumann offers an extended day for its students, including a late afternoon snack and time for enrichment, reinforcement, and supplemental activities until 4:30. The extra time allows them to study or catch up on school

projects in a quiet, safe environment. “Many of them have responsibilities at home, like taking care of younger siblings. This gives them a little time away from that,” Ann Ambacher said. Students also attend a mandatory three weeks of summer school every year.

And, of course, there are sports. Sister Maggie and Sister Cathy attend most of the school games and know all of the parents—like Keli and Rob Johnson—by name. Brien Johnson plays on the school’s championship basketball team and his parents often help set up for games and sports banquets.

Saving Grace

Keli is pleased and grateful that she found Drexel Neumann Academy and that both of her children are doing well there. “It’s a warm, friendly environment,” she said. The faculty and staff are all very personable and extremely dedicated to providing an education to these children. Anyae loves it; she reads everything. And Brien—I’ve really seen him grow.”

Brien is no exception. In the midst of a very tough neighborhood, Drexel Neumann Academy is a saving grace for families who otherwise would not have been able to offer their children a good education in a safe environment. “We hope we are helping them develop a firm faith foundation based on the gospel,” said Sister Maggie. “We hope we provide a moral compass that guides them through life. We remember St. Francis’ saying, ‘Preach the gospel at all times; use words when necessary.’ That’s how we try to show our children what might be possible in their future and in their world.”



HOW YOU CAN HELP...

- The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia continue to support Drexel Neumann Academy and its mission to provide an excellent Catholic education for young children. Make a cash donation to the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia and we’ll send your contribution to Drexel Neumann to support its outstanding programs and assist with scholarships for low-income students.
- Service to others is central to the Franciscan way of life. Consider volunteering at a local Catholic school on a program that needs your help or work with the school to link students to volunteer opportunities in the community.
- Parents are always their children’s first teachers but many parents are too busy earning a living to spend time at school. Help young parents you know by staying with their children to help with homework—or play games—while parents attend school meetings. Or offer to do grocery shopping or other errands during a busy week so that the whole family can attend a school event together.

Share with us the good news of what you did!  
Call or email us with the action(s) you took: (610) 558-7726, [goodnews@osfphila.org](mailto:goodnews@osfphila.org).

Ann Ambacher concurs with Sister Maggie’s vision. While her students may be too young and too busy living life to see the path Drexel Neumann Academy has set them on, that path holds endless possibilities. “When they graduate and look back, that’s when they’ll really get it,” Ann said. ■

For more information or comments on this article, contact [goodnews@osfphila.org](mailto:goodnews@osfphila.org).



First grader Anyae Johnson (second from left) and her classmates take turns reading and listening to each other’s journal entries.



# PEOPLE & PLACES

**W**ho 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.

## LOUISIANA

Representing the congregation’s Committee for Corporate Responsible Investment, Sister Miriam Eileen Murray visited New Orleans to participate in the launch of the Isaiah Fund. The fund is a collaborative project of Catholic, Jewish, Mennonite, and Baptist institutions whose mission is to rebuild New Orleans home by home and street by street. Working in affiliation with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (of which the Sisters of St. Francis are members), the Isaiah Fund is believed to be the first national interfaith fund for long-term domestic disaster recovery. They have already raised money to create two disaster relief funds that will help affordable-housing projects close financing gaps, assist small businesses to get back on their feet, and support the development of community centers on the Gulf Coast. Following Sister Miriam Eileen’s visit, the Committee for Corporate Responsible Investment approved a loan to the Isaiah Fund. “Members of the fund are some of the most passionate, committed people I have ever met,” Sister Miriam said. “Have no doubt that they will be instrumental in the rebuilding of large parts of New Orleans and other cities along the Gulf Coast.”

*Sister Miriam Eileen Murray (fourth from left) toured New Orleans with potential investors in the Isaiah Fund. The purpose of the gathering was to tour the areas where investments might be made and to meet the builders, the movers, and the shakers there. If New Orleans is to be rebuilt, it must have the support of projects like this.*



*The Outer Banks served as the locale for Earth Hope’s planning meeting, allowing Sisters Marya Grathwohl, Companion Val Cummings, Sister Helen Prejean, and Joanna Stott (not pictured) to be inspired by the coastal beauty and diversity of the region.*

## NORTH CAROLINA

Companion Val Cummings welcomed Earth Hope Directors Sisters Marya Grathwohl, OSF, and Helen Prejean, CSA, and board member Joanna Stott to the Outer Banks. They spent time in prayer and planning for the future of Earth Hope, a community whose goal is “to inspire, teach, and create mutually enhancing human-Earth relationships within the sacred web of life, made bold by the compassion of Jesus for the world.” The agenda included a review of Earth Hope’s recent activities, among them a weekend presentation at Chestnut Hill College, where both Val and Companion Director Kathy Boehm offered a supporting presence. Plans were also set in motion for Kathy and Val to join Helen and Marya at Mt. St. Agnes in Baltimore to speak to women interested in forming Earth Hope Support Circles. The weekend also provided time for streamlining the administration of the Earth Hope office; refining the marketing efforts for Camp Earth Hope, a summer experience for high school girls set in Wyoming; and the development of an online newsletter. For more information concerning Earth Hope, visit their website, [www.earth-hope.org](http://www.earth-hope.org).

## NEW YORK

Angela of Foligno? For those who know little or nothing about this 14<sup>th</sup> century Franciscan woman, the Franciscan Institute’s summer session at St. Bonaventure University is a great place to start. Sister Diane Tomkinson will be presenting a one-week, one credit course. It will be of particular interest to those who participated in the “God’s Extravagant Love” program which included a brief introduction to Angela of Foligno’s contributions to Franciscan spirituality and theology. Using Angela’s writings, Sr. Diane will examine perspectives on various Franciscan themes: prayer, poverty, creation and incarnation, suffering, relationships in community, and the mystery of Triune love as revealed in Jesus. The summer session also provides participants with the experience of sharing with the broader Franciscan community, not only in class but also in prayer, at meals, and in social activities.



## WASHINGTON

Like most high school students, the young women and men at Kennedy High School in Seattle make good use of the library. What many of them may not know is that some of the library’s 14,000 volume collection once graced the library of Our Lady of Angels Convent in Portland, Oregon. When the former novitiate and province office at Palatine Hill closed and the property was sold to Lewis and Clark College, the library collection was donated to Kennedy High School. The collection boasted of a variety of genres, including language arts, theology, science, and history. Kennedy librarian, Kay Crane, sorted and catalogued the collection. Volumes that Kennedy already possessed were shared with other schools. Crane discovered that some of the volumes were very valuable. Many had been out of print for years. She continues to remind the sisters that the books—which she describes as rare finds—are still being used and that this one act of generosity has enhanced many library collections.







◀ The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia joined thousands of others at the gates of Fort Benning, Georgia, calling for the closure of the School of the Americas.

## CONNECTICUT

When the Archdiocese of Hartford held a party celebrating Sister Loretta Francis Mann's retirement, guests came from every diocese in New England. Sister Loretta had ministered in the archdiocese for 30 years, first as Curriculum Coordinator and, for the last 20 years, as Assistant Superintendent of Schools. Life in "retirement," however, will continue to blend Sister Loretta's 58 years in education and her love of children. Three days a week she ministers as Mission Coordinator for Education for the Holy Childhood Association, educating archdiocesan school personnel about the concept of "children helping children." Each Monday and Friday finds her volunteering at the neonatal unit at St. Francis Hospital. As part of the Cuddler Program, Sister Loretta works with premature babies. "This is a very rewarding experience for me," she said. "These babies are so medically fragile and it is a joy to bundle them up, cuddle them close, and sing songs and hymns to them."



## MARYLAND

For Sister Dorothy Franz and the people of St. Paul Parish in Ellicott City, 2008-2009 has been a special time. During the Church-designated Year of St. Paul, the parish has been named the official pilgrimage church for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. In addition to hosting pilgrimage groups, they held a number of special events to celebrate this special status. In her role as Parish Catechetical Leader, Sister Dorothy has been actively involved in planning and implementing these activities. In January, as part of a celebration of the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, she arranged a special showing of the film, *One Body, Many Parts: St. Paul in His Own Words*, at a local theatre. After the movie, folks returned to the parish for an afternoon retreat. Sister Dorothy also arranged for a performance of the play *I, Paul* for both the middle school students and parish adults. Throughout this special year, she has served as a tour guide for pilgrim groups who visit the parish.



## NEW JERSEY

Sister Alberta Manzo was honored recently by the parishioners of St. Anne Parish in Jersey City for her more than twenty years of service in the parish. At this year's parish festival celebration, parishioners dedicated a Franciscan garden in her honor. In the center of the garden stands a statue of St. Francis with Sister Alberta's name inscribed on the base. Her years of dedication and service are reflected in the many activities she has either initiated or directed: religious education programs, the Rainbow Program, vacation bible school, Lenten scripture studies, adult formation groups, parish picnics, retreats, dances, trips, socials, and flea markets.



Sister Alberta Manzo gathered with family and friends to enjoy the Franciscan garden dedicated at St. Anne Parish in her honor.

## DELAWARE

Sister Dolores Macklin's many years of dedicated service to persons suffering with HIV/AIDS recently earned her the honor of being named Board Member Emeritus of the Delaware HIV Consortium Board of Trustees. She first began her work in 1988 when Wilmington's Catholic Charities proposed a program that would run for eleven months—months that stretched into almost twenty years. Sister Dolores' ministry with persons with HIV/AIDS included creating support groups for men, women, and families as well as bereavement support groups. She worked with Dr. Eppes at the Wilmington Hospital, helping pregnant women and their babies, and also with Dr. Skinner who assisted her with the men's groups. At one point, Sister Dolores was also named to the governor's task force for pediatric HIV/AIDS issues.



## WASHINGTON/ OREGON

The Sisters of St. Francis were among the many who attended "Human Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery," a program cosponsored by the Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center (IPJC). One of the congregation's cosponsored ministries, IPJC scheduled programs in Seattle, Spokane, and Portland. Each of the regional workshops provided educational information and resources, allowed for personal reflection and group discussion, and concluded with a commitment to end human trafficking. The primary presenter was Rani Hong. A trafficking survivor, Rani and her husband Trong Hong are founders of the Tronie Foundation where they "combine their professional skills with their desire to improve the lives of exploited women and children." To learn more about the Tronie Foundation, visit [www.tronie-foundation.org](http://www.tronie-foundation.org).

## GEORGIA

Carrying their congregation's banner and crosses bearing the names of people who have been murdered or "disappeared" by graduates of the School of the Americas, twelve members of the Sisters of St. Francis were once again among those who gathered at the gates of Fort Benning, Georgia, calling for the close of the SOA/Whinsec. During the solemn procession, the names of these victims were read aloud. Participants responded, "Presente," raising the crosses to symbolize the presence of these individuals at the gathering. The continued presence of the sisters at this yearly gathering is a way of concretizing the congregation's commitment to be a healing compassionate involvement in the world and to become a voice for those who have no voice.



## ITALY

When she was asked by Mary Erickson, director of the Franciscan Spiritual Center-West, to serve as spiritual guide for a pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi, Sister Mary Jo Chaves welcomed the invitation. The pilgrimage, which included two days in Rome and four in Assisi, proved a blessing for all involved. The pilgrims, diverse in age and background, journeyed from California, Washington, and Oregon. They represented various faith traditions, including an Episcopalian priest and a Methodist minister. Several of the congregation's companions also joined the group. The pilgrims found that the opportunity to visit—to experience first-hand—the places where Sts. Francis and Clare actually lived, worked, and prayed had a profound effect on their own lives. Visit the center's website, [www.francisspctr.com](http://www.francisspctr.com), to learn about upcoming events.



## AWARDS SPOTLIGHT

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

### Sister Ellen Eugene Callaghan

**2008 Distinguished Service Award**  
(on behalf of the Native Ministry Training Program)

National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, Alaska

### Sister Marijane Hresko

**President's Distinguished Alumni Award**

Neumann College, Pennsylvania

### Sister JoAnn McPolin

**Recognition of Service Award**  
(20 years of Participation in Essay/Poster Contests)

St. John the Beloved School, Delaware

### Sister Emma Mary Steckel

**Champions of the Community Award**

Phoenixville Community Health Foundation, Pennsylvania





► *St. Francis House in Puyallup, Washington, is a place where people can get clothing, furniture, toys, and other items to keep their families afloat in hard times. Sister Patricia Novak, vocations director for the west coast, and Norma Herrera, a Franciscan Companion, work together to make sure everything they put on display works properly.*



“TO LIVE GOOD AND HOLY LIVES—TO BE THE BEST PERSON  
I’M MEANT TO BE—THAT’S OUR BAPTISMAL CALL.”

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century



*Taking time in their busy lives to reflect on their relationship with God, students from Neumann College in Aston, Pennsylvania, meet for reflection and prayer.*

“God creates each of us with unique gifts and talents,” said Sister Mary Beth Antonelli, OSF, vocations director for the east coast. “But what is the best way for me to nurture my relationship with God? That’s the question.”

Sister Mary Beth is based in Aston, Pennsylvania, home to the congregation’s motherhouse and nearby Neumann College. She works with Neumann students on service projects in places like New Orleans and on a reservation in Wyoming that offer the chance to work side-by-side with women religious. “You get to know people better when you’re serving together,” Sister Mary Beth said. “How can you know if God is calling you to religious life if you don’t know how the sisters live? Once you have those relationships—that’s where more clarity about a vocation may come in.”

Not all of the women who attend vocation activities are looking to become sisters. Some are just looking for a way to slow down and connect more deeply with themselves and God. “Not everyone is called to religious life,” said Sister Patricia Novak, OSF, vocations director on the west coast and a resident of Portland, Oregon. “God calls all of us to holiness, each one of us in our own way. To live good and holy lives—to be the best person I’m meant to be—that’s our baptismal call.” For some that call will be lived out in a religious vocation. For others married life or the single life will be the path that leads to holiness and wholeness. Many married and single men and women choose to be connected to a particular congregation’s charism through affiliate programs. For the Sisters of St. Francis, the Franciscan Companions in Mission program provides such a relationship.

Women today have many more choices than their mothers or grandmothers had but those choices don’t always bring satisfaction. In a world where sex, power, and money are the measure of worth, some women are taking a fresh look at what religious life has to offer.

The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia are inviting women to “come and see” what religious life looks and feels like today. Youth and prayer groups, service opportunities, retreat weekends, and informal gatherings afford Catholic women time to reflect, ask questions, and build relationships with women religious.

## What Being a Sister of St. Francis Means to Me

“

I entered with great enthusiasm and deep yearning to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Along that journey I discovered that life is filled with valleys of peace and with mountains on which the climbing is long and arduous. Such a journey was necessary for me to discover ever so intimately how much our faithful God loved me.

**Sister Margaret Van Wagenen, OSF**

I cannot imagine my life in any other way but as a Franciscan religious. My journey as a woman religious has been rich and varied in the services God asked of me. Best of all are the women in our congregation who accompany me.

**Sister Anita Cattafesta, OSF**

Being a Sister of St. Francis, I know that I am called to be in relationship with God and all of creation. Standing on the shoulders of all those sisters who have gone before to spread the Gospel message, I am both challenged and humbled. The loving generous service of our sisters has greatly contributed to who I am now.

**Sister Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, OSF**

My heart is filled with the joy which so many shared with me. I cannot boast of great accomplishments but of the grace of faithfulness which God has granted to me—not just a fiftieth year of jubilation but a lifetime filled with a God who loves me.

**Sister Clare Agnes Conforti, OSF**

I have always felt proud to be a member of this great Franciscan congregation. In the spiritual, educational, and material needs, I feel blessed, privileged, and truly humbled by all the community has done for me. When I say “community,” I mean all the truly wonderful women who have been a part of my journey. I truly hope I have responded in kind, to both the Lord and community. It has been a pretty amazing ride—bumps and all.

**Sister Esther Stewart, OSF**

When I heard the call into religious life, I was searching for a path to fill a spiritual yearning. The Sisters of St. Francis awakened those hungerers in my heart. It was a call to holiness—not a “holier-than-thou” attitude, but rather a call to a wholesome, genuine, and fully committed life based on gospel values.”

**Sister Florence Petsch, OSF**





(Left) Sister Mary Beth Antonelli, vocations director for the east coast, talks with other leaders of the Neumann College Advent Retreat.

(Right) Sister Patty Kerezsi (left) chats with Sister Christa Thompson, director of the Franciscan Spiritual Center, at the motherhouse in Aston.

# Sisters

## A Compassionate Presence in a Violent World

### Listening For God

Retreats and prayer groups offer women a way to move more deeply into their lives and their relationship with God. Sister Patricia is involved with Busy Person Retreats for college students in the Northwest to help them carve out quiet time and to learn how to pray. The retreat



*Making use of the motherhouse chapel during the Advent retreat, a Neumann College student claims a pew for personal prayer and quiet.*

offers a half-hour of prayer and a half-hour of conversation with a spiritual companion over a period of four days.

“I’ve asked them, ‘How many of you take five or ten minutes a day for reflection?’ Their lives are full of text messages, TV, radio, iPods, cell phones. Prayer and discernment—how a person tries to know where God is calling him or her to be—was almost foreign to them,” said Sister Patricia. “For young people even to think this could be a life they might choose—a celibate life lived in relationship, a life of continuous conversion and of active contemplation—that’s not at all the world they move in.”

And yet she feels that God is still calling some to religious life. If a young woman feels she is called, Sister Patricia feels it is important for a prospective candidate to experience the world a bit, to travel, and finish college before taking any formal steps toward candidacy. “If one has a true vocation to religious life,” she said, “that doesn’t go away. The call will continue to surface.”

### Discerning A True Vocation

That was true for Sister Patty Kerezsi. She grew up in Aston in the shadow of the motherhouse and attended Catholic schools. Throughout high school and college, she felt drawn toward religious life. “But my head kept saying, ‘No, you want to get married and have children,’” she explained. “That’s what people are *supposed* to do.” She worked as a nursing assistant and teacher and enjoyed a busy social life with friends and family. But something kept tugging at her. She had gotten to know some of the sisters and eventually joined the Franciscan Companions in Ministry program for men and women who want to express their faith in service. “I thought I’d give a year of my life to a project in Appalachia and that’d be it,” she said.

After her year of service, she decided to study for a master’s degree in pastoral counseling at Neumann College. “A lot of that was about getting clients to look deeper into their own lives and I thought, ‘I need to do that myself,’” she said. “We had to really think about who we are and do *our own* work in counseling.”

Sister Patty discovered that she had gifts but lacked confidence. “I found out that

you don’t have to please and that it’s not all about what everyone else would think or say,” she said. She had feared that people would think she was “crazy” if she chose religious life but it turned out they’d been just waiting for her to see it. After what she describes now as “twenty years of discernment,” she followed her calling and joined the Sisters of St. Francis in 2003.

### Changes Inside And Out

Life in Catholic religious congregations has changed radically over the years. Perhaps the most obvious change is in the declining number of people entering religious life. In the 1940s and 50s, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia welcomed fifty or sixty new women each year. By the 1990s that number had fallen to one or two a year; one of the last woman to join the Sisters of St. Francis was Sister Patty Kerezsi. Since 1965, the number of Catholic sisters in the U.S. has fallen from nearly 180,000 to just over 67,000. Their average age is 69.

Sister Diane Tomkinson, OSF, is director of formation for the Sisters of St. Francis. She

*continued on page 10*

*The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia keep the doors open for young women who are considering religious life or are simply searching for ways to attend more deeply to their spiritual life and to connect with other women on the same path. Contact our vocations directors for more information or visit our website to view upcoming events.*

**Sr. Mary Beth Antonelli, OSF**  
Aston, Pennsylvania  
(610) 558-6789

**Sr. Patricia Novak, OSF**  
Portland, Oregon  
(503) 233-1878

[www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org)  
[vocations@osfphila.org](mailto:vocations@osfphila.org)

*Neumann College students (left to right): Kelly Render, Melissa Malick, and Megan Birchall dine with other students at the OSF motherhouse before the Neumann College Advent Retreat begins.*



I sincerely believe that I have lived my vocation as a Sister of St. Francis joyously and passionately and to this day I still feel much fulfilled as a Franciscan sister following in the footsteps of St. Francis.

**Sister Maria Vicenta Rodriguez**

My life has been a faith-filled journey, believing that a loving God is always present to me—no matter how deep the loss, no matter how challenging the situation, no matter what blessings and joy have been given to me. God is ever present, ever faithful, ever enduring, and ever sustaining.

**Sister Maureen Fox, OSF**

My life has been spent in teaching on the elementary level and I have loved every minute of that apostolate. Through the years I have been blessed with the help and friendship of the sisters and those whom I have met on the missions to which I have been assigned.

**Sister Edward Paul Colliton, OSF**

Becoming a Sister of St. Francis of Philadelphia has opened worlds to me: worlds of opportunity, of challenge, of relationships, of grace. How can I explain a lifetime of God’s love? Of friendship and encouragement from sisters? Of continual support from those with whom I minister?

**Sister Margaret Cunniffe, OSF**

Life as a Sister of St. Francis of Philadelphia excites me. It always has. I was professed in 1954 and always felt that I was working for God and with the people of God. However, in the past 24 years, my spirituality has grown into a deeper companionship with God and this relationship gives me life each day. My companionship with God excites me.

**Sister Damian Marie Jackson, OSF**

For the past 50 years I have witnessed a community of women religious who know how to celebrate God’s wonderful gifts.

**Sister Mary Hugh Black, OSF**



Our sisters “walk their talk” of the meaning of being “sister to one another.”

**Sister Carmel Gregg, OSF**

My journey challenges me to go deeper within myself to learn who God is calling me to become and to recognize who God becomes for me. My experiences as a vowed religious enabled me to make a home in God while God made a home in me.

**Sister Florence Hee, OSF**

*A mental health counselor with the Ministry of Caring, Sister Patty Kerezsi (left) interviews Shanelle Saunders as part of the admissions process for Hope House I in Wilmington, Delaware. Residents at this shelter for homeless women range in age from 18 to 75.*

”





*Sister Patricia Novak (center), meets with vocations directors from other religious congregations in Seattle, Washington. She finds that they all face many of the same challenges and benefit from sharing ideas and perspectives.*

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sisters

*continued from page 9*

describes her congregation as “not atypical of the arc in the U.S. in the 50s and 60s when second and third generation Catholic immigrants were entering the orders in large numbers.” In the late 60s and 70s, sisters and priests left their congregations in significant numbers and fewer joined. Sister Diane points to the upheaval in the Church and society in general, as well as changing roles and opportunities for women as reasons for the decline. Families’ attitudes have changed also. Sister Patricia Novak remembers her mother saying that she’d be thrilled if one of her daughters entered a convent. Now parents are apprehensive or even baffled about the choice—at least until they see that their daughter is happy in religious life.

In the last decade there has been a small uptick in the number of women joining religious congregations again. These women, according to Sister Diane, are looking for “community; for counter-cultural witness that moves away from consumerism toward simplicity and poverty; and for a life of prayer, joyfulness, and meaning—something deeper than She-Who-has-the-Most-Stuff-Wins.”

For anyone considering a vocation, Sister Patricia Novak recommends getting to know as many sisters as possible and building relationships and connections with others making the same decision. “Today’s young woman has to have a brave heart,” she said. With fewer women entering, those that do cannot count on the same kind of lifestyle that typified the past. Many of the 600+ Sisters of St. Francis live in small households or even alone. “Religious life is changing now and we don’t know what that means and where that leads,” Sister Patricia said. “It’s exciting to invite young women in to help us reshape the future.”

While driving down the freeway in Portland recently, listening to news of the war in Iraq, murder, and havoc, she experienced a moment of grace. “I could hear so plainly: ‘Our world needs this way of life. We can be a healing compassionate presence in a violent world.’ We don’t have the corner on that, by any means,” she said. “But sometimes a *freedom* comes from our choice.”

Sister Patty Kerezsi now lives in Pennsylvania with two other sisters and works at the Ministry of Caring in Delaware as a counselor with men and women who are poor and homeless. “Living in this house, praying, sharing meals, reflecting together on how the Gospel is being revealed in our time sustains me in this life,” she said. As the newest member of the congregation, she tries not to look too far down the road. “When I think about the future, it gets a little scary,” she said. “Who will be there with me? But when I focus on God, I know that this is where God has called me to be—in the present and living with these people, living the Gospel, serving people on the margins of society.” ■

For more information or comments on this article, contact [goodnews@osfphila.org](mailto:goodnews@osfphila.org).

# Focus

## THOMAS A. BRUDER

In 1971 Thomas A. Bruder, Jr., received a phone call from Bishop Edward T. Hughes with an invitation to join the Board of Trustees of Our Lady of Angels (now Neumann) College. Thirty-seven years later, Tom is still an active member of the board because, as he says, “The sisters won’t let me go!” Reflecting on the past four decades and the many changes the college has undergone, Tom expressed admiration for all that the Sisters of St. Francis have accomplished: “I never imagined that Neumann College would come this far.”

As a graduate of the University of Notre Dame, the father of six, and the grandfather of 18, Tom recognizes the value of education, particularly Catholic education. Over the years he has consistently advocated for quality education at an affordable price. Tom applauds Neumann’s efforts to keep tuition reasonable out of fairness to parents, especially those with several children: “I always stressed finding our niche and remaining within our financial means.” For Tom that niche has meant remaining relatively small and cultivating close relationships among faculty, administrators, and students.

During his 37 years as a member of the Neumann College board, Tom has served as chairperson of the Development Committee and a member of the Trustee Committee. Through his generosity the college was able to expand the Life Center, Athletic Center, and athletic fields. Tom received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws Honoris Causa from Neumann College on May 17, 2003. In appreciation for his outstanding leadership, dedication,

and service, the college renamed the Life Center the Tomas A. Bruder, Jr., Life Center in March 2008.

Sister Corda Marie Bergbauer, former congregational minister of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, served with Tom on Neumann’s board from 1971 to 1978 during a critical time in the history of the college. She described him with affection:

“TOM BRUDER IS  
LOW KEY ON WORDS  
BUT HIGH KEY ON  
GENEROSITY.”

*(L-R) Bishop Joseph P. McFadden, Thomas A. Bruder, Jr, Sister Lynn Patrice Lavin, and Dr. Rosalie Mirenda on Charter/Sponsorship Day 2008.*



*Seated: Kathleen and Tom Bruder. Standing: L-R, Sons John and Jim, daughter-in-law Lisa (Christopher), sister-in-law Sally Ryan, daughter-in-law Marissa (Jim), sister Mary Ann Flanagan, daughter-in-law Lynn (Tom), sons Tom and Christopher.*

*Missing from picture: son Tim and daughter Mary Kathleen Trusk*

“Tom Bruder is low key on words but high key on generosity. I have known Tom since the 1970s when he flew in on a Saturday afternoon and landed on the grounds of the college to attend a board meeting! We need more Tom Bruders in this world. He is a friend of the Sisters of St. Francis, a friend of Neumann College, and a friend of ‘yours truly.’”

Mr. Bruder is the former owner and president of M.A. Bruder & Sons, Inc., a family business that opened in 1899. Since his “retirement,” Tom has dedicated himself to the boards of Riddle Memorial Hospital and Mainline Health and, of course, Neumann College. When not engaged in board and committee meetings and philanthropic events, Tom enjoys playing golf and spending time with his family.



# SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

*Everyone has within a piece of good news.*

— Anne Frank (adapted)

See more good news at [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org)

## Celebrating Past and Present

Sisters Rosa Carmichael, Mary Teresa Carmichael, and Helen Martin recently attended a reunion celebrating the 60th anniversary of their graduation from St. Joseph Hospital School of Nursing in Baltimore. Because of the great need for nurses during WWII, student nurses joined the Cadet Corps and following graduation were required to give two years of military service. Fortunately the war ended and the Class of 1948 was the last Cadet Corps class. Sister Mary Teresa recalled the many changes in nursing and in healthcare since her graduation. In the 1960s St. Joseph's moved from the original hospital on Caroline Street to its present location in Towson. Although the hospital is no longer one of the congregation's sponsored ministries, the Franciscan spirit is strong and the healing ministry is carried on by a dedicated staff. Recently many of the Sisters of St. Francis attended the dedication of the new entrance, new facilities for the already well-established Heart Institute, and the newly renovated chapel. The Heritage Wall, which graces the lobby, traces the hospital's history and serves as a visual reminder of its Franciscan roots. The new rotunda houses the Cardinal William H. Keeler Spiritual Center, within which are found the chapel, an interfaith prayer room, a meditation garden, and the spiritual care department. A large San Damiano crucifix in the chapel gives further witness to the facility's Franciscan heritage.

► *Sister Rosa Carmichael, Sister Helen Martin (formerly Sister Ether), and Sister Mary Teresa Carmichael (formerly Sister Eucharist) were part of the last Cadet Corps class at St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing in Baltimore.*



## Anna's Place...Where Sisterhood Happens

Anna's Place, a new ministry sponsored by the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia and named in honor of their foundress, Maria Anna Bachmann, has opened its doors in Chester, Pennsylvania. Originally designated as a hospitality/drop-in center, Anna's Place has taken on a new focus to address the current needs of the neighborhood in which it is located. In the spirit of Jesus and in the tradition of Sts. Francis and Clare of Assisi, the staff—both sisters and volunteers—seek to offer hospitality to women who desire to

- relate as sister to one another through an experience of exchange that is mutually respectful and supportive of the presence and giftedness each extends to the other,
- avail themselves of opportunities for personal and holistic growth that integrates body, mind, and spirit,
- provide an environment for their children that is nurturing and loving, as well as growth-filled and challenging,
- become "Instruments of Peace" in their neighborhoods, their churches, and the wider civic communities in which they find themselves,
- offer themselves in loving service to the people of Chester.

To learn more about Anna's Place, call (484) 361-5900 or visit us at Second & Norris Streets. We occupy the second floor of the former Immaculate Heart of Mary School. Interested in volunteering? We are presently in need of computer literacy tutors, early childhood activities facilitators, and data-base processing assistance.

## Join FAN

The Franciscan Action Network (FAN) continues to grow. During the past year, the organization has increased its membership on both congregational and individual levels. Members have taken public advocacy action on issues like the economy, peace-making, and immigration. During this current year, FAN is attempting to bring their Franciscan-inspired message of social transformation to a new congress and a new presidential administration. The 2009 theme, *Enough for All Creation*, offers the opportunity to more effectively live out our call to be stewards of creation. Check out FAN's website and resources at [www.franciscanaction.org](http://www.franciscanaction.org) and consider becoming one of the Franciscan-hearted people working to make a better world.

## Sharing Our Heritage

As one way to implement the congregation's Chapter 2008 Directional Statement, "To live as sister with one another, with the entire human family, and with all creation by calling ourselves to greater inclusivity by welcoming all who journey with us, especially our companions," one group of sisters extended an invitation to the companions to join them for a day of retreat. The group of 15 companions and 15 sisters met at the motherhouse in Aston and viewed the DVD presentation, "One Thing Necessary," by Sister Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ. The presentation focused on the TOR Rule and the theological teachings of John Duns Scotus. Prayer, faith sharing, and, of course, lunch allowed all attending the retreat to exchange ideas and to get to know one another a little better. Companion director, Kathy Boehm, expressed her gratitude for this experience of Franciscan hospitality, calling it a "beautiful visitation." Hopefully similar gatherings of sisters and companions will continue to enrich both groups, providing yet another way of "challenging ourselves to find creative ways to move the Franciscan charism into the future."



## In Memoriam

Sister Imelda Catherine McGrail  
10/21/08

Sister Annette Marie Finlayson  
(Sister Imelda Joseph)  
11/5/08

Sister Ann Mercedes Miller  
11/19/08

Sister Eugene Mary Delany  
12/3/08

Sister Alice Ignatia Ackerman  
12/4/08

Sister Mary Agnes Brennan  
(Sister Mary Serena)  
1/1/09

Sister Ethelwina Molloy  
1/6/09



## Walking For Others

In September, 14 of our sisters joined the 4,500 men, women, and children who gathered at Rockford Park in Wilmington to take part in AIDS Walk Delaware. People came from various areas—churches, religious congregations, schools, organizations and corporations, friends and relatives of those who have died from HIV/AIDS. They all had one purpose—raising money to help those suffering with HIV/AIDS obtain the services necessary to live a healthier and more wholesome life. Of course, no one could help but be impressed by the 400-foot red ribbon that, hopefully, will earn its place in the Guinness Book of Records. The rain, which had soaked the area the day before, held off until almost the end. After about a third of the walkers returned, a few drops began to fall, then quickly became a deluge—but the rain could, in no way, ruin our parade!

► *The Sisters of St. Francis were proud to carry their banner when they participated in the 2008 AIDS Walk Delaware. They walked and/or volunteered and collected donations for House of Joseph II, one of the ministries that is part of Wilmington's Ministry of Caring.*



# Good NEWS

The Sisters of St. Francis  
of Philadelphia  
609 S. Convent Road  
Aston, PA 19014-1207

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See our website at [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org)

## What do *you* think?

We invite your comments and suggestions about *Good News*. Send to Florence Smith, (610) 558-7726, [goodnews@osfphila.org](mailto:goodnews@osfphila.org).

## 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.



## Exciting Changes Take Place with the *Good News*

Starting with the summer 2009 issue, some exciting changes will take place with the *Good News* publication. *Good News* will have a new format/design! We are anxious to share our smaller format, full-color version with you. It is set to arrive in your mailbox in July. Also, our long-time feature writer, Kathryn Hunt, will be leaving us. It has been a pleasure to work with Kathryn and we wish her the very best in all future endeavors. We welcome Elena Perri who will become our new feature writer with the summer issue. Your feedback is welcomed and appreciated. Please forward any comments to [goodnews@osfphila.org](mailto:goodnews@osfphila.org).

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## Success Times Two

Two of the 2008 fundraisers proved very successful. Combined net proceeds from the *Fourteenth Annual Golf Tournament* and the *Seventh Annual Fall Raffle* totaled \$189,800. The entire amount benefited the sponsored and cosponsored ministries of the Sisters of St. Francis.

- ▶ **Fourteenth Annual Golf Tournament**  
September 15, 2008  
\$103,000
- ▶ **Seventh Annual Fall Raffle**  
November 25, 2008  
\$86,800

Thanks to all the sponsors, donors, golfers, and raffle participants who helped to make these two fundraisers so successful. Visit the sisters' website at [www.osfphila.org](http://www.osfphila.org) for information about the golf tournament and raffle winners.



# Good NEWS

◀ In the 1950s and 60s, after spending one year as a postulant—the young women choosing a life of service participated in an investing ceremony—dressed in all white, wedding-like attire. They emerged in the full habit and white veil as novices. After two more years as novices, they professed vows and received a black veil. Times have changed drastically since then and many of the old traditions of the vocation process are just a memory—as are the days of the large groups of sisters entering the congregation. Read more about how times have changed and what is being done to attract more young women to a life of loving service, see page 8.