



The Sisters of St. Francis
of Penance and Christian Charity

THE GOOD NEWS

Autumn 2023

Imbued with... HOPE



Provincial leadership team: (L-R) Sisters Regina Snyder, Jo-Anne Grabowski, Nancy Zelma and Teresa Miklitsch

The Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity, Holy Name Province, located at Stella Niagara, New York, wrapped up the month of August with the wonderful installation ceremony of its new leadership council. Elected to a four-year term are Sister Jo-Anne Grabowski, Provincial Minister, along with Sister Nancy Zelma, First Councilor, and Sisters Regina Snyder and Teresa Miklitsch, Provincial Councilors.

The Council embarks on its four-year term with the following statement by the community: "Imbued with hope, we recommit ourselves to our Franciscan values of deepening relationships, continuing to engage in diverse service and generously using our resources for the common good of our community and the world. Trusting in God's providence, open to risk we walk together."

"Let us try to serve our good God together..."
Mother Magdalen

Jubilee

...I renew my commitment to live the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...

70 Years...

Having attended grammar and high school at Sacred Heart and Charleston High in West Virginia, it was only natural that when **Sister Aline Henderson** realized she had a vocation to religious life, she would enter the Franciscans' convent at Stella Niagara. Upon celebrating her 70 years of professed life, she is grateful that she was able to fulfill her desire to be an educator by serving as a teacher of all grades through college in the states of New York, New Jersey and Ohio. Her last years in education were as a principal at St. Benedict, where she happily served for 28 years. In 2005, S. Aline moved to St. Mary's Apartments in Williamsville where her ministry changed to being present to the elderly. She has now returned to the motherhouse, where she has found a new wealth of happiness, peace and renewed friendships.

After getting her degree in Education, and while still teaching, **Sister Mary Catherine Raymond** was given permission to study agriculture in order to financially help and upgrade the farm at St. Aloysius Academy in New Lexington, Ohio. She received the equivalent of a Master in Agriculture, and then specialized in the successful "high-bred feeder pig" program. When St. Aloysius closed, S. Mary Catherine returned to Stella Niagara for three years, overseeing the maintenance department. She was then commissioned, along with S. Nancy Leddy, to go to the rural area of southeast Ohio to live among the people and minister to the elderly living alone in the hills. Soon S. Alice Metzger joined them and together they ran a productive farm, sharing their produce, eggs and honey with those in need. Sister Mary Catherine said that in return, she and the sisters received so much more--in trust, friendship and the real meaning of true faith through hardship.

Sister Lucina Stang spent more than 45 happy years teaching at schools in Buffalo, Gowanda, Lewiston and Stella Niagara in Western New York as well as at St. Agnes School in New Jersey. For several years, she looked after the lunch program at Stella Niagara, helped in the school library and taught CCD at St. Peter's in Lewiston. Once retired, S. Lucina had time to enjoy her great love for reading, the outdoors and nature. Now in her 70th year of profession, she enjoys helping her sisters as much as she is able; especially visiting with Sister Joan, to whom she brings the daily crossword puzzle.

65 Years...

Sister Marie Louise Pohlman, right, spent more than 30 years teaching in West Virginia, New Jersey, Western New York and Ohio. She then spent nearly 20 years as an activity therapist at Heritage Day Health



Sisters Lucina, Mary Catherine, and Aline celebrate their Jubilee at Stella Niagara with Provincial Minister, Jo-Anne Grabowski.

Center in Columbus, Ohio, where she remained for several years as a volunteer. In her retirement, she enthusiastically concentrates on designing greeting cards to sell to help raise money for the sisters' missions in Tanzania and Chiapas, Mexico. Reflecting upon her 65th jubilee, her prayers of gratitude include overcoming breast cancer and the many opportunities she enjoyed in her religious life.

60 Years...

Sister Dorothy Mueller's ministry in education included teaching primary grades at Our Lady of the Rosary, Greenville, South Carolina, and St. Ann's, Buffalo, New York and supervising teachers in the Follow Through Program of the Buffalo Public Schools. She then served her sisters as Director of Finance for Holy Name Province for 20 years and as Provincial Minister from 2003 - 2011. Currently she is ministering as a copywriter at Our Lady of Victory Charities (Father Baker's) in Lackawanna, NY.



Donations to the annual Jubilee appeal not only support the needs of the sisters in the health center at Stella Niagara, but also the ministry interests of the Jubilarians. This year, a grant was given to OLV Charities in Buffalo, New York, to continue Father Baker's ministry of compassionate care to the poor, marginalized, the emotionally and developmentally challenged, the abused and neglected, and those seeking spiritual guidance. Located in one of the most economically deprived zip code areas of Columbus, Ohio, St. John Food Pantry, Community of the Holy Rosary-St. John received a grant to help them in their service to the poor. Another grant was given to Miami County Right-to-Life in Troy, Ohio. This group provides cribs, mattresses, car seats, blankets, diapers and formula for new families in need.



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Born the youngest of 5 children in Columbus, Ohio, **Sister Christella Ritchey** says that she was spoiled by God and her faith-filled family. She was educated by the Sisters of St. Francis throughout her youth. Following high school graduation, S. Christella heard God's call and entered the Franciscan order. She received a degree in education from Rosary Hill College and a Masters in Theology from Dayton University. After teaching little children for 12 years, she realized her heart was with adults and this led her to work in parishes with RCIA, retreat teams and the many areas of service which come with parish ministry. S. Christella retired from serving the poor at JOIN (Joint Organization for Inner-City Needs) after 11 years. Now enjoying her retirement, she fills her time with prayer and volunteer work at St. Philip's pantry (which is slated to be closed), driving sisters and friends to appointments, and helping wherever needed. She says retirement agrees with her and is a great time to be able to say to whomever calls, "what day do you need me!"



Sister Christella (left) joins Sister Dorothy as they prepare for their Jubilee celebration.

Sisters Leave Enduring Legacy



St. Leo Church (left) and Convent (right).

Bishop Earl Fernandes with (L to R) Sisters Margaret Scanlan, Nancy Zelma, Regina Snyder and Alberta Wilkes.



After decades of ministering in the Diocese of Columbus, Ohio, Sisters Alberta Wilkes and Margaret Scanlan have left St. Leo Convent and moved to Stella Niagara, thus ending a 117-year residency of our Franciscan sisters on the Columbus south side.

A recent article in *The Catholic Times*, Columbus, shared that more than 75 guests were welcomed into the convent for a prayer service of thanksgiving and open house in late August. Guests included provincial councilors from New York, sisters' family members and friends, and Bishop Earl Fernandes who said, "the people of the Diocese of Columbus are filled with gratitude for generations of dedicated service, especially in the area of Catholic education. On their behalf, I express to the sisters our profound gratitude, assuring them of our heartfelt prayers. Their service and witness will not be forgotten."

The Sisters of St. Francis first came to the Diocese of Columbus in 1875 when they opened St. Vincent's orphanage and Sacred Heart convent. Their legacy includes the establishment of St. Ann's Hospital and Columbus St.

Francis DeSales High School, and staffing the St. Therese Shrine and Retreat Center from 1926 to 1971, as well as various apostolates in education, health care, social work, rural life, administration and youth ministry.

Their association with St. Leo Church and School began in 1904 when three sisters were assigned to teach at the school. Their presence continued in its classrooms until its closure in 1997. Throughout the years, the sisters would follow their Franciscan charism by attending to the needs of the community, such as providing food and medicine for the homeless.

While Sister Alberta is a native of Cleveland, Ohio, Sister Margaret has spent significant portions of her life at St. Leo. A daughter of the parish, she graduated from the school and recalls assisting the sisters with their work in the church and school during her youth. Eventually, Sister Margaret entered the order, and in 1967, she returned to St. Leo School as a teacher. Sister Alberta said that both have come to live at Stella Niagara "because there are a lot of ministry opportunities and you're with more people."

Donors give a Helping Hand to Francis Center Children's Program



From Mary Beth Smith, Director, Francis Center Children's Program

With thanks to your support, the first Kindergarten Booster Camp held at Francis Center in Niagara Falls was a great success. Twenty youngsters spent three weeks learning academic basics, school routines and needed behavioral skills that would prepare them for their first days of Kindergarten and a successful start to their school careers.

In collaboration with Bond Primary School, the camp staff targeted those skills that Kindergarten teachers identified as most important for children entering school. And, they had fun doing it! Along with learning the ABCs and 123s the children were visited by guest music and art teachers, a children's theater group from Niagara University, and a touch tank from the Aquarium of Niagara. We topped off the camp on the last day with a visit from the ice cream truck, donated by Phil and Melissa Mastantuono. The children certainly knew more when they left than when they arrived, but the most impressive changes we observed were in their attitudes toward school, their interactions with each other and in their love for learning. Please accept my sincere thanks for helping to make this experience possible.

A number of the children from Booster Camp are now part of our After School Program. We love to watch them grow and to continue to support their academic and social development.

Please follow the Francis Center Facebook page to see regular stories and pictures about the good work we do. Each "like" and "share" helps to spread the word about our important program. Visit our website, too, at www.franciscenter.com



St. Clare Mission, Tanzania

Sister Rita Cammack, OSF, General Minister of the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity says there are two things we can always be assured of: the love and the Providence of God! This love and providence have blessed our International Mission in Tanzania since the first missionaries arrived in 1987. Sister Marguerite Wolf was one of the first sisters to hear the call to go to Tanzania. She arrived in Tanzania along with S. Karen McCrory and S. Diva Degrandi and the three of them began to form a vision of how and what a mission might be in this place on God's earth. Now...36 years later, S. Margie has done what she came to do and is ready to return to Stella Niagara in January 2024.

No doubt it is bittersweet to say goodbye as S. Margie leaves Tanzania – she is loved and appreciated and will be greatly missed. Sister Rita shared, "One of the things I treasure about S. Margie is her commitment to letting God direct her life! Her discernment about when to return to the US was and is held with great reverence – it is a wonderful witness to how we make decisions in our religious life. Her passion for the (now) Mission of St. Clare, the sisters and the people of Tanzania will always be a part of her...and she will always be a part of the Mission. It was a mission of love that she extended."



Sister Margie Wolf, will return to Stella Niagara after 36 years of ministry in Tanzania.



Mission Minister, Sister Angela Kemilembe, greets **Sister Maureen Harris**, another Stella Niagara Franciscan who has made several trips to the mission to assist in any way that is needed.

Franciscan Central Archive Initiative

In 2017, Franciscan Federation President, Kathie Uhler, OSF, sought out her colleagues to discuss the urgent need for Franciscan congregations to find permanent repositories for their archives in order to safeguard the community's charism and legacy for future generations. Those discussions led to the Franciscan Central Archive (FCA) Initiative.

The FCA will be a physical and virtual center housing the combined archival collections of Franciscan entities across the United States. It will be supported by charism-based educational programs and social engagement to ensure its members' legacies are carried into the future. It will be a physical and virtual center complete with a reading room, exhibition space, lecture hall, and robust virtual presence. Professional archivists will maintain physical and intellectual control, ensure integrity, and make records accessible following national standards.

Sister Mary Serbacki, OSF, archivist for Holy Name Province at Stella Niagara, has been collaborating with other Franciscan archivists on this project. In 2023, a grant from the Academy of American Franciscan History enabled FCA to hire archival consultant, Veronica Buchanan, to do needs assessments for the community partners and assist with strategic planning of the FCA's future. In early May 2023, Veronica visited Stella Niagara to complete its needs assessment and meet with leadership to discuss their concerns and wishes.

The FCA has joined the Chicago Collaborative Archive Center (CCAC). This partnership will offer economy of scale, shared resources and professional interaction, and will be a central repository for scholars. Its board of directors has been in active conversation with Preservation Chicago, Dominican University, the City of Chicago, and the Order of Franciscans Minor, among others. Funding through additional members, donations, and grants is being sought to preserve the history and stories of the valiant Franciscan sisters in the United States who have shaped our world - living and serving "on the margins."

Why is this so important? Through the years, sisters have cared for the poor, children, orphans, the indigenous, people of color, immigrants and "the sojourners among us." Responding wherever and however there was a need, the sisters served in healthcare, education, social service and spirituality for generations. Their stories should not be lost!

One such example comes from our sisters in St. Francis Province, Redwood City, California. In 1929, the Japanese Holy Family mission was established when the sisters started to work with the Japanese community out of St. Joseph's parish in Los Angeles. Sister Roberta Clauter learned Japanese, and with the help of native Japanese sisters, taught Japanese to first graders and adult English classes in the evening. She then moved to Sacramento to continue her ministry of service to the Japanese community. There, she was assigned to start a Japanese kindergarten to prepare students for schools in the area. In later years, Sr. Teresita Beeler stepped into the teaching role, and helped when the tragic orders for the Japanese to relocate to internment camps were issued during the second world war. Her presence provided comfort when she was able to visit these families at the Tule Lake internment camp in 1943.

Did you know?

Founded by the Sisters of St. Francis in 1908, Stella Niagara is located on over 100 acres along the banks of the Niagara River between Lewiston and Youngstown, New York. It serves as the headquarters for Holy Name Province.

From its foundation until the late 1960s, Stella Niagara was the novitiate for hundreds of young women preparing to become Franciscan Sisters.

Even before the stately stone building was completed in 1909, the sisters opened a very reputable boarding/day school for young women in grades 1-12. A Cadet Department was inaugurated in 1935 for boys in grades 3-8. The year 1970 marked the closing of the high school, originally the Seminary of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and the beginning of Stella Niagara Education Park (SNEP).

In 1929 a recreational annex (Heidenkamp) was built to house a gym, swimming pool and auditorium. Extensive construction in 1966-67 included a new wing on the main building and Ormsby Hall. The chapel, renovated in 1964 and again in 2009, features religious icons executed in an ancient technique known as sgraffitto.

On May 10, 1989, Stella Niagara was dedicated as a Peace Site.



Stella Niagara's approach to Ecological Conversion and Sustainability

"Conscious of our personal, communal, and national experience of history, sin, and grace, we, as people of God, commit ourselves to human rights, ecological harmony, and global peace,"
(Mission Statement - Sisters of St. Francis, Holy Name Province)

Grounded in our Franciscan charism and incarnational spirituality, we commit to the care of all creation now and into the future. Small steps and giant leaps measure "how" our commitment is lived out nationally, regionally and locally. We know our commitment also impacts our greater society and institutions, and that our actions reflect our personal conversions.

Nationally, we are signers of and partners in the "Catholic Climate Covenant," which is an organization committed to ecological and climate justice. Specifically, it "helps United States Catholics respond to the Church's call to care for creation and care for the poor." The intersection of climate, racism and migration has been/is a key focus within our Leadership Conference of Women Religious [LCWR] these past four years. "We are heartbroken by the myriad ways our one human family and Earth, our common home, suffer disconnection, indifference, violence, and fear in the face of racism, migration, and climate crisis." Central to our understanding and learning is how climate changes forced the migration of millions and the devastation of communities, islands, ecosystems, and habitats. We also signed onto the Laudato Si' Action Platform. This shared platform brings us in solidarity with others committed to responding to our climate crisis.

Regionally and locally, we advocate and act on our commitment. On the Stella Niagara property, we use ecologically-friendly products for any cleaning and maintenance. This past year we removed a 20,000-gallon oil tank (used for heating decades ago) and a gas tank

from our property. The ecological reparation of our land remains a core value in our Buildings & Grounds Master Plan. Additionally, more climate-friendly and efficient units for heating, water, electricity and air purification were purchased and installed. This is an ongoing commitment.

Personally, many of our sisters and associates write our political representatives and support other climate justice endeavors through prayer, donations and personal witness. We plant flowers, trees and bushes to help and to beautify Mother Earth. We walk and commute with others saving gasoline and not adding to the carbon footprint. We changed our diets and eat healthier foods; and, we reuse, reduce, repair and recycle.

On a deeper level, theologians and religious leaders invite us to ecological conversion and we continue to listen and respond. "Humanity finds itself in the midst of an explosion of new understandings of the universe, as well as an increasingly polarized world of political, ecclesial, and ideological tensions. Where do we find God in this? To what are women religious being called in light of these realities?" "The choices we make in love and for love co-create our future. When we see ourselves as part of a larger whole, we act on behalf of the whole of which we are a part. Christian evolution is thinking and seeing in a new way."

Yes, many of our small steps and giant leaps are a gateway to evolutionary consciousness, to saving Mother Earth, to promoting climate justice, and to creating sustainability. May each of us continue to create and nurture environments that are rooted in these essential values.

Sr. Teresa Miklitsch, OSF



Pictured: S. Connie Marlowe, OSF, with Francesca Collana '22

On International Women's Day, **Buffalo Academy of the Sacred Heart (SHA)** honors and celebrates the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity. Recognizing the courageous actions of the founding Sisters*, SHA girls have benefited from the women who came before them, and continue to be inspired by the lives of St. Francis, St. Clare and Mother Magdalen Damen.

In June, **Sister Connie Marlowe** was surprised by Buffalo Academy of the Sacred Heart Faculty and Staff at their annual picnic when they recognized her for the beginning of her 40th year of ministry at the Academy. During that time, she has served as vice-principal, English teacher, yearbook monitor and coordinator, and currently serves in administrative services.

*View *Leonarda's Journey* at www.stellaosf.org to learn more.

“Grounded in the Gospel, we walk the synodal way with compassion for our world”

Chapter Statement, Immaculate Heart of Mary Province

What a blessing are these Daughters of Mother Magdalen...these followers of Francis!

For much of October, Stella Niagara Franciscans, S. Jo-Anne Grabowski, Provincial Minister, along with S. Mary McCarrick and S. Mary Serbacki, joined sisters from around the globe for the General Pre-Chapter held in Immaculate Heart of Mary Province, Santa Maria, Brazil.

The Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity have ministered in Brazil for 151 years, and the Pre-Chapter coincided with the 95th anniversary of Sacred Heart of Jesus Province in São Leopoldo, Brazil.

On the morning of October 7, during this time of jubilation, Hamas-led Palestinian militant groups launched an attack against Israel. Sister Rita Cammack, General Minister of the Congregation, responded, “We all must be engaged. We all must have a heart for peace and justice for us to walk together in this world! May God bless us and guide us in this time of crisis.”

In concert with Pope Francis and his call for prayer and fasting for peace and reconciliation, the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity humbly offered these words: *We call for creative ways to honor differences, and to hold tension without violence. We call for everyone to work for the common good and to find a new language of peace.*



Prayerful contemplation, education and celebration punctuated the General Pre-Chapter and anniversary of our Brazilian province at São Leopoldo.



Entered New Life...



Sister Barbara Holtzinger, OSF, entered the Heavenly Kingdom of God on September 25, 2023, at the age of 101 years. She was born May 12, 1922, in Columbus, Ohio. She joined the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity, Stella Niagara, NY, on September 6, 1940, and professed her vows on August 18, 1942. She received a Bachelor’s Degree in Education from Rosary Hill College (Daemen University) Amherst, NY in 1961 and studied clinical pastoral education at Benedictine Nursing Center in Mt. Angel, Oregon, from 1986-87.

A dedicated educator, she taught thousands of students at the following elementary schools: St. Anthony, Charleston, West Virginia; St. Joseph, Gowanda, New York; Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Highlands, New Jersey; and in Columbus, Ohio, at St. Peter, Sacred Heart, and St. Leo. She also ministered at St. Ann Hospital, Columbus, Ohio, doing both office work and pastoral care.

After retiring in 1991, she served as organist at Columbus Holy Cross Church, and was a bookkeeper for her local community at DeSales Convent in Columbus from 1991-2002, and caregiver for her sisters in the family home. She resided at St. Leo Convent from 2008 before becoming a permanent resident of Mohun Hall, Columbus, in 2017.

Sister Joan Nelson celebrates 100 Years



Sister Joan Nelson, our most senior member, celebrated her 100th birthday with her Franciscan sisters, family, students of Stella Niagara Education Park, and employees of Stella Niagara.

Sister Joan awoke on October 20 to greeting cards from near and far piled high in her room. Later she joined the students in the children's dining where they sang happy birthday and presented her with cards they made with their prayer partners.

In the afternoon, the Health Center's Resident Life staff did an amazing job decorating the dining room in shades of pink, S. Joan's favorite color. Sisters and staff passed the microphone to take turns offering their blessings and good wishes before enjoying cupcakes and punch. Having ministered for many years at Buffalo Academy of the Sacred Heart, S. Joan was particularly delighted when S. Teresa Miklitsch delivered a special message from its faculty and students, expressing their deep gratitude to her.

Sister Joan was deeply touched by the celebration and good wishes. When offered the microphone, she summed up her life perfectly, "It has been such a blessing," she stated, "to have been able to work together for so many years to help others."

