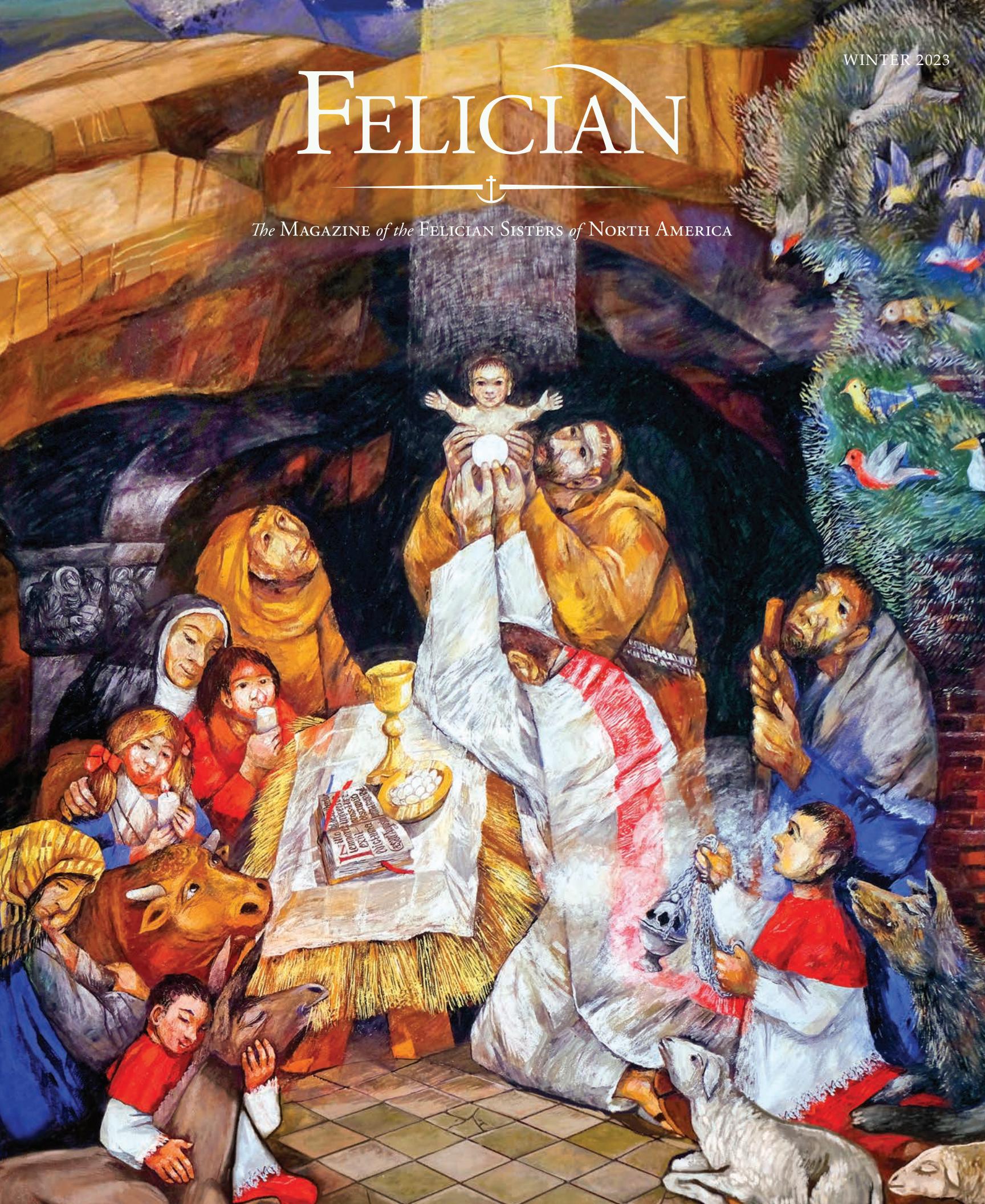


# FELICIAN



*The MAGAZINE of the FELICIAN SISTERS of NORTH AMERICA*





## OUR MISSION

As Felician Sisters we are called by God to cooperate with Christ in the spiritual renewal of the world.

### 2021-2027 PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

Elected by the sisters to oversee the lives of the sisters, ministries and governance of Our Lady of Hope Province:

**Sr. Judith Marie Kubicki**  
Provincial Minister

**Sr. Janet Marie Adamczyk**  
Provincial Vicar/1st Councillor

**Sr. Suzanne Marie Kush**  
2nd Councillor

**Sr. Mary Rosita Brennan**  
3rd Councillor

**Sr. Mary Sharon Iacobucci**  
4th Councillor

**Sr. Nancy Marie Piecewicz**  
5th Councillor

**Sr. Mary Catherine Ryzewicz**  
Provincial Treasurer

### OUR LADY OF HOPE PROVINCE

Founded in Poland in 1855, the Felician Sisters of North America are a congregation of women religious inspired by the spiritual ideals of their foundress, Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska, and Saints Francis of Assisi, Clare of Assisi and Felix of Cantalice. The first Felician Sisters arrived in North America in 1874. They established eight provinces across the United States and Canada and in 2009 united into one: Our Lady of Hope Province.

Pioneers of social services, the Felician Sisters founded and continue to sponsor or minister in more than 50 ministries throughout North America and Haiti. Constantly evolving to meet the needs of the time, they continue to follow God's will and Blessed Mary Angela's directive to "serve where you are needed."

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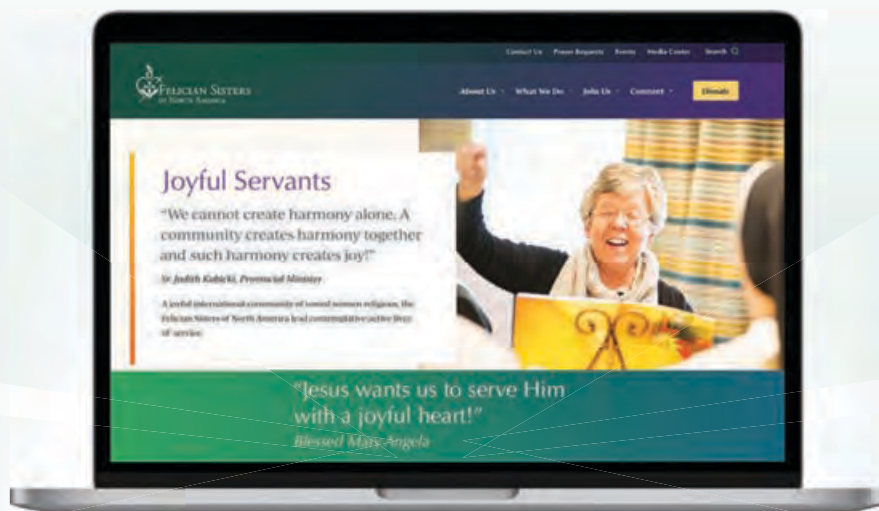
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## Explore Our New Website!

Find inspiration and share the link with friends and family. We hope the stories, videos and articles will inspire you to join us as a sister, associate, volunteer, donor — or simply, and most importantly, in prayer. Visit us at [FelicianSistersNA.org](http://FelicianSistersNA.org).



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## Cover

**Fr. Sieger Köder** painted the fresco *St. Francis Celebrates Christmas in Greccio* in the chapel of St. Francis in Ellwangen, Germany. A prisoner of war during World War II, Köder's wartime experiences profoundly influenced his work. As a parish priest, he combined his vocation with his work as an artist to reveal in his pieces glimpses of our hidden God. He produced numerous paintings, altarpieces and stained glass work until his death in 2015.





## Dear Friends,

The cover of this issue of *Felician* magazine marks the 800th anniversary of St. Francis' reenactment in Greccio, Italy of the original nativity in Bethlehem. While Francis was not the first to celebrate Christmas with a crèche, he was certainly instrumental in popularizing this beloved custom. But what exactly is the significance of this practice for us today? The familiar and sacred scene of the newborn Jesus in the manger tugs at our heartstrings. We look forward to displaying our Christmas cribs each year. But the pictures and stories found inside the cover of the magazine tell us that the scene at the crèche is only the beginning, not the end of the story.

The stories are about gathering — to celebrate, to inspire, to plumb spiritual realities, to serve and stand with the poor, the displaced, the despised of society. There is so much energy and hope in these pages because so many continue to come together to celebrate and share Christ's presence in our world with those who long to know it in their very bones.

I would like to share excerpts from contemporary verses of "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice" written by Marty Haugen:

*Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice!  
Raise your weary hearts and see: Jesus Christ has come to free!  
When the captives find release, in feet that bring the word of peace,  
Christ has come to free! Christ has come to free!*

*Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice!  
In the kind and just and true Jesus Christ is born anew!  
In the lowly, weak and poor, the humble stranger at our door.  
Christ is born anew! Christ is born anew!*

*Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice!  
Still before us on the way, Jesus Christ is here today!  
In the breaking of the bread, in life that cries out to the dead,  
Christ is born today! Christ is born today!*

**The amazing truth of Christmas is not simply that God took on human flesh as a baby, but that God took on human flesh to live and to love, to heal and to share meals, to suffer and to die for us.**

God continues to take on human flesh today as well. Christmas reminds us that we are called to be the presence of Christ in our world. All of us, Felician Sisters and Associates, ministry partners, colleagues and friends, benefactors and prayer partners are committed to this mission. We are grateful for your participation in this holy work and for your generous support. A blessed Christmas!

Peace and all good things!

Sr. Judith Marie Kubicki, CSSF  
Provincial Minister, Felician Sisters of North America  
Our Lady of Hope Province



# Dear Felician Sisters...



Sr. Mary Samuel Holowacz

## Bending Rules to Serve

In your summer 2023 *Felician* — I read most of it — but on page 21, the first paragraph caught my attention. So here's my little story as told to me by my mother when I was about 16 years old. I'm now 84 and my mom is with the Lord.

In 1942, my brother was 4 years old and I was 2 and a half. Mom and Dad had a very difficult marriage and more weeks than not, no paycheck came home, but rather was spent at the bar. In desperation, my mom decided she had to go to work just to put food on the table and pay rent in an unpleasant flat. She came with us

2 children to the Guardian Angel nursery that was run by the Felician nuns with a Sr. Generose in charge. She listened to Mom but told her that they could not take children still in diapers — me. As the three of us were leaving, Mom was



distracted and helpless. Sister called her back at the door and said she would bend the rules. My brother and I spent, perhaps two years there, and they are very happy and comforting times. I can still smell the wonderful warm farina we had for breakfast (so yummy) — so thankful. The nursery closed and moved to a much larger facility here in Buffalo, NY, and by that time I was in kindergarten and my brother in 1st grade at St. Luke's Catholic School run by Felician Sister Loreillis — the principal. Sorry that I don't know the last names of these two wonderful nuns. Hope we all meet in heaven.

~ Pauline

## Fun Times!

I remember making rosaries with Sr. Imeldine at St. Francis Hospital. She showed me how to make them even though I was left-handed. Since 1960, I have made 60,377 rosaries. Sr. Samuel is now in charge of the Rosary Center. I also remember when Sr. Barbara took the St. Joseph's Women's Club to Oconomowoc, WI for a picnic. Sr. Veronica was with us and we played penny poker. I have such fond memories of the sisters!

~ Bonnie



## Spreading Happiness

Sr. M. Henrietta was the principal at my grade school, Immaculate Conception in Detroit, MI in 1969. She visited every classroom each day, read stories to us, took us to the music room and taught us to sing. I remember sister always having a smile on her face. How surprised we students were to find out sister could play ping pong! My childhood parish was razed years ago, and I don't know where Sr. Henrietta was assigned after that. Sr. Henrietta, if you see this, THANK YOU for loving us kids and instilling a love for Jesus in our hearts!

~ Mariessa

Dear Mariessa, Sr. M. Henrietta passed away in 1983.



## Spelling Joy the Felician Way

I remember one of the greatest spelling lessons I received from one of the sisters at my elementary school (Holy Spirit School, Mt. Carmel, PA) sister said in order to have "joy" in your life you must spell it in this way: (J) Jesus (O) Others (Y) Yourself.



Whenever the distractions of the world seem to diminish the feelings of joy, my thoughts return to that simple lesson.

~ The Heromin Family



## On My Path

Sr. John, God places people that are a big influence in other people's paths on life's journey and you had a profound influence on me in my Christian walk. Your reflection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in your daily life and the no-compromise example you set for us children was remembered by me throughout my life. I never had the opportunity to run into you before, but you have always been remembered fondly and included in my prayers. Best regards and may God bless you abundantly.

~ Andrew

SEND YOUR THOUGHTS, MEMORIES & PICTURES to: [FelicianMagazine@FelicianSisters.org](mailto:FelicianMagazine@FelicianSisters.org) or via mail to: *Felician* magazine, Felician Sisters of North America, Office of Mission Advancement, 871 Mercer Road, Beaver Falls, PA 15010-6815.



# Felician Sisters and Ministries

## LIVING THE CRÈCHE

As we reflect on the 800 years since St. Francis created the first Christmas crib scene, it becomes clear that the message of hope, peace and humility persists. The scene is set in a stable or a manger, symbolizing the humble circumstances of Jesus' birth. In homes and communities around the world, the nativity scene remains a timeless symbol, reminding us that greatness can emerge from the most unassuming circumstances.

Our Felician Sisters and their ministries stand as living embodiments of this tradition, contributing to their communities with a dedication to humble service that stands the test of time. Their commitment to breaking down barriers by welcoming everyone and serving where needed reflects the universal message of the Christmas story. As we celebrate the season, may you find inspiration in the stories of the Felician Sisters and ministries to live a life of service and humility.

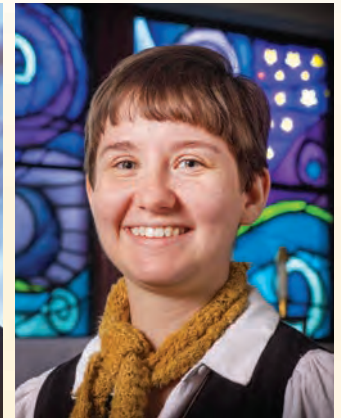


## Felician Women Take Steps in Their Formation Journey

The Felician community is overjoyed in welcoming three women.

The celebration of **Sr. Catherine Marie-Elizabeth Rotterman** making her religious profession began with solemn vespers on the eve of the Mass of Religious Profession. On Sunday, October 29, Felician Sisters, family and friends all came together in the provincial house chapel in Beaver Falls, PA, with many others joining via Zoom for the event.

During Mass, a dear family friend, Deacon Marc Leaderstorf of the Diocese of Buffalo in the homily, spoke about life dedicated to service and promoting social justice. Quoting Catherine de Hueck Doherty, he reflected on the role of women religious in the world: "You are the one who is in love with God, because how could one be consecrated or dedicated to anyone unless they were in love? ...You hold out hope to those of us who are almost hopeless...You identify God to us."



The following Saturday, November 4, in a Rite of Initiation to Religious Life, two postulants became **Sr. Veronica Miriam Kowalski** and **Sr. Mary Monica Edaburn**. As novices, the women gained the title "sister." A Mass of Thanksgiving the following day began a two-year period of continued discernment, study and experience of communal life.

Please keep these women in your prayers as they continue their journey as Felician Sisters.

*l-r: Sr. Catherine, Sr. Veronica and Sr. Monica*



# Responding to an Emerging Need at St. Mary Child Care Center

Celebrating 34 years of serving families in surrounding communities, St. Mary Child Care Center in Livonia, MI continues to adapt and respond to the needs of children in their care. They remained opened as an emergency Child Care Center throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to fulfill the need to support the families of first responders and essential employees with affordable child care services.

Months later, St. Mary's is responding to a new need as more children are struggling with communication skills which may have been caused by wearing masks during crucial child developmental stages. Teaching teams have noted an increase of children with special needs and social and emotional delays. Teachers are working to assist children in developing communication skills by implementing visual picture schedules, "feeling" identification charts, and designed child-friendly "calming" areas in each classroom, where children are encouraged to take a break when feeling overwhelmed. Additionally, St. Mary's received a grant from the nonprofit, Communication is Key AAC, for a communication board that was installed in the Center's playground. It will assist children in communicating their needs while playing outdoors.

The St. Mary's team will participate in professional development to help children navigate this helpful communication tool. Team members will complete training and hands-on exercises will help build awareness of the frustrations children who are nonverbal may be experiencing. Smaller versions of the communication board will be in every classroom so children always have access to support.



This Felician-sponsored ministry continues to follow the example of Blessed Mary Angela, while actively sharing Felician core values with children and their families. "We hope to always strive to inspire children to reach their full potential regardless of any challenges they may face," shared program director, Karen Mroczka.



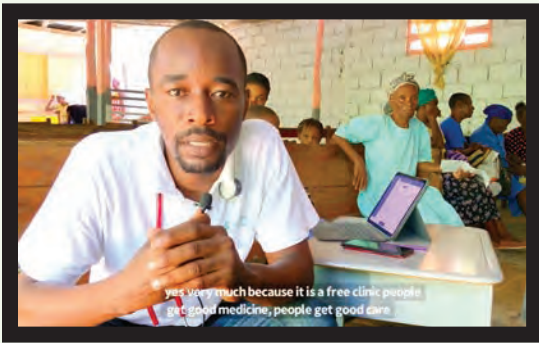
## OLSH Alumni Make a Warm Connection

Gloria Betters, '95 alumna of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) High School in Coraopolis, PA touts Felician core values as the volunteer coordinator at The Cornerstone of Beaver County (TCBC), an emergency shelter for men that also provides resources for those at risk in the county.

OLSH senior Victoria Gronowski learned about TCBC and organized a blanket drive for the shelter as part of her senior community service project. She collected dozens of lovely blankets that were delivered to the men's emergency shelter just in time for the cold weather.

If you, a student or school would like to get involved, contact Gloria Betters at [gbetters@cornerstonebeaver.org](mailto:gbetters@cornerstonebeaver.org) or 724.846.6400, extension 202.





Watch the video



## Sisters Rally With Mission Friends to Stand With Haiti

This fall, Sr. Marilyn Marie Minter and Sr. Mary Inga Borko traveled to Chicago, IL, Buffalo, NY, Livonia, MI and Rochelle Park, NJ to visit friends and supporters of *Felician Mission: Haiti*. They provided updates on the state of the mission, which they are overseeing virtually. The sisters presented a video created by mission staff member Jean Phillippe Desire, that shows a glimpse of life in Jacmel with a walk through of the mission property and testimony from staff and mission friends who live there.

Continue to support and follow *Felician Mission: Haiti* at [FelicianSistersHaiti.com](http://FelicianSistersHaiti.com).





# Earning a Degree Online In Extreme Poverty and Violence

Working towards a bachelor's degree is hard enough. Imagine doing it while living without basic infrastructure and amidst the threat of kidnapping, sexual violence and even death.

Edwina Dieudonne recently started her second year at Madonna University. Though ongoing utility and internet issues make it hard for her to keep up with her courses, she finds strength in the gift of her family. "My two-year-old niece is the person who brings me the most joy in my life."

Vibrant and determined, 23-year-old Edwina is the first student from **Felician Mission: Haiti in Jacmel, Haiti** to attend Madonna's online satellite program. It already took incredible work on her part to be accepted into the program since she had to learn English and be proficient, which she accomplished through hard work and the help of the sisters. But things are getting more complicated each day in Haiti. Edwina explained, "Danger is everywhere. People die from lack of security, diseases like cholera and starvation." A force to be reckoned with, Edwina understands the value of this degree for her future and intends to meet the challenges that stand in her way, no matter how difficult. Perhaps the greatest gift the sisters gave to the people in the Jacmel community is a deep faith, more powerful than food, medical care or education.

You can volunteer to tutor students like Edwina in English via Zoom. Visit [FelicianSistersNA.org/VIM](https://FelicianSistersNA.org/VIM) to learn more.

"I believe in the power of communicating with God, telling him what's on my mind, asking questions, and bettering my heart," says Edwina. "I believe in walking towards this divine power and not away. I say this because, when I communicate with God, when I truly open my heart to God, I feel a shift in myself."



# Teaching on the Front Line

"Since they had to leave, everything has changed," said Peterson Momplaisir, who joins staff at **Felician Mission: Haiti in Jacmel, Haiti** in missing the Felician Sisters since they had to depart in October 2022. "Everyone misses worship and prayer with the sisters — and of course, movie nights."

Peterson knows that Haiti needs strong ethical leadership and that the answer lies with youth. Education is essential. He manages the computer lab at the mission, working diligently to teach students basic skills, helping them with homework and preparing them for secondary education. "Currently, life in Haiti is very difficult," he says, and his response is to add a new session to his classes that already serve up to ten children two days a week.

Forced to set aside his own educational aspirations, Peterson says, "I have a lot of frustration. I would like to study computer science but the situation in my country doesn't give this opportunity." Despite his obstacles, Peterson remains hopeful. "I think one day things will change." Until then, he keeps himself and his students busy learning so they will be ready.







## The Fest

In August, Felician Sisters attended **The FEST 2023 near Cleveland, OH** and spoke to many attendees about vocation and the Felician Sisters. The FEST's goal is to inspire and energize teens, young adults and families.

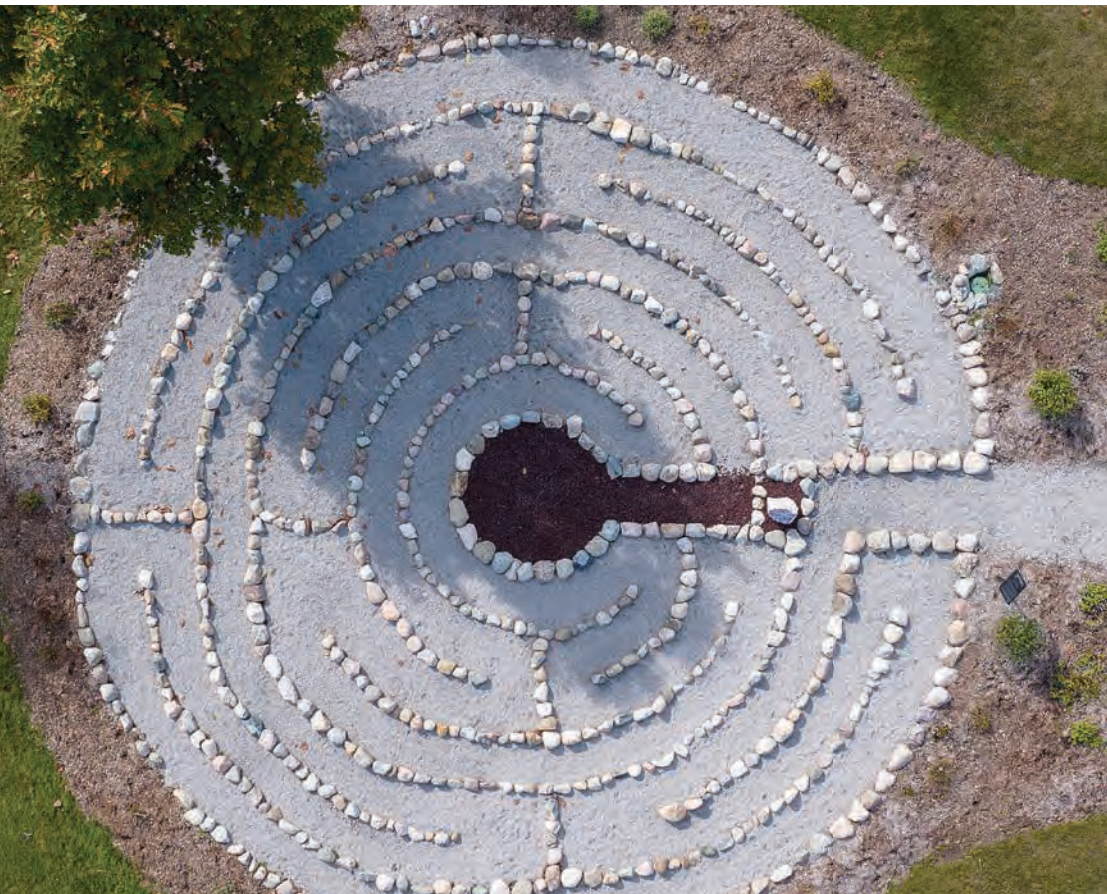
The one-day experience included 40,000 people gathered at the Diocesan Pastoral Center, all day concerts on the lawn, reconciliation services, rosary, Eucharistic Adoration, raffles, giveaways, tours of the seminary, face painting, petting zoo, vendors, Mass with Bishop Edward C. Malesic and much more. It was such a great day filled with faith and fun!

*l-r: Sr. Mary Jeanine Morozowich, Sr. Judith Marie Blizzard, Sr. Jane Mary Gawlik and Sr. Shannon Fox.*

## Creating Places to Reflect and Heal

**A**ngela Hospice, in Livonia, MI celebrated the official opening of its labyrinth and aromatherapy cutting garden. A heartfelt ribbon-cutting ceremony was attended by staff, community members and dignitaries, including Livonia Mayor Maureen Miller Brosnan. The labyrinth — which has been used as a tool for walking meditation and stress reduction for over four millennia — is open to hospice patients, their families and the entire Livonia community, offering a serene space for reflection and healing. Angela Hospice invites you to come, walk the path and take a few moments for yourself, your peace and your healing.

Visit [AngelaHospice.org](http://AngelaHospice.org).







## Enrollment Increased 14% at Villa Maria College

Villa Maria College, Buffalo, NY welcomed its largest class in over 25 years at 550+ students — a 14% increase over last fall, even as enrollment fell across the U.S.

According to Dr. Ryan Hartnett, the College's provost, the increase is due largely to academic programs designed to meet the needs of today's job market, "some boast the most outstanding outcomes in all of Western New York."

Visit [villa.edu](http://villa.edu).



## Celebrating a Legacy at Mooncrest Neighborhood Programs

**"L**et us not be weary in doing good" (Galatians 6:9) proclaimed the invitation to the August 24 dedication of the **Sr. René Procopio Activity Center at Mooncrest Neighborhood Programs in Coraopolis, PA.**

More than 50 people, including officials from Moon Township, Felician Sisters, Felician leadership, donors and friends of Mooncrest gathered to honor Sr. Mary René Procopio's legacy, remembering that she never grew weary serving her neighbors in Mooncrest. Sr. René, at the request of provincial councilor Sr. Mary Christopher Moore, founded Mooncrest in 2001 and oversaw it until she died in 2018.

To mark the dedication, Hopebound Ministries, the overseeing ministry, offered gifts rich with symbolism for the Mooncrest garden: a fig tree to represent the way Sr. René's work has taken root in the community and a rain barrel to represent the "happy tears" of those who remember her great love.

Led by program director Theresa Long, a chorus of children from the after-school program recited a "Prayer for Students" that reflects the values of Sr. René's ministry.

How did Mooncrest begin? Felician Sisters in Coraopolis were determined to help revitalize Mooncrest — a neighborhood that suffered from absentee landlordism and blight. The sisters wanted to start an afterschool program — but needed a leader. Sr. René had just stepped down from her four-decade career in education. She was living in Mooncrest, and saw children skipping school and knew what to do. Sr. René felt the presence of Blessed Mary Angela "walking the streets of Mooncrest," and found "where she needed to be."

In 2002, Sr. René and her sisters founded the after-school program in the basement of a Baptist church. In 2004, they moved to their current location, where the bright activity center is adorned with children's artwork. The programs have grown to meet the needs of the community and include summer activities, faith-sharing and education and food access for adults.

Nancy Lawry, executive director of Mooncrest accepted a plaque from the Moon Township Board of Supervisors recognizing Sr. René's dedication to the neighborhood and permanently renaming the activity center in her honor.

Learn about Mooncrest Neighborhood Programs at [Mooncrest.org](http://Mooncrest.org).



## Pet Blessings

As part of Mission and Heritage Week in October, Villa St. Francis in Milwaukee, WI, offered a St. Francis Pet Blessing. Sr. Mary Victoria Richardson assisted Franciscan Fr. Sante.



# Women's Flag Football is the Fastest Growing Sport in the U.S. — Felician Schools Are On the Ball

Women's flag football is breaking down barriers and creating opportunities for female athletes. With the support of NFL teams like the Buffalo Bills and integration into collegiate conferences, it's paving the way for women to excel in a sport that not only promotes physical and mental well-being, but also fosters leadership and collaboration.

## Villa Maria Makes History

Villa Maria College in Buffalo, NY made history this fall when it was the first college to offer flag football for women, igniting a wave of excitement and empowerment in women's athletics across the region.

"Villa Maria prides itself on removing barriers to education and providing opportunity for all people — starting women's flag football is another way we can expand college opportunities," said Brian Emerson, executive vice president at the college. "We are thrilled to offer this sport at the collegiate level for female student-athletes who want to compete at a high level and pursue higher education."

Villa Maria's Athletic Director, Desmond Randall, saw this opportunity as a long-term benefit for girls of all ages. In Western New York, there were more than 40 high school teams this year, and many had substantial rosters. Women's flag football is more than just a sport; it serves as a catalyst for change and an empowering platform for women athletes.

"Women's flag football is changing the landscape of sports and athletic opportunities for young women across North America," said Keith Wing, the team's inaugural head coach.

**If you want to play on the only collegiate flag football team in WNY, you need to be a Viking!** Coach Wing hosted high school quarterback Alannah Bushorr on campus in November.

When asked what he is looking forward to the most about starting women's flag football, Coach Wing's response is enthusiastic, "We're making history!"

## Stars Shine On at HNMCS

Holy Name of Mary College School (HNMCS) in Mississauga, ON wanted to provide female athletes with as much opportunity as their male counterparts, especially during the fall athletics season. Flag football was a perfect fit for this all-girls school.

In 2013, the school formed its first team of grade 7 and 8 students and a year later, grades 9 to 12 competed. They consistently performed well in one of the largest athletics associations in Ontario, rising in ranking yearly.

The school transitioned into the Conference of Independent Schools Athletics Association, but flag football was *not* part of that conference's repertoire — until HNMCS led the charge starting up the Senior Girls Flag Football League. Five schools joined in the first year!

This year, teams have grown, interest among girls remains high and the future of flag football at HNMCS is bright. Go Stars!



A Stars pep-rally with Head of School, Carrie Hughes-Grant.





# Wildfires Near Tulita Threaten Canada's NWT

Pictured is the North Slave Complex in Yellowknife on August 17, 2023

Photo: Facebook.com/NWTFireinfo

**T**his year, *Felician Mission: Tulita, in Tulita NWT* found itself surrounded by wildfires, thick smoke and black ash for several months. Over 70% of the Northwest Territories were evacuated. One community lost more than 90% of its town. Tulita's elders, children and mothers were evacuated to Délı̄ne, a nearby community for a two-week period. Major neighboring communities such as Yellowknife, Hay River, Fort Smith and several smaller dwellings were evacuated to different provinces for over three weeks.

Getting supplies to Tulita and other nearby communities proved difficult. The cost of food, already high, skyrocketed due to the logistical challenges. A significant concern was a delay in receiving medications from Yellowknife, which had been evacuated. Many went without necessary medications for an extended period. People seeking advanced medical care in Yellowknife also experienced delays, but they are gradually getting back on track.

Numerous cabins and hunting grounds used by the people of Tulita were burned or destroyed which has had a profound and lasting impact on Tulita and will continue into the future. People are worried about the loss of their land,

animals and the natural environment and also the meat they rely on to eat.

With the onset of colder weather and snow, the fires are now under control, but there is significant concern about the return of these fires next year.

Sr. Celeste Mary Goulet, ministering in *Felician Mission: Tulita* and praying with the community over the radio, asked everyone to please pray for people around the world who are currently experiencing or living in the aftermath of natural disasters, including unprecedented wildfires. "At present, much of the population of the Northwest Territories, Canada is under the threat of rapidly spreading wildfires. Everyone in Yellowknife, our capital and Diocese Centre, have been told to leave. It would be a great loss to Yellowknife, as well as the whole Northwest Territories, if the capital were to be destroyed," Sr. Celeste said.

She added that Tulita is safe, unless lightning should strike one tree.

## A Prayer From Sr. Celeste:

*God, our Father,*

*We thank you for those who didn't lose their lives*

*And we ask you to help them rebuild their lives, homes and communities.*

*We pray for those throughout the world who lose their lives from natural disasters.*

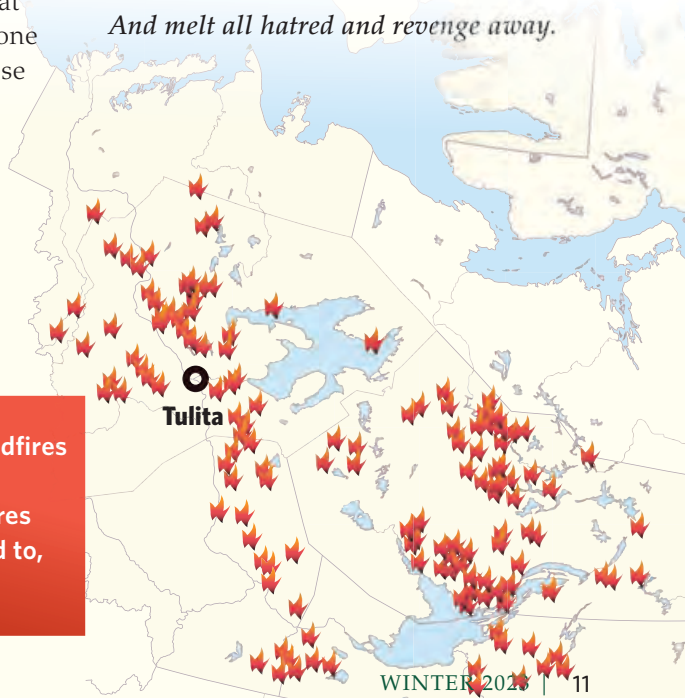
*May they be welcomed into your eternal home.*

*And we pray for all those that are suffering because of wars in our world.*

*May God's love fill the hearts of all with peace and acceptance*

*And melt all hatred and revenge away.*

**By mid-August, more than 230 wildfires raged throughout the Northwest Territories. As of October 18, 91 fires were still actively being responded to, according to gov.nt.ca.**





## Haitian MBA Students Inspire With Unwavering Commitment

**M**adonna University School of Business in Livonia, MI announced the inaugural cohort from Haiti in its MBA program. This achievement was made possible through the support of the Felician Sisters and the commitment of the university's administration.

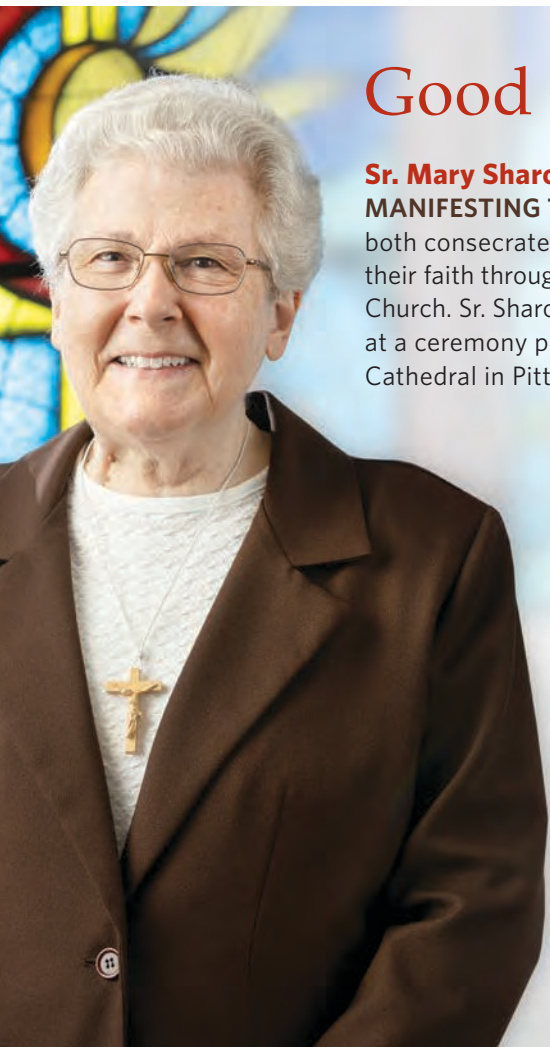
This fall semester, ten exceptional alumni of the Haiti Education Leadership Program (H.E.L.P) have begun their journey toward MBA degrees. The creation of this program was driven by the determination of these graduates to advance their education at the graduate level.

In 2011, Madonna University launched H.E.L.P., a three-year online bachelor's degree program in Business Administration to cultivate leaders in Haiti.



In August, the cohort was welcomed virtually. "It was wonderful to hear the awardees' appreciation for the opportunity as well as to learn how they plan on using their advanced education to better Haiti," said Tara Kane, dean of the School of Business.

**Watch Madonna University's Graduate Interviews to learn how H.E.L.P. is changing Haitian's lives at [FelicianSistersNA.org/Cohort](https://FelicianSistersNA.org/Cohort).**



## Good Causes for Celebration

**Sr. Mary Sharon Iacobucci** was honored with the **MANIFESTING THE KINGDOM AWARD** that recognizes both consecrated religious and lay people who exemplify their faith through their actions and dedication to the Church. Sr. Sharon's lifelong service was acknowledged at a ceremony packed with 2,500 attendees at St. Paul Cathedral in Pittsburgh, PA.

**Sr. Anne Marie Jablonicky** was honored at the **CATHOLIC SEMINARY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL AWARD DINNER CELEBRATION**. She was acknowledged for her many years of service at the Diocesan Counseling Center for Church Ministers, where she provided leadership, guidance, compassion and commitment to seminarians, priests, deacons and religious. "I am grateful to all the sisters, brothers, priests, seminarians and lay ministers who have trusted me to journey with them through their joys and sorrows, challenges, and disappointments."



**FELICIAN UNIVERSITY'S "CELEBRATION OF SERVICE AND COMMUNITY"** honored **Sr. Mary Patricia Kennedy** with a 25-year Service Award. During the event at the school's Lodi campus, Sr. Patricia reflected on her service, starting as a lab instructor and later becoming chaplain of the School of Nursing.

**Sr. Mary Honorata Grzeszczuk** was also acknowledged for her 10-years of service in the Arts and Sciences department, where she is recognized as an excellent physics teacher and currently serves as acting dean of Arts and Sciences. During the event, 45 administration, faculty and staff members were recognized for their service to the university.



**Share good news about sisters, staff and ministries at [FelicianSistersNA.org/Share](https://FelicianSistersNA.org/Share).**





## World's Oldest Interfaith Movement Convenes

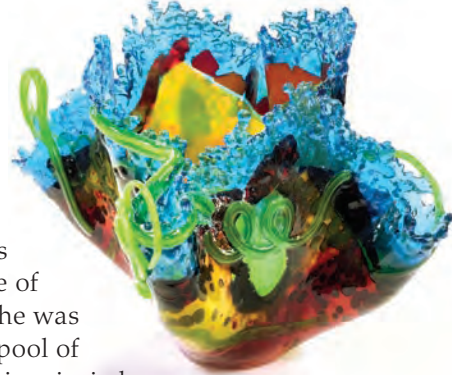
This year's **Parliament of the World's Religions** was a week of both celebration and solemn recognition of the threats facing our communities and the world. These Parliament convenings are the world's oldest, largest and most inclusive gatherings of the global interfaith movement. This year's conference theme was "A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom & Human Rights."

Sr. Maryann Agnes Mueller, justice and peace coordinator for Felician Sisters of North America, participated on behalf of the United States Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking at the conference and attended numerous conference offerings. She shared, "I had tears in my eyes at the opening ceremony as I couldn't help but think, this is Pope Francis' Culture of Encounter. **Everyone was there for the same reason: a profound concern for the human rights and dignity of each human being.**"

With nearly 900 breakout sessions to choose from and numerous plenary sessions, it was a jam-packed week. Over 7,000 attendees represented more than 95 countries and 240 faith traditions, including hundreds of presenters and exhibitors. They all came together as part of a global interfaith movement. During the five days, there was a shared sense of joy in imagining what the world could be when people of faith are committed to justice, peace and sustainability.

## Glass Artist Sister Chosen to Exhibit

Through her **Illumination Stained Glass Studio at Villa Maria College in Buffalo, NY**, Sr. Mary Ann Therese Kelly imparts both the practical techniques and the spiritual significance of stained glass art. Recently, she was selected from a competitive pool of 350 applicants to participate in a juried exhibit at the Burchfield Penney Art Center in Buffalo. The exhibition showcases over 100 works by more than 75 artists, reflecting the broad spectrum of creative expressions within the field.



Sr. Ann Therese has two stained glass works in the exhibition. The first (*shown below*), titled "Water is Life," is hand-blown antique glass with a copper foil leading. "This piece is about the need to protect water on our earth from overuse, pollution and climate change. My work is connected with a poem by St. Francis of Assisi called "The Canticle of the Sun." This 12th century poem speaks to the 21st century as St. Francis has been proclaimed the first ecologist in the history of the earth."

The second piece (*shown at top*) is a free-form vase with organic, nature-inspired images worked into it such as honeybees, butterflies and plant-life inspired ideas. It is most amazing when a real candle is lit inside of it, which makes it glow with beautiful color."

The exhibition is open until March 31, 2024.







## Summerfest Foam Fun at McGuire Memorial

Staff and individuals served at **McGuire Memorial in New Brighton, PA** were literally soaking in the fun at the organization's Summerfest 2023.

You can hear about Summerfest and more by following McGuire's new podcast, *McGuire Moments*. In episode 5, Kelly Suppa, director of Life Enrichment Adult Program at McGuire recounts her own McGuire journey, her favorite memories, and shares in detail — not only the amazing mission McGuire holds to enrich the lives of others — but also how that mission is implemented through the LEAP program.

Listen to *McGuire Moments* at [buzzsprout.com/2198184](https://buzzsprout.com/2198184).

## NCYC

Sr. Marilyn Marie Minter, Sr. Judy Marie Blizzard and Sr. Jane Mary Gawlik were among Felician Sisters, Felician higher ed staff and ministries who interacted with more than 12,000 youth at NCYC 2023. Highlights included a Haiti water woman challenge, prayer with the sisters, a cross to hold hopes and burdens, painting Christmas cards for sisters and a quiet meditation space.





## Sisters Cheered on the Crusaders

On September 30, sisters in Livonia, MI came out for the Madonna University Homecoming to support the Crusaders as they took on the University of St. Francis Cougars. Crusaders were leading 3-0 to start the second quarter, but in the end, the Cougars closed out Madonna 44-9.

*Left-right:*

Sr. Felicity Marie Madigan, Sr. Jane Mary McNamara, Sr. Darlene Marie Schoenherr



## Provincial BBQ Welcomes New Staff

In early September, Felician Sisters from the provincial house in Beaver Falls, PA hosted a day of fun and camaraderie that brought together remote employees and welcomed newcomers. "It was great to meet Sr. Renée and the new counsel assistants," said Caroline Martien, who communicates with many of the staff but works remotely. Acquaintances were made through games, a sandcastle contest and complemented by an island-inspired buffet lunch.

**Top left** *l-r:* Maria Litrenta, Sr. Marie Christine Sinkovich

**New staff top row,** *l-r:* Cheryl Hufnagel, Valerie Wilson *middle row,* *l-r:* Megan Paluh, Bonnie Davis *bottom row,* *l-r:* Mayah Harr, Linda-Su Shaffer, Kevin Herge

**Bottom** *l-r:* Sr. Mary Catherine Ryzewicz, Sr. Christine Marie Stankiewicz, Sr. Mary Renée Kurczaba — new provincial house local minister, Diane (Dee) Groblewski





# Franciscan Pilgrimage

Tracing the footprints of saints and immersing ourselves in the rich history of our faith

In a recent pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi, Felician ministry leaders, board members and staff embarked on a spiritual journey to discover the essence of Catholic faith and Franciscan heritage, deeply rooted in sacred

destinations. This journey wasn't just about visiting holy sites; it was an encounter with the teachings and lives of St. Francis and St. Clare, a chance to strengthen faith and to foster a sense of community among fellow pilgrims.



## Day 1

**Rome:** We celebrated the Eucharist at St. Peter's Basilica before visiting the Immaculate Conception Church, the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano and the tomb of St. Felix in the Capuchin Crypt.

## Day 2

Our group was in the audience at St. Peter's Square and heard Pope Francis's address. Afterwards, we explored Rome and Vatican City.

## Day 3

**Cantalice:** In this town where St. Felix was born, Liturgy was celebrated at the Church of St. Felix. We saw the miraculous fountain St. Felix gave life to.

**Greccio:** A special Christmas dinner was served to us in this hill town where St. Francis popularized the Crèche.

**Clockwise from Top:** St. Peter's Square, the Hermitage of Greccio, descending the Hermitage, the grotto with baby Jesus in Greccio — site of the first Crèche, the miraculous fountain in Cantalice, the Holy Door at the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano.







#### Day 4

**Assisi:** We explored San Damiano, where St. Francis heard his call to rebuild the church and St. Clare lived and began building her community.

#### Day 5

Our visits to San Rufino d'Arce and La Maddalena — where St. Francis once served outcast lepers — were very humbling. St. Francis and St. Clare were baptized in San Rufino. We also visited the Porziuncola, the small chapel St. Francis rebuilt that became the epicenter of his movement and where he died.

#### Day 6

In Carceri, we observed the caves of Monte Subasio where St. Francis found solace in prayer during his conversion. We also visited the grave of Don Aldo Brunacci, who led a network of people who helped hide Jewish refugees in Assisi during WWII and we explored a museum honoring them.

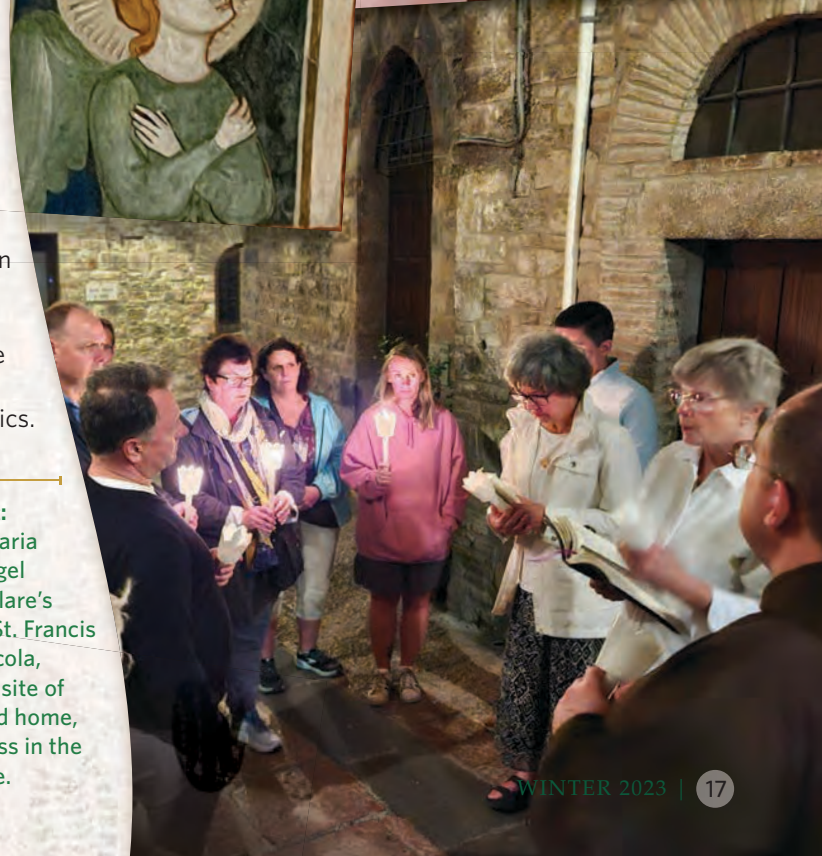
#### Day 7

A day of spiritual solitude and reflection was spent on Isola Maggiore in Lago Trasimeno where St. Francis once observed 40 days of Lent.

#### Days 8 & 9

We celebrated Mass at the tomb of St. Francis at the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. In the evening, we followed in the footsteps of St. Clare who fled her home in the night to join St. Francis and the Franciscan brothers. We dedicated our last day to St. Clare, attending Mass before the San Damiano Cross and visiting her tomb and relics.

**Clockwise from top right:** Touring Assisi, Santa Maria Maddalena Chapel, angel fresco, walking in St. Clare's footsteps, Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, the Porziuncola, exiting La Plateola — site of St. Francis's childhood home, the San Damiano cross in the Basilica of Saint Clare.





# THE CRÈCHE

Eight-hundred years ago  
St. Francis had an idea...

He sought to reignite faith by creating a tangible experience of Christ's presence. At a time and place where reenacting scenes filled in for reading, as many could not read, St. Francis set about creating a living retelling of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem.

He summoned his brothers to set the stage. Townspeople ran together, the forest resounded with their voices and that holy night was made glorious by brilliant lights. St. Francis chanted the Holy Gospel, and renewed in the hearts of the people Christ's living presence among us.





The nativity scene in the back of the memorial of St. Francis, the Santuario di San Francesco, in Greccio, which defines itself as the first church dedicated to the saint, in 1228.

## CHRIST AMONG US

The idea for a live nativity occurred to St. Francis in 1223 on his journey back from Rome, where he had sought to obtain approval from Pope Honorius III for the Franciscan rule of life. After this visit, St. Francis went to pray in Greccio, a hillside town in the Rieti Valley in Italy where a well-off man and good friend, John of Greccio, offered him and his brothers a place to have solitude.

Just a few weeks before Christmas, Francis thought about his recent time visiting the Holy Land and seeing the places Jesus had been. More than any other figure in the history of Christianity, St. Francis lived to emulate Jesus. Indeed, his first rule for the Franciscan friars in 1209 was, **“To follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footprints.”** What better way, he thought, of walking in his footprints than to celebrate the Christ child’s birth through a reenactment, complete with animals and a star-filled sky above?

Just as Jesus gave instructions to his disciples to prepare for the Passover, St. Francis instructed his good friend and follower John of Greccio to prepare a manger with hay, gather some animals and let the villagers know about the celebration. Francis read the gospel at a cave on the mountainside where all could behold the humble, simple beginning of Jesus.

Thomas Celano, a contemporary of Francis and the earliest biographer of the Saint, wrote of the celebration in 1223, “There, simplicity is given a place of honor, poverty is exalted, humility is commended and out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem.”

It is no wonder it was St. Francis who was inspired to create such an event, since the mystery of the incarnation is pivotal to Franciscan spirituality. The human Christ living among us being at once a sign of God’s great love for us, and a model of how we should live. Through this live reenactment where people could see, feel and imagine the harshness that the infant had to endure, St. Francis sought to reawaken the faith of the people of Greccio. He wanted to stir their hearts and call the community of Greccio back to the center of faith, to show the goodness of God to all.

How can we live Greccio in our daily lives? Like Francis, we can emulate the humble existence of Christ our savior, God’s perfect gift of love to us. ✨



# A Little Child Shall Lead Them

## Peer Mentors are Key to Youth Leadership Program

For over 25 years, Jericho House in Wainfleet, ON has galvanized young leaders through a unique model as dynamic and effective today as it ever was. Sr. Mary Jacqueline Keefe and Br. Bill Carrothers facilitate TORCH Leadership Retreats, training sessions and conferences developed around their belief in the dignity and giftedness of young people.



**“Our retreats are not sitting and listening to experts, they’re about interacting with inherent leaders,”** explains Sr. Jacquie. **“We are here to enhance the leadership that’s already there.”**







The TORCH model has nurtured and empowered hundreds of young leaders over decades, and though the issues students face have changed with time, the model continues to work because of its core element — peer leadership.

The program begins with students nominated by school principals. “The principals often ask if we want student council leaders,” Br. Bill said. “We tell them, yes, but we’d also like kids who come into the school through different doors, or on different buses,” recognizing that many young leaders have not yet emerged in traditional roles.

The nominated students complete specialized peer ministry training that invites them to practice inclusive, collaborative leadership and affirms their spirituality. These peer leaders are critical to the TORCH model as they lead small group discussions, navigate their peers through the retreat sessions and become a resource for post-retreat school projects. Sr. Jacquie stresses that the program does not train students to be future leaders. **“They are not leaders in the future, they are leaders in the now.”**

There are four sequential TORCH levels, each for a specific age group and intent, led by the trained peer leaders. TORCH 1 for young people ages 12 to 14 affirms and nurtures the participants’ inherent leadership through large and small group interaction. The next step, TORCH 2, invites participants ages 15 and older to begin assessing their leadership qualities and puts them to work in a community-building context. In the third and fourth levels, those 16 years and older practice their leadership skills, develop concrete action plans and respond to needs in their community.

The TORCH series is flexible and can incorporate unique elements as needed. For example, a school district that had a Six Nations educational program featured indigenous culture including drumming and dancing in the retreat.

Well-known for their effortless blend of leadership, social and ecological justice and spirituality, Jericho House retreats are held in the 18-bedroom facility situated on 17 picturesque acres in southern Ontario, on the border of Lake Erie.



### The Secret of Success

“There are no adults in our small groups,” Br. Bill said. “It’s the main feature of TORCH. Teachers and principals sometimes have a problem with that.” He recounts a teacher who insisted on participating in the small groups, but had to step away to take a call. “When he came back and heard the group’s discussion led by the peer leader, he backed away and said ‘They’re doing it better than I could.’ He was moved to tears in his humility.”

Sr. Jacquie agreed. “We underestimate the power of the Spirit in confirmation. Leadership starts in school, comes to Jericho to be enhanced, then goes back to the community where we see young leaders bearing much fruit.” 🌸





# On Giving and Receiving

A Volunteer in Mission (VIM)  
talks about doing small things  
with great love at  
Deo Gratias Ministries Detroit



Learn more about VIM  
and get involved at  
[FelicianSistersNA.org/VIM](http://FelicianSistersNA.org/VIM).

**M**y name is Magdalene Drohan, and yes, named after Saint Mary Magdalene. I was raised Catholic but as I got older, I drifted away from my faith — I felt like there was a disconnect between God and me. Then, in my junior year of college, I met a group of FOCUS missionaries at my campus and became involved with my school's Catholic club, which led me on a journey that reignited my faith. It was at the SEEK23 conference where I first learned about the VIM program.

I prayed about it and asked friends to pray for me. I went back and forth in my head about whether or not I could do this. In the end, I sent in my application and got accepted.

## Roles, responsibilities and contributions

I wear a lot of hats at Deo Gratias, and have to be able to switch between jobs as the situation requires. When I'm not working in the café, I'm helping out in the food pantry. I help guests with food selection and bag up their food for them to take home. I help stock shelves and wash produce tables. On Monday and Wednesday afternoons, I tutor a boy in reading. When people bring donations, I help unload and sort them. I make sure bathrooms are stocked and do odd jobs that pop up.

A major aspect of the Felician Sisters' identity is community. By serving at Deo Gratias I am

serving the local community. I even find myself welcomed through friendships I have begun to form with some of our regular guests. By helping maintain a clean environment and pleasant atmosphere, I am contributing to the provision of a place where guests can form community with one another socializing in the café.

The charism of the Felician Sisters calls them to "surrender to God's will in compassionate service, and live in total availability and concern for the salvation of all people," which pretty neatly sums up what I feel I am doing here:

**God called me to dedicate these ten months of my time to full-time service of the people of Detroit, and at Deo I give myself wholly over to the task of doing the best I can to meet the needs of the people.**

## Rewards of the work

Obviously, it is wonderful to witness what a positive impact the work we do at Deo has on the people we serve. Seeing someone come into the building in despair and leave with a smile on their face is such a blessing, especially when it's the result of something I myself had a hand in. It's also been incredibly rewarding to recognize my own strength through taking on this endeavor. I can be a pretty anxious person, and I worried that when I got here and realized just what I'd gotten myself into, that I would freak out. Well, it's been over two months and that hasn't happened. I am proud of myself. It's a testament to how much I've grown as a person.

One of our regular guests at the café is a middle-aged man with a somewhat gruff demeanor. My early interactions with him were short and to-the-point: he'd

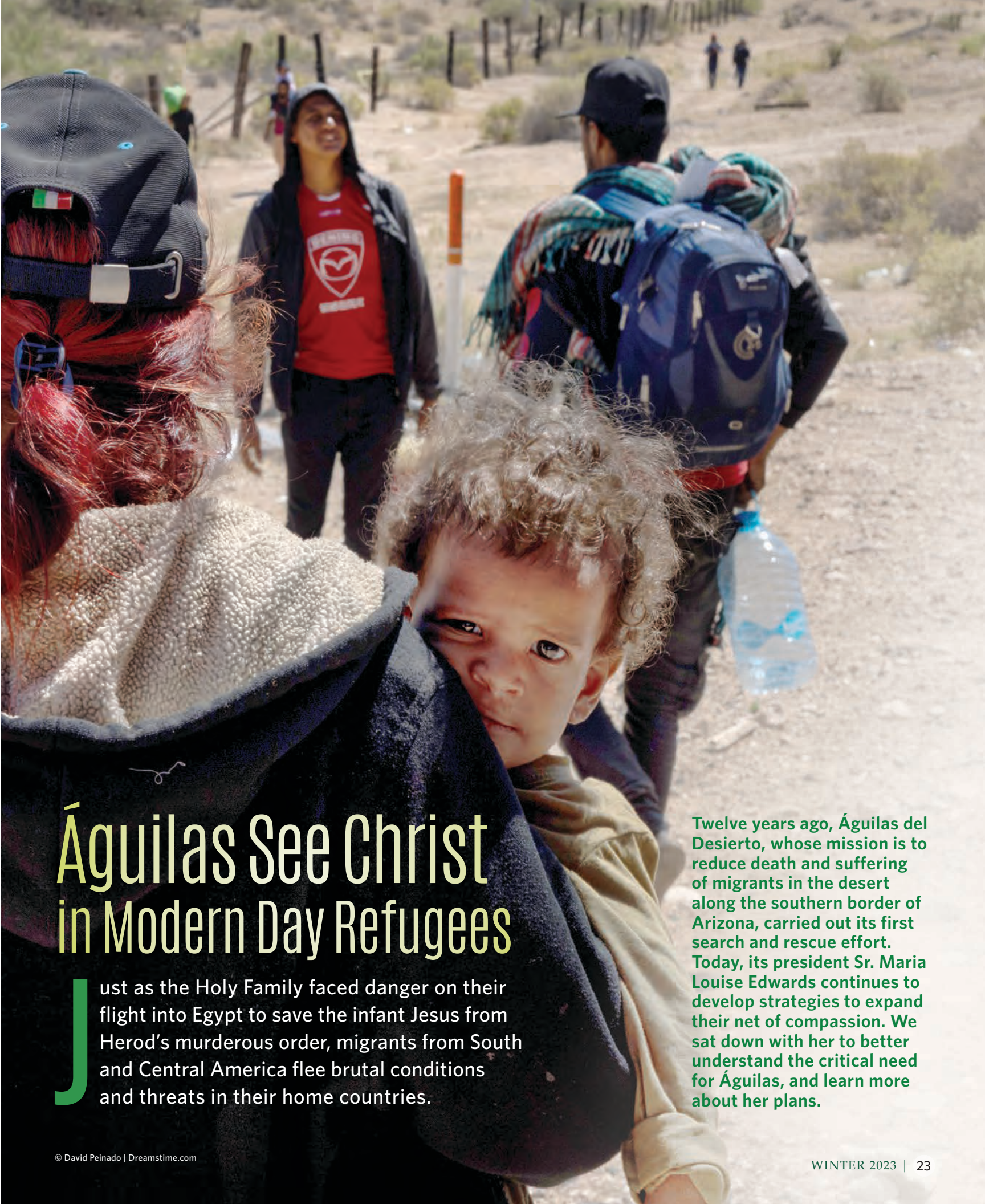
order two black coffees to-go, pick out two snacks, then leave. Over time, our interactions grew friendlier, but I still wouldn't have called him a particularly effusive man — until one day, as I was getting his coffees he started thanking me over and over for "the work we do" at Deo. I could tell he was very emotional, it even sounded like he was getting choked up, which took me by surprise. If you had asked me which guest I thought would provide such a display, he wouldn't have been in the running at all. It was a good reminder for me that everyone feels things deeply, even if they don't — or can't — show it. I'm grateful that he was willing to share such honest emotion with me, and I'm happy to say that since then, he seems livelier — more chatty, making jokes, and sometimes he even comes into the café singing.

Working in the café, it can sometimes feel like I'm not having the greatest impact. After all, how much of a difference can chips and lemonade really make in the face of the poverty that many of our guests experience? But like St. Mother Theresa said, "not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love," and his heartfelt gratitude reminded me that a simple act of kindness can be all a person really needs. I can't erase their struggles, but I can provide a port in the storm, so to speak.

## To anyone considering volunteering with VIM

Just let go. Whatever doubts, or worries or fears you have, give them all to God. Come with an open heart and open mind, and be prepared to give of yourself more fully than you have ever been called to before. 🌸





# Águilas See Christ in Modern Day Refugees

**J**ust as the Holy Family faced danger on their flight into Egypt to save the infant Jesus from Herod's murderous order, migrants from South and Central America flee brutal conditions and threats in their home countries.

Twelve years ago, Águilas del Desierto, whose mission is to reduce death and suffering of migrants in the desert along the southern border of Arizona, carried out its first search and rescue effort. Today, its president Sr. Maria Louise Edwards continues to develop strategies to expand their net of compassion. We sat down with her to better understand the critical need for Águilas, and learn more about her plans.



### How does Águilas del Desierto align with Felician values?

**Sr. Maria Louise:** As Felicians, we are called to care for the marginalized with compassion and without judgment. Blessed Mary Angela instructed us to serve where we are needed. There is a lot of debate these days about immigration and the security of our southern border, but the truth is, people are dying in the desert trying to get to the U.S. It doesn't matter why, it doesn't matter whether it's right. What matters is that living beings are suffering. They need help, and they deserve dignity for the light of God inside of them. What happens to their legal status once they are here is not for Águilas to decide. Our mission is to rescue people who are in danger of death, or recover and respectfully tend to the remains of those who already succumbed in the desert.

### Where and how often are Águilas searches conducted?

**Sr. Maria Louise:** The main search areas include California and Arizona. In the first nine months of 2023, nearly one-third of all U.S. Border Control Southwest Land Border Crossings were along the border in Arizona, accounting for 398,052 crossings. Another 203,735 crossings were reported in the two California-based Border Patrol sectors. Of the deaths recorded by Border Patrol in FY2021, 19% were found in the Arizona border area. Since Texas put up the floating barrier in the Rio Grande in

July, we're seeing more border crossings shift from Texas to Arizona. The river was already hard to cross with at least 100 people dying every year, and the barrier makes it even more life-threatening.

Regularly scheduled searches are conducted twice a month Friday to Sunday. Each day we cover 10 to 12 miles. When urgent calls for help are received, we notify federal authorities who are closest to the suspected area.

### Why aren't Águilas' searches conducted by plane or drone to cover more distance faster?

**Sr. Maria Louise:** Along the U.S./Mexican border, there are areas that require special permission to use air space, and some areas where permission will never be granted, such as federally-owned land used for military training, wildlife preserves and parts of the Tohono O'odham Nation territory. Águilas has been building relationships with the Tohono over the past few years, but the governing structure of their cultural community includes many regions and districts requiring many levels of approval.

In areas where it would be possible to search, a pilot license is required to operate a drone. We are working with a volunteer who has a drone pilot license and will be testing a process whereby aerial and ground-based teams work together. We are not sure if aerial viewing will be effective since most migrants are instructed by coyotes to wear



Águilas volunteers conduct searches with little shelter. A pavilion provides shade to eat and they sleep in tents on the desert floor after walking 10 miles in 100 degree heat.

camouflage, so sighting may be limited by air.

### How do families or those needing rescue find out about Águilas?

**Sr. Maria Louise:** We conduct a prevention campaign throughout Mexico and put posters up in all the migrant centers. Many people learn about us through word of mouth, and of course on social media. Often migrants or their families are afraid to call 911; they don't trust law enforcement but feel safe calling Águilas.

### What are the dangers of crossing the desert?

**Sr. Maria Louise:** Heat and not having enough water are the biggest threats. To travel the distance, a person needs one to two gallons of water per day! There's simply no way to carry that much water. From March to November the temperature averages about 100 degrees. The highest mortality reported by the

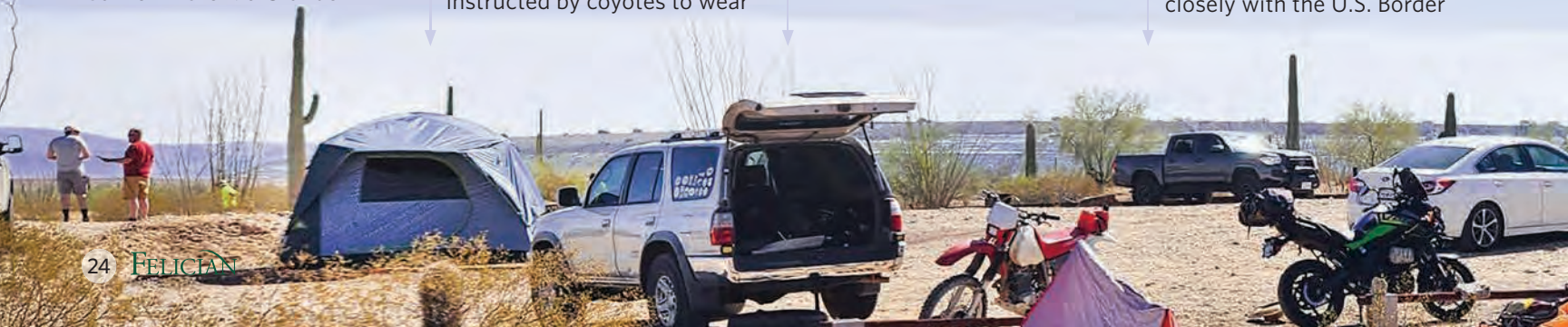
U.S. Customs and Border Protection is distress, meaning a person was found in medical distress and died of natural causes in the field or while on route or being treated at a hospital. That's why our efforts are so critical.

### There are many who disagree with the seemingly unchecked flow of immigrants across the southern border. What do you say to them?

**Sr. Maria Louise:** Águilas has always been and will continue to be a humanitarian effort only. We do not fall on one side or the other of the debate on immigration. We are focused on rescuing people who are in extreme danger of dying of thirst and exposure in the desert and treating the remains of people who succumbed to death with the dignity and respect that all human life deserves.

### What is the relationship between Águilas and government agencies?

**Sr. Maria Louise:** We work closely with the U.S. Border





Patrol and other agencies and participate in all Border Patrol regional meetings. Most of our rescues are coordinated with Border Patrol — without their assistance we wouldn't be able to access certain areas or rescue as many people as we do. When we receive a call from a family member that someone is missing, we immediately contact Border Patrol's Missing Migrant Program and work with them to coordinate a search. Because volunteers have to come from so far away for non-scheduled searches, we rely on federal agencies to get there quickly.

### Águilas has seen a huge increase in rescues, from 45 in 2020 to 183 in 2021 and 215 in 2022. Why?

**Sr. Maria Louise:** The biggest impact has been funding. A single three-day search costs about \$3,000, so the more funds we receive, the higher the number and frequency of searches we are able to conduct. If we can secure a steady stream of funding, the number of rescues will continue to rise.

Another reason for the increase is our growing internet presence, and the press coverage we've gotten. We have over 300,000 followers on Facebook and almost 30,000 subscribers to our YouTube channel! The short documentary, *Águilas*, released in 2021 drew a lot of attention to the crisis, especially since it earned eight nominations and eight award wins. We are incredibly grateful that so much

awareness is being raised, but we're also frustrated because it's leading to a new problem.

### What's the new problem?

**Sr. Maria Louise:** Now that there is a growing awareness of our efforts, families of missing migrants and migrants themselves lost in the desert are reaching out for our help. Phone calls for help are pouring in well beyond what we are able to handle. At the moment, the



The only facility in Ajo is a recent upgrade — an outhouse.

Águilas hotline rings through to just three people. If the first isn't able to answer, it goes on to the second and then the third. When we started eight years ago, this system was difficult but manageable with 250 calls.

Now we receive over 2,500 calls for help each year!

Our focus, and the most efficient solution, is a call center. If we could establish and staff a call center with bilingual employees or volunteers, we could rescue so many more people, getting help to them much sooner than we are able to now. We also receive many calls from people just seeking information, and we can easily guide them to resources if we had a 24/7 call center.

### Do you have plans for a call center for Águilas?

**Sr. Maria Louise:** We originally envisioned a residence on 4 acres of land Águilas already owns in Ajo, AZ where searchers could have a safe place to rest, eat and shower instead of sleeping on the ground in the open desert as they do now, but our vision has shifted. Since Ajo is so remote, we instead are considering establishing a Hospitality House in Tucson, AZ where we will be able to connect with many other organizations that provide resources for migrants. This location would provide more opportunities to work together. It will feature an educational center with videos, testimonials and other materials. There are places in the area that offer a "border experience" where visitors can find room and board and a guided tour to see what's happening at the border, but there is no resource where

they can learn about the history and culture of the migrants we serve. In addition to the educational center, we plan to have office space and house the much-needed call center. The modified plan for the facility will bring several key elements together under one roof.

### What about the 4-acre property in Ajo?

**Sr. Maria Louise:** That site will be critical for our search and rescue operations since it is so close to the border. It will be the place for volunteer searchers to stay during the weekend searches. We are working on developing a quick response team that will be able to act when we receive urgent calls, and that team will be based in Ajo.

### What do you most want people to know about Águilas?

**Sr. Maria Louise:** Hundreds of people are dying, and nobody knows. If we don't pay attention or if we try to distance ourselves, we lose what makes us human. They are fathers and sons, daughters and mothers. They are God's children, and they are dying all alone every day. This should never be okay. I can't make myself find a way to let it be okay. 🌸

Learn more and get involved at [AguilasdelDesierto.org](https://AguilasdelDesierto.org).





# Haiti, Short and Sweet

Why is this nation in a constant state of unrest?

According to the United Nations, in the first nine months of this year, 3,000 homicides were reported in Haiti, 1,500 people were kidnapped for ransom, and 200,000 had to flee their homes due to safety risks. Sexual violence against women and girls at the hands of gangs is rising, and children are unable to go to school.

It's likely that as you read this, you can't remember a time when Haiti was not in a state of turmoil. Poverty, starvation, violence and corruption seem to be the norm. Why is this? How can thousands of tourists flock to paradise at resorts on the eastern side of the island while the western half lives in abject poverty and chaos?

## The climate changed...

Beginning in 1645, the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea experienced 70 years of fewer hurricanes due to a period of cooling called the *Maunder Minimum*. With the threat of shipwrecks minimized, Spain and France took full advantage of calmer seas to expand their fortunes into the island of Hispaniola. They divided it into what would become Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In this tropical environment, they could finally produce in quantity what Europe was becoming addicted to — sugar.

But sugar plantations require grueling labor. After the island's original "Taina" people were decimated in forced labor, nearly 800,000 African people were enslaved and shipped to replace them. A complex caste system based on skin color emerged that went on to cause infighting among Haitians for hundreds of years.

In the meantime, deforestation and over-farmed plantation land led to an unhealthy ecosystem that in the future would make natural disasters even more destructive.

## Costly freedom

Encouraged by the French Revolution in the late 1700s, Haitian people fought for and won their independence from France in 1804, making them **the first independent nation of Latin America and the Caribbean, the first country in the Americas to abolish slavery and the only state in history created by a slave revolt.**

As punishment, France refused to recognize Haiti as a country, cutting off its ability to trade and thrive. Fearful of slave revolts in their own countries, the Western world followed suit. Teetering on economic and political ruin after a series of corrupt and weak leaders, in 1825, Haiti was forced to negotiate a hefty payment to France as an indemnity — meaning Haitians had to pay off their enslavers for their loss of slaves (themselves). In turn, France recognized the Republic of Haiti and restored trade. This financial burden is what has held Haiti back from developing a healthy economy to this day.



Speaking to the crowd in St. Peter's Square on Sept. 20, 2023, Pope Francis recognized the devastating long-term effects that persist to this day in places blighted by colonization and warned that **"the economically more advanced world often closes its eyes, ears and mouth."**

Forced to take loans from French banks over generations with interest and commissions for French bankers, Haiti's debt doubled! Haitians were deprived of this revenue that could have built schools, hospitals and infrastructure, and they were forced into a cycle of debt, poverty and underdevelopment that persists.

It took until 1947 for Haiti to finally pay off the indemnity. It is estimated that had the money remained in the Haitian economy over the last 200 years, it would have added at least \$21 billion, or more likely upwards of \$115 billion to the nation.

## Haiti didn't get here on its own

Created to serve the desires of powerful countries — so that Europe could put sugar in its tea, then in spite, robbed of its ability to provide for itself — Haiti exists in an eternally vulnerable state. Struggling in this aftermath, Haitians have become strong, resilient and unimaginably joyful. The Felician Sisters serve alongside Haitians in a ministry of presence, listening to the people to learn their needs and providing what they can with the help of all who offer support to *Felician Mission: Haiti*. Until they find their way, the Felician Sisters and generous people who support their mission, continue to stand with Haiti. ✨







FROM OUR SISTERS IN PRZEMYŚL, POLAND

# Ukraine Update



Since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, millions of women, men and children were forced to leave Ukraine and become refugees, and millions more are displaced within the country. **Approximately 17.6 million people — 49% of the current population — need humanitarian assistance and protection.**

Sr. Maria Oksana Zhovnir, provincial councilor in Poland, described the current state. “For more than a year and a half, the war in Ukraine continues to bring suffering, lack of basic living conditions, hunger, separation and, unfortunately, death. The elderly and children are the most affected by this war. Families who have suffered, losing their loved ones and all their possessions, still need support and help.”

**Thanks to benefactors from Poland and abroad, and especially our sisters from the Province of Our Lady of Hope, we are trying to help the most needy people of Ukraine to the best of our ability.**

Felician Sisters in Poland partner with religious and humanitarian organizations to further their reach in supporting Ukrainian individuals and families. The combined generosity of donors in North America and Poland is helping to extend the reach of love and compassion to this war-torn nation.

*continued*

**The number of Ukrainian and Russian troops killed or wounded since the war in Ukraine began is nearing 500,000, U.S. officials said, leaving tens of thousands of widows and orphans.**

**Despite the destruction wrought by Russia’s invasion, the Felician Sisters, like their foundress Blessed Angela, continue tirelessly to aid those impacted by war.**



**TOP:** Provincial councilor Sr. Maria Oksana Zhovnir, visited Kherson in September. **ABOVE AND RIGHT:** Sr. Julia Kałdon (*far left*), worked with a postulant and novices to prepare aid packages.



## ■ FELICIAN SISTERS WORLDWIDE

Late this summer, a local priest and volunteers delivered basic products and necessities, purchased by Polish sisters with donor funds, to 150 families in Kherson.

Material assistance is provided to families from Ukraine every month through the *Caritas Poland FAMILY Program*. Through this program, generous donors helped the sisters sponsor a holiday for children whose fathers were killed defending Ukraine.

Sr. Julia Kałdon and postulant Justyna Nowak, with help from novices and donor support prepared 200 aid packages utilizing *Parcel for Ukraine* (in cooperation with Caritas in Przemyśl).

### Occupied in Kherson

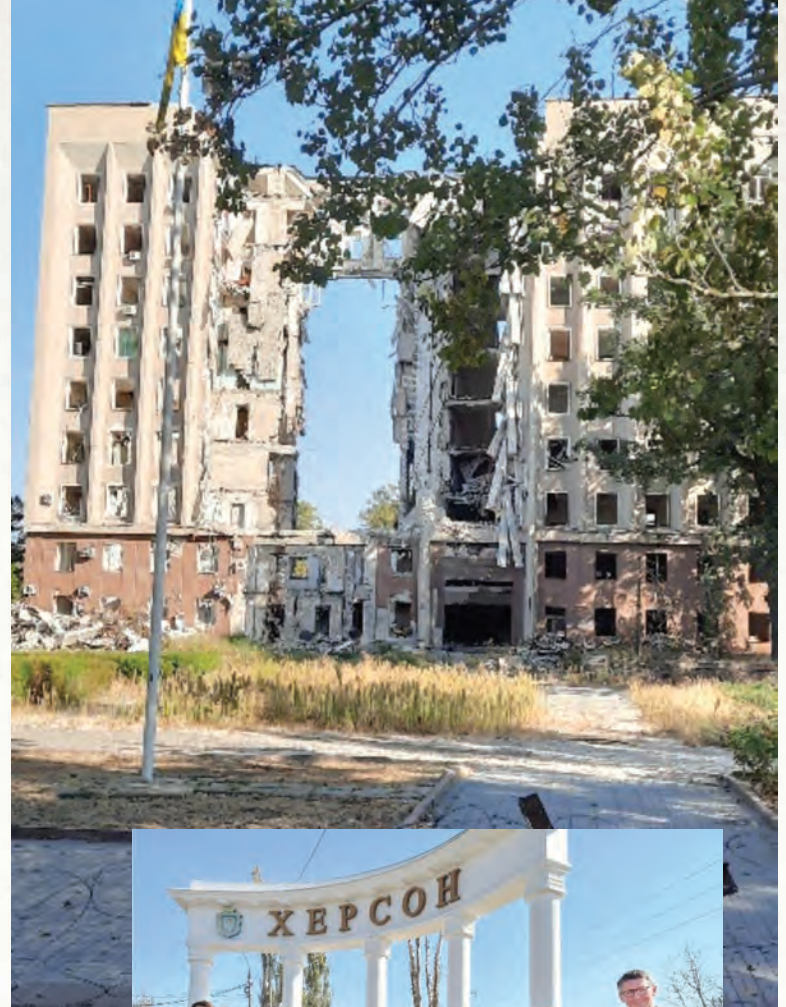
Kherson, a city in the southeast of Ukraine, has been occupied since the beginning of the war. Factories have been closed and residents live on meager humanitarian aid from their Russian occupiers. Many families left because of the danger and difficult living conditions. **Before the war, the city's population was 350,000, today, there are only 50,000 citizens.** Most are the elderly and their caregivers — many are children.

The Dnieper River flows through the city, dividing it into two parts. In November 2023, part of the city south of the river was liberated. The joy of the people was great! Still, they continue to be concerned for those family members who remain on the northern side of the Dnieper as they only have contact with them online.

Tragically, this summer the Russians blew up the dam in the city of Nova Kakhovka in Kherson. Many homes were flooded, as well as cultivated spring fields and gardens, which were the main source of sustenance for the locals.

At that time, help was coming from different parts of Ukraine and the world, but today, Kherson is experiencing more shelling and is less safe so aid is delivered less. Sr. Maria Oksana visited Kherson from September 23-25 and witnessed that from the sidelines, this city looks almost dead.

The children's biggest dreams are to be able to play with their peers, and for the elderly, to be able to buy what they like, not just what they get. Despite the fact that their everyday life is so difficult, they are grateful for any help and believe that in time there will be peace in their city and throughout Ukraine. 🌻



**ABOVE:** Delivering aid packages were Sr. Maria Oksana Zhovnir (center) with Drohobych parish priest, Fr. Mirosław Lech (far right) at the entrance to the city of Херсон (Kherson in English).

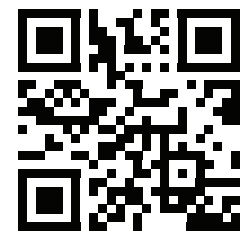
**TOP:** A bombed building in the city.



## If You Would Like to Help Ukraine

You can give to the Felician Sisters' **Ukraine Crisis Fund**. All monies received are sent to our Felician Sisters in Poland and used to help Ukrainians in need. In thanks for your gift, we will send you a glass sunflower dish or ornament made by a Felician Sister glass artist.

Learn more and make a donation at [FelicianSistersNA.org/Ukraine](https://FelicianSistersNA.org/Ukraine).



100% of funds go to our Polish Provincial houses for Ukrainians in need.



# Immigration and Gun Violence A Vicious Cycle

Sr. Maryann Agnes Mueller  
Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Coordinator

**W**hen we think about gun violence in the United States, we often overlook its global implications. And when we think about global migration, we rarely connect the displacement of people to U.S. gun policies. However, these two issues overlap in ways that might surprise many people. Not only are firearms the leading cause of death for children in the United States, but American guns — and the violence they cause — are a major U.S. export.

In Mexico, for example, **70% of trafficked firearms come from the U.S.**, according to a study funded by the School of Public Health at George Washington University. Gun violence is a root cause of migration. While many migrants from Mexico and Central America seek to enter the United States at the southern border, U.S.-sourced firearms in their homelands are responsible for the uncontrolled violence that forces them to flee their communities in the first place, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency. American guns used to commit homicides also threaten human rights defenders, extort shop owners, displace indigenous communities and contribute to floods of people seeking asylum for their families.

Felician Sisters advocate for gun violence prevention in recognition of the dignity of all people. The Felician Sisters of North America are part of a coalition of over 50 congregations of women religious called Nuns Against Gun Violence. They come together to support survivors and youth activists and to amplify their unified voice as Catholic sisters. They work for justice in the following areas:

- legislative** – at local, state and federal levels;
- pastoral** – to help heal and provide trauma support to survivors; and
- cultural and communal** – to change the narrative on gun violence and its many manifestations across patriarchy, racism, xenophobia, misogyny, white supremacy and religious nationalism.

Learn more at  
[NunsAgainstGunViolence.org](https://NunsAgainstGunViolence.org).



**Homicides by Shooting:  
90% Central America  
60% U.S.  
27% Canada**

Source: gao.gov





# The Holy Spirit Is My Hearing Aid

By Sr. Judith Marie Blizzard, Certified Spiritual Director

**A spiritual director is trained to accompany you in prayer, listening with you as you share what stirs in your heart and helping you to understand what the Holy Spirit is telling you.**

**B**efore becoming a spiritual director, often people would say to me, “You are such a good listener,” a skill very important to the ministry. Yes, listening is a gift, but in the realm of spiritual direction, it needs a hearing aid whose name is the HOLY SPIRIT. Each morning, I spend twenty minutes in quiet prayer focused on God and just listening. Before I pray, I just listen to God. Of course, there are many distracting thoughts, which afterwards leave me wondering if it was all for nothing. Over time, I realized that it was not a waste of time because in those few seconds of being present and listening, **I am learning the voice of God.**

When it comes time to be present to my directee, I pray to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit for what to focus on after the person has finished sharing. Often people share at length and the aid of the Holy Spirit is necessary for how God wants to work with that person. I am just the instrument. My role is to ask the right questions that will help the person to reflect on an experience of God and go deeper into that experience.

Often, it is a surprise to me what questions come forth.

That element of surprise is the work of the Holy Spirit and tells me that the Holy Spirit is indeed with us. After the directee leaves, mentally I go over that time with him or her to see if there were any internal reactions that occurred in me that need to be addressed in supervision. This is done so that my personal issues do not get tangled with those of the directee. The listening then is threefold, and I do need a hearing aid in my ministry who is the Holy Spirit, that most precious gift given to us at our baptism. This great gift often leads me to awe and wonder at how God works in and through us. ✨

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**Felician Sisters throughout North America offer spiritual guidance. If you have questions about spiritual direction, text, call or email Sr. Judy Blizzard at 734-718-0632 or [vocation@feliciansisters.org](mailto:vocation@feliciansisters.org).**



## Physics Workbook Addresses Need to Integrate Knowledge

“Reason [...] has wilted under the weight of so much knowledge and little by little has lost the capacity to lift its gaze to the heights, not daring to rise to the truth of being.”

John Paul II. *Fides et Ratio* #5. The Holy See, 14 Sept. 1998

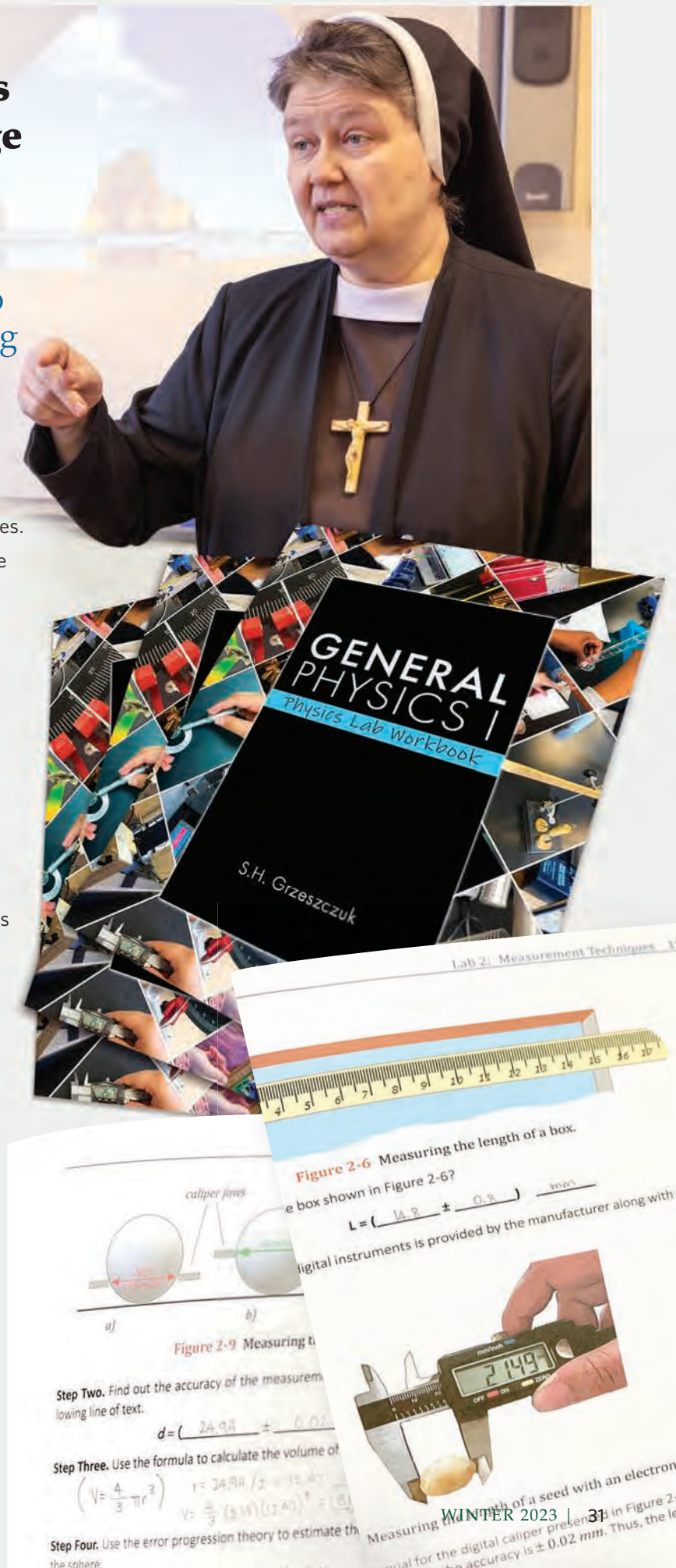
For Sr. Mary Honorata Grzeszczuk, this statement leads to a question of knowledge integration, that seems to be overlooked in undergraduate science classes.

In the age of such great technological advancement, the volume of knowledge that is expected to be taught in college level science courses increases exponentially. Little or no time and effort is reserved for students to integrate their knowledge. In effect, science becomes merely equivalent to facts and theories and does not lead to growth toward the truth. The emerging question is, **how do we help young people who enter the field of science to integrate knowledge so they can "gaze to the heights," see beyond facts, and become leaders in their fields?**

Sr. Honorata sees mindfulness and reflection as tools of knowledge integration and, therefore, an indispensable part of the learning process. In her recent *Physics Lab Workbook* published by Kendall/Hunt in 2023 and created for the undergraduate introductory physics courses, brief mindfulness exercises are interwoven with physics formulas, tables and diagrams. Focused on the process of learning rather than on the knowledge itself, the book facilitates developing students' professional identities rather than only learning.

Another noteworthy feature of the *Physics Lab Workbook* is in its innovative hybrid format. Each lab is accompanied by an online instruction that can be opened by students on a phone or tablet. Existing lab manuals repeat textbooks introducing laboratory exercises, increasing the volume and, hence, the price of lab manuals. Instead of repeating physics textbooks, Sr. Honorata focuses on the laboratory procedure in her *Physics Lab Workbook*. Ready-made tables save time, so students can direct their attention to the hands-on activities and mastering their lab skills. ✨

Find Sr. Honorata's blog:  
**Physics Lab — a Good Place to Do Physics**  
 at [physicsfel.blogspot.com](http://physicsfel.blogspot.com).





In 2015, Pope Francis issued *Laudato Si'* to call on Catholics to take action against climate change. Eight years later, with little progress made, he has issued an urgent message that the world needs to hear.

## Time is Running Out!

**T**he climate crisis will affect everyone, but those limited by social and economic factors are at the greatest risk.

**Why?** Because the level and quality of education, housing and health care can impact a family's ability to prepare for and react to extreme climate events. Wildfires, drought, higher temperatures, floods and storms have a more profound impact on marginalized populations.

Knowing what's at stake and concerned at the limited progress the world has made since his 2015 release of *Laudato Si'* on October 4, 2023, Pope Francis released *Laudate Deum* (*Praise God*), a shorter exhortation expressing urgency for immediate action. In this writing, his tone is strong and he sharply challenges those that deny the severity of the climate crisis and the institutions that perpetuate it. He writes, **"I have realized that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point."**

Pope Francis describes his frustration with political leaders and international agreements producing little to no results but finds hope in the small actions of individuals saying, **"Even though this does not immediately produce a notable effect from the quantitative standpoint, we are helping to bring about large processes of transformation rising from deep within society."**

On September 1, 2023, Felician Sisters of North America, led by sustainability coordinator, Sr. Mary Jean Sliwinski, with input from the entire province including lay staff and community, committed to join the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform (LSAP), a movement inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si' On Care for Our Common Home*. The initiative's goal, through a structured method to set goals and change behaviors, is to make conscious choices that protect and honor creation as part of our daily lives. Felician Sisters are in the process of setting actions to address the seven goals of the LSAP platform which can provide all of us the opportunity to participate in both reflective and active deeds. **"Each of us needs to take this commitment seriously. This is a unique opportunity to be the change our world needs us to be today,"** says Sr. Judith Marie Kubicki, provincial minister.



## It Is Time For Action

*Laudato Si'* is official Catholic Social Teaching — **it is not an option for Catholics.**

*Laudate Deum* is Pope Francis's stern call for us to wake up, look seriously at what is happening in our world and take action before it is too late.

Taking the climate crisis seriously and living LSAP in our daily lives will not only help protect our common home but will help our most vulnerable neighbors.

## Join Felician Sisters in Our Action Platform

**REFLECTION:** Identify the critical social and environmental needs of our time and their systemic causes. **Embrace our call to profound interior conversion** as we take bold, tangible steps to renew our relationships with God, one another, and the created world. **Educate ourselves** about the causes and effects of the climate crisis and do our part to help alleviate these problems.

**ACTION:** Address our choices and model behaviors that demonstrate our commitment to decrease our carbon footprint, the destruction of our planet and implement changes to better care for our Sister, Mother Earth. **Support and hold each other accountable** for making changes to care for our Earth. **Stand in solidarity** with our Felician Associates, employees, and ministries, and assist them in the work of listening to the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth. **Work in partnership with other groups** who have committed to the seven-year journey of the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform.

Look for our detailed plan in Spring 2024. 🌱

“This is a global social issue and one intimately related to the dignity of human life.”

Francis. *Laudate Deum.*

## ■ CATHOLIC CURIOSITIES

### Are sisters the same as nuns?

There are some important differences. Nuns' lives are spent in prayer and they work within a convent or monastery. Sisters are actively working out in the world and engaging in many kinds of work, often for those in need.

### Where do my prayer requests go?

Felician Sisters receive prayer requests through the mail and online from all over the world. Each prayer is read and forwarded to local ministers at Felician convents throughout North America. Every prayer request is shared with sisters in prayer

ministry and with all Felician Sisters and Associates. In all — **more than 350 Felician Sisters are praying for your prayer requests!**

**Send your prayer request at [FelicianSistersNA.org/PrayerRequest](https://FelicianSistersNA.org/PrayerRequest).**

### Can Catholics do Yoga?

Some Catholics view yoga as a forbidden practice — probably because of its pre-Christian origins in Hinduism, but **the Catholic Church does not forbid yoga.** Yoga provides opportunity for exercise and meditation.

**The practice of yoga is the wisdom of connecting your mind with your body.** Thomas Merton, a Roman Catholic Trappist monk, spent



many years engaging with the East to help broaden our minds to share the wisdom of their faith and philosophies. His engagement helped create an interfaith dialogue that was profound in his journey of contemplative prayer. Merton had an evolving relationship with varieties of yoga theory and practice that he engaged with throughout his lifetime. This inspired Catholics throughout the world to practice yoga — and they have done so for a very long time.

**“If the practice of yoga opens your mind and spirit to Jesus — it is grace.”**

*Sr. Judith M. Kubicki, Provincial Minister  
Felician Sisters of North America*



# Advancing Care at St. Joseph's

## While Keeping Felician Culture and Standards Intact

The Felician Sisters have been active at St. Joseph Hospital in Bangor, ME, since 1947. When Sr. Barbara Theresa Marie Martis arrived in 1985, the facility employed 14 sisters. Now, two remain.

**"Numbers do not mean everything," Sr. Barbara said. "Small numbers often produce big results."**

Sr. Barbara and Sr. Mary Edith St. Jean, the only Felician Sisters in the state of Maine, continue to play big roles in the operation and evolution of St. Joseph. The 112-bed hospital, which also has six outpatient locations and serves about 250,000 people in and around Penobscot County, doesn't only mend broken bones — it heals broken lives.

Sr. Barbara and Sr. Edith are really carrying the torch for what the mission is here," said Mary Prybylo, president of St. Joseph Healthcare. "People in the community know this is a safe and a good place."

**Sr. Mary Edith  
St. Jean**  
Patient Visitor



**Sr. Barbara Theresa  
Marie Martis**  
Cultural and Heritage Historian

The original hospital building purchased by the Felicians in 1947 was a large white house that resembled a bed-and-breakfast. It had only 30 beds, but no recovery room and no elevator. In 1964, a community fund-raising campaign enabled St. Joseph to expand and modernize. The growth has continued in recent years, enabling the hospital to provide surgical, orthopedic and cardiopulmonary care, lab services and physical therapy. Then, in 2010 — sponsorship of St. Joseph Hospital was transferred from the Felician Sisters to Covenant Health Systems.

"St. Joseph Hospital is a haven for comfort, compassion and strength," Sr. Edith said. It is the only hospital in Maine with a sexual abuse forensic examiner (SAFE) program. Specially trained nurses provide trauma-

informed care for victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse and human trafficking. The health care providers collect medical and forensic evidence and are able to testify in court.

In the 1970s and '80s, the hospital handled a lot of cases of alcohol intoxication. "We'd keep them here for a couple nights, sober them up and let them go on their way," Sr. Barbara said. The more pressing problem now, she said, is drug abuse.

Overdose cases have been on the rise for much of the past decade. There were 716 overdose deaths in Maine last year, according to data compiled by the University of Maine. In Penobscot County, 77 percent of overdose deaths were caused by fentanyl.

Drug abuse and mental health issues often go hand in hand. "Years ago, that might be one or two people that you met during your lifetime, but now it seems we have hundreds," Sr. Barbara said. "We can't just let them go walking down the street. We have to make an attempt to help them."

Sr. Barbara currently serves as the hospital's Cultural and Heritage Historian, but Sr. Barbara's first job at St. Joseph was a staff

nurse. She's since filled a lot of roles, including director of the hospital's case management system in the 1990s. Working with social workers and other nurses, Sr. Barbara had to deal with fast-changing government and insurance regulations — and mountains of paperwork — providing the same high-quality care even as the average length of patient stays in the hospital got shorter.

"Some of the most rewarding aspects of my career are when I was able to be there for the patient and the family," Sr. Barbara said. "When people come to you with their problems and at the end they can say, 'Thank you. That really helped me,' that's when you feel you've done your job."



A few years ago, an older man turned up in the hospital's emergency room. He was gravely ill, couldn't care for himself, was homeless and had no medical insurance. The man was cantankerous and often made life challenging for the nursing staff, but the sisters knew they could not simply discharge him back onto the streets.

The man remained at St. Joseph and received care for nearly two years. That restored not only his physical health, but his dignity and a sense of self-worth. The sisters found a facility that could take him in.

"When he was discharged, he sent us a thank-you note, which just blew everybody's mind," Sr. Barbara said. "He left this earth feeling loved."

Sr. Mary Edith was a school principal before she joined St. Joseph in 1977 as the hospital's budget director. Five years later, she was elected to the general counsel and went to Rome, Italy, serving as the community's treasurer. By 1993, she was back at St. Joseph.

"As I jumped from one position to another, maybe some people got suspicious, 'Can't she hold a job?' But one of our models is, you follow the will of God," Sr. Mary Edith said. "It was hard to understand, but I knew I had to help. ... It makes me proud I can follow in the footsteps of our foundress, Blessed Mary Angela, and reflect the sensitivity she had for people. I want to give and I want to do."

Sr. Mary Edith was the hospital's chief compliance officer for 15 years prior to transitioning to the role of Patient/Family Visitor. Her favorite task, is making bedside visits to patients to check in and pray with them. During the pandemic, Sr. Mary Edith had to make those check-ins by phone. She still keeps up with her telephone ministry.

"We keep in touch so nobody feels they haven't got somebody to talk to," Sr. Mary Edith said. "I feel very honored to do that. They don't know me and I don't know them, but God has them in His hands."

Sr. Barbara and Sr. Mary Edith know that when they retire from the hospital, they will not be replaced by other Felicians. Yet, they are confident the Felician presence will live on.

"They and the ones before them have laid a foundation at St. Joe's," Prybylo said. "They've really passed that mission over to the lay employees and planted the seeds of what we have to do. They trust us that we are going to keep this moving forward." 🌸



Sr. Mary Ann  
Papiez  
Teacher

Sr. Jeanne Marie  
Akalski  
Teacher

# Reaching and Teaching

## Lifelong Educators Take On Challenges With Faith, Hope and Trust

The windows at St. Stanislaus School rattled as a burly Harley Davidson rumbled up the drive. After the motorcycle came to a stop, a man strode to the doorway and rang the bell.

When the door swung open, the man looked at the Felician Sister standing before him and asked, "Sr. Jeanne! Do you remember me?"

Sr. Jeanne Marie Akalski smiled. "Ronnie, how could I forget you?"

Twenty or so years earlier, the man had been one of Sr. Jeanne's students

— not the kind who's voted teacher's pet. "He was one of those who would try your patience and everything else," Sr. Jeanne remembered with a chuckle. And yet, all those years later, there was Ronnie on her doorstep with his young son waiting on the back of the Harley. "I just came to thank you for everything you taught me," Ronnie said.

That's when Sr. Jeanne knew.

"He was a terror of terrors, but we reached him," Sr. Jeanne said. "That's why I say that sometimes you don't realize you're reaching students, but

*continued*



you are. They're hungering for love, warmth, sensitivity and the appreciation that they're just as good as everybody else. Give 'em a chance."

Sr. Jeanne has stayed true to that approach throughout her teaching career. She continued at St. Stanislaus School in Fall River, MA and has spent the past 18 years instructing fourth graders at St. Joseph School in Webster, MA.

**"God put me in the right place," Sr. Jeanne said. "I love the kids. I'll reach out to the poorest kids whom everybody says can't produce anything, and I'll prove to them that they can. That's my talent. I cherish it. I will never give up teaching. I want to teach until the day I die."**

Sr. Mary Ann Papiez has worked in classrooms for much of her 49 years as a Felician Sister. Since 1999, she's taught math and religion to kids in grades five through eight at St. Joseph School. "I find it a joy to teach religion," she said.

Using an activity in each chapter of her Religion series, Sr. Mary Ann finds ways to connect her lesson plans with the events, challenges and achievements her students encounter in their everyday lives. Each child keeps a prayer journal of their own private chats with Jesus.

**"The students might not say it out loud, but you can tell by their expression, by their responses and by their questions in class, they are hungry for religion and they need and want God," Sr. Mary Ann said. "I hope and pray that the seeds we plant will nourish them throughout their life and help them with whatever they may have to face, always knowing that God loves them."**

When teaching the Baltimore catechism, Sr. Jeanne challenged her fourth graders to work ahead in addition to their regular homework. They surprised her by completing much of the course on their own.

Eager to display her students' extra effort, Sr. Jeanne invited the bishop and school superintendent into the class for an out-loud quiz. "It was magnificent," Sr. Jeanne said. "We went through more than 100 questions and they just rattled off the answers like nothing. I've never had a class like that."

As the end of the class session was getting near, Sr. Jeanne skipped one of the questions about the catechism. When she closed her book, one student raised his hand. "You skipped a question and I know what page it's on," said the student, who then reopened the book and pointed to the absent question.

"That shows that they knew it from page to page," Sr. Jeanne said. "They lived it. They really wanted this. They proved to me, 'Hey, this is possible. We can do this.'"

It's often not easy. Many of Sr. Jeanne's and Sr. Mary Ann's students come from broken homes and single-parent families. Something as commonplace as completing homework can be hindered by extra obstacles.

"They're going to this house, the grandparents' house, the stepdad's house, and they don't know where their books are," Sr. Jeanne said. "When they come to school, and I ask where's your homework and it's, 'Well, I left it at this house or that house.' You have to have compassion, some understanding that it's not the child's fault."

The misery of missing a dad or a mom is rough for any child. Yet, Sr. Jeanne and Sr. Mary Ann say many of their students who are in those situations often handle it with more maturity than one would expect.

"You have to let them know you believe in them and that you care," Sr. Mary Ann said. "You have to help them in their growth, because it's not easy for them today. We didn't have to deal with so many of the things they're faced with. They want to know that they count and that you accept them for who they are."

One of Sr. Jeanne's mantras is, "There are three types of students: great, greater and greatest. You decide which one you want to be." In other words, no student is unreachable or unteachable.

Sr. Jeanne recalled one student, Caleb, who struggled with reading and had fallen well behind his classmates. Every day during the summer before Caleb began fourth grade, Sr. Jeanne tutored him one-on-one, starting with phonics and building from there.

The progress was slow but steady, and continued into the school year. It paid off when Caleb made the honor roll. At the end of the year, Caleb and his family gave Sr. Jeanne the gift of a

framed, antique painting of St. Rita — a patron saint of impossible causes.

Sr. Jeanne took the artwork to a nearby gallery to have it cleaned up before hanging it in the school. Someone who saw the painting in the gallery offered to buy it for \$20,000.

"I said, no way," Sr. Jeanne said.

"This is a treasure to the school. It is a reminder that all things are possible if there is faith, hope and trust. St. Rita proved that through Caleb. A little bit of love and tenderness goes a long way." 🌸





# Introducing... Blessed Angela!

## Sr. Mary Anna Falbo Brings Our Foundress to Life for Students in the Villa Maria Youth Program

Sr. Anna Falbo's debut as Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska was nearly short-circuited by a wardrobe malfunction.

This was four years ago, when Sr. Anna was asked to portray the Felician Sisters' foundress in a presentation during a Chapter of Mats in Detroit, MI. Sr. Anna is a bit shy of five feet tall, and the costume was a poor fit. The habit was so long that even several strategically placed safety pins couldn't keep it from pooling around her feet. When Sr. Anna bent over, the headpiece began to slouch off her head.

statement that asks us to be sister and servant. That's basically what Blessed Mary Angela was — a sister to her sisters and a servant to her convent and others."

Wearing a redesigned costume, Sr. Anna encored her role as Blessed Mary Angela last summer at a Felician ministry leadership workshop. On October 4, also the feast day of St. Francis, Sr. Anna captivated a group of two dozen second-, third- and fourth-grade students in the Villa Maria Youth Program in Buffalo, NY.

"I am a ham actress," Sr. Anna said. "Give me an audience and I'm in my element." To better portray the role, Sr. Anna decided

joined a Felician convent, but left a couple of weeks before she was scheduled to profess her final vows.

"I wasn't really ready to make a final commitment of that nature," Sr. Anna said. "I wasn't sure what God wanted, but I knew I wasn't meant at that time to remain a Felician."

The path to figuring out your vocation rarely is a straight line. Sr. Anna's journey took her from a small town in central New York to the front lines of the Cold War. Lured by an opportunity to travel to Europe, she joined the United States Army. She learned Russian and was stationed in West Germany as an intercept operator for Russian voice.

After returning to America in 1979, Sr. Anna went back to the Felicians and took her vows. After teaching in elementary schools, she eventually spent 24 years as Villa Maria College's librarian.

"When I was working as a librarian, other sisters would tell me their stories of doing social work and being pastoral ministers and I'd think, 'Oh, man, what am I doing?'" Sr. Anna said. "Then I realized my ministry really was just being with the students and faculty and listening. A listening ear — that's what God wanted.

**Sometimes, you just don't know at the time how what you're doing will influence someone, hopefully, in a positive way."**

After retiring as a librarian eight years ago, Sr. Anna knew her work wasn't done, even if she wasn't sure what would come next. "Odds-and-ends jobs," she said, rattling off a list of duties that includes teaching adult literacy classes, remote-tutoring a woman in Haiti and working with the Villa Maria after-school program.

"It's been an exciting life," Sr. Anna said. "We all face this: 'What does God want? What am I to do with my life to become the best person I can be?' It's true for all of us." 🌸



"I was stuck on stage, trying to pull everything together," Sr. Anna recalled with a smile. "Two other sisters ran over to help. All of the sudden, they couldn't help themselves, everyone started to laugh."

Despite the hiccups, Sr. Anna's performance was a hit with the audience, which lined up to take selfies with "Blessed Mary Angela." More importantly, Sr. Anna's message of service and compassion, which is the centerpiece of the Felician Sisters' mission, was delivered.

"It was tremendously enriching," Sr. Anna said. "Our congregation has a vision

to do a deep dive into the history and writings of Blessed Mary Angela, who was born in 1825 in Poland.

"I was delighted that it became easy for me to find so many comparisons between her life and the life we lead now," Sr. Anna said. "I found so many things that interest the children and inspire them. They are practicing values and virtues that are so important to bringing about a peaceful and, if I dare say it, happier world."

Growing up in Oriskany Falls, NY, where her mother was the town librarian, Sr. Anna was a voracious reader. After high school, she





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## What to Watch

### 150th Anniversary Felician Pilgrimage to Poland – Spring 2025

*Join us on a special pilgrimage to the birthplace of Blessed Mary Angela.*

Walk in the footsteps of our foundress through Warsaw, Kalisz, Częstochowa, Krakow and Wadowice. Visit the Black Madonna of Częstochowa and the birthplace of Pope Saint John Paul II. Sr. Mary Inga Borko will lead us on a tour that will deepen our understanding of our foundress — Sophia Camille. Space is limited, so express interest early.

Contact Marcia Wallander at [mwallander@feliciansisters.org](mailto:mwallander@feliciansisters.org) or 724-944-9814.

More information will be available in January 2024!

### Save these Dates to Celebrate Our Sesquicentennial

*Please join us to commemorate the founding of the Felician Sisters of North America.*

Mass and receptions will be held throughout Our Lady of Hope Province and in many former provinces in North America.

Thursday  
November 21, 2024  
**Opening Celebration**  
Polonia, WI

Sunday  
December 22, 2024  
MI

Sunday  
January 19, 2025  
NY

Saturday  
February 22, 2025  
Chicago, IL and WI

Saturday  
March 22, 2025  
NJ and DE

Monday  
April 21, 2025  
PA and SC

Saturday  
May 17, 2025  
New England

Saturday  
June 21, 2025  
Southwest

Sunday  
July 20, 2025  
Canada

August 2025  
**Remembrance of Pioneers  
and All Sisters at Cemeteries**

Thursday  
September 18, 2025  
**Day of Service**

Friday  
October 10, 2025  
**Day of Gratitude**

Friday  
November 21, 2025  
**Closing Liturgy & Reception**  
Livonia, MI

Join our e-news to receive details as they unfold and learn more at  
[FelicianSistersNA.org/150-years](http://FelicianSistersNA.org/150-years).

## Join Us in Praying for Peace in the Middle East

As followers of the nonviolent Jesus and St. Francis of Assisi, we offer our prayers for peace in response to the conflict in Israel and the Gaza Strip.

### Peace Prayer

*St. Francis of Assisi*

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.*

*O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
Amen.*

