A Ministry of Cuddling

Sister Loretta Francis Mann Comforts Sick Babies
Commitment Statement

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

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

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

Mission Statement

We, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, choose to live the Gospel in the prophetic spirit of Francis of Assisi and our Foundress Mother Francis Bachmann. With Jesus Christ as Brother, we live as sister with one another, with the entire human family and with all creation. Calling ourselves and one another to continuous conversion of heart, we commit ourselves to a life of contemplation, poverty and humility.

As vowed women of the Church, we respond with diverse gifts in a spirit of collaboration and of mutual service to the needs of others, especially the economically poor, the marginal and the oppressed. Seeking to participate in the Spirit’s action in the world, we direct our personal and corporate resources to the promotion of justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Filled with trust in the goodness of God, we move forward.

As I read the articles for this issue of Good News, the famous song, “Love Changes Everything” from Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical, Aspects of Love, came to mind.

Love, love changes everything
Hands and faces, earth and sky
Love, love changes everything
How you live and how you die…
Nothing in the world will ever be the same.

In Spokane, Washington, the Sisters of St. Francis have loved and nurtured orphans, children, and infants, those who are homeless, and families for over 125 years. That love changed everything for the hundreds of young children who crossed the thresholds of St. Joseph Orphanage, the five group homes, St. Anne’s Baby Home, and now the families who come to St. Joseph Family Center. In addition, many children were educated by the sisters, not only in the Catholic schools of Mt. St. Joseph Academy and St. Charles School but also through the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, a religious education program for Catholic children unable to attend the Catholic schools. The sisters’ desire and determination to shore up the Catholic faith in remote areas was immense and their love changed everything! While these active ministries transitioned and flourished, in a quiet, serene area of Spokane, the Kairos House of Prayer was created and continues to welcome all who seek God’s presence through silence and contemplation. Time away from the hectic pace of life and time in prayer allows people to once again become centered and grounded in God. Here lives are transformed.

In Hartford, Connecticut, Sister Loretta Francis Mann volunteers at Saint Francis Hospital cuddling infants who are in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Her presence with the babies, their parents, and the medical staff brings a love that also changes everything. Sister Loretta prays for each infant individually and then she holds and cuddles each baby, offering the newborn a sense of comfort and security. The impact of this type of care and concern—this love—transforms a painful experience into one of compassion. Love changes everything!

May these stories inspire you to be conscious of the moments of transforming love in your life, especially the transforming love of our God in Jesus. Let us be grateful for love and be inspired to respond lovingly to all we meet. It just may change everything!

Blessings,

Sister Mary Kathryn Dougherty, OSF
Congregational Minister

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

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

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On the cover: Sister Loretta cuddles one of the babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Saint Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut. This very special ministry brings a loving presence to the infants whose parents are unable to stay with them all day. The personal interaction Sister Loretta provides is critical to the babies’ physical and emotional wellbeing.
On October 25, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia celebrated the 125th anniversary of ministry in Spokane. Sisters, friends, and companions in ministry came from far and wide for the festivities.

Sisters Celebrate
125 Years of

“The heavens are telling the glory of God, and all creation is shouting for joy.”

Like so many of the ministries of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia in Spokane, St. Anne’s Home evolved with the needs of the community: a daycare for children whose mothers worked in defense plants, a home for unwed pregnant women, and a home for orphans awaiting adoption.

On a beautiful autumn day, October 24, 2015, St. Charles Church in Spokane resounded with the jubilant music of an historic Franciscan celebration. Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia traveled from east and west to join the five sisters who continue the congregation’s presence in the Spokane Diocese 125 years after the first five courageous pioneers arrived from Philadelphia in 1890.

In a full church, the sisters—along with friends and companions in ministry—joyfully celebrated God’s gracious goodness during their long years of loving service in the diocese. Bishop Thomas Daly, assisted by the pastor, Rev. Thomas Connolly, and several local clergy, presided over a festive liturgy honoring the dedicated women religious.
who—to paraphrase the words of homilist Rev. Tyrone Schaff—“bravely sowed the seeds and gambled on God’s providence to reap a wondrous harvest in the vineyard of Eastern Washington.”

Following the Mass a reception in the school auditorium provided food and opportunity to reconnect, reflect, and reminisce. Pictorial displays of past and present missions and ministries helped to recall how it all began and remember all that was achieved.

**St. Joseph Orphanage**

Almost two weeks after leaving Philadelphia, three women dressed in traditional black robes with black flowing veils stepped off the train.
onto the dusty streets of Spokane Falls on a warm August afternoon in 1890. Compared to the bustling city they had left behind, their first impression of this “unknown and uncertain” new home was that it was the Wild, Wild West. Sisters Barbara Kuhn, Neri Terion, and Onuphria Kahnsitz—joined two weeks later by Rhabana Loftus and Oswalda Stark—had come at the request of Rev. Charles Mackin who had begged for help caring for orphaned children. A few weeks later, in a little wood-framed building on donated land beside the Spokane River, the orphanage opened with six children. By the end of the year, the number had swelled to 40. A small addition was erected and St. Joseph’s Orphanage was formally blessed on November 2, 1891.

By the year 1899, with over 90 children to care for and with no knowledge of where the first cent was coming from, plans were put in place for a larger building. Through the great heartedness of Spokane donors—primarily Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sweeney—an imposing four-story brick structure was ready for occupancy and dedicated in January 1901, miraculously “debt free.”

The history of St. Joseph’s proves God’s goodness to those who trust. For 40 years Sister Oswalda exemplified this in an extraordinary way. Daily she went by horse and buggy begging for food from ranchers and suppliers for the hungry orphans. It was said that “Her appeals for aid were irresistible and her smile ever bright and cheerful.”

In the 1970s Washington State changed the way it took care of children in need and required St. Joseph’s Orphanage to provide group homes so that siblings could be together. Adapting to the needs of the time, the Sisters of St. Francis built five houses behind the former brick orphanage. In 1982 with the state’s decision to place children in foster homes, the mission of St. Joseph’s as a children’s home ended. During those 80 plus years, however, St. Joseph’s was the only home some children knew. “I came to St. Joe’s when I was six years old,” one lady said simply. “I have known and loved the sisters for over 60 years.” A native of Spokane, Sister Joanne Clavel commented, “St. Joseph’s helped many children grow into loving, responsible adults.”

St. Joseph Family Center (SJFC) Today

Today SJFC continues to assist families. On the same property where the orphanage once stood, the center operates two complementary programs. The counseling program provides high quality, professional mental health services for couples, families, teens, and seniors as well as marriage counseling, anger management classes, and

**“We have a lot to celebrate and, hopefully, a lot more to accomplish.”**
parenting seminars. The Franciscan Place offers spiritual direction, retreats, and healing and contemplative arts/practices. “People who cross our doorway know that they are in a sacred, holy place,” said Sister Patricia Novak, spirituality/healing arts program director. “We are feeding something in people’s souls.”

Sister Carmel Gregg, administrator from 1987-1999, emphasized the focus of the center’s mission. “Each year we re-evaluate and evolve to meet the greatest needs.” In all their ministries, however, one thing remains constant—the sisters are committed to the underserved. In the words of current executive director, Sister Patricia Millen, “We fill a void. Without St. Joseph’s Family Center, a lot of people would not be served.”

Mt. St. Joseph’s Academy, Tekoa

Just two years after opening St. Joseph’s Orphanage, the Sisters of St. Francis answered Fr. Mackin’s call for help in Tekoa, a small town about 40 miles south of Spokane. Tekoa had no parish church but the town needed a school to accommodate a newly thriving railroad community. One of the four rooms of the sisters’ “poorly built wooden abode” was pressed into service as a chapel for both the sisters and the townspeople whenever a priest was available. Otherwise they traveled by horse and farm wagon to the Indian Mission in Lapway, a 10-mile distance over Indian reservation lands.

Lacking sufficient funds, plans were drawn for a “…plain and simple school building.” Mt. St. Joseph’s Academy opened in 1892 with ten boarding students and at its height had over 200 students—boarding and day. With the loss of the railroads in the 1940s and easier access to automobile transportation, the need for a boarding school lessened. The academy finally closed in 1950, leaving a rich legacy of courage, adaptability, and priceless memories.

Even a brief record of Tekoa would be incomplete without the story of Mother Juvenalis Perry—a barely five foot tall Boston lady—running from window to window shooting her gun full of blanks into the night sky to scare away the garden thieves (the vegetables were sorely needed for the boarders’ table) and her early morning “reprimand” from the local sheriff. Today, a beautiful rose garden—planted and dedicated by Bishop William Weigand, a former student—is a memorial to the sisters’ ministry and friendship.

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The luncheon held at St. Charles School included a wide range of people who have been part of the history of the sisters' ministry in Spokane. Students from St. Charles School helped to serve those who attended.

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St. Charles School

When one door closes another opens. As Mt. St. Joseph’s Academy was closing its doors after 58 years of service, the sisters were called upon to open a new elementary school in Spokane. St. Charles was the first new parish school to be established in the diocese in 35 years. In a hastily constructed four-room building, four sisters greeted their new students in September 1951. “A new grade was added each year until there were 16 classrooms with sisters teaching every grade,” says former student Sister Joanne Clavel. “I was in the first 1st grade class and I had a different sister each year. It was the beginning of the story of how I became a Franciscan.”

By the 1960s school enrollment had grown to well over 700. Today the Sisters of St. Francis no longer teach at St. Charles but competent and caring lay professionals keep the Franciscan spirit alive and well.

St. Anne’s Baby Home

Over the years the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia have been called to serve in new and challenging ways. In 1943 Bishop Charles White of Spokane asked the congregation to administer a temporary home for the infants that Catholic Charities was trying to place in adoptive or foster homes and St. Anne’s Baby Home was born. During World War II, the home also became a daycare for children whose parents were involved in the war efforts.

Eventually St. Anne’s became a residence for unwed pregnant girls. Healthcare and counseling were provided to help them decide whether to keep their babies or place them for adoption. Sister Elaine Thaden, who ministered at the baby home from 1973-1975, recalled, “It was a welcoming place where young women could find a temporary home with people who loved and cared for them.”

St. Anne’s mission soon expanded to caring for babies with severe physical problems. Indeed, one could say that those who worked there truly exemplified the Dalai Lama’s belief that religion is compassion.

In 1983, Catholic Charities assumed total responsibility for St. Anne’s Baby Home.

St. Charles School began serving students in 1951. Today, the school remains a place where knowledge and a strong Franciscan spirit get passed down to the next generation.
Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD)

In 1956, Bishop Bernard Topel invited two Sisters of St. Francis to take over the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in the Spokane Diocese. Together with other Franciscan sisters and lay collaborators, Sisters Maurina Rockenstein and Presentina Baechle had labored for 21 years in the Baker Diocese, creating a catechetical structure that achieved national acclaim. What it entailed was the creation of a way to provide religious education for Catholic children—many of whom lived in remote and isolated areas—who were unable to attend Catholic schools.

On arriving in Spokane, the sisters set up and further developed their unique and very effective CCD program. In 1960 Sisters Presentina and Maurina received the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice medal from Pope John XXIII for their untiring and devoted service to the religious education of youth outside of Catholic schools. Bishop Topel wrote, “The difference their coming made was great—extraordinarily great.”

Kairos House of Prayer

Following years of classroom teaching, Sister Florence Leone Poch felt a strong call to establish a place of prayer where people could seek respite from the increasingly hectic pace of everyday life. After several years of discernment, working in temporary locations, and compelled by Bishop Bernard Topel’s request to start a house in Spokane, Sister Florence located “a place of our own” in the wooded foothills near Wandermere. Forty years later Kairos House of Prayer is still welcoming individuals and groups who seek silence and contemplative space in order to transform their lives. “The work here is God’s,” Sister Florence reminds us. “We are here to help but God is in charge.”

Transitions

Transitions, one of the congregation’s most recent ministries in Spokane, is a collaborative effort between the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia and three other congregations of women religious. The ministry, recently featured in Good News, is a series of programs designed to make life better for women and children in various stages of life transitions. Although there are no sisters currently providing direct services at Transitions, the congregation supports the ministry through financial sponsorship and board guidance.

Celebrating the Past - Looking to the Future

When Sister Elaine Thaden welcomed everyone to Spokane, she reminded participants that “Who and what we celebrate is huge... We celebrate the hundreds of children who made mothers of us and the thousands of children who made educators of us. We celebrate the troubled parents, couples, families, individuals, and young unmarried mothers who made genuine big sisters and counselors of us. We celebrate the newborn babies and their ecstatic adoptive parents who brought us such joy as well as the severely handicapped children who broke our hearts and taught us to let go.”

Sister Patricia Novak captured it simply, “We have a lot to celebrate and, hopefully, a lot more to accomplish.” As Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, the celebration was also about our “Yes” to all that the future holds.

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

How You Can Help...

- Pray for the continued success of the ministries of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia in Spokane.
- Be open to change in your own life. It can be difficult to move beyond the ways things have been done in the past. Sometimes, however, it is only by reinvention that we can continue to be vital in the face of an ever-evolving world.
- Celebrate the rich history to be found in your family, school, club, place of worship, or workspace. Connecting with the inspiration, passion, and dedication of those who came before you can serve as a wonderful source of renewed spirit and enthusiasm.
- Remember that each one of us has the ability to make a difference. Take stock of the needs in your own community and kickstart an effort to address one or more of your area’s most pressing problems.
- Use the enclosed envelope to make a donation to St. Joseph Family Center.

In 1975 Sister Mary Presentina—who worked alongside Sister Maurina for over twenty years—published a book entitled, And Away We Go, presenting a graphic account of the achievements and setbacks, joys and frustrations of working with parents and their children, educating both on their fundamental faith.
Who are the ‘Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia’?
Through this section we hope to share a glimpse of our congregation and the individuals who make real its mission.

NEW JERSEY
Sister Dominica LoBianco and our Franciscan Companions in Faith from the Trenton area met with members of the Zubaida Muslim community to celebrate Eid, a time of thanksgiving for God’s many blessings. The program began with prayer and a reflection on Moses. An audio-visual presentation on Zubaida’s many social ministries evidenced their efforts to serve those who are poor: the Trenton Soup Kitchen, distribution of Christmas gifts, food pantry, and a newly formed health clinic to meet the needs of the uninsured. Imam Mubeen shared the story of Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael and their unwavering obedience to God’s call—a central theme in Islam. These stories teach all of us the necessity of surrendering to God’s power—a power that is merciful and never destructive. Imam Mubeen concluded with this question for meditation: “How can I adjust my life so that I am always obedient?”

WASHINGTON
Sister Christine Still’s busy schedule not only includes her ministry with vocations. In 2015 she completed studies for an M.A. in Pastoral Studies from Seattle University’s School of Theology and Ministry. During her studies, Sister Christine also participated in Christifideles, a program coordinated jointly by the Archdiocese of Seattle and the School of Theology and Ministry to prepare the laity for ministry in the Church. In addition, she was also commissioned by Archbishop Sartain as a lay ecclesial minister for the archdiocese.

PENNSYLVANIA
Two of our sisters were honored at Neumann University’s homecoming dinner in October. Sister Linda DeCero received the 2015 Alumni Association Recognition Award which is presented to outstanding alumni who have shown dedication and devoted service to the university. She graduated from Neumann with a master’s degree in pastoral care and counseling in 2001. Sister Linda has worked at Neumann since 1996 and currently serves as the director of Pastoral Service. She assists as a pastoral presence in student conduct hearings, responds to medical emergencies, provides support in assisting resident assistants with mission-oriented programming, and plans evenings of reflection for them. She also serves as chaplain for several sports teams and is the advisor for the gospel choir.
Sister Margaret Grace Gannon received the Alumni Association Honorary Alumni Award. She is well known to the folks at Neumann because of her work as president of Drexel Neumann Academy. The school, a cosponsored ministry of the Sisters of St. Francis, Neumann University, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and St. Katharine Drexel Parish, became a reality when the last Catholic school in Chester was threatened with closure. Sister Margaret has served as president since the school opened in 2007—leading it to its current status as an independent Catholic School with a Franciscan spirit. The academy provides the children of Chester with the “opportunity to be models of peacemaking in a violent environment and the education for a bright an successful future.”
MARYLAND

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Bethesda held a special celebration honoring our sisters who had taught in the parish school. Seven of our sisters traveled to Bethesda for the festivities which included liturgy and the blessing of both a beautiful bronze statue representing the Franciscan sisters and a plaque listing the names of the 92 sisters who had taught there. During the program, John Ford, a former student of Our Lady of Lourdes School and more recently a member of Neumann University’s board, did an enjoyable presentation entitled “A Room Full of Memories.”

PENNSYLVANIA

Sister Margaret Xavier Romans was recently acknowledged in the October edition of the St. Anthony Messenger for her latest endeavor. When not working in her regular ministry, Sister Margaret enjoys designing and creating prayer pillows for those who are sick or in difficult situations. “This ministry is the outgrowth of just being aware of the needs of others and using something as simple as a pillow to let the other person know that he or she is not alone but is held in prayer in a special way,” she explained in the article. The pillow-making process is a very thought-out one. She first chooses a fabric in the person’s favorite color, attaches a cross-stitched block with the person’s name and its meaning, and sends it along with a personalized card. She once had a student request that she make a pillow for her father who was a U.S. Army sergeant on his way to Afghanistan. Sister Margaret made a pocket-size pillow and sent it over. She later received a card of gratitude from the U.S. Army along with her very own encased American flag and certificate. The article written by Rita Piro concludes with a quote from Sister Margaret stating, “Having a ministry that reaches so many and which has brought so much joy and consolation is a dream come true. I hope and pray that others will come up with their own version of a way to reach out to those in need.”

NEW JERSEY

Over the years a number of our sisters ministered at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish in Passaic. In 2010 financial difficulties necessitated closing the school but the sisters and their many contributions have not been forgotten. In November Sister Clare Agnes Conforti was invited to speak at each of the parish Masses. She presented a short history of the sisters’ contributions there beginning in 1926. Her presentation elicited memories from parishioners, especially her mention of the first kindergarten graduation in 1955. A number of those in attendance just happened to be members of that class! The parish showed its appreciation of the sisters’ work by donating proceeds from a special collection to support Assisi House, the sisters’ retirement residence. The celebration included a beautiful performance by both the adult and children’s choirs, the blessing of a monument engraved with the names of all the sisters who served in the parish, refreshments, and a visit from Santa. As a final token of appreciation, Sister Clare Agnes was presented with a beautiful bouquet of pink roses.

INDIANA

Sisters Elaine Thaden and Christine Still attended the 2015 National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) held in Indianapolis. NCYC’s biennial program is a three day, high-energy experience of keynote presentations, prayer, community, and keynote speakers for 23,000 teens, parents, and youth ministers from around the country. A key component of NCYC is the thematic park which is a blend of traditional exhibit booths with interactive areas featuring service projects, games, recreation, live musical performances, arts, and sports. This year’s theme was “Here I Am, Lord.” Representatives from 55 religious congregations were on hand, using a variety of avenues to promote vocations to religious life: exhibitors, storytellers, vocation teams, and mentors for the animators. To commemorate the Year of Consecrated Life, fifteen of those congregations—including the Sisters of St. Francis—conducted teaching sessions about their respective spiritual traditions and held prayer experiences in the chapel.
“She does more than hold the babies. She loves these babies and the babies know this.”
A Ministry of Cuddling

Sister Loretta Francis Mann Comforts Sick Babies

It is early morning and the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Saint Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut, is bustling with calm efficiency. Nurses are busy caring for the littlest of patients—so small that they are weighed in grams instead of pounds. Among the rows of incubators and isolettes, Sister Loretta Francis Mann stands silently next to one of the tiny babies, saying a prayer just for him. When she is through, she moves to the next crib—repeating the process until she has visited and prayed over every infant in the unit.

Sister Loretta has been coming to the NICU as a volunteer baby cuddler for the past six years. Her ministry is one of presence—being there to hold and comfort the babies when their parents can’t be. She started coming one day a week, then increased to two. Now she is in the NICU every Monday, Tuesday, and Friday carrying out a ministry that she says is the best she’s ever had. “I loved every minute of my time in education,” said Sister Loretta who spent years in the classroom and as a principal, “but on my first day here, I knew this was my future.”

Once she is finished praying for each baby, Sister Loretta looks to the nurses to tell her where she is needed most. She spends the rest of the day with a baby in her arms, taking time with each one to help him or her feel safe, secure, and loved. “The babies in the NICU need that interaction,” said Brigette Doane who has been a nurse in the unit for 16 years. “They are going through a lot—lights, noise, needle sticks. It’s important that we have the cuddlers and Sister Loretta does the most amazing job at it.”

Filling the Gap

Having to leave a baby in the NICU is not a scenario any parent relishes. Unfortunately, every year 10 to 15 percent of babies born in the U.S. end up spending time there. For many parents that means having to head home before their newborn is ready to come with them. “They feel brokenhearted when they go home and the baby can’t,” said Sister Loretta.

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“No parent expects their child to end up with us,” said Dr. Jose Arias-Camison, director of the Saint Francis Hospital NICU. “Every parent imagines a beautiful experience and a healthy baby. So when the babies come to the NICU, there are a lot of emotions.”

As much as parents want to stay with their newborns, responsibilities at home—older children, jobs, and other obligations—often make it necessary for them to be separated much more than they would like. It is not unusual for mothers to approach Sister Loretta and ask that she be sure to hold their babies while they are away. Knowing she will be there for their little ones helps give parents peace of mind. “Our families love Sister Loretta,” said Dr. Jose. “She does more than hold the babies. She loves these babies and the babies know this.”

Aciela and Jeffrey Wallner had to leave their son Jadeison in the NICU just two days after he was born. “It was such a stressful time,” said Aciela of the month that Jadeison spent in the unit. “It was comforting to know that Sister Loretta was there for him when we couldn’t be. When I would go in the mornings to see him, she would already be there—holding him, singing to him, reading him books.”

Some babies in the unit are especially in need of the comfort a cuddler provides. Babies experiencing withdrawal from exposure to narcotics during gestation exhibit a variety of symptoms, including tremors, excessive irritability and crying, and trouble sleeping. “These babies shake and scream,” said Sister Loretta. “They need extra care so I spend a lot of time with them.”

“When I have a difficult baby and I know Sister Loretta is here, I can be sure that that baby will get what he or she needs,” said NICU nurse Margaret Zawilinski. “She will sit for hours with them to settle them.”

Occasionally there will be a baby in the unit whose parents don’t come at all. These infants—who often end up being discharged to foster homes—also benefit significantly from the care and attention of cuddlers like Sister Loretta who, for the first weeks of their lives, provide them with the physical and emotional attention that is vital to their development and well-being. According to Dr. Jose, the benefits of human interaction for neonates are well documented. Research has shown that being held leads to higher pain tolerance, more stable body temperature, and stronger vital signs.

**How You Can Help…**

- Pray for the health of babies born with medical struggles, for those who care for them, and for those who love them.
- Volunteer to be a baby cuddler in a neonatal intensive care unit near you. Hospitals who offer these programs provide training for volunteers on how to provide therapeutic talk and touch to infants in the NICU.
- Be a support to a friend or family member with a newborn. Offer to care for older children, cook a meal, or run errands.
- Do you knit or crochet? Find out whether your local hospital needs hats, blankets, and booties for its littlest patients. If so, start a knitting or crocheting group dedicated to providing them.
Keeping in Touch

Sister Loretta’s devotion to the babies for whom she cares goes beyond the walls of the NICU. She has been known to visit babies at other hospitals when they get transferred and to keep in touch with families once the babies go home. “Parents are very thankful for her and she really becomes part of their lives,” said Brigette. “She goes to countless Christenings and birthday parties.”

That is true for Jadeison and his parents who still visit Sister Loretta regularly. “She is such a sweetheart, so warmhearted,” said Aciela. “When we go to her house, Jadeison runs up to her, hugs her, and sits on her lap. She sings him the song she used to sing to him in the hospital.” When Jadeison turned one recently, Sister Loretta got a cake and threw a little party for him.

“I get so involved with these babies,” said Sister Loretta. “I have pictures all over my house of babies I have cuddled. I feel like a mother to 100 babies!”

“Sister Loretta is a volunteer but she makes it like a job,” said Dr. Jose. “She is very dedicated and she has a gift for what she does. She has an aura around her—always smiling, full of love and compassion. She is a positive influence for everyone.”

“We all love Sister Loretta,” said Brigette. “She is caring, kind, gentle, loving, and very comforting. We often tell her we need her to cuddle the staff!”

Always thinking of others, Sister Loretta soon may be cutting back her cuddling schedule to two days a week. She is reluctant to give up a day but says she feels an obligation to make a space available for others who want to experience the joy of serving in the NICU. In the meantime, she says she is immensely grateful for the work she is doing. “I thank God every day that I found this ministry,” said Sister Loretta. “I will do it until I can’t do it anymore.”

Even when she is unable to take the infants out of their incubators, Sister Loretta uses the power of touch and gentle talk to calm them, fostering a deep human connection.

For more information or comments on this article, contact goodnews@osfphila.org.
GoodWeave: Weaving Freedom

GoodWeave is a recipient of one of our congregation’s social justice grants. Aware that the handmade carpet industry exploits nearly 250,000 children, the organization works in Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. to “stop child labor in the carpet industry and to replicate its market-based approach in other sectors.” Companies licensed by GoodWeave agree to open all levels of their supply chains for random, surprise inspection, thus unlocking doors where children toil in obscurity and ensuring that if a child is hidden away in a subcontracted workshop, that child will be found and protected. As a result, in 2015, 65 children were rescued from labor on the looms and provided rehabilitation and 50,000 weaving families were reached through GoodWeave’s supply chain and community-based programs in India, Nepal, and Afghanistan. Nearly 4,000 children were offered education and thousands of others were deterred from entering the workforce.

Pilgrimage to El Salvador

Last November marked the 35th anniversary of the torture and death of four church women in El Salvador: Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, lay missioner Jean Donovan, and Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel. Sisters Loretta Schaff, Maureen Fox, Ruth Bernadette O’Connor, and Sara Marks represented our congregation in this year’s pilgrimage. Sisters Ruth and Loretta both described the highlights of the pilgrimage on their Facebook pages and Sara created a special travel blog in which to record her memories. For each of the sisters, one of the highlights was a visit to Comunidad Esquipulos, the site where the four women were murdered. A church now stands there in memory of the events. There the pilgrims heard testimonies from people who knew the missionaries. As Sister Loretta explained, “Their spirits are still very alive among the people after 35 years.”

Clare of Assisi House Opening Soon

Clare of Assisi House is moving closer to an opening date and two of our sisters are actively involved, not only in making that opening happen but also in carrying out the facility’s mission. Robin Ball, the founder and director of Clare of Assisi House, envisions a place in the Reading and Berks County area where women coming out of prison can find both a second chance and a safe and supportive environment. Sisters Eileen Doherty and Kathleen McMullin, assistant director and program director respectively, will assist staff in providing multiple services to help the women reintegrate back into society and to regain their independence. The team has established partnerships with various local organizations and has held various fundraisers to translate their plans into realities.
Franciscan Volunteer Program is Thriving

Our Franciscan Volunteers: No Risk, No Gain program is thriving! Hopefully we are finding ourselves on a path to becoming financially self-sustaining. Ministry-wise we have been blessed with four amazing and talented young people who not only share their joy of growing in community with our sisters, but who also bring a mutually reciprocated joy to community. As they continue to live their year with us, we invite you to check out a few sources of reading more about them! The Franciscan Volunteers now have both a Twitter account, (@NoRisk_NoGain), as well as a blog which can be found at franciscanvolunteers.tumblr.com. And we’re making plans to expand the program. Last September Sara Marks, the program’s director, met with our sisters in Tacoma, Washington. They are in the midst of making plans for a second volunteer house to be opened on the west coast in the fall of 2016. Ministry sites will include St. Ann’s Convent, St. Francis House, Catholic Community Services, and St. Leo’s Parish L’Honey Program. Stay posted for more details on these ministry sites as well as the logistics of the volunteer community in the west.

On Saturday, November 21, the Philadelphia Area Coalition for Responsible Investment (PACRI) held a half-day seminar on climate change at Neumann University’s Meagher Theater. Before an enthusiastic crowd of more than 150, keynote speaker Sister Ilia Delio, OSF (pictured, left) spoke of her perspectives on Pope Francis’ encyclical “Laudato Si,” as well as the connections between cosmology and faith. Following the keynote address, separate panels titled “Investing in a Time of Change” and “Grassroots Strategies for Effective Change” addressed specific concerns for our future. Sister Nora Nash (pictured, right) explored the risks and rewards of climate sensitive investments, the merits of impact investing, and the implications of investing decisions on environmental policy.

In Memoriam

Sister Marie Evelyn Sinnett  
(formerly Sister Mary Leonard)  
October 10, 2015
Sister Francis Carmel Gonzon  
October 14, 2015
Sister Mary Matthew Cola  
October 26, 2015
Sister Mary Peter Kerner  
October 31, 2015
Sister Joella Francis Campbell  
November 15, 2015
Sister Claudia Cunningham  
November 19, 2015
Sister Anne Charles  
(formerly Sister Philomene Marie)  
December 5, 2015

Recognize a name? Would you like to reconnect or send a congratulatory note? Send communications to Florence Smith; 609 S. Convent Road; Aston, PA 19014; communications@osfphila.org
twenty-five years ago, Julie Martinez worked at a local geriatric center as well as for a healthcare agency that sent her to various facilities. When a friend told her about Assisi House, our retirement residence in Aston, Pennsylvania, Julie applied and was initially hired as a medicine nurse working evenings from four to nine. “After one month I was offered full-time work,” she said. “I gave two weeks’ notice and never looked back.”

Julie’s responsibilities in caring for our sisters require her to distribute medications, perform necessary treatments, and remain alert to safety issues and the general well-being of her patients. However, she is quick to recall the influence of Sister Rosa Mystica, her initial supervisor at Assisi House. “She believed in teamwork,” she explained. This concept apparently continues to motivate her. Sister Rose Raymond Barba, assistant administrator at Assisi House, shared a similar assessment of Julie. “She goes over and above her responsibilities,” Sister Rose remarked. “Julie is an unassuming soul who puts the needs of others, especially our sisters, before her own. She preaches the Gospel, not so much with words but with her daily activities—truly Franciscan!”

Assisi House administrator, Sister Jane LaManna, also sees Julie as someone who carries out our Franciscan values and mission in her relationship with the sisters. “Julie is a wonderful, compassionate nurse—a strong advocate of person-centered care,” Sister Jane explained. “She gives each sister special attention without counting the cost—all is a labor of love.” Then she added, “Julie is family to us and she daily exemplifies our values of relationship, collaboration, and stewardship.”

Julie most likely would not describe herself in terms like “Franciscan” and “sharing the mission.” She clearly experiences, however, a sense of family with the sisters with whom she ministers. “I have been there when there was laughter and when there were tears,” she recalled—“tears of laughter at an accomplishment or tears of sadness at the loss of a family member or close friend. I would not trade my experience at Assisi House for anything in the world!”

Julie’s quiet demeanor and gentle smile when she is working with the sisters create an aura of calm that is both healing and relaxing.

Over the years I have seen quite a few sisters deal with pain and illness. I hope I have made their journey a little easier.”

—Julie Martinez

Julie (center) celebrated 25 years of service with our sisters at Assisi House.
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- Franciscan Spiritual Centers (select one): □ Aston, PA  □ Milwaukie, OR  □ Young Franciscans

- Community Supported Agriculture:
- Red Hill Farm, Aston PA
- Sisters of St. Francis Foundation
- Vocations
- Franciscan Volunteer Program

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SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS FOUNDATION

Assisi House Needs a New Roof. Your Help is Needed.

If you have ever had to replace the roof on your house, you know well how expensive it is. The Sisters of St. Francis face the same thing with Assisi House, their retirement home in Aston. The facility’s roof, with a footage in excess of 68,000 square feet, is already past the 20-year warranty. This past summer’s storms resulted in major damage to the roof. Replacing it is now a necessity, but will cost almost $400,000!

This is an unplanned expense causing a major challenge for the sisters. Your support is appreciated.

☐ Yes, I would like to help. Please accept my donation of $_________ to assist with the replacement of the Assisi House roof.

NAME ____________________________    E-MAIL __________________________

STREET ADDRESS ____________________________  CITY ___________  STATE ___________  ZIP ___________

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SPRING 2016  19
In 1900 students in Sister Claude McKelvey’s first and second grade class sit politely for a picture at St. Joseph Orphanage in Spokane, Washington. Opening in 1890, St. Joseph’s was the Sisters of St. Francis’ first ministry in the diocese. Today 125 years later, the sisters are celebrated for the many ways in which they have been and continue to be of service to the people in the area. Read more of our great history in the Spokane area and the wondrous anniversary celebration on page 4.

**Vigil to End Gun Violence**

Like many Americans the Sisters of St. Francis are concerned about the increasing number of mass shootings and are working to raise consciousness about the need to promote peace and reject violence, especially gun violence. On Friday, December 11, about 50 of our sisters and friends gathered outside the motherhouse property for a silent vigil. We joined in solidarity with thousands of others throughout the country who were engaged in similar vigils and gatherings. Many of the participants carried signs enumerating the number of deaths in various parts of the U.S. in recent years—including in our own Delaware County.

*At the close of our silent vigil calling awareness to the tragic effects of gun violence, we joined in singing “We Shall Overcome.”*

**SAVE THE DATES**

**Join us for our inaugural**

**Franciscan Night!**

- April 16, 2016 from 7 - 10 P.M.
  Our Lady of Angels Convent

Enjoy an evening of food, games, entertainment, and a silent auction benefiting our retired sisters

**22nd Annual Sisters of St. Francis Golf Tournament**

- September 12, 2016
  Radley Run Country Club