

# The Whitehall **FRANCISCAN**

The Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God



# Mission Statement

We, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God, commit ourselves to the evangelical life of continuous conversion in the tradition of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis according to the example of our founding Sisters.

Called together by a good and provident God, we cultivate an intimacy with God that is nourished by Sacred Scripture, by the Eucharist, by our gift of self to others and in reverence for all creation.

Faithful to our Charism, we go to those to whom Providence sends us and conscious of our mission in the Church, we assume the commitment of evangelization and liberation, especially with the poor and oppressed. We witness to God's overflowing love by our lives and service, promoting justice, peace and reconciliation among all.

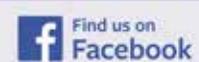
In simplicity and joy, we are signs of hope, for we believe that Jesus Christ is with us in the power of His Resurrection.

## In This Issue

2 - 4	Expanding the Call of Providence
5	Parish Ministry
4-7	Care for our Common Home
8 - 9	Call of Providence (continued from pg. 4)
10	Autumn Gala
11	In Prayerful Memory
	Parish Ministry (continued from pg. 5)
12	Associate Commitment

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# The Expanding Call of Providence

**“Faithful to our Charism, we go to those to whom Providence sends us and conscious of our mission in the Church, we assume the commitment of evangelization and liberation, especially with the poor and oppressed. We witness to God’s overflowing love by our lives and service, promoting justice, peace and reconciliation among all.”**

~ Mission Statement of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God

**T**he foundation our Catholic faith – Jesus Christ, the Gospel – is unmovable, but Providence calls us to adapt how we live our faith in response to present circumstances, challenges and opportunities. The 1960s was a turbulent time where increased awareness of the horrors of war, injustices and poverty challenged many to strive for a more peaceful and just society. The Church’s response, Vatican Council II, was

one of the most significant events in the modern era of the Church and religious life.

In 1965, Vatican II released *Perfectae Caritatis* that directed religious congregations to revisit their roots, discover their unique charism and redefine it in terms of the contemporary world. In response to this mandate of the Church, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God met in a General Chapter in 1968, under the leadership of Sister Virginia Pask, to initiate the contemplative process of adaptation and renewal.

“With great enthusiasm the religious community increased the opportunities for all the members to express their options particularly through the meetings of the Sisters Assembly, the Dynamic Commissions and the Assembly of Corporate Reflection (ACR),” wrote Sister Marian Blodis in a Whitehall Franciscan article commemorating the Congregation’s 75th anniversary. “These internal structures increased communication and consultation among members and enabled them to collaborate on the formulation of Charism and Mission Statements.”

Faithfully going forward, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God continued their education and healthcare ministries, but began to reach beyond classrooms and hospitals to engage in abundant and diverse ministries that included: spiritual direction, art therapy, campus ministry, hospice care, counseling, patient advocacy, day care, pastoral care, catechetical services, social work, prison ministry, immigrant services, and ministries involving indigenous people. They also collaborated with other religious congregations, combining resources to serve the poor and work for peace and justice.

The following pages offer a glimpse of some of these ministries, with more being shared online via our website and Facebook page throughout 2022.

*Editorial Note: In addition to our archives and past issues of the "Whitehall Franciscan," "A Celebration of Franciscan Spirit: Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God 1922-2000," by Eileen Leindecker Gimper, PhD was a source of historic information in this issue.*



After 1965, Sisters collaborated and engaged in discernment and contemplative prayer. The Congregation would eventually rewrite their Constitution and reaffirm their charism and mission, as well as study a new Franciscan Rule. (photo C. late-1960s/early-1970s)

## Christlike Compassion: Serving Refugees and Immigrants



Sister Michele Garas (center) and Sister M. Valeria Puishes (2nd from right) are pictured with a Cambodian family staying at our Pittsburgh Motherhouse in 1984. As a child, Sister Michele's family fled communist occupied Lithuania and spent time in refugee camps before settling in the USA.

The Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God was founded to serve Lithuanian immigrants, with many of our founding Sisters either immigrants themselves or daughters of immigrants. Though the faces of immigrants and refugees have changed, our mission to serve them remains the same.

"Like all our Sisters, past and present, my inspiration is the Gospel: Feed the hungry, welcome the stranger. My heart has been touched by the suffering of others," Sister Elise Mora, OSF told the *Pittsburgh Catholic* in 2020. Since the 1980s she has ministered with Latinos through her advocacy, immigration services, and parish and prison work.

In 1981, Sister Elise was given permission to serve as a patient advocate at Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Hospital in the South Bronx in New York City. (pictured) Then she began one of her most challenging ministries with Catholic Charities Immigration Services in the Archdiocese of New York City where she worked with refugees, persons seeking political asylum, immigrants and others as a counselor. After an educational sabbatical, she ministered at parishes serving Hispanic communities in West Chicago.

Our Community continues to advocate for comprehensive, compassionate and just immigration reform often joining efforts of the Franciscan Action Network, Franciscan Federation and Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

## Counseling and Campus Ministry



After serving as an educator, Sister Nancy Langhart was called to serve as a counselor and earned a master's degree in counseling from Duquesne University. In the 1970s, she served as a guidance councilor at St. Francis Academy in Pittsburgh. Later, she began a 27-year ministry counseling college students and couples in New York where she served as Assistant Director of Campus Ministry at the College of St. Rose in Albany, NY (pictured left), then Assistant Director of the Counseling Center until 2006. She also engaged in campus and pastoral ministry in Troy, NY.

In 2012, Sister Nancy Langhart returned to Pittsburgh and began to offer counseling with a Franciscan perspective to individuals and couples. Believing that mental health and spiritual health are closely connected, at a client's request, she incorporated spiritual direction and prayer into sessions.

Continued on page 4



# Call of Providence (continued from page 3)

## Following in the Footsteps of St. Francis



Sister Phyllis Marie Taulli served as a child caregiver in Roswell, NM.

In 1992, our community was one of six Franciscan Neumann-Bachmann heritage congregations who collaborated on a joint ministry outreach to New Mexico. Sisters were sent to Roswell or Gallup, NM to serve the poor, especially Hispanic and Native American persons. Sisters Phyllis Marie Taulli and Miriam Racas answered the call from our congregation. Sister Phyllis served in a neighborhood day care center in Roswell. Sister Miriam served as principal of St. Francis Parish School in Gallup for 3 years, where she noted the children lacked self-esteem, struggled academically and had troubled home lives. The Sisters worked with children and families to strengthen their self-identity and give them the tools to succeed despite their experiences with discrimination.

In the 1990s and 2000s our Community joined the Franciscans in Action program sponsored by the Neumann-Bachmann Vocation Directors. The goal was to provide an experience of community, prayer and service to others in the Franciscan tradition. Volunteers served impoverished communities in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains of the United States. Their mission was to live, work and share with those who are poor, underprivileged or oppressed; to engage in providing some needed service; to search for understanding of the social, political and economic conditions in which Appalachian people live; and to engage in prayer and reflection.



Sister Michele Garas distributed food to those in need served by our Lithuanian Mission in Utēna where she served for more than 20 years with Sister Dolorita Butkus. During this time they were also joined by Sisters Marianne Walters, Miriam Racas and Ruth Maria Ratkevičius. Sisters taught school and visited orphans, the elderly, and poor, and provided food, clothing and medicine when available. They also spent time in Kretinga offering pastoral services and were instrumental in the founding of St. Clare Hospice, where they also served patients.



As Vocations Director, Sister Althea Anne Spencer participated in many Franciscans in Action missions. She is pictured circa 1994-1995.



Sister Janet Gardner served at Covenant House in New York, which offers shelter and support services for homeless youth who have endured traumatic and adverse experiences. Over the years several Sisters have ministered at Covenant House and other shelters like Bethlehem Haven and Myriams in Pittsburgh. Photos were rarely taken out of respect for those seeking refuge and services.

Continued on page 8

# Serving the Church through Parish Ministry

More than eight centuries ago, a young nobleman felt compelled to enter the small dilapidated San Damiano Church in Assisi, Italy and pray. While kneeling before the crucifix, God spoke to him: "Francis, go and repair my house, which as you see, is falling into ruin." Thus, St. Francis of Assisi received his first mission from God. He and his followers would soon realize this was not church buildings, but THE Church. As Franciscans, we continue to be called to bring renewal to the Church through parish ministry that strengthens the faith and resolve of those who make up the Body of Christ, so that they – and the Church – may persevere even in the presence of doubt, obstacles or challenges. (*The Major Legend of Saint Francis by St. Bonaventure*)

Our Sisters' early parish ministry served the faithful during times of mass immigration, the Great Depression and two World Wars. By 1935, Catechetical ministries of the congregation spanned the United States with our Sisters serving in Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Wisconsin, Massachusetts and Ohio. We even had Sisters at St. John the Baptist Parish in Toronto, Canada. Our Sisters would also serve parishes in our missions in Lithuania and Brazil. (*"A Celebration of Franciscan Spirit" by Eileen Leindecker Gimper, PhD*)



Sisters Rosemarie Stulpinas and Clarita Kadis teach Catechism at St. Andrew Parish in New Britain, CT in 1949.

In the 2000s while serving as pastoral associate at St. Ursula Parish in Allison Park, PA, Sister Janice Campbell also assisted with a bereavement program to help persons cope and heal after a loved one's death.

"My 13 plus year ministry at St. Ursula included training and scheduling Eucharistic ministers and altar servers, teaching in the RCIA program, and visiting the shut-ins. I also helped families prepare funerals for their loved ones, held vigil services in the funeral homes, and participated in nearly 500 funerals. This was truly a blessing and gift—as well as a great preparation for my present ministry within hospice. Through this, my ministry came to include beginning a bereavement ministry, where two seven-week sessions were held each year in the Fall and Spring," Sister Janice wrote in 2018.

The Church has also expanded the role of the laity in parishes, schools, diocesan agencies and Church institutions. In the Pittsburgh Diocese, the Institute for Pastoral Leadership serves the formation of leaders for the diocese's The Church Alive! initiative.



Sister Theresa Codispoti visits a parishioner from Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Homestead, PA.



Sisters Joan of Arc Urban and Lucy Marie Kadlauskas at St. George Parish in Brooklyn in 1947. It was here that Sister Joan of Arc met up with three trouble-making 12 year-old-boys - Joe, Chubby and John. In her own unique fashion, she got them to attend her catechism classes and found odd jobs to keep them off the street. Remaining in touch with Sister the rest of their lives, they attribute Sr. Joan of Arc with keeping them out of gangs or going to prison.

After Vatican Council II, Sisters ministries adapted to meet the changing needs of the parishes while continuing to offer a faithful and grounding presence. Beginning in the 1970s, Sister Theresa Codispoti was called to engage in pastoral ministry and religious education for more than 20 years at Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Homestead. She ministered to communities going through numerous challenges, such as collapse of the steel industry, economic hardships, aging populations and parish reconfigurations. She also engaged in bereavement ministry helping parishioners process loss and grief.

Continued on page 11

# Care for our Common Home

## Pope's Encyclical is for our Entire Planet

The Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God crafted two essential goals for members of their congregation at their most recent Chapter meeting. The first focal point is "Care for Our Common Heart," centering on the Sisters' spiritual lives and their mission of building community and being attentive to their needs and care. The second focus, "Care for Our Common Home," will be achieved through outreach and pastoral/social ministries, care for the environment and work for justice and peace.

This latter purpose was derived, in part, from Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Caring for our Common Home*, first issued in June 2015. This book-length letter was intended to draw Christians into a dialogue with one another, and with all of humanity, about the implications of climate change and other forms of environmental destruction. Pope Francis presented a strong moral call to action: people and nations should come together and take the actions necessary to protect the Earth, and thereby protect the world's poorest and most vulnerable.

The Pope wrote, "Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day."

*Laudato Si'* particularly emphasizes the dissimilar impact of climate change on the world's poor.

### A message for the entire planet

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis said, "This encyclical is aimed at everyone. Let us pray that everyone can receive its message and grow in responsibility toward the common home that God has entrusted to us." This document is the first of its kind. Most papal documents and letters are directed to the bishops of the Church or the lay faithful. Pope Francis addressed this message to all people. It is for every person on the planet and is a wake-up call to the worldwide community to help our planet by requiring action against climate change.

*Laudato Si'* is a reminder that all



of us are connected to the entirety of creation, and that we are summoned to solidarity to bring change forward.

The document throws down the gauntlet to wealthier nations to bear responsibility for their over-consumption of natural resources and to grasp the impact of this mistreatment on those who are poor. Pope Francis states the Earth "cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her."

The Catholic Church's environmental teaching did not begin with *Laudato Si'*. Rather, Pope Francis builds upon the examples and writing of revered saints and pontiffs, including St. Francis of Assisi, St. John of the Cross, St. Bonaventure, St. Paul VI, St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. The premises Pope Francis advances are in harmony with his predecessors and with the Church's environmental teaching over time.

### What does the Pope tell us?

What, then, does this remarkable letter tell us? Obviously, there is too much to summarize in this short essay, so we invite its study.

In the beginning pages, Pope Francis, following his thirteenth-century namesake, calls the earth our "common home," which is like our

Sisters met in July to discuss their focus: "Care for our Common Home" and Care for our Common Heart" (l to r, back row) Sisters Ann Marie Lostoski, Mary Ann Lostoski, Janice Campbell, Joanne Brazinski, Francine McDonald, Althea Anne Spencer, M. Edward Urban, (middle row) J. Lora Dam-broski, Peg Markey, Theresa Codispoti, (bottom row) Hiliária de Oliveira, Eliana da Silva and Janet Gardner.

sister and our mother. But we are damaging this familial relationship as we harm the environment. In so doing, we are harming our relationship with other humans, particularly those least equipped to defend themselves: the poor and future generations. We are forgetting our interconnectedness with the Earth and with those around and ahead of us who depend on our good stewardship of the gift of creation.

The encyclical covers considerable ground while addressing the Church's teaching on the caring for creation. It brings together topics that may appear dissimilar but are in fact intricately connected to the health of our environment and society, including the dignity of work, the significance of the family, and need for technology and the economy to be centered on people. Woven all through is its constant concern for the poor, who suffer the crudest impacts of environmental deterioration and marginalization. While *Laudato Si'* reveals many notable insights, the lesson that shines most intensely is that each living creature has value and purpose.

Francis finds that what is happening to our common home is "unprecedented in the history of humanity." He states that we are "laying waste to our planet." He observes a "violence present in our hearts (that is) also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the

water, in the air and in all forms of life.” He minces no words. He challenges us to “become painfully aware” so that we can “dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering” and “discover what each of us can do about it.”

The Pope argues that we must be guided by the principles of ecology in all our actions that he calls “integral ecology.” It’s an approach to creation embedded in the Christian belief that the Earth, and everything in it, is a gift from God. ***Everything is connected*** and so we must avoid the temptation to think about the problems that we face today as piecemeal. We can’t create a culture of life and wreck the planet at the same time. We can’t clean up the mess left by a consumer society if we ignore the value of human life.

Care for creation flows naturally from our commitment to protect all human life. For example, polluted drinking water triggers birth defects. So, we who march for life should also do our part to make sure that families have clean water for their children. In our different places in life, we can build up a human ecology

by taking into account of how our actions affect the lives of the most vulnerable.

His recommendations are specific based upon what he sees is happening to each of us right now. His message is not inflexible. His encyclical calls for a candid discussion to foster wide-ranging solutions, a dialogue that acknowledges that an assortment of proposals is likely.

Pope Francis’ blistering message is troubling but optimistic because it conveys explicit solutions to the crisis we face, as well as solutions that depend on us. His text deserves close reading. His plea is for nothing short of an ecological conversion, a change of heart in us and our communities towards a “loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures,” each of whom “reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us.”

Even though he recognizes that human beings have been, and remain “capable of the worst,” Francis believes that “all is not lost” and that we “are also capable of rising above ourselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite our mental and social conditioning.”

“We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom,” which for Francis implies our free will and responsibility. For Pope Francis, this is not merely a choice, but is our moral obligation. Are we listening?

### Some suggestions to begin:

- Go all-out to become more aware of your connection to creation.
- How have you lived in unity with nature and all creatures?
- Take an inventory of your consumption and think about making changes.
- Look for recyclable or reusable options when you are able.
- Be attentive of your use of water.
- When doable, opt for transportation methods that produce less impact.
- Recycle what you can and make changes to lower the waste produced.
- Remember that even small actions can make a difference.

*Learn more at laudatosi.org*

## 7 Laudato Si' Goals



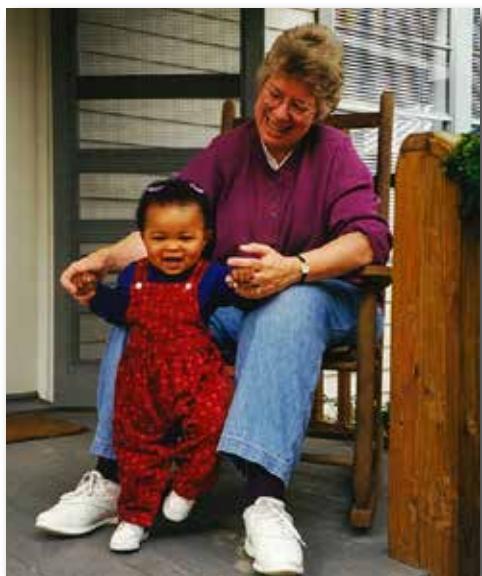
1. **Response to the Cry of the Earth** - increased use of clean renewable energy, efforts to protect and promote biodiversity, access to clean water for all and other efforts to preserve and heal our environment.
2. **Response to the Cry of the Poor** - care for all human life from conception to death, with special attention to vulnerable groups - indigenous communities, migrants, children, persons experiencing poverty, etc.
3. **Ecological Economics** – includes sustainable farming and production, Fair-trade, ethical investments, divestment from fossil fuels, ethical consumption, and reducing and ending any economic activity harmful to the planet and the people.
4. **Adoption of Simple Lifestyles** – examples include moderation in the use of resources, avoiding single-use plastic and disposable items, adopting a more plant-based diet, increased use of environmentally-friendly modes of transportation, etc.
5. **Ecological Education** – design educational curricula and institutions in the spirit of integral ecology to create ecological awareness and action, as well as promote the ecological vocation of young persons, teachers and leaders.

6. **Ecological Spirituality** - rediscover a religious vision of God’s creation, encourage more time encountering the natural world with wonder, praise, joy and gratitude, promote creation-centered liturgical celebrations, and develop ecological catechesis, prayer, retreats, formation, etc.
7. **Community Involvement and Participatory Action** to care for creation at the local, regional, national and international levels, including promoting advocacy, encouraging rootedness in local communities and neighborhood ecosystems, etc.

*Photo and information courtesy of laudatosi.org*

# Call of Providence (continued from page 4)

## Sister Peg Markey Reflects on her Ministry to the Children of Casa de Esperanza



*Sister Peg and 14-month old child she cared for at Casa de Esperanza in Houston, TX.*

"In the summer of 1994 I heard about ministry opportunities at Casa de Esperanza, a foster care program for sick poor children and those suffering from the AIDS epidemic in Houston TX. With the approval of my congregation, I was able to apply to be a foster mom and by December that year I arrived to find myself caring for two premature babies, one 9 days old and the other 13 days, both suffering the effects of having mothers addicted to crack cocaine. Shortly afterward I was asked to give hospice care to a little four year old girl diagnosed with AIDS who was not expected to live out the year. Another little girl came to our home the following year, both girls were the same age and had lost their parents to AIDS. In my eight years at Casa I was blessed to care for twelve very sick little babies who were able to return to their mothers or were adopted. I would have the privilege of raising 'my girls' until they were adopted at age 10. Today 'my girls' are 31, a day care teacher, mom to two girls and a supervisor at a community health center. In the words of Dickens, 'It is no slight thing when those who are so fresh from God love us.' It was indeed a blessing and a privilege to love and be loved by my foster children."

~ Sister Peg Markey

## Sister Janet Serves Families Experiencing Homelessness

From 2013-2017, Sister Janet Gardner, served as the executive director of Beatitude House in Youngstown, OH. A sponsored ministry of the Ursuline Sisters of Youngstown, Beatitude House provides housing, educational opportunities and other services to help women and children break the cycle of poverty and homelessness, and build lives of stability and hope. Sister Peg Markey would join Sister Janet as a volunteer assisting with various needs of the organization.

"Everybody deserves the opportunity to provide for their children, helping them to grow up healthy and save. To be part of an organization providing support for these families is a grace," said Sister Janet in 2013.

This type of ministry was not new to Sister Janet. In 1993, a group of 14 Catholic womens' religious communities, including the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God, collaborated to establish Sister's Place, a supportive housing community committed to assisting single parent families who are homeless in southwestern Pennsylvania. Its mission is to assist such families toward self-sufficiency by providing housing and supportive services. Sister Janet served as the first president of the Board. (*Sisters Place will be featured more in the next issue.*)



*Sister Janet and children during her time as executive director of Beatitude House.*

## The Gift of Comfort and Companionship



For more than a decade, Sister Ann Marie Lostoski served with Comfort Keepers, where she provided in-home care services that can help prolong an aging person's ability to live independently and safely.

"I take them to doctor's appointments, to shop, to their various activities, and do light housekeeping as needed," she said in 2016. "It's a good feeling to be able to help these people in their later years and to make them feel worth something."

*In her ministry with Comfort Keepers, Sister Ann Marie Lostoski (right) developed meaningful and blessed relationships with her clients, like Marcella.*

# The Call of Providence in Brazil



Like the Sisters' ministries in the USA, ministries in Brazil are too varied and numerous to feature in one issue. Much falls under the umbrella of pastoral ministry, which includes serving persons experiencing poverty and other challenges through a variety of spiritual and social services.

Beyond the favelas of São Paulo and other urban areas, our Sisters have been called to serve in rural and remote areas only accessible by motorcycle, boat, or horseback. Sisters also serve indigenous communities and have been missioned to Bolivia and Haiti. One of the newest missions is in Obidos, which is located in the remote Amazon region.

Often, Sisters collaborate with parish, diocesan and state programs to aid the poor. While serving in the Boca da Mata mission – Alagoas, Brazil in the 1990s, Sister Janet Gardner was involved with the Children's Pastoral Program, whose focus was to prevent malnutrition and illness through community-based efforts of education and support. Presently, Sister Carmem Lúcia de Almeida serves as a Diocesan Coordinator of this program in Obidos.

*Pictured above is Sister Carmem Lúcia de Almeida travels on the Amazon River while serving in Obidos, Brazil.*

*Pictured center, Sister Juliana da Silva Aires on a mission to Tírio with other Franciscans to serve indigenous persons in the Amazon region (Members of the tribe drew the temporary markings on her arms.).*

*Pictured far right Sister Maria Goretti Avanzi and a Lay Franciscan (Associate) deliver masks to a local priest for parishioners in one of the largest favelas in São Paulo.*



## Evolving Ministries of St. Clare Hall

For more than five decades ministries in St. Clare Hall continued to evolve to meet the changing needs of Pittsburgh's South Hills. First built to house St. Francis Academy Prep Students, the building was no longer needed for this purpose by the 1970s. A survey of the surrounding South Hills revealed a strong need for independent housing for elderly women. In 1976, St. Clare Hall was renovated into affordable apartments for senior women and the program eventually served 12 senior women.

In 1982, recognizing the need for affordable quality child care in Pittsburgh's South Hills, the Sisters opened the Franciscan Child Day Care Center on the ground floor which was separate from the housing units.

In the late 1980s, with many Sisters trained in Franciscan Spirituality and religious formation, our Community sought opportunities to share these resources. A spiritual center on the Motherhouse grounds in Pittsburgh was approved in 1988, and St. Clare Hall was chosen because of its peaceful setting. The former St. Francis Academy Building became the new home for the growing Franciscan Child Day Care Center, and alternative housing was found for the few women remaining in the housing program at that time.

In 1995, the Franciscan Spirit and Life Center opened and offered spiritual-based programs and retreats for individuals or groups. The Center featured a meeting space, kitchen, chapel and accommodations for 27 guests. It was also available for rental by outside groups for meetings, seminars, etc. The Center expanded to include three hermitages in the wooded area of the property to offer retreatants silence and solitude to pray and meditate in a peaceful space surrounded by God's creation. Sisters served at the Center as administrators, program directors, presenters, and hospitality support.



*Sister J. Lora Dambroski presents a spiritual program at the Franciscan Spirit and Life Center in the late 1990s.*

# Autumn Gala of Gratitude

## Sisters Virtually Gather with Friends and Benefactors

Thanks to our friends and benefactors, our virtual 17<sup>th</sup> annual Autumn Gala on October 3, 2021 was one of our most successful events in recent years. The virtual event began with a special St. Francis Day blessing from our Sisters posted on our website, YouTube page, and Facebook. The evening included an online program expressing our gratitude for the generosity and love that has sustained our Sisters and Franciscan mission for more than 99 years. Our program also included our basket raffle drawing and announcement of the Grand Prize winner of our October Cash Raffle.

Our Sisters are humbled and profoundly grateful for the outpouring of support from our friends and benefactors who sent us well wishes, prayers and generous support of our ongoing ministries and outreach efforts, as well as the care of our senior Sisters.

We remain grateful to all who joined us for our Autumn Gala, and would like to especially thank the following groups and individuals who helped make this special event possible:

- Our Autumn Gala Committee who embraced the challenges and possibilities of 2021 to once again successfully transform our Gala into an online event,
- Our generous raffle prizes donors, especially our Associates, Auxiliary, St. Francis Academy Alumnae Association, Franciscan Child Day Care Center Board, OSF Employees, Maria Ammon, Kathy Antoniazzi, Sister Althea Anne Spencer, Mimi DiGregory and Margo Fittipaldo.
- Sister Mary Ann Lostoski, who coordinates our October and February Cash Raffles,
- Mimi DiGregory, our administrative secretary, for her essential and creative assistance,
- Robyn Moeller, our Development Director, for her event coordination and video production efforts,
- All our Sisters, Associates, Staff, Volunteers, St. Francis Academy Alumnae Association, Auxiliary and friends who always say “yes” when we ask for help and go above and beyond to give us the gift of their time, talents and support.



*Thanks to a generous friend who bought her raffle tickets, Sister Francine McDonald won the Autumn quilt made for the Gala raffle by Kathy Antoniazzi.*

## Thank You, Autumn Gala Sponsors!

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# In Prayerful Memory

Sister Lillian Yurksaitis, OSF (Sister Mary Kateri)



Sister Lillian Yurksaitis, a Sister of St. Francis of the Providence of God for 67 years, died at the age of 89 on October 3, 2021. Born February 20, 1932 in Bridgeport, CT, Sister Lillian entered the congregation in 1954 and earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Education from Duquesne University. She served 20 years in education ministry, first serving at Holy Trinity in Moon Run, PA, followed by assignments at parish schools in Pittsburgh, Grand Rapids, MI, Cleveland, OH, Kenosha, WI and Kearney and Elizabeth, NJ. Sister Lillian also served in the congregation's mission in São Paulo, Brazil and taught English as a second language.

The poverty she witnessed in Brazil strengthened her calling to serve the poor. Upon her return to the United States, Sister Lillian's ministry included volunteering at two women's shelters, Hope House in Wilmington, DE and Bethlehem Haven in Pittsburgh, PA. She also served at Jersey City Medical Center, in New Jersey, where her chaplaincy duties ranged from

spiritual care of patients in intensive care and the emergency room, working with persons with AIDS and assisting with financial problems. Returning to the Pittsburgh Motherhouse in 1994, she served as Assistant to the Campus Administrator and provided community support services utilizing her computer and technology skills. In 2014 Sister Lillian was among our first Sisters missioned to Westminster Place of Presbyterian SeniorCare in Oakmont, PA.

## Parish Ministry (continued from page 5)

In 2019, the Institute for Pastoral Leadership organized a group of 18 Sisters and 6 others to serve as Spiritual Formation Advisors to over 100 Lay Ecclesial Ministers who work in parishes and schools in the Diocese. Sisters Althea Anne Spencer and Peg Markey served as advisors. Through their efforts, our Sisters helped assure that the development of Lay Ecclesial Ministers remained faithful to the Church's theological traditions, as well as responds to contemporary pastoral needs and situations.

Today, our Sisters in Pittsburgh minister through their presence attending Mass at various parishes in the Pittsburgh area and volunteering for parish events and outreach programs. Prior to the pandemic, Sister Althea Anne facilitated meetings concerning the Pittsburgh Diocese Parish reorganization process, and she presently serves on the RCIA team for Our Lady of Hope Parish. Our Sisters in Brazil continue to serve parishes through catechetical and liturgical ministries, as well as pastoral ministries and social service programs sponsored by parishes.

On Oct. 10, 2021, Pope Francis formally opened a two-year process: Synod 2021-2023: For a Synodal Church. The outcome will certainly impact the Church, and our Sisters in the United States and Brazil will be present for parishes as they navigate what this means for their members, ministries and outreach.



*In the 2000s, Sister Hilária de Oliveira served St. James Parish in Newark, NJ, where her ministry included serving the parish's Brazilian immigrant community by preparing Masses in Portuguese and assisting with religious education and other needs.*



Sisters of Saint Francis of the Providence of God

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## Associate Retreat and Commitment



*USA Associates who attended the retreat include (back row, l to r) Joan Ammon, Carol Stasik, Kathy Antoniazzi, Pat Enscoe, Michaela Fisher, Mary Ann Abt, Margo Fittipaldo, Johannah Jones, MaryAnn Garfold (front, l to r) Audrey Patterson, Sister Janet Gardner, and Rosemary Byrd.*

**O**n September 11, 2021, Associates and Sisters gathered at Nativity Convent in Pittsburgh for the annual Associate Retreat and Commitment Day. Blessed with a beautiful day, the program was held outside on the covered porch. Sister Althea Anne Spencer facilitated the retreat and offered meaningful prayer and reflection based on the Our Father. Given ample time for private prayer, each participant found their own peaceful space on the property to reflect and speak with God. The morning concluded with a Service of Commitment, where Associates renewed their commitment to the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God and our shared Franciscan mission.

Thank you, Associates for joining us on our Franciscan journey!

For more information about our Associate Program, contact Sister Janet Gardner at [sjgardner@osfprov.org](mailto:sjgardner@osfprov.org).