

● Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania

# JOURNEYS

is there  
**room?**

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# is there room?

*by Betsy Wiest, SSJ Agrégée*

A young couple travels to Bethlehem to pay their taxes. When they arrive, they are told there is no room for them to stay. They finally find shelter in a stable where she gives birth to their son. As the husband places the baby in her arms, their eyes meet and they instinctively know they would do anything to protect their child and keep Him safe. Violence erupts suddenly and they are in danger. They are forced to flee in the night, away from all that is familiar, to a land they don't know. There, they will have to rebuild their lives apart from family and friends.

There is room. They are welcomed. He is safe. All is well.

More than 2,000 years later, amidst violence, gangs, drugs, and guns, parents continue to do whatever it takes to keep their children safe. They don't want to leave their homes, but are forced to flee from the countries they know, from the families and friends they love. They make a dangerous trip, traveling thousands of miles on foot. They are headed to a land they do not know, where a strange and unfamiliar language is spoken. They arrive in this land with immigration quotas, applications, and processes of which they are unfamiliar.

They are told there is no room. But they can't go back; it isn't safe. They can't stay; there is no room. They remain in limbo, waiting. They have no country. They have no home. But they do have hope. They have hope that their children will someday be safe. They wait. And they hope ... for room.



This Christmas season, as we reflect on Joseph and Mary's journey and the journey of all those seeking shelter, safety, and a home, let's ask ourselves, "Is there room?". Is there room in our thinking, in our hearts, in our country? Can we welcome the stranger, the refugee, those seeking safety for their children?



*As members of the U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph, we call for the welcome and humane treatment of arriving migrants. The United States has a long and proud history of welcoming immigrants and sheltering refugees. As Sisters of St. Joseph, we live and work that all may be one — one with God, with one another, one with all creation. We welcome the 'dear neighbor' without exception. We are blessed to be able to accompany and serve migrant communities throughout this country, and we will continue to welcome all as our faith requires.*



During this season,  
let us honor the  
journey of migrants  
and refugees and  
pray there is  
always room.

The Sisters of St. Joseph  
of Northwestern Pennsylvania



# 30 years of kindness



Sisters of  
St. Joseph  
Annual  
Thanksgiving  
Dinner

*by Dotty Hanna, SSJ Development Director*

Too many people were in need of a meal on Thanksgiving Day. Peter Lyons owned a restaurant. And the Sisters of St. Joseph had the heart and hands to get it done. Thirty years – and 28,000 meals later – the dinner is still going strong, thanks to the thousands of donors and volunteers who have made this ministry a tradition of their own.

## from the beginning, the need was evident.

"I saw people on the streets and in the parks and knew there was a need," said Sister Teresa Marie Bohren, SSJ, who started the dinner with Peter Lyons who owned the Marketplace Grill restaurant in downtown Erie. About 150 meals were served the first year, 800 the second year and more than 1,000 other years (including deliveries for the homebound). "It was always about providing more than just a meal," added Sister Teresa Marie. "The need for companionship – for togetherness – is just as great as the need for food."

"Togetherness' is a good way to describe it," said Sister Mary Herrmann, SSJ, president of the Sisters of St. Joseph. "Each year, we see around 1,000 people come together in a single act of

kindness. Our food service partners and more than 125 volunteers and 700 donors who really make it all possible."

## But what about the leftovers?

Well, it wouldn't be Thanksgiving without leftovers – in this case, left-over funds.

"Our donors are amazing," added Sister Mary Herrmann. "Very early on, our donations exceeded the costs of the meal. So for 29 years, we have had the privilege of sharing excess funds with organizations that care for the hungry, homeless and underserved all year. With this year, we will surpass \$550,000 in support given to these organizations."

And it all started with a simple desire to share a little kindness on Thanksgiving. 



Tom Horvath, "the gravy man," served gravy for 30 years in a row. Though he's hanging up his ladle, we know his heart will be with us in coming years, while he finally shares Thanksgiving with his family out of town. (Thanks, Tom. We love you.)



## KEY PLAYERS

It all started with an idea and a resounding "yes" from the three original Thanksgiving dinner coordinators – (from left) Teresa Marie Bohren, SSJ, Peter Lyons and Mary Fromknecht, SSJ.



## SO MANY VOLUNTEERS!

Every year, more than 100 volunteers make it all happen. They set up, pack meals, cut pies, greet guests, serve meals, and even clean up. Some come just to give back. Others have made us a part of their holiday tradition after a significant change or loss in the family. Many of our volunteers are families. Whatever their reasons, they make the day a blessing for all involved.



"When we started the Thanksgiving Dinner, none of us thought about how long it might last. Now – 30 years later – I think, 'what a blessing for all of us.' It just wouldn't be Thanksgiving without hundreds of friends serving and sharing the holiday."

**Mary Fromknecht, SSJ**

# 30 years of Thanksgiving

## by the numbers

More than **28,000** meals served



**24,000** lbs of turkey



**14,000** lbs of potatoes



**4,000** lbs of corn



**583** gallons of gravy



**3,600** pies

**4,050** volunteers have given more than **12,150** hours

Raised more than **\$700,000** and (as of this year) will have distributed more than **\$550,000**.

## giving back awards

To recognize the extraordinary contribution of Peter Lyons of Marketplace Grill and Gannon University/Metz Culinary Management, two special cash awards are given out during the Thanksgiving Fund distribution. Each selects an organization to receive the award. The Peter Lyons Thanksgiving Giving Back Award has been given since 2009 and the Gannon University/Metz award since 2014.

For more Thanksgiving photos visit [ssjerie.org](http://ssjerie.org)

## CARRYING ON THE TRADITION

*Carrying on our Thanksgiving tradition are Sr. Mary Claire Kennedy, dinner coordinator from 2000 to 2016, and Dr. Keith Taylor, Gannon University president and host of the dinner from 2009 to the present.*



## WE DELIVER!

*In our first years, meal delivery accounted for only a fraction of Thanksgiving meals served. But today, deliveries outpace dine-ins, with nearly 500 meals taken to the homebound on Thanksgiving.*



Volunteer Ben Antolik ready to roll.

# santa associates

*just be claus...*

*Two men who were called to be SSJ Associates, were also called to take on the role of Santa. Not surprisingly, there are some common characteristics. Those called to be associates are naturally drawn to reaching out to others, helping them, bringing them comfort, and adding joy to their lives. Those who are called to animate the persona of Santa, naturally exhibit the same qualities. Santa Claus, as we know, evolved from the story of St. Nicholas who had a reputation for kindness and generosity, especially to the poor. One story tells of St. Nicholas helping three poor young girls to get off the streets and find better lives by giving them bags of gold as dowries. Interestingly, the earliest Sisters of St. Joseph in France taught young girls to make lace as a means of making better lives for themselves. Coincidence?*

## Santa Ron

Ron Visnoski became an SSJ Associate in 1998, five years after his wife, Evelyn, became an associate. Ron has been a faithful volunteer in his parish as Eucharistic minister and for many SSJ events and ministry activities including our annual Circle of Friends liturgy and picnic, and the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network soup kitchen. Ron livened up the holidays each year by donning his Santa suit and spreading Christmas cheer to our sisters and as a featured guest at our annual That's A Wrap event for sisters and associates. After he retired, Ron was a part-time driver for our sisters for many years.



## Santa Lew

Lewis (Lew) Nordin became an SSJ Associate in 2016. He was the Grand Knight at Sacred Heart of Jesus parish in Erie for three years. Currently, he is serving a three-year term as a District Deputy for Knights of Columbus councils of six churches in the Erie Diocese.



While working at the West Erie Plaza in the early 1990s, Lew was asked by the merchants association to be Santa and arrive on a firetruck. "Ever since that day, the red suit and everything that comes with it, became a part of me," Lew said. "Slowly but surely, I am convinced that I definitely possess the big guy's DNA."

# the men of SSJ

SSJ Associates are Christians who are called to live the mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Seventeen percent of our associates are men and we think that deserves some attention. We sent an online survey to 22 of the guys who use email and we invited others to share as well. We also dug through our databases and archives for information. Here's what we can tell you about the men of SSJ. 🙏



## How do you live the mission of the SSJ?

"By treating everyone I meet as a neighbor." **Jon Furhman**

"By always helping neighbor to neighbor." **Wally Brown**



*Sister Ann Marie Cappello with some of the guys. Seated, left to right: SSJ Associates Richard Marshall, Gary Flick and Steve Kuhn.*



## what would you want other men to know about being an SSJ associate?

# 39 male associates

out of 233 total associates



30

are married (28 of them have a wife who is also an SSJ associate)

↓  
89%

entered at the same time as their spouse  
11% wife became an associate first.

34  
are in Pennsylvania

5  
are out of state  
*as far away as*  
Beaverton, OR  
Boston, MA  
Ocoee, FL



5  
single

2  
clergy

2  
widowed

## HOW LONG

have they been an associate?



**Paul** Mercier  
**33** years



**Paul** Wilkoz  
**first year**

## how old are they?

**Youngest**  
**Brandon Vogt: 32 years old**

**Oldest**  
**Paul Mercier: 89 years old**

## What influenced them to become an associate?

Relationship with the SSJs  
**75%**

Desire to deepen spirituality  
**58%**

Desire to get to know the sisters  
**33%**

"It's a wonderful community of inspiration and positive reinforcement of our Christian values. What the sisters accomplish is amazing and done with such humility. If you are looking for a place to find ways to further your Christian outreach and faith, it can certainly be found as an SSJ Associate." **Hal Sheldon**

"There's plenty of room for men—not a women's organization." **Don Swift**

"I want men to know that being an SSJ associate will enhance their faith and help them realize all that the SSJ community does and that they can be a volunteer to make it better." **Gary Flick**

"I've learned a lot about what makes women special and the power of a group of women to influence their community and society as a whole -- a humbling realization that I badly needed. **Pat Shaughnessy**



# where's the justice?



Left to right: Carol Finotti, Betsy Wiest, and Brad Moore.

## on the road against human trafficking

**Betsy Wiest**, SSJ Social Justice Coordinator, and **Carol Finotti** of the Crime Victim Center of Erie, met with **PA State Senator, Dan Laughlin; Dept. of Homeland Security Agent, Joseph Kruszynski; PA State Representative Glenn Thompson's Regional Director, Brad Moore; PA State Senator Patrick Toomey's assistant, Ashley Frankin; Erie Mayor, Joseph Sember; and Erie County Executive, Kathy Dahlkemper**, to discuss human trafficking awareness initiatives in the Erie area. Work continues to change the notices at rest stops along I-79, I-90 and I-80 to increase awareness for travelers and to provide more information on where victims can seek help. Betsy and Carol continue to give presentations on human trafficking to community organizations such as the Indivisible, Sisters of Mercy, Zonta Club and the Erie County Department of Health Nurses.



## homelessness – no laughing matter

In October, Jr's Last Laugh Comedy Club in Erie sponsored a comedy challenge featuring local corporate executives and spokespersons who gave their best standup comedy for a great cause – eradicating homelessness in our community. Proceeds will help to continue our ministry to homeless men at St. Patrick's Haven.

## take back the site vigils – when will they end?

Take Back the Site Vigils are short prayer services held at the sites where a violent act has resulted in a death. The vigils are held to bring the local Erie community together to reclaim the site to non-violence and to remember the person who was killed. Family members of victims find the vigils to be a source of healing. "We live in an increasingly violent world," said **Betsy Wiest**, SSJ Social Justice Coordinator. "We held 12 vigils in 2018, planned collaboratively by the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Benedictine Sisters and the Sisters of Mercy. This is most number of vigils ever held in a single year since they began in 1999. As we move into the Christmas season, please pray for peace in all of our communities and for all those who continue to work toward a non-violent way of life." This is the most number of vigils ever held in a single year since they began in 1999. As we move into the Christmas season, please pray for peace in all of our communities and for all those who continue to work toward a non-violent way of life."



## sustainability - can you do just one thing?

**Betsy Wiest**, SSJ Social Justice Coordinator, recently wrote a letter to **Danny Wegman**, CEO of Wegmans grocery stores, applauding the store for the increased offering of organic foods, produce, etc. Wegman's Consumer Services Specialist, **Kim Lasher**, responded and shared other ways in which Wegmans is working to make a difference. These include:

- changing lighting in stores to efficient LED technology
- installing solar panels on corporate buildings and various store locations
- using bags made from 100% plant-based renewable material throughout stores
- donating 145 million pounds of food to food banks
- converting 4 million pounds of plastic bags into 203 million new bags
- composting 32.6 million pounds of food waste in its stores, thereby keeping it out of landfills

If we all do just ONE THING, we can collectively make a difference in our world. The next time you go shopping, please consider:

- taking a reusable bag for your purchases
- purchasing, using and reusing mesh bags for your produce
- buying local products in season that do not have to be shipped into your area
- trying to buy products in recycled packaging
- thinking before you buy to be sure you can use the food before it goes bad and has to be discarded
- buying organic products

Are you doing something in your household to help our environment? If so, please email your initiatives to [socialjustice@ssjerie.org](mailto:socialjustice@ssjerie.org) and we will share them in future issues.



## honoring Sister Mary Thomas

A plaque was placed in the lobby of St. Patrick's Haven to honor **Mary Thomas Downing, SSJ**, who died earlier this year. Sister Mary Thomas was a dedicated servant at St. Patrick's Haven for many years. She visited the men at the Haven each week. Her smile, sense of humor and loving care will be forever missed.



## love knows no borders



A 24-hour prayer procession for migrants and asylum seekers stopped at our nation's southern border was held in downtown Erie coinciding with the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 11 and 12.

# nuns on the bus rolls into Erie

Who we elect matters. This was the message from Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, as NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus rolled into Erie during its Tax Justice Truth Tour. The Nuns on the Bus travelled across the country in advance of the 2018 midterm elections to focus on tax justice and reasonable revenue for responsible programs, as well as affordable healthcare. Who we elect matters now more than ever. There is not a single political party that represents all values; they are all flawed. A single issue should not

determine how we vote. We must make conscious decisions on the candidates who best (maybe not perfectly) represent our values and what we perceive to be the greatest good. And, we must recognize that those who vote differently from us are not evil, stupid, or enemies. They are fellow Americans living in a democratic society where our differences should not divide us. These are challenging times — times which will test our nation's spirit and resiliency. As Sister Simone states, "change starts with voting."



*At right: Simone Campbell, SSS, with Betsy Wiest, SSJ Social Justice Coordinator, and above with Kathy Dahlkemper, Erie County Executive.*

# leadership message



Is there room? There are so many ways to reflect on that one simple question. In these divisive times, we need to remember that everything comes down to the room in our hearts for others. Regardless of political affiliations, where we each stand on issues or which candidates we favor, we need to treat each other kindly and with civility. It takes room in our hearts to disagree respectfully, to refrain from expressing hate, to accept that not everyone is in agreement with our beliefs. We are all human. We are all neighbors in God's universe. We are all called to expand the space in our hearts and welcome others as God always welcomes us.

With gratitude and blessings,  
Sr. Mary Ann White  
On behalf of SSJ Leadership

## news

### HANDS gives Sister Phyllis Hilbert a big hand!

**Phyllis Hilbert, SSJ**, was presented with the 2018 **Charles R. and Katherine L. Scalise**

Community Service Award by the Housing and Neighborhood Development Service (HANDS) at the organization's annual community celebration. The award honors someone who has demonstrated excep-



tional leadership in the Erie community and who has exemplified HANDS' core values. Sister Phyllis taught at several schools in the Erie Diocese and coordinated religious education programs. She also did missionary work in Arusha, Tanzania and ministered at Erie's Community House for Women. She became co-director of Bethany Ministries and founded Erie Dwelling and Advocacy for Women in Need (Erie DAWN). In 2006, she joined the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network as housing and family advocate.



### meet our new agrégées

Congratulations to **Judith Janke, Jeanne Marie Costa** and **Teresa Cieslikowski** (pictured l-r) who professed a vow of fidelity and became our newest SSJ Agrégées in September. For more information on the SSJ Agrégées, contact **Sister Susan Herzing** at 836-4066 or [s.sherzing@ssjerie.org](mailto:s.sherzing@ssjerie.org).



## Saint Mary's Home of Erie Medaille D'Or Award



**Mary Herrmann, SSJ**, was one of four individuals honored with the Medaille D'Or Award at the 2018 Saint Mary's Home of Erie Board and Friends Christmas Dinner. Other honorees included **Robert Cox, Leo Brugger**, and **Kathleen Macrino**. This prestigious award is given to individuals who live out the SSJ mission of unity of neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God; exemplify the loving



*Mary Herrmann, SSJ (left) with Phyllis McCracken, SSJ, Saint Mary's Home of Erie president/CEO.*

to care mission of Saint Mary's Home of Erie; and have worked and/or volunteered in the senior services field and/or provided meritorious services to Saint Mary's. Congratulations!

## tree blessing

At the Women Who Are Called event during National Catholic Sisters Week in March, **Mary Claire Kennedy, SSJ**, was presented with a tree to honor her work in social justice. The tree was later planted on the grounds of the SSJ Community Living center and a bless-

ing and dedication took place in August.

**Mary Ann Stuckert, SSJ**, and **Agrégée Deb Seng** wrote and conducted the ceremony which was attended by several sisters and members of Sister Mary Claire's family. Seed packets were given to those in attendance.

## Erie Gives Day

If generosity is compassion in action, then Erie just can't sit still. In 12 hours, 7,945 donors gave nearly \$4.5 million to 381 non-profit organizations in our area through Erie Gives.

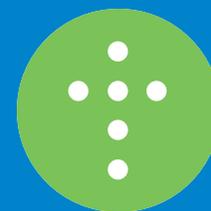


Collectively, the Sisters of St. Joseph, the SSJ Neighborhood Network, Saint Mary's Home of Erie, St. Patrick's Haven and Erie DAWN received 592 donations (up from 560 last year) for a total of more than \$113,000. Heartfelt thanks to the many donors who supported the Sisters of St. Joseph and our sponsored ministries on Erie Gives Day. And special thanks to Erie Gives sponsors — The Erie Community Foundation, GE Transportation, Erie Insurance, Presque Isle Downs & Casino, E.E. Austin & Son, ErieBank, Erie Times-News, Knox McLaughlin Gornall & Sennett, Little Caesars/Dickey's Barbeque, McInnes Rolled Rings and Northwest — who provided funds for the prorated match.



*Left to right: Marianne Stuckert, SSJ; Mary Claire Kennedy, SSJ; and SSJ Agrégée Deb Seng.*

# we remember



### Deceased Sisters:

*Bernardine Pais, SSJ*  
December 10, 2018

*Mary Thomas Downing, SSJ*  
August 16, 2018

### Deceased Associates:

*Claire Gredler*  
October 19, 2018

*Genevieve Skrzypczak*  
July 24, 2018

## to report abuse

This is a sad and painful time for our Church, our Diocese, our congregation, but most important, for so many victims, it has been a sad and deeply painful time for way too long. Compassion and healing for abuse survivors, as well as protection of children and vulnerable adults, are top priorities for the Sisters of St. Joseph. We strongly encourage anyone who has experienced sexual abuse by a member of our congregation, or any affiliated employee or volunteer, to contact law enforcement. You can report abuse to the Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General's Clergy Abuse Hotline by calling **1-888-538-8541**. In addition, anyone can report suspected abuse of a present-day child by anyone to PA ChildLine by calling **1-800-932-0313**. The line is open 24/7, and callers may choose to remain anonymous. To report abuse directly to the independent investigators retained by the Sisters, e-mail [ssj@klgates.com](mailto:ssj@klgates.com).



The U.S. government recently set an all-time low cap of 30,000 as the number of refugees that will be allowed to enter the United States in 2019. Communities around the country are prepared to welcome at least 75,000 refugees.

In living our gospel values, we should protect refugees and others who are fleeing violence or persecution.

Tell Congress that a cap of 30,000 refugees is unacceptable and ask for an admissions goal of at least 75,000!

**Call your senators and representatives today at 202-225-3121.**



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# take action!

## support those seeking a safe place to live

Now is a critical time for people of faith to make our voices heard. Tell Congress that all people deserve to be treated humanely. Every dollar added to the budget for immigration detention and enforcement allows the administration to carry out policies which erode the rights and safety of immigrants, refugees and migrants.

Please **call 202-224-3121** today and ask your representative to protect families by reducing funding for Detention, Deportations and Border Militarization.

Journeys Vol. 36 No. 2, Winter 2018-19

© 2018 Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, Inc.  
5031 West Ridge Road, Erie, Pennsylvania 16506-1249

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**Contributing Writers:** Betsy Wiest, Dotty Hanna, Stephanie Hall

**Photography:** Stephanie Hall, Allan H. Johnson, Linda Romey, OSB, Tim Rohrbach Photography, stock photos, contributed photos. Printed on recycled paper by Printing Concepts, Inc.

**Graphic Design:** Allan H. Johnson, allanhj.com