

Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania

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# Journeys

Simple Women,  
Simple Mission.

Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania

# Simply put.

## What are they thinking?

That's probably what you were thinking when you saw the cover of this issue of *Journeys*. A black and white cover, very few words and no pictures? Really? There is a reason.

We hope you noticed that we did not send *Journeys* this past summer. We undertook a major initiative funded through a grant from the Indiana University Lilly School of Philanthropy\* for advancing mission initiatives. As part of that, we did a communications effectiveness study to help us do a better job of connecting with you. The project was extensive; we worked with an outside firm to do focus groups, surveys and interviews. In the midst of it all, it would have been difficult to get an issue of *Journeys* completed. That brings us to this issue and why it's so different.

One of the recommendations from the study was to reevaluate *Journeys*: its intended audience, its content, length, frequency, look and feel -- even perhaps its name. We will do that beginning in January but we didn't want to put off publishing another issue until then. We also wanted an opportunity to get your input on the future of *Journeys*.

Another recommendation, that we establish a theme, led us to *Simple women, simple mission*. It seems to say it all. And simplicity seems to be a good message for all of us in these complex times. Thus, the pared down, back to basic, *simple*, interim issue of *Journeys*. We're thinking of it as wiping the slate as we move from *Journeys* as it was to *Journeys* as it is becoming.

You can help us by completing the survey included in this issue. You can use the enclosed envelope to mail it back or, if you prefer, you can answer the survey online. Either way, your input (as a *Journeys* reader) is most valuable.

With that being said, let's enter this season of Christmas with simple hearts, simple thoughts and with a simple prayer for peace on earth and good will to all.

We wish you many blessings,



Mary Herrmann, SSJ  
On behalf of Leadership

The original grant was made to the Lilly School of Philanthropy by the Conrad Hilton and GHR Foundations for "Advancing Mission: Women Religious in the 21st Century." We were one of several sub awardees.



## Simple Women, Simple Mission.

That's it. We strive for simplicity -- in who we are, how we live and what we do. Yet in this increasingly complex and complicated world, it's easy for all of us to drift away from the simple things that matter most and we have to make an intentional effort to get back to basics. For us it all comes back to love of God and love of neighbor. Simple.

Our charism and our vows reflect who we are and our mission statement defines what we do.

*We, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, reaching out to the ever changing needs of the world, serve the neighbor without distinction as we work toward uniting neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God.*

Our mission is our purpose. It's how we do what we do

and why we do what we do. It hasn't changed though how we live it has changed over time. It determines whether we are staffing schools for immigrants, building hospitals, or educating and advocating about the human trafficking crisis in our world.

We strive to *live* our mission, but we *are not* our mission. Our mission was here long before us and it will endure long after. If there are needs to be met, if there are people who are broken, there is a place for our mission. We live our mission along with the SSJ associates and our first SSJ agrégées (who will pronounce their vow of fidelity in January).

We live and work so that all may be one. Simple.



# simple messages.

You may know (how could you not?) that Pope Francis made his first visit to the United States in September. Thousands, perhaps millions, of pilgrims gathered at various venues in the hopes of catching a glimpse, touching his hand or just hearing him. He spoke many times to many audiences and, as written by Mark Edmundson in an article on foxnews.com, through all his words came one simple message: *live a compassionate life.*

Among a group of pilgrims from Erie that travelled to Philadelphia to see Pope Francis were our Sisters Clare Marie Beichner and Rosemary O'Brien, and SSJ associate, Jeanne Marie Ryan. They shared reflections of the experience and though each was unique, they all seemed to convey simple messages.

## **Sr. Clare Marie Beichner**

"His message and impact were universal in showing God's love so well," expressed Sr. Clare Marie. "The

message was given in word and example, was personal and yet global, and we experienced being part of the body of Christ -- a unified family of faith. His message was speaking to each heart and person to make a difference by doing small acts of kindness. He shared this in each encounter."

## **Jeanne Marie Ryan**

"There were over 100 countries represented, yet language did not present a barrier," shared Jeanne Marie Ryan. "As the Pope approached our area and I looked at the thousands of people surrounding me, all I could think was, 'this is Church.' Real Church was everywhere -- simple pilgrims on our earthly journey. Nobody cared where you were from, what you wore, the color of your skin, what religion you practiced, what kind of family you had, your financial status, your politics, etc. We were all one -- united in the hope that this simple servant could bring God's love in a special way to His people."

## Sister Rosemary O'Brien

"In the midst of our world wounded by poverty and violence, hunger and homelessness, Pope Francis' visit was an experience of great hope and joy for me," said Sr. Rosemary. "In addition to being in the presence of the humble, prophetic and spirit-filled person of Francis, I experienced the "Joy of the Gospel" in the throngs of enthusiastic pilgrims. People of all cultures and ages were welcoming, kind to one another, patient while standing shoulder to shoulder in long security lines, breaking out into song as we walked together. The diversity of languages wasn't a barrier to the genuine hospitality of spirit that I experienced throughout the five days of our pilgrimage. There were many spirit-filled moments among the people in the subways, streets and parks. Together we witnessed that if we are intentional about bringing peace to the world, it is possible."



Departing for Philadelphia, left - right: SSJ associate Jeanne Marie Ryan, Sr. Clare Marie Beichner and Sr. Rosemary O'Brien.

## *Laudato Si*: Simply explained.

*Laudato Si*, Pope Francis' much anticipated encyclical on climate change, was released to the world in June. This 192-page document delivers a powerful, yet simple, message summed up in its subtitle: *On Care for Our Common Home*. *Laudato Si* means *Praise Be to You*, and is taken from St. Francis of Assisi's famous hymn, "*The Canticle of Creatures*."

A papal encyclical is a letter from a Pope most often to the Bishops of the Church. *Laudato Si*, however, was addressed to "every person living on this planet" and with whom Pope Francis would like to dialogue about care for the earth. Never before has an entire encyclical been devoted to the environment.

Pope Francis calls us to a renewed focus on caring for our common home as "the exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits" and the time for action is now. Individuals, families, communities, and civic and political leaders are challenged to make lifestyle changes, including manners of consumption. We are urged to pay attention to environmental degradation and to repair the damage that's been done. Pope Francis asks us to take more responsibility for this common home that God has

entrusted to us.

The encyclical's message reaches far beyond Catholics and other Christians and has been endorsed by environmentalists and scientists. Non-Catholic religious leaders are bringing it into ecumenical discussions.

We are challenged to revise our entire way of living -- including how we live the Gospel. As stated by Marcia McNutt, Editor-in-Chief of Science Journals, "*Pope Francis has done perhaps the most to raise awareness of the moral imperative to take action on climate change for the sake of the most disadvantaged members of society, who have done the least to cause the problem.*"

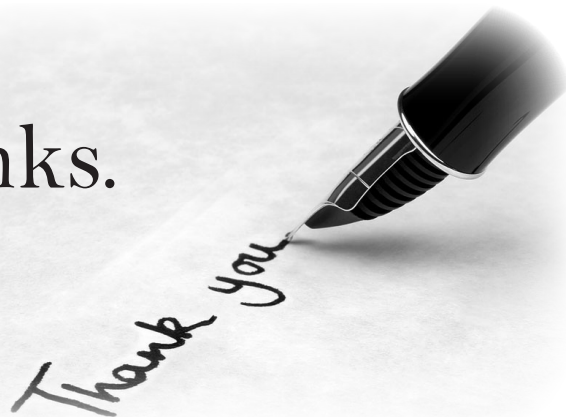
*Laudato Si* is a call to "wake up the world," echoing the theme for this Year of Consecrated Life. It is hoped that the message influenced the dialogue at the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Paris. The objective of the conference was to achieve a binding agreement on climate from all nations of the world.

Pope Francis' influence and popularity as the 'People's Pope' will carry this simple message a long way.

*Unlike past encyclicals, Laudato Si is easy to read. Thomas Reese, former editor of America magazine said that anyone who can read a newspaper can read the encyclical. You can read the entire encyclical on the Vatican's website: <http://w2.vatican.va>. A reader's guide is available on the National Catholic Reporter website: <http://ncronline.org>*

# A simple note of thanks.

Throughout the year, we say “thank you” in many ways. We send thousands of cards and make thousands of phone calls. We acknowledge our donors in print and offer prayers of gratitude for each and every one of you. But somehow, it never seems like enough.



You see, every simple act of kindness you show – whether it’s a donation, an hour of volunteering, an unexpected visit, or a note or phone call just to keep in touch – creates a ripple effect that changes our lives and the lives of so many others.

We hope you know how much you mean to us. Every time we see you, hear from you or work alongside you, we receive more than you know. More joy. More energy. More inspiration. You truly are the gift that keeps on giving.

And although it’s a simple thank you, we want to say it again. Thanks for all you are and all you do.

God’s blessings to you and yours this holy season and throughout the year,

*The Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania*

## We Remember



Rita McNulty, SSJ  
entered into eternal life on  
April 27, 2015



Mary Carmel Skeabeck, SSJ  
entered into eternal life on  
May 7, 2015



Michaela Fox, SSJ  
born to eternal life on  
November 5, 2015

### SSJ Associates

Msgr. John Carter	February 17
Walter Tarwacki	April 27
Rosalie Miller	July 27
Barbara Faluszczak	August 11

We realize that we may have asked some of these questions in the past and we are grateful if you took the time to respond. This survey takes it a step further as we prepare to re-evaluate *Journeys* and we would really like your input. You may use the enclosed envelope to return your responses, or if you prefer, you may answer the survey online at     TBD    .

How often would you like to receive *Journeys*?

- Once a year
- Twice a year
- Three times a year
- Quarterly
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

What do you think is the ideal number of pages? (excluding this issue, we usually publish 16 pages)

- 8 pages
- 12 pages
- 16 pages
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you prefer to receive *Journeys*?

- Printed issue via postal mail
- Digital issue via e-mail

What is your connection to/relationship with the Sisters of St. Joseph: (check all that apply)

- I am a Catholic sister
  - SSJNWPA
  - CSSJ other location
  - non-SSJ Catholic sister
- I am a former SSJNWPA
- I am an associate/associate candidate
- I am an agrégée/agrégée candidate
- VME alum
- VMA alum
- VMC alum
- Family of a sister
- Donor
- Employee/former employee
  - SSJ congregation
  - SSJ ministry
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

What is your age?

- 25 and under
- 26-40
- 41-55
- 56-70
- 71+

We are most interested in what content you would like to see in *Journeys*. Please indicate/rank the following in order of importance to you:

- News/updates about individual sisters
- News from and about SSJ ministries
- Stories about individual sisters, associates, agrégée
- Stories about individuals who have been served through SSJ ministries
- Spiritual resources/opportunities
  - inspirational articles
  - spiritual direction
  - retreat opportunities
  - other \_\_\_\_\_
- News about SSJs around the country/world
- News about issues:
  - climate change
  - human trafficking
  - death penalty
  - legislative issues
  - other \_\_\_\_\_
- Donor profiles "*Why I support the SSJs*"
- SSJ future plans
- SSJ Mission & Ministries Foundation
  - giving opportunities/ways to give
- Volunteer opportunities

Would you please provide us with your email address? Don't worry, if you indicated a paper copy of *Journeys* is your preference, you will still receive it that way. There may occasionally be other news and items of interest that we'd like to pass along to you in a timely manner. E-mail is much cheaper than regular mail.

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for responding to our survey!

# a few simple Qs



**SISTERS OF  
ST. JOSEPH  
OF NORTHWESTERN  
PENNSYLVANIA**

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**Christmas, in a word,  
love.**

(simple)

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania