

# interim

Volume 36, Issue 11

November 2018

Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania

## a very painful time for so many

### keep our focus on victims

This is indeed a sad and painful time for our SSJ community. We are deeply sorrowful for any abuse that may have occurred by any member of our religious community. It is difficult to assimilate that such incidents occurred and that such pain was inflicted. We are keeping our focus on the victims and survivors of sexual abuse, especially the victim whose sharing has brought us to this moment.

### transparency, accuracy and clarity

Of utmost priority is our desire to be forthcoming and transparent, and to ensure that information is conveyed with accuracy and clarity. As such, we wish to clarify information that was reported in an Erie Times News headline dated 10-30-18 which reads: *Nuns Knew of Abuse for Decades*. This headline is inaccurate and

misleading and gives a false impression that we knew about an abuse allegation and deliberately chose to do nothing about it.

### the steps we took

We, as leadership of the congregation, had no knowledge of any allegations of abuse against Mary Carmel Skeabeck, SSJ until they were brought to our attention by the victim a few months ago. Upon learning of the accusation, we were expedient in taking the appropriate steps to determine its credibility. We enlisted attorneys with the Pittsburgh-based law firm K&L Gates LLP to conduct an independent investigation, and gave them unrestricted access to our files and personnel, and instructed them to follow the evidence, wherever it may lead. They collected and analyzed numerous documents, conducted multiple interviews, and performed an

## Prayer of Lament

Friday, November 2  
5:45 p.m.  
in the CLC Chapel  
sisters, agrégées,  
associates, and staff  
are invited

unbiased evaluation of all evidence gathered. Ultimately, they determined that Sister Mary Carmel Skeabeck, SSJ, did abuse a student on numerous occasions in the late 1950s while teaching at Villa Maria Academy in Erie, Pennsylvania. We then gave the information to the District Attorney's office.

The evidence gathered during the investigation suggests that reports were made at the time the abuse was occurring. Unfortunately, key individuals are now deceased and there is no written record of the reports in our files. The evidence also suggests that some corrective actions may have been taken when this occurred more

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For news and dates regarding Chapter, see page 5.

**Diocesan Mass  
for deceased  
men and  
women religious  
Monday,  
November 19  
7:00 p.m.  
Mercy  
Motherhouse**

See page 6 for details.

**Remembering  
our deceased  
sisters &  
associates  
Sunday  
November 18**

Details on page 4

## mission possible

Sr. Ann Marie Cappello, SSJ, Mission Integration Coordinator

I recently attended the SSJ Neighborhood Network volunteer dinner which is held annually in appreciation for the many who offer their time to the ministry.

During the program, one of the SSJNN board members reminisced about his years as a volunteer with the Neighborhood Network. He recalled that in the early days of the SSJNN, the volunteer dinners were held at Villa Joseph, the congregation's retreat cottage on the shores of Lake Erie in North East, PA.

As time went on and volunteers grew in number, the venue had to be moved to a larger space to accommodate the growing number of volunteers.

Today, there are 348 volunteers who serve the SSJNN at both locations, east and west. They share their talents in a variety of ways: working at the Monday night soup kitchen,

tutoring, as receptionists, gardening, helping in the office, and mentoring in the bicycle repair program. The individual went on to thank the Sisters for providing the opportunity for individuals to do volunteer work.

A video recapping the various activities sponsored by the SSJNN was shown and six volunteers who died during this past year were remembered.

As I interacted with many of the people in attendance, they repeatedly thanked the sisters for the wonderful work being done. I reminded them that it was their generosity in sharing their time and talents that help accomplish this work.

I also was reminded of another group of wonderful volunteers as I attended the annual Fall Tea Party for the sisters at the Community Living Center.

Two volunteers served us coffee and tea while others made delicious cookies. There are 14 volunteers who help Sue Ann Wisniewski with all the activities she plans for the sisters. These volunteers help in a variety of ways: folding laundry, helping with bell choir, playing bingo and games with the sisters, sewing bibs or cover-ups, reading, helping sisters write letters, accompanying sisters on their bus trips, or going along to doctor appointments.

I would like to thank all of the wonderful volunteers at our sponsored ministries – SSJNN West and East, Saint Mary's Home of Erie, St. James Haven and St. Patrick's Haven and at our Community Living Center, for all they do to help make the SSJ *mission possible*.

## painful time

(Continued from page 1)

than 50 years ago, however insufficient by today's standards. But, again, there is no record of this. We state unequivocally that we began taking action the moment we were made aware of this allegation just a few months ago, contrary to what the headline conveyed.

## Reporting encouraged

We ask anyone who has previously reported abuse (particularly, pre-2002) or witnessed misconduct by a member of our congregation to report today. 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). Victims or concerned individuals also are welcome to contact the Sisters of St. Joseph directly to report abuse at 814-452-8903.

Counseling assistance is also available for survivors at no charge and available by contacting the Victim Assistance line at 814-452-8903

We understand that no apology, investigation, or counseling will ever undo what has happened. We intend to fully cooperate with law enforcement, shine light on past misconduct, aid in healing, and take steps to ensure that today's children do not have to

endure any abuse, now or in the future.

*We strongly encourage anyone who has experienced sexual abuse by a member of our congregation, or any affiliated employee or volunteer, to report it.*

*Victims or concerned individuals also are welcome to contact the Sisters of St. Joseph directly to report abuse at 814-452-8903. Counseling assistance is also available for survivors at no charge and available by contacting the Victim Assistance line at 814-452-8903*

## Words of support

Following are some excerpts from the many messages and comments received over the past few days:

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## Annual SSJ Thanksgiving Dinner

### 30 years of kindness – thanks to you



It's almost turkey time – which means our Thanksgiving Dinner plans are in full swing.

If this year is like last year, we will serve nearly 800 meals on Thanksgiving Day. Hundreds of guests will join us for dinner at Gannon's Waldron Center and even more will have meals delivered to their homes.

Volunteer positions are filling up, but we still need additional help with meal delivery to homebound neighbors. We're

also looking for a few more Sisters to be present at the dinner to visit with guests.

We also need pies (at least 100). Frozen pies should be delivered to the Sisters of St. Joseph Community Living Center by 4 p.m., Friday, Nov. 16.

Fresh (unfrozen) pies should be delivered by 8 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 21.

If you would like to volunteer or if you're planning on baking or buying pies for the dinner, please contact Carol Hermann at 814-836-4198, or email her at [carol.hermann@ssjerie.org](mailto:carol.hermann@ssjerie.org).

As always, the dinner is open to anyone in need of a meal or companionship on

Thanksgiving Day. Doors will open to guests at 11 a.m. and serving ends at 12:30 p.m.

Those who are unable to attend may arrange for delivery by calling 814-836-4198 between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 20. This is the ONLY time delivered meals can be requested.

Donations to the Fund are used for the costs associated with the Thanksgiving Dinner. Gifts over and above our expenses will be distributed to area food pantries, soup kitchens and social service agencies immediately following the Liturgy of Thanksgiving in January.

### painful time

(Continued from page 2)

*Know that you and your community are held in my/our prayers at this time. So sorry that we all have to go through this darkness to reach the light. Be assured of my/our support. In peace,  
Anne Wambach, OSB*

*I have just viewed your website and read your honest, humble and courageous posting on sexual abuse by one of your Sisters some years ago. I am a Sister of St. Joseph in London, Ontario, Canada, and a friend of (Sister) Josette Gocella, having served with her at the International Centre in France. I am touched, and edified (to use an old-fashioned word) by your honesty, and wonderfully straightforward approach to this painful and embarrassing situation in our Church. Congratulations to you, and thank you for modelling this transparent*

*and truly Gospel approach.  
Sr. Mary Diesbourg, CSJ  
London, Ontario, Canada*

*Dear Sisters.  
Know that you are all in my thoughts and prayers at this difficult time.  
Carolann McLaughlin, OSB*

*Just saw your statement. It is beautifully crafted and so honest and transparent. Thank you for doing such a great job with it.  
Annmarie Sanders, IHM  
Director of Communications  
Leadership Conference  
of Women Religious*

*I know this has been most difficult, but please know you have the respect and support of many. You handled this as well as anyone could.  
God Bless,  
Tina Mengine  
Sisters of St. Joseph  
Mission and Ministries  
Foundation Board*

*I just had the opportunity to read your press release. It is so clear and informative. You are so open in inviting others to come forth. You have handled this so well. Lots of love and prayers continue to be with you,  
Michele Beiter, SSJ  
Sisters of St. Joseph, Buffalo  
Leadership Team*

*I just saw on Facebook your acknowledgement of abuse by a member of the Congregation. First of all, I would like to tell you how eloquent and authentic your acknowledgement of the truth of the abuse is. Your words express the empathy and sorrow you feel for the victim. Furthermore, the depth of pain regarding how inconsistent with the heart and soul of the charisma the Sisters feel. This was voiced without any kind of deflection, excuse or denial. Please know that my respect and affection stand with you and the Sisters.  
Sharon Santia*

## get to know ssj associates



### Meet Ann & Gary Flick

If you attended liturgical events at the CLC, you probably saw Ann taking pictures and Gary playing the clarinet. Gary and Ann became associates in 2009 with Sr. Martha Howick as their mentor.

Ann became acquainted with the sisters while she was the Director of Financial Aid at Villa Maria College. She spent most of her career in social work. Gary attended St. Joseph Grade School where he was taught by the sisters. After college, he went to work in the family business, Johnson & Flick.

Although now retired, Gary keeps busy as a member of three bands and is treasurer of the Rotary. Gary and Ann are involved in their respective parishes, Ann at Luther Memorial and Gary at St. Peter Cathedral. They are members of a Marriage Encounter Group and enjoy participating in many activities together, especially fitness and travel. Their most memorable trip was to Israel. They are looking forward to attending the Passion Play in Germany in 2020. As Ann puts it, they feel blessed to be associates.

## associates' news and happenings

Along with the wonderful celebration of Thanksgiving, November is also the month we remember those who have gone before us and rest in eternal peace. We will remember and honor sisters and associates who have died in the past year with a **Memorial Prayer Service** on Sunday, November 18 at 2 p.m. in the Chapel of the Community Living Center. Our special intentions will also remember all our departed family and friends. All are invited to join in prayer and remembrance. Refreshments will follow in the Gathering Room.

Many **prayer groups** continue to meet throughout the months. Many use the Maxims

for reflection; others use spiritual books; others use scripture. Sharing the Sisters of St. Joseph charism and mission is the core of these gatherings as we share our thoughts and everyday experiences. If you are not in a group, we welcome you! Just call the Associate Office (814-836-4134) for more information.

One of the prayer groups will be hosting **"Movie with the Sisters"** on Tuesday, November 27 at 1:30 p.m. in the Gathering Room. All are welcome to attend and enjoy a short movie and refreshments. This will be a great time to hear the sister's stories and tell your own, too!

Please join us  
prayer service  
to remember  
Deceased Sisters  
& Associates  
Sunday, November 18  
2:00 p.m.  
CLC Chapel  
Refreshments to follow

### We remember:

S. Hildegarde Boxer  
S. Mary Thomas Downing  
S. Marie Eileen Moyer  
S. Joachim Onuffer  
S. Mary Alice Reed  
S. Dorinda Young

### Associates:

Rachelle "Rae" Bishop  
Renee Caldwell Calabrese  
Claire M. Gredler  
Carol Mando  
Jean McKee  
Maryanne Niewiedomski  
Virginia Pacuraw  
Genevieve Skrzypczak





## chapter of affairs and elections

### Chapter chairpersons

**Sister Mary Drexler**  
814-824-5557 or  
814-464-3307

**Sister Moira Sullivan**  
814-452-6580 or  
814-460-8671

### Important chapter dates

November 10 & 11, 2018	Mission & Charism
February 9 & 10, 2019	Membership
March 9 & 10, 2019	Resources
April 6 & 7, 2019	Elections*
May 4 & 5, 2019	Elections*

### chapter info at [www.ssjerie.org](http://www.ssjerie.org)

Be sure to regularly check the special chapter page in the LOGIN area of the ssj website [www.ssjerie.org](http://www.ssjerie.org).



Information has been added since the Chapter meeting in September. You may find the information helpful in your group discussions.

### Delegates' Statement

*With the guidance of the Holy Spirit and our mutual trust in one another, we commit to make decisions by praying, being informed, listening and speaking our truth in a non-judgmental manner. Collegiality and Subsidiarity will continue to be the congregational decision making process. We accept our responsibility to support and carry out all decisions.*

### Chapter Reminders!

Just a reminder about upcoming chapter meetings on **November 10 & 11, 2018**. Please prepare by carefully reviewing what was previously distributed and by logging into the login area of [www.ssjerie.org](http://www.ssjerie.org) to review relevant chapter materials and articles.

### notes

With gratitude for a prayerful Jubilee liturgy, the Ministry of music, the delicious meal and a thank you to all who prepared the meal. For all who made the day so wonderful. Also, for the notes, cards and gifts. Keeping you in prayer.  
Sister Frances Therese Matia

Dear sisters, agrégées and associates, I can't thank you enough for all the kindness given to me in honor of my Diamond Jubilee. All your remembrances, cards, gifts, and the many donations made to our various ministries are greatly appreciated and I know they will be put to good

use. Thank you for sharing in this special day.  
Gratefully,  
Sister Joseph Marie Fitzgerald

Sisters, agrégées, associates and friends,  
Thank you for your prayers, cards, gifts and all you did to make our Diamond Jubilee celebration one to remember. Also, thanks to all who made donations to the ministry of your choice in our name.  
Gratefully,  
Sister Naomi Wood

Dear sisters, associates and agrégées,  
We would like to extend our

sincere appreciation for all of the blessings we have received over the past few years during our agrégée formation. We are truly blessed to have had love and support from the formation team, mentors and all those who have shared their time and talents with us. We will remember you in our prayers and look forward to continuing our faith journey with you.  
Jeanne, Judi and Teresa



## events, happenings and ministry news

**St. Patrick's Haven** is always in need of visitors one evening each month an hour at 7 p.m. If you are interested, contact Betsy at 836-4153 or [betsy.wiest@ssjerie.org](mailto:betsy.wiest@ssjerie.org).

### no laughing matter

**Jr.'s Last Laugh** hosted a fundraiser to benefit **St.**



**Patrick's Haven** and the Upper Room on **October 3**. Thank you to all who attended, the sponsors and corporate execs who gave their best standup comedy for a great cause.

### SSJ Neighborhood Network Quilt Raffle

A beautiful quilt handmade by SSJ Associates Gina Adams and Brenda Desser will be raffled on May 4, 2019 at the 13th annual Guess That Tune Gala. Quilt dimensions 88' x 103'. Tickets are \$5 each or 3 for \$10. Call 454-7814 for more information.



### reflections during Advent and Lent

Sisters, agrégées and associates are invited to give a reflection during our Sunday evening prayer services during Advent and Lent. Please contact Sister Lucille DeStefano if you are willing to share a reflection during these Liturgical seasons.



### brown bag & basketry

**November 5 & 6**

**4:00 - 8:30pm**

Heritage Apartments  
2547 W. 8th St. (ground floor)  
Enter the door at the south end. Parking is next to the gym.

Cost: \$30 Please bring: bag supper, old towel, dish pan.  
Please make your reservation as soon as possible: **836-4139 or 969-1429 or s.andrefeulner@ssjerie.org**  
Next Class: December 3 & 4

### remembering deceased clergy and religious

The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL, Bishop of Erie, cordially invites members of religious communities, their associates or oblates, seminarians, members of the Serra Club and the public to join in prayer for deceased men and women religious at the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy In the Chapel at the Mercy Motherhouse 444 East Grandview Boulevard, Erie Monday, November 19, 2018 7:00 p.m.

Please join us in the Mercy Motherhouse Dining Room for a social gathering following the Liturgy.

## Peace and justice news/happenings

### Take Back the Site November 13 5:15 p.m.



A Take Back the Site will be held for Phillip Clark on November 13, 2018 at 5:15 p.m. at 336 W. 29th St., Erie, PA.

### Silent Peace Walk November 20 4:00 p.m.

A Silent Peace Walk will be held in the CLC Chapel on November 20, 2018 at 4 p.m. We will be walking in Thanksgiving of all the gifts God has given us.

### Elks learn about homelessness

Betsy Wiest gave a presentation to the Elks Club Auxiliary on homelessness in Erie. The group was interested in learning about St. Patrick's Haven and its mission of helping homeless men.

### directory changes

New addresses for:  
**Agrégée Tammy Van Buren**  
713 Michigan Blvd  
Erie, PA 16505  
Same phone #814-397-4879

**Associate Eleanor Niewiedomski**  
Crawford County Care Center  
Room 109B  
20881 State Highway 198  
Saegertown PA 16433  
814-763-2445

New email for :  
**Sister Mary Arnold Tann**  
[s.matann@ssjerie.org](mailto:s.matann@ssjerie.org)

## where's the justice?

### U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph — Resolution to Action During This Election Season

The U.S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph join with NETWORK Catholic Social Justice Lobby, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), and other faith-based advocates in seeking federal policies that reflect gospel principles. Our mission of unity calls us to the realization that an economy and a society of inclusion depends on good policy.

It is up to *we the people* to make our voices heard and vote our conscience. Partisan in-fighting and conflict between factions of Americans will not end unless a common understanding of values emerges. Until we can mend relationships among *we the people*, there will be no repairing the fabric of our nation. What's required is a civic transformation that shifts our nation's collective consciousness and public discourse.

For Christian Americans, this is where our **gospel values** are put to the test, and we have a responsibility to test ourselves. We look to the scriptures for guidance and profess belonging to the body of Christ, and so the Gospels provide us with our template. Individually and collectively, Christians are called to engage with our fellow Americans — particularly those we view as sinful — in a seeking,

loving, forgiving manner and with the intention of reconciliation.

How can I seek out those with different political leanings and find a space to connect with them? How can I facilitate authentic and respectful dialogue? How might I put my fellow citizen who is fearful and suspicious at ease? How have I failed to acknowledge my own sinful contribution to our divided nation?

As we near election day, perhaps Rumi's timeless wisdom could provide our mantra:

*"Raise your words not your voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder."*

### teaming up against trafficking

Mayor Joseph Schember, Chief Dan Spizarny and members of the Mayor's team met with Betsy Wiest and Carol Finotti of the Crime Victim Center in the Mayor's office on October 2. The group discussed initiatives to increase awareness of human trafficking in the Erie area and collaboration with the Erie Police Department.



### getting the word out

Betsy Wiest and Carol Finotti of the Crime Victim Center of Erie recently gave a presentation on human trafficking to the Indivisible Group in Edinboro. Indivisible is a grass roots organization of diverse, progressive constituents who organize locally, developing and building consciousness

and solidarity to promote advocacy and electoral work at the local, state and national level.

### working with border patrol

Betsy Wiest met with Assistant Patrol Agent Joseph Kruszynski and Carol Finotti of the Crime Victim Center to discuss border patrol actions to identify and assist victims of human trafficking. Much of the activity they find pertains to immigrants promised employment who find themselves "working off" the cost of bringing them to Erie.

### on the road for awareness

Betsy Wiest and Carol Finotti met with numerous representatives from the offices of local legislators Dan Laughlin, Glenn Thompson, and Patrick Toomey to discuss human trafficking in the area, including the fact that not all interstate rest stops have trafficking hotline notices posted. The legislators have agreed to work with PennDot to develop a notice that educates the public and provides resources for victims. Notices will be placed in restrooms and lobby areas of all rest stops.

### welcome new citizens

Betsy Wiest attended the Immigration Naturalization Ceremony at the Federal Court House on September 27 and gave a welcoming address to the new citizens. Each citizen was then presented with a Be Kind magnet.

## Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania

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E-mail: publicrelations@ssjerie.org



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SSJERIE  
.ORG

## when we vote, we win!

Who we elect matters. This was the message from NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus led by Sister Simone Campbell as they rolled into Erie on October 22<sup>nd</sup> with their Tax Justice Truth Tour. Nuns on the Bus is traveling across the country ahead of the 2018 midterm elections to focus on tax justice and reasonable revenue for responsible programs.

We know the 2017 Tax Law hurts our communities while giving handouts to the wealthiest in our nation. We must work for just tax policies that mend the gaps in our nation. We must also assure that affordable healthcare is available for all citizens. The mid-term elections are almost here and we are a deeply divided country. This is a time to

take seriously our right and obligation to vote. Who we elect matters now more than at any time in our history. No one political party represents all values. They are all flawed. No one issue should determine the way we vote. The time is now to make a conscious decision on the candidates who best (not perfectly) represent our values and what we perceive to be the greatest good. Those who vote differently from us are not evil, stupid, or our enemy. They are fellow Americans living in a democratic society where our differences do not need to divide us. Sister Simone encouraged everyone to "do your homework". She said, "Change starts with voting." and offered a comparison chart to fill out and share with those who aren't familiar with the

current political scene. You can download a copy of this comparison tool at: <https://networklobby.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SidebySide2018.pdf>. Sister Simone told the crowd, "If you've got a bad law, you can work to change it. Change starts with voting." So, on November 6<sup>th</sup>, please take the time to compare the candidates and vote.



Betsy Wiest (left) and Sr. Simone Campbell.

