

petite Sisters of St. Joseph
of Northwestern Pennsylvania

journeys

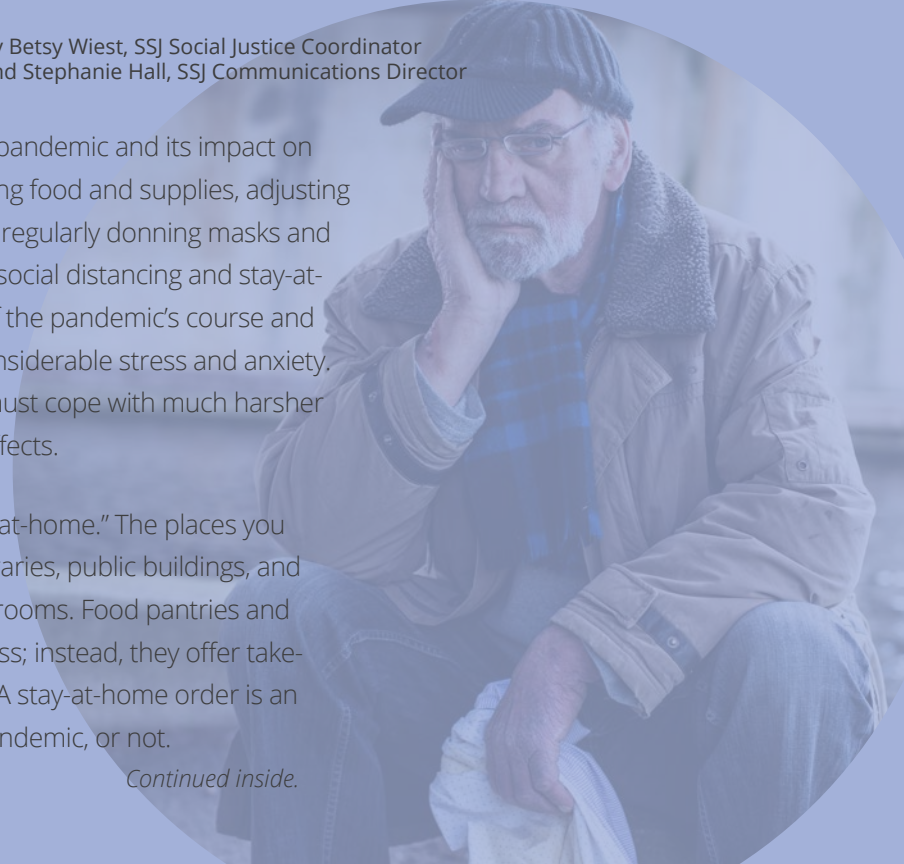
stay-at-home orders *a perspective*

by Betsy Wiest, SSJ Social Justice Coordinator
and Stephanie Hall, SSJ Communications Director

We're all feeling overwhelmed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on our daily routines and our lives. We are stockpiling food and supplies, adjusting to losing jobs or working from our kitchens, and regularly donning masks and gloves as we adapt to the realities of mandated social distancing and stay-at-home orders. Together with the uncertainties of the pandemic's course and our fears of getting sick, we are experiencing considerable stress and anxiety. Despite these difficulties, there are some who must cope with much harsher realities and the possibility of more significant effects.

Imagine being homeless and being told to "stay-at-home." The places you usually go during the day (restaurants, malls, libraries, public buildings, and parks) are closed; you can't even use public restrooms. Food pantries and places that provided meals no longer allow access; instead, they offer take-out meals for you to eat elsewhere. But where? A stay-at-home order is an oxymoron that underscores your daily plight, pandemic, or not.

Continued inside.



Few people talk to you, and you have limited access to information. While others may be dealing with an overload of news stories about COVID-19, all you know is what you hear on the streets, most of which are rumors. Lack of information, or worse, an abundance of misinformation, generates fear. Everyone is fearful, but fear coupled with knowledge is different than fear alone. For you, it's just fear.

The mission of the Sisters of St Joseph, *unity of neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God*, has always been fulfilled through ministries responding to the needs of the era and area. That holds true today, even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.



There are more than a dozen shelters in the city of Erie, Pennsylvania that serve homeless men. Upon news of the COVID-19 pandemic, Erie County and the Erie County Department of Health began working with the various service providers to ensure there would be available shelters for the homeless population. A plea was made for local shelters to stay open and to accept previously banned individuals. Both an overflow shelter and a designated

quarantine location were identified. Even **St. Patrick's Haven**, a long-standing ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph, established 35 years ago, has made operational changes to continue responding to the needs of the day.

As many as 24 men are welcomed each night as guests (they are never referred to as clients) at St. Patrick's Haven. They are respected and valued as individuals created in God's likeness, regardless of their stories or their circumstances. Hot coffee or cocoa, a snack, a hot shower, and a clean bed are provided. Extended hours of operation now allow the guests to arrive earlier in the evening. Unfortunately, there isn't enough staff to keep the shelter open around the clock. When morning comes, the men have to leave for the day until they can return in the evening.

*"Our mission is displayed
in our actions."*

During the pandemic, Executive Director, Betsy Wiest, holds periodic meetings with the guests to keep them informed. A typically quiet and reserved group, the men are opening up more and expressing their concerns. In a word, what they feel is fear. They are scared. They have no place to go. They fear for their safety. They want to know why the day shelter is closed and where they can go during the day. They want to know how they can get in to the overflow shelter if St. Patrick's Haven is full. They want to know what will happen to them if they get sick. They are afraid of losing jobs. They wonder if they can get gift cards for coffee during the day. And they ask if St. Patrick's Haven will have to close. Although closing isn't being considered, Betsy

reminds them that their help is needed to keep things in operation.

“Our mission is displayed in our actions and in this crisis, I can see that mission of caring for the “dear neighbor” in how our guests treat each another, how they care for one another, look out for one another, and how they care for the surroundings,” Wiest said.

Many of the guests are regulars and return each night. They have developed a sense of community, and they exhibit a sense of ownership in the building. When they spill something, they clean it up. One guest used his food stamp money to purchase coffee for the Haven because he wanted to help. One long-time former guest saved money to travel to Australia to be with family. He made it as far as California when the pandemic hit. Borders were closed, and he couldn't leave the U.S. He returned to St. Patrick's Haven because he knew it was clean and safe, and that he would be welcomed back among those who care about him.

Part of that community feel comes from the on-site, live-in managers at the Haven. Former guests themselves, the managers know firsthand what it means to be homeless. They are among those on the frontlines as essential workers whose commitment makes it possible for shelters such as St. Patrick's Haven to remain open. They are the helpers that Fred Rogers of *Mister Rogers Neighborhood* always encouraged us to seek. Even at this challenging time, there are helpers. They are the individuals and organizations with missions to serve others and to respond to the needs of the day.

responding to the needs of the day

Since the 17th century in France, the Sisters of St. Joseph have responded to the needs of the era and area. Today, SSJ ministries are at the forefront of serving the dear neighbor during the COVID-19 pandemic.

At **Saint Mary's Home of Erie** the social service and activities departments are assisting residents with phone calls, ZOOM, and FaceTime, to help them connect with their families. Residents play bingo from their doorways with the staff calling numbers from the hall. And the treat cart makes rounds with a different snack each day.

For the **SSJ Neighborhood Network**, the focus is on food, hygiene, and cleaning products. Takeout meals are offered at its weekly soup kitchen, and emergency food boxes and toiletries are distributed at both SSJNN locations. Work has started at the gardens and urban farm following social distancing guidelines.

St. James Haven in Meadville, PA began operating 24/7 to accommodate guests with no place to go during the day. The local community responded to a call for help and as a result, food, toiletries, hygiene and cleaning products are delivered regularly.

For more information on the Sisters of St. Joseph and their ministries, visit www.ssjerie.org.

companions on the journey

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we find ourselves on a journey in unsettling times. It seems that everything has changed. We have more questions than answers. We're not sure when or how things will work out, but we know that they will. We have hope and the promise that "this too shall pass."

We also have companions – like you – who have shared our journeys before and who continue along with us today. Many of you ask how we are doing and how you can help.

Rest assured, our ministries continue to serve the area's most vulnerable – the homeless, the

If the COVID-19 crisis teaches us nothing else, let it underscore that we are all companions on this journey. We are interdependent.

by Dotty Hanna, Development Director

disadvantaged, and the elderly. The needs of these dear neighbors were great before the pandemic and they are even greater now.

Likewise, the needs of the congregation -- especially for resources to care for our elderly sisters -- were significant before the crisis. The economic effects of this time will only make it more challenging for all of us to prepare for the future.

We recognize how difficult this time is for everyone. So, first and foremost, know that we hold you in our prayers. We ask that you do the same for us and those we serve.

For those of you who can, we ask you to consider a gift to help us respond to the ever-changing needs of this challenging time. Your support – through gift or prayer – will help more than you know.

Thank you. We are blessed to have you as companions on this journey.

To make a gift, visit us online at www.ssjerie.org or use the enclosed envelope.



message from leadership



(L-R): Carol Morehouse, SSJ;
Mary Drexler, SSJ; Phyllis McCracken, SSJ

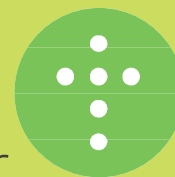
We are in the midst of the Easter season – a season of new life and hope. Yet all around us are signs of death and loss, of disappointment, and lack of hope. Now, more than ever, we need Easter. We need to celebrate resurrection and new life right here, right now.

Jesus appeared to his disciples amid their sense of despair and great loss. What unfolded in their encounter? Glimmers of hope emerged and sadness slowly turned to joy as they talked about what was happening. Encouragement and support came from the disciples. Jesus told them, “Go to Galilee and tell my disciples that I have risen.” Slowly the message got out as Jesus broke through their barriers of doubt and fear.

The homeless in our community experience that same doubt and fear, especially during this pandemic. St. Patrick’s Haven in the city of Erie and St. James Haven in Meadville, PA provide refuge, assurances, and hope for homeless men. Perhaps this helps them break through their barriers of doubt and fear. Easter is happening in their midst.

May the risen Jesus break through our barriers and be the glimmer of hope we need to reach out and bring alive the message of Easter today. May we hear Jesus tell us, “Go to your Galilee and proclaim a message of hope and joy.” Alleluia!

we
remember



Deceased Sisters:

Mary Arlene Menz, SSJ

March 19, 2020

Deceased Associates:

Agnes Priscaro

December 8, 2019

Ben Montifiori

December 22, 2019

Adrienne M. Ward

January 4, 2020

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take action

Dream Act of 2019

Passed by the House and headed to the Senate, this bill will provide security for 800,000 DACA recipients and grant them permanent safety and security. It upholds the inherent dignity of these individuals by recognizing their contributions to the safety, prosperity and well-being of our country. We must take action NOW as the Supreme Court prepares to issue a decision.

TAKE ACTION:

- **Contact** and implore your U.S. Senator to urge Senator McConnell to allow a vote and to pass a clean Dream Act of 2019 (S. 874).
- **TAKE ACTION** at www.ssjerie.org and listen to stories of DACA recipients.
- **Pray** for the protection of our undocumented community in these dire times.

Prisons and COVID-19

Imagine being locked in jail or prison for a non-violent crime or because you are unable to post bail. Perhaps you have to share a cell with someone who is coughing and feverish. Hand sanitizer might be considered contraband. The U.S. Attorney General has called on wardens and other officials to consider compassionate releases during the pandemic for non-violent offenders.

TAKE ACTION:

- **TAKE ACTION** at www.ssjerie.org. Sign the **MomsRising** petition letter and tell the DHS, ICE, our governors, mayors, and sheriffs to reduce the number of incarcerated persons through powers of clemency, furlough, parole, and compassionate release.

