

interim

Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania

Won't You Be My Neighbor?

Alleluia! Jesus is risen!

We are now in that season of hope, new life, and joy! Easter has always been a favorite time of mine. Since I was in grade school, the spectacular display of spring color and new life going from the seemingly barren and brown earth to budding trees and flowers poking their heads out to show their beauty. It has always been a time of slow, spectacular richness. We can say similar things about the richness of Lent, Holy Week, and the Easter vigil.

Even the first few weeks after Easter are filled with stories...stories that engage, challenge faith, and draw one into the richness of the Easter season. There is the story of Jesus fixing breakfast on the shore for his friends... How cool is that? Especially after all they have just gone through. Another favorite is the Emmaus story. Jesus joins two

disciples on the way to Emmaus. They converse but the friends don't recognize Jesus until they sit down and break bread with him. Have you ever had a time where your eyes were opened and you truly did recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread?

Jesus breaks into encounters with his disciples at unexpected times to let them and us know that he is near. Do we recognize him? Do we take advantage of those encounters?

Lastly, what would Jesus' encounter with you be like? Where would he seek you out? Go on an Easter journey with Jesus this month. You pick the time and the place, Happy Easter and many blessings!



Sister Mary

SAVE THE DATES Pre-Chapter and Chapter meetings

May 16, 2026

June 27, 2026

October 3 & 4,
2026

November 7 & 8,
2026

April 13 - 17,
2027



April 25th Community Day

9 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Gathering Space

The Pre-Chapter Planning Committee will share information from their meeting with the Canon lawyer.

Reservations are required by April 13th.

Please email RSVP@ssjerie.org or call 814-836-4040.

Please indicate if you plan to stay for lunch.

- The May 16, 2026 Community day has been **cancelled**.
- Sisters, Associates, and Agrégées are welcome to attend the June 27, 2026 Community Meeting.

MISSION: POSSIBLE!

Thanks for Making the Mission Possible

Sr. Ann Marie Cappello, SSJ, Mission Integration Coordinator

"Shawls...made for centuries universal and embracing, symbolic of an inclusive, unconditionally loving God. They wrap, enfold, comfort, cover, give solace, mother, hug, shelter, and beautify. Those who have received these shawls have been uplifted and affirmed, as if given wings to fly above their troubles...." *Janet Severi Bristow*

Janet Severi Bristow and Victoria Galo, graduates of the 1997 Women's Leadership Institute at the Hartford Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut, began the Prayer Shawl Ministry in 1998. It has developed into a worldwide ecumenical ministry.

The prayer shawl ministry combines the love of knitting or crocheting with the atmosphere of prayer as the maker of the shawl prays

before, during, and after it has been created.

In 2006, after Associate Mary Lou Rathers experienced being a part of the prayer shawl group in Florida, she volunteered to start the SSJ Associate prayer shawl ministry here. A small group of associates, sisters, and friends came together once a month to pray and make prayer shawls. However, since then, several parishes have begun a prayer shawl ministry, and many associates began participating in their respective parish groups. At the present time, there is no formal prayer shawl group that meets at the CLC; however, a few associates, sisters' and friends continue to make shawls at home and drop off the completed shawls to Cathy Fresch at the Administration building. Cathy

continues to distribute these shawls as requested and often mails them to people out of town upon request.

Over the years, we have received many thank you notes from recipients of prayer shawls. Our Prayer Shawl Ministry has touched the lives of the dear neighbor near and far. This reaching out to the dear neighbor without distinction is what makes the SSJ Mission Possible!

If you wish to make a shawl and donate it to the SSJ Prayer Shawl Ministry, please contact Cathy Fresch by calling her office at 814-836-4253 or email her at cathy.fresch@ssjerie.org.

Likewise, if someone you know would benefit from the love and comfort offered by a prayer shawl, please contact Cathy Fresch.

A Lesson in Manners from Emily Post

It is inconsiderate, but unfortunately common, for guests to fail to RSVP.

Anyone who receives an invitation has an important obligation to reply as soon as possible. And yet so many don't. Some forget; others procrastinate and then feel guilty, so they delay even longer.

**Hospitality is important to us
but we need your consideration and respect.**

PLEASE RSVP!



On 3/28/26, Sr. Phyllis DiFuccia and Agrégée Betsy Wiest attended the No Kings Rally in Perry Square.

Associate and Agrégée News

What's Going On In Your Life?

We want to know what is going on in the lives of our Agrégées and Associates! Are you celebrating a special anniversary or birthday? Is there an addition to your family? Maybe you are taking an exciting trip or have started a new job. Don't be shy about telling us. We really want to know. Sharing details of your lives is one way for us to stay connected. If you have something to share, email us at SSJNews@ssjerie.org.

Continuing Connections. Having met at the Federation Event in Kansas City this past summer, Agrégée Charlene Kellerman and Sr. Chris Pologa reconnected recently at an event in Syracuse, NY, along with other CSJs and CSJ Associates from the Utica and Syracuse area. In the photo, the group had a moment with composer Dan Schutte (Here I Am, Lord). As religious life continues to evolve, the importance of making and strengthening these connections and relationships becomes more evident.



Pictured L- R: Pat J. CSJA, Sr. Lynn, Pat P. CSJA, Dan, Charlene, Sr. Chris, Sr. Betty

In Memorium

Please remember the following and their families in prayer:

Associate Gerald Derby, 92, died on February 25th in Meadville. Gerald became an Associate in 2005. His wife Loeta, deceased, was also an Associate.



Associate Mary Stephany Theiss Lyons, 81, died on March 28th. Mary and her deceased husband Tom became Associates in 2014.



Associate Jon Fuhrman, 73, died on March 6th at the Cleveland Clinic. Jon and his wife Mary both became Associates in 2011.



Norman Stark Esq., husband of Associate Donna Geiger, died on March 1st.

Associate Ruth Mercier, 89, died on March 9th. Ruth and her late husband Paul became Associates in 1985 and were part of the team of original founders of St. James Haven in Meadville.



Rudy Passauer, husband of retired CLC Resident Care Coordinator, Mary Beth Passauer, died unexpectedly on March 15th.



*May eternal light shine upon them, O Lord,
and may they rest in peace.*

Retreat Opportunities at Stella Niagara

For more than 50 years, the **Center of Renewal (COR)** has provided a welcoming interfaith retreat center sponsored by Sisters of St. Francis of Penance & Christian Charity, Holy Name Province. Check out some of these retreat opportunities and [CLICK HERE](#) to view more offerings.

Three Wonderful Retreats Presented by Sr. Marcella Kiesel, OSF

A Franciscan Sister of Penance and Christian Charity, an international congregation. Her ministries have included registered nursing, college teaching, rural and urban work directly with the poor, teaching English to immigrants, and directing retreats throughout the United States, Canada, and in Tanzania, East Africa. Sister Marcella presently resides in a hermitage on campus and is available for Spiritual Direction through the Center of Renewal.

Saturday, April 18, 2026 - 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Spiritual Transformation In Suffering



We can each experience a wide range of suffering in our daily lives: Physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, social, occupational, relationship, divorce, trauma, financial, diminishment of any kind. This special retreat day will open new possibilities about how to deal with suffering in our lives with a meaningful connection to our own spirituality.

Cost: \$65.00

Reservation Deadline - April 2, 2026

Includes retreat, lunch and the book Teilhard de Chardin Seven Stages of Suffering: a Spiritual Path for Transformation by Louis M. Savary and Patricia H Berne

Saturday, May 9, 2026 - 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Mandalas:

Windows on Our Spiritual Journey

Where am I? God asked Adam,
"Where are you?" (Gen.3:9)

How would you answer that question? Plan now to enhance your spiritual journey by learning about how mandalas can impact your personal spirituality, along with helping to establish sacred spaces for continued insight and growth. Explore self-revelation and stories from our own sub-consciousness.

COST: \$65.00 INCLUDES RETREAT, & LUNCH
(LIMITED RESERVATIONS AVAILABLE)

Reservation Deadline - April 25, 2026



The Lord opened the understanding
of my unbelieving heart so that I should recall my sins.
-Saint Patrick

Saturday, June 6, 2026 - 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

ENERGY CENTERS RETREAT (CHAKRAS)



Where we place our energy is self-revealing on our spiritual path. Chakra is a Sanskrit word that means disk or wheel, referring to energy centers in the body. The chakra system originated in India between 1500 and 500 BC, and can be thought of as our body's subtle energy system. The focus is on the Seven major energy centers. Each center has a unique meaning about our body, life, breath, mind, intellect, and overall sense of well-being. Explore connections between body and spirit, personal and societal, in this insightful retreat day.

COST: \$65.00 INCLUDES RETREAT, & LUNCH
(LIMITED RESERVATIONS AVAILABLE)

Reservation Deadline - May 23, 2026

**Note: Fees & deposits are non-refundable,
administration fees for transfers**

From the Spiritual Growth and Development Team

SAVE THE DATE

Conference Retreat - June 14-19, 2026 With Sr. Melannie Svoboda

Sr. Melannie is a Sister of Notre Dame from Chardon, OH. She is the author of many books including *Hanging onto Hope*.

WRAC (Women Religious Archives Collaborative) Update

Even though WRAC is still in the process of construction, their staff is planning ahead for their display area. Each Congregation or Monastery committed to being a part of WRAC was recently asked to submit the following things: a brief written history of the Community, 12-20 historical photos, 12-20 ministry

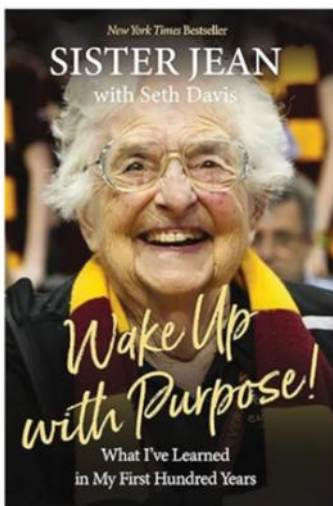
photos, a video explaining the Community's history if one is available, and a completed submission form including the Community's mission statement.

WRAC will use 2 minutes of the video and other materials to do a presentation on each Congregation or Monastery. When the building is complete

and open to the public, visitors will be able to use an interactive display to look up any Congregation or Monastery to see their presentation.

For more information on WRAC, click on this link to access their March newsletter:

https://mailchi.mp/archives_collaborative/wrac-march-2026-news



Book Discussion:
*Wake Up
with
Purpose!*

Participants in last book discussion shared:

"I loved sharing in the wisdom and life of others."

"I feel closer to each member after meeting and sharing."

Join us, from near or far, for a one-session discussion of *Wake Up with Purpose! What I've Learned in My First Hundred Years* by Sr. Jean Dolores Schmidt—a joyful and wisdom-filled memoir from the beloved Loyola Chicago matriarch and basketball icon. The book is available at online retailers and some libraries.

Click [HERE](#) to register and receive the Zoom link for:

☐ May 13, 2026 | 6–8 PM or

☐ May 15, 2026 | 1–3 PM (repeat of May 13 session)

The Zoom link will be sent the week of the meeting to those who have registered. If you have difficulty registering, please send your name, email address and date(s) you wish to participate to mchrymko@hotmail.com.

SAVE THE DATE!
**Special Fall
Weekend Event!**

***Let Us Sing as We Go:
Dreaming the MORE
for Us and the World***

September 25-27

The Program Committee is planning an awesome fall weekend that will include prayer, reflection, music, and fellowship, focusing on the charism and the mission with special guests

***Sr. Kathy Sherman, CSJ
and Sr. Pat Bergen, CSJ***



More details to follow.

Sr. Agatha's Art Crosses Time, the Country, and Faiths



Circa 1915, Sr. Agatha Bierbauer painted a picture entitled "Mother of Sorrows" as a gift to Sr. Aurelia A'Hearn for her Silver Jubilee. Over one hundred years later the work of art has reappeared as gift to someone else.

A few weeks ago, Shirin Barekatein, a woman in Washington State, emailed to tell us about a work of art she had acquired which is entitled "Mother of Sorrows." A paper taped to the back of the picture explained the origins of the piece, and Shirin thought our archives should have a record of it. We emailed back and forth several times. Shirin very kindly sent photos of the front and back of the artwork and also told me why the piece has a spiritual meaning for her. I asked her permission to share her story and she agreed. I think the story is best told in her own words.

Following is one of her emails.

Dear Pat,

Thank you so much for your kind message and for sharing the beautiful history of Sister Agatha with me. I wanted to share something personal with you about why this painting is very meaningful to me.

I am Muslim and for several years I was not able to have a child. One night on January 26th I had a dream and in my dream someone told me that if you wanted to have a child you should go to a church and ask Mother Mary for help. The next day I told my classmate about my dream and she became very emotional and told me about a special church gathering that happens once a year for women who cannot have children. I asked her for the address and two days later, on January 28th, I went to Cedar Park Church. In February I became pregnant and my daughter was born on December 14th. Her name is Rozheen Mary. This story was also shared in the Seattle Times.

Two years ago I was in an antique shop just looking around and I saw this painting. I bought it out of respect for Mother Mary without knowing anything about its history. Only after I brought it home I looked at the back and discovered how old it is and its connection to Villa Maria. At that moment I felt that it was not a coincidence that this painting came into my home. I feel grateful and peaceful having it.

Thank you again for your kindness and for helping me learn more about its history.

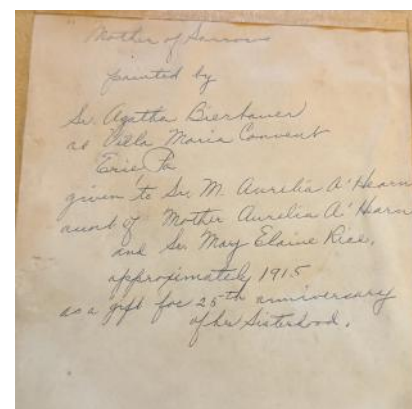
With respect and appreciation,

Sincerely,

Shirin Barekatein

by Pat Marshall, Archivist

We will probably never know how "Mother of Sorrows" traveled the entire way across the country. Sr. Agatha couldn't have known the impact her art would have on someone so far into the future. Perhaps we too may do something that will touch another, though we may never know it. We can hope.



Living Laudato Deum Give your home a "spring greening."

by Deb Seng, SSJ Social Justice Coordinator

Spring cleaning is a great way to clear out clutter, shake off the winter doldrums, and refresh our living space. Be sure to replace toxic cleaning supplies with eco-friendly versions. Before you throw something out, make sure it cannot be reused. DIY magazines and web sites offer many fun and creative ways to repurpose

common household items. Sort everything into piles of recycling, donating, or throwing away. Make a list of things you want to improve upon: such as , toxic or inefficient products that still need to be replaced and energy conservation measures that you have yet to adopt.

SSJ community April Birthdays



- 1 A. Evelyn Visnoski
- 2 A. Jan Larrey
- 3 A. Gina Adams
- 4 A. Margo Keefer
- 4 A. Amy Dennen
- 7 A. Alice Connelly
- 8 A. Donna Geiger
- 9 S. Margaret Ann Hardner
- 13 S. Mary Carol Hoke
- 14 A. Cindy Bielanin
- 14 A. Susan Reda
- 17 A. Suzanne O'Connell
- 17 A. Stephen Branton
- 17 A. Brenda Desser
- 19 A. Audrey McLaughlin
- 23 A. Lani Reinwald
- 23 S. M. Millicent Zimmer
- 26 S. Nancy Sonnenfeld
- 26 A. Marlene Scully
- 28 Agr. Charlene Kellerman
- 29 A. Linda Dougherty
- 30 A. Ann Flick

Save the Date

Hospitality Sunday

April 19th, following 9 am Liturgy

Join us in the Gathering Space to continue our Easter Celebration and re-connect with friends. Sisters, Agrégées, and Associates will continue our celebration of new life and on-going journey together.

Outreach Committee will provide snacks to enjoy.



19TH ANNUAL
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SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORK

Guess That Tune

GALA

May 2, 2026

Bayfront Convention Center

Join us for a friendly competition of guessing songs! Enjoy music, dinner, theme baskets, silent auction, and a "Western Glam" themed evening you won't want to miss! Tickets on sale now.

Interested in donating money or gift cards for theme baskets? Drop off donations to the CLC front desk or 425 W. 18th St. no later than April 14. Baskets will be valued at \$250 and will be on display at the CLC from 4/29 - 5/1 if you are want to purchase chances.

For updated info, visit www.ssinn.org/GALA or call 814-454-7814.

SSJ & As Relay for Life

We are working hard to defeat Cancer...will you help?

Every year for the past 26 years, the SSJ & As Relay for Life Team has raised funds, walked, and prayed to find a cure for cancer. Each year we learn of new ways to treat and survive this horrible disease, but there is still work to be done. Please come and spend some time with us.

WHEN: June 20, 2026 **WHERE:** Prep Event's Center, 501 W. 12th St. **TIME:** 11am until 5pm.

There will be more information in future publications. In the meantime, if you are not already a team member and would like to join or you would like to donate to the SSJ & As Relay for Life Team, please contact: tammyvanburen32@outlook.com; s.mfromknecht@ssjerie.org

Donations can be received:

CASH Please leave envelope at the front desk of the CLC.
 Attn: Sr. Mary Fromknecht & Agrégée Tammy Van Buren

CHECKS made payable to AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY.
 Mail to: SSJs & As RELAY FOR LIFE TEAM,
 Attn: Sr. Mary Fromknecht & Agrégée Tammy Van Buren
 5031 W. Ridge Rd., Erie PA 16506

PAYPAL: @TammyVanBuren

VENMO: @Tamela-VanBuren



Thank you for your support!

Prayer, Fasting and Advocacy

by Deb Seng, SSJ Social Justice Coordinator

The Sisters of St. Joseph are members of LCWR (Leadership Conference of Women Religious). LCWR has responded to the world situation by asking their over 200 member communities to participate in a public witness of prayer, fasting, and advocacy. To date, there have been 2 sessions of 100 days of prayer, fasting, and advocacy. So far, over 1,000 letters have been hand-delivered to members of Congress. The letters have communicated the deep commitment LCWR members have to issues like immigration, human trafficking, racism, care for the climate, and advocacy on behalf of the most vulnerable.

Individual communities have been asked to participate in the third session by choosing a day between February 18th and June 7th to participate in another 100 Days of Prayer, Fasting, and Advocacy. Our community has chosen Wednesday, April 22nd for our day. April 22nd is also Earth Day. The Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation team will be planning our actions for that day. Whatever is decided, we hope that many people will come and participate. Please mark your calendar for a public witness on April 22nd. Each of us can participate as our collective response to these times.

At a time when so many of us feel helpless, this is one way to have our voices heard. More information will be coming soon. I will close for now with Maxim 31: In times of trouble, trust firmly that you are an instrument of God's dream.