

interim

Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania

There's Lots on the Horizon

Last month, I ended with an invitation for us to pray and ponder what was next on the horizon. The Christmas decorations are put away, the season has come to a close and we are invited to move forward. What awaits us now?

For Mary and Joseph, they began to ponder the work of raising their son, to teach him and to form him in the ways of his Jewish tradition, to observe the rituals of his faith, to grow in community life in Nazareth. That is no small task. Those who are parents know that is an awesome challenge and responsibility.

Perhaps now is a time to ask God for the wisdom that Mary and Joseph sought to do their task well. Joseph also spent time teaching carpentry to his son while Mary worked to make their home one of love and warmth to all who visited.

As the family of Nazareth looked to the future, so, too, we look to the

future. There are many things on our horizon. Let me name just a few: we continue to pray for a new Bishop for our Diocese (prayer cards are at the front desk). Sister Phyllis Esposito, SSJ, Brentwood, who has expertise in facilitation with Associates and Agrégées, is working with a group of about 18 volunteers here to map the future for these groups. We are expecting great things to come. We also have some community days coming up and we hope you will join us, pre-Chapter preparation, and a Lenten Morning of Reflection will take us into a season of penance that is the Church's springtime. Lots on the horizon...hope you can enter into some or all of it.

Blessings,

Sr. Mary
Sister Mary

We Are In This Together

One thing that really stood out from our Wisdom Circles was the idea of inclusive love — caring for everyone, just as they are. When we say "We're all in this together," we mean that every person matters and deserves kindness and respect. Inclusive love is about:

- Accepting people for who they are, without trying to change them.
- Showing empathy and compassion, even when it's hard.
- Making sure everyone feels like they belong—when people feel included, they're more likely to open up and share their gifts.

In a world that can feel divided, choosing inclusive love helps us



build real connections and reminds us to live out our charism as a community of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Let's Get Together!

Join us on **Sunday, February 8th at 9:00 am for Liturgy and a Fireside Chat.** Bring a friend! We'll have coffee, hot water, and snacks. Hope to see you there.



Community Day

**Saturday,
Feb. 21, 2026
9 a.m.—
12:30 p.m.**

The focus of this day will be to discuss our needs concerning leadership as we move forward.

We will discuss our next steps for leadership.

PLEASE RSVP and indicate if you plan to stay for lunch.

**[Click here to RSVP](#)
or call
814-836-4040**

MISSION: POSSIBLE!

Congratulations Agrégées!

Sr. Ann Marie Cappello, SSJ, Mission Integration Coordinator

When I was younger, I would often hear my elders saying, "how time flies!" The older I get, I find myself using this expression frequently. I can't believe it has been ten years since the first group of Agrégées professed their vow of fidelity to live our mission of unity. How time flies!

As I look back, it seems like yesterday that Sister Susan Herzing was planning her first meeting with **Arlene Chaney, Charlene Kellerman, Cindy Polesnak, Jeanne Ryan, Deb Seng, Michelle Tortorelli, Tammy**



VanBuren, Betsy Wiest, and Cindy Brown (now deceased). Before we knew it, **Teresa Cieslikowski, Judi Janke, and Jeanne Costa** (now deceased) were joining them.

I would like to take this opportunity to

congratulate all of you on celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Agrégées and to thank you for your faithfulness in reaching out to the dear neighbor without distinction wherever and whenever you are able - making the **SSJ Mission Possible!**

More photos on page 5.

10th Anniversary of Agrégée Vocation

A Celebration mass took place on Sunday, January 18 at the Community Living Center.

In 2016, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania accepted nine women as the first Agrégée (ah-greh-ZHEY) members of the congregation. Agrégées are Catholic women called to permanently commit themselves to growing in a closer union with God through Jesus Christ by embracing the Sisters' mission of unity and by closely connecting with the congregation through prayer and personal relationships. Agrégée is a French word meaning "attached to." Agrégées date back to the seventeenth century in France, when the Sisters of St. Joseph were founded and had three forms of membership: vowed religious Sisters, Agrégées, and lay Associates.

Following Vatican II, religious congregations were encouraged to study and return to their roots to ensure they were living according to their founder's intent. That led to the Sisters of St. Joseph establishing a lay

Associate program in Erie in 1982 for Christian men and women drawn to the congregation's mission. After further exploration, the congregation initiated an Agrégée membership program specifically for women desiring a deeper commitment to the congregation by making a vow of fidelity. Erie is one of only six congregations with Agrégée members.

"It was about finding the affirmation of my call. I felt that I had been living as an Agrégée for a number of years before the process even began," said Charlene Kellerman. "The challenge was naming it and recognizing it -- in myself and by others."

Prior to professing their vow, candidates participated in a two-year formation process under the direction of Susan Herzing, SSJ, that included study, prayer, and discernment. Candidates and their Sister/mentor participated in prayer groups and spiritual

direction. The first year focused on prayer and the candidate's spiritual journey, and the second year specifically on the Sisters of St. Joseph. Agrégées continue living in their own homes, continue with their independent lives, and are responsible for their own financial affairs, including healthcare and retirement.

The first nine women who became Agrégées in the Erie Diocese were **Cindy Brown (dec.), Arlene Chaney, Charlene Kellerman, Cindy Polesnak, Jeanne Marie Ryan, Deb Seng, Michelle Tortorelli, Tammy Van Buren, and Betsy Wiest**. Since then, three more women completed the formation program and professed a vow of fidelity. They are **Judi Janke, Teresa Cieslikowski, and Jeanne Marie Costa (dec.)**. Presently, there are 10 Agrégée members of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania congregation.

Lenten Morning of Reflection

Lent as a Hymn of Promise

Presented by Sarah and Dave Roncolato
Saturday, February 28, 2026 9:00 a.m.—12 noon
Community Living Center

Prayerfully unpacking lines from *The Hymn of Promise*, we will spend the day of reflection preparing for the Lenten season.

This hymn begins;
In the bulb there is a flower;
In the seed, an apple tree;
In co-coons, a hidden pro-mise:



Together we will reflect and pray with images from scripture and nature that deepen our experience and understanding of the Paschal Mystery which is the core of our Lenten Journey.

RSVP/registrations due by Friday, February 6

[Click here to RSVP.](#)



For over forty years, Sarah and Dave Roncolato have been partners in ministry and life. While raising two daughters and two sons, both had careers in ministry and service. Sarah served for almost thirty years as a United Methodist pastor, Dave in higher education at Allegheny College and as a spiritual director and retreat leader. Now retired, they enjoy time with their family, which now includes eight grandsons, community work around justice and equity, and cycling.



Virtual Book Discussion: *The Gift of Years*

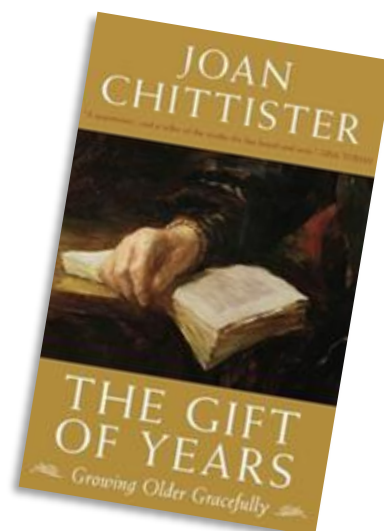
If you missed the January book discussion, you can still join us for the February sessions on February 11, 2026 from 6-8 PM or February 13, 2026 from 1-3 PM for an engaging discussion of Joan Chittester's acclaimed book, *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully*. The February sessions will focus on the second half of the book. You may join for either or both of the sessions. The book is

available through major retailers and at some libraries.

You **MUST** register by February 8, 2026 to receive the Zoom link. (If you registered for January, you do NOT need to register again.)

[Register here](#) for the sessions.

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



Women Making History 2026

Congratulations Sr. Claudia Dombrowski

Congratulations to Sr. Claudia Dombrowski and the 17 other women chosen as this year's Women Making History 2026 honorees. The committee selected these remarkable women from 40 thoughtfully prepared and beautifully written nominations.



Women Making History event at the Mercyhurst Performing Arts Center.

For more information about the event, the mission of the Mercy Center for Women, and how to get involved, please visit www.mcwerie.org or call (814) 455-4577.



Women Making History
Monday, March 30
7:00 p.m.
Mercyhurst University
Performing Arts Center

Admission is free.

2026 Honorees

Andrea Amicangelo
Elana Como
Linda Corso
Kathryn DiVittorio

Sr. Claudia Dombrowski
Donna Douglass
Cassie Dundon
Melanie Ford

Karen Haas
Alivia Haibach
Melinda Hall
Carol Holmgren
Lana Kunik

Kyrie Laubenthal
Tiffany Lavette
Tica Nickson
Sarah Prylinski
Jamie Snider



Special Year of St. Francis

Pope Leo XIV has proclaimed a Special Year of St. Francis (Jubilee) from January 10, 2026, to January 10, 2027, to mark the 800th anniversary of the saint's death. This, along with the 2025 Jubilee of Hope, allows for plenary indulgences through pilgrimages to Franciscan churches.

Key Details of the Franciscan Jubilee (2026-2027)

Purpose: Commemorates the 800th anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi's passing (Transitus)

and promotes his message of peace, humility, and environmental care.

Duration: Jan. 10, 2026 – Jan. 10, 2027.

Plenary Indulgence: Granted under standard conditions (sacramental confession, Holy Communion, prayer for the Pope's intentions) by visiting a Franciscan conventual church or a church dedicated to St. Francis.

Significance: The jubilee emphasizes Saint Francis as a model of



peace during a time of global conflict and division.

The initiative, announced by the Apostolic Penitentiary and highlighted by EWTN Vatican, invites the faithful to engage in spiritual renewal.



Lit by Love Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of our SSJ Agrégées

(Clockwise from above: Charlene Kellerman, Michelle Tortorelli, Judi Janke, Jeanne Marie Ryan, Cindy Polesnak, Arlene Chaney, Deb Seng, Tammy Van Buren, Besty Wiest, and Teresa Cieslikowski.

What's the difference?

Sisters*

- Open to single, Catholic women
- Permanent, canonical vows of poverty, chastity and obedience
- 6 – 9 year formation process
- Lives in community with SSJs
- Finances governed by vow of poverty.

**While we no longer offer a novice formation program in Erie, if a woman is interested in becoming a Sister of St. Joseph, we connect her with another SSJ congregation.*



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

Agrégées

- Open to Catholic women
- Permanent, non-canonical vow of fidelity;
- Usually a 3-year formation process;
- Continue with independent living arrangements;
- Participate on committees and attend various meetings;
- Personal responsibility for finances, health care, retirement, funeral expenses and indebtedness.

Associates

- Open to Christian men and women
- Annual, renewable commitment
- 1 year formation process
- Continue with independent living arrangements;
- Participate on committees and attend various meetings;
- Personal responsibility for finances, health care, retirement, funeral expenses and indebtedness



You Are Not Alone

SSJ Agrégée Betsy Wiest (right) attended the recent "you are not alone" community witness/prayer service for immigrants, migrants, and refugees at Perry Square. This prayer service will be repeated on the second Friday of every month during the winter.

All are welcome to attend. The prayer service begins at 12:15 p.m. and lasts about 20 minutes.

SSJ community February Birthdays

2	A. Sandy Greggs
2	A. Tina Branton
2	S. Ann Stephanie Stano
4	A. Ginny Hughes
8	S. Josette Gocella
8	A. Cynthia Grucza
9	A. Penny Guelcher
9	S. Moira Sullivan
17	A. Jane Zawacki
18	A. Elaine Hirsch
19	Agr. Cindy Polesnak
19	A. Charlotte Sheldon
21	A. Carol Picheco
23	S. Mary Drexler
23	A. Ann Semler
26	A. Rhonda Sharie
28	A. Donna Maycock



Living Laudato Deum *Responsible De-icing*

by Deb Seng, SSJ Social Justice Coordinator

We live in an area where winter brings many hazards. De-icing our walks and driveways is very important. We must do it responsibly. Did you know that Americans use hundreds of thousands of tons of de-icing chemicals each winter? Rock salt and calcium chloride can leach into groundwater and destroy vegetation. The runoff from these products can enter streams and lakes, harming aquatic creatures. Magnesium chloride is considered less toxic. Opt for de-icers that are nontoxic and don't contain rock salt or chlorides. Calcium magnesium acetate and potassium acetate are biodegradable and not as corrosive as rock salt.



And remember, like the sign in Wegman's parking lot, "Walk like a penguin." Stay safe this winter.



Thank you Sisters, Agrégées, and Associates for your many prayers, card, thoughts and wishes. You have been a blessing for me and I experience the strength of your good wishes in my recovery. I continue to pray for you in gratitude for your kindness.

S. Marjorie Adams

SUPPORT ST. JAMES HAVEN!

COMMUNITY DRIVE-THRU DINNER
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19TH @ 3 - 6 PM
779 N. MAIN STREET, MEADVILLE

MEATLOAF, MASHED POTATOES,
CARROTS AND GRAVY
WITH A ROLL & SWEET TREAT

COST: MINIMUM DONATION \$5/MEAL

THANK YOU TO THIS MONTH'S SPONSORS AND VOLUNTEERS!



SUPPORT THE HAVEN! SUPPORT OUR COMMUNITY!



Save the Date!
Join us for the second annual



We are pleased to invite you to the second Shamrock Showdown, a lively trivia event filled with fun, community spirit, and purpose.

Saturday, March 7, 2026 5-9 p.m.
Bayfront Convention Center

Join us for a friendly competition that includes:

- ◆ Six exhilarating rounds of trivia with prizes for the top three teams
- ◆ A prize to the team that's dressed the best to reflect its team name.
- ◆ A simple meal - the same as our shelter guests will be served that evening.
- ◆ 50/50 and basket raffles
- ◆ Card-only bar

Mark your calendars and join us for a night to remember!
\$50/person or \$400/table **Registrations due by 2-20-26**
For more information, or to register, go to stpatrickshaven.org

Your participation helps us to continue providing vital services for Erie's homeless, while fostering the joy and solidarity that make our community strong.



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Erie, PA 16506-1249

Phone: 814-836-4100
publicrelations@ssjerie.org
www.ssjerie.org

Continuing to Help Haiti

As many of you may remember, between 2011 and 2021, the U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph, along with Mission Haiti, Inc, supported the education of 10 girls who otherwise would not have been able to go to school.

Mission Haiti has tried to follow the path of these girls. One girl, Anastasia Michel, is now attending University of Notre Dame of Haiti, focusing on Business Administration.

Since 2021, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania have continued to support the Haiti Trade School through our Lenten almsgiving.

The trade school continues to flourish amid the chaotic



situation brought about by gang violence

and control of people's lives in Haiti.

The trade school provides a sewing machine for sewing school graduates and a small amount of start-up money for the restaurant/cooking/

by Deb Seng, SSJ Social Justice Coordinator

management graduates.

Once again, we will support Mission Haiti through Lenten almsgiving to continue helping the students attending the trade school. Throughout Lent there will be a container in the lobby

to collect your alms. If you would rather write a check, make it payable to the Sisters of St. Joseph, mark Haiti in the memo section, and ask the front desk to put it in my



mailbox. We will write one check to Mission Haiti, Inc.

Thank you.