

Volume 6 No. 2 • December 2024

petite journeys

Sisters of St. Joseph
of Northwestern Pennsylvania

Listen for
Love *page 4*

leadership message

We recently received a copy of a message written by a woman named Liz Neumark. It outlined the overwhelming range of feelings driven by the election, the devastating warfare on three continents, and the frightening specter of the climate crisis — each alone enough to keep us awake at night. At the same time, the holiday season begins with the expectation of shared celebrations and festivities and a mission to unleash joy. How do we reconcile these conflicting emotions?

She suggested that we must refocus from global woes to intimate scale humanity: our families, colleagues, and communities of caring people. These times call for precisely what we have to offer—connection, compassion, community, comfort, culture, and conversation. Coming together to talk, exchange ideas, share a meal, display generosity, and find moments of joy might just be what it takes to make it through the long winter nights ahead. We are grateful for her message and the reminder it offers to all of us. And we are moved by how beautifully it reflects the charisma and mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph. May we all heed Ms. Neumark's message this holiday season. God bless you.



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Mary Drexler, SSJ,
Carol Morehouse, SSJ,
Phyllis McCracken, SSJ*

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Mary Drexler, SSJ
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petite Journeys

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May you and your families
experience this oneness
at Christmas and
throughout the New Year.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania

Christmas is the birthing
of relationships,
of our connectedness
to the whole world . . .
Because we have a God
who wants to be one with us
wherever we are,
this birth makes everyone
our neighbor,
and makes the neighbor “dear,”
because we are bound together
in the heart of a loving God.

Phyllis DiFuccia, SSJ

listen for love

Phyllis DiFuccia, SSJ

For Sisters of St. Joseph, self-emptying is essential to all other aspects of our spirituality. Self-emptying — what does that mean? Our spirituality, or pathways to great love, are a call to wholeness, the movement of the Spirit, zeal, or serving others as Jesus did, the discerning heart characterized by Mary, and the compassion of Joseph. The call to any of those paths inevitably means a “letting go,” an emptying of whatever keeps me from following that path. And the path leads to the unioning love of ourselves with God and with every kind of neighbor.

If I’m being asked to follow the example of Mary by having a listening heart, does my mind keep obsessing about things like constantly rehearsing a recent uncomfortable conversation? Or if I’m being asked to follow Joseph’s compassion and cordial love, does anger keep swelling up in me as I think of some people (even the term “some people” says it all!). Are there people whom I can’t imagine as being deserving of love? Do I despair when I look at the state of the world or the outcome of our recent elections? Am I happy? Am I angry? Any response can isolate us from one another.

The Pain is Part of the Joy

I remember my Dad having a difficult time after my Mom passed — he was sure he would die first, and he spent his entire life ensuring her care when he was gone. He told me he couldn’t pray because he was angry with God. I suggested he take his anger to God, yell, and complain all he wanted because anger was not a problem for God.

He eventually arrived at a kind of peace, and then, when he thought about Mom, he remembered the deep joy and love they had experienced throughout their relationship. I believe it was the experience of contemplation that caused that shift in my Dad. The author C.S. Lewis, when contemplating the death of his wife, came to this conclusion: “And now, the pain is part of the joy. And that’s the deal.”

Contemplation and Transformation

It is in quiet and contemplation that our pain, anger, weakness, and fragile world become the birthplace of love, empathy, and joy. To lament in God’s presence, we join

“We are already one. But we imagine that we are not.
And what we have to recover is our original unity.
What we have to be is what we are.”

-Richard Rohr

with Jesus, who asked, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me/us?”

“Contemplation is not a validation of things as they are... but a constant questioning and restlessness that waits for and believes in the coming of a transformed vision of God... a new and integrating spirituality capable of creating a new politics and generating new social structures. What vast energy fields of communion and interdependence would be created on this Earth, in our cosmos, if our consciousness were more closely aligned with the consciousness of Jesus Christ if his relational identity were more nearly ours.”

— Constance FitzGerald, OCD

If we want to bring love to the world, rather than our despair, frustrations, or anger, we must come to the world embracing our inability to “fix” it. And so, we come with more compassion and

oneness with those who can’t “do.” Our reality helps us live in greater union.

Through contemplation, I am transformed as I experience a God who loves me unconditionally. It’s an evolutionary

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Saint Mary's Home of Erie

Residents of **Saint Mary's at Asbury Ridge** enjoyed a summer of fun activities, including a visit from Smiley's Ice Cream Truck, a Hawaiian luau, water-gun art, painting classes, outdoor picnics, and banana split socials. Something new to enjoy this season was the bocce ball court. Funded by a grant from the SSJ Mission and Ministries Foundation to expand outdoor activity areas at Saint Mary's, a bocce ball court was recently installed. Bocce ball is a low-impact and healthy activity for seniors. Thanks to this new



addition, residents spent many afternoons enjoying some sunshine and friendly competition.

Sister of The Year

Carol Morehouse, SSJ, was recognized as this year's Serra Club Religious of the Year. The honor was presented at the Serra Club's annual event in June. William Hilbert Jr., was honored as Outstanding Layperson of the Year, Deacon Jerome Peterson was honored as Deacon of the Year, and Father Nicholas Rouch was honored as Priest of the Year.

SSJ Memorial Service

A memorial service was held in November to remember those Sisters, Agrégées, and Associates who died between October 1, 2023, and September 30, 2024. Members of the SSJ family who were remembered include **Elizabeth Ruza, SSJ; Jean Baptiste Diluzio, SSJ; Joseph Marie Fitzgerald, SSJ; Mary Rachael McGuire, SSJ; Agrégée Cindy Brown, Associate Gail Smith, Associate Uta Smith, Associate Patricia DeVore, Associate Donna Nicholas, and Associate Mary DeSanti.**

Venez Célébrer!

The SSJ Mission & Ministries Foundation hosted a French-themed celebration in honor of the founding of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Le Puy, France 374 years ago. Pictured below at the celebration are: **Sr. Ann Stephanie Stano, Sr. Phyllis Hilbert, Sr. Ricarda Vincent and Mary Wells Gloystein.**



Welcome New Associates

Welcome to our four new Associates, **Joseph Sette, Bonnie Short, Michael Short, and Rose Strazisar**, who made their commitment on October 13. A big thank you to **Sister Susan Herzing, Pat and Richard Marshall and Sister Mary Fromknecht** for being their faithful mentors during the year.



New Associates, (l-r): Mike Short, Bonnie Short, Rose Strazisar, and Joseph Sette.

Helping Hands of Justice

This year's Helping Hands of Justice honor at the Erie Diocese Catholic Charities Helping Hands Gala went to the Sisters of St. Joseph. The Helping Hands of Justice award recognizes those who look for strategic solutions to improve systems and society on a grander scale, thereby improving individual lives. SSJ Agrégée **Deb Seng** accepted the award on behalf of the Sisters. "Working for justice is in the DNA of the Sisters of St. Joseph," said Seng. "Their mission is to live and work so that all people will be united with God and one another."

Centenarian Sister Honored as Distinguished Citizen

Sr. Ann Patrice Murnock who celebrates her 100th birthday on December 13, was honored as a Distinguished Citizen by her hometown, Forest City, PA. The city honors a current and former citizen during its annual Trail Days festival. Sr. Ann Patrice was also presented with a Key to the

City. She was nominated by her nephew, Michael Murnock, who said, "She's the most humble person I have ever met." Sister Ann Patrice entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1958 and has always maintained a connection to her hometown.

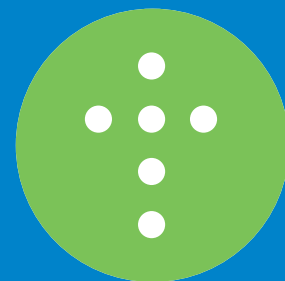


375th Anniversary

On October 15, 2025, we will join with Sisters of St. Joseph worldwide to commemorate the 375th anniversary of our founding in LePuy, France. The U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph has planned four globally livestreamed prayer services leading up to the anniversary. The first was held in conjunction with this year's Founder's Day in October. Included in the prayer were reflections by three Sisters in various parts of the world and one lay partner. Our Associate **Stephanie Hall** was invited to give the lay partner reflection. If you missed it, you can access the recording at the Federation YouTube channel @USFedSistersStJoseph.



we remember



Sisters*

Mary Rachael McGuire, SSJ
April 27, 2024

Joseph Marie Fitzgerald, SSJ
August 12, 2024

Agrégées

Cindy Brown
February 22, 2024

Associates

Uta Smith
April 13, 2024

Patricia DeVore
April 14, 2024

Donna Nicholas
August 19, 2024

Mary DeSanti
August 29, 2024

Thomas Hoffman
October 18, 2024



*Scan the QR code to read the Sisters' complete obituaries.

celeBrations!

Employees Milestones

25 YEARS

Ferisa Alihodzic

20 YEARS

Robert Hilliard

15 YEARS

Marija Buljiubasic
Kimberly Dinges
Carol Hermann
Rebecca Hower
Vickie Pangratz
Bill Winarski

10 YEARS

Anthony Cuneo

5 YEARS

Sylvia Hower
Paul Morris
Mary Pickens

Sisters Jubilees

80 YEARS

Mary DePaul Sabella, SSJ

75 YEARS

Margaret Ann Hardner, SSJ

70 YEARS

Josette Gocella, SSJ
Margaret Frank, SSJ
Mary Helen Forney, SSJ
Perpetua Dickant, SSJ

60 YEARS

Carmel Rojek, SSJ

50 YEARS

Carol Morehouse, SSJ

Associates Milestones

30 YEARS

Cindy DeCoursey
Marti Michael

25 YEARS

Ann Swift
Don Swift

20 YEARS

Mitzi Bannister
Betty Jo Chitister
Martha Connelly
Kristina Huber
Jan Larrey
Mary Grace Lewis

15 YEARS

Ann Flick
Gary Flick
Kay Hotchkiss
Joan McCain
Sue McCreary

10 YEARS

Cindy Berarducci
Gretchen Durney
Mary Lyons
Maria Ines Giraldo
Carol Picheco
Joanne Rupp

5 YEARS

Frances Skobieranda

St. Patrick's Haven: **40 Years** of Volunteer and Community Support

This year, we commemorated the 40th anniversary of St. Patrick's Haven homeless shelter for men in the City of Erie. We chose to commemorate, rather than celebrate, this milestone because the celebration doesn't happen until homelessness is no longer a reality.

Each night, as many as 22 men find shelter, food, comfort, and a sense of community at St. Patrick's Haven. Volunteers provide everything from a warm meal to compassionate listening. We hosted a Volunteer Appreciation Brunch in March to honor the dedicated volunteers who make our mission possible. Sister Mary Fromknecht, SSJ, the visionary founder of St. Patrick's Haven reminded us that compassion and grassroots action can impact an entire community. Sister Mary is still actively involved with the ministry.

More than a look back at its history, this anniversary is a reminder that there is more work to do. As we look toward the future, we hope there won't be a need for shelters like St. Patrick's Haven someday. Until then, St. Patrick's Haven will continue to be a place of welcome, refuge, and compassion for those who most need it.

**A \$40 anniversary
donation provides
one night's shelter
and essentials for
one person.**

**In the cold winter
months, \$40 can
truly save a life.**



www.stpatrickshaven.org



Pictured, l-r: Shelby Folga, Executive Director; Carol Morehouse, SSJ; board members Bethany Woods, Terry Holmes, and Donna Geiger; Mary Fromknecht, SSJ, board members Eardly Wickramasinghe, Edith Benson, Steve Drabant, and John Groh. Below: volunteers enjoying the Appreciation Brunch.



**St. Patrick's Haven, a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, is a financially independent 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.*

Thank You!

Throughout 2024, the Sisters of St. Joseph Mission & Ministries Foundation has been blessed with donors who chose to support the Sisters and their transforming work. You have made it possible to fulfill our mission to build resources to support the congregation, its ministries, and other like-minded organizations. Thank you for:

- the intellectual, physical, and spiritual care of the Sisters;
- the upkeep of their home;
- St. James Haven kitchen upgrade and remodel to feed their guests nightly and their neighbors monthly through its “Drive-Thru” Community Dinners;
- St. Patrick’s Haven outdoor patio and winter Blessing Bags for their nightly guests;
- the SSJ Neighborhood Network and their work with Menagerie Studio to create a legacy documentary capturing, preserving, and celebrating the Sisters’ exemplary work in northwest Pennsylvania these past 165 years;
- Erie-area nonprofits that feed our neighbors year-round.

May God’s abundant love be with you and yours as we prepare for and celebrate the birth of our Savior.

Sr. Mary, Cathy, Carol, Carleen & Almi



*left: Lucille DeStefano, SSJ
right: Nancy Prenatt, SSJ*



Please make your 2024 gift by December 31

- Securely online at: www.ssjmmf.org/donate-now/
- Or by mailing your gift to: **SSJ Mission & Ministries Foundation**
5013 West Ridge Rd.
Erie, PA 16506-1249



Questions about other ways to give?

Please email or call Carol at carol.hermann@ssjerie.org or 814-836-4198.

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process. God is not “fixing me,” either. God is loving me as I am. Deep listening is an act of surrender. I risk being changed by what I hear.

To Be Heard is to be Loved

And that loved, transformed self enables me to sit with and listen to the neighbor who experiences the world differently. Do we have to agree? No. It is diversity that is at the heart of our unity. Besides, God takes away everything that estranges us from one another. My transformed self allows me to listen and hear the other. As Paul Tillich once said, “The first duty of love is to listen.” And the first step to a listening heart is to sit and experience the wisdom and love of God.

So what needs to happen, not only in the world but also in me? Only God knows. Listen. Listen for God’s deeper invitation. Listen for love.



Phyllis DiFuccia, SSJ

Sr. Phyllis DiFuccia recently returned to Erie after living outside the Erie Diocese for 32 years. She ministered in Chicago as a consultant and worked with several organizations, particularly with Loyola University and the Archdiocese of Chicago. She then moved to Cleveland, where she was vice president of mission at St. Joseph Academy. She served in leadership for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania from 2000-2004 and currently serves as a counselor on the leadership team. She chairs the SSJ governance committee and is actively involved with Spirits on Fire, a national program of formation for lay leaders and SSJ partners in mission.

When The Holy Thaws*

When I am most fragile and in need,
it was then, it seemed,
God came closest.

God, like a medic on a field,
is tending our souls.

Our horns get locked with desires,
but don't hold yourself too accountable;
for all desires are really innocent.
That is what the compassion
in His eyes tell me.

Why this great war between the countries
—the countries— inside of us?

What are all these insane borders we protect?

What are all these different names
for the same church of love
we kneel in together?
For it is true, together we live;
And only at that shrine
where all are welcome
will God sing loud enough to be heard.

St. Teresa of Avila
1515-1582

**an excerpt*



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Please Pray For...

Our long-standing prayer ministry provides the opportunity for anyone to submit prayer intentions. Each day, many of our Sisters gather to pray the rosary for these requests.

We invite you to submit any requests or special intentions you may have. Requests can be submitted anonymously, or you may indicate your name and request that a Sister contact you.



Visit ssjerie.org and click on
Prayer Request or
email your prayer request to:
prayercall@ssjerie.org

Our personal and communal prayer is a sustaining and unifying force in our lives which leads us to great love of God and neighbor.

From the Constitutions of the Sisters
of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania