

Vision

THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF NEW YORK

VOL. 24, ISSUE 2 *Now in Our Third Century of Living Lives of Love* SPRING 2020



Vincent's Village—

*Moving Closer to
Welcoming Seniors*

From the President

Dear Friends,

As I sit here at my desk at work surrounded by silence, I can't help wondering, as everyone else undoubtedly is, how our world will be changed once COVID-19 is no longer a threat to us.

What will we have learned, if anything? Will we be kinder and more compassionate individually, as a nation, as a world? Will the ministries that the Sisters of Charity sponsor be financially viable and able to respond to those in need?

While I can't answer any of these questions, fortunately, I can rely on the words and promises in the psalms I have prayed over the years that are now even more meaningful.

*I am at rest in God alone;
my salvation comes from Him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my stronghold; I will never be shaken.*

*Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."*

And with the father of the child in Mark's Gospel, I, too, pray "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

If you are like me, you need to take a break from the news every once in a while to find something uplifting. Thus, I invite you to read this edition of *Vision* ...

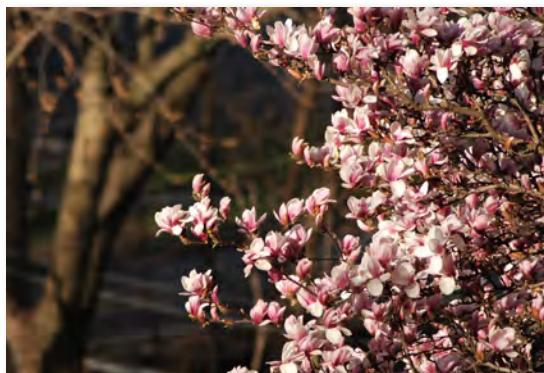
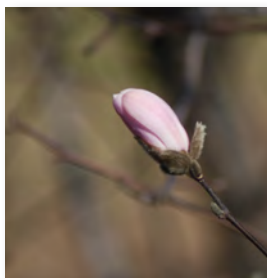
Blessings,



Sr. Donna Dodge, SC



Signs of spring at Mount Saint Vincent



Photos by Margaret Egan, SC

VISION enables the Sisters of Charity of New York to make a cohesive statement about how we reveal God's love in our lives and the many and varied ways in which we respond to the signs of the times.



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Charity Wisdom in a Time of Shared Crisis

By Regina Bechtle, SC

Charity Wisdom from Our Founders and Friends is featured on our website throughout the year. Crafted by Sr. Regina, the column provides inspirational quotes from Saints Elizabeth Ann Seton, Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, and other spiritual and world leaders. The column seeks to help guide our way throughout the liturgical year with words of wisdom. In light of the global crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope these words bring you comfort and hope.

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

“Acting well our part in present difficulties is the only way to insure the peace of futurity.”

“As Sisters of Charity we should fear nothing.”

“It would be ungrateful in me after all our God has done for me and mine to be discouraged now, distrusting his future goodness.”

Saint Vincent de Paul

“The poor who do not know where to go or what to do, who are suffering already and who increase daily, are my burden and my sorrow.”

“...Believe that the Lord will not leave a heavy burden on your back without sustaining you. The Lord will be your strength as well as your reward for the extraordinary services you give Him.”

Saint Louise de Marillac

“Go then courageously, advancing moment by moment on the path on which God has placed you in order to reach Him.”

“You see a great deal of distress that you are unable to relieve. God sees it also.”

“Bear the pains of the poor together with them, doing all you can to give them whatever help you can and remain in peace.”



Reflection

Suddenly, the world has become very small. In ways we could not have imagined, we are truly citizens of the world, as Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton said of herself.

She knew something about quarantine. In 1803 she arrived in Italy with her eight-year-old daughter Anna Maria and her husband William who was in the last stages of tuberculosis. He was hoping the Italian sun would cure him. Instead,

the authorities mistook his illness for a potentially contagious fever and quarantined the three in a damp, cold prison. A month later they were released; William died eight days later, and Elizabeth's world was turned upside down.

We struggle to comprehend the enormity of the COVID-19 pandemic. Obediently we wash our hands, stock up on essentials, practice social distancing, and curtail trips and visits. But at a deeper level we are trying to wrap our minds around the implications of this fierce virus for ourselves, for our families, friends, communities, and our sisters and brothers in China, Italy, South Korea, and in over 130 other countries besides our own.

With the whole human family, we are facing our fragility in a way that most of us have never experienced. Life is precious—and precarious.

Times of change and crisis can trigger anxiety. They can narrow our focus to our own needs and fears, even turn us against one another (think of supermarket fights over the last bottle of sanitizer).

Yet times of crisis can also summon us to be our best selves. Think of the selfless first responders and care providers after the 9/11 attacks, Hurricanes Katrina and Irma, Superstorm Sandy, floods, hurricanes, and wildfires near and far.”

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FamVin 2020: The Vincentian Family Moving Forward

By Mary E. Mc Cormick, SC

An historic meeting took place in Rome on January 8–12, 2020, when, for the first time, leaders from 92 Vincentian groups from around the world gathered for reflection, input, and sharing.

The theme of the meeting, FamVin 2020: The Vincentian Family Moving Forward, identified its main goal.

Members of 150 separate groups who identify as “Vincentian” number nearly two million members who live in countries throughout the world. Yet many are not aware that other Vincentians are in their area or are doing similar work.

Some of the meaningful questions presented were: How can those who follow the way of Vincent, including the founders of religious communities of men and women, as well as lay organizations, come to a new awareness of who else embraces the Vincentian charism, the charism of charity? And how can we work together collaboratively to move into a future which grows more complex every day?

The meeting started with an early-morning audience with Pope Francis, who took time to be photographed with the 200 participants on the steps of the vast stage where he had addressed a large and enthusiastic audience.

Then followed five days of meetings. Sr. Mary Mc Cormick, SC, facilitated the sessions. Members of the Vincentian

Family Office gave updates on events taking place worldwide. Fr. Tomaž Mavrič, CM, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, issued a challenge to the leaders to be proactive in moving forward together into their preferred future.

Speakers addressed issues of homelessness, the creation of a culture of vocations to the charism, ways of transmitting the charism to the next generation, and identifying what the charism means to those who share it.

Now, what must be done?

Vincentian Question

In the keynote address Sr. Constance Phelps, SCL, blended art, poetry, and inspiration in her talk, *Weaving Our Web: An Imaginative Challenge for the Future*.

A last reflection asked the participants to grapple with the Vincentian question: Now, what must be done? Responses to this question will continue to be unpacked in the days—and years—to come.

During break times and break-out sessions, Sr. Mary encouraged participants to meet and share ideas with those from other groups and other countries.

There was an energy in the group meetings that spoke well of participants’ eagerness to move into the next phase of the Vincentian story with enthusiasm and joy. The Vincentian family is indeed moving forward!

Update

Since the close of the Gathering, the entire world has experienced the effects of COVID-19, and the Vincentian Family has responded to its challenge with charity and zeal. Two examples: The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, an organization known for its hands-on aid to those who are impoverished, are using social distancing to protect their volunteers and staff. Tailoring their services to meet the needs of their clients, they are minimizing personal contact for the duration of the pandemic yet continue to provide needed assistance.

The Ladies of Charity, or the AIC, the International Association of Charity, as it is now called, continue their outreach to their clients in a way that is affective and effective. They are examples of what *can* and *must* be done in times of shared crisis.

Photo: Pope Francis greeted the 200 participants at the Vincentian Family meeting.

Sisters Respond to the Call for Assistance in Shamokin, 1918



By Margaret Donegan, SC

Every Sister of Charity is familiar with the small mining town of Shamokin, Pennsylvania. In 1875, four Sisters of Charity began teaching elementary school grades in the old church, St. Edward. By 1883, a new three-story brick school building was opened to accommodate the growing student population, and by 1895, classrooms for high school students were installed in the renovated convent. At the time, even the youngest novice in the Congregation learned that a certain aura surrounded Shamokin; those born there and those missioned there were never deterred by any obstacle. In 1918, an outbreak of influenza termed the Spanish Flu emerged just after the armistice of WWI. Fourteen Sisters, with the permission of Mother Mary Josepha Cullen, responded to the call for assistance in Shamokin.

Tragically, the death rate rose rapidly, and was one of the highest in the country. "I could never describe the sadness that reigns in Shamokin," wrote Sr. Angela Maria Coneys. "Nearly every five minutes the church bells ring to warn that another soul has passed away."

Shamokin was placed under martial law, the town was surrounded by State Police, and the Federal government sent 20 doctors to manage the crisis. On their first day at the Edgewood Emergency Hospital, it was filled to overflowing, with limited supplies and one staff

doctor. The Sisters began immediate treatment by bathing, comforting, and feeding patients, doing all they could to relieve their suffering. Afterwards, hospital nurses told the Sisters, "We shall never forget the first day you arrived. You looked around, rolled up your sleeves, and got to work in earnest."

Wearing their distinctive habits, the "black caps" were praised for their unflagging efforts. Although the sisters were not trained nurses, Major Ferrel of the United States Army marveled at the intelligent service they rendered to the sick. Sr. Angela Dolores Stack, head night nurse, assumed full charge of medicine, Sr. Rose Mercedes Gillespie answered telephones and received new cases that arrived throughout the night, and Sr. Mary Trinita Kohler, who by her very presence saved many lives, was described as "simply wonderful" by staff and patients. Sr. Gertrude Miriam Hunt and Sr. Mary Liberata Hyland spent their time visiting as many as fifteen families in the community daily, carrying medicine, cans of soup, baskets of potatoes, tea, coffee, and sugar for those suffering at their homes. Several Sisters' relatives drove the Sisters to the hospital each day, and Sr. Maria Cornelius' mother assumed the tedious task of ironing the Sisters' collars and sleeves, a time-consuming task.

The self-sacrifice of the Sisters brought back lapsed Catholics to the

Above: This postcard image shows one Sister of Charity on the left (only black cap visible) and one Sister at center, facing forward, wearing a white apron.

1832 Cholera Epidemic

"The need of a second child-caring home (in addition to St. Patrick/Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum, Mott Street) was particularly urgent during the summer and fall of 1832, when a severe epidemic of cholera took the lives of four thousand New Yorkers, with an average of sixty deaths a day from July until October. ... Even the schedule of Sunday Masses had to give way to the urgent needs of administering the Last Sacraments. During these harrowing months the priests were aided by the selfless Pierre Toussaint and by the Sisters of Charity, who devoted every available moment to nursing the sick." [Walsh, 1:81]

Note: On Oct. 30, 1832, the Council in Emmitsburg agreed to send Sisters to New York for St. Joseph's Asylum. Their departure was delayed several months until a suitable building was found, and funds were secured to rent it. "On April 22, 1833, Sr. Mary Appolonia Greaver and a companion left Emmitsburg for the new mission. The opened St. Joseph's Half Orphan Asylum (for children of widowed parents) in a rented house at 68 Sixth Avenue..." [Walsh, 1:83]

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In the third century, a young man, Augustine, struggled over the decision to become a Christian. He wrote that he heard a child's voice singing, "Tolle, lege, tolle, lege" (take up, read, take up, read). In a flash he picked up the Scriptures, began to read—and was transformed (eventually) into Saint Augustine. Talk about the power of reading!

For Sisters of Charity, spiritual reading is one of the practices that support our life of prayer. Our *Directory* states: "Regular and prayerful reading of the Word of God in Scripture holds a central place in our lives." We are also encouraged to seek inspiration from documents of the Church and the Congregation, lives and writings of the saints, especially Saints Elizabeth Ann, Vincent, and Louise, and classic and contemporary writings on theology and spirituality (*Directory*, #3.4). Here are some readings that nourish and inspire sisters and associates.

Sr. Lorraine Cooper recommends *One Foot in Eden* (Paulist Press, 1999). Author J. Philip Newell, she writes, "demonstrates the Celtic belief that grace is given by God to liberate us from what is false in us, not from what is most deeply natural. It reminds me of the belief of 'original blessing.'" By portraying the unique graces of the stages of life, Sr. Lorraine says Newell "brings me back to the beginnings of my life's journey and that of Jesus. The face of God can be seen in each **newborn and creation**, all coming from the everlasting womb. All are groaning for relationship. This comes full circle at **death**. Those who went before us are like midwives birthing us into eternity—full consciousness and God."

In the continued discussion of Newell's stages, she notes, "Childhood with its innocence reminds us of the words of Jesus, 'Unless you become like little children'—in their openness, their readiness to trust, their sense of wonder and simplicity. The **Awareness & Awakening** stage reminds us of the impatience to break out of our limits," to grow in self-awareness, and to seek to fully belong. In the years of **Early Adulthood & Passion**, layers of self-protection can clash with the desire to form bonds of love and commitment. "Reflection on God's everlasting love as the source of all true love, in prayer, is needed," Sr. Lorraine writes.

In the stage of our **Middle Years & Commitment**, she continues, Newell believes that "What has gone before lives in us still. We must find the freshness of love and duty. Our false self can drown out 'Love one another as I have loved you.'" The discipline of true love and choice are important now.

Old Age & Wisdom can enable us to know the mystery of time and the endurance that comes from waiting. We can



Tolle Lege (Take and Read)

*Suggested Titles
from Sisters & Associates*

By Regina Bechtle, SC

Sr. Regina reads and recommends *Elizabeth Seton: American Saint* by Catherine O'Donnell

return to playfulness and laugh at ourselves and situations."

Sr. Lorraine summarizes, "In retrospect, grace and what is 'most natural' come together so well in this book, and the reflections on scripture following each chapter are helpful."

Sr. Donna Dodge suggests Margaret Wheatley's book, *Who Do We Choose to Be? Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity* (Berrett-Koehler, 2017). Wheatley writes of her "desire to summon us to be leaders for this time as things fall apart, to reclaim leadership as a noble profession that creates possibility and humaneness in the midst of increasing fear and turmoil."

Sr. Margaret Egan points to two websites: first, the "inspiring as well as challenging" (also brief) reflections from Franciscan Richard Rohr's Center for

Action and Contemplation <https://cac.org/category/daily-meditations/>. Simply sign up to receive them by email daily or as a weekly digest. Sr. Margaret also recommends Christine Valters Paintner, a Benedictine oblate, artist, and writer, whose website <https://abbeyofthearts.com/> creatively fosters "transformative living through the arts" and invites readers/viewers to meet God through music, images, creation, word, and silence.

Sr. Maryellen Blumlein writes, "When you are looking for calming, spiritual reading, something that is meditative, not 'heady,' get yourself a cup of tea, sit back, and enjoy *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal*, by Rachel Naomi Remen, MD (Penguin Press, 1996). Sr. Maryellen explains, "It is a collection of stories that speak of both spiritual and natural life issues. Each story deals with a different aspect of ourselves. This book is one from which I tend to read a story or two and then use the inspiration for quiet contemplative prayer. Each time I reread a story, I learn something new and my heart feels happy about a new insight gained or lesson learned. *Kitchen Table Wisdom* holds many surprises and insights for those who choose to pick it up, sit comfortably, and read it contemplatively."

Sr. Regina Bechtle finds that poetry can be a doorway into prayer. She enjoys *Poetry Unbound*, a ten-minute podcast that, twice a week, offers a poem read and reflectively unpacked by Irish writer and peace-builder Pádraig Ó Tuama. It promises to be "short and unhurried; contemplative and energizing," and it is all of that. <https://onbeing.org/programs/welcome-to-poetry-unbound/> Another website that inspires her is <https://gratefulness.org/>

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The Congregation's spiritual heritage was represented in miniature replicas of Sr. Margaret Beaudette's sculptures, (from left) Saints Louise de Marillac, Elizabeth Seton and Vincent de Paul.



Sisters voted on revisions to the Congregation's *Constitution* and *Directory*.

Charity Rising in Sacred Space, Kairos Time

By Lisa Shay, SC Associate

“What we are about is sacred,” Sr. Donna Dodge, President of the Congregation, reminded sisters, associates, and companions attending the final session of General Assembly 2019 on January 19–20, 2020. The Assembly, which met March 26–31, 2019, approved most of the revisions to the governance document, but some sections still required revision. Because these recommendations would require Assembly approval, the delegates invoked a provision of Canon Law keeping the Assembly open until March 31, 2020.

The new Congregation leadership, which assumed office on July 1, 2019, set January 18–19 for the final session, allowing time for weather delays. With a severe storm forecast for January 18, the session was indeed postponed, but only for a day. As Sr. Donna quipped, “there is a statement in one of our documents



Sr. Donna Dodge
President

that we are a flexible body of women... maybe not as physically flexible anymore, but certainly in other ways.”

During this final session, Smith Hall was transformed into a sacred space operating on Kairos time. On one level, the revisions to the *Constitution*, *Directory*, and various policies and procedures could be seen as mundane. Yes, the Constitution Committee demonstrated painstaking attention to detail as passages were added, deleted, revised, or moved. But on a deeper level, the revisions reflect the profound growth of the Congregation's understanding of its history and the relationship with God and one another.

Louise de Marillac is now recognized in the spiritual heritage of the Congregation, and is included in the Mission statement. The revisions emphasize the working of God in all creation and the responsibility to care for all God's creation.

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Sr. Helen Connors lights the tribute candles.

Right: A tribute to recently deceased Sisters opened the Assembly session. Far right (from left): Director of Congregation Affairs Jennifer Mahoney, Sr. Margaret Egan, and Sr. Sherryl White, CSJ





Vincent's Village— Moving Closer to Welcoming Seniors

Carrying the 200-plus-year tradition of the Sisters of Charity forward is not an easy role to step into, but that was the challenge for Matt Janeszcko, the third Executive Director and CEO of the Sisters of Charity Housing Development Corporation (SCHDC) in its 22-year history. Mr. Janeszcko assumed the role when Sr. Donna Dodge became President of the Sisters of Charity on July 1, 2019. Eric Feldmann was the first SCHDC Director and CEO.

On April 16, 2019, just one year ago, Sr. Jane Iannucelli, President of the Congregation at the time, and Sr. Donna Dodge joined several Sisters of Charity, New York State, Rockland County, and local officials, Rockabill Development executives, and others to break ground for Vincent's Village in Nanuet, N.Y. The site is adjacent to Seton Village and was once part of the St. Agatha Home for Children campus. (See *Vision*, Summer 2019.)

Despite a few construction-related obstacles, the development has proceeded as scheduled, and the expected occupancy date for the first group of seniors is fall 2020.*

Vincent's Village will provide ninety-three single-bedroom units for seniors. A limited number of two-bedroom units will be available for residents who need live-in aides. Following the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI)

guidelines, some apartments will house frail, elderly seniors. These are units for seniors who have difficulty performing a minimum of one daily living function, such as cooking or ambulating. ESSHI provides additional funds to provide services for seniors who require other services.

In speaking of Vincent's Village staffing, Mr. Janeszcko said, "We're working out the staffing now. We plan to have a nurse practitioner and physical therapist on-site a couple of days a week to provide services to certain residents, which is especially important in our mission."

In his short tenure, it is evident that Mr. Janeszcko has embraced the charism of Charity. In reflecting on his role, he said, "The Sisters of Charity Housing Development is not in the housing business; we're in the home business, and that's why Mr. Feldmann, Sr. Donna, and now I, put so much emphasis on value-added. It's applying for and receiving grants for iPads for residents; it's making sure that there is a place for the folks who want to play cards with their friends; it's Sr. Eileen Walsh, who, when someone goes into the hospital, visits them. That's the value-added piece."

The COVID-19 global crisis has significantly impacted the lives of seniors, a cause of great concern to the SCHDC. Mr. Janeszcko stated, "Senior centers were closed, and meal delivery services delayed. The small face-to-face interactions that so

Left: A scale model of Vincent's Village illustrates the community setting that was built into the development's design. Above: Matt Janeszcko inside one of the Vincent's Village apartment structures.

Dear Sr. Donna,

My parents were married for 64 years when my Father's dementia and a stroke finally took him from us. You can only imagine how happy we were when Sr. Eileen (Walsh) from Seton Village called to say that there was an opening for our dear mother.

I am grateful to know that someone so special is taking care of this wonderful senior living facility. Sr. Eileen's warmth makes you feel like you have known her for a much longer time. She makes herself available to meet with me and is always kind and pleasant on the phone and in person. I have experienced her care and concern for the tenants, too. After one of our meetings she was headed to a funeral for one of the residents. I thought to myself, how beautiful for these tenants that someone would care about them in such a personal way.

Everything at Seton Village is so well thought-out and wonderfully executed. My mother's apartment is perfect for her and safe, too. My brothers and I are thankful that she was accepted in Seton Village.

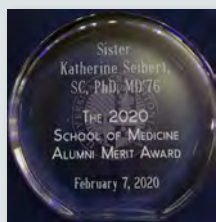
I can't say enough about Sr. Eileen's kind heart and Seton Village. I believe that God gives us so many blessings that we take for granted. I wanted you to know how much we all are thankful for the blessing of Sr. Eileen in our lives and how grateful we are for our mom's new home in Seton Village.

Patti Buongiorno
January 2020

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Sr. Katherine Seibert Honored by Creighton University

On February 7, 2020, Sr. Katherine Seibert, SC, MD, received the Creighton University Alumni Merit Award for the School of Medicine. Sr. Katherine, a Sister of Charity for 66 years and a medical doctor for 44 years, earned her medical degree at Creighton University in 1976. The award, which recognizes alumni from each school and college, “honors women and men who live life with high moral standards, guided by the Jesuit ideal of women and men for and with others.” The University honors “passionate leaders who touch and enrich lives, encouraging and inspiring others while they serve selflessly and leave the world a better place.”



Creighton University President Rev. Daniel S. Hendrickson, SJ, Ph.D., notified Sr. Katherine of her selection in October 2019. He wrote, “I concur with the committee that you have provided distinguished service to the University and your own community with a way of life that clearly exemplifies the University Credo both personally and professionally.”

Sr. Katherine received the award at the Evening of Honors in Omaha, Neb., during Creighton University’s Founders Week. Sr. Margaret Ellen Burke, a friend since their novitiate days, traveled to the event with Sr. Katherine. She noted that everyone the Sisters encountered was amazed that at age 85, Sr. Katherine was still actively working with the poor. In reflecting on her experience, Sr. Margaret Ellen said, “I was thrilled to be with Sr. Kay and see once again (I was at Notre Dame when she received an award in 2018) the admiration and respect people have for her. She never looks for attention or praise and is often surprised when others speak of what she has done and continues to do. I’m repeatedly in awe at



From left: Sr. Katherine Seibert, Fr. Daniel Hendrickson, Creighton University President, and Sr. Margaret Ellen Burke

her humility and generosity. I’m concerned for her safety at this challenging time as she continues to work in the clinic twice a week.”

Upon completing her internship and residency, Sr. Katherine trained at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Md., and St. Jude’s Hospital in Memphis. She served in oncology for 29 years and since 2005 is a physician at Hudson River Health Care. Sr. Katherine was an educator in elementary and high schools for thirteen years before pivoting to immunology and medicine. She also trained therapy dogs for twenty years and today works with her dog, Danny Boy, to help young children with anxiety issues.

Sr. Katherine recalls that the Creighton University honor brings to mind Sr. Anna Mercedes, her teacher at Cathedral High School, who often spoke the words, “noblesse oblige,” or nobility obligates. Reminding all why she is so respected and loved, Sr. Katherine sees her gifts as an obligation to serve others, saying, “God doesn’t ask how many awards you have.”

Vincent’s Village

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many elders rely upon for social connections were indefinitely paused without warning. Self-quarantine by choice is an epidemiological strategy; self-isolation because of age and risk factors was already a way of life for many senior citizens before COVID-19. Now its effects are total and unyielding. SCHDC has responded to these challenges by shifting its entire case management system in Staten Island to a call-based system. Service Coordinators engage residents by telephone at least once weekly, and more frequently if needed or requested. We have initiated procedures for food pantry deliveries, remote support for Medicare/Medicaid, SSI, SSDI and other social programs in order to help our seniors cope during this difficult time.”

The target date for completion of Vincent’s Village is January 2021. The mission of the Sisters of Charity—the heart of Charity—continues.

**The target date for occupancy predates the COVID-19 global crisis.*

Sr. Maria Louis Octavio, 102 Years of Life



Sr. Louis celebrated her 102nd birthday at Yonkers Garden (formerly St. Joseph’s Nursing Home) on March 18. Sr. Florence Mallon, who was sponsored into the Congregation by Sr. Louis, visited with her friend and captured this photo. Happy Birthday, Sr. Louis!



Miriam Anne Brennan entered the Community in 1939.
Right: Sister Miriam Anne Brennan today



Sister Miriam Anne Brennan Celebrates 100 Years of Life

By Patricia McGowan, SC

On May 2, 2020, Sr. Miriam Anne Brennan will celebrate her 100th birthday, and more than half of her one-hundred years has been spent as a health care professional. During those years she has brought an enormous amount of comfort to so many people and for that we are grateful. In this case, the Irish saying, “May your giving hand never fail you,” has proven to be 100 percent true.

When Sr. Miriam Anne was born, the world was changing rapidly. For many, the 1920s became known as the “Roaring Twenties,” a time when the increased pursuit of material things was personified in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. Undoubtedly the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust cast the largest shadow over the world during the first half of the 20th century, but medical breakthroughs such as penicillin and insulin and the initiative for a National Health Proposal helped to provide more

comprehensive and effective health care for all Americans.

However, when “Mae Mae,” as she was affectionately called, entered the convent in February 1939, nursing was not even remotely part of her plans for her future. All she really wanted was to become a Sister of Charity.

A year after she entered the Congregation, she was sent to St. Paul School in Brooklyn and, even though the Pastor jokingly warned her that the last third grade teacher “had ended up in a mental institution,” she was not a bit frightened. She loved the children whom some called “Brooklyn tough.” She fondly recalls one day when one little boy (a little bit of a “prankster”) put an apple on her desk. Suddenly the classroom door burst open and the local grocery man dashed in, grabbed the apple, looked at the boy, shook the apple at him and yelled, “You want an apple for the sister, you ask. You don’t

steal.” He put the apple back on her desk and left, still shaking his finger at the boy. Sr. Anne says, “Life was like that in Brooklyn, and the apple WAS delicious.” A year later she continued this love affair with young children when she was sent to teach the second graders at St. Margaret of Cortona School in the Riverdale section of the Bronx. Even though she loved those “wonderful days,” they soon came to an end.

Sr. Miriam Anne would continue to teach, but her expertise would no longer be confined to a parish school classroom. Her attention would soon be focused on at-risk babies and those born prematurely.

In 1944, at the request of the Congregation, Sr. Miriam Anne and three sisters enrolled in the nursing program at the College of Mount Saint Vincent. At the beginning they traveled down to St. Vincent’s Hospital in Manhattan one day a week for clinical



Sr. Miriam Anne during her years at St. Vincent's Hospital, Manhattan.

Faison, she helped create the first Premature Ambulance, "Preemie Transport," and Premature Center in New York City. Using city funding and private financial aid, at-risk babies born prematurely at other hospitals were brought to St. Vincent's Hospital to receive the latest in neonatal care.

It seems almost serendipitous that "Mae Mae" herself had been a one-and-a-half pound preemie and was not expected to live. Her parents, Mary and Thomas, kept their only child warm in a laundry

practice, and then spent their second and third years entirely at the hospital. At the end of her studies she was awarded dual degrees, a BSN from the College and a diploma from St. Vincent's School of Nursing.

Her responsibilities at the hospital varied for the next few years: operating room nurse, medical/surgical nurse, and then what was to become her "true love"—the Obstetrics-Gynecology Unit—where, she says, "Everything was alive and upbeat, centered on life and looking to the future." As administrator of the Unit, she loved working in pastoral care and student supervision, along with her regular nursing duties.

She is grateful that during those early days, she was sent for a six-week course given by the American Maternal Association of New York to learn the latest techniques in the increasingly popular area of natural childbirth. And she still laughs when she remembers when she and Sr. Margaret Carmela, in full habits, lay on their backs practicing the breathing exercises needed in natural childbirth.

In the evenings she held maternity classes for patients, nurses, students, and even expectant fathers. With Dr. Jere

hamper surrounded by hot-water bottles. And now she was able to provide the latest expertise and care for these tiniest of babies. During those days her mother often told her that, even though she had not planned on becoming a nurse, it was simply "meant to be."

Those were happy years and she admits she was "brokenhearted" when, in 1957, she was sent to open a two-year School of Nursing at St. Vincent's Hospital on

Staten Island. She, along with five other sisters, planned the curriculum, organized classes, ordered equipment, and designed clinical experiences for the new nurses. The atmospheres of the two St. Vincent's Hospitals were different but she came to love the "intimacy" of the Island. She loved that the patients, the staff, and the students lived close by and that it was easier to become friends and even family.

And, of course, it was here that she began her lasting friendship with Sr. Mary Linehan.

Nine years later, in 1966, she was once again open to the Spirit when she was asked to become the Health Care Coordinator for the Congregation. In her new position she visited every convent, gave advice and support on health matters, and introduced the sisters to the newest trends in preventive health. It was during this time that her own common-sense attitude, wit, compassion, and innate positive outlook on life made her a most beloved sister to the entire Congregation.

On the side, lest she have any "extra time to herself," Sr. Miriam Anne also worked in the Archdiocesan Office of Education on a health and sex education program.

Continued, see page 14



Sr. Mary Kay Finneran (left) and Sr. Miriam Anne Brennan, Director of Nursing, (center) preside over the Capping Ceremony at St. Joseph School of Practical Nursing.



Charity Rising in Sacred Space, Kairos Time

Continued from page 7

There is greater emphasis on our Triune God and the importance of relationship with God. Reflecting our greater interdependence, the revised documents refer to “communal” rather than “corporate” missions and responsibilities. These revisions express how Charity is rising in the Congregation today. Almost all changes passed unanimously, a tribute to the governance committee’s collaborative process, thoughtfully considering input from several area and Congregation meetings, and personal and online feedback.

In her final remarks, the facilitator, Sr. Sherryl White, CSJ, reflected on what the Congregation is called to do as it goes forth from the Assembly. She challenged all to pay attention to the point in their steps along the way when neither the right nor left foot is firmly planted but we are suspended in the in-between space of life’s path. At that moment, she noted, there is possibility for the Spirit, for God, for the divine, to move the Congregation forward. Having come to know the Sisters of Charity over the past few years, she noted, “Charity is in your very cellular structure. Before you even drew breath, you were women and men of charity, for it drew you here together as Sisters, Associates, and Companions of Charity. It holds you now. You can be none other to the world and to one

another than Charity. You have only to decide your next step and what it will look like. May it always find you making the choices of courage and faith to be Charity Rising!”

Those are challenges for all people today. Prayers throughout the session served as a reminder that everyone is challenged “to learn new lessons from old experiences...to be present to the now moment that is unfolding and receive gratefully its gifts; to take seriously the call to name and make real the bold choices of how to move forward. All are challenged to deepen relationships and to listen—really listen—to

Above left: (clockwise from bottom left) Sisters Mary Ellen O’Boyle, Ann Costello, Marie Morris, Margaret C. Kelly, Sheila Finucane and Elizabeth Vermaelen
Above: Sisters, Associates and Companions extend their appreciation to Sr. Sherryl White, CSJ, for her outstanding guidance during the Assembly.

one another’s stories and share them. All are challenged to trust in the Providence that continually calls one forth to a fresh and unexpected future...alive with possibility and the promise of Charity Rising anew.” To each of those challenges we respond, “We don’t know where the roads will lead us. We will not turn back. Let Charity Rise.” Amen!

Sisters Respond to the Call for Assistance in Shamokin, 1918

Continued from page 5

Sacraments and inspired conversions. The Sisters “laid out the dead, attended funerals and visited the grief-stricken relatives.” [Walsh, 265] Doctors claimed they would willingly give their lives for any Sister infected with the flu. Thus, when Sr. Mary Stella Murray, who had nursed at the Hospital every other morning fell seriously ill yet refused to take the prescribed medicine, even the Mayor of Shamokin visited the convent each night to watch over her.

Today, with humility and pride, the Sisters of Charity cherish the memory of these fourteen sisters who were on mission at St. Edward, Shamokin, during the influenza of 1918: Sr. Mary Cyril Bradley; Sr. Gertrude Miriam

Hunt; Sr. Miriam Angeline Broedel; Sr. Mary Liberata Hyland; Sr. Mary Sophia Carey; Sr. Mary Trinita Kohler; Sr. Angela Maria Coneys; Sr. Agnita Carmela Molloy; Sr. Anastasia Marie Doyle; Sr. Mary Stella Murray; Sr. Rose Mercedes Gillespie; Sr. Angela Dolores Stack; Sr. Ignatius Maria Harrington; and Sr. Marie Mechtilde Stritch.

Sources for this article: Walsh, Marie de Lourdes. *The Sisters of Charity of New York, 1809-1959*, Fordham University Press, 1960. Sr. Agnes Carmelita Meenahan; letters of: Sisters Miriam Angeline Broedel, Rose Mercedes Gillespie, Angela Maria Coneys, Marie Mechtilde Stritch, and Anastasia Marie Doyle.

The Grape Arbor at Mount Saint Vincent

The juice of the grape is the liquid quintessence of concentrated sunbeams.

Thomas Love Peacock, Melincourt
or Sir Oran Hutton

The Hudson Valley region of New York State is well known for its vineyards. The Mount Saint Vincent campus within the Hudson Valley region featured thriving grapevines from the mid-to-late nineteenth century, until the late twentieth century, or approximately 100 years. Although the image of monks tending vineyards may be familiar to many, the Sisters of Charity of New York were successful growing grapes, too!



A large arbor with winding vines may have been present when the Congregation purchased the Bronx estate Fontheill in 1857 from Shakespearean actor Edwin Forrest. Presented here are the only known images of the arbor. The earlier image is from an engraving printed in the 1884 book, *A Descriptive and Historical Sketch of the Academy of Mount Saint Vincent on-the-Hudson, 1847-1884*.^{*} The drawing shows the south-facing corner of the arbor in an open area next to the current stone wall and water well near the estate's carriage house, now Elizabeth Boyle Hall. While the dimensions of the arbor are unknown, it is possible the arbor extended into the area that is now the Villa parking lot. From this image, a rough estimate of size is 64-feet long by 30-feet wide.

The 1937 photograph depicts 18-year-old College of Mount Saint Vincent freshman Mary Esther Stadler standing by the

arbor. In 1942, Mary entered the Sisters of Charity of New York as Sr. Mary Thaddeus. Grape vines wrapped around the wooden trellises are visible in this winter scene.

Some Congregation members recall the large arbor on the upper campus. Sr. Regina Bechtle recalls the presence of the arbor when she arrived on the campus in 1962. Sr. Elizabeth Vermaelen also notes that the arbor was a distinct feature on campus. Both sisters observed that during this time period kitchen staff would gather the grapes in baskets weekly during the growing season. The purple grapes were pressed to produce juice served at mealtimes in the Convent.

The Congregation's grape-growing days came to an end in mid-1980s when the arbor was removed to provide space for the construction of Ely Hall.

By Mindy Gordon, Archivist



The grape arbor stood in front of Elizabeth Boyle Hall (gray granite) and extended north on the property where Ely Hall now stands (red brick).

^{*}For full text online: <https://archive.org/details/cu31924052629650/>

"And how could you **not** pick up a book titled *The Thorny Grace of It (and Other Essays for Imperfect Catholics)* (Loyola Press, 2013)?" continues Sr. Regina. "Author Brian Doyle's brief essays on themes like "Jesus and Other Testy Saints," "Speaking Catholic," "Clans and Tribes," and "There Are Many Ways to Pray" made me smile, guffaw, cry, remember, and more deeply appreciate the rich heritage that is ours. It's also the kind of book that you could gently give to someone who is a "used-to-be-Catholic." Caution: Doyle's non-pious yet utterly reverent spiritual insight may be habit-forming!"

Associate Mary Barrett Herbst offers two current reads: *The Flowing Grace of Now: Encountering Wisdom through the Weeks of the Year*, by Macrina Wiederkehr (Ave Maria Press, 2019). In weekly reflections, this popular author invites us to discover the presence of wisdom teachers already at work in our lives, teachers who can guide us to deepen our faith. Mary's other selection is *Dagger John: Archbishop John Hughes and the Making of Irish America*, by John Loughery (Three Hills, Cornell University Press, 2018). Her takeaway from this engaging biography of "one tough guy" is that "God has little interest in choosing the qualified but rather qualifies the chosen." Mary also recommends any of Thomas Merton's writings. Whenever she looks through a book of his reflections, she always finds something meant for her at that moment. "That's God's grace," she says.

Tattoos on the Heart by Gregory Boyle, SJ (Free Press, 2010) inspires Sr. Florence Mallon. The author, she explains, "has run a gang intervention program in a Los Angeles neighborhood, the gang capital of the world. He writes about his experience working in the ghetto in parables inspired by faith. His essays offer a look at how full our lives would be if we could find the joy in loving others and being loved unconditionally."

Lay or religious, we are all called to be holy. As one SC Associate commented, "Holiness is...being the best you can be, with God's grace, and doing your best to find the best in everybody." So—take and read!

Please Note

**THE 2020
SPRING BENEFIT IS
POSTPONED TO MAY 2021**

More info: sisters@scny.org

As people of faith, we pray and believe that "life is changed, not ended" (Preface Mass for Christian Burial). Changed it will be, indeed; of that we are certain, when so much else remains uncertain.

Through it all, we desire to keep the fire of Charity alive within us, with eyes and hearts open to those most in need, deliberately living from the perspective of "we/us/our."

*In prayer, let us call on our Sisters and colleagues
who have gone before us:*

You who served the people of New York during epidemics of yellow fever, cholera and influenza—

Response: Give us a share of your courageous charity.

You who nursed seriously wounded Civil War soldiers—

Response

You who treated persons with HIV/AIDS with compassion and skill, even when little was known about the cause or transmission of that deadly virus—

Response

*Much is uncertain. Yet we know and believe in the certainty
that our God will be with us, giving us the grace and strength
to do the work that is before us to do.*

Sr. Miriam Anne Brennan *Continued from page 11*

Her eternal optimism went with her to St. Joseph Hospital in Yonkers when she became Director of the School of Practical Nursing and the Assistant Director for In-Service Education.

In 1981, Sr. Miriam Anne became Nursing Administrator for the Convent of Mary the Queen, the retirement home for the Congregation, along with another term as Sisters of Charity Health Care Coordinator.

Then, in 2002, she assumed the role of part-time coordinator of the nursing services for the Mount Saint Vincent Convent until she retired in 2009. However, "retirement" has never been a word that fits easily into her vocabulary.

These days she brings her health expertise, her cheerfulness, and her never-ending enthusiasm to everyone she meets at Cabrini of Westchester where she now lives. She marvels the work accomplished by nurses and aides and their ability to do so much good. As she says, nursing has become "so much more difficult" than it was in her day.

As we look back at the extraordinary life of Sr. Miriam Anne Brennan, it is difficult to believe that life was easier back then. We can certainly believe that her "giving hand" never did fail her.

Slainte!

With Love and Appreciation We Remember...

Visit www.scny.org for complete biographies

Sister Mary Aquin Flaherty, SC

Entered: 1942 + Date of Death: January 29, 2020 + Age: 98

Sr. Mary Aquin served 61 years in the ministry of education, primarily in elementary and high schools in Manhattan and Brooklyn. At St. Bernard in Manhattan she also coordinated the CCD program and taught remedial reading and math. After retiring, she continued as a volunteer substitute teacher in Archdiocesan schools for 12 years. Her lessons often included descriptions of the lands and traditions of Scotland, where she was born, Ireland, and Halifax, Canada, along with the living faith expressions of the people, particularly their devotion to the Eucharist. Her travels enriched her life and brought joy to her students and her friends.



Sister Catherine McGlynn, SC (Sister Marian Daniel)

Entered: 1944 + Date of Death: February 21, 2020 + Age: 94

Sr. Catherine ministered for 31 years in the elementary grades in schools in the Bronx, Manhattan, and White Plains. While she was still teaching at Our Lady of Good Counsel, she began her hands-on experience with the poor and those who really needed help as the Executive Director of the Alpha Housing Coalition in the Bronx. She then served in administrative positions in housing developments in Manhattan and New City, New York. Her advocacy helped many families and seniors find safe and affordable housing. She was a Sister of Charity who lived the charism of charity to the fullest.



Sister Marie Irene Breheny, SC

Entered: 1948 + Date of Death: February 5, 2020 + Age: 92

Sr. Irene's active ministry began with teaching math in high schools in Manhattan and Yonkers for 14 years. For the next 41 years she continued teaching math on the college level at Elizabeth Seton College in Yonkers, and at Iona College. She also volunteered teaching college-bound students and adults in the Malcolm King Harlem College Extension program. She enjoyed her retirement sharing her love of her Irish heritage with her friends in the community and her large family. Students remember her as a thorough and tireless teacher who empowered them to do their best and who "made math make sense."



Sister Nora Hearty, SC (Sister Honoria Maria)

Entered: 1951 + Date of Death: March 6, 2020 + Age: 87

Sr. Nora's ministry in education began with 25 years teaching the elementary grades in schools in the Bronx, Manhattan, Staten Island, Rye, and Yonkers. For the next 15 years she used her secretarial skills in schools in Mamaroneck and Dobbs Ferry and in the Marist Brothers Provincial Offices in Pelham. After her retirement she volunteered in the Religious Education Program and the tutoring and outreach programs in St. Joseph, Yonkers. She will be remembered by her students and their parents for her quiet, gentle, and compassionate nature, and by those with whom she lived and worked for her sense of humor.



Sister Patricia Maureen Mulryan, SC

Entered: 1949 + Date of Death: February 9, 2020 + Age: 89

Sr. Patricia spent the first 26 years of her ministry in elementary education, 15 years as a teacher in St. Paul, Brooklyn, and Elizabeth Seton Academy, Yonkers, and 11 years as the principal of Elizabeth Seton Academy. After receiving her master's degree in Business Administration in 1979, Sr. Patricia served for 13 years as the Assistant Treasurer and Treasurer for the Congregation. She then shared her business acumen with the Daughters of Divine Charity, as their Treasurer for 16 years. From 1983 and through her retirement she served on the board of directors for the Leviticus Fund, a community development fund for housing for the poor.



Sister Janet Baxendale, SC (Sister Francis Rosaire)

Entered: 1957 + Date of Death: March 31, 2020 + Age: 82

Sr. Janet's years of ministry span 58 years. She taught for two years on the elementary level and 12 on the secondary level. The remaining 44 years were in the field of liturgy, devoting the first 27 years to the Archdiocese of New York. She was Adjunct Professor of Liturgy at St. Joseph Seminary and a Professor of Liturgy in the master's program of the Institute of Religious Studies. Beginning in 2001 until retirement in 2019, Sr. Janet served as liturgical and educational services consultant for dioceses across the country and was appointed consultant to the U.S. Bishops Committee on Divine Worship. (See *Vision* Winter 2020.)





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Sr. Andrea Dixon Honored at St. Patrick's Cathedral Liturgy

By Mary E. Mc Cormick, SC

St. Patrick's Cathedral was alive with the sounds of horn and drum, and the excited voices of hundreds of people from parishes throughout the metro area. They joined Timothy Cardinal Dolan to celebrate the achievements of women from the black community whose witness and service in their communities and beyond have made a difference over many years. Among the recipients of the Bakhita Woman of Faith and Service Awards was Sr. Andrea Dixon.

Sr. Andrea was recognized for her 53 years of vocation as a Sister of Charity, and for the untiring work she has accomplished to restore to the most abandoned a sense of their dignity and worth. In addition to 16 years in early-childhood education, Sr. Andrea served as a social worker in correctional facilities, a court advocate and counselor for incarcerated women and their families, and as a court advocate and counselor to domestic violence defendants and children who are victims and witnesses of domestic violence. A trained clinical social worker, Sr. Andrea ministers in a



New York hospital as a trauma specialist for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other violent crimes. She is a commissioner of the Office of Black Ministry and has a private practice in psychoanalytic psychotherapy.¹

Reflecting on the honor, Sr. Andrea said, "The name 'Bakhita' means fortunate. I am fortunate, but mostly I am humbled. I feel humbled to be recognized by the Office of Black Ministry, as a black woman and as a Sister of Charity. I feel loved."

Sisters and friends in attendance were honored to accompany Sr. Andrea, and proud of her recognition. Sr. Mary Sugrue stated, "I am so grateful that I had the privilege to be part of the award celebration for Sr. Andrea. The liturgy, music, enthusiasm and spirit were alive and joyous. I am so happy that she received this well-deserved award." Sr. Mary Ellen O'Boyle added, "I was

Friends and Sisters joined Sr. Andrea (center holding award) including (bottom row from left) Sisters Vivienne Joyce, Mary Ellen O'Boyle, Doris Heinlein, Sheila Brosnan, Mary Mc Cormick and friends Ann Harris and Patricia Titcombe; (back row) Sisters Margaret Dennehy, Geraldine Hanley, Florence Speth, Mary Sugrue, Claire Regan, and Sr. Edith Hart, RSHM.

so happy to be a part of this vivid celebration of black culture and to share beautiful music, powerful words, and intercessions in French, Creole, Gurune, Tigrinya, Garifuna, and Igbo."

The Bakhita Woman of Faith and Service Award is named for St. Josephine Bakhita, who was kidnapped and sold into slavery at the age of seven. Freed from slavery in Italy, she converted to Catholicism and became a Sister of St. Magdalene of Canossa in 1893. She died in 1947 and was canonized in 2000.

¹ Annual Archdiocesan Black History Month Mass Booklet, February 2020