Our retreat will be at Mount Carmel in Dubuque, Iowa, June 26–28. More about it will be in an upcoming newsletter. Save the date!

We have started the presentations for “An Associate Conversation: Making Our Path Together.” The Associate Coordinating Committee members (including your ACT) will be visiting you all around the country over the next year.

As always, remember to send in those pictures and articles! Happy New Year!

—Jeanie, Grace, and Eileen
Associate Coordinator Team (ACT)

Dear Circle of Friends,

Welcome to 2020!

A lot is happening this year: BVM Assembly, Associate Retreat, and “An Associate Conversation: Making Our Path Together,” plus all you are doing every day to share the charism and core values of the BVMs.

This issue highlights YOU! Thank you for sharing your stories (keep them coming!) and your celebrations. It is especially good to see and hear how you held your Dec. 8 renewal of associate promises.

The BVM Congregational Assembly will be in Dubuque, Iowa, April 14–19. Associates are encouraged to attend and participate in all, except the elections themselves. If you need financial assistance, please contact one of the associate coordinators about the Mrs. Berkeley funds.

Leaders Need Prophetic Thinking

On the evening before the start of the 2019 BVM Network on Women’s Issues, members of the Associate Coordinating Committee joined BVM Leadership and the network’s conveners in an intimate discussion with Jan Phillips on the need for prophetic thinking in leadership. Jan Phillips is a visionary thought leader, award-winning author, and dynamic speaker. She is co-founder and executive director of the Livingkindness Foundation and facilitated this year’s network event.

Pondering Association Future

At the October Associate Coordinating Committee meeting at Mount Carmel in Dubuque, Iowa, Associate Kathleen Weishaar (l.), BVM Mary Frances Reis, Associates Lori Ritz and Jeanie Fritscher, BVM LaDonna Manternach, Associate Eileen O’Shea, BVM Vicki Smurlo, and Associates Michele Miller, Susan Hoerger, and Grace Mendez talked about what BVM Association might look like in 2030 and welcomed Jeanie as the newest member of the Associate Coordinator Team.
In 2016, I made a life-changing move to be closer to my two girls. With tons of help, I packed up and downsized 42 years of memories and embarked on a journey that brought me to St. Louis. I came with the hopes of continuing my teaching of catechists and being active in a parish.

The first two years went well. I taught three classes for the Paul VI Institute and became a reader at Mass for the college church. The parish community was welcoming, and I made many acquaintances.

Then, due to health and safety concerns, I left downtown St. Louis and moved to an independent senior living facility in Ballwin, Mo. No longer able to drive, I had a hard time adjusting to being “housebound.” However, following the example of the BVMs, I looked around and decided to start a Small Christian Community here at Briarcrest Estates. We read and discuss the coming Sunday’s Liturgy of the Word. It has proven to be a heart-opening experience for the residents who join me on Thursday evenings. I am hoping to teach another class for the Paul VI Institute online, if possible, in the coming year.

Thanks to BVM Mary Frances Reis, within two weeks of my arrival in St. Louis, I became an associate member of her cluster. The welcome I felt made the transition from Florida to Missouri a lot easier than I feared. The sisters and associates I have met have made me a welcome member of their cluster. The time I have spent at my senior independent living residence has made me more aware of how, even housebound, I can continue to practice and live the BVM core values. Our craft club makes lap quilts for various organizations and participates in food drives. The interaction of the residents provides many opportunities for education and building friendships.

I am looking forward to many happy years here in St. Louis, surrounded by the BVM family and by my daughters.

—Associate Christine Middendorf

Four New Associates Make Commitments

Associates Paula Schmidt, Katie and Kraig Pfiffner, and Diane Broderick came to Mount Carmel in Dubuque, Iowa, during Thanksgiving weekend to jointly celebrate their commitment as BVM Associates.

Diane came the farthest as she traveled from Poulsbo, Wash., while the other three live in Dubuque.

Each helped plan and conduct the ceremony, which included their companioning sisters and associates. Their readings, song selections, art choices, and testimonies powerfully and uniquely introduced the individual associates.

Many Dubuque area associates opted to renew their promises during the Nov. 30 Associate Commitment Ceremony, during a Dec. 9 ceremony at Clarke University, or via individual observances at home.

Associate Reflection: “Meet Me in St. Louis”

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‘An Associate Conversation: Making Our Path Together’

On Jan. 11 the Montrose, Calif., Cluster piloted the new program, “An Associate Conversation: Making Our Path Together.”

The 10 attending sisters and associates shared in pairs and small groups on the past and present of association. At their next meeting, they will discuss the future of association!

This program will be presented by members of the Associate Coordinating Committee and the Associate Coordinator Team with associates and sisters around the country over the next year.

—Grace Mendez

Associate Coordinator

Associates (l.) Erica Brown, Lia (Rosalia) Avila, Nancy Niles, Francine and Bill Lee, and BVM Vicki Smurlo were among the first to have “An Associate Conversation: Making Our Path Together.”

Watch the commitment ceremony at: portal.stretchinternet.com/bvmsisters.
Annually, BVM Associates celebrate the renewal of their associate commitment promises, often during a shared ceremony with the sisters who are renewing their vows. Thank you to the many associates who shared photos of their celebrations.

“On Dec. 7 we had a wonderful afternoon renewing our vows and promises and celebrating Virginia Piecuch (l.) and Helen Gabel’s 25th anniversaries as associates. We had a good crowd of 45 sisters, associates, friends, and relatives.”

—Eileen O’Shea, Associate Coordinator

On Dec. 9 Missoula, Mont., Cluster Associates (l.) Joan Butler, Linda Plamondon, Mary McGonigle-McCourt, Jim Tackes, and Marge Nordin held a recommitment ceremony. Mary is holding a pre-1960 photo of BVMs.

On Dec. 9 in northern California, 18 BVMs and associates gathered at BVM Bette Gambonini’s home for a vow renewal, promise recommitment prayer, and camaraderie. Pictured are Associates (l.) Carol De Carvalho, Barbara Harper, Kay Harrison, and Carmella Huser.

On Dec. 5 Stevens Point, Wis., Associates Mary Ann Krems (l.), and Michelle Miller answered book club members’ questions about how they practice core values in their lives as part of renewing their promises and sharing BVM Association with others.

Associate Coordinator Jeanie Fritscher (l.) renewed her promise over Zoom with Jane Rogers, BVM.
On Oct. 22, 2019, two dozen Clarke University students of Associate Norm Freund’s “BVM and Clarke Heritage” class toured the Motherhouse at Mount Carmel in Dubuque, Iowa.

The first display of the tour was the miniature replica of the “St. Joseph’s on the Prairie” homesite. Norm reviewed what he taught to students who previously toured the actual farm and ruins.

He spoke of the tower-shaped school where the children from the nearby farms attended classes and pointed out radical acceptance of one another in the messiness of life.

This acceptance must include even those we dislike or see as enemies, following Jesus’ teaching to “love our enemies and do good to those who hate you.”

It is only through a contemplative stance that we will find the strength and courage to engage with one another and our world, a countercultural attitude to the rugged individualism that is a characteristic of our present-day society.

Sister Simone went on to share that we cannot face the challenges of our present day alone, but need to hold one another in a community of support. We also need to ask ourselves the question asked by Walter Brueggemann in his 1979 book *The Prophetic Imagination: What makes a vibrant community?*

Such a community has a commitment to a truth bigger than one individual. It is a community that:

- has a long and available memory.
- is touched by the pain of the world as real, allowing our hearts to be broken open.
- has an active experience of hope.
- engages in effective discourse across generations and cultures.
- has the capacity to sustain long-term tension with the dominant culture (to be *in*, but not *of* the world).

Moved by the enormous needs of our world, we can feel insignificant and powerless. Sister Simone reminded us that not only do we need a community in which to work but also that we need to remember we are all part of the mystical body of Christ described by St. Paul.

No part of the body can work alone, and each part is necessary. What part do we see ourselves to be? What other parts do we need to do our work? What parts need us? We explored these questions with one another, helping us recognize that we need even those members we may not appreciate, and they need us.

—Associate Elizabeth Fitting

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Mount Carmel Heritage Tour Explores BVM History, Values

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He spoke of the tower-shaped school where the children from the nearby farms attended classes and pointed out other areas of interest.

The second stop on the Motherhouse tour featured the bell, which had also been on the prairie before moving to Mount Carmel. Next, they visited the traditional main entrance of the Motherhouse. Norm explained that this entrance was typically only used once—when a sister entered the community.

Students explored congregational artifacts in both rooms flanking the lobby, then proceeded to the Prairie Room.

Student Bailey Dunkin wrote, “Norm does an excellent job teaching BVM and Clarke heritage. I am not a history person and get bored easily. However, with Norm teaching, taking us to the old Motherhouse, Mount Carmel, and walking tours of Clarke have helped me understand the values of Clarke University and essence.”

—Jeanie Fritscher
Associate Coordinator
As a participant of one of the two groups organized by the BVM Office of Life and Mission visiting the Working Boys’ Center (WBC) Family of Families in Quito, Ecuador, we had an amazing trip. It was a time of spiritual renewal, cultural awareness, and service as we learned and stood in solidarity with the working poor in Quito.

Our first group visited the homes of families who participate in the WBC, where children are provided with nutritious meals.

One of the teaching staff explains about the class in which students learn background education for technical skills. Students are now able to receive a high school diploma while attending school at the center.

Our group participated in a minga, where community members come together to help one another with house building.

Our hearts were opened as we visited Working Families Happy for Change in the south of Quito. This center is run by Ecuadorian staff, including some of the original shoeshine boys. BVM Madre Miguel and Padre Juan provide spiritual guidance to the center. They serve about 60 to 70 percent Venezuelan refugees and the rest of the working poor in Quito. The members receive nutritious meals, health care services, and after or before school programs for children.

—Associate Carol De Carvalho

Volunteer service group members accompany a WBC social worker on a visit to the homes of families who are new to the center.

Group members prepare foundation work to help build a house while participating in a minga (voluntary collaborative work).
Southern Californians had another opportunity for “Associates in Action” at the 27th annual Adopt-a-Family project on Dec 7.

Every year the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels provides food, gifts, and cards with Christmas wishes to more than 450 families in downtown Los Angeles and other low-income parishes.

Annually BVMs and associates help pack the boxes of food items collected by school children, wrap gifts specific to the needs of each family member, and sign cards to attach to the boxes before they get delivered to each family. This is the first year we had our BVM volunteer shirts to wear, and we did so enthusiastically.

Associates volunteering their time to the Adopt-a-Family project are (l.) Nancy Niles, Clara Schwartz, Carol Walsh, and BVM Marguerite Murphy.

Associate Coordinator Grace Mendez (l.) and BVM Anne Kendall sign cards.

Filling boxes are (l.) BVM Vicki Smurlo and Phil and Associate Teresa Tiffany.

Gathering to help with Adopt-a-Family are (front row, l.) BVM Marguerite Murphy; Associates Clara Schwartz and Teri Piña; and BVM Anne Kendall; (back row, l.) Phil Tiffany (husband of Teresa); BVM Vicki Smurlo; Associates Teresa Tiffany, Carol Walsh, Grace Mendez, and Nancy Niles; and BVM Mary Elizabeth Galt.
Minnesota Associate Anne Kijement visited Mount Carmel Oct. 25 to give an updated presentation on Dorothy Day, foundress of the Catholic Worker Movement.

During the second annual Advent Carols and Lessons service at Mount Carmel on Dec. 1, (l.) Associate Andy Schroeder, BVM Mary Alma Sullivan, Associate Marilyn Wasmundt, BVM Roberta White, Associate Sharon Scully, and BVM Mary Janine Wolff join in prayers and songs awaiting the arrival of “God With Us.”

Members of the Wisconsin Cluster gathered at Associate Pat O’Driscoll’s home for a time of friendship and food provided by Virginia Stone, BVM.

New Associate Diane Broderick (center) enjoyed a meal at Caroline’s restaurant in Dubuque, Iowa, with BVMs Mira Mosle (l.) and Kathy Carr in November.

Dubuque area associates gathering for lunch are (l.) Sharon Scully, Maureen Frommelt, Marilyn Wasmundt, and Holly Bernhardt. Thanks for holding still long enough to get this shot.

Associate Nancy Niles (standing) helps coach the Montrose Cluster Associates (l.) Francine Lee, Kathleen Hebron, and Teri Piña on how to set up Zoom.

Associates Lori Ritz (l.) and Rose Ritter visited when Lori was in Phoenix.

Whether in person or via zoom, sometimes the best way for associates and sisters to connect is to do something just for the joy of spending time together.

Serving sundae toppings in Loyola Hall during a social sponsored by the activities department are (l.) Associate Jolene Clevenger, BVM Veronica Higgins and Tricia McDonell.

Top: Terese Shinners, BVM (l.) and Joann Crowley Beers, Associate.

Bottom: (l.) Associates Pat O’Driscoll, Mary Ann Krems, and Michele Miller; and Terese Shinners, BVM
Annually, Jan. 11 is the National Day Against Human Trafficking and begins Human Trafficking Awareness Month. In recognition of that day, the Tri-State Coalition Against Human Trafficking and Slavery held a screening of the film “I Am Still Here” at the Grand Opera House in Dubuque, Iowa. The film addresses the sexual trafficking of children in America.

Approximately a dozen BVM associates and sisters and more than 100 others attended the screening. Although the snow and ice kept many away, 98-year old Concetta Naba, BVM arrived with a little help from her friends.

BVM Mira Mosle facilitated the after-film discussion and Q&A. Members of the discussion panel included Dubuque County Attorney CJ May, Ivan Divino, volunteer educator from the Clarity Clinic, and Associate Suzie Wright, board president of Set Free Dubuque and a member of the coalition.

Many of the coalition members volunteered to make this event a success by coordinating, promoting, and staffing the screening. Three billboards and more than 200 posters were distributed to local schools, churches, and businesses to encourage attendance.

More screenings are planned in local schools and for the public. A small group of BVMs and associates met in the Caritas dining room for a follow up discussion the next week.

Tristate Coalition Against Human Trafficking and Slavery volunteers wearing blue to the screening to increase awareness of human trafficking are (l.) Associate Suzie Wright; Carol Cook, BVM; Mary Lechtenberg, OSF; Mira Mosle, BVM; Sybil Schroeder; Associate Maureen Frommelt; Nancy McCarthy, BVM; and Pat Conlan, RSM.

BVMs Betty Voss (l.), and Concetta Naba head into the Grand Opera House.

Mary Lechtenberg, OSF, leader of the Tri-State Coalition Against Human Trafficking and Slavery welcomes the audience and introduces the film.

Members of the Tri-State Coalition Against Human Trafficking and Slavery gather for the Dubuque County Supervisors’ proclamation declaring January as Human Trafficking Awareness Month: (l.) Nancy Miller, OSF; Mira Mosle, BVM; County Supervisor Jay Wickham; BVMs Eileen Healy, Diane Rapozo, and Nancy McCarthy; Mary Lechtenberg, OSF; BVMs Mary Jean Ferry and Irene Lukefahr; Associate Maureen Frommelt; Pat Conlan, RSM; and County Supervisors Ann McDonough and Dave Baker.

Movie Increases Awareness of Human Trafficking