

SAVE THE DATES FOR 2020

TBD

BVM Associate
Retreat Postponed

Oct. 24–25

BVM Network for
Women's Issues
More details to come

Dec. 8

Promise Renewal

For more information about
associates and events, contact:
bvmassociates@bvmsisters.org.

For a complete list of events,
visit the members' website:
members.bvmsisters.org>
[Resources](#)>[Calendar of Events](#).

Did You Know?



BVM Associates have a private Facebook group dedicated to just us. If you are interested in being added to the group, please let your associate coordinators know how to reach you on Facebook.



The *Associate Handbook* was recently updated. A new edition is on the bvmsisters.org website under the heading of [Offices > Associates > Associate Resources](#).

We would love to share your associate events, stories, and photos. Send submissions to: swright@bvmsisters.org.

For a list of volunteer opportunities, visit: bvmsisters.org/volunteer.

BVM Associate News will be emailed and posted on the associate page of the members' website. Copies mailed on request. Contact: swright@bvmsisters.org.



BVM Associate News

A Faithful Present, a Hopeful Future

F R E E D O M • E D U C A T I O N • C H A R I T Y • J U S T I C E

Spring 2020

Dear Circle of Friends,

When last we wrote we were looking forward to the many events in 2020 that would bring us together. Now faced with this unexpected COVID-19, many of those events have been cancelled or postponed.

As we write this in early April, we are being asked to distance ourselves from one another, to limit or avoid basic interactions, and stay away from the places where we normally gather.

This includes participation in liturgy and other kinds of religious services. It's particularly difficult as we face the prospect of celebrating Easter away from our faith communities.

As we mourn this loss, we are blessed to belong to this circle of friends —BVM sisters and associates.

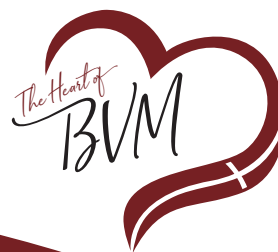
We know we are not truly cut off from one another, and our circle of friends is not compromised by these new and temporary constraints.

Our prayer is that by the time you read this, we are well on our way out of this pandemic.

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



An Associate Conversation *Making our Path Together*



Gratitude in Phoenix

On Jan. 19, four associates met at the La Siena Retirement Community in Phoenix, where Rose Ritter resides.

Rose, Joan Spittler and husband, Tom, Lori Ritz, and I gathered for a lively discussion. The topic centered on the gift of the BVM community and our gratefulness

for the richness association has brought into our lives.

It was undoubtedly a time of getting to know one another and hearing each person's story, which I believe was enriching for each one of us.

—Jeanie Fritscher
Associate Coordinator

All work and no play? No way!

Card Game Unites Associates and Sisters in Midwest and West

Service comes in many forms.

When here in Montrose, Calif., and in Dubuque, Iowa, for meetings, I have witnessed significant card games going that include associates Grace Mendez, Nancy Niles, Suzie Wright, and Lori Ritz, with Carol Walsh as a sub.

Why significant? To engage others in fun, of course, and also to lift the spirits, raise the roof with laughter, challenge the mental technique of strategizing, and calm anxiety—all at the same time.

The favored game in Montrose is Gaigel. The German card game has also made its way to Mount Carmel.

I'll address the Montrose group primarily because I've witnessed the reality of what goes on. Gaigel is played on the west end upstairs and I hear laughter in the east end downstairs. If it's quiet—and sometimes it is—the likelihood is that serious conversation is going on as each engages the others for support dealing with difficult issues.

Nancy and Grace agree that coming here on most Tuesdays and Thursdays has been therapeutic, not only for fun but for distraction from challenging issues.

There is a level of trust that has been tested among this group. Once for BVM Suzanne "Sue" Stopper's birthday, Anne Kendall, BVM made identical fake high trump cards with her computer skills. At the appointed time in a game, Sue



California card players: BVMs Suzanne (seated, l.) and Mary Jeanne Stopper play cards with Associates Nancy Niles and Grace Mendez in Montrose, Calif., in this photo from before Mary Jeanne moved to Mount Carmel.

Iowa card players: BVMs Anne Kendall (l.), Roberta White, and Mary Jeanne Stopper play cards with Associates Nancy Niles (standing), Suzie Wright, and Grace Mendez.



surreptitiously snuck them onto the table to instantly defeat Grace at her apparent winning game. Even the neighbors must have heard the screams when the truth was revealed!

When the game was taught to others in Dubuque, it united the West and Midwest. The purpose was to engage Mary Jeanne Stopper, BVM (Sue's sister) who could

surprisingly still contribute to the fun and levity of the game because the rules have been well established in her memory.

Thus, another example of Associates in Action—not in work but in play.

—Vicki Smurlo, BVM

Mrs. Berkeley Fund Available for Associates and Discerners

Mrs. Berkeley, a member of Miss Clarke's Seminary on North Anne Street in Dublin, is considered the honorary first associate. She was an affluent widow who financially supported Mary Frances Clarke's "Circle of Friends," including funding part of the ocean crossing for the five founding BVMs.

In honor of Mrs. Berkeley's generosity, there is a special fund

for discerners and associates. The fund is available to defray travel costs and attendance fees for BVM assemblies, retreats, and days of prayer. As an example, discerners might apply for Mrs. Berkeley Funds to visit Mount Carmel.

Contact one of the associate coordinators if you would like to apply for Mrs. Berkeley Funds.

If you would like to donate to the fund, you can do so by donating online at: bvmsisters.org/online-donations.

Put a note in the comments section that you want the funds designated to the Mrs. Berkeley Fund. Or mail a check to:

**Mrs. Berkeley Fund
Development Office
c/o Sisters of Charity, BVM
1100 Carmel Dr
Dubuque IA 52003**

Meet an Associate: Gina Burkart

Called by the Spirit of Mary Frances Clarke To Practice BVM Core Values



Almost eight years ago when I began my position at Clarke University, I heard the story of Mary Frances Clarke. Her courage and persistence spoke to me.

Learning about the BVM tradition stirred something in my soul. And when I heard Associate Norm Freund and BVMs Kathy Carr and Lou Anglin present at a Catholic Identity event about the role of associates, I felt a calling.

That calling resurfaced later in the year while Kathy and I discussed our faith, Scripture, and prayed together at the Busy Person's Retreat at Clarke. After the retreat, Kathy mentored me and guided me in the process of becoming an associate and learning more about BVMs—their history, mission, and core values.

The BVM core values of freedom, education, charity, and justice led me to seek membership in the associate community. Throughout the process, I found a kindred spirit in Mary Frances Clarke. Her mysticism intrigued me, and I related to her passion for social justice and education.

What especially spoke to me was the BVM understanding of freedom as aligning one's self with the will of God. This is very different from the media's depiction of freedom.

When one relinquishes control and hands the reins over to the Holy Spirit, one truly becomes free. Mary Frances Clarke captures the essence of this when she says, "I bow and submit to the holy will of God."

With the BVMs, I have found kindred spirits who listen to the Holy Spirit and follow where it leads—with trust and enthusiasm.

As a college educator of 20 years, I also see education as a work of charity, tool of justice, and means of freedom. These values ground my teaching and research.

Part of this calling has been to work at Clarke as the learning specialist and to teach courses in English and College Success Strategies. As the learning specialist, I am privileged with supporting all learners (undergraduate and graduate). I guide and mentor students to find success in their courses. I also develop and coordinate academic programming that supports students and faculty with teaching and learning.

I found that what impacts learning most is emotional intelligence and understanding of self. This involves engaging students in metacognition—thinking about how they think and learn—and attempting to make adjustments as needed.

As part of this work, I have been asked to be a consultant and collaborator for the award-winning online journal, *Improve with*

Metacognition. In this role, I will be writing frequently about metacognition and sharing my work and research. The first of a five-part series was published in February: "Getting to Know Your Students: Using Self-Assessment in the Classroom to Foster Metacognition." improvetwithmetacognition.com/getting-to-know-your-students.

In learning how we think, learn, and teach, we get a better understanding of self. And, in better understanding self, we grow in our relationship with God and others.

Additionally, I am a wife, mother, and new grandmother. Steve and I will celebrate 27 years of marriage this April. Together, we have three children—Adam (26), Brianna (24), and Emma (23). (My children, husband, and daughter-in-law are Clarke graduates! Dare I confess to graduating from Loras College for my bachelor's—and the University of Northern Iowa for my master's and doctorate.) Last May, Adam and his wife, Nicole, blessed us with a beautiful grandson—Bennett Christopher.

Steve and I are natives of Dubuque. Returning eight years ago brought us back to our families and roots. And it led me on a journey with the BVM community that has challenged me to grow in a deeper understanding of my spiritual self and faith.

—Associate Gina Burkart, Ed.D.

Associates in Action



Oh-la-la! Help came from Associate Teresa Piña, Discerner Theresé "Tad" Edwards, and BVM Vicki Smurlo, who helped sort clothing in Los Angeles.

Sorting in L.A.

On a rainy March day in Los Angeles, the day after COVID-19 caused the cancellation of many activities and events, three volunteers helped sort clothing donated for the Christmas Adopt-A-Family program at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels.

In December, multiple volunteers from the archdiocese provided gifts, clothing, and food for 483 families. Excess clothing needed to be organized for easy access this year.

—Vicki Smurlo, BVM

Associates Remember Joan Stritesky, BVM, First Associate Coordinator

We are grateful for the foundation Joan Stritesky, BVM, who died Feb. 18, 2020, laid as the first associate coordinator. Joan's dedication to the associate program lasted long beyond the time of her formal service. We celebrate her life with a few reflections from associates:



Joan was a lovely lady and very sociable. She was friendly, helpful, charming, and always interested in my welfare.

—Mary Anne Troy, Wisconsin



Joan was the associate coordinator, with Therese Frelo, when I began this journey in May 1984. I do remember going to my first associate gathering at the parish (don't remember which one) where Joan was working. She welcomed me with open arms (literally) and never stopped embracing me for all these many years. Her encouragement and warmth were always evident.

—Helen Gabel, Illinois



BVM Joan Stritesky (r.) welcomes Rose Ritter as an associate during Rose's commitment ceremony in 1996.



When I decided I wanted to become a BVM associate, Joan was director of the program. As I recall, we set up a time to meet for dinner at the House of China. (I had never met her.) She was wonderful! Easy to be with and a great storyteller with an almost outrageous sense of humor. I think we talked for several hours. I probably talked about myself. But Joan regaled me with stories. I only remember one:

Shortly after the habit was no longer mandatory, she said she applied for a parish position wearing street clothes for her interview. The pastor (she didn't say who he was) immediately

told her she wouldn't get the job because she obviously was just like all the other sisters who no longer wore habits and, consequently, needed jobs so they'd have money to buy lots of fancy clothes.

When the evening concluded, Joan told me I was "in." The associate preparation process was quite simple way back then!

She had a passion for the associate program, believing they would enhance and strengthen the BVM community at a time when that sentiment wasn't shared by everyone. She believed that a reciprocal relationship between vowed and lay members was the way of the future. She was truly a visionary.

—Jeanne Harrington, Iowa



Associates Gather For Lunch in Dubuque

Ann Sweeney (second from l.), Mount Carmel director of development and grant administrator, joined Associates Mary Chapman, Betty Takes, Marilyn Wasmundt, Sharon Scully, Mary Tritz, Norm Freund, Lori Ritz, and Maureen Frommelt for lunch recently.

BVM Mission:

We are the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a community of Catholic women called to live the mission of Jesus through our core values of

FREEDOM, EDUCATION, CHARITY, AND JUSTICE.

BVMSISTERS.ORG
MEMBERS.BVMSISTERS.ORG



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