

SAVE THE DATES FOR 2021–22

2021

November

- 9 Zoom Social with Grace Mendez
- 10 Exploring Intersections: Restorative Justice
- 16 Just for the Fun of It Zoom with Vicki Smurlo, BVM

December

- 8 Vow and Promise Renewal
- 8 Exploring Intersections: Affordable Housing
- 14 Zoom Social with Grace Mendez
- 21 Just for the Fun of It Zoom with Vicki Smurlo, BVM

2022

January

- 11 Zoom Social with Grace Mendez
- 12 Exploring Intersections: Education Justice
- 18 Just for the Fun of It Zoom with Vicki Smurlo, BVM

February

- 8 Zoom Social with Grace Mendez
- 9 Exploring Intersections: Equitable Access to Healthcare

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

Contact Us

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

Submit your associate events, stories, and photos 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.



Photo by: Elizabeth Huber, BVM

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

Fall 2021

Dear Circle of Friends,

This is the second year in which we are sharing an associate necrology in our October newsletter (see p. 8). Recently, we added a place for Associate Obituaries under the "What's New" tab, on the bvmsisters.org website. We hope you will find this to be a convenient way to express your fond memories. Please

be sure to check out this section of the website.

As the days grow shorter and leaves turn, I invite you to think about our renewal of Associate Promise on Dec. 8. Enjoy this beautiful time of year.

Peace and Joy,

—Jeanie Fritscher, for the ACT



Associate Coordinator Team (ACT): Jeanie Fritscher, Grace Mendez, and Eileen O'Shea



Attendees enjoying a picnic lunch at Eagle Point Park in Dubuque are (l.): Associates Mary Chapman, Jeanie Fritscher, Pat Maddux, Paula Schmidt; Discerner Karen Kane-Herber; BVM Kate Hendel; Associates Marilyn Wasmundt, Suzie Wright, Maureen Frommelt, Mary Tritz; Discerner Diane Kopp; and Associate Sharon Scully.

Dubuque Area Associate Picnic

The Office of Life and Mission and I would like to thank Associates Maureen Frommelt, Marilyn Wasmundt, and Sharon Scully for planning and hosting the Dubuque-Area Associate Picnic in August. We encourage all associates groups to reach out to their associate coordinators

if you are interested in hosting such an event. If you do not know which coordinator covers your geographic area, see p. 3 in the associate appendix of the new BVM Directory.

—Associate Coordinator Jeanie Fritscher

Celebrating Service

For several years, Southern Californian BVM sisters and associates have worked with Wellness Works. This agency is a previous Ministry Partnership Grant recipient. The organization provides support for U.S. military and first responders who have completed their assignments, whether it be an emergency in another country or our own.

Often, the veterans struggle with transitioning to civilian life, usually due to PTSD and its effects. Wellness Works is a place for them to get re-grounded in civilian life. It offers a variety of professional help services with a focus on mental health. Wellness Works is a loving

environment, open to vets and their families. No one who asks for help will ever be ignored.

At their annual event “Not On Our Watch,” they celebrate the individuals served by the organization. Wellness Works invites the military members and their families to a backyard social. Associate Nancy Niles and BVM Vicki Smurlo attended. Also attending was my eleven-year-old grandson, who participated by handling several chores during the day. As we believe in our hearts, where one of us is, so are all.

—Associate Clara Schwartz



Mary Lu Coughlin, Co-Founder of Wellness Works, and Montrose Cluster friend, speaks at the 2021 “Not on Our Watch” event held on Sept. 28, in Glendale, Calif.

Montrose Cluster Zooms Into Action

Though not physically together at our Zoom meeting, we decided that we still wanted to “zoom into action” with a service activity as a cluster.

And so it happened. We agreed that

we could do something for Operation Gratitude. This local organization acknowledges Military and First Responders, and thus the idea was born: we would write notes to our military

serving in other countries.

With Associate Lia Avila’s help in procuring pre-printed and handmade THANK YOU cards provided by Operation Gratitude, we divided the bounty and distributed packs to cluster members who agreed to write personal notes to be placed into “care packages” being sent to various military sites.

“Thank you for your service” . . . “We appreciate your protecting our country” . . . “We pray for your family missing you” . . . “Our gratitude for your sacrifices” . . . “We pray for your safe return” were the phrases that came from our hearts. The possibilities continue with opportunities for individuals to also write notes to vets in hospitals and first responders.

At the conclusion of our project, we happily provided 250 cards for Operation Gratitude. We’re doing it! We are living our core values of charity and freedom by making loving choices and being our best selves.

—Vicki Smurlo, BVM



Associates (l.) Gil Federico, Carol Walsh, Shirley Federico, and Faith Holland; and BVM Vicki Smurlo, from the Montrose Cluster, write 250 thank you notes that will accompany care packages sent to military heroes by Operation Gratitude.

Welcome New BVM Associates!

Ann Hoefer



We welcomed Ann Hoefer, from Dubuque, Iowa, as a BVM associate on Sept. 24. BVMs Liz Olsen, Theresa Caluori,

Judy Callahan, and Marjorie Heidkamp, and Associate Suzie Wright were her discernment companions.

With the gentle prodding of BVM Joan Stritesky, Ann started her discernment process while employed at Mount Carmel. Ann

feels that Joan continues to guide her, even now. Ann is grateful to the BVMs who have played such a vital part of her life. Liz Olsen served as Ann's primary companion after Joan died, and shared these thoughts, "Companioning Annie Hoefer has been a joyful, new experience for me. I feel enlightened and affirmed in my own spirituality."

Judy Callahan wrote in her letter of affirmation, "Ann brings energy,

encouragement, joy, friendship, collaboration, and a spirit of love of the BVM congregation in all of its aspects. It is a joy to work, pray, serve, and just be with her."

Ann looks forward to joining a cluster and renewing her time with sisters and associates in the Dubuque area. Her commitment ceremony is on hold as she hopes to have the ceremony at Mount Carmel Bluffs with others.

—Associate Coordinator Jeanie Fritscher

Jane Pohl



Jane Pohl of Round Lake, Ill., completed the candidate process and was accepted as a BVM associate on Sept. 29.

BVMs Dee Myers, Eileen Powell, and Marge Sannasardo accompanied Jane on her discernment journey.

Jane is a former BVM, known to some as "Jo." She graduated from Our Lady of Peace High School, in St. Paul, Minn., and Mundelein College, in Chicago, where she first got to know BVMs. She recently

retired from Carmel High School, where she taught for over 25 years.

"Praying together and sharing our time, thoughts, and stories" was the most meaningful part of the discernment process for Jane.

In her application, Jane shared that praying with others nourishes her spiritual life. "This is one of the things I have missed the most since leaving the community many years ago. Being an associate would [I think] bring some of these experiences back into my life. I would very much

like that, as I would feel a part of something larger than myself."

In Marge Sannasardo's letter of affirmation, she acknowledges Jane's "eagerness and sincere desire to be a BVM associate and her desire to share living the core values of our BVM life and mission."

Planning for her commitment ceremony is on hold as Jane hopes to have the ceremony at Mount Carmel Bluffs once it is safe to return.

—Associate Coordinator Eileen O'Shea

Q & A: Bill Lee



Bill Lee lives in southern California, where he and his wife Francine have been associates for 15 years. They have faithfully attended the

Montrose Cluster meetings where Bill always has a clever joke to share.

I interviewed Bill with curiosity about what it's been like for him to be an associate. Bill's response was "It brings me closer to Jesus Christ. I wasn't conscious of how important it is to be close to Jesus. I read an hour every day, and 15 minutes of that is from the catechism and religious books. I do

Zoom cluster sessions, and I participate in our group service activities."

When asked how association changed his life, he said, "Now when I meet people, I say 'God bless you' and things like that."

I asked, "And the best part of being an associate?" Bill nonchalantly responded, "I like being with the sisters, praying, and I feel loved in our group . . . in-person on and online."

I reminded him how important his hugs had been (pre-COVID). Says Bill, "It feels very good to be hugged by all. It's all about being joyful!"

— Vicki Smurlo, BVM



The Office of Life and Mission frequently creates special short-term projects that require people with unique skill sets, i.e., writing and public speaking. If you are an associate or sister interested in sharing your skills, talents, and knowledge via Zoom, recording, or in-person, please send an email to bvmassociates@bvmsisters.org to add your name to our volunteer list.

Montrose Cluster Welcomes Four New Associates

Members of the Montrose Cluster held the BVM associate commitment ceremony for Dolores Bromberek, Gil and Shirley Federico, and Faith Holland on July 10. The ceremony was held at Holy Redeemer Church in Montrose, Calif. Associate Coordinator Grace Mendez and BVMs Marguerite Murphy and Vicki Smurlo participated in the ceremony with companion Associate Francine Lee. Sisters, associates, and friends shared a meal and companionship in the convent dining area and yard following the ceremony.

“The joy of the day was not only in their commitment but also in our cluster being physically together. In particular, it was a blessing that Gil and Shirley were there as they came from Northern California, where they now reside,” shared BVM Vicki Smurlo.

—Associate Coordinator Grace Mendez



Associates (l.) Dolores Bromberek, Gil and Shirley Federico, and Faith Holland come together for their commitment celebration. Personalized “Heart of BVM” candles and certificates of acceptance inscribed with calligraphy by Associate Mary Trinity Kelly sweeten the moment.



Associates Dolores Bromberek (l.) and Associate Coordinator Grace Mendez take part in the commitment ceremony held in the sanctuary of Holy Redeemer Church in Montrose, Calif. on July 10.

Working Together to Build Relationships: Networking and Collaboration are Vital



Since July 2019, I have served as the Social Justice Coordinator for the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque, Iowa. My primary focus is to promote justice education, advocacy, and action on the part of the sisters, associates, and staff with respect to current issues of justice, peace, and integrity of creation.

My primary communication to both congregations, communities, and others nationally and internationally is through email. One example is sending out a weekly Action Alert Digest e-newsletter produced by the Iowa Clinton Franciscans’ Franciscan Peace Center. This e-newsletter provides updates on the main issues and corporate stances that have also been taken by the BVMs. It provides a quick summary of information and potential actions that the reader

may take. Also sent out weekly, are emails on current events—usually legislative actions that require immediate and timely action.

Networking and collaboration with other organizations are vital to social justice work. During these two years, in partnering with BVMs and others, I prepared prayer services on immigration, care of creation resources, racism, and other topics, which were made available online.

Book discussion groups, webinars on various issues, and special events are also sent out regularly. Last year, we offered a book discussion group for the book, *So You Want to Talk about Race*, by Ijeoma Oluo. Currently, book discussion groups are forming for Fr. Dan Horan, OFM’s book, *A White Catholic’s Guide to Racism and Privilege*. He will also be giving an all-day presentation on Nov. 13. To register, email justice@bvmsisters.org.

For social change to occur, participation is needed. Everyone

can’t do everything, but everybody can do one thing. What is your one thing?

Working together to build relationships changes everything. Therefore, I invite you to sign up for the weekly Action Alert Digest e-newsletter by contacting me at justice@bvmsisters.org. I am happy to serve as a resource.

On a personal note, in order to remain a hopeful and joyful person, I cultivate other interests. I love my community, my family and enjoy cats, dogs, nature, music, playing ping pong, and woodworking.

It is a real privilege to work in a collaborative effort of shared values with the BVM community and the Sisters of St. Francis. I appreciate getting to know both congregations and associates in new ways and walking this path together into the future.

—Nancy Miller, OSF
Social Justice Coordinator

Reflection on BVM Association



"You are in my thoughts and prayers." I'm not sure how many times I have said, heard, or read those words since the pandemic began — hundreds or perhaps thousands of times. In some ways, the expression has become so overworked it has lost its meaning. But when I say to people, "I will pray for you," I make an important commitment.

I was challenged to become an associate not only to join others in

prayer, but also to be encouraged and empowered by a circle of friends to remain faithful to my commitments. For me, prayer can be uplifting, inspiring, and moving, as I sense union with God. Other times, it is a struggle, filled with distractions and dullness. In these times, I need a circle of friends to urge me on.

Sometimes, I may feel powerless when confronted with the struggles and sorrows of others. But in the words of Henri Nouwen, "Through prayer we

can carry in our heart all human pain and sorrow, all conflicts and agonies, all torture and war, all hunger, loneliness, and misery, not because of some great psychological or emotional capacity, but because God's heart has become one with ours."¹

—Associate Marybeth Coleman

1 M., Nouwen Henri J. *The Way of the Heart*, Ballantine Books, New York, 2003, pp. 87.

Reflection of Core Values: Restorative Justice Thriving at the Catherine Center



One of the best ways I know to live out the BVM core values of charity, freedom, education, and justice is through my ongoing work with the Catherine Center in San Mateo, Calif. The Catherine Center is a part of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of San Mateo County's Restorative Justice Ministry that serves women recently released from jail or prison.

I started out as a mentor for one of these young women. In addition to the joy of becoming her close friend, I've continued my association with the Catherine Center as an ambassador, a group of people who assist the Center in carrying out its work.

It is difficult to imagine what some of these young women from the Catherine Center experienced in their lives. The girl I mentor came from a home where her father was in prison for murder, her mother was an alcoholic, and both she

and her brother became drug addicts, supporting their habits through theft. Her brother eventually died of a drug overdose, and she ended up in prison.

When she was released, my friend was blessed to find a home at the Catherine Center. There, people cared enough about her and the other residents to create and enforce rules, provide education, group therapy, and engage them in spiritual development.

In addition to the support she received during her two years in the Catherine Center, my mentee also credits the spiritual element of the program for helping her understand that she is a person of worth and that God is there to guide and support her on her journey to rehabilitation and a productive life.

Today, she is a responsible mother. She works as a substance abuse caseworker, helping others with their rehabilitation from drug abuse. She believes that she would never have made it without

the spiritual direction and support she received from the Catherine Center.

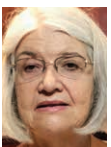
My work with the Center is certainly not all-giving. Last year, I won a prize in the Center's annual fund-raising raffle: a personal workout program donated by A.J. Limcuando. Today, at age 82, 20 pounds lighter and physically stronger, I am enjoying the freedom that comes with improved health and a lot better attitude about exercise! Thank you, A.J. and the Catherine Center.

To learn more about the Catherine Center, visit: svdpsm.org/programs/restorative-justice-ministry/#catherineCenter.

— Associate Carmella Huser

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul of San Mateo County's Catherine Center received a 2020 BVM Ministry Partnership Grant through the recommendation of BVM Elizabeth Avalos and Associate Carmella Huser.

St. Vincent DePaul and BVM: Complementing Core Values



I am currently volunteering with St. Vincent de Paul (SVdP) as the Conference President at Holy Redeemer/ St. James in Montrose, Calif.

SVdP is a worldwide organization of lay Catholic men and women committed to living and growing in their Christian faith through prayer and personal involvement in charitable works. As a member of SVdP, we help others in a loving, non-judgmental way, seeing the

face of Christ in each other and in the people that we help.

I find that the core values of the BVMs complement those of SVdP. First, both groups place a premium on helping each member develop spiritually and bringing them closer to God. Second, the core values of the BVMs of charity and justice speak to the SVdP goals of helping others in time of need and seeing the face of Christ in each person that we help, which translates to treating them with respect

and in a kind and just manner. Third, both groups try to help alleviate some of the burdens in a time of need, giving those we support the freedom to move forward. Finally, the BVM core value of education complements SVdP, as where we can, we try to educate those we help in ways that may help improve their living conditions.

I am proud to be a member of both.

—Associate Dolores Bromberek

Riverboat Revelation

*There is an appointed time for everything,
and a time for every affair under the heavens.*

Eccles. 3:1

A Journal of Discovery

July 11, 2001

[On a Mississippi riverboat]

"Kathy, look at that statue. Is that Jesus? What a gorgeous building! I bet it's something Catholic."

The Mississippi River was particularly beautiful that evening as we floated along the bluffs, enjoying the riverboat's top deck after a lovely dinner cruise meal. My sister-in-law and I had taken a short vacation to Galena, Ill., and also ventured to Maquoketa and Dubuque, Iowa. I returned home to St. Louis clueless that I had received a priceless, yet unrevealed gift.



Associate Jill Burleson visits the Mount Carmel Motherhouse in Dubuque, Iowa, 20 years after seeing it from aboard a Mississippi River riverboat cruise.

October 10, 2015

[In a church in Mo.]

"I'm Jill. You read excellently; it is evident that the Holy Spirit inspired you," I announced, grateful to introduce myself to the lector after Mass.

"I'm Sister Mary Frances [Reis]."

"I thought you might be a sister."

As we conversed, she shared information about the BVMs, and I eagerly absorbed it. Something at the back of my mind was nudging me, but I couldn't grasp it. Eventually, I realized that it was Mount Carmel and a statue of Saint Joseph that I had seen from the riverboat. A forever friendship was born, and she companioned me into association.

We often discussed visiting Mount Carmel together.

July 18, 2021

[At Mount Carmel Bluffs]

"Sister [Mary Frances], I can't believe we're here! The pictures don't do it justice. Let's get photos of each other in front of the Motherhouse."

As I walked along the Mississippi, I spied a bench. As I sat there, I couldn't help but recall looking up at Mount Carmel from the riverboat 20 years before. Here I was, looking down at the river—my perspective had changed in more ways than one! Enveloped by God's love and care, my heart overflowed with gratitude.

To actually be in this holy place was remarkable. This priceless and eternal gift of the BVM charism continues to reveal itself. If you ever have the chance for a riverboat cruise, don't pass it by.

—Associate Jill Burleson



Mount Carmel Bluffs as of Summer 2021

Mount Carmel Bluffs

I thought for sure I would cry
or at least let out a heavy sigh
but I didn't
as before me I saw
the Motherhouse,
new wings
and a foundation ready to be poured
then suddenly
a gentle peace, gratitude, and hope
rose up from this newly formed terrain
and filled my heart
and drove away the pang of any conjured pain

And inside that holy dwelling place
spaces new and old
I sensed
our recent summer call
of beginning something new
a peace, a hope, a joy
that radiated from each smile I met,
a forging forth
like that at the old motherhouse
in more primitive times,
a circle of friends
gathering to create
a community of lovingkindness
once again.

—Mary Frances Reis, BVM

This poem was written in July by BVM Mary Frances Reis, in response to seeing Mount Carmel Bluffs for the first time during her 2021 trip with Jill Burleson to Dubuque, Iowa.

Associates in Action



Associates Mary Chapman and Katie Pfiffner add BVM stickers and personal notes written by the sisters to each meal.

Serving More than Sandwiches at St. Pats

For more than 30 years, BVM associates and sisters have volunteered to serve free community meals at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Dubuque, Iowa. At the August 18 meal, BVM Sharon Rezmer and Associates Katie Pfiffner, Mary Chapman, Lori Ritz, Jeanie Fritscher, and I served 225 boxed meals prepared by a local restaurant. In addition to serving, the BVM congregation provides for some, or all the meal, twice each year. Area associates and sisters donated more than \$1,000 to assist the meal program.

—Associate Suzie Wright



Associate Sandy Craig (l.) was visited by friend and Associate Lori Ritz, a few weeks before her death.



Associate Jeanie Fritscher (standing) was delighted to join the audience with BVM (l.) Karen Conover, Julia Casella, BVM Mira Mosle, and Sandra Carrillo at the Grand Opera House's musical production "Disenchanted!" in Dubuque, Iowa. Julia and Sandra, former colleagues from Holy Names High School, Oakland, Calif., who taught at Holy Names, were in town visiting Karen. The five friends donned crowns in reference to the show's fairy-tale princess characters.



Associate Jeanie Fritscher (r.) congratulates Ann at the BVM Center in Dubuque, Iowa after Ann submits her application for association.



Associate Necrology: October 2019–September 2020

As we prepare our hearts and minds for the observance of All Saints Day Nov. 1, let us give thanks for these associates who died within the past year.

These women embodied the BVM charism and core values. They were treasured friends and family members. They are missed.

Recent obituaries have been posted online:
bvmsisters.org/associate-obituaries.



Jean Hedberg

July 10, 1930–Nov. 22, 2020
Acceptance: May 9, 1996



Ann Miller

April 24, 1935–May 19, 2021
Acceptance: Jan. 26, 1982



Marilyn Haas

Aug. 26, 1932–June 5, 2021
Acceptance: Jan. 1, 1992



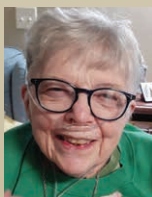
Ann Donlin

Aug. 12, 1930–June 26, 2021
Acceptance: Jan. 25, 2002



Mary Helen Hughes

Aug. 1, 1940–July 7, 2021
Acceptance: Aug. 14, 1994



Sandra Marie Craig

May 28, 1937–Sept. 11, 2021
Acceptance: Sept. 7, 2008



Mary Patricia Sheehan

Sept. 23, 1924–Sept. 14, 2021
Acceptance: Feb. 14, 2001



Marilyn Heinz

Dec. 4, 1933–Sept. 15, 2021
Acceptance: Aug. 14, 1994



From the Office of BVM Life and Mission

Dear Associates,

As Jeanie Fritscher shared in *Circle of Friends*, on p. 1, we have the opportunity to share a reflection about an associate who has passed away. I wanted to provide a tutorial on how to do this.

First, go to bvmsisters.org.

Next:

- Click “What’s New.”
- Scroll down and click “Associate Obituaries.” This will have the obituaries of our recently deceased associates.
- Scroll to find the obituary of the associate you want to read.
- Click “Read More” to access the full obituary.
- Scroll to the bottom of the page and click “Leave a reply” if you’d like to share how that associate touched your life.

While on the website, you can do a little more searching!

You can:

- Click “Get Involved.”
- Read the sections on BVM Life and Mission and BVM Association.

If you have ideas of where and how to connect with others to share the life and mission of the congregation please give me a call, talk to your associate coordinator, or send an email.

Grateful for all you do,

—Lori Ritz

Director of the Office of BVM Life and Mission

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.

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