

From Our Associates

Dear Circle of Friends,



I hope this newsletter finds you healthy and living lives of simplicity and joy even though so much of our society is living in unrest and uncertainty.

We often find ourselves surrounded by divisive diatribes in the mainstream media and sensationalized soundbites on social media. I invite you, dear friends, to live in the solace Mary Frances Clarke offered to the pioneering sisters: "Do not be uneasy, rely on God whose aid is never denied to those who ask it."— Letter 212, Sept. 1885

—Suzie Coulthard
Associate Coordinator



**PEACE
WITH CREATION**
SEASON OF CREATION 2025



After a recent trip to Ireland, Associate Maureen "Mo" McGrain shared this image of Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site near Newgrange and Knowth in celebration of the Season of Creation.

Associate Relationship Steering Committee Update

In early 2025, the Associate Relationship Steering Committee and its working groups completed original research in preparation for the working retreat held in August.

The research efforts included an Associate Survey and Associate Program Benchmarking Report. Summaries and actual data for both of these items are

posted in the Associate portion of the members' website and are available for review.

Participants used the findings, along with information gathered by Associate Suzie Coulthard's visits to associates, to better understand our hopes and concerns as we plan a collective future.



Summaries and data can be found on the members' website:
[members.bvmsisters.org > Offices > Associates](https://members.bvmsisters.org/Offices/Associates)
or: members.bvmsisters.org/offices/associates

New Associate Kathy Petitgout

Kathy Petitgout, of East Dubuque, Ill., was accepted as an associate on Sept. 18. She is a staff member in BVM Community Life Services (BCLS) and works as an emergency companion.

In Kathy's application to join the Associate Relationship, she expressed her understanding of the associate/sister relationship as "... becoming closer to God through each other. I am there for them and they are here for me in prayer and presence." She also shared that she sees Christ's call to service as "...having my arms wide open to Jesus for what he wants me to do in life."

Associate Mary Chapman and BVMs Vicki Smurlo, Marge Sannasardo, and Lynn Lester were Kathy's discernment companions. Each sent a letter of affirmation in support of Kathy's

acceptance. Lynn shares, "I have come to know Kathy as a deeply religious person who desires to become a BVM associate to deepen and widen service and learn about BVM mission and core values. Throughout the time of her discernment and meetings with us, her spiritual companions, she has been faithful, preparing and contributing to each session."

Planning for Kathy's commitment ceremony is in process and details are to come.



—Associate Coordinator
Suzie Coulthard

Associate Community Clusters and Clubs

Many in the wider BVM Community have returned to the regular routines that start in the fall, such as the resumption of some clusters and clubs. A few people have asked how to connect to these groups. As in the past, I am happy to assist. Should you be someone looking for a group, reach out to someone nearby, or send a message to

me, and I'll suggest possible connections to others seeking community.

For those of you who are leading clusters or book clubs, please send updates as to who is leading them this year and if you have any openings.

—Associate Coordinator
Suzie Coulthard

MKS Gathers for Retreat

Members of Midwest Kindred Spirits (MKS) gathered for a joyful two-day business meeting and retreat day in September at the Redemptorist Retreat Center in Oconomowoc, Wis.

Our theme for these days was, "MKS Come Together, Unite for Futuring."

After joyfully welcoming each other, we opened in prayer titled "In the Stillness . . . We Find Trust in the Holy One," recognizing that in the stillness of prayer is where God awaits us, in the conversations and learnings we offer one another. During opening prayer, we each placed a stone in the center space as a sign of our open hearts to one another and to all in our world.

We came to this meeting with hope, with questions, with trust in the need to unite for the future. We discussed and contemplated how we are developing leaders in our communities. So many new ideas were shared! We took time to socialize, playing a variety of card games in the evenings, and to enjoy each other's presence in the work we share.

The second day we entered retreat

joyful grateful kind hopeful & expectant excited present & thankful INTERESTED on holy ground SEEKING PRESENT excited for unity relaxed & mellow Full of Spirit Open NEW Appreciative distracted & Expectation possibility overwhelmed recycled

Words express how MKS members were feeling at the beginning of their retreat.

time guided by Sr. Marian Brown, OP. The title was "Dreamers of a New Day." She shared, "When our lives are threaded with others in the seamless garment of the Spirit, in this space visions are born."

We listened to the song "Dreamers of a New Day" by Sara Thomsen, which reminded those gathered that as "Charism Carriers," we are "the midwives at the birth of something new; we are wisdom seeking more."

We reflected that we are all being called to love ourselves and everybody else, and above all, to "Love Large." We were left with this one question:

"Do we have the will, strength, means, and leadership to create a unified organization that can continue to draw new members? The words of Jan Novotka's song "Consciousness Waking" reminded us that "Now is the time! We are the space for the Holy to rise in our mist."

—Barbara Bacci Yugovich
IHM Associate Co-coordinator

Editor's Note:

Associate Coordinator Suzie Coulthard was a member of the retreat's planning committee and presented both days.

Associates in Action



Associates Adelaida Tanagras, Joanne Yerkes, and Pat Dieveney from the Northern Illinois area got together in September to pray for our world, our church, one another, and especially our BVM family. Amen.



The Dubuque Coalition for Nonviolence held its third annual Die-In at Washington Park in September. Symbolic tombstones in the park, along with volunteers, represented the 120 people who die in the United States each day from gun violence. Attendees included Associates Marabeth and Norm Freund (l.) and BVMs Theresa Caluori and Rose Mary Meyer.