

Salt

SISTERS OF CHARITY
OF THE BLESSED
VIRGIN MARY



A Life
Commended to
God



Heart of BVM

Our Mission

The Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a community of women religious whose members, in response to a personal call from God, have chosen a vowed life of prayer, ministry, and community. BVMs express their mission of being freed and helping others enjoy freedom in service to God's people through their core values of freedom, education, charity, and justice.

Our Core Values

- **Freedom:** The gift that permits us to become our most faithful self and who we are called to be at the deepest core of our being.
- **Education:** The process of calling forth the gift and potential of ourselves and others.
- **Charity:** The gift of love! The simple and profound power that calls forth a benevolent, tender, and sensitive response to all peoples and events.
- **Justice:** The principle that assists us to recognize the dignity, equality, and rights of all persons.

Our Directional Statements *(Abbreviated)*

Drawn by grace and compelled by grief for current situations of injustice, we commit ourselves humbly, boldly, and courageously:

- To live our interconnectedness with all creation.
- To express publicly values aligned with the Gospel.
- To confront inequities we have caused and act boldly with others to repair injustices.
- To be the face of an inclusive, welcoming, and merciful Church working for a world in which all flourish.



On the Cover

BVMs follow in the funeral procession of Jean Dolores Schmidt, BVM on Oct. 16, 2025, at Loyola University's Madonna della Strada Chapel. Photo courtesy of Loyola University Chicago.



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SEASONing

A Message from BVM Council

This issue of *Salt* comes in the darkness of a Midwest winter. It is an invitation to do what winter calls for us to do—hunker down, reflect, and savor the richness of life. As January is the beginning of the year and December the year’s end, this edition of *Salt* speaks to the continuation of the BVM mission, recollects some past BVM ministries, and reflects on constants of BVM life.

An article describing the experience of association, particularly with younger associates, demonstrates this deepening and expanding relationship. The BVM mission of being freed and helping others enjoy freedom in God’s steadfast love continues to attract followers, if not as vowed members, then as committed associates. These women and men of all ages are inspired to continue the spirit of Mary Frances Clarke and her followers.

That spirit likewise continues in the congregation’s charitable giving. The “Legacy of Love” feature illustrates how scholarships and Ministry Partnership carry on the BVM commitment to education and care for those who are least among us. The core values of education and justice are furthered by scholarship recipients and ministry partners.

A feature piece narrates the history of BVM ministries in Des Moines as the last BVM sister

to live and work there retires to Mount Carmel Bluffs in Dubuque, Iowa. This retrospective takes us back to the early days of BVM ministry in the state capital, how it grew, the schools that were established, and the ministries that flourished as sisters left the classroom to take on other ways to care for the community at large.

Another article looks back at the ministry begun by BVMs Mary Gene Kinney and Letitia Close, who responded to the “signs of the times” by counseling religious women living with addiction. These pioneering women sought to preserve the vocation of sisters while treating their addictions. Their ministry continues in many ways through the missions of several organizations.

Two constant components of our BVM life and mission are explored in this *Salt* issue. At the very core of BVM life is prayer. Sisters answer the question, “How do sisters pray?” and talk about how their lives of prayer inspired years of gospel-centered ministry.

Ministry, another constant of BVM life, embodies the core value of justice. The ministry of Isabel Conchos, BVM, with the diverse community in the Phoenix area and how her students at Xavier College Prep help with that ministry, completes this issue’s theme.

May this winter issue of *Salt* take you deeper into your understanding of BVM life, history, and mission. Savor every word! ■

Ledonna Manternach, BVM

Katherine J. Kendefer, BVM

Anne Marie McKenna, BVM

Amy L. Gilm, BVM



Sister Jean: *A Life Shaped by Purpose and Love*

For generations of college students, alumni, and fans around the world, Jean

Dolores Schmidt, BVM—known as Sister Jean—was an enduring presence whose faith, warmth, and conviction shaped campus life and radiated far beyond it.

When Mundelein College, where Sister Jean had been a teacher and administrator for 30 years, affiliated with Chicago’s Loyola University in 1991, she became a crucial bridge between the two Chicago institutions.

She continued her ministry at Loyola for more than three decades, serving as an associate dean and associate vice president of academic affairs. But it was as chaplain to the Loyola men’s basketball team that she became known to the world. In that role, she emerged as a global icon at age 98 when the team made the NCAA Final Four—posing for selfies, leading pre-game prayers, and cheering the team on from the stands. Her greatest joy, she said, was “telling the world what these kids were doing.”

That instinct to foster belonging and community began almost the moment Sister Jean was born Dolores

Bertha Schmidt on Aug. 21, 1919, in San Francisco. She grew up in a family where love of God was woven into daily life. That experience inspired her third-grade dream: “I would pray, ‘Dear God, help me understand what I should do, but please tell me that I should become a BVM sister.’”

Sister Jean entered the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Sept. 8, 1937. She marveled that her childhood prayer “put me on such a gratifying, godly path. All I ever wanted to do was serve God and teach children.”

For more than two decades, she taught in classrooms across Chicago, Los Angeles, and North Hollywood. Her stories revealed both her humor and her heart: the student who finally grasped inverted fractions after she turned him upside down; the blind student who, with her encouragement, aced a

scholarship exam; and Roger Mahony, a former pupil who would later become a cardinal. In every lesson, she invited students to engage the world with curiosity, compassion, and a deep sense of justice.

In 1961, she arrived at Mundelein College, where she was a steady presence during a time of profound change. She guided students through national tragedy, social upheaval, and transformation, while also accompanying



Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt, circa 1970s.
Photo courtesy of the Women and Leadership Archives, Loyola University Chicago.

young BVM sisters through academic, spiritual, and personal challenges. In every role, Sister Jean embodied what many came to call a “mighty kindness.”

Despite her celebrity status with Loyola’s basketball team, she remained at heart a BVM sister who viewed her life as “an amazing blessing.”

Those who knew her—and the millions who came to admire her—remember not only a beloved chaplain and educator, but a woman whose steadfast faith shaped every step of her remarkable journey of 106 years. Her life stands as a living testament to God’s enduring love. ■

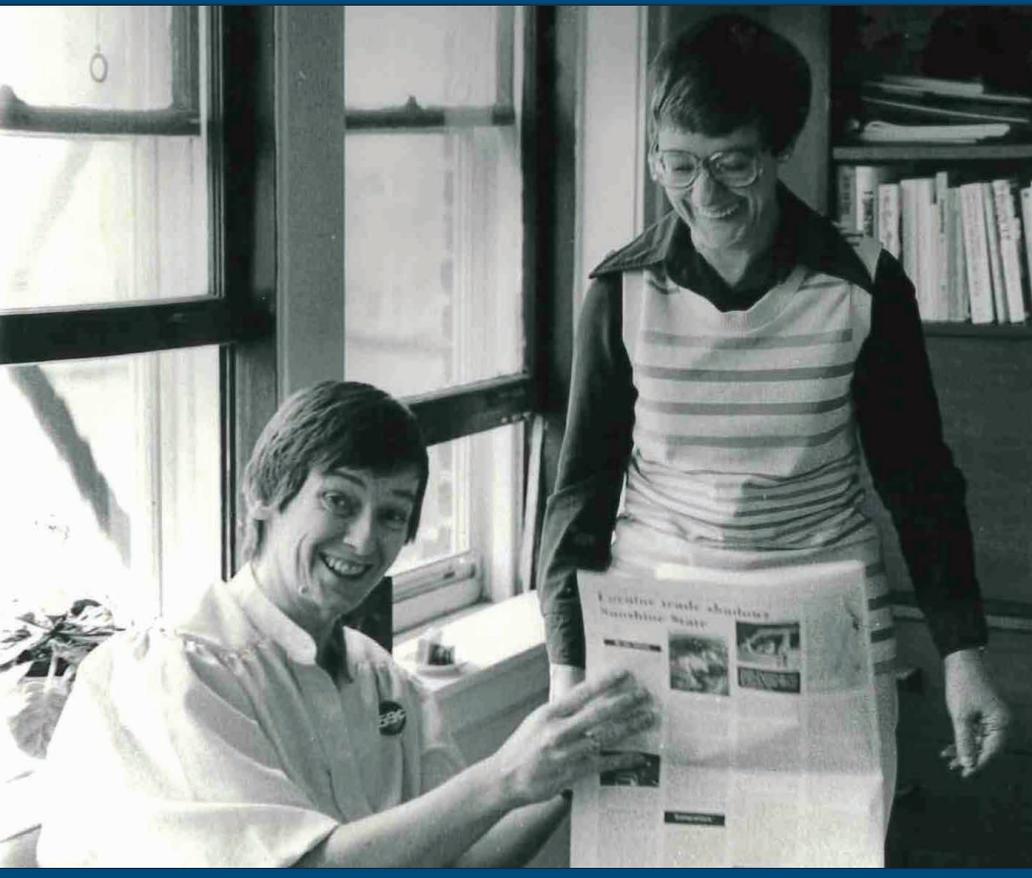
This article was adapted from previously published material, including the *Eulogy for Sister Jean* by Mary Ann Zollmann, BVM, and a statement released by BVM President LaDonna Manternach.



Celebrating Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt, BVM with a life-size standup at her funeral services are BVMs Mary Ann Zollmann (l.), Margaret Mary Cosgrove, Kathy Kandefer, and Anne Marie McKenna.

Sisters of Hope: BVMs Honored for Pioneering Work in Addiction

by Michelle London



Leadership Conference of Women

Religious (LCWR) Region 10 (Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska) recently honored the ministries of BVMs Mary Gene Kinney and Letitia Marie “Letty” Close.

Sisters of Charity, BVM hosted the event that shone a light on the Inter-Congregational Addictions Program (ICAP) that Mary Gene and Letty founded.

President LaDonna Manternach, BVM says the honor has long been championed by anybody familiar with Mary Gene and Letty’s work in the field of addiction and recovery.

“Region 10 has been a big supporter of both of these women,” she shares. “They saw that they deserved to be honored.”

The Beginning

ICAP was co-founded by Mary Gene and Letty in the 1970s. Both had a strong desire to work in the field of addiction counseling for very personal reasons—Mary Gene was a recovering alcoholic and Letty was the adult child of an alcoholic.

Recognizing a need for support and education in the religious community, they helped establish a policy that recognized alcoholism as a disease and implemented a program of education, as well as a process to reach out to those in need. As word spread, other religious communities started making inquiries. ICAP was born out of that movement.

Based in Chicago, Mary Gene and Letty created an outreach service for women religious with the 12-step program as its foundation.

“It was about education and the communal aspect of support,” Mary Gene says. “It was about removing the stigma of alcoholism and educating people about it being a disease, not a choice.”

Mary Gene and Letty established a network of referrals where women religious could receive treatment in an atmosphere in which their vocation and lifestyle were respected.

Over time, as the need arose, ICAP expanded to include addictions of all kinds, such as gambling, compulsive eating, prescription drugs, and compulsive spending. Friends and family members

Working together since ICAP’s early years in 1982, co-founders BVMs Letitia Marie “Letty” Close (l.) and Mary Gene Kinney—pictured then and now—are honored at an LCWR Region 10 evening celebrating their legacy.



who had been affected by a loved one's addiction were also welcomed into ICAP and encouraged to participate in Al-Anon or Adult Children of Alcoholic Families.

In 1986, the director of Guest House, a treatment center for priests, deacons, and brothers located in Lake Orion, Mich., consulted with Mary Gene and Letty to explore ways of serving women religious.

Knowing that women approached their addictions and recovery differently from men, Letty created an advisory board of women religious to provide guidance as Guest House developed a treatment program, which was launched in 1993. She would also serve on its board of directors as the new program was being implemented.

Luann Brown, BVM, an addiction therapist, has been a member of ICAP since 2006 and is currently working at Guest House. Women religious, Luann points out, often feel alone and hopeless in the disease of addiction.

"One of the great things Mary Gene and Letty have done over the years is to normalize addiction as a disease that people in all aspects of society have," Luann shares. "And there is a way to recover."

One Story of Many

Colleen McGinnity, BVM is one of the women religious who reached out for help. It was 1986, and Colleen had been a BVM for 25 years. While she had always been wary of becoming dependent on alcohol due to her family history, it had been the last five years that had proven difficult.

"I contacted another BVM in the community who had identified herself as an alcoholic," Colleen says. "I said, 'I have a problem with alcohol.' She told me to call Letty or Mary Gene."

ICAP helped get Colleen, who was

living in Texas, into treatment in a program in the Chicago suburbs. After three months, she returned to the Rio Grande Valley, but she knew that to succeed in her sobriety, she needed to change her environment.

"I moved to Chicago and connected with several BVM communities," she says. "The work that Mary Gene and Letty had been doing in raising the issue of alcoholism—that it's a disease and not a moral failure, that we're not weak people who just can't control ourselves—that was so important."

Colleen also learned not to hide her addiction. That revelation came rather unexpectedly.

When attending AA meetings that included lay people, she was careful not to disclose her vocation. She was serving in a parish in Chariton, Iowa, at the time, about three years into her recovery.

"I didn't want to say I was a nun," she says. "I kept that to myself. I had heard through the grapevine that one of our parishioners was in AA, so I called him up one night and said I was in AA and really needed to start going to meetings."

The parishioner said she was welcome to join him and told her he'd save a seat.

"When it came time for announcements, the guy says, 'This is Sister Colleen. She's the new nun in our parish,'" Colleen shares. "It just took my breath away. But honestly, after that, everyone knew who I was, and I realized that was okay."

It was part of Mary Gene and Letty's philosophy—that there is no shame in sharing that you have an addiction.

"And the communal aspect was big," Letty says. "Because women do things together, and women talk to each other. Our goal has always been to bring recovering sisters together, trusting that we can do together what none of us can do alone."

Today, ICAP extends throughout the United States, Canada, Ireland, England, and Croatia, as well as providing support for recovery in Ukraine.

Hope Prevails

During the course of the evening honoring Mary Gene and Letty, the theme of "Hope" prevailed as women religious and former women religious told their stories of how ICAP had

changed their lives.

Letty and Mary Gene were instrumental in helping Guest House launch their women's program. They also support Transfiguration House in Lviv, Ukraine, which treats both men and women religious.

"There are so many who have benefited from Letty and Mary Gene's work," Luann says. "I don't think we can even count how many. They are two beloved women—pilgrims and prophets, passionate, persistent, perceptive, pragmatic, and playful witnesses."

The chair of Region 10, Maureen Leach, OSF, presented donations to Guest House and Transfiguration House in honor of Mary Gene and Letty.

"When Region 10 decided to honor these two wonderful women, we asked them, 'What can we do to honor the valuable service that you have provided?'" Maureen shares. "They said, 'Give a gift to Guest House and a gift to Transfiguration House.'" (Photo, top l.)

"How Can We Help?"

Colleen's journey is just one example of the thousands of women religious and, by extension, their loved ones, who have been helped because of Mary Gene and Letty's selfless service.

Colleen said the social aspect of ICAP was a huge part of her recovery and helped her in relating to other people she would meet in AA.

"I learned I didn't have to pretend that I was anybody else," she says. "I was Colleen the alcoholic and it didn't matter to them, and nobody ever said anything. It didn't matter that I was a nun. It doesn't matter if you're a doctor, a lawyer, a schoolteacher, a guy living off the streets, or a nun. We're just all here to recover."

Through the years, Mary Gene and Letty have never wavered from their goal of assisting those who need help.

"Sisters need help. It's a disease. Who can we reach? How can we help?," says Mary Gene. "That has always been the goal, and that is still what it is today."

The mission of ICAP continues to be "Walking with Sisters to Initiate and Sustain Recovery." ■

About the author: Michelle London is a communications specialist for the Sisters of Charity, BVM in Dubuque, Iowa.

A Winding Trail: *The BVM Presence in Des Moines*

by Mira Mosle, BVM

As BVM Sandra "Sandy" Rodemyer's siblings held a large banner that read "Happy Trails to You" and sang the refrain, it was no ordinary farewell.

Sandy's move to Mount Carmel Bluffs in Dubuque, Iowa, in late September marked the end of 160 years of BVM ministry in Des Moines.

But the beginning of that ministry was not promising.

A Brief History

In late October 1865, six pioneer BVMs left Dubuque by stagecoach to Cedar Rapids. Heavy snow had fallen a few days before. From there, they boarded a train for Boone, as no railroad ran into Des Moines.

To avoid a collision with an incoming freight train, the passenger train suddenly switched tracks. The rear coach where the sisters were riding became detached as a result and was flung over an embankment into a pond of water. The sisters survived, but they would have to find another mode of transportation.

They hired a stagecoach: "When crossing Skunk River bottom the wheels sunk deep into the mud; the horses reared and plunged and it took very substantial tips to induce the drivers to continue the journey."

Upon arrival the sisters discovered that an old log church was to be St. Ambrose School. It opened with 250 pupils. The conditions were primitive.

Finding Their Place

The pastor of the only parish in the city, Fr. John Brazill, wanted the sisters to do more than teach. This prompted a response from Foundress Mary Frances Clarke, clarifying co-founder Fr. Donaghoe's belief that, "The laborer is worthy of his hire. And to pay and be paid.' He did not wish the sisters to have anything to do with the choir, altar, or church. Neither make, mend, wash or scrub for it . . . You wish to examine the sisters' accounts. It is the first time any gentleman, not even our Right Reverend Bishops, required that. Therefore, you will excuse me for positively and finally declining." Dealing with patriarchy was a constant.

As the city grew, new parishes formed. Visitation Parish was founded in 1881, and BVMs began a school in 1882 near the State Capitol. Classes included all eight grades and a high school.

In 1906, St. John's Parish spun off from St. Ambrose. BVMs staffed that school, too.

Sisters spent Saturdays teaching catechism in small towns near Des Moines, plus summer vacation school. Religion classes for public school students were taught once a week.

But how to provide for the Catholic education of girls not within Des Moines? Mother Clarke was aware of the 24/7 nature of having a boarding academy: "We have five of them now and that is more than enough. Select and parish schools will be less laborious and won't require so much help."

Yet she left the decision up to the sisters: "If all conclude it is best to have boarders I won't object." Mary Frances' trust in her sisters who knew the local situation resulted in them buying a large home and seven acres outside the city for \$25,000.



Clockwise, l.: Students study in the library at St. Joseph Academy in 1961.

At St. Joseph Academy are BVMs Notberga Ryan, Vivina Joyce, and Geralda McLaughlin, circa 1940.

The Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto at St. Joseph Academy became the site of the annual May Crowning.

St. Joseph Academy (SJA) opened in 1885 for girls ages 4–18. When Bishop Austin Dowling opened a boys’ Catholic high school in 1918, all parish secondary schools closed, and SJA became the sole Catholic academy. The elementary grades for boarders ended in 1948. High school boarders continued until 1950.

Tragedy struck in 1921 when two sisters were killed by a hit-and-run driver. A grotto to Our Lady of Lourdes was erected as a memorial. This became the site of the May Crowning tradition.

Former Students Reminisce

BVM Kathleen Mullin ’56, recalls, “The high school building size kept enrollment at about 500. Music, art, limited athletic programs, and other after-school happenings reinforced the academic choices for business and college prep curricula. Teachers urged creative thinking, being aware of current affairs and justice issues. We were encouraged to be life-long learners, to live our faith, to care for one another, and to enjoy life!”

Students recall mother-daughter teas, sock hops in the gym, candle lighting, pageants and musicals, the senior class trip to Washington, the Stepperettes drill team, and SALT-Teens community outreach.

For Deborah McKeone ’71, “The greatest gifts from SJA were respect for ourselves as women and as individuals. We learned that we had the capacity for intellectual endeavors and that we could accomplish anything with hard work.”

Classmate Aimee Beckmann-Collier concurred. “Our teachers, both BVMs and laywomen, were intelligent, articulate, and well-suited to serve as role models for high school students on the cusp of maturity. The BVM sisters, like nuns throughout the United States, were, in my opinion, the first feminists.”

For Kathleen Antol ’62, her experiences at SJA were a decisive factor in choosing life as a BVM. “They were always so friendly and genuine with all of us. They were loving toward one another and had fun with each other.”

Sandy Rodemyer, BVM receives the Dowling Distinguished Alumni Award in 2021.

Her retirement in 2025 marks the end of 160 years of BVM presence in Des Moines.

Photo courtesy of Des Moines Diocese.



Growing Enrollment and New Spaces

In the early ’60s, increased enrollment necessitated additional space. A new school was dedicated in 1964 with almost 1,000 students. The future was secure. Or so it seemed.

The boys’ high school needed a new facility. The diocesan decision to build a co-ed school in West Des Moines led to the closure of SJA.

More than 6,000 young women had graduated in its 87-year history. The new Dowling High School/St. Joseph Educational Center opened in 1972.

Sixteen BVMs became administrators and faculty. Others in the city walked new paths as parish and campus ministers, hospital chaplains, food pantry directors, retreat volunteers, senior daycare administrators, prison volunteers, and diocesan staff. Several faculty and principals remained at Catholic elementary schools.

Over 800 BVMs have been missioned in the Des Moines area. More than 130 women entered the congregation there. Six are currently

living at Mount Carmel Bluffs: BVMs Kathleen Antol, Carol Marie Baum, Patricia Donahoe, Dorothy Dwight, Kathleen Mullin, and Sandy Rodemyer.

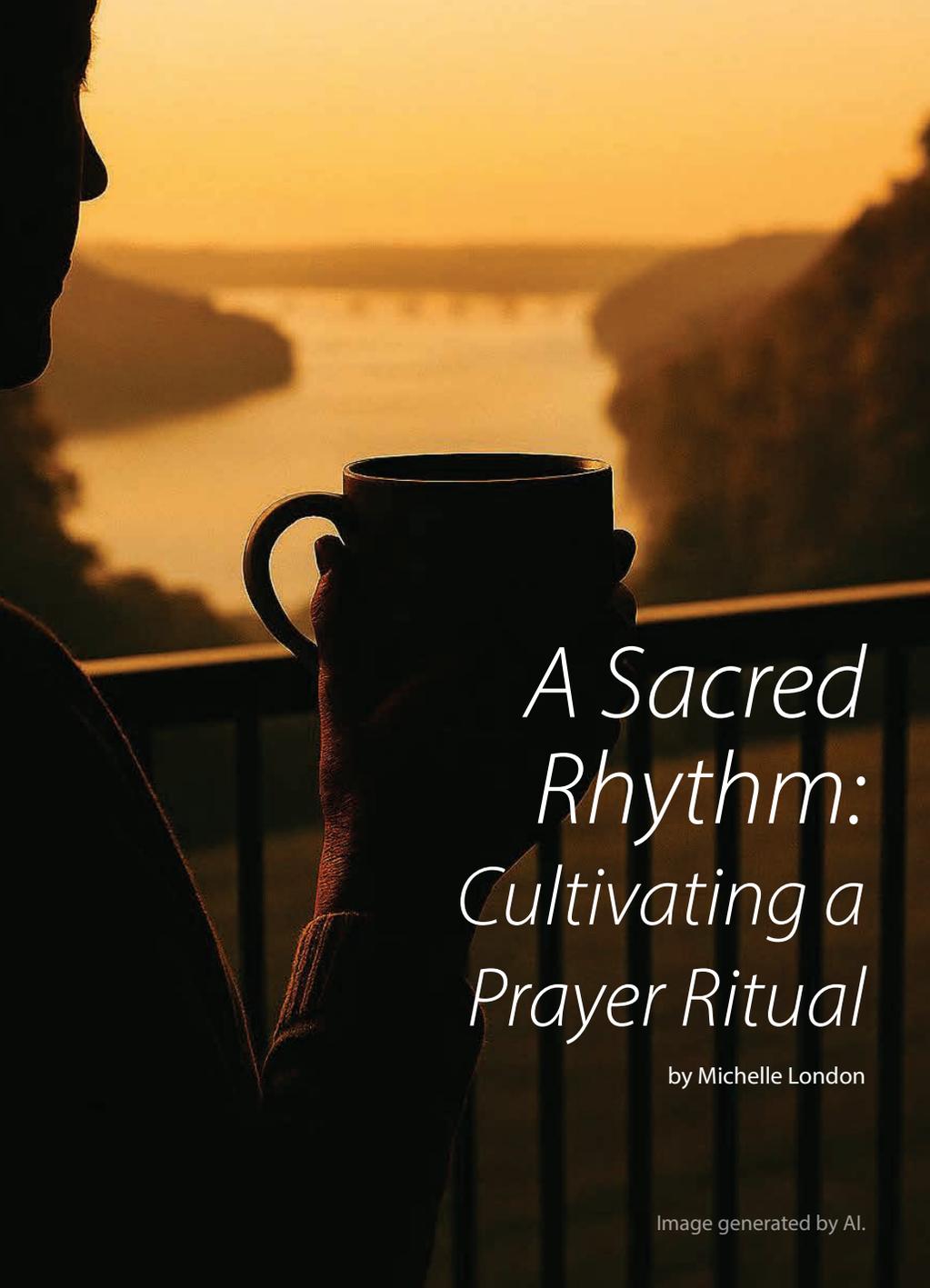
“In the summer of 1961, I left my home in Des Moines to move to Mount Carmel in Dubuque,” Sandy says. “In September of 2025, I repeated that move for the last time. The trails of my 60 years of ministry were all spent in Iowa. Fifty-seven of those years were spent serving in my home diocese of Des Moines, where my vocation began and was nurtured.”

The trails of service have been winding. The BVM legacy continues in the multi-generational lives of persons served—grounded in love of God, intellectual inquiry, compassionate service, and a thirst for justice. ■

About the author: Mira Mosle, BVM served for 26 years in the Des Moines Diocese as a teacher at SJA and Dowling, as well as staff positions in parish/campus ministry and at the ecumenical media center.

BVMs purchased the house that would become St. Joseph Academy in 1884. Initial enrollment was two girls in September of that year, but by November, 14 more had joined them, circa 1890.





A Sacred Rhythm: Cultivating a Prayer Ritual

by Michelle London

Image generated by AI.

In a world that often pulls us in

many different directions, carving out moments of stillness and establishing our connection to God can feel like a monumental task.

For many, the practice of regular prayer is a vital lifeline—a source of peace, strength, and profound spiritual growth. Developing a consistent prayer ritual can transform your daily life, offering a sacred rhythm to your routine that can anchor your soul amidst the chaos. But how do you begin to weave prayer into the fabric of your already busy existence?

The life of BVMs includes a profound prayer life to which they are dedicated. Their reflections on prayer offer a beacon of wisdom and practical guidance on how to craft your own daily prayer ritual.

The vast experiences of the BVMs range from educators, chaplains, counselors, and advocates for immigrants and the poor to focusing on issues like the environment, healthcare, social justice, and recovering from addictions.

These experiences illuminate the importance of nurturing the spiritual discipline of prayer and reveal how a committed prayer life can shape not just individual hearts, but entire communities as well.

God's Loving Faithfulness

by Joan Mueller, BVM



There is a lot of talk these days about religious communities “coming to completion.” There is even mention of the last person “turning off the lights.” But as the youngest sister of a small community of active Poor Clares, I often wondered, “Then what?” The last sister still has her religious vocation. What happens where there is no community left?

I faced this difficult reality when

my last beloved sister died. I was left pondering an uncharted future. How would I live my religious life going forward?

It was a painful search. I diligently looked and visited but came up with nothing. Then one night I simply abandoned the search into the hands of God. I had done my best. I had “fished all night but caught nothing!”

Suddenly there was a phone

call from Mount Carmel Bluffs that there was an apartment available for me to move into and begin that next chapter of my life. The rest is history. I spent the past years getting to know the Sisters of Charity, BVM, studying BVM history with Kathryn “Kitty” Lawlor and other sisters, learning BVM *Constitutions* and charism from a wonderful group of companions gathered by Colleen McGinnity—

What is Prayer?

Prayer is a sacred conversation of the heart. It is a way to open ourselves up to the Divine. We may do that through words, silence, gratitude, or just simply being aware of a presence. Prayer can be structured, spontaneous, communal, or deeply personal.

No matter how one prays, it is an act of connection, a way to center oneself, and a way to recognize that we are part of something greater than ourselves.

“I think that prayer is the expressed graced response of my relationship with the Divine,” says Mary Frances Reis, BVM. “It includes the mind, body, and spirit, and it spans all cultures, religions, Eastern and Western spiritualities, Indigenous people, and all who have ever lived. Prayer is universal, and that is both unifying and comforting.”

How Do I Pray?

There is no right or wrong way to pray or to develop your own prayer ritual.

“In recent years, I have realized that it doesn’t matter how I talk to God,” says Joanne Lucid, BVM. “It doesn’t matter how I pray. I could talk to Him anytime or in any way I want to, and that’s just fine with Him. Your desire is to connect. That’s the gift.”

Paulette Skiba, BVM tells of a form of prayer she has used when riding

mass transit while living in a large city.

“This was what Mary Evelyn Jegen, [SNDDn] called benevolent glancing,” she says. “A way of praying for the strangers around me. Now, the two places I do this most are in church and at airports.”

Paulette emphasizes that even the news can be an occasion for prayer.

“Wonder moves the heart, but so does horror and injustice,” she says. “Prayer keeps the heart feeling rather than being callous and indifferent.”

Expressing oneself through an artistic endeavor is yet another way to pray. Mary Frances often responds to prayer with poetry.

“Lots of times it’s a spontaneous response,” she says. “I start out with nature, or an event, or a speech, or a saint’s day. I don’t set out to write a poem. I don’t look at my poems as prayers, but that’s what happens sometimes when I put them into writing.”

Where Do I Pray?

The short answer: Anywhere.

Judith “JT” McNulty, BVM is an avid swimmer. Every morning while she swims, she prays.

“That’s one thing about prayer,” she says. “It fits in well with multitasking. You can do it anywhere, anytime. All my life, I’ve been drawn to water. Swimming has been an important part of my life.”

So swimming became an important part of JT’s prayer ritual. Water

represents a strong spiritual presence for many people.

“I used to live by the ocean, and I would go down to the beach and pray,” says Eileen Powell, BVM. “I liked being by the water.”

When to pray is also a personal choice.

“When I get up in the morning, I make my coffee, look out to a beautiful scene, and I say ‘Thank you for this amazing day; it’s going to be amazing because your presence is with us,’” Joanne says. “It sets the tone for the day.”

There is No Instruction Book

Whether you pray in a group, in solitude, at the beach, in a pool, while creating art, or hiking through nature, you’re doing it the right way, and you’re connecting with others.

“I would suggest that prayer is both unique and commonly shared,” says Mary Frances.

There are no directions for prayer, no instruction book to help you along the way. Prayer is really whatever you want it to be.

“I often wondered during my prayers if this is what it is,” Eileen says. “Is this how one prays? And I realized that was a useless question. Because everything is prayer—everything.” ■

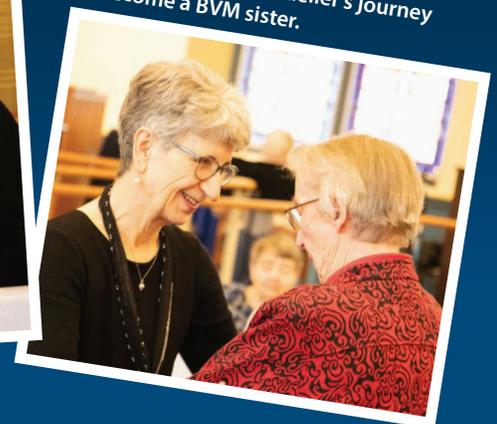
About the author: Michelle London is a communications specialist for the Sisters of Charity, BVM in Dubuque, Iowa.

fostering BVM identity with Diane Rapozo, studying BVM government and processes with Mira Mosle, and so much more. All this has culminated with my taking vows as a BVM on Jan. 4, 2026.

My community “came to completion,” but my religious life did not. I am so grateful to God for this gift, and I am grateful to the BVMs for looking on me with Mary Frances Clarke’s loving gaze. ■



Formation Director Colleen McGinnity, BVM (l.) celebrates with the congregation and guests as Joan Mueller takes her perpetual vows.



Kathryn “Kitty” Lawlor, BVM (r.) has been a part of Joan Mueller’s journey to become a BVM sister.

We Are Xavier: Building Community Through Faith

by Michelle London

Maddie Kaiser, Miley Quintero Salas, and Bella Rojas Serrano are all forward-thinking voices in We Are Xavier (WAX), an organization at Xavier College Prep (XCP) in Phoenix.

The student-led club is devoted to building community through faith, culture, and shared responsibility at the school, which was co-founded in 1943 by Sisters of Charity, BVM and the Jesuits of St. Frances Xavier Parish.

For Easter, Isabel Conchos, BVM (l.), Spanish teacher Noemi Santaella, and siblings and XCP students Jaina and Maddie Kaiser are just a few of the WAX Truth committee members who collected and distributed stuffed animals to patients at Phoenix Children's Hospital.

Truth in Spirituality

WAX is organized into seven subgroups—Truth, Justice, Music, Dance, Food, History, and Art. Isabel Conchos, BVM moderates the Truth arm of WAX.

The Truth committee focuses on faith formation and spirituality. Isabel, a retired teacher and college professor, has woven her experience as an ESL teacher and as an advocate for immigrant communities and Indigenous peoples into the group.

Joan Fitzgerald, BVM, president of XCP, invited Isabel to moderate the Truth committee in 2021.

"She asked me to develop the spirituality of the girls, and I wondered how I was going to do this," Isabel says.

Grounded in Faith

She began with Benedictine spirituality, emphasizing silence, reflection, and attentiveness to God, and Ignatian spirituality, which invites the body, the senses, and the soul to experience inner stillness.

"There is so much competition—academics, athletics, fine arts—and all of it is excellent," she says. "We hear so much about students going to college and leaving their faith behind. I wanted them to understand that faith must be practiced."

Isabel started by asking students to give five minutes a day to these practices.

"What's happening is they are taking it very seriously," she says.

A sense of belonging has taken root, thanks to Isabel's influence.

"Sister Isabel has taught me that the world has a greater good than we see," says Maddie. "She taught me that no matter what happens in life, you always choose kindness and love, because that's what God and Jesus do every day for us."

"You practice your faith the same way you practice sports or study chemistry."

—Isabel Conchos, BVM





Bella Rojas Serrano (bottom r.) travels to Europe with her parents and six siblings on a church pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Carlo Acutis in Assisi, Italy.

An Emphasis on Diversity

Spanish teacher Noemi Santaella, who helps moderate the Truth group, shares that Isabel has had a noticeable impact on students.

“Her interactions encourage students to be kinder, more thoughtful, and more aware of the people around them,” she says.

The question of identity resonates deeply within the Xavier community because of its diverse population.

“Many of our students are Mexican-American,” Isabel explains. “Some come in knowing exactly who they are and where they come from. Others who were born here may not always know their culture.”

WAX helps bridge that gap, honoring heritage while forming spiritual grounding.

Putting Faith into Action

Miley has seen that formation play out in leadership and justice work, including a cultural exchange to Peru, where she was part of a group of Xavier students working with Fe y Alegría,

an organization that provides free education to vulnerable populations.

The group helped older students with their English skills and were “buddies” to younger students. The experience inspired them to advocate for educational equity. This semester, they have plans to host a school bake sale and yard sale, as well as a “Sweats Day” where students can wear sweats or jeans to school if they donate a dollar.

“Social justice became a major part of our drive,” Miley says. “The location of this school (in Peru) does not allow it to get proper resources for students.

We hope to help them with that.”

For Miley, Isabel’s mentorship has been a valuable part of her time at XCP.

“Apart from teaching me different ways to navigate my relationship with God, she helped me build confidence in making leadership choices, and in public speaking,” Miley says.

A Life-changing Pilgrimage

St. Carlo Acutis is the first millennial saint. His Eucharistic Miracles Exhibit highlighting documented miracles around the world, which he designed before his death, has been displayed at XCP, thanks to the WAX Truth committee’s three-year sponsorship.

Many young Catholics have taken an interest in Carlo’s life. For Bella, a trip to visit the shrine of St. Carlo in Assisi, Italy, with her family was a faith journey that tested her.

“I went two days without eating, and I slept on the streets of Spain,” Bella says. “Those challenges made me doubt God. I realized I needed to truly open myself to the pilgrimage.”

When she entered the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, where St. Carlo is venerated, she had a profound experience.

“Seeing how simple the church was reminded me of how simple and pure God’s love is,” Bella says. “I was overwhelmed.”

Practicing Faith Formation

For Maddie, faith and action converged through innovation. This year she competed in the Makers of Change Assistive Technology Challenge. With a goal of helping people take part in all aspects of society, her group developed a camera for wheelchair navigation. They are working on adapting the project for white cane users as well.

Service remains central to WAX’s identity. Last spring, Maddie was one of several Truth members who collected dozens of stuffed animals for distribution to patients at Phoenix Children’s Hospital.

Isabel emphasizes that all these efforts, big and small, are part of faith formation achieved through practice and prayerful action.

“You practice your faith the same way you practice sports or study chemistry,” she says. “It makes me happy to know the students are growing.” ■

About the Author: Michelle London is a communications specialist for the Sisters of Charity, BVM in Dubuque, Iowa.



Miley Quintero Salas (l.) travels to Peru with classmates Nora O’Donovan (r.), Itzayana Coctecon (behind Nora), and others to volunteer in a school that lacks many resources.

Association: A Very Special Relationship

by Michelle London

The BVM Associate relationship is a “Circle of Friends” between associates and Sisters of Charity, BVM, and a way to expand the charism of Foundress Mary Frances Clarke.

Associates of all faiths share in the congregation’s core values of freedom, education, charity, and justice. They partner with BVMs to serve vulnerable communities, support ministries, and lead hands-on projects.

Becoming an associate offers a meaningful way to live their values with purpose. A desire for deeper spirituality, a commitment to social justice, and making a tangible difference are just a few of the reasons an associate relationship can be a fulfilling way to serve.

In recent years, there has been a shift towards younger people becoming associates. This shift is part of the evolution of the associate relationship, which has been active for over 50 years.

Associate Julie Cirks (l.) and her mentor Julie O’Neill, BVM share a special moment during Julie’s associate commitment ceremony.



Living the Charism on Campus and Beyond



Julie Cirks

Julie Cirks grew up surrounded by parish life, yet it wasn’t until she arrived as a student at Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa, that she learned about the BVMs.

Julie found that college life drew her away from her Catholic upbringing. But then after graduation, she became a Clarke employee. As her career advanced at the BVM-founded school, she developed a deeper relationship with sisters and learned about association.

“I didn’t know that was even a thing,” she says. “But the way the BVMs showed up in that faith just really aligned well with my beliefs.”

She began to explore becoming an associate, but soon life demanded her attention elsewhere.

“I got cancer,” she says. “And I was pregnant with my fourth baby at the same time.”

Treatment, motherhood, and survival reordered her priorities. When the university asked her to return to work on campus after she had been gone for a while, she began to consider association again.

“My director of admissions, Emily Kruse, and her husband, Terry, went through discernment,” Julie says. “That kind of gave me the idea. I was friends with [other associates who also worked on campus]. So I was learning more about what association meant.”

Julie O’Neill, BVM was an influence in Julie’s discernment.

“She is absolutely fantastic,” says Julie Cirks, speaking about the sister who was one of her mentors.

“I think the best part of the discernment process is talking about whether this is something that aligns with you. I really enjoyed sitting at a table and

feeling 100 percent comfortable in having true conversation.”

Now two years into her association, she feels the bond even more strongly. She has developed and facilitated workshops with her staff and with other university employees to talk through the BVM core values and how to incorporate them into their work lives.

“I am excited for the opportunity to become more engaged as an associate,” she says.

Association and Service



Dan Abben

Dan Abben has been an associate for 25 years, beginning his journey at just 22 years old.

A graduate of Clarke, Dan traces his earliest interest to a BVM History and Philosophy course taught by Norm Freund, who is also an associate.

“With encouragement from Norm, the class formed a discernment group,” Dan says. “It introduced me to the BVMs, and it set the foundation for that connection.”

Dan briefly considered seminary. Instead, he spent four years working in parish ministry as a Director of Religious Education. Today, he teaches Organizational Psychology at DePaul University in Chicago.

Service has been central to Dan’s associate life. He has served on numerous BVM committees and is on the board of directors for Carmel Catholic High School in Mundelein, Ill., co-founded by Sisters of Charity, BVM and the Order of the Carmelites.

For Dan, the heart of being an associate is connection. He values the relationships he has formed and appreciates the community’s commitment to social justice and openness.

“Especially when the church hasn’t always been open to that,” he says.

A Partnership in Discernment



Mariah Reeves (l.) and Elizabeth Maus

Mariah Reeves (l.) spent four years as principal at Wahlert Catholic High School in Dubuque, Iowa. When she first walked through the doors, she didn't expect to find a spiritual home. She wasn't Catholic, and she wasn't looking to become one.

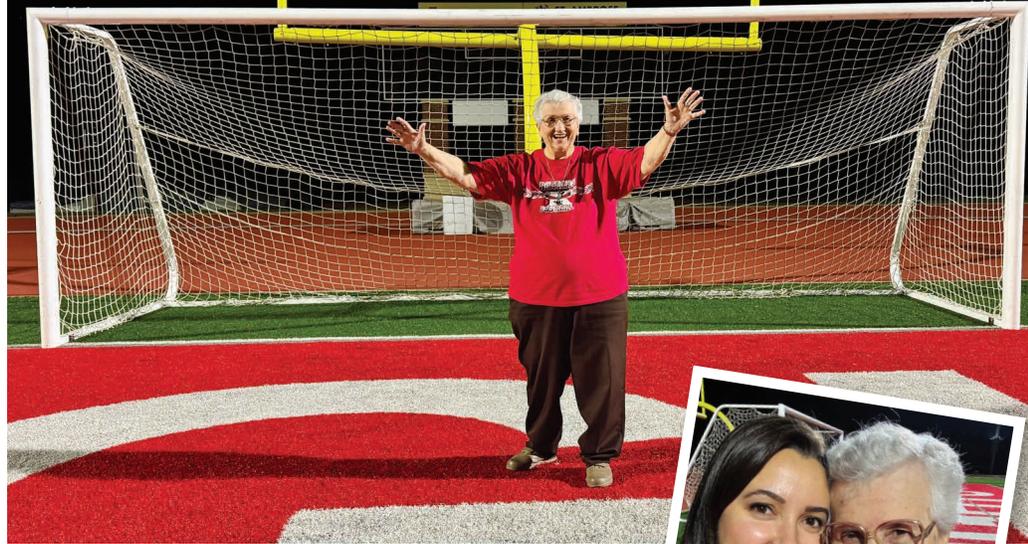
Mariah viewed herself as ecumenical, but felt that joining the Catholic Church would be a good step in her role at Wahlert.

"I'd always been faith-filled," she says. "I didn't necessarily picture myself working in a Catholic school. Yet when the opportunity came, it made sense—almost like something was nudging me forward."

During that process, Mariah befriended several BVMs, including Roberta White and Gwen Farry.

"I wanted to bring our religious sisters back into the Wahlert community because they were such a central part in previous chapters," she says.

Mariah serves as the co-representative, along with Karen Conover, BVM to Loretto at the UN, an organization that works with UN



Diane Rapozo, BVM travels to Davenport, Iowa, to support Assumption High School's women's soccer team, coached by Elizabeth Maus, during their state qualifying game.

"Diane has been such a blessing in our lives," says Mariah Reeves (l.). "We consider her family."

bodies like the Commission on the Status of Women. Mariah, along with other BVMs, have accompanied young women from Wahlert to the UN to learn about the commission's role in global women's issues.

"Their advocacy, their radical hospitality, their commitment to justice reverberated with me," she says. "BVMs humanize the gospel. That is the heart of Christ."

While Mariah entered Catholic life as an adult, her partner Elizabeth Maus was raised in it.

Elizabeth attended Catholic schools and a Catholic university. For much of her life, she experienced Catholicism as many young people do—through ritual, memorization, and tradition.

"I don't think I felt fully connected to the faith until I met the BVMs," Elizabeth says. "What they offer is a more welcoming, holistic perspective. It's the community that drew me in."

Mariah and Elizabeth never imagined they would one day walk through the BVM Association discernment process together.

"It's strengthened our relationship, our faith, everything," Elizabeth says.

When they complete the process—likely within a year—they hope to make their commitment side-by-side.

Carrying the Legacy Forward

As two of the younger prospective associates, Mariah and Elizabeth are inspired to share in the BVM charism.

"Their lives have changed mine," Mariah says. "I feel indebted and honored to continue their legacy of justice."

Mariah and Elizabeth's vision includes outreach to high schools, colleges, and the students who participate in trips to the UN.

"So many people are passionate about justice," Mariah says. "Why not show them this community that embodies those values?"

What makes the BVMs so compelling, says the couple, is that the sisters humanize faith.

"It's service as sacrament," Elizabeth says. "They are the gospel in motion. With them, faith looks like love." ■

About the author: Michelle London is a communications specialist for the Sisters of Charity, BVM in Dubuque, Iowa.



Associates like Dan Abben and Linda Heying often attend events that recognize BVM core values.

Azzarelli Clinic

Delivers Compassionate Care for Four Decades and Counting

by Michelle London

At Azzarelli Clinic in Kankakee, Ill., patients fill the waiting room—many of them with chronic conditions and speaking limited English.

Without the clinic, most would not have access to medical care.

With the belief that quality healthcare is a human right, Azzarelli Clinic provides services at no cost.

“Thank God we’re here,” says Brooke Futterer, a nurse practitioner and the clinic’s director. “Our patients would have nowhere to go.”

A former nursing faculty member at the University of St. Francis in Joliet, Ill., Brooke brings a teacher’s heart to her work. With a 90 percent Hispanic patient population, she communicates by drawing diagrams and using volunteer translators to help break down complex concepts.

“My goal is that every patient leaves knowing how to manage their health,” she says.

As a Ministry Partner of the Sisters of Charity, BVM, Azzarelli Clinic embodies what happens when faith, community, and generosity come together.

A Mission Built on Heart

The late Helen Chigaras, RN, a nurse for St. Theresa Parish (now St. John Paul II Parish), began doing blood pressure checks in a closet at the parish outreach center in the mid-1980s. Helen began to put together a volunteer medical team.

“She is the clinic,” says Father Tony Taschetta, pastor at St. Theresa Catholic Church from 1990 to 2002. “She was the heart, the pulse, the motivating force, the genius.”

Eventually, the clinic expanded to the annex of the former St. Theresa Catholic School.

“The clinic stays open because people care . . . Every person who comes through the door is treated with dignity.”

—Judy Callahan, BVM

“We were in the poorest section of Kankakee, but our parishioners supported the clinic,” Fr. Tony says. “There was a saying: ‘If you have to get sick, get sick at St. Theresa’s on a Sunday morning.’”

Judy Callahan, BVM, who sponsored Azzarelli Clinic, says, “The clinic was an outgrowth of the needs of the community. Black, Hispanic, and Anglo families all worked together to help it grow.”

Fr. Tony credits Judy and other BVMs who served in the area with inspiring the diverse community to get out and make a difference.

“They were incredible,” he says. “They were knocking on doors and getting women out of their homes and into groups where they were learning English and starting projects within the parish, including helping the clinic.”

A Patient Who Became a Volunteer

Few people understand the clinic’s impact as deeply as Sofia.*

“I was very sick,” she recalls. “I’m an asthmatic and I didn’t have my inhaler. The medication is very expensive.”

Sofia came to the clinic in 2015. Due to circumstances beyond her control, she had no insurance.

“It was a relief not to have to worry



Our BVM Legacy of Love, “to seek out and attend to those in need,” has remained constant throughout our history. As ministries have evolved and sisters have retired from active service, we now support our mission through the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Scholarships for Women and by funding Ministry Partners who share our values in the United States and abroad to ensure our legacy continues.

about how to pay,” she says.

Sitting in the waiting room, she watched other patients struggle to communicate.

“It took me back to my childhood,” says Sofia, who came to the United States from Mexico at age three. “We learned English and we translated for our parents.”

Volunteering at the clinic felt natural.

“In return for them treating me and helping me get my medication, I give my time,” she says. “They saved my life. I’m very grateful.”

Translating isn’t easy—patients

speak different dialects, and medical terminology is tricky.

“Google helps,” Sofia says.

Funding the Mission Today

Keeping the clinic open remains a daily challenge. Grants and volunteers are essential to help treat between 800 and 1,200 patients annually.

“We’re always exploring ways to expand funding,” Brooke says. “Without the sisters and private donors, we couldn’t continue this work.”

After Helen’s death in 2017, the clinic carried on its mission of free care.

“The clinic stays open because

people care,” Judy says. “Every person who comes through the door is treated with dignity.”

Fr. Tony offers moral support, even after retiring.

“This clinic is an expression of the Gospel,” he says. “They care for people not because they belong to our parish or our country, but because they belong to God.” ■

*Sofia is a pseudonym.

About the author: Michelle London is a communications specialist for the Sisters of Charity, BVM in Dubuque, Iowa.

Azzarelli Clinic treats all who come through its doors free of charge. The team of volunteers includes nursing student Nathan Howard (l.), nurse Judy Snead, receptionist Alice Sparks, Executive Director Brooke Futterer, and office manager Cathy Wade.



Five Scholars, One Mission:

Shaping the Lives of University of Iowa Students

by Michelle London

When five University of Iowa students were awarded the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Scholarship for Women, they became part of something that doesn't happen often—all of the recipients are attending the same school in the same academic year!

For freshman Eleanor Granstrom, of Evanston, Ill., the scholarship is an opportunity to pursue her dream of being a writer. For the other four—juniors Alora Rapp-Uptegraph and Cecelia Miller and freshmen Kristine Hellmann and Valarie Schuster—the scholarship has been a bridge to the BVM Community they cherish in Dubuque, Iowa, where they all work part-time at Mount Carmel Bluffs.

The Mount Carmel Connection

Four of the young women were introduced to the BVMs through their part-time jobs. Alora works in culinary service, and Cecelia, Kristine, and Valarie are CNAs.

Alice Caulfield, BVM who sponsored three of the girls' applications, and Marcella O'Rourke, BVM who sponsored Valarie, met them through ordinary moments of daily life—



BVMs Alice Caulfield (l.), Marcella O'Rourke, and Associates Marybeth Coleman and Eileen O'Shea are recent sponsors of five University of Iowa students.

serving lunch, offering care, or simply stopping in for a conversation.

"I didn't know who the BVMs were when I started," Kristine says. "But they are such incredible ladies. So kind. I love working with them."

Though their academic paths differ, these scholars share an Iowa upbringing and a deep connection to the BVMs.

Kristine is majoring in music education with dreams of teaching. Alora is an art history major and hopes to work as a museum curator. Cecelia is a psychology major who wants to work as a pediatric oncology therapist. Valarie hopes to become a therapist, helping others with their brain health.

For Alice, the scholarship is a natural extension of the congregation's identity.

"Providing these scholarships is living the BVM core value of education," she says.

Alice gets to know the recipients as young women with unique stories.

"I want to know their names, and I want to know a bit about their lives," she said. "Sometimes it's just an email, but we keep in touch."

While the young women are grateful for the financial help, it is the personal connection with the BVMs that they love.

"It feels like people are really caring for us," Alora says. "It makes you feel supported."

Alice shares, "That BVM charism rubs off on them. I love when they talk about their ambitions and their goals. These young women are going places."

Valarie, a psychology major, is grateful to the BVMs and her sponsor Marcella.

"I met Marcella when I began helping her with everyday tasks like getting ready for bed," she says.

Valarie knew U of I was where she wanted to pursue her vocation.

"It is one of the best psychology schools," she says. "I love their campus."



"Providing these scholarships is living the BVM core value of education."

—Alice Caulfield, BVM



Five University of Iowa students, all recipients of a Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Scholarship for Women, take a break from classes for a meet and greet meal in Iowa City: Eleanor Granstrom (l.), Kristine Hellmann, Valarie Schuster, Cecelia Miller, and Alora Rapp-Uptegraph.

The Illinois Connection

Eleanor's sponsors are Associates Marybeth Coleman and Eileen O'Shea, who are both long-time friends of Eleanor's family through Chicago's St. Patrick's Church.

"They helped us when my dad passed away suddenly when I was in middle school," she says. "They were very good to us."

She was attracted to U of I because of its storied literary reputation.

"I mean, this is the University of Iowa," she says. "They have the Writer's Workshop!"

Eleanor worried about attending an out-of-state school far from her Chicago roots, but she said the scholarship did a lot to alleviate that concern.

"In a broad sense, it's opened up

opportunities for my future," she says. "I feel like I have more leeway to figure out what I want to do after college. I'm very, very thankful."

New Friends

The scholarship has also connected the recipients to one another. They recently all met to share a meal—a rare break from campus life.

"That dinner felt like a piece of home," Cecelia says. "It's been such a blessing to connect with new faces."

The young women appreciate that the community is interested in how they're doing, and the BVM legacy is deeply felt.

"It's really special that so many of them were teachers," Kristine says.

"Now I get their support as I become a

teacher myself."

Alora, Cecelia, and Kristine plan to continue working at MCB during school breaks.

"I love it there," Kristine says. "I miss the sisters dearly."

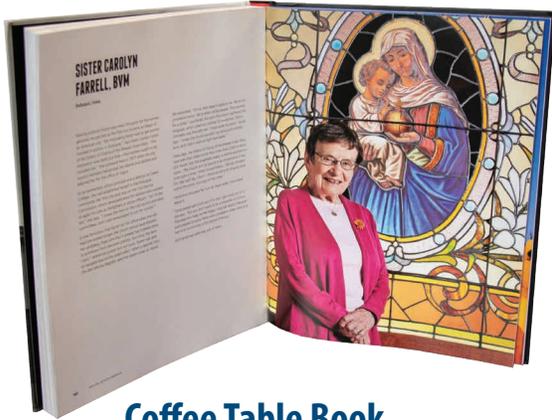
Stepping Out in Faith

The mission of Mary Frances Clarke continues in the lives of young women who carry forward a legacy of service, commitment, and compassion.

"This scholarship has meant so much," Kristine says. "Financially, academically, emotionally—it's opened doors and given us a community. It's phenomenal, and the BVMs are phenomenal." ■

About the author: Michelle London is a communications specialist for the Sisters of Charity, BVM in Dubuque, Iowa.

Salt Briefs



Coffee Table Book Features BVM Carolyn Farrell

Along with mayoral luminaries from across the country, BVM Carolyn Farrell is highlighted in author/photographer Steve Hathaway's book, *Mayors Across America*.

Carolyn, who died in 2020, was Dubuque, Iowa's first and, thus far, only female mayor. After being active in city politics for several years, including serving on the Civil Service Commission and as the first woman elected to the Dubuque City Council, she was appointed mayor by the council in 1980. She finished out her term in that position.

It is believed that she is the only women religious to ever serve as a city mayor in the United States.



Indigenous Peoples' Day Proclamation

On Oct. 6, 2025, the Dubuque (Iowa) City Council read into the record a proclamation announcing Oct. 13 as Indigenous Peoples' Day in the city. The original proclamation had not been updated since 2021.

Members of the Land Justice Futures committee, a group dedicated to pursuing racial repair and ecological healing, includes members of the BVMs, Sisters of the Presentation, and Sisters of St. Francis, as well as other invested

organizations.

Ann DeNicolò, BVM (third from l.) spoke on behalf of the religious communities: "We hope to embrace the invitation of Maryellen Baker, an elder in the Ojibwe tribe, to end the Doctrine of Discovery and to partner with Indigenous peoples and all who have suffered from this principle, to build a new Doctrine of Unity."



BVMs Represent at No Kings Protests

In October, Jean Tucker (l.) and BVMs Joellen McCarthy and Kathleen Conway joined nearly 7 million people across the country for "No Kings" protests both in person and online. *Global Sisters Report* gave a special shout out to the BVMs "...They sported T-shirts that said, 'I was an immigrant and you welcomed me.'" Read more: tinyurl.com/GlobalSisters.

Wear Blue Day

BVMs and associates wore blue on Jan. 11 to raise awareness about human trafficking—a crime that affects more than 27 million people each year.

BVM Pat Bombard was one of many to express her reason for wearing blue by holding a sign that read, "Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity."

BVM Irene Lukefahr shared: "Perpetrators of this crime must be called to accountability."

For more information on how to help, visit dhs.gov/blue-campaign.



Louise Levandowski, BVM



Pat Bombard, BVM



Dee Peppard, BVM



Visit our website to read a sister's entire obituary or watch her funeral Mass at: bvmsisters.org/obituaries.

In Memoriam

Please pray for BVM sisters and associates who have died October 2025–January 2026.



Jean Dolores Schmidt, BVM

Aug. 21, 1919–Oct. 9, 2025

Jean Dolores was born in San Francisco and entered the congregation in 1937 from St. James Parish.

When Jean Dolores decided to become a BVM sister, it was because she had fallen in love with God, who had seized her imagination from an early age. She responded to God's invitation by sharing her light and love with everyone she encountered. She was a kindred spirit, a basketball lover, and a mentor at Loyola University, where she became an accidental celebrity and matriarch of the Loyola Rambler's men's basketball team.

She ministered at Loyola University in Chicago for 34 years where she was an administrator and chaplain of the men's basketball team. She served as associate academic dean and instructor in the education department at Mundelein College in Chicago. She also was an elementary teacher at St. Vincent in Chicago and St. Charles Borromeo in North Hollywood, Calif.; and an elementary and music teacher at St. Bernard in Los Angeles, where she also served as principal. In 2023 she co-authored her memoir *Wake Up with Purpose! What I've Learned in My First Hundred Years*.



Mary Ellen (Ellenmae) Zimmermann, BVM

Nov. 8, 1932–Nov. 23, 2025

Mary Ellen was born in Milwaukee, Wis., and entered the congregation in 1951 from St. Sebastian Parish.

She was a gracious, gentle, and beautiful person who genuinely didn't think about herself. She was devoted to her vocation and to those she served. She loved telling stories about her 39 years as an elementary teacher. Everything she did regarding religious education was thoughtful, creative, and faithful. She had an engaging personality and was untiring in her efforts to relate to people.

Mary Ellen served as associate administrator of Marian Hall in Dubuque, Iowa. She was an elementary teacher in Illinois at Annunciation in Chicago; St. Peter in Antioch; and Lake Shore Catholic Academy in Mundelein; in Missouri at St. Catherine in Kansas City; and in California at St. Bernard in Los Angeles; Holy Family in Glendale; and St. Anne in Santa Ana. She was principal and teacher in California at Incarnation in Glendale, and St. Patrick in Carlsbad; and principal and learning center coordinator at St. Therese in Palm Springs. She was parish secretary and pastoral minister at St. James in Chicago, and assistant religious education director and office staff member at St. Mary of Vernon in Mundelein.



Eileen (James Leone) McGovern, BVM

July 18, 1929–Jan. 3, 2026

Eileen was born in Dubuque, Iowa, and entered the congregation in 1947 from Cathedral of St. Raphael.

Reflecting upon her life, Eileen once said she "helped others break loose from the bondage of fear, shame, worry, guilt, and anxiety and I have helped them moved forward toward greater self-acceptance . . . I have become convinced of the importance of awareness, of living in the present moment, and of radical acceptance of self . . . to live a full human life."

Eileen was a sociology/social work department chair and instructor at Clarke University, a therapist for Spanish speaking clients at Catholic Charities, and a clinical social worker for the Gannon Center for Community Mental Health, all in Dubuque, Iowa. She was a psychiatric social worker for the Dubuque County/Jackson County Mental Health Center, and a school social worker for the Grant Wood Area Education Agency in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She ministered as a university instructor in Bogotá, Columbia, and Salta, Argentina. She was an elementary teacher at St. Ambrose and St. John in Des Moines, Iowa; Sacred Heart in Lincoln, Neb.; and St. Paul in San Francisco. She served the congregation as second vice president and pastoral care minister.

We remember our Associates



Therese Hawks

La Grange Park, Ill.
Oct. 11, 1943–Aug. 23, 2025
Accepted May 5, 2015



Obituaries for associates are posted online at: bvmsisters.org/associate-obituaries.

BVM Perspective

2024–2025 Annual Report
Office of BVM Development

Dear Friends,

Thank you for walking with us on our journey through the years. Your support has sustained our mission and helped shape our past, present, and future.

After thoughtful consideration, we wish to share that we are formally concluding our active fundraising campaigns. Today, there are 182 sisters with only seven under the age of 75. Thanks to careful stewardship, favorable markets, and devoted benefactors, the congregation is financially secure and able to provide for all sisters—those currently on mission and those in retirement.

Our history is rich with sacrifice and service. From Mary Frances Clarke's arrival in the United States in 1833 to countless sisters who cared for the sick, educated the young, and supported immigrant families, our sisters have given selflessly, even in times of scarcity. We find ourselves living in uncertain times, when faith and community matter more than ever.

Though older and fewer, our spirit remains strong, and we continue to joyfully live out Mary

Frances Clarke's vision—seeking out and attending to those in need—by supporting organizations that share our values of freedom, education, charity, and justice.

For those who wish to continue partnering with us in our mission, donations may still be made through our website or by returning the remittance envelope included in each issue of *Salt*.

We are deeply grateful for your faithful companionship. As we enter this new chapter, we hold dear the relationships that have been formed and look forward to nurturing them—always in the spirit of Mary Frances Clarke.

Be assured of our continued prayers; we hold you lovingly in our hearts.



With deep gratitude and affection,

LaDonna Manternach, BVM

LaDonna Manternach
BVM President



Jean Tucker
Director of
Development



Jean Short
Gift Entry
Specialist

Contact the Office of Development

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Dubuque, IA 52003-7911
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development@bvmsisters.org

The Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is recognized as a nonprofit, tax-exempt, religious organization by the State of Iowa and the Federal Government. All financial information in this report has been reviewed by Eide Bailly LLP.

Thank you for your generous support and friendship.

The Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and those we serve are truly blessed that you have joined us in our mission. It is with sincere gratitude that we present this accounting from the Office of Development.



BVM Sisters' Development Network



The BVM Sisters Development Network (SDN) serves as a key connection between benefactors and the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Founded in 1987 with an original group of 11 sisters, there were 18 BVM sisters who actively participated in this ministry during the past year, 15 of whom have been corresponding with donors for more than five years.

Connections between Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and

donors are long-standing and deep. In fact, many of the donors are former students of BVMs. To maintain these unique bonds which are based in shared values and respect for the BVM mission, SDN members frequently communicate with donors through letters, cards, phone calls, and email.



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“Peace has the gentle power to enlighten and expand our understanding; it resists and overcomes violence.” —Pope Leo XIV



an immigrant
I was a ~~stranger~~ and you welcomed me.

Matt. 25:35

Jesus

SISTERS OF CHARITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY