

From Our Associates

Dear Circle of Friends,



“May God who gives patience, steadiness, and

encouragement help you to live in complete harmony with each other—each with the attitude of Christ toward the other.”

—Romans 15:5

This blessing is a hard one to trust when inundated by pervasive schismatic messaging. So much of our current world is in turmoil—political partisanship, global climate crisis, and for some, more personal concerns such as failing health or familial strife.

And yet, we are people of hope, people of courage, and people called to embrace “the other.” We are living it in and through our Associate Relationship.

For some of us, we do it by being people of intercession—prostrating in prayer, listening in love, or standing with the marginalized. We are embodying the attitude of Christ.

The discernment process to become a BVM Associate is a way of living out this verse. For most of last year, there were

between 10 and 15 discerners exploring BVM spirituality as they considered association. They had the support of 54 associates and sisters, as well as friends, actively engaged in their discernment. From Feb. 1, 2025 to Feb. 1, 2026, we welcomed five new associates. Currently, we have 14 discerners, including six in Ecuador.

In this issue, you will get to meet two new associates, learn about the next steps of the Associate Relationship Steering Committee (ARSC), and learn about a few opportunities for community building, actions of charity, and spiritual growth.

—Suzie Coulthard
Associate Coordinator

Welcome New Associates



Judy Giesen

New Associate Judy Giesen lives at Mount Carmel Bluffs in Dubuque, Iowa. She is a retired teacher, artist, widow, and mother of three.

She was introduced to the BVMs at a young age while being educated at St. Joseph Academy in Des Moines, Iowa, and by her sister, who was BVM Mary Patricia (St. Thomas) Haley.

Judy’s primary discernment companions are Associate Mary Moothart and BVM sisters Kathleen Conway, Ann DeNicolo, Mira Mosle, and Kathleen Mullin.

Judy is a “doer” of many things past and present. She was a middle school art teacher, taught ESL at Clarke College, was a campus minister at Loras College, and still volunteers with the Lantern Center as a language mentor.

She is passionate about people and is known in her local community as a person who will bring laughter and wisdom to the table whether it be at an arts event or a social justice forum.

Judy is waiting to schedule her commitment ceremony so that she can share it with others who are currently in the discernment process. It will be held at Mount Carmel Bluffs in the Mary Frances Clarke Chapel.



Noemi Santaella

New Associate

Noemi Santaella lives in Scottsdale, Ariz., with her husband and is blessed to be the mother of two adult daughters. Their story as a couple began when Luis, a native Californian, was introduced to Noemi by a mutual friend while he was on vacation in her hometown in Mexico. Noemi works at Xavier College Preparatory (XCP) as a Spanish Teacher, Kairos Retreat Moderator, Spanish National Honor Society moderator and WAX (We Are Xavier) Club moderator.

Noemi’s primary discernment companions were Associate Lori Ritz and BVM Isabel Conchos, although she also regularly interacts with the sisters and associates in the Phoenix area. Her

first connection to BVMs came when her daughters attended XCP and then deepened while on staff there.

Throughout her life, Noemi said, she has “[felt] Christ’s call to service as standing up for fairness and respect for all people, especially those who are often ignored, and doing what I can, through small and large actions, to make a positive difference.” In a letter of affirmation for Noemi, Lori Ritz stated, “Her faith, relationship with God and her search for how she can impact the lives of young people fit right in with the core values of the BVM Congregation.” Noemi’s husband Luis composed a song, “Freed by Love,” and had it recorded in honor of her becoming an associate. You can listen here: tinyurl.com/FreedByLove.

We look forward to Noemi’s commitment ceremony, which is planned for March 21, at the Xavier College Preparatory Chapel.

—Associate Coordinator
Suzie Coulthard

Associate Relationship Expands Volunteer Opportunities

More opportunities to support and strengthen the Associate Relationship in 2026 are arising as we work to deepen our bonds with each other and our broader BVM community.

Led by new co-chairs Associate Michele Miller and BVM Katie Anders, the Associate Relationship Steering Committee (ARSC) is focused on three goals:

- Engaging more members of the BVM Community in as many meaningful opportunities as possible.
- Improving our communications by sharing progress more frequently and building better channels to send and receive information.
- Supporting the new Sustainability Committee as it explores financial viability and the creation of a new non-profit entity. (Associates Marybeth Coleman and Andy Schroeder are co-chairing this group.)

Four new "enhancement" committees are launching to deepen our shared experiences. These new committees are: Spirituality chaired by Associate Eileen O'Shea; Community Engagement chaired by Associate Lori Ritz; Youth Outreach chaired by Associate Mariah Reeves; and Social

TALENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we have the people we need to do the transition work? • Will we have enough new people to make this sustainable? • How will people learn of this opportunity? • Who will we invite?

OFFERINGS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What problem or need are we responding too? • What "services" or "products" will we offer as a 501c3? • What will we do? • What name will we use?

ORGANIZING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who and how will we staff this? • What monies will we need? • How might we synchronize the offerings from Pat M. and Suzie C. as we move forward?

ARSC is focused on three goals to engage more members of the BVM Community.

Justice chaired by Associate Andy Fitzpatrick.

The committee chairs are collaborating with associates Jeanie Fritscher and Grace Mendez and Associate Coordinator Suzie Coulthard to coordinate their efforts.

Together, we all are striving to live the vision and mission that emerged from our 2024 planning retreat:

- **Vision:** We envision a compassionate world community living in freedom, strengthening relationships, deepening spirituality, and committed to justice.
- **Mission:** To provide opportunities for individual and collective growth through the sharing of spirituality, social justice actions, and community, uniquely grounded in the spirit and charisma of the Sisters

of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the BVM core values of freedom, education, charity, and justice.

Contact Suzie for more information about how to get involved. Be on the lookout for communications on upcoming opportunities. And don't forget to invite friends!

—BVM Pat Bombard, ARSC



Pondering

Wisdom
Nobody asked me, but ...

Wisdom is not so much learning what you learn or even knowing what you know as much as seeing what you see and recognizing all the world in that.

Like I read in a 12-step book once we ought not to compare our inside to another's outside - yet somehow we think we are all alone in what we feel, and she is perfect, and we don't bother to stop to consider what we show to others ourselves, and how limited that can be.

I'm also pretty sure wise people don't go around saying wisdom is this or wisdom is that, so consider this as you ponder.

—Sean Bradley
Spiritual Care Coordinator

Tied to Each Other

On March 7, BVM, Franciscan, and Presentation associates were invited to tie together fleece blankets to be donated to people sheltering at the Iowa City, Iowa Ronald McDonald House and immigrants who will be standing in the cold as they report to their immigration assessments with Homeland Security in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Please RSVP to scoulthard@bvmsisters.org by Feb. 28, 2026 if you would like to attend or donate to these projects.



Associates in Action

Nine associates from the L.A. area and BVM Marguerite Murphy (back row, c.) join in celebration to renew their promises and vows at Holy Redeemer Church in Montrose, Calif.



BVM President LaDonna Manternach (c.) joins with Associates Maureen "Mo" McGrain (l.) and Helen Gabel, discerner Donna Lane, and Associate Andrea "Andy" Fitzpatrick to celebrate Carmel Catholic High School's Founder's Day.



Associate Jill Bureson braves the cold to bring the congregation's newest poster in support of immigrants to the ICE Out For Good protest in Hillsboro, Mo. on Jan. 14.



Team members from Fundación Nuevo Mundo in Ecuador come together to experience the joy of community and walk the prayer labyrinth with associates Sonya Rendón (seated, l.) and Sandra Molano and Pat McTeague (back row, c.)



Marci Madary, DMin, has ministered in the realm of spirituality throughout her professional life and is passionate about the intersection of theology and the lives of laity. Along with working for the Catholic churches in Oak Park, Marci is a facilitator, spiritual director, speaker, and poet. She earned a Doctor of Ministry in spirituality at Catholic Theological Union. Mother of two married children, she and her husband deeply treasure the relationships in their lives.

Save the Date

April 18, 2026
9:00 AM - 3:30 PM CDT

Moving with Mutuality into an Unknown Future

This Zoom-only event will focus on exploring the future of associate relationships within and between spiritual communities. Associates, sisters and friends are welcome.

More details will be available in January 2026.

