

A Newsletter for friends of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine

### Partners in Prayer and Service



On April 8th, 2024 the Sisters of Charity were united with our residents, friends, family and staff at Regina Health Center (RHC), experiencing the total solar eclipse. With our glasses, cameras, hats, and presence with each other, we truly saw the beauty of the design and love of our Creator manifest above us. I could only reflect on the gift of seeing God's glory in creation. The intimacy of God shown in that moment will always be in my heart.

This edition of *Images* focuses on the manifestation of God in each other as we share the gifts of collaboration that are with us today. As we live our religious vocation in these difficult but hope-filled times, we also see many ways to give thanks to our God, who is the source of peace each day. God is faithful in the midst of change, and is with us as we author the new chapter of our congregation into the future.

But just as we look to the future, we acknowledge and reflect on the past. Recently, I had the opportunity to attend the 43rd anniversary of University Hospitals St. John Medical Center's opening day on March 1st. I was able to attend Mass, and share the story of the hospital's planning, begun in 1979 and culminating in its opening in 1981. Thinking back on these times, I was struck with thankfulness at God's providence. The dreams and shared vision that we had then is a reality now. The hospital was founded as a joint venture of Bay View Hospital and St. John Hospital. Today, it is a member of the University Hospitals Health System. We are grateful that what was started as a profound collaboration continues to be a collaborative effort, and that St. John's continues to carry on the faith-based legacy of quality care up to this day.

Given the dynamic change in our religious lives, we have made deliberate efforts to come together with other congregations to serve others. One small example was a shared "Fill the Truck" event, which sought to provide assistance to refugees and migrants resettling in the greater Cleveland area. This event involved the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland, the Incarnate Word Congregation, and our CSA Community. Over three days, a large truck stopped first at Ursuline's Merici Crossings, then at Mount Augustine/Regina Health Center, and finally at the Incarnate Word motherhouse.

We each loaded up supplies for those in need, such as paper towels, toilet paper, Kleenex, laundry detergent, cleaning supplies, baby diapers, and cash donations. All of these items were used by Sr. Ritamary Harwood, SND to help welcome these persons and their families. Together, we were able to fill the truck and provide much-needed aid.

(continued on page 5)

*Sr. Judith Ann Karam, CSA*



(Left to right) Maggie Spotila, Sr. Regina Fierman, Sr. Kathy Andrews, Donna Crow, Sr. Miriam Erb, and Sr. Loretta Spotila viewing the eclipse from the back steps

# "In all things charity"

- St. Augustine

## 70 Years a CSA: Sr. Mary Denis Maher



Sr. Mary Denis at the Jubilee Mass

On September 24th, 2023, Sr. Mary Denis Maher celebrated her 70th Jubilee as a Sister of Charity of St. Augustine. A Mass was held in the chapel at Mt. Augustine, followed by a reception with close family and friends.

For her Jubilee theme, Sr. Mary Denis chose the oft-quoted words of St. Augustine: "In essential things, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity." This quote has been a favorite of Sister's during her many years in ministry.

Sister Mary Denis entered the community in 1953. She taught English for many years, first at St. Augustine Academy and later at Ursuline College. Sister also served as a member of the CSA Leadership team, and was Major Superior from 1981-1985.

In 1999, she published her book, *To Bind Up the Wounds: Catholic Sister Nurses in the U.S. Civil War*, which examines the role of Catholic nuns during its titular conflict. Her book is still available for purchase on Amazon. A lover of history and stories, Sr. Mary Denis began working in the CSA archives in 1993. She has been a steward of the congregation's history ever since. In 2001, for the community's sesquicentennial, she composed *Living in Love: A Brief History of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine*.

Sister Mary Denis's Jubilee Mass was celebrated by Fr. Lou Papes, who shared his own wonderful memories of Sr. Mary Denis, having met her when they were students at John Carroll University.

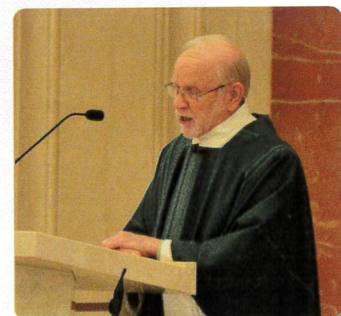
"Having Mary Denis as a friend is like getting one of those CVS cash register receipts. You know, the ones loaded with all sorts of added rewards," Fr. Lou said. "With Mary Denis you get not only a friend, but you get a mentor, a resource, a counselor, even an occasional dinner companion. She's all about being present, especially when it really counts—like when my life was at a critical crossroads, and there she was making all the difference in the world!"

Sister Mary Denis expressed her heartfelt gratitude to all those who were able to share in the celebration, as well as her dearest thanks for all of the cards, prayers, and messages she received. It was a beautiful afternoon filled with reminiscing, laughter, and love.



Top: Sr. Mary Denis Maher with her family  
Right: Fr. Lou Papes

Congratulations, Sr. Mary Denis! You are truly a radiant blessing to CSA.



# *"This is a holy place"*

- Sermon at the dedication  
of Mt. Augustine

## **The History of Mt. Augustine**

By about 1950, it was becoming apparent to Mother M. Carmelita Reilley and CSA that they had outgrown their current Motherhouse, the St. Augustine Convent in Lakewood, OH. Forest View Farm, a 363-acre property near Elyria, OH was the Sisters' first choice for a new building. The farm had been gifted to CSA by Bishop Schrembs in 1923, and a few elderly Sisters were living there at the time. However, when the property was assessed, it was discovered that its water source would prove inadequate for the Sisters' needs.

Around the same time, one of the Sisters' drivers, Tom Schmidt, noticed that the 354-acre Newton Farm in Richfield was available. Better yet, it had three working water wells. Plans were made, funds were raised, and the Sisters even buried a statue of St. Joseph on the property, per the old superstition that it would bring the sale good luck! On September 24th, 1955, the cornerstone for Mt. Augustine was laid.

In the meantime, the large house that had previously stood at the driveway entrance of the Newton Farm property was bought by Charles Elliott. The house was moved across the street where it still stands, still occupied by his family. Elm trees were ordered to line the driveway, but yellow maples arrived instead and were planted. The Sisters moved into their new motherhouse on March 16th, 1955. They celebrated the first Mass there on March 17th, with chaplain Monsignor Teare presiding.

Over the years, Mt. Augustine continued to grow and adapt alongside the community. In 1964, St. Joseph Hall was constructed, adding 95 rooms. "Henry," the original Angelus bell from Lakewood, was mounted on the grounds in 1976. In 1982, the Hermitage, a small cabin for individual retreats, was built in celebration of CSA's 25 years in Richfield. Mt. Augustine was designated as a Peace Site in 1991, as part of CSA's Peace Stance, and the Our Lady of Peace Chapel was installed on the ground floor. And, of course, in light of changing needs, plans were begun in the late 1980's to develop Regina Health Center. The first resident was admitted in 1994. She was Mrs. Eucker, mother of Sr. Mary Jean Eucker, CSA. Later, in 2005, the Holy Family Chapel was renovated and rededicated, celebrating 50 years of CSA's presence at Mt. Augustine.

The land, too, continued to flourish. Beginning in 1978, 60 acres were and continue to be leased to Crestview Farms for the development of the fields. Nature trails were made through the woods in 1980. Through the assistance of Sr. Pat McHale, CSJ, the property was classified as an official Wildlife Habitat Site in 2004. The land itself is considered a wetland, and supports a variety of plants and wildlife: herds of deer, snakes, rabbits, squirrels, turkey vultures, and the occasional coyote. Our St. Francis Pond, located near the front driveway, as well as the small Lake Monica in the rear, host a number of regulars, including a blue heron.

Throughout the years, various transactions have occurred so that the present acreage is approximately 240, including a Land Conservancy to the rear of the property where the East Branch of the Rocky River runs. Another transaction was the sale of 41 acres to the Ohio Operating Engineers for their training purposes. And throughout the years, Mt. Augustine has seen countless picnics, bike rides up the driveway, sledding down the hill, skating on the pond, and much more. We are so blessed to call this place our home.



*Mt. Augustine cornerstone laying, Sept. 24th, 1955*



*Novitiate moving into Mt. Augustine, 1956*



*Lake Monica, 2006*

# "We seek to love one another"

- CSA Constitution, pg. 3

## Many Congregations, One Loving Heart

On their own, a congregation of women religious can accomplish herculean tasks. Just imagine what happens when three of them work together.

"The collaboration between the three congregations allow us to work together for a common mission, a common cause," Sr. Erin Zubal, OSU said. "We are our best selves when we show up for each other and the world. We are stronger together, and that has been so renewing for me."

The Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine (CSA), the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland (OSU), and most recently the Sisters of the Incarnate Word (SIW) have been fostering a collaborative intercongregational relationship. This sharing includes joint activities, service opportunities, and friendships. The CSA's and OSU's have been collaborating since 2022, and the SIW community joined them in 2023.

"We are all going through some kind of transition," Sr. Jacinta Benavidez, SIW said. "I for one believe it is important to stay connected with other women religious and form those connections."

A committee with representatives from each community is responsible for organizing joint events, social gatherings, and service opportunities. They also develop ways for the Sisters to deepen these intercongregational relationships on a personal level. One of the most fulfilling ways is by giving Sisters the opportunities to talk to each other.

"'Casual Conversations' are held on a bi-monthly basis on Zoom," Sr. Marian Durkin, CSA explained. "I have loved getting to know Sisters from both congregations. It widens our circle with other voices as we all look forward to a new and different future."

The communities also alternate hosting in-person, educational events at their respective Motherhouses. This gives the Sisters living at these facilities, or the Sisters who may not be as comfortable with virtual sessions, the opportunity to participate as well.

The program offerings are as diverse as they are inspiring. For example, the CSA's hosted a presentation by Randy McShepard, co-founder of Cleveland's Rid-All Green Partnership, last August. Randy shared with the Sisters how Rid-All turned Cleveland's Kinsman neighborhood into an urban farm, specializing in education, community outreach, aquaponics, and more. Since that talk, many Sisters made a point to visit Rid-All's Community Kitchen restaurant, enjoying meals there together!

Earlier this year, the OSU community also hosted a presentation by Warriors' Journey Home, where Rev. Dr. John Schluep and other veterans shared their personal experiences with war, moral woundedness, and healing.

Top: (l-r) Bob Varley, Chair of the CSA Health System Board; Sr. Sue Zion, OSU; Sr. Mary Lois Phillipp, CSA; Sr. Allan Kenzig, CSA; Sr. Susan Durkin, OSU at the 91st Day Outreach "Fill the Truck Event"

Bottom: Sr. Susan Durkin, OSU loading the bus



The communities have also begun collaborating on works of service. All three congregations have participated in the Ursuline's Ninety-First Day Outreach program, which addresses the needs of refugees and migrants in Northeast Ohio. The "Fill the Truck" event in February was a particular success!

"My hope for the future is that we will be able to sustain what we have begun," Sr. Marian said. "Our planning group looks forward to new and exciting opportunities for further collaboration as the evolution of religious life continues."

With each Zoom call or event attended, the bond between these communities deepens.

"We get to know each other at a personal level," Sr. Jacinta said. "It is almost intimidating, and yet at the same time encouraging, to see how much our friends are doing for the people on the margins of society."

And it's not just the Sisters. This collaborative relationship includes each community's Associate members as well. Associates are lay men and women who have committed themselves to sharing in that community's charism and spirituality.

"It's just so humbling to be in the room with those Sisters and Associates who have ministered before me," Sr. Erin said, "and to consider all the incredible work that they do every day, and have done in the past. So it's great to take the long look back with them while also visioning for the future. The ways that the Associates have also been committed in their lives of service continue to inspire me."

While the future of religious life continues to change, these three communities will walk that graced journey together.

As Sr. Erin said, "I hope that we continue to show up for each other, to check-in with each other. Together we can continue to learn and dream together, while sharing our resources for our brothers and sisters in need throughout the city of Cleveland and beyond."



## Partners in Prayer and Service

*(continued from pg. 1)*

God has blessed our CSA Congregation with the opportunity to walk our journey in friendship with the Incarnate Word Sisters and Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland. Graced casual conversations among us, educational opportunities, and social times remind each of us of the shared charism of religious life. Together, we live out our call.

As participating members in the Women Religious Archives Collaborative (WRAC), we also extend our hearts and helping hands to other communities. In March, we welcomed several new congregations to WRAC; there are now over thirty congregations participating in this joint venture. This new archives space will be a real symbol in the inner city of Cleveland, where the presence of religious women has been such a reason for hope. It also fulfills a significant need of religious congregations to have proper care of their historical materials well into the future, preserving the loving stories and histories of religious women so vital to the story of the church.

Our lives continue to unfold into God's loving mystery. We rely on the lessons of the past to help us persevere into the future. Let us remember each day the manifestation of God's love and care in the gift of the eclipse. Each of you, reading *Images*, are blessings to the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine. We hold each of you in our daily prayers.

*Above: Sr. Lois Buck, OSU and Sr. Diane Pinchot, OSU at Mt. Augustine*

*Left: Sr. Rita Mary Hardwood, SND presenting on the 91st Day Outreach*



*Sr. Diane Pinchot, OSU at the Warrior's Journey Home event*

# "The example of a life well lived"

## In Remembrance: Sr. Xavier Gorman

"Well, I entered [the Sisters of Charity] when I was 19, after I graduated from high school... [but] I really didn't want to go to the convent; I didn't want to go be a Sister. But the Lord was saying, *You gotta go. You gotta go.*"

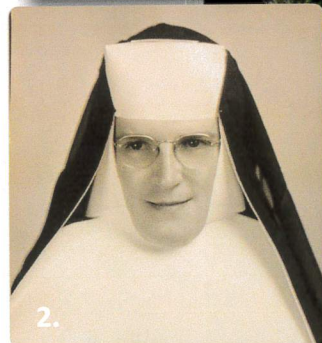
So recalled Sr. Xavier Gorman, CSA, during an interview in 2019. During her 103 years, Sr. Xavier was a gift to her CSA community, a blessing to those she served, and a friend to all who knew her.

"The example of a life well lived and well loved is so profound and evident from Sr. Xavier," Sr. Judith Ann Karam said.

Sister Xavier, formerly Mary Agnes, was born on June 11th, 1920 in Akron, OH. Her deep desire to help those in need was influenced by her loving family, most notably by the passing of her uncle, Fr. Ray Gorman. Fr. Gorman died tragically when his car was struck by a train one foggy night, when he was returning from a sick call administering last rites.

"The day I went to the wake to see him, his hands were just so special, it seemed," Sr. Xavier said. "And I thought, *I wish I could do something with my hands.* And as I said, from March until May I knew there was something [nagging at me]—but I didn't want to admit it. So in May I said to my mother, 'I think I have to go to the convent.'"

The day that Sister entered the community, she was accompanied by her parents, two sisters, and Sr. Ignatia Gavin, CSA. Sister Xavier's mother was a volunteer at St. Thomas Hospital, and from an early age Sr. Xavier helped Sr. Ignatia in her office there. Sr. Ignatia, of course, was instrumental in the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous alongside Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith. Sr. Ignatia was a dear friend and role model for Sr. Xavier, and would check in with the young Sister during her time in Novitiate.



Sister professed her final vows on Sept 20th, 1945 and took the name Xavier: "I always wanted to be a missionary, but since China and India were so far away, I decided to ask for the name Xavier and pray for missionaries."

And Sister did become a sort of missionary, after all, to the many lives that she served in ministry. Sister cared for children and babies at Parmadale, St. Ann Hospital, and DePaul Infant Home for over thirty years. She began the Parmadale Baby Cottage, and at St. Ann's she was appointed the supervisor of the children's floor.

It was in 1959 that Sr. Xavier was appointed Housemother at DePaul

1. Sr. Justine Sendlebach (l) and Sr. Xavier Gorman (r), n.d.; 2. Sr. Xavier, c. 1945; 3. Sr. Mary Dorothy Tecca (l) and Sr. Xavier (r) on her 101st birthday, 2021; 4. Sr. Xavier next to the tree planted for her 100th birthday, 2020

# and well loved..."

- Sr. Judith Ann Karam, CSA

Infant Home. There, she cared for 50-60 unwed mothers whose ages ranged from early teens to late 30's. Sister Xavier put her whole life into working with these women during an incredibly difficult and profound time in their lives. It was there that she again drew upon the work of Sr. Ignatia, establishing a community of support among the women that was not dissimilar to Sr. Ignatia's work with alcoholics at Rosary Hall in St. Vincent Charity Hospital.

After 15 years, Sr. Xavier transitioned ministries. As she recalled in another interview from the mid-1980's: "First I was the same age of many of those girls, then I was the age of their mothers, and when I was the age of their grandmothers, I knew it was time to move on."

Sister went on to serve as the Coordinator of the Infirmary at Mt. Augustine from 1974-1978, where she cared for her aging Sisters. After a leave of absence to care for her own aging mother, Sr. Xavier returned to community and began her work in Pastoral Care, both at St. Vincent Charity Hospital and St. John Hospital.

She also worked at St. Vincent's information desk, where she became a friendly face that others could turn to. Sister would frequently give out free meal tickets to hungry members of the neighborhood. She recalled that often, the children or mothers she had cared for would come into St. Vincent's, wondering if she was the same Sr. Xavier. Sister made many lifelong friends, and kept in touch with them even well into her retirement.

Sister retired to Mt. Augustine in 1995, where she remained an avid volunteer. She was a fond lover of hazelnut coffee, and many a visitor came into her room with a smile and a cup of Dunkin's hazelnut blend. She always wrote the most thoughtful cards, and radiated her heart's joy. Sister had a special way of making those around her feel welcomed, loved, and understood.

Sister Xavier died on June 12th, 2023. In her 103 years, Sr. Xavier had seen WWII; the fight for civil rights; man land on the moon; pandemic and perseverance; and much, much more. She saw the construction of a new CSA Motherhouse and its eventual renovation into Regina Health Center. And through it all, Sr. Xavier impacted the lives of countless individuals, spanning generations. The ripple effect of her glad and loving heart is still felt—and is still spreading—today.



5. Sr. Xavier at the SVCH Information Desk, n.d.; 6. Sr. Xavier at the RHC gift shop, c. 1995; 7. Sr. Xavier with Fr. Lawrence Bayer and Fr. Stephen Spisak on her 75th Jubilee, 2014

## Become an Associate

Do you desire to live the values and goals shared with CSA in your own life? For more information on becoming a spiritual Associate of CSA, contact Sr. Nancy Hendershot at 216-262-2576.

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As Sister said in 2019, on the occasion of her 80th Jubilee: "All my years have been special and happy. I hope the dear Lord agrees!"

*Prayers - Best Wishes*  
*- Sister Xavier*

*Address service requested.*

## Glimpses

The following are just a few snapshots of our Sisters' most recent accomplishments. While not an exhaustive list, these highlights can offer you a glimpse into a year with CSA:

- For her historic work as co-founder of The Open House, **Sr. Marian Durkin** received the Jane Daroff Lifetime Achievement Award from PFLAG Cleveland on October 17th, 2023.
- **Sr. Judith Ann Karam** was one of the 2023 recipients of the Cleveland Heritage Medal, the highest civilian honor in Cleveland. She accepted the award at the Cleveland City Hall Rotunda on November 16th, with many of our Sisters in attendance.
- In August, **Sr. Judith Ann** also presented at the VII Peruvian National Convention for Alcoholics Anonymous.
- **Sr. Catherine Walsh** was recognized as a one of Summit County Historical Society's Women of the Year on March 22nd, 2024. On May 16th, Sr. Catherine also received the Walks of Life Award from the Irish American Archives Society.



*CSA Sisters present at the Cleveland Heritage Medal ceremony, November 2023  
Photo courtesy of Dennis Crider Photography*