

Witness

Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield Magazine

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ST. VALLER 1683
ST. AUGUSTINE 1866
CORRAL, PUERTO RICO 1976

SISTERS OF SAINT JOSEPH



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WITH PRESENCE IN

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Rhode Island	Jamaica
Vermont	Burkina Faso

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*ON THE COVER: The CSJ tree is an adaptation
of the original heart graphic created by Sister Kari Pohl, CSJ.*

*An Anniversary is a
time to celebrate
the joys of today,
the memories of
yesterday,
and the hopes of
tomorrow.*

— S.J. Perelman



From the President's Office

Elizabeth Sullivan, SSJ



Three hundred seventy-five years have passed since the Sisters of St. Joseph were established as a religious congregation in LePuy, France, in 1650 when six young women, desirous of loving God and eager to serve the dear neighbor, came together and were recognized as a religious community. Our history tells us that under the guidance of Jesuit priest, Jean Pierre Medaille, this community of six women was allowed to work outside the cloister, to divide the city and work with women, "teaching them anything that women were capable of doing!" To this very day, the Sisters of St. Joseph throughout the world continue to live our mission, "to unite neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God, without distinction, that all may be one!"

We enter this Anniversary year knowing that 375 years is certainly a milestone and an event to be celebrated. Anniversaries allow us to strengthen established friendships, create new relationships and connect with others. Beyond that, celebrations allow us to reflect upon our

memories, recall our experiences, celebrate what has transpired, meet new friends and, as always, hope for the future! Through the commitment of faith, compassion and kindness of the many Sisters who have preceded us, we have seen love in action, hope alive and service provided daily to our dear neighbors without distinction.

Pope Francis has proclaimed 2025 to be a Jubilee Year with the theme of "Pilgrims of Hope." Our early Sisters and all those who have come after them have certainly been icons of hope bringing their lived commitments, compassion, faith, resilience and understanding to all those with whom they have ministered so "that all may be one!" (John 17:21)

In this edition of Witness, you will find brief articles written by Sisters, an Agrégée and an Associate telling us how their experience of living the mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph coincides with their call to love and serve God and neighbor.

The beginning of Psalm 19: *"The heavens declare the Glory of God
the firmament proclaims
the handiwork of Love,"*

reminds me of the many Sisters, upon whose shoulders we all stand, who formed our Congregation. Confident of their love, faith, and courage, they ministered to those in need and we are grateful. As we celebrate this momentous occasion, we pray that this Anniversary enables all of us to trust and hope that God's message of peace will permeate our world.

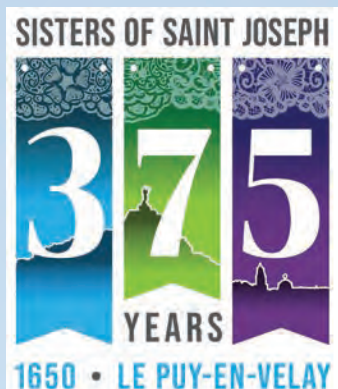
A word of gratitude also to each of you for your friendship and generosity to us and for the many ways in which you support us and our ministries.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth (Betsy) Sullivan SSJ". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth Sullivan, SSJ, President

Our History



The Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield find their origins in mid-17th century France, where dedicated women of the time sought to provide for their own salvation and perfection and to bring about the salvation of their dear neighbor.

The original six sisters in Le Puy, already running the Hospital Montferrand, received official recognition and support from Bishop Henri de Maupas on October 15, 1650. The new congregation expanded to over 100 groups throughout southeastern France, “to practice all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy of which woman is capable, and which will most benefit the souls of our dear neighbor.” (Primitive Constitution)



1789

The French Revolution brought the dispersal of the community and at least four members to the guillotine. However, Napoleonic France found itself unable to deal with the vast social problems resulting from years of war, and so begrudgingly agreed to the reestablishment of some apostolic orders, including the Sisters of St. Joseph. In 1807, Mother St. John Fontbonne refounded the community in Lyon, and it soon expanded in numbers and ministries.

1650

Not called to the traditional cloistered religious life of the time, the women found guidance from Jean Pierre Medaille, SJ, under whose direction early groups were established, the most noted being six women in Le Puy.

1836

In 1836, The Countess de la Rochejaquelein sponsored six Sisters of St. Joseph to travel to America in response to a request from Bishop John Rosati, CM, of St. Louis, Missouri, choosing this particular community “because in this Order a foundation according to rule is not so restricted as in some other Orders; it accommodates itself to times and circumstances” (Mme de la Rochejaquelein to Bishop Rosati, Chambery, 1835). The six arrived in Missouri, founding missions in Cahokia and Carondelet in the first year. From there, the Sisters moved to many parts of the United States and Canada.

1883



Sr. Mary Albina Murphy, founding member of the Springfield Congregation and its second Superior.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield were founded in 1883 following a request by the pastor of St. Patrick's in Chicopee Falls. He needed help starting a parish school, so seven Sisters from the New York Congregation moved to the Springfield area. The small community grew slowly but steadily while educating poor immigrant children in central and western Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

1953



Esther Hannigan, SSJ

On September 15, 1953, twenty-two postulants came to Mont Marie. Mother Borgia was overjoyed at the number since it was the largest group we've had.

Sr. Paula Kelleher went to each of us and welcomed us by introducing herself. I approached the group with uncertainty since I was twenty-five years old and found myself surrounded by teenagers. However, as we came to know each other I found that Sr. Theresa Murtha was my age, and that Sr. Kit McCarthy would be "forever 49" like Jack Benny.

Outside, our group took refuge in the Bird Bower (Gazebo.) It was a distance from the novices and we felt free to be ourselves. Many sounds of laughter came from our group. There were a few of us, myself included, who had our college degree. Consequently, we would be missioned after vows. We had sisters from the Elms College who came to instruct us along with Passionist priests and brothers to teach us Scripture and Theology.

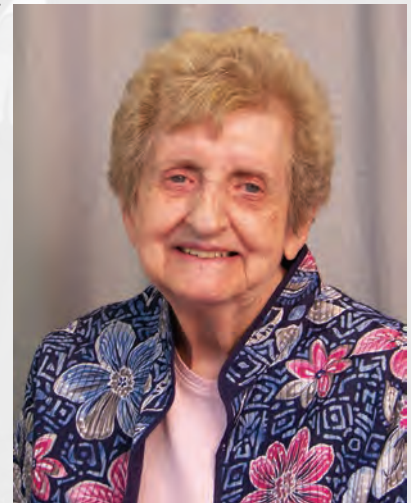
We went for beautiful walks because hills surrounded us. However, sometimes when we returned from the walk, the group would be missing a sister because she left the community while we were on our walk. When we were novices, we walked from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. in the afternoon. However, while we walked, we would have to memorize the 100 "Maxims of Perfection!" Because I had to memorize them, I developed a bias against them. Years later, I attended conferences where they changed the translation, but they still had no meaning for me!

When we were second year novices, we were assigned to Angels' Dorm for our sleeping quarters. This was wonderful because we were away from the Mistresses and the other novices. Surprise entertainment delighted us! Sr. Eileen Shea sang in her sleep! Eileen was an alto but sang a beautiful soprano in her sleep. Her repertoire included "Shall my Soul Pass Through Ireland" and "A Mother's Love is a Blessing."

March 19, 1956 dawned and we were bused to the Cathedral where we received our profession cross during the vow ceremony. Then we were officially known as Junior Professed. The day started out cloudy but as the day progressed, a blizzard started while we were in church. The bus had trouble going up the hill at first, but finally we made it back to Mont Marie.

As novices, we heard a few "horror stories" about the missions. For me, St. Peter's in Worcester was a wonderful mission. Sisters were very welcoming. There were other missions after St. Peter's but that mission touched my heart.

As we look toward the future, I am filled with hope that the same Spirit who has been with us through the years will guide us into the future.



1958

Miriam Francis Predom, SSJ

Greetings from the Green Mountains of Vermont. In 1958, I applied to enter the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rutland, VT and was accepted. On Sept. 8th of that same year, I entered the novitiate. The novitiate {mansion} was of Italianate Architecture, built around 1856 and was named Clementwood after Charles Clement and his wife Elizabeth Wood. The Sisters of St. Joseph bought the forty-acre parcel in 1950 after the defunct Rutland Junior College. The mansion became the novitiate. After arriving at the door with my trunk and list of belongings that I was told to bring, I was shown my room on the second floor in what had been the servants' quarters in the time of Charles Clement.

Eventually, the time for reception of the habit was approaching and we had to ready ourselves by choosing three names connected with saints that we would like plus getting a wedding dress and veil. In those days, vowed sisters were considered "brides of Christ." Again, beyond my wildest dreams, did I think I would be walking down the aisle in the convent in a wedding dress with a bridesmaid at my side. However, if I was to receive the habit it was to be part and parcel of the ceremony to take place in the chapel of the Motherhouse. It was a solemn event of great happiness, and I felt I now belonged to the Sisters of St. Joseph.



I moved on to make my first Profession and into my Canonical year. Things hadn't improved much academically, and I finally decided this life was probably not for me. I left the novitiate at the beginning of the following summer and returned home. A short leave of absence. Visiting with our chaplain for the novitiate, he thought I should make an appointment with then Mother Concepta Pellerin and that visit brought me back to the novitiate and from there I was assigned to hands on ministries within the community and I went on to make my final profession.

Now, after 67 years, I have a grateful heart.



1968

Shirley Campbell, SSJ

Postulant 9/15/68 – Novice 8/15/69. In 1969 after a year in the Community I left with a masters in floor cleaning, lots of singing practice and a strong sense that I would return one day. Fast forward to 9/5/79. On that date I moved in with a wonderful group of sisters on Melha Avenue who helped and grounded me in daily prayer, cooking, more cleaning and of course the foundations of what it actually meant to be a Sister of St. Joseph.

I had a “dream team” of mentors in Sisters Roberta Mulcahy, Mary Quinn, Carol Wren, Kathleen Keating and Eleanor Spring. Those formative years especially that first year on Melha set the tone for what is now 46 years of joyous service to the dear neighbor. I can't imagine living my life any other way. With a sense of humor, a song in my heart, and faith in the God who called, I ministered with the poor, the developmentally challenged, the mentally ill, the substance abusers and the incarcerated.



I served on the Community Leadership Team from 2017-2022 and now in retirement, I assist our sisters and neighbours at the Mont Marie Senior Housing Campus where I reside.

Throughout the years, Isaiah 61:1-3 guided me. “The spirit of the Lord has been given to me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken, to proclaim liberty to the captives, freedom to those in prison, to comfort those who mourn.”

Commonsong (1981 a travelling folk group)

was a special gift of these years that brought ten SSJ's together to sing and entertain at festivals, parish gatherings, etc. We played and sang our hearts out for twelve years until we got too old to carry the equipment. We brought joy to our community and to our neighbours from Boston to the Berkshires, Rhode Island, Vermont and beyond.

This journey has blessed me and I am grateful.



2016



Leila Sullivan, SSJ

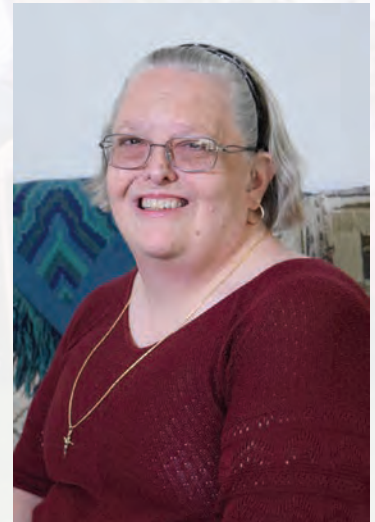
Being raised in the Baptist tradition gave me a deep love of God and of scripture. I felt a call to a level of service and belonging that was not possible in the Baptist church. I found what I was looking for in the Catholic Church.

I converted to Catholicism in 2011. It took me a long time to find the courage to go against family tradition and the fear of my family's reaction.

After looking into different congregations and not finding the right fit, a friend of mine suggested trying the Sisters of St. Joseph. I contacted Sr. Natalie Cain and began monthly meetings. She introduced me to many community members and encouraged me to attend monthly reflection mornings, various meetings, and to go on retreats. All of this gave me the chance to meet even more sisters.

I joined the Congregation in 2016. I lived with three other sisters on Sheldon Street during my candidacy period, discerning that living in community is a lifelong learning process. I moved to West Springfield shortly before entering the novitiate, volunteering at a number of ministries during this time. After professing vows, my first ministry was as a paraprofessional for the Greenfield Schools. When the position of pastoral minister opened at Holy Name in Springfield, I saw an opportunity to help more people and to challenge and stretch myself. To my surprise, I love the ministry and have found my place.

The more people I meet, the more I learn about the charism and ministries of the Congregation. I know I have found my home. These welcoming and supportive women have a joy that is so energizing. It was the charism, ministry and people that drew me to the Congregation, and it is the charism, ministry and people that keep me here and call me to profess final vows.



Two articles in this edition touch on various ways individuals and vowed sisters join together around the charism and mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph. "Charism" is a word defined as "the soul of the community, that which gives it purpose, motivation, and animates its action."

In keeping with the history of the congregation, we now have four groups of individuals who comprise the Community of St. Joseph. When we first began in LePuy, France, there were vowed sisters but also others who joined with them in community. These others were known as Agrégées, who took a simple vow of stability and carried out the same exercises as the sisters. In our history, it is noted that this group could include "noblewomen whose rank or obligations kept them in the world." Another group who joined with the congregation were Associates who were pious lay women living with their families while collaborating with the congregation.

Finally, the fourth group, "Partners in Mission" are people who have no defined membership or set commitment; rather, it is a designation for the many persons with whom we share ministry, spirituality or like-minded concern for the people of God through various circumstances in either enduring or short-term relationship.

Today, we continue this configuration under the umbrella of the Community of St. Joseph. The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph is the canonical entity, comprised of vowed women. Agrégées are a smaller group who take a vow of fidelity to the charism. Associates make a personal Covenant that outlines their commitment to the charism. Finally, Partners in Mission, as defined above, includes a wide variety of individuals and groups who support our charism and mission.

Karen Hurd, Agrégée

My name is Karen Hurd, and I was among six Agrégées who made a vow of fidelity to the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Springfield, MA. This was an historical moment. It was the first time a vow of fidelity was made by Agrégées.

This charism was first planted within me by my parents, my church, and my school where the Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood, NY taught me. In those days, I didn't know the word charism, but I did know that I should "love God and love my neighbor so that all may be one."

Then, when I met the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield, MA, that seed that had been planted so many years ago began to sprout. I found myself visiting Mont Marie often and I became friends with Sr. Theresa Fournier and Sr. Mary K. Dutko, who invited me to look at becoming an Associate.

On October 17, 1992, I became an Associate. As an Associate I had the opportunity to take part in summer ministry where I worked in Lajoya, Texas. My second summer I worked at Holy Family Parish in Springfield, MA.

As my roots went deeper, so did the call for something more. When I look at the word "more" for me, I felt that God was calling me to another level of saying, "Yes" in the Community. Then when I did say "Yes," I knew in my heart I was doing what God was asking of me at this time in my life. In the late 1990s I started looking at the Agrégée form of membership. On August 6, 2011, I said "Yes" to the call for something more.

Now, we are six Agrégées responding to the call to the vow of fidelity to the charism to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield, MA and we say "Yes" to the call.





Mary Creighton McDowell, Associate

Why did you become an Associate of the Sisters of Saint Joseph? Sounds like an easy question to answer, right? Wrong! My journey as the first Associate in the SSJ's was not what I call easy. My intention was always to become a vowed member of the community. Upon graduation from college, I chose to pursue that dream. At that time the entry process included living in a community for two years before professing first vows. Living with four incredible women on South East Street in Holyoke was by far one of the most life changing experiences. I thought I knew how to pray... those four women helped me understand prayer in meaningful and life-giving ways. I thought I knew what sacrifice and giving of oneself was all about ... those four women showed me a deeper meaning of sacrifice and self-giving.

While Sister Roberta Mulcahy, AKA our Superior as my Dad would call her, is not with us today, her presence is with me always. Sr. Roberta educated my children about Mother Earth and how it is important to preserve and protect HER. She babysat our kids growing up. We still speak of Sr. Roberta often, mostly about how we miss her! Today in 2025, these four women, along with countless other SSJ's, continue to inspire me, support me, and affirm me in so many different ways.

Why didn't I want to continue this wonderful experience? I did! I just didn't want to do it the way that was prescribed. I wanted to continue to live with women who shared the values, spirituality and concept of Church that I did. When I met with Leadership, the choice was clear: "Mary decide to continue with first vows, otherwise continuing to live with these women is not an option." That is how I became an Associate! I did not accept that option and felt there were other options available. So I didn't stop pursuing them! I haven't looked back since. Thank you Sr. Kathleen Keating for understanding the importance of connecting with others in creative ways!

Just look what I have today ... a husband who is as connected to the SSJ's as I am and children who are as connected to the SSJ's as I am. The grandchildren connection is in process! In my book that's called a WIN, WIN!!!! Thank you to so many of you who have supported me in ways you will never know! I love you all very much.



From the Director of Development

Mary Ferguson, SSJ



Dear Friends,

The celebration of a 375 - year history is a call to look back and forward, to thank God for graces bestowed and challenges met, and to thank you, our faithful donors, who share this journey with us.

As stated on the timeline, the Sisters arrived in the United States in 1836 at the request of St. Louis Bishop Joseph Rosati, who sought assistance from a friend of nobility in France to fund the plan.

Felicite de Duras agreed to help, on the condition that Bishop Rosati accept her choice, as *"they (Sisters of St. Joseph) are the most adaptable."* *"They take charge of ... schools, hospitals, asylums for foundlings or the aged; ... look after prisoners, attend the poor and sick, they are ready for anything."*

"I am confident that they bring to America the true and admirable spirit of their congregation ... the fruits of the establishment of these good Sisters in America will... comprise all good works which charity may suggest."

—Countess Felicite de Duras to Bishop Rosati – January 4, 1836

With the Bishop's acceptance of her terms, the Countess provided funds for six Sisters' passage to America and their livelihood during the early years, becoming our first donor!

Led by the spirit of our first Sisters, over the years we have engaged in numerous and diverse ministries, embracing change to respond to the needs of the "dear neighbor."

You, our faithful donors, as was Countess Felicite de Duras, share your prayers and your gifts, and we, ever grateful, assure you of remembrance in our prayers. Thank you!

With deep gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Ferguson SSJ". The ink is dark and the signature is written on a light-colored background.

Sr. Mary Ferguson, SSJ

In Memoriam

2024—2025



Sr. Marilyn Logan
(Mary Arthur)
April 7, 2024



Sr. Mary Behan
(Margaret Therese)
April 9, 2024



Sr. Barbara Faille
(Francis Richard)
August 4, 2024



Sr. Kathleen A. Wallace
(Margaret Kenneth)
November 20, 2024



Sr. Therese L'Heureux
(Sr. Therese Albert)
December 15, 2024



Sr. Mary K. Dutko
(Mary Jonathan)
February 11, 2025



Sr. Catherine Alaimo
(John Constance)
February 16, 2025



Sr. Mary Bisson
(Margaret Arthur)
March 5, 2025

Our History, Continued...

Mother Mary Cecelia Bowen served the Congregation from 1880 through 1890.

Sister Mary Cecilia Bowen came from Flushing, New York with ten other sisters to staff the parochial school in Chicopee in 1883 at the request of Bishop O'Reilly. Shortly thereafter, Sister Mary Cecilia was chosen as the superior of this new mission, began its first novitiate and successfully staffed schools. Through her persistence and determination, Mother Mary Cecilia's vision of mission expanded, and she received permission to visit almshouses, and arranged for Masses to be celebrated regularly.

Eventually, she went to York Street Jail where once again, her determination to visit led her to minister to the inmates regularly, provided books thus establishing the first library in the jail, offered education classes to the inmates and facilitated the celebration of Mass at the York Street Jail. Mother Cecilia often carried oranges and candy in her pockets and offered them to the children she encountered while going from place to place. From history, it is obvious that Mother Mary Cecilia was truly a woman of faith, and led by the mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph.



Mother Mary Philip McDonagh served the Congregation from 1876 through 1893.

Sister Mary Philip McDonagh entered the Flushing, New York Community in 1857 from St. Patrick's Cathedral and was the 10th member of the congregation. Shortly after receiving the habit, she was appointed as the Mistress of Novices and remained in that position for several years. She was sent to Rutland, Vermont, continued as the Mistress of Novices and was appointed Superior General in 1876. Additionally, she taught in schools proving to be an excellent teacher and administrator. Mother Mary Philip was admired for her religious qualities, intellectual capabilities and

administrative skills as she oversaw three schools while also serving as the Mother General.

Mère Louise Thérèsia Romeyer served as the superior of the first group of nine Sisters of St. Joseph of LePuy who came to St. Roch's Parish in Fall River in July of 1902. She served as the 'principal superior' until 1933 and oversaw a steady growth of the community, the expansion of missions in the Fall River area, the establishment of the 'principal house' of the Community, the novitiate, and later, the provincial house.

In a tribute to Mother Thérèsia found in the Annals it states "In her presence ... one sensed her as much virile as maternal, as tenacious as condescending, as simple as noble, as firm as pleasant. Her deep expression revealed her solid convictions, which softened the reflections of tender and sincere emotions. Her piety, woven of faith, confidence and humility, rested on her unwavering religious principles ... her charity was warm, her hope complete ... with her, no half measures: she had given herself once and for all."



..... please cut at dotted line

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ssjspringfield.org



Clockwise, from the top: Some of this year's celebrants for Special Anniversaries.

Upper right: Walking the Mont Marie Labyrinth on Earth Day.



Center right: Our last Irish Gala was held in late February.

Bottom right: The Rutland Associates renewed their covenant at a gathering last August.



Bottom: Our last Golf Tournament was held in August. The Sisters greeted the players with a special sign.



Find a Sister: ssjspringfield.org/contactus/findasister/ • Find us on Facebook: facebook.com/ssjspringfield



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