

# *Witness*

Spring 2026  
Volume 35

Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield Magazine



*Living*  
*Catholic Social Teaching*

*Witness is published each Spring by the Development Office of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield.*

## WITH PRESENCE IN

Massachusetts

Vermont

Rhode Island

Burkina Faso

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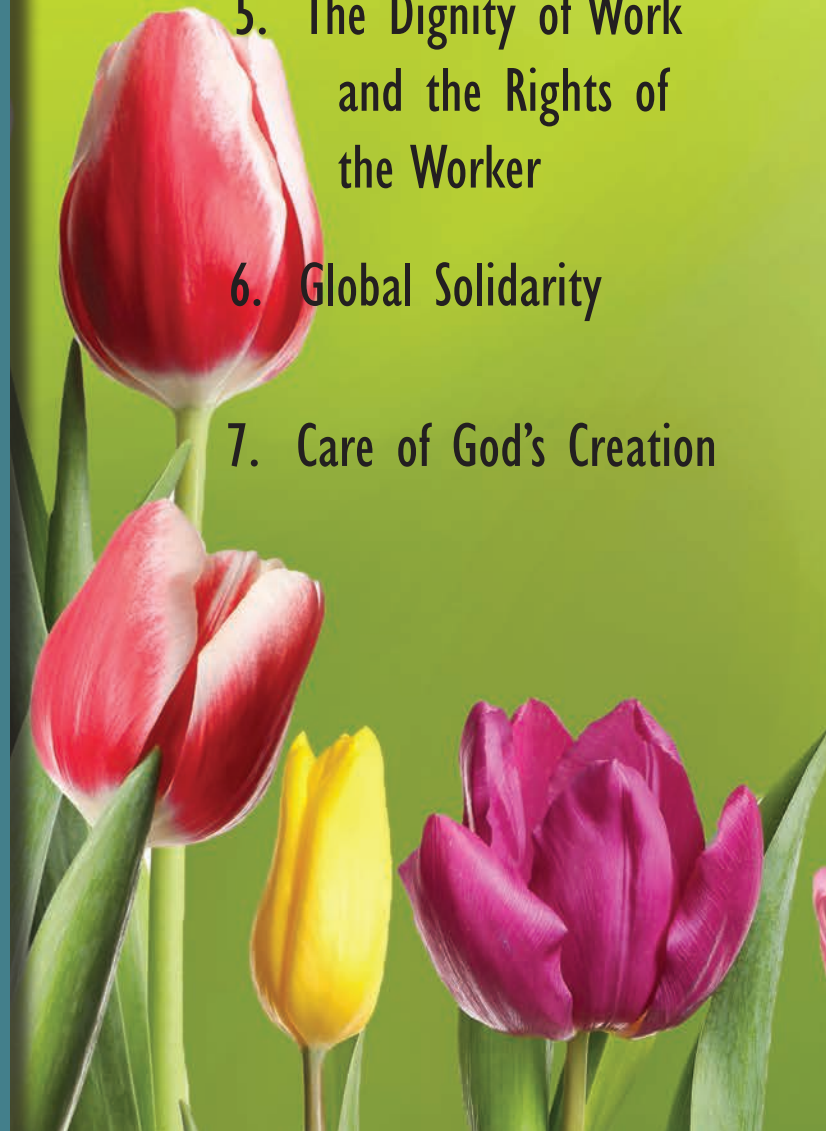
Annette McDermott, SSJ

Margot Eckert, JPIC

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## PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person
2. Call to Family, Community and Participation
3. Rights and Responsibilities
4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
5. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of the Worker
6. Global Solidarity
7. Care of God's Creation



# From the President's Office

Elizabeth Sullivan, SSJ



Dear Friends,

Many passages in Sacred Scripture tell us, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark: 12:31). This passage serves as the foundation of the mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph, “uniting neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God, without distinction, that all may be one!” Our mission calls us to respect the dignity of others and to stand in solidarity with others. Yet we acknowledge the turmoil, the unrest, the pain, the cruelty, the fear, and the injustice that is current within our country and world, so

contrary to our Catholic Social Teaching that all life is sacred and that every person is made in the image of God.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have published seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) which promote the human dignity of all persons. Based on the life of Jesus, as learned through Scriptures, Church tradition and various theologians, Catholic Social Teaching has been the guide within our Church that addresses injustices. They provide us with a foundation for living God's mission. In support of the Life and Dignity of all people, these principles tell us that we are one human family regardless of our national, racial, ethnic, economic and ideological difference. We are called to serve all. In the words of Pope Francis:

*“An authentic faith—which is never comfortable or completely personal—always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.”*

(Evangelii Gaudium)

The principles of Catholic Social Teaching are a significant treasure of wisdom, exemplifying the Gospel command, “to love your neighbor as yourself.” The scripture passage encourages us to see beyond our own needs, to reach out to others and to recognize our neighbors' well-being. All of this begets compassion which reflects the heart of God thus deepening our relationship with God.

In this edition of *Witness*, you will read stories of how members of the Community of St. Joseph have integrated the mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph with the Catholic Social Teaching principles in various ministries.

The Sisters of St. Joseph thank you, our faithful readers and donors for your continued prayers and support for our Congregation. Your kindness and on-going support are greatly appreciated. Let us continue to pray for one another and may we be beacons of hope to all!

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

# *Living* *Catholic Social Teaching*

Source: USCCB

## **Life and Dignity of the Human Person**

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching.

## **Call to Family, Community, and Participation**

The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society – in economics and politics, in law and policy – directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.



## **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

# The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected--the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

## Solidarity

We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that if you want peace, work for justice. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.



## Rights and Responsibilities

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities--to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

## Care for God's Creation

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

*“...that all may be one...”*



# Providing Water, Food and Love in Burkina Faso

by Linda Wilk, SSJ

*“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”  
—Micah 6:8*

Today more than ever, this verse compels me to action on behalf of the “dear neighbor.” It is a global call—one that many of us faithfully live out within our own countries, which in these times urgently call for compassion and response.

Alongside Ruth Cox, and through our sending mission, Sheltering Wings, we live out this calling in Burkina Faso, West Africa—one of the poorest nations in the world. There, we strive to help create a more just and hopeful future by addressing deep-rooted injustices. Through the provision of clean water, we serve villages where women have long walked miles each day to meet their families’ most basic needs. In 2025 alone, ten villages received functioning wells through our ministry. Every person has a fundamental right to clean water, food, education, shelter and healthcare.

Our hands and hearts are extended especially to widows and vulnerable children and their families. Last year alone, our sponsorship programs enabled more than 250 children—from primary school through university—to receive an education, opening doors to brighter futures. These children and their families also receive over 200 pounds of rice each year, helping to address ongoing food insecurity.

Widows—often marginalized when they are no longer seen as “productive” members of society—are shown dignity, love, and respect through their inclusion in our food distribution program. In these small yet vital ways, we seek to walk humbly, love mercy, and act justly answering God’s call, one life, one village, one act of compassion at a time.

These acts of love and mercy, carried out in the name of all of us Sisters of St. Joseph, endeavor to elevate human dignity and reach the hearts of those we walk alongside instilling in them the knowledge that they, our “dear neighbors,” are worthy of love and support, and that they are deeply loved by their Creator.



# Having a Conversation

with Terry Foley, Agrégée, and Annette McDermott, SSJ

*Unlike many other religious orders founded with a specific type of ministry, like education or healthcare, the Sisters of St. Joseph were founded to respond to the needs of the times and “to unite neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God, without distinction.” Ours is a radical call grounded in respect for the dignity of all people. What does that call look like today?*

**Terry Foley, Agrégée:** One question I think people might be asking is, why is the care of immigrants so important to us as Catholics? We had the opportunity to hear Bishop Bruce Lewandowski, Bishop of the Diocese of Providence, speak about that at the Witness to Hope Regional Conference last December. He emphasized that, if you really look at it, care for the immigrant is in our bones, that it’s a divine command. Love of the stranger is interwoven into many biblical stories and calls to action, beginning in the Old Testament. The prophet Elijah was running away from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Joseph was captured and became a stranger in the land of Egypt. Mary and Joseph were fleeing the oppression of the Roman government. If you read the Bible, Bishop Lewandowski emphasized that the care for immigrants is, as he says, in our DNA as Catholics, and that we are the ones called to counter fear with our faith and to understand the gospel imperative to welcome the stranger.

**Annette McDermott, SSJ:** When Bishop spoke about how caring for immigrants is in our bones, in our DNA—that this is simply who we are—it resonated deeply with me. The metaphor was so simple, yet so perfect. I was stunned because I had never heard this level of clarity of teaching expressed so succinctly and unambiguously before. In that moment, I genuinely felt it in my own DNA. Truth has a ring to it.

I realized while we were with him that a thirst was finally being quenched. It was a real call to action to live our Catholic Social Teaching. How do we protect the dignity of the person, especially the most vulnerable, with a preferential option for the poor today? Or in the Sisters of St Joseph’s voice, how do “we love the dear neighbor without distinction?” This is who we are as Catholics—it is in Scripture, and therefore in our DNA.



Annette McDermott, SSJ

**Terry:** The call today is the very nature and the mission of the Sisters of St Joseph. Each religious congregation has what’s called a charism: a special gift they carry deeply within themselves and share with all those with whom they work. It also serves as a guide for expressing our ministries.

The charism for the Sisters of St Joseph is directed toward reconciliation and union—with neighbor and neighbor, and neighbor with God, so that all may be one without distinction.

Back in 1980, when Sr. Kathleen Keating was president of the congregation, she challenged every member to go out and make the stranger a neighbor—that was

more than 40 years ago. It was a call to return to our roots in Le Puy, France. That call to renewal is now deeply embedded in the bones of the Sisters of St Joseph of Springfield, in our unique commitment to living the charism fully.

**Annette:** Loving the stranger, as the dear neighbor, is central to who we are as Sisters of St. Joseph. It is what has shaped me since entering in 1987. It is Scripture-based and counter-cultural, especially when the stranger is framed as someone to be feared. We are continually being called to bridge divides, not to deepen them. To do that, however, we must acknowledge our own fears and face them honestly; otherwise, even our charism can wither. Part of this work also means healing our relationship with all marginalized communities — where we are the strangers—to be in right relationship. That is called justice.

**Terry:** Here is a little history: St. Xavier Academy, where I ministered for over 10 years—a Mercy school in Providence, Rhode Island—was attacked by the anti-immigrant “Know Nothings” group and threatened with being burned down when it first opened in the 1800s. We are not in uncharted territory. If we look back, we can see just how important the sisters have been in their educational ministry as a response to that prejudice, when so many of us were “strangers” in need of a pathway to acceptance; our schools, for the most part, provided that space.

The Gray House is a perfect example of what emerged from Sr. Kathleen’s call. Four sisters and a friend moved to the North End of Springfield, a neighborhood considered one of the poorest in Massachusetts, to help with basic needs. Sisters went all over the globe and into marginalized neighborhoods throughout the U.S., expanding their ministerial capacity to address the varied needs they encountered. It is clear to make the stranger, the neighbor, is who we are.

**Annette:** Terry, your panoramic view reveals the choices we’ve made over time. It brings us to this moment so beautifully—we have sisters who have ministered all over the globe and in many different neighborhoods across New England. Our congregation includes sisters whose roots are in Fall River, Massachusetts, and Rutland, Vermont. When we come together, we carry all those diverse perspectives and the many gifts of our dear neighbors.

If we truly believe in the Incarnation—that we are all made in the image and likeness of God—then the many ways people experience that image and likeness invite us to recognize that every call is worthy of serious consideration. Our consciences are continually being formed by the tensions in society today. We ask ourselves: What is our moral obligation in this situation? What can I do? We do? Who is the “dear neighbor”? Even when reality feels difficult, how can I see the image and likeness of God within it? How can I trust that it comes from a place of love?

It is not a simple, sentimental kind of love. It is a deeper love—one that may lead us into places where we suffer, are misunderstood, grow, and are challenged. And it is in those moments that we begin to see the true gift of the charism and what it means to be a Sister of St. Joseph.



*Terry Foley, SSJ Agrégée*

# Helping the Dear Neighbor

by Denise Granger, SSJ

The Dear Neighbor Fund, celebrating its tenth year, was created to support programs or organizations begun by Sisters of St. Joseph or where members of the Community of St. Joseph serve or organizations that have a mission like ours. The second function is to be able to respond quickly to emergencies, like a refugee family in immediate need or people in need because of a natural disaster. To illustrate the impact of the donation, there are a few excerpts from thank you notes we've received from recipients.

*“Your support (through the Dear Neighbor Fund) means the world to us as we continue the mission so beautifully set in motion by Sisters Jane Morrissey and Maureen Broughan. Their vision to create a nurturing, educational environment for Holyoke’s children lives on every day in our classrooms.”*

—Dave Haslam, Executive Director, Homework House

*(The Dear Neighbor Fund) “will be used for the Mamba Project which provides a peanut butter sandwich daily to one thousand plus children in our six schools. For most of our school population and their younger siblings at home, this is their only food for the day.”*

—Alex Daugherty, Executive Director, Haiti Plunge, Inc.

The good that we can do with the Dear Neighbor Fund, the unqualified generosity of it, with no restrictions, allows us to show our solidarity with those among us who are in need- our dear neighbors. This project flows from our SSJ mission to “unite neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God, without distinction.” It also highlights first principle of Catholic Social Teaching—the Life and Dignity of the Human Person.

*“Thank you for your generous donation to the Ignatian Spirituality Project. This gift will help provide much needed spiritual care to our friends ... recovering from homelessness and addiction.”*

—Christine Curran, Executive Director

For, if our eyes are clear and focused enough, we will be able to see the face of God in all our dear neighbors.

*“I have personally witnessed the difference (this donation) makes to our people. We have a drilling team working ... to bring clean, safe water to villages in Burkina Faso.”*

—Linda Wilk, SSJ

# Stopping Human Trafficking

*by Margot Eckert,  
member of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Committee*

The first principle of Catholic Social Teaching—Life and Dignity of the Human Person—calls us to focus attention on the scourge of human trafficking (HT). The attention of women religious on HT can be traced to 2001, when Catholic sisters from 77 countries agreed to work, in solidarity, to combat all forms of human trafficking, including labor and commercial sexual exploitation.

Human trafficking is the exploitation of people by force, fraud, or coercion into labor or sexual servitude. The Sisters of St. Joseph continue to go into this dark and dangerous corner of our world to serve the dear neighbor.



In 2011, the SSJs of Springfield held a seminar at Mont Marie to educate the public on HT and correct false myths.

In 2013, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts issued an Intra-Agency Task Force Report on HT which called on every sector of the state, including faith communities, to help combat this scourge. The SSJs answered the call by raising awareness through presentations at Elms College, interviews on local radio stations, and meetings with mayors, hotel executives, transportation representatives and legislators. Two years later, the SSJs joined the Coalition Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) - convened by Baystate Health Systems to connect all the public and private organizations in the region to form a network to combat the exploitation of children. In 2018, the SSJs held the “Shine a Light Symposium” at Mont Marie with hundreds of attendees

to educate and raise awareness that human trafficking occurs in our midst and to debunk myths that excuse or minimize the magnitude and the harms caused by HT.

A small group, including retired Springfield Police Captain Lee Bennett, Sr. Denise Granger, Sr. Roberta Mulcahy, and I met with many groups in faith communities. In 2019, with the initiative of Sr. Mary Quinn, we started a “Women’s Drop-in Center” to provide a hot meal on Tuesdays and offer resources to women “in the life” without judgment. Unfortunately, this effort was shut down by Covid in 2020.

The SSJs continue to help the dear neighbor by advocating for legislation to adopt the “equality model” which criminalizes those who buy and profit from exploitation instead of prosecuting the victims. With the guidance of Sr. Annette McDermott, the SSJs continue to support CSEC as well as the Safe Exit Initiative, Inc. and other organizations which do street outreach and offer a safe way out of “the life” of exploitation.

**For more information visit: [www.stoptrafficking@feliciansisters.org](http://www.stoptrafficking@feliciansisters.org)**

**<https://polarisproject.org>**

**Safe Exit at <https://safeexitinitiative.org>**



# Caring for God's Creation

by *Ginny Maitland, SSJ*  
*Member of the SEED Committee*

Care for God's Creation is the seventh theme of Catholic Social Justice Teaching. This precept asks that we display our respect and gratitude to the Creator by honoring and caring for Earth. Every created thing is a reflection of God's creative energy. We are each called to live our faith in partnership with all of creation, for that is God's design. This is both a moral and faith-based duty, viewing Earth not simply as a resource but as a gift from the Creator. Every creature, all of creation, is a gift and has its own intrinsic purpose (yes, even spiders!)

Pope Francis has written a formative and influential encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, *On Care for Our Common Home*. The encyclical is addressed to all Catholics, yet Pope Francis noted that because of global environmental deterioration he wished to speak to every person living on the planet! He calls us to enter into dialogue with all people concerning our environmental challenges and reversing the destruction of our common home. St Francis of Assisi, the namesake of Pope Francis, is a model for us of an integral ecology. Pope Francis writes of him: he shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace.

As Sisters of St Joseph we have committed ourselves to live in deeper union with all creation, to individually and communally bring intentionality and action in living in harmony with Earth.

Our mandate to care for "the dear neighbor" extends as well to care for creation.

More than 30 years ago we established a committee to shepherd our efforts, with awareness that care for Earth is both an ecology and justice issue, one that invites inner conversion along with outward action.



# SSJ 500 CLUB

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SEED (Sharing in Earth's Ecological Design) meetings combine a Book Club selection of an ecological topic, along with research and ideas for continuing our own commitment.

Among the areas we have addressed in ongoing ways are limiting single use plastics, reducing our use of household water, eating more healthily, limiting consumerism, charting our carbon footprint, incorporating the cosmos and creation into our prayer, and creating Stations of the Cross which focus on the manner in which Jesus is crucified in creation and in society.

We have created a Labyrinth in an area in our cemetery, alongside a garden. Many in the area come to walk the labyrinth and find peace in its surroundings. As we have sold all of our property, the Labyrinth is, and will continue, as a gift of space and legacy where one can feel connected to Earth and in the ritual of walking experience inner peace. A group from the Community of St Joseph and volunteers are currently renovating the ground to become more accessible and adding over a hundred native plantings. We sometimes gather in this space for prayer, and each year we hold Earth Day and Solstice gatherings, open to all.

May we each honor the Creator by using only what we need, by sharing what we have, by walking gently on Earth, and by leaving behind beauty on this our common home.

For safe, quick, and easy online registration, visit [ssjspringfield.org](http://ssjspringfield.org), or fill out the form below and mail in.

**SSJ 500 Club**      **Checks payable to: Sisters of St. Joseph**  
 Monthly     Yearly

**Payment:**       Cash/Check     Credit Card     Visa  
 MasterCard     Discover     American Express

**Credit Card #** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Email** \_\_\_\_\_

## 500 CLUB

Sisters of St. Joseph  
OF SPRINGFIELD



Monthly drawings for each group of 500 members!

1<sup>st</sup> Prize: \$500

2<sup>nd</sup> Prize: \$200

3<sup>rd</sup> Prize: \$100

Yearly membership: \$100 up front or \$10/month

First drawing September 17, 2026

SSJ 500 Club

c/o Development Office

577 Carew Street • Springfield, MA 01104

(413) 536-0853 • [development@ssjspringfield.com](mailto:development@ssjspringfield.com)

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# From the Director of Development

Mary Ferguson, SSJ



Dear Friends,

*A lawyer, wishing to justify himself, asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"*

Jesus responds by telling the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Matt 10:25-37), highlighting the importance of compassion and the expectation that love for God extends to love for the neighbor as well.

For Sisters of St. Joseph this concept is an integral part of our heritage. The term "Dear Neighbor without distinction" is woven throughout our primitive documents dating back to 1650. Though not referred at that time as Catholic Social Teaching, that truly is what it is - a reminder from Jesus to each of us of God's great love for all people.

The welcome Jesus offers was and is to men and women of all colors and languages, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, wise men and fishermen, sinners and saints. His teachings are not offered only to those who may be considered worthy, of one race or class, but to all, who are to be welcomed as an integral part of God's wonderful creation.

Catholic Social Teaching calls each of us to be mindful of our relationships with one another, friend or stranger, of God's relationship with each one of us, with all of us together, and with all of creation.

We are most grateful for your prayers and your support as we strive to live our charism to unite neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God, without distinction.

Please be assured you and your intentions are remembered daily in the prayers of the Sisters of St. Joseph. God bless you always!

With deep gratitude,

*Mary Ferguson SSJ*  
Sr. Mary Ferguson, SSJ

# *In Memoriam*

2025—2026



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



**Sr. Gloria Corriveau**  
(Veronica Emile)  
April 26, 2025



**Sr. Theresa Croteau**  
(Marie Felicite)  
May 5, 2025



**Sr. Vivian Pyne**  
(Michael Agnes)  
May 12, 2025



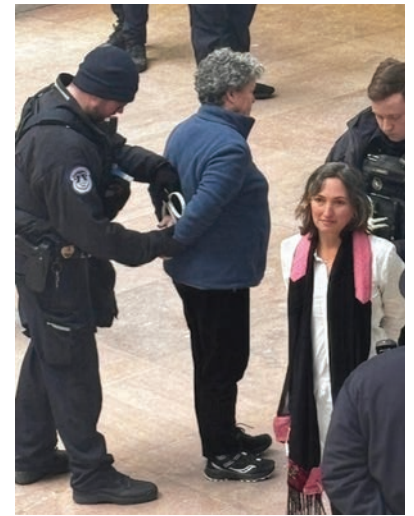
**Sr. Frances White**  
(Walter Marion)  
November 7, 2025



**Sr. Patricia Curran**  
(Dorothy John)  
January 15, 2026



**Sr. Helen Perry**  
(Patricia Jane)  
March 23, 2026



Upper left: A number of Sisters were on hand to celebrate their Special Anniversaries last June.

Upper right: Sister Deirdre Griffin was arrested with other faith leaders during a peaceful protest in Washington DC.



Middle, right and left: 2025 marked the SSJ's 350th anniversary of our founding! A banner was donated to adorn our office building on Carew Street. Even the statue of Mother Fontbonne got into the spirit!



Bottom right: Sister Leila Sullivan (right) professes her final vows.

Bottom left: Sr. Betsy Sullivan received the Christian Charity 2026 Award from the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Here she is marching in the (rather rainy!) Holyoke St. Patrick's Day parade.



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