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Sister Judith Elected as General Superior

By Julie Dowd, Communications and Marketing Director

In April and May, the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ (PHJC) congregation held its General Chapter in Dernbach, Germany, the founding place of the Poor Handmaids. Sister Judith Diltz was elected as General Superior of the congregation. Sister Annemarie Pitzl, from Germany was elected as Vicaress. Sister Betty Vazheparambil, India, and Sister Jacqueline Injete, Kenya were elected as Councilors. This team will serve the Congregation for the next six years. The installation for the General Council will be held in Germany on August 3, 2019.

Sister Judith reflects, “It is an incredible honor and responsibility to be elected General Superior of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ at this point in our Congregation’s history. The fifty participants of the General Chapter have just concluded set directions for us to work on together in the nine countries where we minister. Along with the recent canonization of Saint Katharina Kasper, we are energized to continue to make a significant difference among God’s most poor and needy all around the world.”

A native of Mishawaka, Indiana, Sister Judith was born to Raymond and Monabelle (Wade) Diltz. She took her first vows as a Poor Handmaid in 1969.

Since that time, she has ministered in education and served the Poor Handmaid Community. She taught English at Bishop Dwenger High School in Fort Wayne, Indiana; Marian High School in Mishawaka, Indiana; Mater Dei High School and Kaskaskia College in Breese, Illinois; and was the English and humanities professor/faculty assessment coordinator at Ancilla College in Donaldson, Indiana. Sister Judith also served as the PHJC Vocation Director, Postulant/affiliate Director, and Director for Development. She has been Provincial of the American Province since 2013.

Sister Judith holds an associate degree from Ancilla College, Donaldson, Indiana; a bachelor degree in English from University of St. Francis in Fort Wayne, Indiana; a master degree in English from the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, and a Ph.D. in interdisciplinary studies with a focus on writing as a spiritual process from the Union Institute & University in Cincinnati, Ohio.

During General Chapter, the delegates created a congregational direction statement for life and mission.

This statement is the path in which the Congregation will continued to proceed in the future. The statement reads:

Rooted in PHJC charism and spirituality, we commit to be communities in communion with each other and with all of creation.

We courageously witness this by

Advocating non-violence of all forms in our communities and ministries

Implementing practices that protect and heal the Earth

Standing with our sisters and brothers against injustices done to them

Networking with religious and civil organizations for justice.

We apply our commitment to the circumstances of our specific Provinces/Pro-Regions.

Elections to fill the office of Provincial of the American Province will be held later this year.
Adapting
to the Needs of the Times
By Sister Connie Bach, PHJC

Left: Sister Mary Baird, PHJC and students explore the natural environment.
Above: Volunteers learn how to tilt the solar panels. Right: Students assist in the greenhouses at The Center at Donaldson.
As the PHJC Volunteer Program continues to grow, we sensed a call to adapt to the changing needs of the times. Sister Connie Bach, PHJC approached the campus minister at Bishop Noll High School, Stacia Bolakowski, about service opportunities for young people. Together they collaborated and worked out arrangements for these high school seniors to do their senior service retreats through our program.

In a series of four very successful senior retreats, the volunteer program has reached about 140 young adults this fall and spring. The students and chaperones worked in nine different Poor Handmaid ministries, including MoonTree Studios, the greenhouses at The Center at Donaldson, Catherine Kasper Home, Catherine’s Cottage, Sojourner Truth House, Nazareth Home, Emmaus House, and Saint Catherine’s Convent. In addition, the students served with a partner of Sojourner Truth House who does overnight arrangements for women and children, the Missionary Sisters of Charity, who utilize the former St. Mark’s Convent in Gary, Indiana.

From picking up litter along Union Road and tilting solar panels to planting trees, visiting with elderly Sisters, organizing diapers, pairing and counting shoes for a shoe drive, doing yard work or organizing food and bedding donations, the students were able to make the connection as taught by Saint Katharina that: “No deed done in God’s love is small. Everything done in God’s love is great!” They saw the impact they had first hand in the smiling faces, the words of gratitude and the rows of planted trees and vegetables!

The benefits of this collaboration are already being seen. One student will be graduating and volunteering at MoonTree this summer before beginning college. One counselor who chaperoned one of the retreats will be joining Sister Connie with a group of ten volunteers heading to El Paso, Texas for two weeks to work with refugees at the border through Annunciation House.

As Saint Katharina listened with an attentive ear and courageous heart and as she adapted to the needs of her times, our volunteer program continues to be shaped and spurred on by the needs of our days! Already four more senior retreats have been scheduled for the coming school year!
Left (L-R): Systematic Training of Effective Parenting participants; María de los Angeles, Alejandra, Lourdes, Sister Deborah Davis, PHJC, Sara, Norma, Margarita, María, and Lorena. Right: María is receiving her certificate of course completion.

By Sister Deborah Davis, PHJC
Residing in Mexico for 17 years serving indigenous women and street kids was my life. I loved that life. I would have been happy to remain in Mexico the rest of my time on this Earth. God had other plans. So, I needed to learn to let go. This is not easy for someone who worked hard to gain control throughout my life.

A medical condition brought me suddenly back to the United States. That same condition would make it very difficult to return to living full-time in Mexico. Now what? What does God have in store for me?

The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ Foundress, Saint Katharina Kasper, regularly wrote about loving God’s holy will. Could I really follow in her footsteps and embrace and love God’s will for me? And really, what is that will?

After several months of physical therapy and a sacred time of a life-giving sabbatical, I was ready to put the questions to God: “Where would you send me?”, “How would you have me serve?”, and “What IS your will for me?”

I offered two criteria for God to see if God agreed with MY will: to serve people who were economically disadvantaged and to use the Spanish speaking skills that I had gained south of the border. Thus began the search.

Poor Handmaids Sisters Marie Heppeler and Connie Bach narrowed the scope a bit by inviting me to share community with them at Sarah House in South Bend, Indiana. They offered information that there is a large immigrant population on the west side of the city. It seemed like God was pointing in this direction. Then, an invitation came to serve at St. Adalbert School and Parish. It seemed that God’s will for me was firming up.

I said “yes.”

My role of parent liaison to St. Adalbert School continues to unfold now three months later. The ministry keeps on taking shape. Offering a four-session formation (leadership, communication, community building, and commitment) to the women and men who form the Madrinas y Padrinos (literal translation God-mothers and God-fathers) has been a joy. This is a group who takes seriously their role as parents of the school children. Their focus is to unite other school parents to serve the needs of the school.

Beyond that, we recently completed the six-session course of Systematic Training of Effective Parenting, a program that I had been teaching since 1980. Here it is taught to first-generation Latinos and taught in their native tongue. Offering two different time slots we engaged 24 moms and dads who want to improve their relationships with their children.

The classes frequently lead to individual sessions focusing on the same skills taught in the course. These take on a more pastoral approach because each one ends with praying for the needs of the parents and their children.

So the question is, “Am I living God’s holy will?” YES, I believe so, and I love every minute of it. Once I let go, life became easier.
The vision of senior living apartments became a reality for the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ on January 10, 1989. Maria Center Independent Senior Living, as the apartments would be known, was intended to expand upon the need for a continuing care retirement community that included an independent living center. As part of the Catherine Kasper Life Center family, Maria Center has grown over the years to include twenty-seven beautiful apartments for seniors looking to enhance their quality of life, connection with spirituality, and our Earth in a setting of beauty and comfort.

Since 2019 marks the 30 year milestone of Maria Center’s establishment, our residents and co-workers have planned unique events to celebrate its past and to inspire others to seek out Maria Center as a place to call home in the future. The events begin on June 23 with a 30th Year Anniversary and Time Capsule Ceremony and a resident participatory liturgy followed by an outdoor celebration complete with time capsule dedication and picnic lunch. Guests will also be encouraged to enjoy campus tours and the beauty of The Center at Donaldson. The time capsule is being donated by Johnson-Danielson Funeral Home and its contents will be placed in the vault and sealed until Maria Center celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2039. All ministries and their members will be invited to include items in the time capsule prior to the celebration.

Maria Center will also host Eva Kor to campus for a public lecture on September 6 in Cana Hall. Kor is a holocaust survivor, forgiveness advocate, and human rights champion from Terre Haute, Indiana. Because she embodies many of the Poor Handmaids attributes including compassion for all, it seemed fitting to hold such an event as part of our anniversary celebration.

A Senior Summit on October 23 will cap off Maria Center’s anniversary year of events. The Summit is a continuation of last year’s “Are You Benefiting From Your Benefits” public workshop, but will expand the event by including many relevant topics and informational speakers for today’s and future seniors and caregivers. This year’s Summit is open to all seniors and caregivers who want to experience an inter-active and joy-filled day complete with a time for learning, lunch, and a unique twist of fun and humor as part of the day’s agenda.

The residents and co-workers of Maria Center are most grateful that the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ established a vision for independent senior living in 1989. That vision continues with the mission of offering seniors of the future a place to enjoy their inspirational and continued life journey within a beautiful setting at The Center at Donaldson.
Ancilla Student Communicates His Way to Graduation

By J. Chad Kebrdle, Institutional Advancement Associate, Ancilla College

On “Star Wars Day” Saturday, May 4, 2019, Ancilla College congratulated a class of 142 graduate candidates. But though this was one of the largest graduating classes in the history of the college, one student in particular stood out.

Michael Eads is a special graduate for Ancilla College. Though he is an exemplary student and received the Humanities Division Honors award, it is not just his grades that set him apart from his classmates. Michael is one of the first graduates of APAC, the Autism Program of Ancilla College. APAC is a fee-based, college level program designed to assist students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder build academic independence, social and workplace skills, and knowledge. It was started two years ago and Michael is the first of the graduates of the program.

According to the college’s website, “APAC is intended for students who may struggle with communication and social interactions in an educational environment, but are also academically capable of pursuing a college level education.” Communication is a challenge that Michael himself admits he is faced with, but ironically, this was his favorite subject at Ancilla College. “It pushed me outside of my paradigm and made me rethink how I interact with other people,” he said.

Even though he found a new interest in communications, he will continue (at Bethel College) to study digital arts. He has an affinity for Godzilla and Japanese Anime Art with hopes to work in digital effects in film production.

As a student, Michael is one that professors enjoy in the classroom. Professor of History Dr. Tom Buchanan stated, “He has what I call intellectual curiosity and has many interests. He is very diligent in his responsibilities and, accordingly, has excellent attendance and participation.” I have also had Michael in my classes several times and was always happy to see his name on the roster. He fueled classroom discussions with his insight and knowledge and I wish I had more students like him.

For Kristen Robson, director of APAC, Michael is special as well. “Michael is exactly the type of student this program was designed for.”

With the achievement of Michael Eads, it not only shows that this program works, it shows that it can truly help students move into the future successfully.
Creating Community at Ancilla College is a Great Sign

By Barbara Allison, Communications Assistant

Co-workers and students gather in a classroom on a damp, early spring afternoon. Their hands move and flutter, yet the room is silent. It’s a community Sister Michelle Dermody, PHJC felt compelled to create when she learned about deaf Ancilla College student Matthew Markovitz, 20, of Knox, Indiana. While the silence is novel for most, it’s life for Matthew, who was born deaf. “English is my second language,” Matthew explains through an interpreter. American Sign Language (ASL) is his first and primary language.

According to the National Institutes of Health, “ASL is a language separate and distinct from English. It contains all the fundamental features of language—it has its own rules for pronunciation, word order, and complex grammar. While every language has ways of signaling different functions, such as asking a question rather than making a statement, languages differ in how this is done.” Matthew describes ASL as non-linear language.

Sister Michelle created the informational, voluntary class in sign language to help members of the Ancilla College community learn to communicate with Matthew. “We’re entering into his world,” she said. “Each week, I’ve learned something new.” Recently, she learned that deaf millennials rely on text messaging rather than older TTY voice to text devices formerly in use. “She’s really funny, loves life, and has so many stories,” Matthew says of her.

It’s not new for Sister Michelle to create a community where none existed before. One of her impetuses for learning to sign was when she heard an otherwise educated person state that deaf Catholics were guilty of mortal sin for never “hearing” Mass. The emphasis on the verb “hear” confounded her and spurred her into action. “I delved into it,” (learning to sign) she said. “I was determined to help them (the deaf) find Jesus in a healthy, happy way without ever feeling condemned.” With the blessing of the late Sister Stephen Brueggeman, PHJC then provincial, she enrolled in a Sign Language Interpretation program at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., one of the premier colleges for the deaf in the United States. She earned her degree in 1975, writing her thesis on relationships of the Church and the deaf community.

After graduation, she moved to Cleveland, Ohio and ministered to the deaf community at St. Augustine Parish.

Ancilla College co-workers Tiffany Fisher, Dia Cooper, and Kristen Robsen attend the classes every week and are learning to communicate with Matthew. “It’s important that we make sure our students are comfortable in their learning environment,” said Tiffany. She practices what she’s learned in class throughout the week, and it’s evident. She’s one of the better signers in the class. No one’s faster at it than Matthew, who can sign the entire alphabet and count from one to twenty in seconds. In the class,
Sister Michelle has Matthew teaching, too. “I’m happy she asked me to help,” Matthew said. “We’ve made some adjustments, and the signing has improved.”

Matthew is the only one in his family that’s deaf. He’s teaching his parents and sister to sign. “Mom tries, but Dad’s better,” he said. He attended Culver Community Middle School and graduated from Indiana School for the Deaf in Indianapolis. He’s a first-year student majoring in Culinary Arts. His goal is to enroll in the Culinary Institute of America in New York City when he finishes his degree at Ancilla. Ultimately, he’d like to move to Brindisi, Italy, where he can cook his favorites, Italian and fish dishes. Like his uncle before him, he wants to be a chef.

There are some things Matthew wants this community to know about the deaf community. The preferred term is “deaf,” not hearing-impaired, which is considered derogatory since it emphasizes impairment. “We understand, but we struggle with education and in the job market,” he said. “I’m healthy, not handicapped or disabled. I just can’t hear.” He noted college has been a challenge for him, and he’s benefited from the tutoring at Ancilla College. He’s also open to communication via text messages or old-fashioned notes. Currently, there are about one million deaf Americans or about 3.8 percent of the United States population. About 15 percent of Americans struggle with some form of hearing loss.

Six Maria Center residents have recently signed up for another session of the informal class, taught by Sister Michelle. “I’m proud that we’ve reached out to help others learn, all without using our voices,” she said.

Above: Sister Michelle Dermody, PHJC and Ancilla College student Matthew Markovitz educate others how to use sign language to communicate.
Jubilarians

Reflect on Life and Years of Service
75 Years

Sister Florence Kuhn, PHJC

Looking back on my life as a Poor Handmaid Sister, I’m thankful for Sister Virginia Scanling, who taught me in sixth-grade in Quincy, Illinois. She was a wonderful, giving person who inspired me to become a Poor Handmaid. My mom died when I was 16 years old and an aspirant. Sister Virginia arranged for two Sisters to meet me in Chicago and ride the train home with me when it happened, since I’d never traveled alone before. My dad didn’t want me to go to Donaldson to become a Sister, but he came around to the idea. When he drove me here, I remember thinking how far away from home I was. It was hard, but I lived through the homesickness of being a young aspirant.

I always knew I wanted to teach because God gave me the gift. First grade is wonderful because young children are so enthusiastic. As a veteran teacher, I helped other primary school Sisters gain a solid foundation by sharing my gifts.

Today, the number of Sisters don’t really count as much as the quality of our ministries and our community life. I really appreciate community. What would we be if we were all alone? My hope for the future is that as individuals, we will always have a desire to be spiritual and prayerful. I’m glad God has given me the gift to be a PHJC.

During my 75th Jubilee year as a Poor Handmaid, I will enjoy reminiscing with family and friends and, also receive a ticket to a St. Louis Cardinals baseball game. I am grateful to God for my life, and I thank him for 75 years as a Poor Handmaid. I count all the graces and blessings I’ve received.

70 Years

Sister Agnes Muehlenfeld, PHJC

Joy is one of the first things that comes to mind when I reflect on my life as a Poor Handmaid Sister. I worked at the Motherhouse for 50 years and it was a lot of joy and fun. I also worked at St. Monica for 13 years and in Milwaukee for a year. It was a joy to try new things in my cooking and to make the Sisters happy. I enjoyed all the friends I made and the little children I would give cookies to. I love little children!

My ministry is here at Catherine Kasper Home, but I miss the Motherhouse very much. I try my best to do what I can here, to pray and watch the birds. I’m grateful for Sister Antoinette’s friendship and support and I enjoy helping her with the quilts in the sewing room.

In the future, I hope and pray for more Sisters. I pray to Saint Katharina that she will inspire us how to pray and make sacrifices. I hope that we are all friendly and outgoing to all, the staff, residents, fellow Sisters, and visitors. I wish I could’ve gone on the canonization pilgrimage, but I’m so happy so many others were able to go.

My greatest enjoyment for this Jubilee year is that God gave me so many special graces and blessings that I could make it to 70 years. I never expected that!

Look back....

Opposite page
1. Sister Agnes Muehlenfeld
2. Sister Frances Jean Gallinatti 3. Sister Florence Kuhn
4. Sister Damian McNamara 5. Sister Judith Diltz
6. Sister Pauline Bridegroom and Sister Joetta Huelsmann
7. Sister Kathleen Quinn 8. Sister Pamela Tholkes
9. Sister Marlene Ann Lama
Sister Kathleen Quinn, PHJC

Life as a Poor Handmaid of Jesus Christ has been a life filled with delight, challenges, adventures, and deep spiritual renewal. I have had many opportunities to touch other person’s lives as they have touched mine in ways I never thought were possible. When I reflect back over seventy years I am fully aware of God’s wonderful presence in my life. The gift of community with many supportive and loving Sisters has been great. The gift of my ministry in nursing and the broader aspects of health care in Chicago, Fort Wayne, East St. Louis, Gary, and East Chicago was challenging. Leadership in community, in health care and in volunteering has called me to a deeper understanding of the importance of daily prayer. One never stops learning about the value and challenge of community, the need for prayer, reconciliation, and God’s great love, which is so sustaining and enriching.

I loved the various ministries of health care, leadership, in not taking myself too seriously, spiritual accompanying, and friendship. In my retirement, I feel that I have touched others deeply in heart to heart conversations, working together on Boards of Directors, committees, in volunteering, and with the parishioners at the local parish. My hopes and prayers for my future are simple—to live each moment of each day with love in my heart and a song on my lips and to be forever open to receive God’s great love and to share it with others. I love our community and I see us going forward in the spirit of Saint Katherina Kasper with courageous hearts and listening intensely to the Holy Spirit and each other.

My greatest enjoyment during my jubilee year is to continue to serve in small ways with a big heart. To receive graciously the love of God and others so that I am always a gift when I am myself, a person who loves to celebrate with community and friends.

60 Years

Sister Pauline Bridegroom, PHJC

Looking back on my life, I have a deep sense of gratitude. I see the hand of God gently – sometimes not so gently – guiding, protecting, and inspiring me. This is seen in hindsight because, usually, as I am going about my life, I had neither the words nor the wisdom to recognize the hand of God.

Early in life, my parents passed on to me their deep and simple faith. God chose the perfect time in my life to drop me into this community of Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ. I came to this community when I was 19 years old without the background of a formal Catholic education. Knowing nothing about the community (I did not even know the community’s name), and knowing none of the Sisters, I came in faith with a deep conviction that this place was where I was called to be. Because I had no contact with the Sisters, God put a strong desire in my heart to come to this place.

My ministry has been varied, challenging, and Spirit-filled. Whether serving children in the classroom, the orphanage, or the trailer park, I was blessed to have the companionship, the trust, and the love of so many of God’s delightful children. In hospital chaplaincy, health care administration, and caring for the elderly, I walked on holy ground sharing people’s lives through their trials and triumphs.

Today, I am grateful for the more contemplative stance we are taking in discussions and decisions in the community. I am encouraged by our emphasis on ecology, on justice issues, and on community life. My hope for my future is that I will maintain a prayerful, positive, and playful attitude through the aging time of my life. For this I am grateful.
Sister Damian McNamara, PHJC

My life as a Poor Handmaid of Jesus Christ has never been dull. I can’t imagine my life other than as a woman religious. Every day I am grateful the Lord called me to be a Sister. I thank my parents for the spiritual DNA I inherited from them and the Poor Handmaid community for accepting and nourishing my vocation. I am also deeply grateful to my siblings, friends and community members for helping me develop and grow into the person I am today.

As I look back over the variety of ministries I have been part of, I realize how much I enjoyed each and every one of them. Some of the ministry experiences I had ranged from teaching swimming, gym class, and basketball to high school girls, to directing a transportation department, to working with inner-city kids at summer camps in Colorado, to ministering to refugees in Thailand in the 1980s. Later, I taught our visiting Vietnamese Sisters how to drive. Unlike our American Sisters who had some familiarity with driving, these ladies had no driving experience whatsoever. It was a wild ride for all of us! Some of these experiences were challenging but the good Lord provided the grace I needed at the time—and I grew and matured in spirit because of these challenges.

Whenever I think of the future of the Poor Handmaids my first thought is that of Saint Katharina Kasper, “This is God’s community. If he wants it to prosper it will.”

I believe our province will flourish if God wills it and if we are not afraid to let our Poor Handmaid Sisters from other cultures come here to continue God’s work. My hope for the future is that our congregation will be able to accept this concept. Whoever would have thought the Poor Handmaid community would be growing in so many different places. Even Saint Katharina could not have imagined Kenyan or Nigerian or Brazilian Poor Handmaids.

Sister Frances Jean Gallinatti, PHJC

I certainly had no idea where St. Anne Hospital was when I was sent there during my second year as a novice. But St. Anne heralded my great Loyola undergraduate, my later work experience as a lab and ECG technician with the Poor Handmaids who served at St. Anne, and the merriment of the Stritch Medical school faculty years, of friends, and diverse rotations.

I cried when I was missioned to East St. Louis as I wanted to work at St. Elizabeth Hospital in Chicago after my internal medicine residency…but thank God, God knew better. These were among the best years of my life.

Ever heard of the word Mexico in the same sentence with the words Poor Handmaids? Me neither until January 1988. Well, that was soon to change as I flipped from the great African-American and ecumenical friends of East St. Louis to being a happy Handmaid amidst the Mexican comadres, the challenges of the Coatzacoalcos City Hospital, and the incredible medical and cultural learnings of traveling the rivers area of the dioceses of Coatzacoalcos.

Selfishly all I ask is enough health and more than enough wisdom for the years ahead. For the Pro-region: the best is yet to come. We in Mexico pray for an increase in numbers of women passionate about the Good News of Jesus.

Enjoyment this year will be just spending simple days in Donaldson with my class of 1966 and the rest of the friends that have flowed from that site since I was a 14-year-old aspirant.
Sister Joetta Huelsmann, PHJC

As I reflect on my life as a Poor Handmaid of Jesus Christ so many memories arise for me. During my three years of formation, I remember the wise mentorship of Sisters Jeanette Schutte and Catherine Herman and ice skating and fishing on the lake. I recall the days in Milwaukee finishing my studies at Alverno College, but also being mentored there at our house by Sister Mercedes and Father Charles Yost.

People have been a big part of my journey. My family; my parents, sisters, brother, nieces, and nephews who all have supported me in my life choice.

Teaching elementary school gave me contact with children who were eager to learn. Studying for my masters at St. Mary’s College in Minnesota allowed me to enjoy the nature around me as well the ability to learn more about myself and my gifts. Pastoral ministry with adults and children in a variety of ways led to the invitation to be a Spiritual Director. Having the opportunity to be with people as they shared their stories of how God impacted their lives was a graced event. Being on the staff at our Spiritual Growth and Renewal Center in Minnesota gave me a chance to enhance community living with my Sisters. Serving in Leadership for the PHJC community also broadened my view of community life as opportunities came to visit Mexico, India, and Germany. Directing the John XXIII Center in Hartford City helped me enhance my creativity in leading others in retreats and gave me more opportunities to walk with others on their spiritual journey. Training others to become Spiritual Companions continues to be a blessing for me, as we send others out to accompany people in their walk with God.

Having the opportunity to be present at the canonization for Saint Katharina Kasper as well as walking in Dernbach, Germany was an experience I never dreamed of having. Celebrating with our Sisters from nine countries was a joy!

Sister Judith Diltz, PHJC

My life has been so richly blessed with experiences, challenges, opportunities, friendships – way more than I anticipated when I entered the convent as a teenager. Participating in both the beatification and the canonization celebrations in Rome are high points. The Vatican was great, but the best part was being with Poor Handmaids from around the world, joined in and celebrating Saint Katharina’s spirit together, recognizing we shared her spirit deep in our hearts.

But each place where I lived and ministered also has special ties as I recall the wonderful people I’ve ministered with and the shared efforts we made to touch lives and make them better: mind, spirit, body integrated. Helping others realize and grow their own giftedness – to have a part in the call for that is humbling and to have accomplished even a tad towards that shows God working with.

I learned the most profound lesson regarding ministry when I took a risk to do something totally foreign to me where I had little training or comfort level. I chose to use some sabbatical time to work with people with AIDS in the late 1980s and that changed me. I learned the value of simply being with people, honoring them with my care, attention, receptivity to what they shared, presence. All the education and degrees in the world and all busy-ness and “doing good stuff” for others, in my mind these don’t matter near as much as our real attentiveness, simply being soul to soul with others.

As aging happens and new generations bring new ways of ministering to changing needs, being present never gets out of date. Jesus’ ministry was mostly a ministry of being with. I can keep developing my ability to listen, be with, affirm others till I die. And that feels good. As a Province, our ministries adapt to new needs; leadership of them changes, some come to completion, laity make more of the decisions – and that’s the way it should be. But in all circumstances the gift of presence continues.
Sister Marlene Ann Lama, PHJC

Looking back over my life, I must say that 50 years of religious life seems like the blink of an eye! I am overwhelmed with gratitude that God called me to a religious vocation and then gifted me with the grace to answer that call and be faithful to my fiat over these many years. Described as a quiet and shy child while growing up, my life changed tremendously as I learned to trust God and follow the Lord’s lead in the dance of my life, especially in ministry and service. Today I am ever so grateful for the hundreds of students, teachers, and parents whose lives touched mine during the many years I ministered in elementary education. It was in the classroom where I offered not only my natural teaching skills but also a quiet, gentle presence. The joys of being an educator always far outweighed the challenges.

My unexpected election to Provincial Leadership turned out to be a blessing in disguise. I look upon my several years of community service in Provincial Leadership as a privilege and honor that allowed me to get to know my fellow Sisters and our dedicated co-workers on a deeper level. Elected leadership was also an international eye-opener. I was blessed with opportunities to experience God at work in the lives and ministries of our international Poor Handmaids in different Provinces and Pro-regions. What a gift it was to see first-hand the charism of Saint Katharina Kasper alive and flourishing all around the world! Today, I serve my fellow Sisters once again. As Local Leader of Catherine’s Cottage, I join the rest of the Sisters in the Cottage in being a house of hospitality to each other and all who come to our door.

The pilgrimage to Rome and Germany for the canonization of Saint Katharina Kasper will forever hold a place in my heart as an outstanding memory to be cherished and reverenced. Technically, it took place the year before my jubilee year, but I still sing my thanks and praises to God for foundress was declared a saint for the whole church to venerate.

Sister Pamela Tholkes, PHJC

As I reflect on my life, my loving family and Sisters in community are my most precious memories. It is with gratitude and thankfulness that I was born into and raised in a happy and religious family. The teachings from Vatican II is another awesome memory that has enriched my views on the Catholic Church and its teachings. My final vow day is still a vivid memory that I relive each day as I renew my vows. The opportunities and freedoms I have had in pursuing my nursing degree, ministering in Thailand, Retreat in the Holy Land, and most recently attending the canonization of our foundress, Katharina Kasper, in Rome and Germany are among great memories I will forever hold in my mind and heart.

Presently my ministry and in the nursing profession is challenging and exciting. I also realize that with the number of Sisters dwindling we must instill our charism in others to carry on our ministries. Now is the time to listen to the voice within ourselves to joyfully share our charism and let others take leadership in our ministries.

My hopes and prayer for the future for myself and the PHJC community are to follow the calling of the Spirit and listen to the voice within wherever it may lead us. I pray it will be a joyful and peaceful transition.

My greatest enjoyment this year will be to relax and celebrate with gratitude and love for all the blessings and joys God has given me with my family and 50 years as a Poor Handmaid of Jesus Christ.
Shannon Winder was working part-time when she realized she was pregnant. The thought of a baby was exciting and shocking because she hadn’t thought she could physically bear children. But she knew that single motherhood would be a struggle.

Her fast food wages paid little more than the rent. Meals came from local food pantries. She couldn’t stop smoking. And she knew nothing about pregnancy—let alone parenthood.

Then she heard about Healthier Moms and Babies (HMB), a Fort Wayne, Indiana agency that provides health education and case management services to low-income women in Allen County. “They actually teach you the better ways in life to do things, not to give up,” says Shannon, who is now 37.

Today, her story echoes the voices of thousands of single mothers across Allen County—many of whom are drowning in a deluge of social, economic, and health problems. HMB was Shannon’s saving grace, but other organizations are just as crucial to the effort. They include the Women’s Care Center, A Hope Center, A Mother’s Hope, Catholic Charities, Young Lives, Lutheran Social Services, and Parkview’s Community Health Worker program, just to name a few.

“Funding for these nonprofits flows from many revenue streams, including the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation, a significant provider of grant support to vulnerable families,” says Meg Distler, the Foundation’s executive director. The Foundation’s aim is to continue the work of its sponsor, the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, who have helped struggling women and children in Allen County since 1868.

“Our goal has always been to extend compassion and support, so that new families, mothers, and babies in Allen County can live in safe, stable, and nurturing environments,” Meg says.

Here’s how the organization’s behind-the-scenes work is playing out in Allen County.

Women’s Care Center locations in Fort Wayne served 2,500 women in 2018, provide free pregnancy tests, instructional classes, clothes, and diapers to new moms at no cost. Most clients are between the ages of 13-46, single, and lacking the emotional and financial benefits of a two-income household. In other words, they need help.

Local organizations that support pregnant women often interact through the Prenatal Infant Care (PIC) Network. The St. Joseph Community Foundation established this network in 2015, partnering with HMB to host quarterly luncheons to connect care providers with potential partners and local professionals through presentations and informative panel discussions.
Now that the days are filled with more sunshine, warm breezes, and extended daylight, we invite you to take a moment to enjoy the beauty of nature and God’s creations at The Center at Donaldson Prayer Garden.

Our Prayer Garden is a hidden gem of tranquility that offers fantastic views of Lake Gilbraith and a quiet place for reflection. There is a little something for everyone to enjoy in the garden, from bird watching, identifying the many varieties of flowers, and taking a stroll along the winding pathways. If you’re in the mood to extend your walk, visit the neighboring labyrinth for prayer and reflection.

Coming soon for bird watchers, binoculars and books will be available at the Motherhouse reception desk.

As you’re walking through the garden, you’ll notice the inscribed bricks lining the pathway. Take a moment to read the words of love, messages of hope, and lasting tributes to loved ones. The bricks, large and small, have become a way to mark the changes and milestones of the community at The Center at Donaldson and surrounding towns. While donors are honoring loved ones, they are also ensuring that the Prayer Garden can be maintained and protected for years to come.

If you would like to become a part of this legacy, order forms are available in the lobby of Lindenwood and the Motherhouse. For those that have already donated a paver to the garden, it’s easy to find the brick with your special message. At the entrance to the garden you’ll find a binder located inside a wooden storage house with all the bricks listed by the donor’s last name with location or you can search by the inscription. Each section of the Prayer Garden is marked by section signs.

Memorial Prayer Garden

Offers Tranquility

By Alicia Hammonds, Donor Relations Officer

To order your memorial brick or learn more and www.poorhandmaids.org

For more information, email developmentoffice@poorhandmaids.org

or call 574-935-1725
Last year there was significant flooding in Plymouth, Indiana which prompted the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ to respond with incredible generosity. They housed families and groups who came into town to volunteer and extended an incredible benefit to their co-workers, that they could volunteer to help the victims of the flooding and get paid for that time. This program was intended to allow co-workers to respond to the needs of their community wherever they felt called to serve.

This year, The Center Leadership Team has updated the mission and vision statement for The Center at Donaldson, and one of the goals for all of us going forward is to better respond to the needs of our community. With that in mind, we have made a conscious effort to get co-workers, Maria Center residents, and members of the Associate Community into the area and to see the needs of the community firsthand. We have been able to serve at Casa Catalina in Chicago alongside Sister Joellen Tumas, PHJC, side by side with our own co-workers at Sojourner Truth House in Gary, Indiana and right here in Plymouth with the Marshall County Neighborhood Center.

Our original goal for expanding these volunteer time off (VTO) opportunities was that it would help all of us to stay grounded in service. The benefit that we did not necessarily see coming out of these outings has been what it has done for our internal community. These opportunities to volunteer have given us a chance to people that we do not normally interact with and get to know the people we work and live with even better.

Additionally, due to the establishment of the VTO program, co-workers whose family situation or schedule would not allow them much time for volunteerism are now able to give back. One co-worker is Christina Lawson of Environmental Services. Christina works another job in addition to her role at The Center at Donaldson, and she also cleans house for her aging aunt and uncle. Having paid volunteer time off allowed her to volunteer at Casa Catalina in Chicago at Christmas, and she also signed up to volunteer at Sojourner Truth House.

Christina liked the experience for both the opportunity to serve and because it enabled her to interact with co-workers she normally doesn’t get to at The Center. “They (Casa Catalina) give food and clothes to people and assist them with getting into programs that serve them,” Christina said. “That day, we gathered Christmas gifts by age for the children. It was nice that they gave each child several gifts,” she added. “It’s a good experience for everyone to do at least once. You see how others aren’t as fortunate, and it’s really nice to help other people.”

Whether it’s through the gentle nudge of signing up to serve or the elimination of a barrier that impeded service, Volunteer Time Off is a great opportunity for everyone to live more fully the charism of Saint Katharina Kasper.
Ministry Collaboration Empowers Students

By Cheri Ringer, Retreat Development and Bookstore Assistant, Lindenwood Retreat and Conference Center

The updated vision statement for The Center at Donaldson states “through collaboration, seeks to address the emerging needs of the surrounding communities through the lens of integral ecology.” As part of The Center at Donaldson, Lindenwood Retreat and Conference Center is embracing integral ecology by partnering with Joint Educational Services in Special Education (J.E.S.S.E.) to provide work experiences for high school students with special needs from nine area school systems. The Work Experience Program provides an opportunity for high school junior and senior students to experience a variety of realistic jobs in a friendly, safe environment.

Students with mild to moderate special needs are typically on the “Diploma Track” and are able to earn a diploma when they complete high school. These students can have success with an appropriate vocation but are often overlooked due to lack of funding and work experience opportunities. The Center at Donaldson provides a safe and welcoming environment for these students to work. The ministries on campus provide a wide range of work experience opportunities where students gain soft skills. The Work Experience Program teaches soft job skills training for these underserved students.

The Work Experience Program is a way to practice integral ecology. “Integral development seeks to meet the needs of the whole person and requires the flourishing of multiple dimensions of society to meet the needs,” according to A Master of Spirit, the newsletter of Intercommunity Peace and Justice. The participating students were provided realistic work experiences, in a natural setting, providing self-confidence in their job-related abilities. For example, an area teacher shared that her student, “could not be more excited about her position as a card designer. SHE LOVES IT! She can’t wait to go each week. This is a child that has rarely been inspired by anything, let alone used the word with a smile on her face.” This testimonial sums up the difference this program has made in the lives of our area students.

Mentors are paired with one or more students to teach and encourage the students in performing their job-related tasks at The Center at Donaldson. In addition to the benefits for the students, the mentors gain insight in relating to individuals with special needs. At the end of each Work Experience semester, mentors and students celebrate their achievements and friendship with a luncheon. The workplace is one setting that influences the way we think, feel, act and relate to one another. “Authentic development includes efforts to bring about an integral improvement in the quality of human life, and this entails considering the setting in which people live their lives,” according to Laudato Si, Pope Francis’ encyclical on the Care Of Our Common Home. To that end, The Center at Donaldson helps by providing work-life opportunities for area special needs students.
HealthVisions Midwest (HVM) has a long history of dedicating resources and efforts to enriching the lives of immigrants and the poor. By fulfilling our mission of developing healthy communities, we continually fine tune our programs and services to address the evolving needs of underserved residents of the areas we serve. Our dedication to extending the hands of strength, support, and faith allow us to be of service as Saint Katharina Kasper did, focusing on those who seemingly have no voice but who experience the greatest need.

From our inception, services offered in the Fort Wayne, Indiana office have been focused on the elimination of health disparities in both the immigrant and minority communities. According to the Allen County Vulnerable Population Study, limited English speaking capability can put immigrants at an even greater risk of falling into the poverty category. There are 23,277 (6.7 percent) foreign-born residents in Allen County, most of whom reside in the same zip code as HVM of Fort Wayne. The evolving population base in Fort Wayne continues to include more Hispanic and Latino members and HVM of Fort Wayne has been at the forefront in providing services to these residents.

Our bilingual Community Health Worker works with non-English speaking clients to help them navigate life-saving healthcare channels so that essential physical and emotional needs are addressed. Assistance with medical translation and interpretation enables clients to access information and resources offered by community partners. Her service to the Hispanic community, as well as to all clients, follows the Community Health Worker (CHW) model of imbedding a frontline public health worker in an area so that they can earn the trust of the clients they serve. This trusting relationship enables the CHW to serve as a liaison/link between those clients and health and social service organizations to facilitate access to services while improving the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.

Health education classes are delivered in English and Spanish and specialty health clinics are held that focus on Burmese and Latino residents. We are committed to encouraging wellness to the medically underserved and working poor in the immigrant and minority community and partner with seventeen community organizations to provide no cost health screenings and education for preventable diseases. These comprehensive screenings consist of testing and examinations for blood sugar, blood pressure, height, weight, body fat, BMI, hearing, and foot exams. In 2018, we participated in eight community clinics, two of which were specialty clinics held for members of the Latino and Burmese communities.

HVM of Fort Wayne is located in a medically underserved area that houses many of the city’s poorest residents. This has allowed us to witness firsthand the challenges of these citizens and to be responsive to their needs. The ability to evolve to meet current needs is what sets us apart and has allowed us to remain relevant to those we serve. As we enter our 20th year of service as a ministry of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, HealthVisions Midwest of Fort Wayne co-workers and volunteers remain committed to our shared vision of addressing the needs of members of the community who need us most.
Constance "Connie" Berger, age 97, passed away on May 15, 2019.

She was the loving mother of Michael J. (Patricia) and Peggy (late James) McFarland. Connie was also a dear grandmother of six and great-grandmother to five.

She is survived by her sister Eileen (late Robert) Dasher; brothers, Lebert and John. Her husband, George, and sister, Geraldine preceded her in death.

Connie made her first commitment to the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ Associate Community in 1998. She was a longtime parishioner and organist of St. Augustine Church, member of St. Augustine Golden-agers, leader of St. Augustine Campfire Girls, member of 3rd Order of St. Francis, 21 year teacher at St. Jerome Catholic School (Bridgeport), former parishioner at St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church, Citizen of the Year-Chicago and lector and member of Mayslake Village Choir.

Connie’s funeral was held May 20 at Our Lady’s Chapel, Oakbrook, Illinois.

May Connie rest in peace.

Sister Marguerite Niesen (formerly Sister Maurice), Poor Handmaid of Jesus Christ, died on May 5, 2019, at the Catherine Kasper Home, Donaldson, Indiana. She was 90 years of age.

Her parents John J. and Florence (Amann) Niesen preceded her in death along with her brother Gerald. Sister is survived by her brother, John, and her sisters, Rosemary Sprague and Ruth Martinez. Sister Marguerite was the third of five siblings.

Sister Marguerite entered the Poor Handmaid community on September 3, 1947, and professed her vows on June 25, 1950.

Sister Marguerite graduated from Alverno College Milwaukee, Wisconsin with a bachelor of art in math and history and received her master’s degree in history from DePaul University. She began her ministry as an elementary teacher from 1950 until 1964. She served at St. Joseph and St. Monica in Mishawaka; St. Mark Gary, Indiana; and St. Augustine in Chicago. In 1964 she moved to high school and ministered at Bishop Dwenger High School Fort Wayne, Indiana, St. Augustine in Chicago, Mater Dei High School in Breese, Illinois. She completed her educational ministry as a college instructor for 10 years at Ancilla College in Donaldson, Indiana. In 2001, she moved to Community service and pursued her hobby of photography. The many beautiful photo cards which can be purchased at Lindenwood Retreat and Conference Center are a testament to her skill as a photographer. Sister stated “My joy is to capture the beauty in the ordinary. God provides the amazing subjects in every flower, tree, sky, sunrise, sunset, lakes and all of nature. I try to preserve the moment for all to enjoy.”

She officially retired to Catherine Kasper Home in October 2018 at The Center in Donaldson, Indiana and continued to create beautiful gift cards with her photography.

Visitation and prayer service was held at the Catherine Kasper Home in Donaldson May 8. The Mass of Resurrection was celebrated at Catherine Kasper Home Chapel the following day. Burial took place in the Mt. Carmel Cemetery, Donaldson. Memorial contributions may be made to the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, P.O. Box 1, Donaldson, Indiana 46513 or on www.poorhandmaids.org.

May Sister Marguerite rest in peace.
Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ and the Mary Lou McCarthy-Artz Concert Series present

Handel’s Messiah

November 16
Ancilla Domini Chapel
The Center at Donaldson
All are welcomed, free-will donations accepted.
Reception to follow.

New this year!
Dinner and overnight accommodations, limited seating for dinner. More information available at poorhandmaids.org/HandelsMessiah