



Heartbeats

SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF LYON IN MAINE
NEWSLETTER | JUNE 2026

It's All About Relationship

BY TONI FREDETTE, AGRÉGÉE

Throughout its history, the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph has developed relationships with neighbors and groups called to live the charism “that they may all be one (John 17:21).” These relationships have led to the large, global family of Joseph we are part of today which includes 7,850 Sisters, 5,700 Associates, 60 Agrégées, and many other partners and volunteers in 45 countries.

Our community of ten Maine Sisters of St. Joseph of Lyon have active relationships with many diverse groups including agrégée, associates, and volunteers. These groups include a group who gathers on Mondays to reflect on the Gospel, and a unique partnership of local civic and non-profit organizations who came together in 2021 and created Saint Joseph's Nature Sanctuary, a welcoming place where anyone can share and learn ways of caring for the earth, build community, integrate their own spirituality, and enjoy nature's beauty.

The *Associate* relationship is one that dates back to the founding of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Associates of the Congregation of St. Joseph are women and men who desire to live and share the mission of unity with the Sisters, with one another, and with the world and all of creation. The Maine sector of Sisters has been in relationship with a group of Associates for the past four decades.



A summer gathering of Sisters and Associates a few years ago.



(L to R) Associates Patty Hackett, Dave Champion, and Doris Bourque who renewed their commitment last fall. *Missing from photo:* Lewella Daigle and Cheryl Smith.

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Living the Charism with Courageous Presence

BY JOANNE GALLAGHER, CSJ [1]

There are Sisters of St. Joseph of Lyon present throughout the East and Middle East—including Egypt, Lebanon, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and many other regions deeply affected by ongoing violence.

Near Beirut, our sisters remain relatively safe in their village, yet daily life is marked by the disruption of the ceasefire and by new waves of people displaced from the border regions. Half of the community are elders with medical needs. Because access to medical care has been interrupted, they are now being cared for at home, day and night, by their sisters.

As they have always done, the sisters continue to live their mission wholeheartedly, reaching out beyond their own needs to accompany neighbors, welcome the displaced, and assist all without distinction.



A Summer Gathering of Sisters and Associates a few years ago.

*In the midst of fear and loss,
they choose presence,
relationship, and faithful love.*

This spring we received heartbreaking news: Fr. Rahi, the parish priest of the small village of Kalaya and a close friend of our sisters, was killed by Israeli tank fire. After the October 6 Hamas attacks on Israel, many fled the village, but he remained to serve those who could not leave. His courageous presence reflected deep fidelity to the most vulnerable. His death has devastated the village and shattered its sense of safety.

Our sisters have been in Kalaya for more than 60 years. All of the sisters are either from Kalaya or served for many years in the parish or school. Their families, lay collaborators, and dear friends are part of this suffering community.

And still the mission continues. A second-year novice carries on her formation. The sisters gather children at their school even when schools are officially closed. They welcome the displaced and continue accompanying university students. In the midst of fear and loss, they choose presence, relationship, and faithful love.

We hold in prayer all who live where violence and conflict cause displacement and vulnerability, and we thank you for your continued prayers and actions for peace and justice.

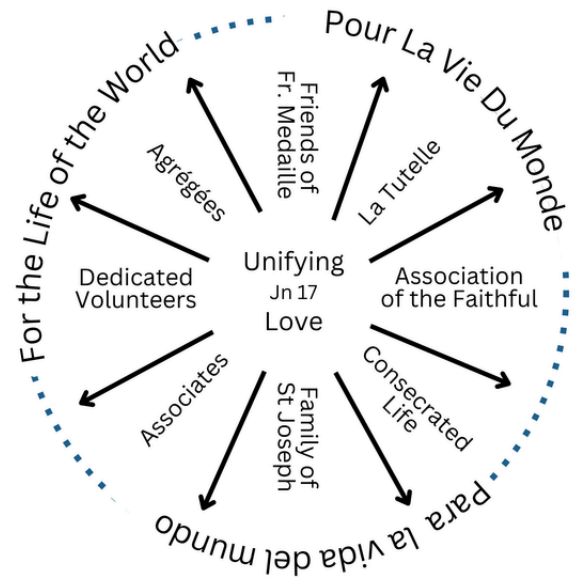
[1] Sister Judy Donovan, General Superior, Sisters of St. Joseph of Lyon, and Toni Fredette, CSJ Agrégée, Winslow, Maine contributed to this article.

Associates respond to this call to grow in relationship with God, one another, and the dear neighbor through prayer and gatherings, and by embodying the spirit of unifying love in their daily lives. Associates express their call to live the charism through an annual commitment which usually takes place during the yearly Sisters and Friends retreat.

It was during and after the 2025 Sisters and Friends retreat that the Sisters started to explore welcoming a new group to learn about and discern becoming Associates – a formalized, historical way of being in relationship with the Sisters of St. Joseph and with each other.

During that retreat, Sr. Mary Rowell had led us in a shared journey about the history and spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph. With all these active relationships, why not learn more about and from one another and deepen our relationships with one another?

By the guidance of the Spirit, the vision came to life. On Wednesday, April 15, a group of five gathered with Sisters Janet and Angela and Agrégée Toni to begin learning more about the history of the Congregation and to share how they came to know the Sisters. Three others have also joined the discernment process, and will be attending future meetings.



This graphic shows some of the many ways of being in relationship with the Sisters



L to R: Discerning candidates Martha Squires, Sally Harwood, Donna and Mike Heavener; Sr. Angela, and Sr. Janet at our first gathering on April 12. Other discerning candidates are Sarah Sirois (who joined this meeting via Zoom), Sara Donovan, Annette Rioux, and Kate Newkirk.

Our most recent gathering was a barbecue picnic in Joseph House. We shared a delicious meal with contributions from all, and we shared our stories; it was a beautiful evening filled with God's grace. As we continue the journey of sharing ourselves and learning together, we look forward to the Annual Sisters and Friends retreat in October where some may choose to make the commitment to join the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Associate relationship for 2027. A hopeful blessing to grow the Joseph Family once more!

*I living in them
you living in me-
that their unity may be complete.
So shall the world know that you sent me,
and that you loved them as you loved me.*

- John 17:23



Donna and Mike



L to R: Kate, Sr. Angela, Annette, Sally, Sr. Claudette, Sr. Janet, Mike, Donna, Sr. Line, Martha, Sarah, Sr. Marcelle. Toni took the photo.



At right, Annette, Sr. Line and Martha



Toni, Sarah, Sr. Angela

Charism: a gift of spirit given gratuitously to a person for the sake of others...This seed grace shapes the spirit of a community and in an apostolic community it directs the mission.

Why Become an Associate?

- Walk with others deepening one's personal relationship with God, neighbor, and all creation,
- Intentionally live the mission of unity and spirituality of the Congregation of St. Joseph,
- Partner with the Congregation in serving the dear neighbor,
- Participate in faith sharing and community with Sisters and Associates of the Congregation,
- Offer one's life experiences, hopes and gifts to enrich the community and world.

How Do I Become an Associate?

Associates embark on a journey in which they experience the spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph through relationships with sisters, associates and other interested people and by learning the history, spirituality and ministry of the community.

If you are interested in learning more about the Associate experience, reach out to your local Sisters of St. Joseph congregation or email us at connect@csjmaine.org to have a conversation!

*In the end...all that God wants for me is to
receive love in order to give love.
- Mary Rowell, CSJ*

Kennebec Messalonskee Trails at the Saint Joseph's Nature Sanctuary

BY MELISSA SULLIVAN, COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATE

As part of our continuing series focusing on the founding partners of the Saint Joseph's Nature Sanctuary, in this issue we are featuring the Kennebec Messalonskee Trails group (KMTrails).

When the Nature Sanctuary was founded in 2021, KMTrails had been in existence for nearly 20 years. An entirely volunteer-led group, KMTrails was created with the intent to build and maintain recreational trails for the community, and to promote trail use for all to enjoy. Through a variety of public donations and trail bond funding, the current trail system has gradually emerged within several Central Maine towns surrounding the Kennebec and Messalonskee Rivers.



The trails have been built with ease of access in mind. Most of the trails are graded as “easy” to use, and several are ADA-accessible with trailheads located next to parking areas. With a diversity of terrain from easy to difficult, there are a variety of trails to meet an assortment of skill levels and interests. The trails are also open year-round, which means they are accessible for walking, biking, and even snowshoeing and nordic skiing as conditions allow.

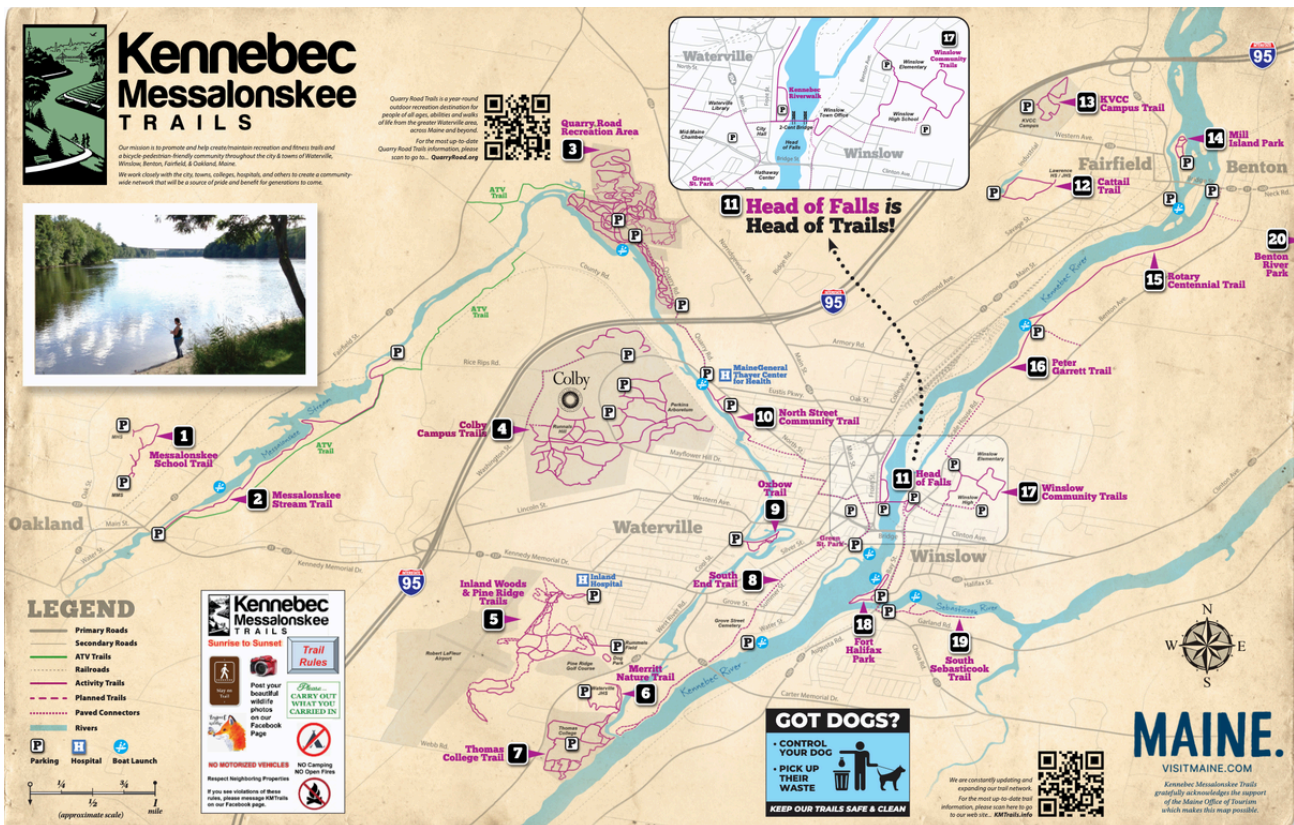
Community support of the trail system has been robust and continues to grow. More property owners have given permission for trails to be built through their land, and local towns have arranged right-of-way permissions for public trail access. KMTrails has now built 40 miles of trails in the towns of Winslow, Oakland, Fairfield, Benton, and the City of Waterville.

Efforts to expand and improve the existing trail along the Sebasticook River at SJNS are ongoing. Currently, the trail extends from Pleau's grocery store to the edge of the Sanctuary property, joining the SJNS perimeter trail at the wooded edge above the river.



Expansion of the SJNS trail is currently paused, but there is always more work to be done on the existing trails throughout the KMTrail system. Each year on the first Saturday of June, KMTrails celebrates the National Hiking Association's "National Trail Day" to gather volunteers to work on the trails.

Whether sprucing up footpaths or clearing storm damage, large numbers of volunteers are needed to keep the trails open and safe. Anyone interested in volunteering or helping the organization in other ways can send an email to: kmtrails.info@gmail.com.



KMTrails have built a gem of a trail system in the heart of our community. Whether you are interested in getting some exercise, taking the dog for a walk, bird watching, or standing on a quiet path to listen to the wind blow through the trees, these Central Maine trails are all a short drive or walk away. It's time to get out and enjoy these natural treasures!



Skills Sharing Workshops

BY SARAH SIROIS, PROGRAM COORDINATOR

March 28 - Grassland Birds with Laura Suomi- Lecker

Just in time for Spring, as we were awaiting the return of many birds to the fields and meadows of Maine, Laura Suomi-Lecker, program director of the AG Allies program of the Somerset County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), shared a wonderful and educational presentation on grassland birds at our SJNS March workshop.

Laura first shared some bleak statistics: nearly 1/3 of the nation's bird species are endangered, threatened, or in significant decline, including grassland birds such as bobolinks, meadowlarks, larks and sandpipers, all common to Maine. The United States and Canada have seen the loss of 2.9 billion breeding birds since 1970. (*Cornell Journal of Science*). These declines are due to habitat loss, changes in agriculture management and other factors. The good news is that there is something that can be done to reverse these trends; conservation works! By working with Agricultural Allies like farmers and owners, grassland birds can continue to have the breeding and nesting habitats they need, while farmers can continue to use their land for their needs. One example



The bobolink is the only North American bird to have white back and black underparts. Males also have rich straw colored patch on the head.

[Listen to the bobolink's song.](#)

is managing a hay field: delaying a cut until mid-July allows the grassland birds the opportunity to nest successfully. For fields that are not needed for livestock feed, leaving the grassland standing until mid-August is even better, not just for the birds, but for pollinators and other wildlife to use as feed and cover.

Bobolinks travel the longest distance of grassland birds when they migrate, coming from as far away as Argentina, Paraguay and Bolivia. They orient themselves with the earth's magnetic fields using the iron oxide in their nasal cavities to travel the 12,500 mile journey - impressive!

Bobolinks have strong site fidelity; they will return to the same breeding grounds year after year. The male bobolinks usually arrive first followed by the females a couple of

weeks later. Females build nests in late May or early June. Babies mature through June into early July. This is why a field cut in June offers no chance of viable bobolink chicks.

Laura shared that climate change and solar developments also create challenges for the grassland birds. Grasslands are maturing earlier in the season, and farmers want to cut it earlier and earlier. Delayed harvesting can also change the quality of the forage for feed, which is why some farmers cannot wait to harvest. There is research being done to determine whether the birds nest in solar development sites.

Back to the good news and work that is being done to balance the needs of birds and farmers! Since 2016, when the Conservation Collaborative 'Ag Allies' began, they have worked to provide nesting habitat while balancing the needs of farmers. Without farmers and landowners with grasslands, we would not have nesting habitats for the birds; this is why it is important to support and recognize the conservation efforts of farmers and landowners. Ag Allies has built strong relationships working one-on-one with farmers to find best-fit practices and offering support that benefits all - the farmer and the birds. *(The Grassland Bird Project, Ag Allies handout)*

"This past year alone, Ag Allies protected more than 2,000 acres of habitat working with more than 130 landowners and land trusts throughout Maine, providing habitat for over 700 breeding pairs of bobolinks, meadowlarks and Savannah sparrows. Additionally, over 500 acres previously enrolled in this program are being managed for grassland birds without further need for assistance." *(The Grassland Bird Project, Ag Allies handout)*

Listening to Laura's presentation filled me with hope; there are positive actions being taken to protect all of creation and to share the earth with all its inhabitants, human and non-human. I believe this is the reciprocity and union that our Creator God intended for the world.

If you would like more information about the Ag Allies project, please contact them by emailing info@AgAllies.org or visiting their web site: www.AgAllies.org.

After years of bush hogging our field during the summer, we adopted a delayed mowing program...It was surprising how quickly birds moved in!

Strolls with the sound of birdsong and buzzing bees, and the breeze, wildflowers and grasses is a great summer pleasure!

- Carol Weymouth, Stetson, ME

St. Joseph's Nature Sanctuary

April 25 - Cool Crops with Barbara Russell

It was a cool Saturday morning, perfect for a workshop on 'Cool Crops', those plants which prefer cooler weather for growth. Barbara shared that many of these can be planted as soon as the ground has warmed up to 50 degrees. Some examples are peas, lettuce, and spinach. These were all planted in the 'lasagna' garden bed. In addition, a couple of herbs were planted: summer savory and parsley. Barbara spoke about the advantages of 'companion planting' which is placing certain plants together to naturally deter harmful moths and insects, to maximize space, attract pollinators and improve the quality of the soil.



Early planting

Barbara's Presentation

Perennial walking onions

[Click here](#) to access a handout shared at this workshop: 'Predators/'Flowers that help Kill the Pests.'

May 23 - Annual Plant Sale/Swap

On a beautiful Saturday morning in May, Girl Scout Troop 545 and the Mid-Maine Permaculture Group (MMP) held their annual plant sale/swap. The Girl Scouts sold tulsi basil, genovese basil, lemon balm, cucumbers, and beefsteak and cherry tomatoes. Some of the plants included in the MMP's swap were lilies of the valley, daylilies, sunflower plants, aloe, and a few houseplants. They also had some seed packets to share, along with handouts on best practices for seed starting .



In March, Sr. Angela was invited to offer a blessing of a new home completed by Habitat for Humanity volunteers. Skip Pratt, who coordinated the Joseph House build in 2023 and also coordinated the build for this home for a local veteran and his family, invited Sr. Angela to share a blessing at the housewarming celebration and key ceremony.

◆

We are happily gathered to give thanks to the Almighty God, and St. Joseph, "the carpenter par excellence" and the numerous volunteers, under the guidance of the master builder, Skip Pratt, for their many hours spent in the building of this house, soon to be a home. I am positive that the owners cannot wait to be given the keys.

We ask God and St. Joseph to bless this home and all who will live here and visit. May this home be forever filled with love, peace, laughter, good health and lots of fun.

May you take time to relax and enjoy this peaceful, natural space - which is surrounded by trees, birds, squirrels and whoever lives here. Be ready to be surprised - after all, we live in Maine.

May God and St. Joseph bless you in your new home for many years to come. Amen.

March 31, 2026
Jacques Lane
Oakland, Maine



The United States of America 250 years of LIBERTY and HOPE

BY SARAH SIROIS, PROGRAM COORDINATOR

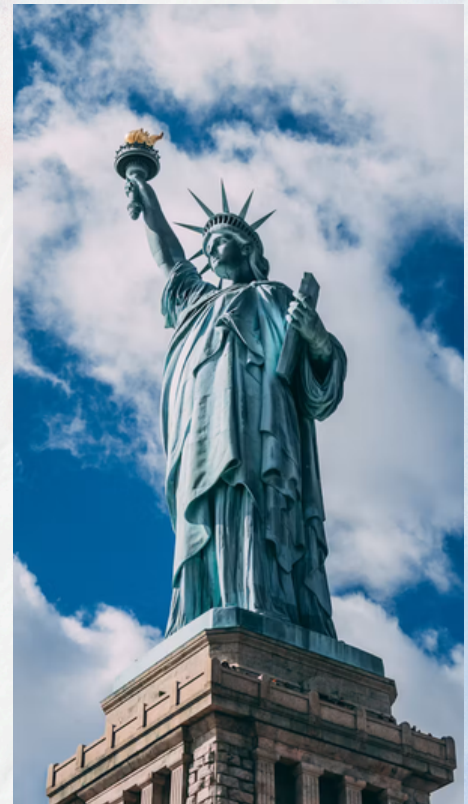
As our nation commemorates 250 years of independence at a very complex and challenging time in our history, it would be easy to just let it pass by without celebrating. Yet, we know from the past that there have been many difficult periods, and solutions and progress never come from living in fear and complacency.

Life and liberty are always a work in progress; the work of social justice and respecting human dignity must be ongoing, and each citizen has a role in promoting the common good. We will not all do “big” things, but we all can make a difference. Following the example of our founders, our daily living must ensure that hope will never fade away, but must be the strong link that leads to actions that will bring freedom and unity for all human beings who live in our country and in our world.

This Jubilee Independence Day is an opportune time to reflect on our own family heritage, of how we got here, the challenges and sacrifices our ancestors faced, the perseverance they demonstrated. Ponder for a moment the image at right: the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of freedom, inspiration and hope. A gift to our country from the people of France, Sculptor Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi’s creation became known as *Liberty*

Enlightening the World. The Statue’s torch is a symbol of enlightenment, lighting the way to freedom and showing us the path to Liberty. Her crown represents light, with spikes that are like sun rays reaching out to the world; the tablet in her left hand a symbol of American independence and the end of slavery. The chains and shackles at her feet signify Liberty breaking free from bondage.

<https://www.statueofliberty.org/statue-of-liberty/overview-history/>



Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore Send these the homeless tempest-tost to me, I will lift my lamp beside the golden door!

Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus”

Below is the famous sonnet written by poet Emma Lazarus, who was born in New York City to a family of Portugese Sephardic Jewish descent. Her poem depicts the Statue as ‘**Mother of Exiles,**’ a symbol of immigration and opportunity that remains significant today.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glowes world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Emma Lazarus

November 2, 1883 <https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/colossus.htm>

America, the Jesuit Review of Faith and Culture, published the poem *on the following page* in their June 2026 issue. It was the winning poem of their annual Foley Poetry Contest. Written by Emily Davis-Fletcher, who has also had poetry published in several other journals, it depicts a sharp contrast to Lazarus’ poem, a lament expressing grief at the state of our country’s current immigration challenges, and lack of concern for all of creation. Reading these two poems together made me appreciate the necessity of both proclamation and lamentation in our journey on this earth. Hope is not lost as we remember all the suffering, sacrifice, hard work, and perseverance that brought us to this 250th Anniversary of our country, and we are still here. We know there is still hard work to do, and we must call upon the guidance of our God, listen deeply to the message of that call, and take action beginning in our own hearts to work for peace and social justice.

Let’s keep HOPE alive! Happy 250th Anniversary, United States of America!



The 1903 bronze plaque of “The New Colossus” is located in the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. An exact replica is also found in the Statue of Liberty Museum.

America's 250th





THEY TELL US BORDER NETS, 10,000 FEET HIGH,

keep us safe from the ecstatic
arrows of sandhill cranes twirling for
a mate. Stop the small but mighty threat
of hummingbirds in their armor, laughter's
color, leaning into hydrangeas and sipping
our breath. What good
are great blue herons reflecting our quiet
thoughts or mourning
doves feathering our lonely
hearts? What peace without lead-
footed geese honking at slow-moving clouds.
Our downcast eyes. How clear
the sky, freed of billions of birds
that steal our seeds, take advantage of our trees'
open arms. We're told we won't miss
their singing, as if we could forget—
song is another migrant
that seeks the light it brings.

By Emily Davis-Fletcher

<https://www.americamagazine.org/author/emily-davis-fletcher/>

...as if we could forget - song is another migrant that seeks the light it brings.

Around the Community



Spring Sowing

Sr Angela and Marcia teamed up to plant the zinnia seeds.



An outing to Longfellow's for hanging flower baskets

Summer Socials

The Sisters decided to schedule one afternoon each month for social time during the summer months. They had their first gathering in May and enjoyed Scrabble, Backgammon, Cribbage, and Solitaire. Oh, and delicious chocolate chip cookies and brownies!



It looks like Sr. Janet has an invisible Cribbage partner, but Melissa was indeed playing!



Scrabble - Sr. Marcelle and Sarah
Backgammon - Sr. Claudette and Toni

Sr. Marcelle and Sarah may appear serious, but the truth is they laughed through the whole two games they played!



Around the Community

A Celebration of Gratitude for Annette Rioux



Annette started with us in June 2019 to provide some 'extra' pastoral care to the many sisters we had at Mount St. Joseph at that time. During COVID she was really a lifeline for us! This was over and above her usual pastoral care hours. She recently made the decision to let go of this 'extra.'

Annette will continue her regular work at the Mount, so any of our Sisters who are there will continue to be blessed by her presence. She will also continue to be engaged with us as a friend and leader of the Gospel Reflection group. Annette is also discerning becoming an Associate with us.

We are grateful for Annette, and on June 1 we celebrated her with a community/staff luncheon. Annette is fond of butterflies (see quote), so we made sure to have plenty of butterflies in our decorations, and she even received a beautiful butterfly pillow case and a mini table runner, both made by Sr. Angela.

“Yes, I love butterflies, because they represent life, death, resurrection, and TRANSFORMATION!”



Sisters Dorine and Marcelle



A trio of Rioux: Annette, Sr. Line and Sr. Lorraine



Srs. Judy DONOVAN and Rita BUJOLD (L) welcome young Sisters of St. Joseph from around the world to Lyon as part of the Roots & Wings program for those preparing for final vows. The program was led by Sr. Michelle LESCHER of Philadelphia (3rd from left) and our own Sr. Raymonda SAADE of Lebanon (center).



Sr. Rita BUJOLD, center, being thanked by the five sisters from around the Congregation who took part in this year's Kindling the Flame program in Lyon (one from the Region of Egypt, 2 from St. Joseph Province, India and 1 from Nava Jeevan Province, India and Sr. Lovely from the General Council). Sr. Rita organized their French classes and many other activities. Two other sisters (1 from Nava Jeevan Province and 1 from the West Africa Region) were in Mexico for the same program. Kindling the Flame is a program for Lyon sisters under 60 to spend two months together outside their home province/region/sector in order to: 1. build their relationships, 2. experience life/mission/community in another country of the Congregation, and 3. to learn or strengthen their skills in one of the three languages of the Congregation (English, French, Spanish).

Contributed by Sr. Judy DONOVAN

Around the Community



(L to R): Srs Claudette and Janet, with Marcia our Community Support Coordinator, Justin Lambert our electrician, and General Contractor Zak Foote and his construction crew, review the progress on turning the one-bedroom apartment adjacent to our St. Joseph Center into a two-bedroom, handicapped-accessible residence.



Monthly Sandwich Making for the Evening Sandwich program at the Universalist Unitarian (UU) Church in Waterville continues to provide meals for the hungry in our community.

(L to R): Melissa, Sr. Janet, Sr. Angela

(L to R): Sr. Line Rioux, Sr. Marcelle, and Sally Harwood walking together to join a gathering in Joseph House.





Sister Janet and Sister Angela introduced new friends to Joseph House for the summer: 'Birdie' and 'Tweetie Bird' (in her nest)!



Spring has sprung in our gardens at the Center! The lettuce and tomatoes are flourishing, and the herb spiral is producing an abundance of delicious additions to our lunches and teacups.

Maxim 73

Live out your life with one desire only: to be always what God wants you to be, in nature, grace, and glory, for time and for eternity.



La gratitude est le secret de la vie.
L'essentiel est de remercier pour tout.
Celui qui a appris cela sait ce que vivre signifie.
Il a pénétré le profond mystère de la vie.
- *Albert Schweitzer*

Gratitude is the secret of life.
The essential thing is to give thanks for everything.
He who has learned this knows what it means to live.
He has penetrated the deep mystery of life.



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Janice Champion	Sr. M. Line Rioux
Sr. Judy Donovan	Sr. Lorraine Rioux
Sr. Angela Fortier	Sr. Marcelle Roy
Toni Fredette	Cheryl Smith
Sr. Janet Gagnon	

Our Mission is to live and work so that all may be one.