Who Is Our Neighbor...
We Believe...

that we create the future
As we move with the Spirit
in giving full expression
to our giftedness as women in the Church
Sharing equally in its mission—
In living a life that is simple
prayerful
courageous and
compassionate—
in proclaiming with prophetic voice
the Gospel to all people—
in strengthening our corporateness
as women in community—
in demonstrating our belief
in the dignity of the human person
and the call to secure this dignity
for all women and men—
in expressing our solidarity
with the poor and oppressed.

IN FAITH AND HOPE
WE ACCEPT
THE CHALLENGES
THESE BELIEFS IMPLY.

Sisters of St. Joseph • Brentwood, NY
—Vision Statement
FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Sisters, Associates and Friends,

It is a privilege to share with you all that is happening since the last edition of Focusing. In the pages that follow you will read exciting and inspiring accounts of the rich relationships that enable our congregation’s mission to thrive and meet the needs of our neighborhood of the universe in new ways. Considering the rapid changes our world is experiencing and the very complex challenges that exist, it is critical that we realize the power that resides in uniting with others whose talents and gifts bring hope and new possibilities to sustain all life without exception.

This awareness calls all of us to attentiveness, first and foremost, to the whisperings of the Spirit in our own hearts and to the yearnings of others seeking peace, dignity and welcome. In our busy lives, we are drawn to times of quiet contemplation, listening deeply to God opening our hearts to see our world with new eyes. As you read the following pages we invite you to embrace the universal right of all to share in the circle of life and its fullness. Look to see the power of community that feeds the hunger for food and companionship and the loving attentiveness of our neighbors who struggle with violence, loss and limited resources. Be inspired by the skilled farmers who provide affordable, healthy food and alternative ways to preserve our earth. Enjoy the power of companionship that encourages and supports young people searching to discern the voice of God in their life choices.

We can marvel at the power in all of these relationships but we will be reminded that many uncommon bonds have been part of our congregation’s history. In fact the faithful simplicity and openness our world needs is integral to even the smallest of God’s creatures. We are grateful to all of our readers who offer generous support and encouragement as we remain faithful to the call of the gospel.

Before you begin to browse these pages, take a moment of silence to be aware that we are all held in the loving embrace of God and, together, we are capable of imagining a world where all are united in that embrace.

S. Helen Kearney, CSJ

The mosaic, representing our relationship with our neighbors in this issue of Focusing, can be found within the repeated pattern crafted on the St. Joseph side altar in Sacred Heart Chapel.
On a crisp early autumn evening, twelve Sisters made their way to Brentwood High School to accompany the community of several hundred residents. The gathering was to celebrate the lives of two students Kayla Cuevas and Nisa Mickens. They had been brutally murdered. Along with other neighbors the Sisters offered support and condolences to the families by their presence.

The dictionary defines a neighbor as a person who shows kindliness or helpfulness toward a fellow human being. Love of the dear neighbor without distinction is lived out daily by Sisters and Associates in large and small ways in the neighborhoods in which they live and/or minister. This article will highlight how that is experienced in the community of Brentwood.

The media is quick to describe the challenges that Brentwood faces but gives less attention to describe the blessings that exist in the community. The multi ethnic population of Brentwood brings richness to the configuration of the hamlet. Like a stew, the more ingredients added the more flavorful the dish.

All parents want the same things for their children wherever they live, a healthy environment, a good education, and safe surroundings. In Brentwood when a situation demands attention, many unite as one to have their voices heard and to advocate for changes that will be life-giving. Sisters and Associates have accompanied our neighbors in their efforts to demand that local government clean up the toxic materials that were dumped in Roberto Clemente Park. Where there are gatherings to advocate just laws for Immigrants, the prayers and presence of the Sisters and Associates are an expression of solidarity.

To acknowledge and celebrate all that is positive in Brentwood, the Sisters invited other faith based groups to sponsor a Gathering of Neighbors. This was an opportunity to give witness to the unity and shared values of the Brentwood community through prayer, music, dance, poetry, and art that honored the diversity of the participants.

As is a custom among neighbors, we invite folks to our home to enjoy the Christmas concert, to bless their pets, to visit the farm, to savor the peace and tranquility of our campus, to participate in prayer services, and programs. Many residents are students of the Learning Connection. Others send their children to Shepherd’s Gate or to the MDQ Academy.

The spaces available in the Renewal Center and the Academy have become a resource for groups and organizations who serve the local community as well as the wider neighborhood. The following is a sample of some of the events that take place on the campus.

❖ Adelante, (Onward) a community service agency in Brentwood sponsors an event called “A Children’s Shopping Spree.” Ninety children accompanied by a parent or guardian received a new set of clothes for the first day of school and a backpack filled with school supplies. Sisters and Associates collaborated generously with this effort.

❖ FREE (Family Residences and Essential Enterprises) the group that was the first to farm the land celebrates the harvest every year honoring their associates who contributed with the work of their hands.

❖ Sepa Mujer, (Women Empowered) conducted a three day training workshop for mothers on how to initiate early childhood education at home.

❖ The Brentwood Women, a group in recovery, experienced the hospitality and encouragement of the Sisters especially at Christmas when each one received a gift.
**Neighbor**

- County Legislator, Monica Martinez hosts bi-monthly meetings of the Legislative Community Council for her district that includes Brentwood, Bay Shore, and Central Islip to address the challenges identified by her constituents.
- Jobs with Justice and Make the Road NY are two advocacy groups that hold workshops and training sessions on the issues of immigration and labor.
- New York Community Bank offers a four part workshop directed to small business owners and those who are interested in setting up a small business.
- The resources of the campus have also served the ministries of the Sisters and Associates for retreats and days of prayer. Other groups who have come for spiritual renewal are the Massapequa Reform Church, Long Island Yoga Association, Pax Christi, St. Cyril and Methodius Youth Group, and Catholic Charities.

To love the dear neighbor means that we are open to receive the love of that neighbor. Being in relationship with the neighbor invites us to a relationship of mutuality where the lines are blurred as to who is giving and who is receiving.

*Sisters attended the Shepherd’s Gate Graduation.*

*Adelante sponsored “A Children’s Shopping Spree.”*
The combination of natural beauty and the hospitality extended by our CSJ "relievers" made Hampton Bays the ideal place for members of Congregational Committees, Earth Matters, Justice, Liturgy, and the Non Violence Community and Leadership Team to gather with Nancy Sylvester, IHM on February 17-19 to contemplate our Chapter Direction. Nancy led us in a process which included communal contemplative sitting, a way of addressing our differences as we prepare for dialogue, and a way to envision the future. We worked together as committees to plan what we hope to do in the next five years and where the Congregation will be in five years because of that work. The weekend's "Dreaming A Grace" theme flowed from a poem by Marlene Marburg. Part of her poem is excerpted below:

I imagine a place  
people gathering, sharing  
their deep desires  
for the way things can be  
in this world at this time  
in places  
where a new consciousness  
of God in all things  
is emerging.

Nancy reviewed the dispositions for listening and speaking from a contemplative heart. She explained how a contemplative practice prepares us to engage in dialogue which is best used for complex issues. Using the Five Why Process we explored how to become aware of the emotional investment we have in certain positions. This led us to listen deeply and speak openly.
Where a New Consciousness of God in All Things is Emerging

When we gathered in our committees, our conversations reflected a deep desire to move forward and an urgency for doing so. The call to use our voices in engaging differences with the power of our contemplative hearts is imperative given the unsettling and disturbing times in which we find ourselves.

What we hope will engage us in the next five years includes:

✶ The Land Ethic document as the lens through which we see all aspects of our lives.

✶ Conversations in our neighborhoods to speak about real needs, building relationships in response to those needs, using our voices and seeking new partners.

✶ Bolder steps in the design of liturgical celebrations so that they incorporate the gifts of women, mirror inclusiveness and welcome all, particularly members of other religious traditions.

✶ Continued attentiveness and challenge to the message and activities of our country’s new administration, mindfulness of the violence in ourselves and the world, particularly the violence in prisons.

✶ The contemplative dimension of our lives, simplicity of life and the challenge of the Gospel, the centrality of relationships and support for the Mission Fund.

Our closing ritual gave us the opportunity to voice our belief in what we have imagined for ourselves and for the good of the world.
In the Gospel of Matthew 25:35-40 Jesus says, “for I was hungry, and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...truly, I tell you whenever you did this to one of the least of these, you did it to me.”

More than 25 years ago, the Peanut Butter and Jelly Gang and Hospitality Too Soup Kitchen was started by Joe Duggan and Norma Dalley in Brentwood and it is still alive and active today. Our Mission is to serve those in need and to provide opportunities to do good for those who wish to serve. We are an Interfaith group, that meets every Saturday in the basement of St Anne’s Church. Everyone is a volunteer, ordinary people doing extraordinary things to fight hunger and serve hungry children and adults. There is a Director and Board who coordinate the various activities. The Core member volunteers help with various ministries. Among the Core Members are: CSJ Associates, Norma Dalley, Audrey Montes, Maureen Lalonde, Mary Lou Locke, Co-Ministers, Mary Ellen Zeller Lyons, Sacred Heart Academy 1981, Tina Pannacchione Alfiere, Academy of St. Joseph 1979 and S. Nancy Fackner.

The original Peanut Butter and Jelly Tee shirt was designed by Judith Generoso from Mary Louis Academy. The words “Fighting Hunger Everywhere” are on the shirt! Volunteers see themselves fighting hunger everywhere by making Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwiches, serving hot meals in our soup kitchen, volunteering in the food pantry, providing bread and cakes to guests, sending Mission Packages to sites throughout the world, serving the homeless in our Outreach Woods ministry, making wash up kits for the homeless and providing a clothing ministry.

For I was hungry and you fed me;

Nancy Fackner, CSJ
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink.

Matthew 25:35-40

Every Saturday morning volunteers arrive to start the day in a circle of prayer, and make sandwiches. The sandwiches and wash up kits made by all the gangs are distributed weekly to agencies throughout Long Island and Harlem by volunteer drivers. In January 18,230 sandwiches and 1,971 wash up kits were delivered.

By 11am many of our guests arrive for a delicious meal, lots of chatter, hugs and a deep sense of family. We know that food is only a part of what we offer each week. Our Hospitality Too Cooks are responsible to coordinate the meals and prepare them for everyone. We are blessed to have many different groups prepare and donate meals for us. In January alone, we had meals delivered on all four Saturdays from:

St Anthony’s High School
Ladies of the Ancient Order of Hibernians
Brentwood Presbyterian Church
Tzu – Chi Buddhist.

Each week we serve about 230 guests! Of course, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter are large celebrations and we are packed! During the spring, summer and fall, we have wonderful fresh vegetables donated by St. Joseph Garden and Long Island Harvest!

There is no special profile of our guests. Many are families with children, senior citizens, Vietnam Vets, people living in shelters, homeless people and day laborers. All help to create a joyful atmosphere and a sense of community bursting with life! Everyone has a story that breaks your heart and can bring tears to your eyes. We see the suffering Jesus in so many, but we also experience Resurrection in knowing they feel welcomed and loved! Referrals are made to agencies to help people find services they need and many contact elected officials on the need to support a minimum wage, health care, WIC, SNAP, Earned Income Credit, the rights of Immigrants and programs to assist those living in poverty and hunger. Our Mission Packages are part of our Global Outreach to missions serving the poor. Joe Duggan sends about 15 packages a month around the world to Ethiopia, Africa, Brazil, Haiti, India. Volunteers donate money for the postage and bring items to be sent like vitamins, Ensure, oatmeal, school supplies, baby clothing. We are grateful for all the Peanut Butter and Jelly Gangs fighting hunger everywhere!

We are grateful to all our Community Sponsors, Long Island Cares, Island Harvest, Shop-Rite, Costco, Campbell and Stanley Bakeries, PSEG Volunteers, and we are very grateful for all the Good Samaritan donations we receive from individuals. Let us remember the words of Jesus,” I tell you whenever you did this for one of the least of these, you did it to me.”
Who would not be cheered to hear someone say, “I’m here to give you life to the full.” Every text in the Gospel puts that purpose behind what Jesus says and does. Sisters of Saint Joseph, from 1650 to today, have believed and taught that a full life is found in union with God and with one another. They have embodied this way of life by engaging in an active, inclusive love of others.

This mission of active, inclusive love came to the “foreign land” called America when a few Sisters of St. Joseph in France emigrated to St Louis to teach children outcast by deafness. In the following years, many women who joined the Sisters of St. Joseph had immigrant origins also. Again and again, the Sisters displaced themselves to reach the new frontiers that opened as the country grew. Now, one hundred eighty years later, we find ourselves in communities across the country living and working with both recent and long-settled neighbors who have also experienced the hardships of displacement. Yes, we ought not deny that we are all immigrants. We are strangers who seek to be welcomed and who ought to be welcoming in turn. Welcoming is our work of mercy. (Matthew: Chapter 4, verse 35)

Lest we forget the past, or lose our purpose to live in an inclusive way, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood pledged, in 2011, to be a welcoming community for our immigrant brothers and sisters harmed by practices of intimidation and exclusion. We promised to work for the transformation of these practices. We told our neighbors with a prominent sign: “Sisters of St. Joseph stand for just laws for all immigrants.”

In 2016, we re-affirmed this commitment and, in recent months, our conversations in small groups and larger assemblies have been the means to plumb the depths of inclusive love and to discover what more we must do be inclusive. This has led us to a deepened insight into those influences and practices that are so contrary to this love we seek for ourselves and others. Yes, we Sisters, in and with the entire Church, need to acknowledge and repent the racism that turned women away from admission to our congregations, or welcomed only those women of color who could pass as white. What it means to experience the forced estrangement from one’s roots, family, and community and to live in the shadows in order to survive is sinking in. We cannot be complacent to see a second class label put on any human being by using racial, ethnic, religious or gender identity as justification for exclusion.

We feel a new urgency to claim and to share our understanding of the word “catholic” in the truest sense – “all-embracing, diverse, and universal.” The imagination of our Divine Creator intended diversity rather than sameness. Diversity, not exclusion, works in everyone’s favor. In the statement on immigration that the Sisters of St. Joseph affirmed* on March 18, 2017, we noted that fundamental justice cannot be served without attending to the good of others as well as our own. Welcome brothers and sisters in this circle of life and its fullness that is everyone’s birthright.

* See Statement on Immigration on page 16
We, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood, NY and our Associates are guided in our personal and corporate decisions by the example of Jesus, the teaching of the Gospel, our personal and public prayer, the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching and the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph which calls us to inclusive love. We share a common hopeful history with migrating people drawn to a new land.

In our time, as in the past, there is involuntary and widespread displacement due to war, persecution, poverty and climate change. In our current political climate, many who seek freedom on our shores are being denied the opportunity to create a meaningful future for themselves and their families. We believe that fundamental justice cannot be served without attending to their good as well as our own. This belief compels us to deepen our fidelity to the Chapter Directive on Immigration.

Hoping to make a united and practical moral response to increased migration, we will take pastoral, educational and legal measures to strengthen fundamental human flourishing. We pledge to pursue the following goals on behalf of our neighbors who are immigrants and to find effective means to implement them.

✶ To recognize the presence of Jesus in all persons who are displaced and ensure that our institutions and ministries are examples of inclusion for all. We will create safe space and offer assistance to those whose personal and family security are threatened.

✶ To use our CSJ educational institutions, ministries and spheres of influence to educate ourselves and others on the value of inclusion and equality in our society, to eradicate racial and xenophobic attitudes, and to encourage diversity and multi-cultural understanding.

✶ To collaborate with religious and civic organizations in political actions necessary for the well-being of immigrants, especially those brought here as children, to support immigrants and refugees threatened by detention and deportation, and to seek the enactment of comprehensive immigration reform leading to citizenship.

Sisters of St. Joseph and Associates will be present to people in their search for inclusion in our communities and intentionally recognize men, women and children who are immigrants with whom we interact on a daily basis. We will respond with courage and fidelity whenever our actions require our sacrifice on behalf of others.

—Affirmed March 18, 2017
Know Your Farm...

KAREN BURKE, CSJ

We acknowledge our responsibility to balance our communal needs and the needs of Earth now and into the future. As we continue to deepen these beliefs and understandings and make decisions regarding the land entrusted to our care, we commit ourselves to ... keep in mind the needs of the persons in all of our local neighborhoods.

—Sisters of St. Joseph Land Ethic, March 2015

Locally Known, Locally Grown

For the past two years we have been working to preserve our 211-acre property in Brentwood and to return some acreage to agriculture. The process we have initiated through our land ethic statement involves setting appropriate goals, linking these to specific projects, and taking into account ecological, financial, and social factors. The fields that once were a working farm are slowly being restored to agriculture. Twenty-eight acres of land have been leased to several organic farmers. Local food preserves open space and supports the environment. Our organic farmers will strive to be good stewards of the land by respecting the rich agricultural soil on our property and the clean water provided by recently drilled wells.

Supporting the farmers on our motherhouse grounds promotes sustainable farming practices that are aligned with nature and in balance with the environment. It is our desire to give our neighbors the opportunity to buy locally and receive the freshest possible produce, picked just hours before it gets to their table. Buying produce from a farm stand, community supported agriculture programs, or from a farm itself is a no-frills process that involves less packaging, promotes energy conservation, and reduces the use of fossil fuels. Buying local food also builds community. Getting to know the farmers who grow your food builds understanding, trust, and a connection between your neighbors and their environment. The organic vegetables grown on our motherhouse grounds will be available this year for purchase by the local community through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and farm stands. These farm stands will be able to accept payments from users of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).

The CSA Experience

Community Supported Agriculture consists of a community of individuals who support a farm and share the risks and benefits of food production. Typically, community members purchase a share in advance to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation. In return, they receive shares in the farm’s bounty throughout the growing season, as well as satisfaction gained from reconnecting to the land and participating in food production. Members also share in the risks of farming, including poor harvests due to unfavorable weather or pests. By direct sales to community members, our Brentwood farmers will receive better prices for their crops, gain financial security, and will be relieved of much of the burden of marketing.
Know Your Food

The Brentwood Farm Stands
For Long Islanders, farming is part of the history. Most of Long Island was farmland before it developed into towns and villages. Many small farms remain on the East End. These farmers sell their goods directly to locals at farmers markets or on farm stands. Unfortunately, this opportunity does not exist in the central and western part of Long Island. As a response to the needs of our neighbors, we will allow two of our farmers to sell produce directly from their farm stand on a table set with baskets of freshly picked produce. The farm stands will give visitors the chance to experience the big picture of our farmed land and see the variety of produce grown on the grounds of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Farmers like building long-term relationships with customers, and the relaxed situation will give everybody time to connect.

The SNAP Program
The increase in obesity and diabetes rates signal the need for increased access to fresh, healthy foods in low-income communities. The SNAP program, formerly known as the Food Stamp program, provides food purchasing assistance for low- and no-income people living in the U.S. It is a federal aid program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, under the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Administration. More than 46 million families receive SNAP benefits in the United States. Farmers are vital lifelines to healthy nutrition in areas where they can nourish local economies, while helping those in underserved neighborhoods. The Sisters of St. Joseph hope that by assisting our farmers in offering SNAP benefits at their farm stands, we can increase access to and consumption of healthy, organic, and locally-grown produce for our Brentwood neighbors and the surrounding community.

For more information on CSA membership with our farmers:
- Family Residence and Essential Enterprise Farm: call Karen Bonne at 631-345-0318 or email atthefarmer@familyres.org

Follow the Sisters of St. Joseph on Facebook for farm stand schedule updates:
Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood, NY
On January 22, 2017, during the first 100 hours of the new presidential administration, people of diverse faiths gathered at Sacred Heart Chapel, on the grounds of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Brentwood to pray for the US government to accelerate its response to climate change. The vigil was linked with over 50 similar vigils and dozens of other actions nationwide under the banner of the People’s Climate Movement, a coalition of environmental, labor, racial justice, faith, student and other organizations. Joining the Sisters in carrying out the vigil were representatives of MDQ Academy and their families, St. Joseph College, CSJ Associates, co-ministers and neighbors.

“We stand at the threshold of a new era for our planet and in the climate movement; a time that will require courage, resilience and faith. At the start of this new era we need to join together as one, grounded in our faith traditions that help us process our grief, our anger, our fear, and equip us with the hope and strength that will sustain us as we bear witness to the needs of the world and its people. In the first 100 hours of our country’s new administration it is important for us to be united with others and join in prayer and action for our planet, for good jobs in a clean energy economy and for the protection of vulnerable communities.” said S. Joan Gallagher, a member of the Vigil planning committee.

The Vigil recounted the wisdom of our faith traditions and the new learnings of our Universe that are giving rise to a New Story, one of inclusivity, that when put to our current times has the capacity to heal, educate and transform our human community. Those gathered prayed to reconcile any harm done to one another, to living creatures and to Earth. Prayers were offered for our politicians and leaders so they may act in the best interests of all nations today, and all peoples in the future, in order to avoid catastrophic changes that would make all life vulnerable. All in attendance then recommitted to bring peace to those who suffer harm, to bring love to those who suffer hate and to bring justice to those who suffer need.

S. Helen Kearney, CSJ President, shared her thoughts on the prayer experience. “I was in awe of the chorus of diverse voices who called upon God, the source and sustainer of all life, to empower all of us to work as one to sustain our planet, protect vulnerable communities and speak out for justice for all.”

Those gathered were grateful for the opportunity to join with others and emphasized their commitment to working across religious traditions. Hafiz ur Rehman MD, Chairman of MDQ Academy commented, “That was a wonderful event and Prayer Service. I congratulate you (Sisters of St. Joseph) for holding such a meaningful get together.” Going forward, our communities committed to pray and work together in a more intentional way to address poverty, hunger, and racial prejudice, and to promote peace and mutual understanding. Together we will heed the call of Pope Francis who in Laudato Si reminds us that “All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.”

The vigils were coordinated nationally by GreenFaith, Interfaith Power and Light, the Franciscan Action Network, and other religious-environmental networks. Local faith partners will now turn their sights and work to participate in an April 29, 2017 People’s Climate Movement mobilization which will take place in Washington DC and around the country. “What’s happening with the Earth’s climate is not okay,” said S. Joan. “We want to make sure that our leaders know that we want and expect them to act on behalf of all life.”
Interfaith Power & Light (IPL) is a non-profit organization committed to mobilizing a religious response to global warming in multi-faith religious congregations through the promotion of energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy. For 16 years, IPL has been helping congregations address global warming by being better stewards of energy. Interfaith Power & Light announced the inspiring five winners of Cool Congregations Challenge, which is a united effort by religious congregations across the country to address global warming by reducing their carbon footprint and by becoming inspirations to their members and communities. Winners were selected from five categories: Cool Planner, Sacred Grounds Steward, Energy Saver, Renewable Role Model, and Community Inspiration. The Sisters of St. Joseph received the first place award for Sacred Grounds Steward.

In 2015 the Sisters of St. Joseph affirmed a Land Ethic Statement to guide their future decisions about their Brentwood property. It is based in their awareness of the responsibility we all have for the health of Earth and in particular for the Long Island Bioregion. In response to that statement, members of the congregation have formed new partnerships on Long Island, gathered information about the bioregion, implemented new initiatives, and continued ecological projects that were already in place. For the past two years they have been working with the Peconic Land Trust to preserve the land and to return it to agriculture. As they evaluated the special features of the property they strategized about what conservation tools could be utilized to protect the unique features of the property in the context of their Land Ethic Statement. The long-term recommendations being considered include possible conservation easement options and suggestions for land management that concentrate on the shared sense of mission, obligation, sacrifice, and perpetual care for the land. The Sisters of St. Joseph have given themselves and their resources to the challenge. At this time of planetary degradation and aware of the needs of the Long Island bioregion, they plan to respond by keeping the land in their trust as a sacred place of respect and healing for earth and the community.

“The Cool Congregations Challenge winners inspire and show us what is possible. We awarded Catholic Sisters creating sustainable farms in New York, a church in North Carolina that rallied 15 other churches to work together to weatherize low-income homes, and a synagogue in Maryland that swapped out 477 light fixtures. These winners are creating jobs, saving money, and saving Creation. There are dozens of excellent applications, but the five winners really stand out for the creativity and impact of their projects,” said The Rev. Canon Sally Bingham, founder and president of Interfaith Power & Light.

The Cool Congregations Challenge is open to congregations all over the country, from every faith tradition. The faith communities represent many different religious backgrounds, but all share a common mission — to be good stewards of Creation by addressing global warming as a moral imperative. They do this through activities undertaken in their own facilities and on their grounds that reduce their overall carbon footprint.

The Cool Congregations Challenge shows that people of faith are united by concerns about climate change and are taking action — with or without support of government policies. The winners provide strong moral role models for their communities, and their activities have a ripple effect with people in their own homes. Listed below are the five $1,000 prize-winners:

**Community Inspiration**
Justice in a Changing Climate
Community United Church of Christ, Raleigh, NC

**Energy Saver**
The Bright Idea Project
Temple Shalom, Chevy Chase, MD

**Renewable Role Model**
CCUCC Goes Solar
Congregational Church in Cumberland, Cumberland, ME

**Sacred Grounds**
Agricultural Land Preservation
Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood, NY

**Cool Congregations Planner**
Manchester United Methodist Church, Manchester, MO
A border collie named Celine; two goats called Elsa and Josefina; three rabbits known as Molly, Polly, and Peter; and thirty-two chickens—too many to name—are our unique neighbors on the Sisters of St. Joseph motherhouse grounds. Celine—a border collie rescue—shares her life with two sisters, S. Mary Lou Buser and S. Kathleen Loughlin in the Octagon House. Responding to her internal clock, Celine begins her day at 5 am sharp. Immediately, she ventures out to check her “kingdom” for errant raccoons and squirrels. After a hearty breakfast, she joins Mary Lou for the trek across the grounds to the farm at the CSJ Organic Garden. Both open the doors to the animal shelters so that the goats, rabbits, and chickens can greet the day. Celine takes her job of protecting her friends very seriously. She herds the chickens to make sure that thirty-two of them come out of the coop. She watches Molly, Polly, and Peter scurry about their houses looking for the fresh greens that make their day. And she greets the two goats—Elsa and Josefina—who bleat loudly reminding her and Mary Lou to serve them breakfast. By 7 am all are ready to begin the work of their day.

After her tasks at the farm, Celine takes a brisk walk back home and begins her primary vocation as companion to Mary Lou and Kathy. She is always ready to respond affectionately when called on. Above all she is faithful to enthusiastically welcoming Mary Lou or Kathy home. Additionally, she can look out the living room window and be on guard identifying strangers by her loud bark. This responsibility of guarding the house is a twenty-four-hour commitment which she does with gusto.

Back at the farm, all are ready for today’s visitors. Elsa and Josefina let the visitors pet them while they hope for a morsel of food. The rabbits particularly Molly love to be held and petted mostly by the children. The children also engage the free-range chickens and if lucky they get to hold a warm egg that was just laid. The rhythm of these activities fill the animals’ day until it is time for dinner and a good night’s sleep.

Five pm arrives and once again Celine’s internal clock says “It’s time for a walk.” So, she and Kathleen begin the evening walk around the grounds to make sure all is ready for the night ahead. After this walk, Celine eagerly awaits her dinner, followed by a time to play with her Kong ball and “Kermit,” her stuffed animal. As night descends, Celine takes her place in the living room to watch the news program to keep up-to-date with world events. At 10 pm it’s time again for her to survey her “kingdom” and find out that all is well at the Octagon House. Assured that all is as it should be, Celine ends her day with a treat. She takes up her stance in the living room as she sleeps with one eye open to guard the house. And so, ends a day for these our animal neighbors.

Perhaps what is most significant is that these special neighbors have much to teach us. Although each is different from the other, they all share common characteristics. They are simple, faithful, and open. In a hectic world with many voices competing for our attention, we could benefit from reflecting on these gifts and their negative counterparts: simplicity rather than complexity, faithfulness rather than estrangement and openness rather than narrow-mindedness. In essence it is by being mindful of these our animal neighbors that we can learn wonderful lessons that both enrich and enlighten our lives!
January 28, 2017 was the annual Associate/Sister Retreat. The theme of the day was “The Power of Silence…Breaking into Our World” and there was a felt presence of love and unity during the day – our Charism! S. Mary McConnell, the presenter for the morning session, helped us recognize that because Jesus, the Son of God, was faithful in being human, we, in turn, are called to be more than human. We are called to be God’s presence in the world. Her examples included the Amish villagers who not only forgave the man for killing their schoolchildren, but they took in the grieving widow and her family, as well. Steven McDonald and his wife were also examples of people who, through forgiveness, answered the question: “Who is my neighbor?” When, through prayerful silence, we realize again and again that each of us is not God, we begin to love one another without judgment.

S. Karen Cavanagh was presenter for the afternoon. She also spoke on the subject of silence, and described it as intimacy based on the truth of who and where we are at any moment, so that we can allow God to transform us. Karen told us that “God is swaddling you right now” and that we just need to be in the moment and rest in God. Sometimes that time of quiet is like a muddy glass of water. As we sit in silence, God’s love is like water pouring into that muddy glass until it is transformed into a clear glass of water.
In October 2016, Pope Francis announced that the next general assembly of Catholic Bishops (Synod 2018) will focus on Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment. The chosen topic is an indication of the “Church’s pastoral care for the young” and aims to “accompany young people on their way of life towards maturity so that, through a process of discernment, they can discover their life project and realize it with joy, opening the encounter with God and [others], and actively participating in the building up of Church and society.” Vocational discernment in the Catholic Church includes and promotes vocations to married life, single life, religious life and ordained life.

As Sisters of St. Joseph we have always recognized the goodness, wisdom and potential in the young. Over the years our ministries in education, parish life, religious education and social services have put us in contact with hundreds of thousands of youth and young adults. Their hopes include a world where everyone is “neighbor,” diversity is valued and all have a say in creating the future. Young adults desire to change the way things are in the world. At the World Youth Day held in Krakow, Poland in 2016, Pope Francis challenged them by saying, “A better world can be built as a result of your efforts, your desire to change and your generosity. Make your voice heard, let it resonate in communities and let it be heard by your shepherds of souls.”

Over the past eighteen months we have expanded our ministerial outreach to young adults (20-39) by offering additional spiritual and service opportunities as well as listening sessions to enable them to discern their gifts and how they may best use them to bring about the Reign of God locally and globally. Below are some of the highlights these endeavors:

**CHARIS Seeker’s Retreat** was held on January 7, 2016 at the St. Joseph Worker House located on the property of The Mary Louis Academy. Appropriately, the retreat coincided with the Church’s celebration of Epiphany. Despite the snow, thirty young adults arrived to share their spiritual journeys with each other and offer support and companionship. The day-long retreat consisted of three talks by members of the Team followed by small groups facilitated by sisters and lay volunteers. The facilitators listened to the joys and struggles of being a young adult in the Church and the challenges they face in society. As a result of the sharing, new opportunities for gatherings that include Mass and faith-sharing are scheduled for late spring. The next CHARIS Retreat will be held on June 3, 2017. Your sponsorship is needed.

**St. Joseph Worker Volunteer Program** expanded its recruitment efforts by visiting Campus Ministry and Newman Centers on college campus in New York State, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The living space for the SJW community is shaping up and interviews of applicants are in process until the end of June. If you know a young woman (21-30) who wishes to give a year of full-time service in a Sister of St. Joseph Ministry please encourage her to contact us.

**National Religious Vocation Conference Convocation** was held in Kansas October 26-31, 2016. Keynote speakers included Fr. Kevin O’Brien, SJ who spoke about his own discernment process that led him to enter the Jesuits and how we, as Vocation Directors and Spiritual Directors, can assist the young by teaching them how to discern the voice of God amidst the cacophony of messages delivered to them through the internet and social media. Sherry Weddell, co-founder of the Catherine of Siena Institute and...
The author of *Forming Intentional Disciples*, spoke on the connection between discipleship and vocations. She challenged us to create opportunities for faith development and servant leadership among youth and young adults.

**National Catholic Conference of Youth Ministers** held in San Jose offered the Brentwood Congregation an opportunity to represent the US Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph to promote vocations to religious life and service through the St. Joseph Worker Volunteer Program. The conference focused on the importance of a multi-generational approach to sustain faith among the young and to invite them to claim their voice in the Church.

**Project Miriam** was hosted by the Vocation Committee on February 18 at The Mary Louis Academy. Twenty young women ages 12-30 spent the afternoon praying and listening to sisters share stories of faith and of their call to religious life. Six religious communities of women were represented. During dinner the women had the opportunity to ask questions about religious life.

**National Catholic Sisters Week 2017** included events at numerous CSJ high schools, parishes, St. Joseph’s College and local convents. Sisters invited young and old alike and shared their stories of religious life past and present and offered their vision of the future.

**Catholic Schools Week** provided an opportunity to respond to invitations from local Catholic Elementary Schools in the Diocese to speak on the importance of vocations to all lifestyles in the Catholic Church. Special attention was given to religious life and the story of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Students and faculty had many interesting questions. If you are interested in having a sister come to speak at your school, parish, youth/young adult group or community meeting please contact S. Marie Mackey at the Vocations Office.

**Busy Persons Retreat** provides an opportunity for students and faculty on college campuses to enjoy a four-day retreat experience without leaving home. Participants on retreat commit daily to thirty minutes of prayer/solitude and thirty minutes of meeting with a spiritual companion to share what their prayer experience stirred up in them. S. Marie was a guest spiritual director at Georgian Court University during their Busy Persons Retreat February 5-9.

**NDVision 2017** is off to a great start with forty-one young women from Fontbonne Academy, Sacred Heart Academy and The Mary Louis Academy and an additional eight women from St. Francis Prep participating in the week-long retreat/conference at the University of Notre Dame. This program encourages high school students to consider the gifts and talents God has given them and how they will use their gifts to change the world. The program also offers students an opportunity to meet with men and women religious to discuss religious life and ordained ministry as a possible vocational choice. We are in need of sponsorships for students for this summer.

As the Congregation continues to grow its outreach to young adults we encourage you, our friends and benefactors, to share with us your gifts, talents and insights so that we, like Pope Francis in his announcement to the young church about the 2018 Synod, may say to our young people, “I wanted you to be the center of attention, because you are in my heart.”

**Please Support Our Young People in Their Efforts to Participate in Retreats and Service Opportunities**

Your support is needed for CHARIS Retreats, NDVision 2017, NCYC (National Catholic Youth Conference) and Summer High School Volunteer Programs.

Please consider sponsoring a youth or young adult by offering financial assistance. Sponsorships range from $50 - $500.

Please contact S. Marie Mackey for further information.

Office of Young Adult Ministry and Vocational Discernment
718-791-7911
email: csjmack@gmail.com or Mackey@csjbrentwood.org

Students from St. Francis Prep opted for an alternative vacation of service at Maria Regina Residence in Brentwood.
The story of American history cannot be fully told without the story of the American Catholic church, and the history of Catholicism in America must include the narrative of the work of those who made the institution viable—especially the women religious who lived out the gospel mandates in selfless and invisible lives.

The importance of their stories is now being recognized and researchers and historians are delving into the complex and compelling intersection of Catholic history with women’s history. One such study produced *Spirit Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920*, co-authored by Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, CSJ, in which they explored the contribution of women religious to American life. From the small band of French Ursulines who came to Louisiana in 1727 to the exploding numbers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sisters “had created and/or maintained approximately 500 hospitals, 50 women’s colleges, and over 6,000 parochial schools, serving 1.7 million schoolchildren in every region of the country, both urban and rural. These figures do not include the vast number of orphanages, private academies, schools for the handicapped, homes for unwed mothers, homes for working girls, and homes for the elderly also conducted by the nuns.”

But where are the resources for such research to be found? In the archives of dioceses and religious orders, primarily, if records were kept at all. There is a new sense of urgency in locating and preserving these records, since the disappearance of some religious orders and the diminishment of others have endangered the very existence of their archives. Every archivist who serves as steward of a religious archives is keenly aware of the perils the future might hold for these precious records. And while preservation is uppermost in our minds, we are mindful that our stories are so intertwined that our records might be of interest to other archivists and historians, too.

Sister Mary McGlone, a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet, is engaged in writing the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph for their U.S. Federation. It is, she acknowledges, a huge undertaking that has required her to visit every congregational archives, including Brentwood, and to seek answers to the new questions that arise as she plunges more deeply into her research. Like other CSSJ historians before her, she is amazed at the interconnectedness of the various congregations. The questions she has asked of me have, in turn, made me more conscious of the stories of bonds which abound: Mother Stanislaus Leary, founder of the Concordia, KS, congregation, was a good friend of Mother Baptista Hanson of Brooklyn. Mother Teresa Mullen traveled to Georgia in August 1892 to regain her health with the Sisters of St. Joseph there, but died a few months later on New Year’s Day; the Sisters in Flushing were comforted to
know "she died among friends." For the benefit of her health, Mother Austin Kean was known to have visited Sisters of St. Joseph in St. Paul, Minnesota! Mother Anastasia Donovan of Buffalo sent one thousand grapevines to Mother Mary Louis Crummey for the new property purchased in Brentwood; in 1903, visiting French Sisters, en route from Bourg to New Orleans, supervised the making of wine from the first harvest. Such interlacing is almost sacramental.

A remarkable woman and a nexus of relationships is our own Mother de Chantal Keating. Lent from Flushing at the height of the Civil War to help a struggling Wheeling congregation—a foundation of Carondelet—she was only thirty years of age when she faced both the challenge of strengthening a community and supervising a hospital that was soon commandeered as a Union post hospital. Mother de Chantal was a prolific letter-writer and corresponded with a wide array of people, both lay and religious. While in Wheeling, she wrote to Jesuits and Redemptorists and local clergy seeking guidance for the temporal and spiritual challenges she faced. She also welcomed recommendations of young women who might have vocations to the religious life. The letters that survive provide a rich context of information about Mother de Chantal and the circumstances she faced—through the lens of her correspondents. (Interestingly, most have not been read or transcribed until now; many are difficult to read due to individual styles of penmanship compounded by the writing conventions of an earlier century.) The letters, I realized, are also a treasure trove of historical information about the ministries of these coworkers in the vineyard!

Eager to share these resources with other archives, I contacted Dr. Patrick Hayes, the Redemptorist archivist, about the letters of one correspondent—Fr. Robert Kleineidam, C.Ss.R. I also hoped that Mother de Chantal’s half of the correspondence might be found in his file. Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly, they were not; I was still happy to offer copies of his letters to the Redemptorist archives. Fr. Kleineidam, I discovered, was a holy man. He died of typhus while ministering to the poor, imprisoned, and mentally ill on Blackwell’s Island in New York City. “You just made my day,” wrote Dr. Hayes upon receiving word of my offer. “Any surviving document related to the dearly departed Fr. Kleineidam is to be cherished.”

In so many ways, I am reminded that the archives is a sacred space, not unlike the magnificent Sacred Heart Chapel whose apse mural depicts the intertwining vine of Christian life and the holy ones who tended it.
THE GIFT OF LIFE INSURANCE

So many of you have been touched, moved and formed by the mission and ministries of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Consequently, you have responded by helping the Sisters with your gift of financial support. For this act of love and grace we are so very grateful.

Many of you have told us that you wish to make a larger gift to the Sisters of St. Joseph but don’t have the financial means to do so. But, as I have said in previous Focusing articles, there are ways to do this without incurring a financial burden. One of them is through a gift of life insurance. By making a gift of a life insurance policy to the Sisters of St. Joseph, you are able to make a much larger gift than you thought possible and in most cases receive tax benefits as well.

First we’ll define some life insurance terms:
- **Insured** -- the person whose life is insured by the policy
- **Provider** -- the insurance company
- **Owner/Policy Holder** -- the one who has the right to name the beneficiary and the right to cash in the policy
- **Premium** -- the cost of the insurance policy, usually paid monthly, quarterly or annually
- **Beneficiary** -- the one who receives the financial benefit upon the death of the insured
- **Death Benefit or Face Value** -- the amount paid to the beneficiary upon the death of the insured
- **Cash surrender value** -- the amount the owner/policy holder would receive if the policy were cashed in before maturity or prior to the death of the insured (insured event)
- **Cost basis** -- the sum of all your premium payments at the time of your charitable gift
- **Replacement cost** -- the value of the insurance policy at the time of your gift

OK you ask, so how can I make a gift of life insurance and still pay the rent? Here’s how!

**Sisters of St. Joseph as Beneficiary**
This is simply naming the Sisters of St. Joseph as a beneficiary of your existing policy. It can be revocable (changed at any time) and it can be primary or contingent (upon the death of primary beneficiaries). Although there is no current income tax deduction and the death benefit would be included in your estate, your estate will be allowed an estate tax charitable deduction.

**Gift of a Paid-Up Life Insurance Policy**
You may have an old life insurance policy that you no longer need. Either there are no heirs, or they may be financially secure. A gift of a paid-up policy can be made by naming the Sisters of St. Joseph as beneficiary of the policy and transferring ownership of the policy to the Sisters of St. Joseph. You may then receive a current charitable deduction on your income tax for the lesser of the cost basis or replacement value of the policy. It may also reduce the value of your estate thus avoiding some estate tax. The Sisters of St. Joseph would then be able to cash in the policy at any time or receive the full death benefit at the passing of the insured.

**Gift of a Non Paid-Up or New Life Insurance Policy**
You may make the Sisters of St. Joseph owner and beneficiary of an existing policy or purchase a new policy and continue to pay the premiums yourself. In this way, you and the Sisters of St. Joseph receive the same benefits as gifting a paid-up policy and you may take a charitable tax deduction for the premiums you pay. Your premiums are small in comparison to the amount of the gift that the Sisters of St. Joseph will receive.

**Here’s a simple example of the process:**
Mary owns a paid-up insurance policy on her life. She has paid premiums of $2,000 a year for 10 years (a total of $20,000 cost basis). The replacement cost (value) of the policy is now $36,000. Mary makes a gift by transferring ownership to the Sisters of St. Joseph and naming the Sisters of St. Joseph as beneficiary. Mary may now deduct the lesser of the cost basis or replacement cost of the insurance policy from her income tax -- in this case $20,000 -- and the Sisters of St. Joseph receive a gift of $36,000!

If you have any questions about gifts of life insurance please call Jim Rennert at 631-273-1187 x150 for more information. Of course all will be kept in the strictest confidence. Thank you again for all you do for the Sisters of St. Joseph.

This article is not intended as legal or tax advice. Please consult an attorney or tax advisor.

James R. Rennert, CFRE
Director of Mission Advancement
**Donor Advised Funds**

Do you have a Donor Advised Fund (DAF) with Fidelity or another financial institution? The Sisters of St. Joseph gratefully accept charitable gifts from DAF’s to further their mission and support their ministries. Here are some ideas for gifting from your DAF:

1. You can create a memorial fund to in the name of a deceased loved one who cared about the mission and ministries of the Sisters.
2. You can arrange for your fund to be distributed to the Sisters of St. Joseph upon death.
3. You can turn assets into cash with your DAF that can then be granted to the Sisters.
4. Also, your DAF is great way to teach your children about philanthropy.

Don’t forget to put the Sisters of St. Joseph on your list of charities that receive gifts from your Donor Advised Fund!

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**Grants**

Thank you to the following organizations for their generous grant funding:

- **SOAR! (Support Our Aging Religious)** -- $24,800 for hospital beds for our aging and infirm Sisters in St. Joseph Convent.
- **NYCB Foundation** -- $2,000 for The Learning Connection for Adult Education.
- **Frank J. Lewis Foundation** -- $4,500 for furnishings for the St. Joseph Worker Program home.

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**SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH MASS ENROLLMENTS**

**Birthday**

**Healing**

**Thinking of You**

**Special Occasion**

**Folder**

**For the Deceased**

**Memorial**

These cards are available in the Mission Advancement Office in Building 4 of our Brentwood campus.

OR

To order please call 631-273-1187 x145

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**Sisters of St. Joseph 22nd Annual Golf Classic**

**Honoring**

John D. Cameron, Jr., P.E.

**Monday**

September 18

2017

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**Save the Date**

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Hour Children’s Executive Director S. Tesa Fitzgerald was inducted into the Irish America Magazine 2017 Irish America Hall of Fame. In addition, the Knights of Columbus have presented the Father McGivney Pro Vita award to Tesa for her work with Hour Children.

In February Joan Duffy Johnson (S. Mary Scholastica ’57) launched a chapbook "An Alphabet for Aging." Joan distills the challenges and gifts of aging into twenty-six short poems (cinquains). Each one is rich in insights and images inviting exploration and reflection. Appropriately the chapbook launching took place at the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph in St. Paul, MN. Copies are available at www.redbirdchapbook.com