

# VOICES — OF CHARITY





SISTERS OF CHARITY  
OF LEAVENWORTH

## CHAPTER 2022 DIRECTIONAL STATEMENT

Now, with God's grace, we are called in these days

"...to give freely of ourselves and our goods for the sake of the Kingdom..." (*SCL Constitution*, Norm 14)

In the spirit and charism of Vincent, Louise, Xavier, and our founding Sisters, we step into our future with a renewed sense of mission.

Through the lens of integral ecology, we will:

- tend to the care of marginalized people and the fragile earth;
- use spiritual and tangible resources to meet the critical needs of God's people and earth;
- broaden collaboration with local and global groups working to achieve systemic change;
- explore our relationship with sponsored works;
- clarify the structure of our governance model.

As Gospel-centered, ecclesial women rooted in Christ, we are called to love and serve in these times and in these places and to stand and pray with those who suffer, who grieve, who hope.

Now, with God's grace.

### ON THE COVER:

Morning light breaks through the mist along the Kansas River as members of Friends of the Kaw paddle downstream. The organization works to protect and preserve the 173-mile river through education, advocacy, and hands-on stewardship. As one of the organizations supported through the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth's Charity and Systemic Change Fund, Friends of the Kaw embodies the call to care for both people and Earth, one river mile at a time.

### in this issue

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Sister Rosemary Kolich,  
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Sister Jean Anne Panisko,  
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Page 3



Page 12



Page 22

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#### Voices of Charity

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The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth trace their roots to the spirit, spirituality, and outreach of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. Founded in Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1858 by Mother Xavier Ross, the SCL Community continues this Vincentian tradition through ministering to and on behalf of the poor and those on the margins of society.

3 **A Current of Change: How Friends of the Kaw Inspires Stewardship and Systemic Action**

6 **The Justice Project: Guiding Women Toward Freedom**

8 **PrimeHealth+: Where Care Comes Together**

10 **Feeding the Future Together: The Power of Community in Leavenworth**

12 **Feeding a City, Sustaining a Legacy**

14 **Envision Kenya: From Friendship to Flourishing Futures**

17 **Advocates for Immigrant Rights and Reconciliation**

18 **A Shared Dream for Justice: Missoula Interfaith Collaborative**

20 **Integral Ecology Initiative: Change at the Speed of Trust**

22 **Living Vincentian Charism Through Kind, Gentle Service**

24 **An Open House**

27 **A Shared Home: From Cameroon to Leavenworth**

## From the Community Director



Sister Eileen Haynes, SCL

### Where Charity Meets Change

As you look at the cover photo of this edition of *Voices of Charity*, take a moment to allow yourself to be drawn into the scene: feeling the mist of the early autumn morning, hearing the gentle movement of the paddle connecting with the water and, perhaps, the sound of birds praising God for the gift of a new day.

This scene depicts the ministry of Friends of the Kaw, an organization whose mission is to provide education, stewardship, and commitment to proper care of the waterway system in northeast Kansas. They understand the significance of being in right relationship and encourage people to join them in experiencing the sacredness of the Kaw as learners and/or volunteers.

Our Chapter 2022 Directional Statement states, in part, that “through the lens of integral ecology, we will broaden collaboration with local and global groups working to achieve systemic change.” Rooted in our Vincentian tradition, each year we join hands with organizations that utilize this systemic approach which achieves a long-term impact to heal the division and inequities that harm people and Earth. In this edition, our hope is to highlight a few of the organizations as well as individuals whose lives are dedicated to systemic change.

In this way, our mission is extended and deepened far beyond what we as an individual religious congregation could achieve.

Whether it’s nourishing families in Kansas, protecting the Kansas River, mentoring new teachers, or expanding access to healthcare in Kenya, each partnership is a living expression of integral ecology—recognizing that care for one another and care for creation are inseparable.

We are blessed!

*Sister Eileen Haynes, SCL*

Sister Eileen Haynes, SCL  
SCL Community Director

## A Current of Change



Dawn Buehler, Kansas Riverkeeper® and Executive Director of Friends of the Kaw, conducts water quality testing along the Kansas River near Tecumseh. The organization’s ongoing monitoring and advocacy helps protect the river from pollution and preserves this vital waterway for future generations.

### How Friends of the Kaw Inspires Stewardship and Systemic Action

By Jane Ellen Leibert, SCLA

#### A River Worth Protecting

The Kansas River, known locally as the Kaw, is one of three public rivers in Kansas, stretching 173 miles from Junction City to its confluence with the Missouri River in Kansas City. The river provides drinking water to more than 950,000 Kansans and is the largest prairie-based river system in the world. In 2012, it became the second river in the U.S. to be designated a National Water Trail—a recognition by the National Park Service that highlights its natural beauty, public accessibility, and the ongoing efforts to promote recreation, education, and environmental stewardship along its waters.

Since its founding in 1991, Friends of the Kaw (FOK) has worked to keep the Kansas River healthy, accessible, and valued. Advocacy has been central to its mission from the beginning. In 1995, the organization led a successful campaign to block a sand dredging permit that would have harmed the river’s recreational values, setting a precedent for future protections. Beginning as a grassroots effort, FOK has grown into a robust network of advocates, educators, and volunteers.

## Education and Advocacy in Action

Through its advocacy, education, and cleanup programs, FOK manifests the Vincentian spirit of service, protecting one of Kansas' most vital natural resources for both present and future generations. FOK ensures river protection remains a priority in public policy by advocating on issues such as water quality, pollution, habitat preservation, public access, and responsible development. This includes speaking at city commission meetings, the statehouse, and with local stakeholders.

Education plays a powerful role in the FOK mission. Guided paddle trips offer participants the chance to experience the river's beauty while learning about its ecology and the challenges it faces. Off the water, FOK's Water Quality Education Program reaches students in grades six through twelve with hands-on, science-based lessons on watershed health, pollution, and stormwater management.

## Restoring Dignity to the River

Cleanup efforts reflect a commitment to restoring dignity to the river and its surrounding communities. Since 2016, FOK has removed more than 5,000 tires, 30 tons of battery cases, and countless discarded items from the river's banks and sandbars.



Joey Shondell, Youth Outreach and Programming Coordinator, teaches water quality to students at a local stream.



Above, a decades-old dumpsite on the Kansas River. It is estimated that 1,000+ tires are at this location, which is about the size of the hay field on the Mother House grounds. Below, volunteers kayak to this remote location and remove 400+ tires from the riverbed.



These ambitious cleanups rely on the support of 800+ volunteers and the strong relationships with community groups, businesses, nonprofits, municipalities, and other river allies.

## Connection Where Protection Begins

At the heart of the organization's work is the understanding that connection is where protection begins. When people paddle the Kaw, learn its history, or take part in a cleanup, they begin to see themselves as part of the river's story. That connection sparks care, and care leads to action.

FOK's mission extends beyond environmental stewardship; it's about transforming how people value and interact with nature, seeing the river not as a commodity to consume but as a shared, sacred resource to cherish.

Systemic change is about looking upstream to prevent harm, downstream to promote healing, and strengthening the relationship between people and the Kansas River through reverence, trust, and shared responsibility.

## Faith, Humility, and Love

FOK is not a religious organization but their work is grounded in faith—faith in the strength of communities, faith in the dedication of volunteers, faith in the resilience of nature and in the belief that environmental stewardship can bring about healing, renewal, and sustainability.

Guided by humility, the work begins with listening to scientific data, to community voices, and to the natural rhythms of the Kansas River. Each decision grows from a sense of responsibility and collaboration, grounded in the understanding that no river is protected alone and no effort succeeds in isolation.

At the core is love. Love for the Kansas River, for those who rely on it today, and for the generations to come. Every river cleanup, every guided paddle, and every effort to influence policy reflects this love, made visible through steady, hopeful action to protect a shared and sacred resource.



A volunteer cleans up a plastic-filled eddy on the river.

The mission of FOK is not just environmental; it is value-driven, lived out along the banks of the Kansas River and carried forward by all who are moved to join the current. 

## AT A GLANCE: Friends of the Kaw



**Length:**  
173 miles



**Mouth:**  
Missouri River, Kansas City



**Drinking Water Provider:**  
to more than 950,000 Kansans



**Cleanups Since 2016:**  
5,000+ tires and 30 tons  
of debris removed



**Volunteers Engaged:**  
more than 800 annually



**Website:**  
[www.kansasriver.org](http://www.kansasriver.org)

# The Justice Project: Guiding Women Toward Freedom

By Marcia and Steve Nicely, SCLAs

## A Life of Helping Others

At 74, Kris Wade shows no signs of slowing down. For two decades, she has served as the Executive Director of The Justice Project in Kansas City with fierce compassion and lived experience. She has known firsthand the realities of homelessness, poverty, drugs, trauma, domestic abuse, incarceration, and sexual exploitation. Having once needed help to escape those circumstances, she now dedicates her life to helping others do the same.

The Justice Project works to assist women escaping trafficking and exploitation. Its success stories are many—but the challenges are mounting.



Kris Wade, Executive Director of The Justice Project in Kansas City

## Fewer Helpers

“We are seeing more trafficking than ever, and fewer people are stepping up to help,” says Wade. She explains that as more organizations attempt to take on anti-trafficking work, they quickly learn how difficult and emotionally demanding it is. “Some shelters are now refusing trafficked folks,” she said. “Organizations that formerly worked in this field no longer do so. As changes to funding and priorities shift in Washington, D.C., and in Missouri, it’s apparent that many sources of funding for exploitation and violence against women will be shrinking if not eliminated.”

## Partners on the Journey

Recovery from trafficking can be a long, painful journey. The Justice Project provides immediate help—safe escape, peer support, referrals, and essential needs, but Wade says collaboration is critical. “We can’t do it all and we depend on our partners to assist our efforts. We are the guides to the way out, but our partnerships help create a solid action plan for a woman’s recovery.”

Wade is deeply connected within Kansas City’s network of support agencies, including shelters, health and mental health providers, the Family Court of

Jackson County, probation and parole offices, area courts, and local police departments.

## From Local to Global Advocacy

Her advocacy extends beyond Kansas City. Wade is part of the Sister Survivor Working Group, a component of the Alliance Against Human Trafficking—formerly the U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking. In May, she traveled with the group to Rome and Sacrofano, Italy, to meet with Talitha Kum, an international network of consecrated life combating trafficking.

**“We are seeing more trafficking than ever and fewer people are stepping up to help.”**

*Kris Wade*

“There we were able to take the voices of our women to the highest quarters,” she said, “including the Holy See ambassadors and the Holy Father, and to help craft progressive anti-trafficking policies. As a result of joining Talitha Kum, we are now in anti-trafficking partnerships worldwide.”

## A Vision of Respect and Renewal

The Justice Project’s mission is clear: to create a respectful world where women are safe from violence and exploitation, accountable for their actions, and free to pursue healthy, independent lives. Wade adds, “We’ve had women go on to become social workers, substance abuse counselors, graphic artists, and computer programmers.”

## One Woman’s Story

Wade recalls one woman, called “Charlotte” for her privacy, rescued in a federal trafficking sting. “She’d been trapped by a gang for 11 months, traumatized, malnourished, high on crack cocaine, but she was articulate and had been to college,” Wade said.

With help from The Justice Project, “Charlotte” testified against her traffickers, entered drug treatment, found housing, and began volunteering with the organization. “She went back to college, graduated cum laude from UMKC, earned a master’s degree in social work, and now works for one of the largest nonprofits in Kansas City,” Wade said. Wade, herself, also enhanced her qualifications by earning a bachelor’s degree in criminology and criminal justice with a minor in sociology at UMKC.

Wade says stories like “Charlotte’s” are why she keeps going. It’s proof that, given a chance, survivors can rebuild their lives and help others do the same. 



The Justice Project staff member Mary Jolly (left) takes a moment with clients, reflecting the compassion and advocacy that guide the organization’s mission.

## AT A GLANCE: The Justice Project



**Founded:**  
2004



**Executive Director:**  
Kris Wade



**Mission:**  
to create a respectful world where women are safe from violence and exploitation



**Partnership:**  
joined Talitha Kum, expanding global anti-trafficking partnerships



**Service:**  
helped changed lives of more than 100 women from the streets of Kansas City since 2007



**Website:**  
[www.justiceprojectkc.org](http://www.justiceprojectkc.org)

By Jacque Dansby, Development Director for PrimeHealth+

### Origins in Charity

In her role as President and CEO of SCL Health St. Mary's Hospital, Sister Marianna Bauder, who passed away in 2019, responded to Denver's unmet medical needs by creating a safety-net clinic to serve families impacted by job loss, home foreclosures, unmet healthcare needs, and lingering despair. Leading the way, Sister Marianna mobilized others in the Grand Junction community to participate in this important project. This initiative is now under the auspices of Intermountain Health St. Mary's Hospital.

Named after Saint Louise de Marillac, Marillac Clinic opened in 1988 with a mission to provide charitable health care. In its early years, the clinic served about 5,000 people—including those who were homeless, elderly, farmworkers, and undocumented immigrants and families who were uninsured, underinsured or on Medicaid.

In 2014, Marillac Clinic became a Federally Qualified Health Center. Rebranded as PrimeHealth+ in 2025, it now serves more than 16,000 patients, providing integrated medical, dental, behavioral health, and pharmacy services. PrimeHealth+ believes that all people deserve dignity and welcoming access to health care, regardless of their life circumstances.

### Big Help for Little Teeth

PrimeHealth+ is serving more and more immigrant children with advanced oral disease. Usually ages three to five, these children often have severely deteriorated baby teeth and diseased gums—sometimes with teeth visibly rotted to the gumline. If left untreated, these infections can be serious, even fatal. Each year, the clinic treats nearly 100 cases of advanced pediatric dental decay.

While most of PrimeHealth+'s pediatric patients are covered by Medicaid, families without

Medicaid face the devastating challenge of affording immediate care. To meet that need, PrimeHealth+ launched Big Help for Little Teeth (BHLT) in 2024, a formal assistance program that provides swift intervention, including outpatient surgery, for uninsured children with extensive decay.

Pediatric dentist Dr. Kate Hart, DDS, who has worked at PrimeHealth+ for 18 years, explains: "These children must undergo general anesthesia in an operating room for procedures that often take two hours. Repairing a mouthful of diseased baby teeth usually involves root canals, fillings, crowns, and caps. Any unsalvageable teeth must be extracted, and spacers must be inserted. Treatment plans range from \$3,000 to \$4,500. That is a staggering cost for immigrant and very low-income families who lack insurance."

### Removing Financial Barriers

PrimeHealth+'s bilingual pediatric dental team has the expertise to provide this care—but cost remains the greatest barrier. To reduce expenses, the organization negotiated with a partnering surgical center and anesthesiology practice, which agreed to lower their combined fees to \$1,800. However, these fees must be paid before surgery can proceed.

The BHLT Financial Assistance Fund, assisted by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, was created to cover these upfront costs for children who lack insurance or other resources. The fund ensures that life-changing care happens without delay.

"The gift from the SCL Charity and Systemic Change Initiative allows us to extend the Vincentian tradition of compassionate care to our youngest and sickest patients," Dansby said. "And when the delivery of health care is rooted in faith, humility, and love, God's love continues its journey to us, through us, and beyond us."



## Healing Smiles: Ismael's Story

Meet pediatric dentist Dr. Kate Hart, DDS, pictured above with her patient Ismael. Dr. Hart has worked at PrimeHealth+ for 18 years.

At just four years old, Ismael suffered from advanced dental disease, something that can develop quickly through unhealthy snacking, sugary beverages, inconsistent brushing, and lack of professional dental care. Because baby teeth are smaller and softer than adult teeth, they deteriorate fast.

With financial assistance from Big Help for Little Teeth, funded by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Ismael received the surgery he urgently needed. Within days, he was full of energy again—playing, sleeping well, and eating comfortably. 

### AT A GLANCE: Big Help for Little Teeth

 **Founded:**  
2024

 **Annual Pediatric  
Dental Surgeries:**  
approximately 100 to date

 **Average Cost Per Case:**  
\$3,000–\$4,500

 **Negotiated Fee  
For Partners:**  
\$1,800

 **Ages Served:**  
3–5 years old

 **Website:**  
[www.primehealthplus.org](http://www.primehealthplus.org)



For more than 13 years before COVID-19, Backpack Buddies was powered by volunteers sorting and bagging food for children across Leavenworth County. Today, due to changes in distribution through Second Harvest and now Harvesters, bags arrive pre-packed and go straight to the school district. The process has changed, but one thing hasn't—children in Leavenworth County still receive the food they need.

## Feeding the Future Together: The Power of Community in Leavenworth

By Sandy Simmons, SCLA

### A Weekend Lifeline

For more than 17 years, the Leavenworth Backpack Buddies program has provided a steady source of nourishment and hope for local children. Each weekend, the program supplies a bag of food to students in Leavenworth schools who have been identified as food-insecure by federal and district standards.

According to Harvesters, a regional partner of the Feeding America program, Leavenworth County has an 18.4% food insecurity rate among children under 18, with an annual family food budget shortfall of more than \$7.6 million. To help address that need, Backpack Buddies purchases nutritious, shelf-stable food from Harvesters and distributes it through elementary schools and Head Start programs, so children do not go hungry over the weekend.

### Community Generosity

The program is sustained by the generosity of the Leavenworth community. Individuals, churches, banks, and local organizations all contribute to ensure its continued success.

When Backpack Buddies began, it cost about \$175 per child per school year to supply food to recipients. Today, that cost has risen to \$308 per child. The program currently reaches about 310 students each week.

### Partners in Mission and Hope

The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth and the University of Saint Mary have been long-time supporters of the program, offering both financial assistance and community encouragement. Their partnership has helped assist Backpack Buddies through years of changing needs, ensuring that

students in Leavenworth have consistent access to nutritious meals throughout the school year.

School principals, teachers, and staff have expressed deep gratitude for the Leavenworth Backpack Buddies program and for the community partnerships that make it possible. The impact is evident: many children return to school on Mondays, better nourished, more focused, and ready to learn.

### Feeding the Future

As noted by the Leavenworth Times in April 25, 2025, "the program continues to serve pre-K through third-grade students each week, providing single-serving, nonperishable, vitamin-fortified food items at no cost to families or schools."

The Leavenworth Unified School District website states that, "Since its founding, the partnership



Pre-COVID-19 volunteers with the Leavenworth Backpack Buddies program unload boxes of weekend meal packs provided by Second Harvest Food Bank.

between Backpack Buddies, Harvesters, and local schools has distributed more than two million food items to students in need."

A local effort to feed hungry children has grown into a model of collaboration, transforming awareness into action for lasting change. 🌟



Each Backpack Buddies sack includes a weekend's worth of kid-friendly, nonperishable food—such as canned soup, vegetables, cereal, fruit cups, juice, and snacks—ensuring that children have nutritious meals when school cafeterias are closed.

### AT A GLANCE: Leavenworth Backpack Buddies



#### Service:

- 17 years serving Leavenworth students
- Currently supporting 310 children



#### Statistics:

18.4% child food insecurity rate in Leavenworth County



#### Distribution:

two million+ food items distributed since inception with zero cost to families and schools



Denver area volunteers work side by side in an assembly line, packing Thanksgiving bags that will help ensure families across the community have a holiday meal.

## Feeding a City, Sustaining a Legacy

By Mary Jo Anzik, SCL

“Nothing beats love,” said “Daddy” Bruce Randolph, a Denver, Colorado restaurateur who, in 1964, closed his restaurant for Thanksgiving so he could cook a meal for anyone in need. “If you give just one thing,” he said, “you get three things back. That’s why I do it.”

### A Legacy of Giving

By the 1990s, Daddy Bruce’s annual meal had grown into what became known as the Daddy Bruce Thanksgiving Baskets program in Denver’s historic Five Points neighborhood. Each basket held enough food to feed a family of eight.

When the Randolph family could no longer continue the tradition, Epworth United Methodist Church stepped up in 2002, eventually forming The Epworth Foundation in 2005 to ensure Daddy Bruce’s legacy of love would endure.



Volunteers, John Schliep (left) and Sister Mary Jo Anzik (right), lend a hand preparing bags at the Epworth Foundation’s Thanksgiving “Feed-a-Family” event.

The Foundation’s mission remains ingrained in that same spirit: to provide emergency assistance and support to individuals and families in crisis across Denver. Beyond hunger prevention, Epworth offers youth programs, parenting classes, and community outreach—focusing especially on children and families who need a bridge to stability.

### Love in Action

Each year, beginning at 5 p.m. on the Friday before Thanksgiving, several city blocks near the church transform into a bustling hub of service. Semi-trucks roll in, unloading thousands of turkeys and grocery items. Over 1,000 volunteers work in shifts through the night, sorting, packing, and delivering baskets—each filled with enough food for a full Thanksgiving meal.

**“Nothing beats love.”**  
*Daddy Bruce*

By dawn, a long line begins to form outside Epworth. Families arrive before sunrise—rain, snow, or shine—waiting patiently for a basket and a moment of hope. Volunteers also deliver meals directly to the elderly, homebound, and disabled.

In 2024, 7,500 families received Thanksgiving baskets through the program.

### Partnership in the Spirit of Charity

Since 2017, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth have supported this effort through the SCL Charity and Systemic Change Fund, by providing an annual donation to be used directly to purchase food for the baskets. “I’m grateful that our Community can help keep this work alive,” Sister Mary Jo said.

The connection between Daddy Bruce’s vision and the Vincentian spirit runs deep: faith in action, care for the poor, and love made visible through service. As Scripture reminds us, “For I was hungry and you gave me food.” (Matthew 25:35) 



Sister Mary Jo Anzik, SCL, joins volunteers from the Epworth Foundation in Denver to support the annual Thanksgiving “Feed-a-Family” event honoring Daddy Bruce Randolph’s legacy of generosity. Together, they helped distribute more than 5,000 meals to families in need. Volunteers also delivered Thanksgiving bags to shut-ins and disabled community members. The program, originally serving only the Denver area, now reaches into surrounding suburbs, expanding its impact even further.

### AT A GLANCE: The Epworth Foundation

 **Founded:** 2005, Denver, Colorado

 **Mission:** promoting healthy families through meals, emergency aid, outreach, and education

 **Volunteer Impact:** more than 1,000 volunteers annually

 **Website:** [www.epworthfoundation.org](http://www.epworthfoundation.org)



During a recent visit to St. Anne's Girls' High School in Kapkemich, Kenya, board members of the Friends of St. Anne's Girls' School Fund (FOSA) gather with students supported through the Envision Kenya Initiative. The students in golden T-shirts are recognized as top FOSA Scholars, honored for their academic excellence and leadership. Pictured with the students in the back right are Ginger Riddle, Ruth Schukman-Dakotas, and Dan Dakotas. Not pictured is fellow board member, Blaise Heckman, who also attended the visit.

## Envision Kenya: From Friendship to Flourishing Futures

By Ruth Schukman-Dakotas, SCLA

What began as a Kansas City connection has grown into a powerful partnership of education, health, and entrepreneurship in western Kenya. Through the Envision Kenya Initiative, Ruth Schukman-Dakotas and a dedicated circle of supporters have helped bring hope and opportunity to the rural village of Kapkemich—transforming lives one project at a time.

Based in the greater Kansas City area, Envision Kenya unites three nonprofits and an entrepreneurial initiative under one mission: Friends of St. Anne's (FOSA), the Virginia Wright Health Clinic (VWHC), and The Water Room. Together, they are building a foundation for long-term sustainability ingrained in community empowerment.

### Education: The First Step Toward Change

Education remains at the heart of Envision Kenya's mission. St. Anne's Girls' High School offers students from Kapkemich and surrounding villages a safe place to live and learn. In a country where financial hardship and cultural expectations often limit a girl's access to schooling, St. Anne's provides both opportunity and dignity.

Through Friends of St. Anne's, students receive scholarships and housing support that make it possible to continue their education. Since 2012, FOSA has awarded 330 high school and 282 post-secondary scholarships, helping hundreds of young women overcome barriers and pursue their dreams.

The school's steady growth from a small sub-county institution to a county-level school reflects not only academic achievement but also a community's shared belief in the power of education.



As part of Envision Kenya's commitment to education and empowerment, Ruth Schukman-Dakotas, SCLA (not pictured), led a hands-on home science class at St. Anne's in Kapkemich, teaching students how to prepare and serve a nutritious meal.



Artist Dan Dakotas, SCLA, leads an art class, encouraging students to design creative works using just four Prisma colored pencils (including white) on Letramax blackboard.

### Health and Wellness

As education took root, it became clear that health and learning are inseparable. In response, Friends of St. Anne's partnered with Dr. Chris Warholic to establish the Virginia Wright Health Clinic, providing essential care for both students and residents. The clinic serves more than 200 patients each month, offering medical services, maternal care, and health education. Despite receiving only a fraction of expected government reimbursements, the clinic continues to operate through the dedication of its staff and the generosity of supporters. Beyond healthcare, the clinic provides employment and inspiration—showing students that careers in medicine and community health are within reach.

### Entrepreneurship

Recognizing that lasting change requires opportunity, Envision Kenya expanded to include entrepreneurial education and vocational training. Programs at St. Anne's now teach sewing, cooking, and business management, equipping participants with practical skills to support their families and community. In 2023, Envision Kenya launched the Water Room, a water purification and distribution facility that now employs seven people and delivers clean drinking water to schools, churches, businesses, and the surrounding community which meets a critical need while creating sustainable jobs.



Students at St. Anne's in Kapkemich, Kenya, focus on their studies—a glimpse of daily life within the community supported through the Envision Kenya Initiative.

### Support from generous donors has helped fuel this growth. Their donations have made possible:

- Construction of a 200-student dormitory
- Installation of a well which led to installation of a clean water system in partnership with Agua Viva International
- Expansion of the clinic, including a labor and delivery center
- Home-science equipment such as sewing machines, a stove, and a refrigerator
- A behavioral-health program at the clinic
- Classroom technology, including a projector
- A vehicle for transporting patients to referral hospitals

Each investment strengthens the St. Anne's community's capacity for independence, ensuring that progress continues from within. 

### AT A GLANCE: Envision Kenya



#### Care:

education, healthcare, and entrepreneurship



#### Scholarships:

Since 2012, FOSA has awarded 1,662 annual scholarships to 330 high school and 282 post-secondary students, helping Kenyan youth, primarily girls, overcome barriers and pursue their dreams.



#### Service:

200+ patients served monthly at the Virginia Wright Health Clinic



#### One Shared Vision:

community self-sustainability in Kapkemich, Kenya



#### Website:

[www.envisionkenya.org](http://www.envisionkenya.org)

# Advocates for Immigrant Rights and Reconciliation



By Stephanie Nash

### Empowering Voices

Across Kansas and Missouri, Advocates for Immigrant Rights and Reconciliation (AIRR) helps immigrant families move from fear to empowerment. Through education, accompaniment, and advocacy, AIRR ensures that every person, no matter where they were born, has the chance to live safely and be treated with dignity.

immigrants who are eligible to vote, offering help to register, study the issues and candidates, advocate for candidates and legislation that they support, and to vote in local, state and national elections. By aiding eligible immigrants to exercise their right to vote, they are given pathways for participation more fully in the life of the country and can become leaders in their communities.

Voter Engagement Table, and local churches expand AIRR's reach and strengthen its organizing network.

With support from the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, AIRR continues to foster justice, dignity, and reconciliation—building communities where immigrant voices are heard, valued, and leading the way toward systemic change. 

### AT A GLANCE: AIRR



**Focus:** immigrant rights, education, and community organizing in Kansas and Missouri



**Programs:** include, Know Your Rights, Immigration 101, Voter Engagement, Accompaniment, and Advocacy Campaigns



**Approach:** empowerment through education, civic participation, and leadership development



**Website:** [www.airrkc.org](http://www.airrkc.org)

AIRR's mission is to organize and activate immigrants to advocate for their rights and well-being. Programs such as Know Your Rights, Immigration 101, Voter Engagement, and Advocacy Campaigns equip participants with the knowledge and confidence to protect themselves and their families.

AIRR advocates, nationally, for comprehensive and inclusive immigration reform, the bedrock of the work to change the national political conversation around immigration.

"Our goal is to make sure the people most impacted by inequity are the ones shaping the solutions," says an AIRR organizer.

### From Awareness to Action

AIRR's voter education initiatives engage with

# A Shared Dream for Justice: Missoula Interfaith Collaborative

By Mary Jo Quinn, SCL

The dream for Missoula Interfaith Collaborative (MIC) evolved as Casey Dunning moved through a master's degree in social work program as a young adult. He had already completed an engineering degree, married, and become involved in the Presbyterian Church in Missoula. He also became a youth counselor, both in his profession and within the church. His quest was always, "How can I help young people not make the same mistakes that I made?" Eventually, as his own family grew, he asked, "How can a church body discover a sense of outreach, a 'passion' for the works of justice within their community? Further, how can many churches that are discovering this passion support one another in this work?"

## A Seed Takes Root

With the encouragement of Lutheran Pastor John Lund and others at the University of Montana, Casey developed his graduate thesis into what would become a living ministry. A substantial "seed" grant from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development helped bring that dream to life. In 2013, the Missoula Interfaith Collaborative (MIC) became an officially recognized nonprofit organization.

From the earliest days, Casey was able to bring together many individual faith congregations to support people who had recently been released from prison, often helping to resource these individuals in housing and providing support services for their new lives outside the confines of prison and/or jail.

## Faith Communities Open Their Doors

At the same time, another effort was taking shape across Missoula: Family Promise of Missoula, an outreach from local faith communities focused on serving families without homes.

Thirteen church buildings opened their doors, each hosting up to four families for a week at a time. Within a given week, the four families were housed in a member faith congregation, where they were cared for entirely by the congregation's members, including sleeping quarters, prepared meals with the companionship of the local community, job counseling, and transportation as needed. At week's end, volunteers packed up the beds and belongings and moved everything to the next congregation in the rotation.



Volunteers spend the morning digging, cleaning, and delivering beautiful Yukon Gold potatoes for the MIC programs and participants. The potatoes were also served at a community meal.



of domestic violence, the Meadowlark proudly opened its doors during the pandemic in 2021 and became a new home for Missoula's Family Promise program.

## The Work Continues

Since its founding, MIC has continued to discern and respond to the evolving needs of the Missoula community. Some of its early initiatives, such as Common Good Missoula, Glass Recycling, and Ventures (a sewing manufacturing company), have since grown into independent organizations.

## Today, MIC oversees vital programs, including:

**Family Promise:** providing transitional housing and support for families,

**Missoula Works:** creating job opportunities for those facing employment barriers,

## Growing Together

In 2016, Missoula's Family Promise became one of several programs of MIC, increasing the strength and size of MIC. Following a conversation among various groups concerned with the housing needs of Missoula, a further dream was realized in the form of a family housing center, a \$13 million building that could accommodate up to 31 families at a time. In collaboration with the local YWCA, which houses up to 15 families in its shelter for victims and families

The MIC website offers impressive statistics. To date, MIC has engaged over 5,104 volunteers: supported and employed over 160 persons through Missoula Works; served over 11,189 meals; and has developed 65 congregations, local allies, and organizations. The whole of Missoula has watered well the dream for MIC.

## A Dream Sustained

From one student's question to a thriving network of faith-based collaboration, MIC is proof that the Spirit moves powerfully when people come together to serve. The Missoula community has watered well the dream that began with one person's desire to make a difference, and continues to grow through the shared labor of love and justice. 🌸

## AT A GLANCE: Missoula Interfaith Collaborative



**Founded:**  
2013



### Community Impact:

- over 5,104 volunteers engaged
- over 160 people employed through Missoula Works
- over 11,189 meals served
- collaboration of 65 congregations and community partners



**Major Achievement:** opened the Meadowlark Family Housing Center in 2021, created in partnership with the YWCA of Missoula



**Website:**  
[www.micmt.org](http://www.micmt.org)

# Change at the Speed of Trust

By John Shively, SCL Executive Director of Mission

## A Season of Contrast and Connection

For me, this fall has been marked by the contrast of the heat of the sun in Peru and the cool, crisp morning air in Kansas. However, in both places, the Integral Ecology Initiative (IEI) has been hard at work meeting with community organizations, engaging with the marginalized, and exploring where our energy and resources can best meet the cry of the poor and cry of the Earth. What is becoming increasingly clear through these conversations is the essential role that partnership and collaboration will play in bringing this vision of caring for people and the planet to life in our communities.

## Trust Across Distance

In the organizing world, we often say that change happens at the speed of trust. At first, it was difficult to understand how trust could be built in a local community nearly 3,700 miles away from my home in Leavenworth. But in Piura, Peru, at



These homes, seen from the rooftop of the Centro Pastoral San Vicente de Paul, in Piura, Peru, face ongoing challenges from flooding, instability, and lack of infrastructure.

the edge of the Santa Julia Wetlands, I witnessed that trust firsthand—between the IEI team and the residents of the La Florida community. That trust exists thanks to the ongoing pastoral presence of the Sisters in Peru and my teammate, Rosario Valdivieso Morales. Because of their care for this small, vulnerable community, residents felt safe enough to share their struggles and hopes that their families could stay in the place they call home.

## Lessons from La Florida

The La Florida community has worked for more than a decade to infill the wetlands with dirt, establish basic electricity, remove trash dumped near their homes, and even care for one another through a community kitchen and pantry. Here, I see more clearly than ever what the SCL land ethic teaches: “the way we treat the land is the way we treat one another.”

## A Fragile Home and Difficult Choices

The reality, of course, is that the wetlands are entirely incapable of supporting long-term inhabitation. The sand is unstable, and heavy rains in the wet seasons bring torrential flooding that threatens life, health, and community resilience. Yet the alternatives offered to residents seem little better, asking families who live together to split up and move away from their neighbors, work, schools, and access to critical services like healthcare. This affects not only La Florida but more than 16,000 people living in unofficial human settlements around the Santa Julia Wetlands.

## The Call to Accompany

In a moment that pricked at both my heart and mind during a site visit by the IEI team, when the La Florida community asked if we could help, I had no easy, certain answer to give. What I do believe is that there is an opportunity for us to help the civil authorities understand that the

alternatives they present to these communities must be built in conjunction with them, not imposed on them.

The grace in this moment is the opportunity to accompany. While we can't control the forces of nature or the pace of bureaucracy, we can walk alongside the community with compassion and dignity. It has been heartening to see the community-based organizations, faith groups, and social services agencies, organized by Rosario's work through the initiative, respond to the community's immediate needs while building trust for long-term collaboration.

## Reflections from Home

Back in Leavenworth, sometimes the gift of travel helps me realize that the struggle for basic human needs is not all that different in other places. While we enjoy immense privilege in the United States, people here, too, face housing insecurity, food scarcity, and economic instability. It does make the world feel smaller because in each place and in our own time, we see people struggling for the fundamental things required to survive. The tragedy is that these conditions persist in one of the wealthiest nations in the world, proving that the violence of poverty is not just a misfortune but a choice.

In many ways, as I've often echoed Pope Francis' writing in *Laudato Si'*, I believe this social sin begins with the fact that we have forgotten we belong to one another. How, then, can we remember?

## Hunger and Hope

I woke up on Monday, October 24, 2025, with a gnawing in my stomach, a hunger not from a lack of food, but from the desire to do something, perhaps anything, knowing that 41 million Americans would soon lose their access to critical government food programs. Since the creation of

the SNAP program in 1968, formerly known as food stamps, benefits have never entirely lapsed in the program's entire history. This



With litter along the Santa Julia Wetlands, the La Florida community demonstrates resilience and solidarity as they care for both their neighbors and the land they call home.

meant neighbors, coworkers, people I knew and cared about, and those I had never met, would go hungry. What could we do?

## The Work of Trust Continues

Inspired by Rosario's example in Peru, we reached out to community-based organizations in Leavenworth County, including food pantries, churches, schools, and social service groups, to develop a rapid local response. Just five days later, over 40 people from community-based organizations, the Sisters of Charity, and our dedicated staff came together on a Saturday morning to identify the greatest current need and explore how we might collaborate and share our resources for the common good of the community. Out of that meeting, a core group formed that helped lead this coalition in organizing a county-wide food drive on November 15 where an estimated 3,000 pounds of food was collected.

What our ultimate impact will be on food security in Leavenworth remains as uncertain as our impact in La Florida. But change happens at the speed of trust, and trust only happens in relationship. It is my great hope that we will continue to build, nurture, and deepen relationships with trusted partners, allowing both our impact and the possibilities to grow. 

# Living Vincentian Charism Through Kind, Gentle Service

By Stephanie Nash

## A Friend at Dawn

When morning breaks at the Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope night shelter, guests awaken to more than a safe place and a warm bed—they’re greeted by a friend in Mary Lou Anderson.

For the past seven years, Mary Lou has quietly lived out her faith in service, arriving before dawn to make coffee, wake guests, and offer encouragement with her trademark gentleness and patience. “Ownership is important,” she says, handing out the reusable cloth bags she sewed for guests’ belongings. “Helping clean up gives them dignity—and that’s what we all need.”

This year, her remarkable witness was recognized with the seventh annual Vincentian Charism Award, presented on the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, September 27, 2025, at the SCL Mother House in Leavenworth.

## Honoring a Life of Compassion

The Vincentian Charism Award, established in 2018 to mark the 160th anniversary of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth’s arrival in Kansas, honors individuals who reflect the Vincentian spirit of humility,

compassion, and service to those most in need. “Mary Lou is kind and gentle in her interactions and so calm when supporting the guests,” said Sister Pat Johannsen, SCL, who nominated her for the award. “She goes beyond the call of duty. If she sees something that needs to be done, she does it.”

A retired K-6 physical education teacher of 32 years, Mary Lou spent her career teaching children about movement, teamwork, and perseverance. Today, those same lessons shape her ministry of compassion and care.

## Faith as a Daily Practice

Mary Lou is a longtime member of First United Methodist Church, where serving others

is viewed not as optional but as an expectation of faith. “Without my relationship with the Lord, I don’t think I would have the heart to serve others the way I do,” she reflected. “To be a believer means you openly help others.”

Her call to help the unhoused began after reading a book that opened her eyes to the struggles of people without shelter. Soon after, she began volunteering with Welcome Central—an early ministry of outreach that evolved into what is now the Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope. When the night shelter opened, Mary Lou became a volunteer, and eventually a steady staff member who keeps mornings running smoothly.



Mary Lou Anderson, 2025 Vincentian Charism Award recipient, is pictured at the Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope, where her faithful service helps ensure “A Safe Place to Sleep” for those experiencing homelessness.



Mary Lou (second from left) stands with her daughter (left), brother, and sister-in-law (right) following the presentation of the Vincentian Charism Award at the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul celebration.

## Working Together for Systemic Change

Mary Lou’s story is a portrait of community collaboration, the intertwining of faith, service, and compassion that fuels real systemic change.

“It takes 70 volunteers a week to keep the night shelter running,” she said. “That’s 70 people working together so others have a place to sleep. It’s community in action.”

She has seen firsthand how collaboration restores hope. “It’s a blessing to be there when someone finds housing or comes back to volunteer,” she said. “A lot of times, people who are unhoused don’t see a future for themselves. Helping them find that future—that’s what this is all about.”

## A Legacy of Love

Mary Lou credits her parents for teaching her gentleness, faith, and dedication—values she’s carried throughout her life. She’s one of six children, a mother and grandmother, and was married for many years to a loving husband who volunteered beside her before his passing in 2019.

“I’ve been blessed my whole life—with family, faith, and love,” she said. “Serving others is how I give back.”

Through her example, Mary Lou has inspired countless others to volunteer. Her life reflects the very heart of Vincentian service: humble, faithful, and rooted in love.

## Past Recipients

Over the years, the Vincentian Charism Award has honored individuals whose lives reflect the compassion, courage, and commitment of Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Louise de Marillac, and Mother Xavier Ross.

Each honoree has demonstrated a spirit of service that lies at the heart of the Vincentian tradition, carrying the mission forward in their own unique and transformative ways.

- **2019:** Richard Sack, Welcome Central, Leavenworth, Kansas
- **2020:** Irene Caudillo, El Centro, Kansas City, Kansas
- **2021:** Kathy Dean, Uplift, Kansas City, Missouri
- **2022:** Eric Basye, Community Leadership and Development, Inc. (CLDI), Billings, Montana
- **2023:** Mary Ann Finch, Care Through Touch Institute, San Francisco, California
- **2024:** John Sage, Bridges to Life, Houston, Texas



Mary Lou leads a scarf-juggling activity.



# An Open House

By Rita McGinnis, SCL

Mother House Sisters recently completed a project begun at their Spring All-Community Assembly in May 2025. At that time the Sisters had whole-heartedly voted to open their Mother House fourth floor empty rooms to become a guest area for the Sisters' families and friends. A task force of five worked through the details, planning, and implementation with support from many of the Sisters and Mother House departments. The first guests were Sisters from outside the Mother House as they met for the Fall All-Community Assembly in September.

On September 20, 2025, the SCL Council and Mother House Sisters gathered for a time of prayer and open house to formally dedicate the space. The door to each new guest room was fitted with a "Grand Opening" red ribbon which the Mother House Sisters cut to symbolize the opening of this new venture. As they gathered, they prayed for all the good that this new initiative would bring.

Members of the Mother House Fourth Floor Guest Area Task Force are Sisters Kathy Atkins, Bernadette Helfert, Donna Jean Henson, Rita McGinnis, and Mother House Coordinator Sherry Wickenhauser.



Sister Elizabeth Skalicky enjoys the artwork displayed throughout the fourth floor of the Mother House. This art was purposefully chosen from the Sisters' original artwork and from areas where Sisters had previously served.



Sister Margaret Hogan (above) and Sister Bernadette Helfert (below) cut the ribbons to the newly dedicated guest rooms on the Mother House's fourth floor, marking the official opening of the refreshed hospitality space.



With smiles and scissors in hand, Sisters Peg Johnson (above) and Mary Pat Johnson (below) help open the newly refreshed guest rooms on the Mother House's fourth floor.



Sisters gather for prayer to bless the Guest Area.



Sister Rita Orleans tours the Guest Area with her bright smile adding joy to the celebration.



Sisters make their way down the hallway to explore the recently dedicated Guest Area rooms.

During the dedication of the Guest Area, the Sisters shared a prayer that reflected the many ways this new space will serve the Community.

They prayed for safe travels and warm visits, for joyful family gatherings, and for moments of support during times of loss. The prayer also acknowledged those who lack adequate

housing and affirmed the Sisters' ongoing commitment to care for others. Finally, they offered thanks for those who helped prepare the space and bring the project to completion.

## *A Blessing of Welcome*

***“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.”***  
***Hebrews 13:2***

“We pray for all those, angels and saints, who we will greet, and for whom we have prepared these spaces.

***May this be a house of New Beginnings.***

We lift our voices to pray for the travelers, for safe journeys, for happy homecomings. For family and friends who will visit in happy times, family gatherings, Jubilees, and celebrations.

***May this be a house of Joy.***

We lift our voices to pray for family and friends who will gather in times of sorrow, accompanying on a last journey and a final farewell, celebrating a Sister’s life well-lived.

***May this be a house of Compassion.***

As we gather we remember those who are without adequate housing for themselves and their families. We pray that, with charity and love, a harvest of care may be raised up among our American people to work with those inadequately housed toward respectful solutions.

***May this be a house of Hope.***

We lift our voices to pray for all whose work has prepared this space.

***May this be a house of Gratitude.”*** 

## ***A Shared Home: From Cameroon to Leavenworth***

*By Rita McGinnis, SCL*

The globe did a mighty shrink when Sister Marivone Buse Kang joined the Mother House Sisters and the University of Saint Mary (USM) Community from her home in Cameroon, west Africa. Leavenworth, Kansas and Buea, Cameroon found common ground that day.

Sister Marivone is a Sister of St. Theresé of the Child Jesus of Buea, Cameroon. There are 100 Sisters in her congregation with 10 Sisters currently studying in the United States. Living at the Mother House and studying at USM, Sister Marivone is becoming acquainted with both sides of this campus and finds joys and challenges in each.

Getting used to the food and the weather has been an exercise in adaptation. The basic food is the same but cooking with distinctive spices, which taste like home, is different. It is much warmer in Cameroon with two basic seasons, the rainy and dry seasons. Kansas thunderstorms are not something that Sister Marivone is used to, and they can be intimidating with the rain, wind, lightening, and thunder all happening at once.



Sister Marivone renews her vows during Mass at the Mother House on October 1, 2025, the feast of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, her Community's patron saint.



Sister Marivone Buse Kang, of the Sisters of St. Theresé of the Child Jesus of Buea, stands beside the St. Thérèse of Lisieux etching, also known as “The Little Flower.” The image honors the saint who inspires her congregation’s mission of love and simplicity, now shared across continents from Cameroon.

Sister Marivone earned her associate's degree in religious arts at Assumption College for Sisters, administered by the Sisters of Christian Charity in New Jersey. She is at USM to complete her work towards a degree in secondary education, and is grateful for this opportunity. Having observed at Xavier Catholic School in Leavenworth, she has already witnessed the interaction between teachers and students in real-time in the classroom. Sister reflected that students here have the advantage of having enough materials and textbooks to support their learning; that is not true in all the schools in Cameroon and it makes the teacher's job much more difficult.

When she finishes her academic work in the United States, she will return and teach in her Community's schools in Cameroon. She may also be tasked with a role in administration, if there is a need. 



Sister Marivone makes her way to class at the University of Saint Mary, where she is completing her degree in secondary education.



During a visit with the Mother House Sisters, Sister Marivone points to her home on a carved wooden map of Africa, sharing about her life and ministry in Cameroon while studying in Leavenworth.

## Systems

*By Susan Rieke, SCL*

We must trust in the universe's true rhythm, its system of harmony along the constellations' highways.

Among stars are no systems of bombs, no borders against brown skins, where human giants stand in primordial chaos before the dawn.

We need new giants who create profound and proactive systems, like the universe's systems of harmony among nations:

an abolition of power brokers who are greedy for personal gain and lust for money and pleasure.

We must cultivate systems of generous hearts, bodies to serve, and souls united in a dance with the circle of universal grace.

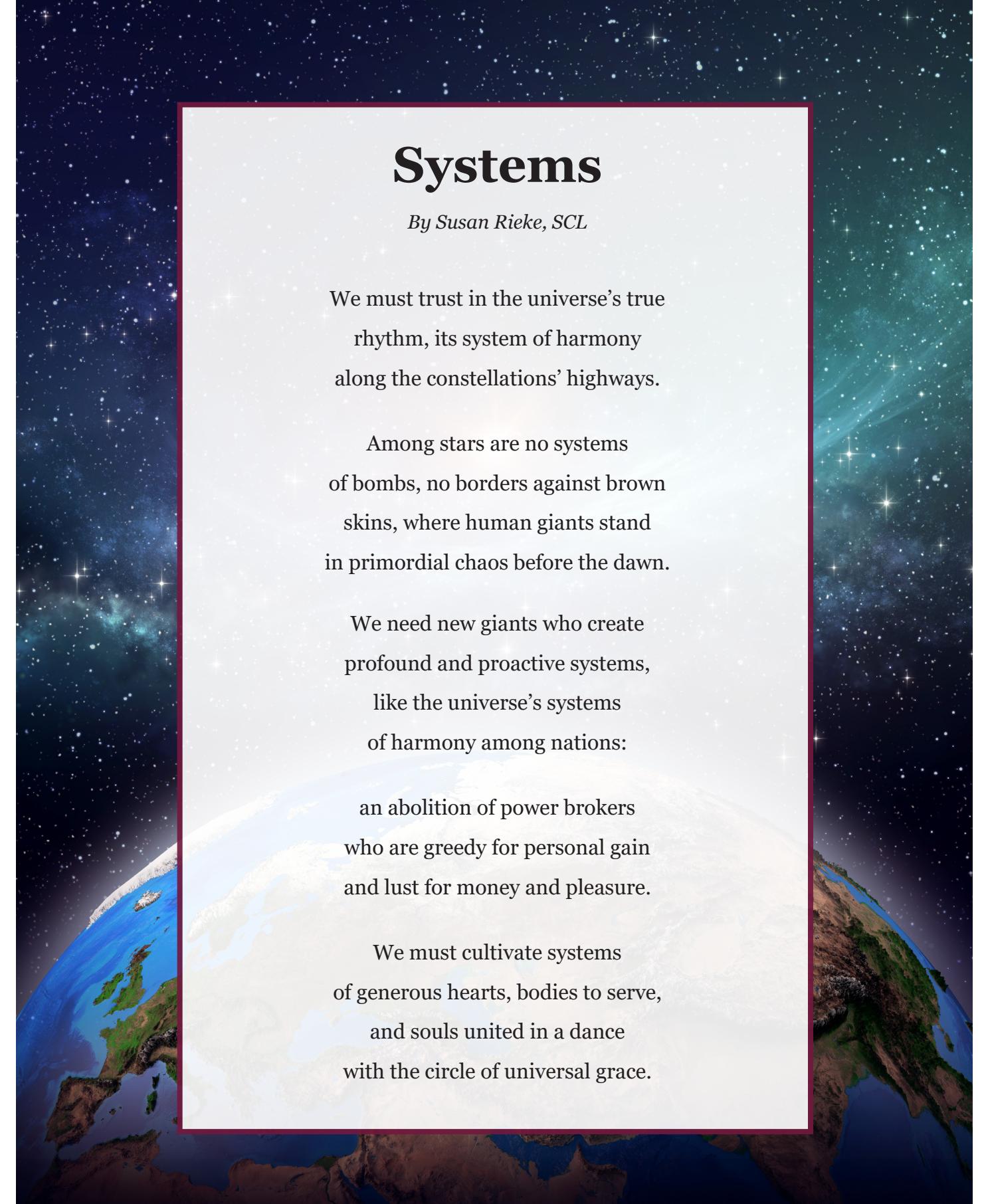


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OF LEAVENWORTH

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