

VOICES — OF CHARITY



SISTERS OF CHARITY
OF LEAVENWORTH

— SPRING 2026 —



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:

A ministry of prayer and presence: Hermana Laura Rumiche Morales visits with Señora Donatila Parina at her home in Chuschi, Ayacucho, Peru, offering prayer, companionship, and pastoral support through the simple but meaningful act of listening and shared presence. In communities where isolation and hardship are common, these visits provide connection, comfort, and a reminder that no one is forgotten.

Photo used with permission: Señora Lucia Cabana.

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The Sisters of Charity
of Leavenworth trace their
roots to the charism, spirit, and
ministry of Saint Vincent de Paul
and Saint Louise de Marillac.

Founded in 1858 in Leavenworth,
Kansas, 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.



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From the Community Director



Sister Eileen Haynes, SCL

“All of us change in some measure, each because of the other. But flesh and blood, nerves, veins, senses respond to forces and currents that we shall never be able to explain. Our old selves fade into the unreality of old photographs. And that is as it should be. We must change and assist others to change into a semblance of our dear Saviour and His beloved Mother.” Mother Xavier

The interactions we experience daily do play a significant role in shaping who we are. Sometimes, it is through the unexpected comment, action, or smile that draws us to a space of interconnectedness. A sense of wholeness. An awareness of joy deep within.

What are the opportunities that are presented to you to grow more and more into the semblance of our dear Saviour and His beloved Mother, even when you are feeling tired, too busy, or “this isn’t my area of comfortability?”

May the eyes of our heart be open for the invitations that await us each day to walk with another, whoever that may be and whatever the need. May our feet go to the place where our heart is.

Now, with God’s grace.

Sister Eileen Haynes, SCL

Sister Eileen Haynes, SCL
SCL Community Director

Holy Hangout:

Where Generations Meet and Flourish

On a campus shaped by the living presence of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth (SCL) and the spirit of the University of Saint Mary (USM), something simple is becoming something meaningful. They call it “Holy Hangout.”

Holy Hangout offers an opportunity where relationships form, stories are shared, and the Vincentian call to care for one another takes anchor. It reflects what this spring issue of *Voices of Charity* invites us to consider: tending to the marginalized and caring for the fragile Earth always begins with relationship.

A Place for Kindling Relationships

For Denise Whelan, Campus Minister at USM, Holy Hangout is rooted in what she calls relational ministry. “Before students can grow spiritually, they need relationship,” she said. “They need to experience love first. That’s what opens the door.”

After an earlier bingo-style gathering, Whelan and a small team reimaged the experience. They created a format that encouraged conversation rather than competition. Students and Sisters were invited to talk, share stories, and get to know one another more intentionally.

The result was immediate. “Students keep asking, ‘When is the next one?’” Whelan said. “There’s a real desire for these relationships.”

During the event, something unexpected happened. The simple prompts meant to spark conversation began to unlock something deeper. Stories emerged. Sisters shared memories of ministry, of places they had served, and of lives shaped by faith. Students listened, asked questions, and found themselves drawn in.

“Our elders have stories, wisdom, and life experience,” Whelan said. “Sometimes society



Sister Mary Agnes Hogan and Aasean Whitener



Ava Klassen, Erik Brim, and Sister Donna Jean Henson



Izabelle Mesa and Sister Jean Marian Rilinger

forgets that. But here, students get to receive it.” For many students, these encounters bridge a divide. Some are far away from their grandparents. Others have never had meaningful relationships with older adults. Sitting across from a Sister and hearing her story changes that.

It also changes how they understand dignity. Students begin to learn patience, attentiveness, and respect. They discover how to be present to someone whose pace of life is different from their own. And the connection goes both ways.

“The students exhibit a respectful attitude toward their elders,” said Sister Elizabeth (Liz) Youngs, an SCL and the Director of the Doctor of Education Program for USM. “They benefit from hearing stories and perspectives that are different from their own, and the Sisters benefit from the energy and joy the students bring.” What might have once been a gap between generations becomes a place of mutual belonging.

Tending To What Is Often Overlooked

In a culture that often separates generations, bringing them together is itself an act of care. Whelan names a reality that is easy to overlook. Older adults are often set aside or forgotten. In that sense, they can be among those on the margins.

Holy Hangout offers a different vision. It creates space where women religious are not only seen but valued. Where their lives of service are honored. Where their stories continue to shape the future.

At the same time, students’ character is being formed. They begin to recognize the dignity of every person, not as an abstract idea, but as something lived in real relationship. They hear stories of service to those who are poor and marginalized, and they begin to imagine their own place within that call. “They don’t just hear about serving others,” Whelan said. “They experience it.”



From left, Sister Therese Marie Steiner, USM student, Misty Imogene, and Sister Judith Jackson share a joyful moment during Holy Hangout, where a simple game became an opportunity to build connection across generations.

These relationships also gently respond to loneliness on both sides. Students who are homesick find comfort in the presence of the Sisters. Sisters who have spent their lives in active ministry find renewed connection in engaging with young people. Each encounter becomes a reminder that no one is meant to be forgotten.

An Ecology of Relationship

For Sister Liz, these encounters reflect something even broader. They are part of what the Church calls integral ecology, where care for people and care for creation are intimately connected.

“The cry of the Earth is inseparable from the cry of the poor,” she said, echoing a principle that shapes both the mission of the Sisters and the life of the campus.

Just as the natural world depends on balance and relationship, so too does human life. Each stage of life has its

place. Each generation has something to offer. When those relationships are nurtured, something life-giving inherently emerges.

On the shared campus of the Sisters and the University, that reality is visible. Students and Sisters cross paths at Mass and at events such as sports games, music performances, and lectures, and now more intentionally through gatherings like Holy Hangout. Over time, strangers become familiar. Familiarity becomes relationship, and relationship becomes formation.

Students begin to see the Sisters not as distant figures, but as women who are joyful and committed to Community life. They grow curious about

vocation, about purpose, and about what it means to live a life centered in faith and service. Sisters, in turn, see their legacy carried forward. “I see a deep goodness in the students,” Sister Liz said. “They are eager to grow, to serve, and to become who they are called to be.”

What happens at Holy Hangout may look straightforward. A game. A conversation. A shared moment.

But beneath it is something enduring. It is the quiet work of tending relationships. It is the recognition of dignity across generations. It is a small but meaningful way of caring for what might otherwise be overlooked. And in that space, the mission continues. 🌱



Sofia Predomo, a USM student, smiles as she goes home with a basket filled with nonperishable food items and other small gifts.

Meet Denise Whelan

Campus Minister, University of Saint Mary



Denise Whelan. Photo credit: Morris Lane Photography.

Denise Whelan (left) brings a heart for relational ministry to her work with students at USM. Her path to campus ministry has been shaped by years of service, including youth ministry, parish work, and time spent as an activities director in a senior living community.

Her experiences across generations continue to influence her approach today. She is passionate about creating spaces where students feel known, welcomed, and invited into relationship with God and one another.

At USM, Denise works to build connections between students and the Sisters of Charity, encouraging a campus culture firmly established in Vincentian values, community, and care for others. 🌱

Caring *for the* Whole Person



Pierson and Kena Ellington serve the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth through restorative care and nursing at Ross Hall. Together, their work supports the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the Sisters they serve.

Every day at Ross Hall, healing takes many forms. Sometimes it looks like carefully updating a care plan or listening closely to a Sister's concern. Other times, it looks like encouragement during an exercise class or celebrating a successful rehabilitation journey.

For Kena and Pierson Ellington, who have been married for 20 years, caring for others is more than a profession. It is a daily commitment to helping each person maintain dignity, purpose, and quality of life.

Kena serves as Medical Records Supervisor/RN at Ross Hall, where no two days are alike. Her work ranges from reviewing physician orders and updating care plans to ensuring accurate medical documentation so Sisters receive the best possible care.

"I have always wanted to be a nurse and help people," Kena said. "Caring for the whole person, to me, means looking at all aspects of

their life, what their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs are rather than just symptoms or a disease process.”

Her path into nursing was shaped by the loss of her mother and other close family members at an early age and years of experience in long-term care. After high school, Kena began as a CNA, later became an LPN, and eventually returned to school to earn her RN in 2024. Since joining the Sisters of Charity in 2008, she has served in multiple roles across Ross Hall. “Experiencing these different roles has helped me grow as a nurse, a woman, and a person in general,” she shared.

Pierson, who has worked for the Sisters for 12 years, serves as Restorative Lead. He works closely with Sisters through exercise maintenance programs

and leads several fitness classes focused on strength, flexibility, and mobility. “We work on things in physical therapy to help improve quality of life,” Pierson said.

His interest in caring for older adults began early in life. As a child, he spent time volunteering in long-term care facilities where his mother worked as a nurse. “I enjoyed spending time with and helping older adults,” he said.

Though their responsibilities differ, both Kena and Pierson emphasize that healing extends beyond physical treatment. Listening, patience, encouragement, and presence are often what matter most.

“Most of the time it is just someone to listen to them and advocate for them,” Kena said.

“Sometimes a patient just wants their concerns to be heard.”

Pierson echoed that sentiment. Beyond medical care, he believes people need “encouragement to keep moving forward” and “someone to listen to them.”

Over the years, both say the Sisters themselves have left a lasting impact on them. “The Sisters are some of the strongest, hardworking, most compassionate, caring, and confident women I have ever known,” Kena said.

For Pierson, supporting the Sisters is a way of giving back to a Community that has become deeply meaningful to him. “The Sisters mean a lot to me,” he said. “That is why I try my best to do my part to support them and their mission.” 🌸

**“Sometimes a
patient just wants
their concerns
to be heard.”**
Kena Ellington

Pierson Ellington leads Sisters in a music and movement activity in the Ross Hall physical therapy department. Combining rhythm, movement, and social connection, activities like these support whole health by encouraging physical activity, coordination, cognitive engagement, and emotional well-being in a communal setting.





Volunteers gather at the Leavenworth County Council on Aging during a community pantry drive, collecting and organizing food to support neighbors across the Leavenworth community. L-R: Olivia, Jessica, and Brandon Pontbriant, Kat McIntyre, Connie Harmon, Sister Amy Willcott, Sister Vickie Perkins, John Shively, and Ashley Hernandez.

At the Table Together: How the Feed LV COalition is Strengthening Community Response to Hunger in Leavenworth

Hunger in Leavenworth is not always visible, but it is ever-present. When Ashley Hernandez, Organizing and Policy Coordinator for the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth (SCL), arrived in Leavenworth, Kansas, in late 2022, she began to notice the signs right away. Grocery costs were rising, and stores were not geographically accessible to all. Some neighbors were clearly struggling. “It was immediately apparent that there was a food insecurity issue,” she said.

What she has come to understand since is that hunger in Leavenworth is

not confined to one group or one circumstance. It touches students, seniors, families, individuals with disabilities, immigrants, and those experiencing homelessness. Often, it is intertwined with other challenges such as limited transportation, rising housing costs, and financial instability.

In response, a growing network of partners is working together to meet both the immediate need and the deeper causes.

At the center of that effort is the Feed LV COalition.



Pantry shelves at the Leavenworth County Council on Aging are stocked through local food drives, helping ensure that essential items are readily available.

Rapid Response to Meet the Moment

In October 2025, the end of SNAP benefits was a looming threat. Local leaders recognized that many in the community could soon face even greater hardship. “We knew the need was about to increase,” Hernandez said. “We had to do something to meet the moment.”

Within a single day, plans were underway. Calls were made, partners were invited, and a vision began to take shape. Within three days, nearly 20 organizations and churches gathered for the first food security forum, an effort jump-started by Hernandez and the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth.

The Sisters not only convened the gathering, but they also participated fully. They helped organize, reached out across the city and SCL Community, and showed up in large numbers. From that first meeting, action followed quickly, including a food drive at the Council on Aging supported by Sisters, volunteers, and community partners.

Their response reflects a long-held understanding at the heart of the Vincentian mission, that care for those who are vulnerable begins by recognizing how close that need truly is. “We don’t always realize it [the need] is our neighbors, our students, or our colleagues,” Hernandez said. “But it is.”

Seeing the Whole Picture

Emerging from the first gathering was a shared commitment to work together differently. The Feed LV COalition brings together nonprofits, churches, service providers, and community members to create a coordinated approach to food insecurity across Leavenworth County. Its work is grounded not only in meeting immediate needs, but in addressing the systems that contribute to hunger in the first place.

This reflects an integral approach, the understanding that human needs are interconnected. “Food insecurity is rarely just about food,” Hernandez explained. “It is connected to health, housing, wages, and access. That is why we cannot work in silos.”

Through collaboration, the Feed LV COalition is strengthening communication, aligning resources, and building a more effective response than any one organization could achieve alone.

Early in its work, the Feed LV COalition set out to better understand the landscape of hunger in Leavenworth County. What they found revealed both need and opportunity. Some voids are geographic. In areas such as North Leavenworth, Easton, and parts of the county without incorporated services, access to grocery stores and fresh food is limited. Other shortfalls are



Mission of Feed LV COalition

Advancing food security in Leavenworth County through coordinated action, shared resources, and systemic solutions.

What Makes It Different

- Brings organizations together instead of working in isolation
- Addresses root causes, not just immediate need
- Focuses on long-term, sustainable systems

Key Focus Areas

- Expanding access to food across the county
- Strengthening collaboration among providers
- Improving transportation and infrastructure
- Building sustainable funding and partnerships

Get Involved

- Join a working group
- Volunteer at events or food drives
- Participate in a community forum
- Help share information and resources

experienced by particular populations. College students, seniors, immigrants, single parents, and individuals with disabilities often face additional barriers when seeking support. Some families hesitate to ask for help at all. There are also resource challenges, including limited access to fresh and nutritious food, insufficient cold storage and transportation, and inconsistent funding or volunteer capacity.

At the same time, lack of coordination and information, internet restrictions, and transportation barriers can make it difficult for people to find services or for organizations to work together effectively. Naming these realities has become an important step toward addressing them with clarity and purpose.

Building Towards Sustainability

While the work is ongoing, there are already signs of meaningful progress. Community pantries are expanding, increasing access in neighborhoods where resources are limited. Organizations are sharing ideas and resources in new ways. Relationships are forming that allow for collaboration and long-term planning. “I have been surprised by the willingness of people to come together,” Hernandez said. “There is a tangible desire to not just respond, but to build something better.” There is also growing interest from community leaders and elected officials, signaling broader support for sustained solutions.

The work of Feed LV COalition continues to grow. In the coming year, the organization plans to host quarterly food drives, community focus groups, a mental health block party, and a resource fair. At the same time, efforts are focused on building a strong foundation by establishing trust, strengthening partnerships, and developing systems that can endure.

Three working groups guide this work, focusing on education and access, direct service and community projects, and organizing and advocacy. Together, they seek to meet immediate needs while advancing long-term solutions.

The work of Feed LV COalition is an invitation. Sisters, SCL Associates, SCL employees, and community members are all welcome to take part, whether through leadership, service, or participation in events and conversations. This invitation reflects something bigger than a program or initiative. It speaks to a shared responsibility for one another.

In the spirit of the Gospel and the Vincentian tradition, caring for those who are hungry is not only about providing food. It is about recognizing dignity, building relationships, and working toward a culture where all can flourish. Around the table, there is room for everyone. 🍷



Bright blue pantry shelves, placed throughout the Leavenworth and Lansing area, offer free nonperishable items donated by various sponsors for anyone in need.

A Place at the Table for All

Across the Mother House and Ross Hall campus, the response to hunger also takes form.

In kitchens and common spaces, Sisters gather to bake cookies and cakes for the monthly free community meal and support other outreach initiatives, offering something special to those who come to the table.

Sisters and staff spend time assembling goodie sacks for guests at the Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope, filling them with simple items that communicate care.

These acts carry personal and consistent meaning. They are offered with intention. While efforts like

the Feed LV COalition bring partners together to address food insecurity across the community, these moments on campus reflect that same commitment in a different way. They are reminders that responding to hunger is not only about large initiatives, but also about being there for neighbors in need. 🍪



Sister Marie Michael Mollis prepares a homemade cake for the monthly free community meal at the First United Methodist Church in Leavenworth.



Sister Renée Washut, seated, and staff members Julie Newman, left, and Sarah Nichols bake cookies to give to students at a USM basketball game.



Sister Ruth Reischman packages homemade cookies for one of the free community events in the Leavenworth area.



Sisters gather to fill goodie bags for guests of the Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope. In the left photo are Sisters Judy Hayes and Clara Scherr. In the right photo are Sisters Regina Deitchman, Maureen Kehoe, Frances Marie Grady, and Kathy Atkins.

Following the Current

A Call to Care for Creation and One Another

SCL Associate Katie Kilbourne (right) volunteers at the Issaquah Salmon Hatchery in Washington, where she helps educate visitors and cares for the salmon whose life cycle reflects the interconnectedness of creation.



For SCL Associate Katie Kilbourne, ministry has taken shape in ways both familiar and unexpected, guided by a lifelong thread of Vincentian influence and a growing call to care for creation.

Her early encounters with the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth left a lasting impression. Growing up in Billings, Montana, she experienced their presence in classrooms, in healthcare, and

in the faithful ways they served those on the margins. Their joy and commitment to others became an early model of what compassionate service can look like.

A Foundation of Service

Years later, that foundation expanded in a new direction. After relocating to the Pacific Northwest, Katie found herself drawn more intentionally into questions of environmental care and justice. A pivotal shift

came through her encounter with *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical on care for our common home. What had once been an appreciation for the beauty of the Earth grew into a sense of responsibility for its protection.

With the concept of integral ecology, she began to see more clearly the connection between environmental degradation and human suffering, particularly among vulnerable populations.

Salmon following a seasonal journey that sustains both ecosystem and life along the river. Photo credit: Bill Perry.



The impacts of climate change are not shared equally but are most strongly felt by those with the fewest resources.

Where Creation and Culture Meet

That awareness found a tangible expression close to home. Living near the Issaquah Salmon Hatchery in Washington, Katie became involved as a volunteer, helping to educate visitors and support the ongoing work of habitat restoration. Her role connects her not only to the natural world, but also to the cultural and spiritual traditions of Native communities for whom salmon hold deep significance.

The work is both practical and meaningful. Each year, she participates in the raising and release of salmon, witnessing what she describes as a “miraculous journey” from freshwater streams to the ocean and back again. This rhythm has strengthened her sense of connection to creation and to God.

A Call to Justice

At the same time, her involvement in the Sacred Salmon Campaign has broadened her understanding of justice. Through collaboration with Indigenous communities and advocacy efforts, she has come to recognize the lasting impacts of displacement, broken treaties, and environmental harm. In this way, care for creation and care for people are not separate callings, but one.

Caring for the Earth is both a moral responsibility and an invitation to address the social realities

that prevent people and ecosystems from flourishing. This reflects the Vatican II Council’s call to respond to the signs of the times. Those needs include both ecological crisis and the suffering of marginalized communities.

Community and Hope

Katie’s ministry is also shaped by community. She is a member of Jesuit Volunteer EnCorps, an organization where members volunteer part time in their communities while gathering regularly for enrichment and mutual support.

Through her involvement, she is part of a network committed to justice, spirituality, simple living, and shared service. There, she witnesses the power of intergenerational collaboration, where the energy of younger generations meets the wisdom of those who have gone before. It is in these relationships, along with local environmental efforts and the commitment of communities working together, that she finds hope.

For those who feel drawn to care for both the Earth and the marginalized but are unsure where to begin, the path forward can be simple. Start close to home. Small changes, local involvement, and a willingness to learn can grow into something much larger.

Looking back, the path that has led Katie to this work is not a straight line, but one shaped by relationships, experiences, and an increasing awareness of the interconnectedness of all life. Looking ahead, there is reason for hope. 🌱





A daily ritual, a bit of humor, and a lot of faithfulness: Father Dennis' collection of "I've Been Screened" COVID stickers became a sign of steady presence in uncertain days.

Day by Day, Sticker by Sticker

Farewell to Father Dennis Schaab, C.P.P.S.

After 13 years of faithful service, Father Dennis Schaab, C.P.P.S., concluded his ministry as Mother House and Ross Hall chaplain on February 2, 2026. For more than a decade, he was a steady and compassionate presence within the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth (SCL) Community, walking alongside Sisters, SCL Associates, and staff through both ordinary moments and sacred ones.

For the SCL Community, he was known for his humility, loyalty, and his dry wit that surfaced at just the right moment. His presence was quiet but constant. Whether in the chapel, at a bedside, or in conversation, Father Dennis offered something deeply needed. He was more than a chaplain; he was a companion.

“He was a community man. He had a servant heart,” said Sister Rita McGinnis, Mother House Administrator.

Showing Up, Especially When It Was Hard

That companionship was especially evident during the long and uncertain days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Each day, those entering the Mother House campus were screened for symptoms and then given a small yellow sticker. Father Dennis followed the same routine, but at the end of each day, he made it his own. He removed his sticker and placed it on a large, framed board. Day after day, the collection grew.

His simple ritual was a quiet act of humor, a sign of persistence, and a visual testament to endurance. Each sticker marked a day he showed up, even when

the world felt uncertain. It brought lightness to a heavy time.

Tending Through Presence

Father Dennis lived the call to care for others not through grand gestures, but through gentle presence.

During the pandemic, the Sisters of Ross Hall and the Mother House experienced isolation, disrupted routines, and separation from loved ones. In those moments, tending meant celebrating the Eucharist via livestream, offering prayer, multiple phone conversations, and calm reassurance.

“His office hours were often spent on the phone with Sisters during COVID and beyond,” said Megan Trout, Pastoral Care Coordinator for the



Sister Karen Guth offers a heartfelt farewell to Father Dennis, whose ministry has left a lasting impact on the lives of many.

Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. Those conversations, along with countless visits, prayers, and moments of listening, reflected Father Dennis’ commitment to accompanying others wherever they were.

A Lasting Mark

Father Dennis is the second-longest-serving chaplain at the Mother House, surpassed only by Father Thomas Downey. Yet his legacy is not measured simply in years, but in presence through the many small, faithful ways he walked with the SCL Community.

Like the board covered in yellow stickers, his ministry is remembered not for one defining moment, but for the steady accumulation of days spent serving others with faithfulness, compassion, and care. 🕊️

Sister Loretta Fick presents the gifts during Jubilee Mass as Father Dennis receives them.





Sister Mary Jane Schmitz smiles while preparing recycled pill bottles for reuse, continuing a ministry that supports medical care while reducing waste. An SCL for 72 years, serving as a teacher and principal in elementary schools, Sister Mary Jane continues to teach, influence, and guide.

Small Acts, Lasting Impact:

Sister Mary Jane Schmitz Finds Meaning in Caring for People and the Earth

In a workspace filled with small plastic bottles, Sister Mary Jane Schmitz carries out a ministry that reaches far beyond the room.

Each medication bottle is washed, dried, and prepared by hand. Labels are removed. Caps are matched. When finished, they are boxed and shipped to Matthew 25: Ministries in Blue Ash, Ohio, where they are sent to developing countries and reused in pharmacies that rely on donated supplies.

For Sister Mary Jane, organizing the work is steady and meaningful. “Helping people and the Earth is just the right thing to do,” she said. “That’s the best motivation.”

Reducing Waste, Serving Others

Sister Mary Jane gathers pill bottles from across the SCL Community, preparing each one for reuse. The process takes time and attention, but she does not mind. She finds satisfaction in knowing the bottles will serve someone else. Additionally, she said, “I like the idea that I’m doing my part to save the bottles from a landfill.”

The program reflects a dual purpose: improving access to medical care while reducing waste generated by empty bottles. For Sister Mary Jane, that connection between human need and care for creation is what makes the work worthwhile.

**“Helping people and the Earth
is just the right thing to do.
That’s the best motivation.”**

Sister Mary Jane Schmitz

“Shipping is costly,” she said, “but caring for the Earth is worth the price.”

Her commitment extends beyond one project. Sister Mary Jane has made a personal decision to avoid single-use plastics whenever possible, choosing instead to reuse what she can and reduce what she throws away.

She reuses paper lunch sacks as trash liners and encourages others to consider the practice. She also helped introduce cloth napkins in the Mother House Dining Room, pressing each one herself so they are ready for use. Recently, Ross Hall has adopted a similar practice that is cared for by the Mother House Laundry Department. These choices may seem small, but they reflect a consistent way of living.

She has been an advocate for TerraCycle, a private recycling company specializing in hard-to-recycle materials that traditional municipal facilities cannot process. This advocacy helped begin a recycling initiative on the Mother House campus that is now supported by the SCL Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation.

Even now, she continues to look for new possibilities, including ways to recycle used medical gloves.

Letting Things Grow

Over time, she has seen how efforts can expand. “They start quietly and expand,” she said. She has watched changes take hold, such as reducing the use of disposable supplies at gatherings and encouraging more sustainable habits in everyday life.

Her influence also reaches beyond environmental efforts. At Xavier Elementary School in Leavenworth, she remains involved in “Prayer Buddies” and “Nickels for Needs.” While these programs began with the teachers, Sister Mary Jane helped bring them to life and sustain them.

A Way of Life

For Sister Mary Jane, none of this is complicated. It is not about recognition or scale. It is about doing what she can, where she is.

Even in her personal life, that mindset continues. She has gifted friends and family members with reusable lunch containers and bags, encouraging them to carry leftovers home rather than rely on disposable packaging. It is one more small way to care for both people and the planet.

Though she jokes that she might need a full-time job to rest from all her volunteering, her work reflects something more than activity. It reflects intention and the concept that meaningful change often begins with simple acts. 🌱



Sister Mary Jane Schmitz holds a reusable bag she brings for leftovers when dining out, part of her personal commitment to avoid single-use plastics and reduce everyday waste.

Guiding the Journey Toward Wholeness:

Accompanying Veterans Through Healing, Purpose, and Renewed Life



SCL Associate Laura Alexander, a Whole Health coach with the VA, supports veterans on their journey toward greater balance and well-being, walking alongside them as they define what matters most in their lives.

By Laura Alexander, SCLA

About 15 years ago, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) introduced a new service line called Whole Health in response to the opioid crisis impacting the United States. While suicide rates in the general population were concerning, the numbers among veterans were even more alarming. Whole Health emerged as a different kind of response, one that focused not only on treating illness, but also on supporting the full well-being of each person.

Whole Health is embedded in a holistic understanding of care. It recognizes that health is not just the absence of disease, but the presence of well-being across all dimensions: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Within this model, Whole Health coaches are trained to walk alongside individuals as they identify their goals, strengths, and barriers, helping them move toward a more balanced and meaningful life.

Alexander shares, “In my work as a Whole Health Coach, I let the veteran ‘drive the bus.’ I am there to support, to listen, and to gently guide. I believe each person is the expert in their own life. They know themselves better than anyone. My role is to create a safe and supportive space where they can reflect on what truly matters to them and begin to shape a path forward.”

This work is incredibly personal. Veterans engage in coaching to create the life they want to live, and that process often requires courage. It may mean setting new boundaries, changing relationships, shifting careers, or even relocating. It is not always easy, but when individuals begin to align their lives with their values and purpose, the impact can be profound.

Whole Health coaching also makes up the difference between clinical care and everyday life. It moves beyond appointments and diagnoses, focusing instead on sustainable habits and meaningful change. Through practices such as mindfulness, stress management, improved sleep, physical activity, and stronger social connections, individuals are supported in ways that touch every part of their lives.

At its core, this work reflects something deeper than healthcare. It reflects a way of seeing people.

The SCLA Mission Statement includes the words, “we strive to make a difference.” That commitment connects directly to the mission and charism of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth: to respond with mercy and love, to recognize the dignity of every person, and to tend to the care of others in meaningful ways.

“I am grateful to live that mission through my work,” says Alexander. “To accompany others in this way is both a responsibility and a gift. Each person carries their own story, their own struggles, and their own hopes. To walk with them, even for a time, is an honor.” 🌸

Statistics

- In 2011, U.S. veteran suicide rates remained high, with approximately 49,000 veterans taking their own lives between 2005 and 2011, averaging a rate roughly double that of the civilian population. Data indicates that in 2011, there were significant increases in suicide among younger (under 30) and female Veterans Health Administration (VHA) users. *Kemp, J. E., RN, PhD (2014, January 1).*
- Based on the 2025 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report (covering data through 2023), veteran suicide numbers have shown recent, slight declines—6,398 in 2023, down from 6,442 in 2022—suggesting slight progress, yet still presenting as a high-risk population. *Burnett, T., Psy.D., MDiv. (2026, March 8).*
- **Anyone can use the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Speak with someone 24/7 by calling 988 or texting 838255.**



Accompaniment in Chuschi



Hermana Susana Córdova Castillo (right) brings Communion to Señora Victoria Conde Huarancca during a pastoral home visit in Cancha Cancha, Ayacucho, Peru. Photos used with permission: Señora Lucia Cabana.



Hermana Laura Rumiche Morales (right) visits with Señora Donatila Parina in Chuschi, offering prayer, companionship, and pastoral support during a home visit.

In the rural community of Chuschi, Ayacucho, Peru, the Hermanas de la Caridad de Leavenworth continue their ministry of accompaniment, prayer, and presence, walking alongside those often pushed to the margins.

Through pastoral visits and community outreach, the Hermanas remain closely connected to the people they serve. They visit families in their homes, pray with those facing illness or hardship, and bring Communion to those unable to attend Mass, ensuring no one is forgotten.

That same spirit of care extends into community life. At the San Vicente de Paul Parish Soup Kitchen, weekly gatherings offer elderly neighbors a place to connect. Mornings of exercise and conversation offer a meaningful environment of dignity and belonging.

Formation also remains a priority. In March, 50 catechists from rural parishes gathered at San Pedro Parish in Cangallo for three days of training. Hermana Susana Córdova Castillo helped lead the sessions, supporting lay leaders who carry the faith into remote communities.

At the same time, efforts are underway to preserve a central place of worship in Chuschi.



Hermana Laura leads a morning activity at the parish dining hall, where elderly community members gather each week.

Following the completion of a technical report in March, the community has begun raising funds to repair the church's roof and one of its towers, an important step in sustaining both the physical space and the spiritual life it holds.

Life in Chuschi is shaped by distance and limited resources, but also by strong relationships. The Hermanas' presence helps bridge those gaps, offering support that is both practical and personal. 🕊️



Hermana Susana, Chuschi community members, and engineers review plans inside the Chuschi church as preparations continue for needed repairs to the historic worship space.



Where the Whisper is Heard

Marillac Retreat and Spirituality Center Offers Space for Rest, Renewal, and Quiet Transformation

*By Nic Herrmann,
Director of Marillac Retreat and Spirituality Center*



Nic Herrmann joined the Marillac Retreat and Spirituality Center team as Director in December 2025.

“Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.”
1 Kings 19:11–12

True now as it was then, the call of the Lord is not in the loud, the obtrusive, or the blatant. The call of God is in the gentle whisper. And how hard it is today to find a space quiet and serene enough to not only hear God’s gentle whisper, but to respond fully?

Since its opening in 2002, Marillac Retreat and Spirituality Center has dedicated itself to accompanying God’s people on their journey through retreats, spiritual direction, deep conversation, and community building. In that time, thousands of people from across the world

have made a pilgrimage to Marillac to retreat, rest, and renew. It is the goal of Marillac and the Marillac team to ensure that every guest who enters, no matter where they are on their camino and no matter their faith tradition or background, leaves this space more centered and grounded.

Rooted in the Charism

Marillac desires to offer its beautiful space in the charism of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, humbly, simply, and generously. Psalm 23 speaks of the Lord leading us to verdant pastures and allowing us to lie beside quiet waters. Marillac seeks to be a verdant pasture and calm waters where all souls can be refreshed.

Rest for Those Who Serve

We live in a fragile and interconnected world. We are more aware each day that what happens across the globe affects our own communities and neighborhoods. The people who visit Marillac are the same people confronting the wounds of this fragile world. They are encountering and accompanying those who have been forgotten, disposed of, and left behind.

Some guests come to Marillac for personal retreats, and some come to rest and renew

because they will soon return to ministering, shepherding, teaching, and consoling.

A Continuing Blessing

It is our sincere hope that those who visit Marillac bring with them their stories, their scars, their teachings, and their practices. We believe that the first Sisters of Charity, who arrived in Leavenworth almost 170 years ago, and those who come today bless this place by their presence.

We hope that upon leaving, our guests will do so having heard God's gentle whisper, because it is in this gentle whisper that all will be made well.

The Marillac team is excited to begin planning for 2027. In this, our 25th year of offering spaces of prayer and peace in the Center, we look to celebrate the spirituality of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth and invite all to this Jubilee celebration. Specific information about retreats, days of prayer, and events can be found at the following:

Website www.scls.org/marillac-center

Instagram www.instagram.com/marillacretreat 🐦



Just steps from Marillac Retreat and Spirituality Center, the prayer labyrinth offers a sacred space where visitors can walk, pray, and listen for the whisper of God's presence. Photo credit: Morris Lane Photography.

A Joyful Sound:

Ross Chapel Welcomes a New Organ With Gratitude and Celebration

Many Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, SCL Associates, area musicians, and friends gathered in Ross Chapel on February 15, 2026, for a joyful celebration as a new organ was dedicated and blessed. Filled with music, prayer, and gratitude, the afternoon marked the first time the instrument's rich sound echoed through the chapel.

The new organ was purchased following the retirement of the chapel's previous instrument, which had been generously donated by Pete and Pat Zink and faithfully served the SCL Community for more than 20 years. When the organ began experiencing significant mechanical issues in fall 2025, Sister Sheila Taylor, Director of Liturgy, turned to Rodgers Organs of Kansas City for guidance, where longtime friend and accomplished musician John Winkels serves as the company's local representative.

Winkels helped the Sisters select an instrument that would meet the Community's needs for worship and prayer. He also offered to present a dedication concert following the organ's installation, a gift that added special meaning to the celebration.

A Celebration of Song

The dedication service invited all present to give thanks for the gift of music and the role it plays in prayer. One prayer in the worship aid clearly expressed the hope for the instrument: "May it inspire your people to sing with clarity and vitality."



John Winkels, a Kansas City-based organist and representative for Rodgers Organs of Kansas City, rests at the console in Ross Chapel following the concert.

Throughout the concert, Winkels paid tribute to the rich musical heritage of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. He performed compositions by the late Sister Dominique Long (1925–2019), including "Lights of the City," and Sister Gloria Solomon's "As the Deer." Alongside his remarkable musicianship, he shared stories and memories of Sisters who helped shape the Community's musical tradition, including a tribute to the late Sister Rose Tomlin (1913–2002).

With its versatile capabilities, the organ will accompany daily liturgies, special celebrations, and communal prayer for years to come. More than a new instrument, it reflects the relationships, talents, and shared faith that continues to enrich the SCL Community.

As the music filled Ross Chapel, it also served as a reminder of the many musicians, composers, and leaders who have sustained a vibrant tradition of worship through song since 1858, nearly 170 years ago. As Sister Sheila Taylor reflected, "We are grateful to God for bestowing the gift of music upon our SCL Community through the years." 🌹

Listening to the Land, Listening to One Another:

The Land Justice Committee and the Role of Healing Relationships with the Earth and Its People

In recent years, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth (SCL) have accelerated their commitment to caring for the fragile Earth. For many, that commitment has taken new shape through the work of the SCL Land Justice Committee, a small group helping others reflect, learn, and respond to the interconnected needs of land and people.

Formed in December 2023, the committee emerged as part of its participation in the Land Justice Futures Focus Community Program, a two-year journey of education, reflection, and relationship building alongside other communities of women religious.

A dancer in vibrant regalia participates in the KU Powwow and Indigenous Cultures Festival. A group of Sisters and Associates attended the event as part of an ongoing commitment to listening, learning, and building deeper understanding around land justice and Indigenous history. Photo used with permission: KU Powwow and Indigenous Cultures Festival Planning Committee.



The learning process has become something more. It is becoming a new lens through which to understand mission, history, and responsibility.

A Mission Lead Call

While there is no single moment that sparked this work, its existence is undoubtedly Vincentian. The 2022 Directional Statement calls the SCL Community to tend to the care of marginalized people and the fragile Earth, a commitment that continues to guide discernment today.

Land justice, as the committee has come to understand it, expands the idea of environmental stewardship. It is not only about protecting land for future generations. It is also about acknowledging and repairing the harm experienced by societies who have been dispossessed by it. This understanding reflects a core truth of integral ecology. The cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor are inseparable.

To practice land justice, then, is to hold both realities together, seeking ecological sustainability while also pursuing racial healing, right relationship, and shared responsibility for the common good.

Learning, Listening, and Facing History

Over the past two years, the committee focused first on building a foundation by learning about the history of land in the United States, the ongoing effects of



Members of the SCL Land Justice Committee attended the Washunga Days Powwow in Council Grove, Kansas, an opportunity to listen, learn, and build relationships with members of the Kaw Nation and the broader Indigenous community. L-R: Committee members, Nick Keehler, Sister Sheila Karpan, Sister Liz Youngs, Kenny Davidson, and Sister Nancy Svetlecic, joined by Sister Pat Johannsen and Sister Réjane Cytacki.

colonization, and the role institutions, including religious communities, have played in that history.

Some of those discoveries were difficult. Research revealed that the land on which the SCL Mother House sits was acquired through systems that displaced Indigenous Peoples, with the Munsee being the most recent Indigenous steward before the Sisters of Charity. While the Sisters may not have been directly responsible for every aspect of that history, the reality remains that they benefited from it.

Acknowledging that truth is not about assigning blame. It is about accepting responsibility. "It remains

essential to understand that the Sisters were beneficiaries of a system that displaced people from their homes," Nick Keehler, Community Engagement Coordinator for the Sisters of Charity, shared. "As beneficiaries of that system, the Sisters have a responsibility to repair harm."

At the same time, the response within the SCL Community has been one of openness and engagement. Sisters and SCL Associates have shown a willingness to learn, reflect, and participate.

From Education to Relationship

As the Land Justice Committee moved into its second year, the focus shifted toward

relationship-building. Partnerships have begun to take shape with members of the Kanza, or Kaw Nation, as well as with other women religious communities engaged in similar work. Committee members have attended gatherings, workshops, and events, including efforts to support the protection of sacred land at Oak Flat, Arizona.

These experiences have underscored an important lesson. Land justice cannot happen in isolation. It requires listening. It requires humility. And it requires being present in ways that are guided by those most directly affected.

“Land justice is not possible without collaboration,” Nick explained. “Some have access to resources. Others have a vision for the common good. The work is about bringing those together in ways that serve everyone.”

Spiritual Practice, Not Just a Project

For the Sisters of Charity, land justice is a way of seeing. Sisters have engaged in this work not only through education and events, but also through prayer, by reflecting on the SCL Land Acknowledgment (inside back cover) and SCL Land Ethic (next page), and by integrating these into their spiritual lives. In this sense, land justice is both action and transformation. It invites an intentional awareness of our place within a web of relationships with one another, with the Earth, and with God.

Looking Ahead

With the initial two-year phase complete, the work continues. The committee will remain engaged with Land Justice Futures, offering ongoing educational opportunities and continuing to nurture relationships already formed while seeking new ones. Future possibilities include partnerships that support land access, food sovereignty, and community-based stewardship.

What success will look like five years from now is still unfolding. At its heart, it will be a community that understands the connection between ecological and social healing and is actively responding to it. Perhaps most importantly, the

path forward will not be predetermined. Instead, it will be shaped by listening, especially to those whose voices have too often been unheard. “Our role,” Nick said, “is to be ready to receive those asks, to listen, and to respond.”

Members of the SCL Community are encouraged to begin simply by learning, by praying, and by starting conversations. Even small steps, reading, reflecting, or discussing these ideas with others, can open the door to deeper understanding. Because at its core, land justice is about relationship. And like all relationships, it begins with listening. 🌱



USM students, including those pictured above, Leyton Ross, Adam Champagne, and Joseph Holland, joined faculty, staff, Sisters, SCL Associates, and SCL employees in planting a community garden at the Enchanted Forest, an off-site property recently purchased by USM. The project reflects a shared commitment to sustainability and care for the Earth. Photo used with permission: USM/ Hayden Parks.



Stewardship Close to Home



Left, SCL employees Stephanie Abbott, Don Stubbings, and Meg Milburn help plant flowers during an SCL campus clean-up day.

Right, Sister Jean Martin Dawson and Jo Ann Diale, a Bellroom employee, tend roses and share companionship through their ministry of caring for campus flowers. Not pictured: Bellroom employee Janice Thompson, who also helps.



Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth Land Ethic

As Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, we are called in the Spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul, to unite justice and charity in our lives by tending to the care of marginalized people and the fragile earth. We cherish what has been entrusted to us by our foundress, Mother Xavier Ross, and have spread deep roots in this land. Through the years, bolstered with devotion and prayer to Mary, women of faith, in collaboration with others, have stewarded the land responsibly and with care. This kinship calls us today to live in right relationship with all of God's creation.

We receive this sacred responsibility, mindful of the relationships other peoples have cultivated with this land before us, and who continue the practice of being in right relationship.

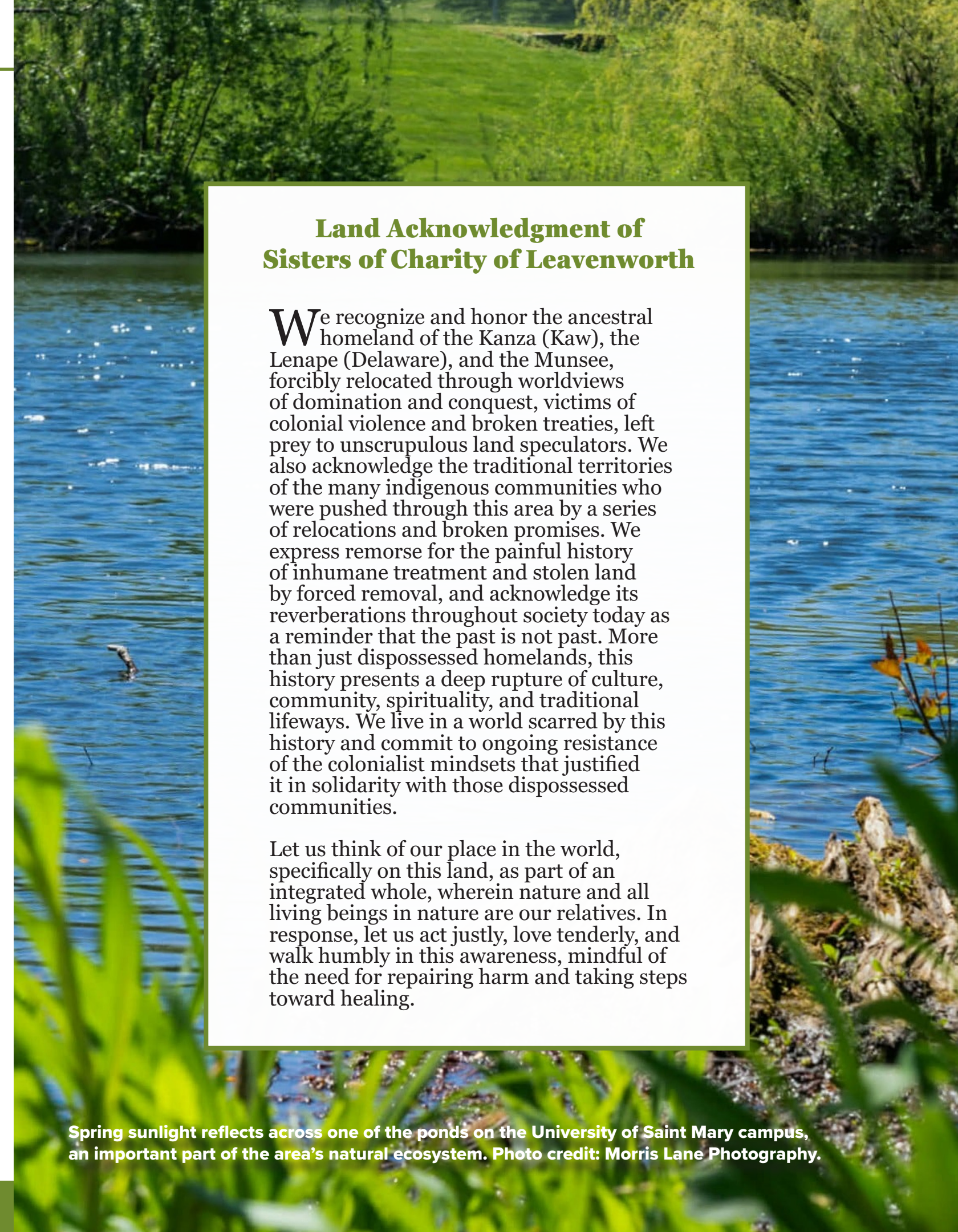
We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when we must choose our future. We recognize the need to be part of a global partnership to care for the Earth, guided by an ethical foundation. This Land Ethic is our commitment to walking humbly, taking steps toward healing as we make decisions about land, buildings and resources that honor the following principles:

1. We embrace Pope Francis' call to integral ecology, recognizing that all creation is interconnected and the cry of the Earth is inseparable from the cry of the poor. We recognize the health of our ecosystem is our health. We view land as part of the community to which we

belong, rather than something to be exploited.

2. We continue to educate ourselves, both individually and communally, about Earth and its creatures, knowing that humanity is a part of an interdependent system of relationships among living and non-living beings. The way we treat the land is the way we treat one another.
3. To steward land is a moral responsibility. Its practice should honor our obligation to past, present and future generations by regenerating and preserving the integrity, stability and beauty of the ecological community, including the soil, water, air, animals and plants.
4. We commit to fostering relationships grounded in solidarity with communities who have been dispossessed from their historic connection to land. We ally ourselves with their efforts and priorities.
5. Our decisions will honor the perspective of the Whole – the land and buildings as one – rather than as separate parcels. We recognize that our actions have consequences for the entire ecological system.
6. Through a spirit of gratitude for Earth's gifts, we acknowledge our own enoughtness, seeking to align our consumption of energy, food and other resources with Vincentian values. Through a spirit of reciprocity, we seek ways to give back and sustain the Earth as she sustains us.

We commit to this Land Ethic and ask for the grace of God to fulfill it.



Land Acknowledgment of Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth

We recognize and honor the ancestral homeland of the Kanza (Kaw), the Lenape (Delaware), and the Munsee, forcibly relocated through worldviews of domination and conquest, victims of colonial violence and broken treaties, left prey to unscrupulous land speculators. We also acknowledge the traditional territories of the many indigenous communities who were pushed through this area by a series of relocations and broken promises. We express remorse for the painful history of inhumane treatment and stolen land by forced removal, and acknowledge its reverberations throughout society today as a reminder that the past is not past. More than just dispossessed homelands, this history presents a deep rupture of culture, community, spirituality, and traditional lifeways. We live in a world scarred by this history and commit to ongoing resistance of the colonialist mindsets that justified it in solidarity with those dispossessed communities.

Let us think of our place in the world, specifically on this land, as part of an integrated whole, wherein nature and all living beings in nature are our relatives. In response, let us act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly in this awareness, mindful of the need for repairing harm and taking steps toward healing.

Spring sunlight reflects across one of the ponds on the University of Saint Mary campus, an important part of the area's natural ecosystem. Photo credit: Morris Lane Photography.



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