

VOICES — OF CHARITY



SISTERS OF CHARITY
OF LEAVENWORTH

— SUMMER 2025 —



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:

Sister Sharon Smith, who celebrates 50 years as a Sister of Charity this August, enjoys a peaceful moment with her pup Shep on the SCL campus. Photo by Linda Wlaysewski, sister of Sister Sharon.

Community Officers

Sister Eileen Haynes,
Community Director

Sister Melissa Camardo,
First Councilor

Sister Nancy Svetlecic, Councilor

Sister Rosemary Kolich, Councilor

Sister Jean Anne Panisko,
Community Treasurer

Voices of Charity

published by the
Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth
Cantwell Hall
4200 South 4th Street
Leavenworth, KS 66048-5054

Editorial Advisory Committee

Sister Rosemary Kolich
Sister Rita McGinnis
Megan Trout, SCLA
Sister Amy Willcott

Editor

Margaret Haik,
Director of Communications

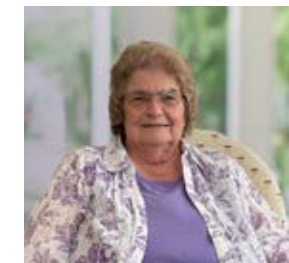
Design

Stephanie Nash, SCLA
Graphics and Communications
Manager

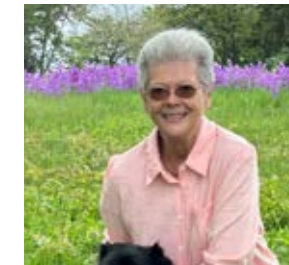
Printed on recycled paper by
McDonald Business Forms,
Overland Park, Kansas

Comments and story
suggestions appreciated.
Email to communications@scsls.org;
mail; or call 913-758-6508.

in this issue



Page 8



Page 14



Page 20

- 3 A Synodal Church: The Christian Faithful on Pilgrimage**
- 5 On Pope Francis and His Journey to Take the Church to the Peripheries**
- 6 Sisters Share Recollections, Prayers, and Hopes for New Pope**
- 8 No One Dies Alone: A Ministry of Presence**
- 10 Ministry of Prayer and Presence**
- 11 Climate Action on the SCL Campus**
- 14 Golden Jubilee: A Celebration of Charity**
- 16 Embrace the Day: Mother House Jubilee Celebration**
- 18 The Integral Ecology Initiative: A Shared Commitment to the Earth and One Another**
- 20 First Generation Mentor Helps Others Navigate College Life**
- 22 Growing Justice: USM's Integral Approach to Food Sustainability**
- 24 Building Community Across Distances: The SCL Associate Speaker Series**
- 26 Carrying Forward the Mission: An Associate in Healthcare**
- 28 Hope for Hurricane Victims**
- 29 Federation Communicators Meet in New York**

The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth trace our 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.

Voices of Charity seeks to remain faithful to the charism of Saint Vincent, Saint Louise, and Mother Xavier. Looking through the lens of Integral Ecology, these articles hope to educate, highlight ministries, and inspire readers to continue the mission of charity.

From the Community Director



Sister Eileen Haynes, SCL

“Through the lens of integral ecology, we will use our spiritual and tangible resources to meet the critical needs of God’s people and earth.”

This statement, taken from the Chapter 2022 Directional Statement, invites us to reflect on the abundance of resources with which we have been blessed and discern how they are meant to be used for the common good. This alone is insufficient.

In what manner do we share our spiritual and tangible resources? Saint Vincent de Paul instructs us, “You will find out that Charity is a heavy burden to carry, heavier than the kettle of soup and the full basket. But you will keep your gentleness and your smile. It is not enough to give soup and bread. This the rich can do. You are the servant of the poor, always smiling and good-humored.... It is only for your love alone that the poor will forgive you the bread you give to them.”

This core within each of us serves as a profound resource. How do you share this spiritual resource—the gift of God’s presence and love within you? In what ways do you walk the synodal path as a resource for our Church and beyond, honoring your baptismal call?

To what extent do we understand the impact our actions or inactions make upon others and God’s creation? What influence occurs and what depth is experienced when one commits to a life of loving serving as a “resource” to those in need, whether it be physically, spiritually, or emotionally?

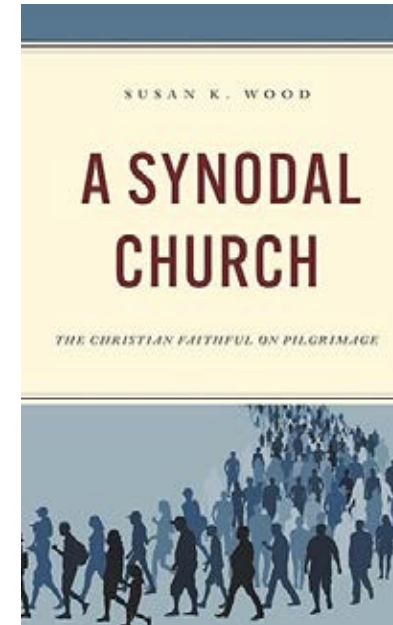
This 2025 Summer Edition of *Voices of Charity* presents an opportunity to meet people who live in just such a manner in their heart’s response through prayer and action. Let us give praise to God for our Sisters who celebrate their Jubilee as Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth in their commitment to use their gifts in service to those in need. May we also give gratitude for those who are able to identify potential resources from throwaway items and use them for the common good. The sharing of resources and the necessary vulnerability within us enables us to share *and* receive from each other. It is in the giving and receiving from our heart that makes a difference.

We are blessed.

Sister Eileen Haynes, SCL
SCL Community Director

A Synodal Church:

The Christian Faithful on Pilgrimage



Picture a parish pastoral council where everyone’s voice matters—the single mother worried about childcare, the overlooked elderly parishioner, the teenager with fresh ideas. This vision can become reality through synodality.

Sister Susan Wood, Sister of Charity and professor of systemic theology at the Regis St. Michael’s Faculty of Theology at the University of Toronto,

explores the theological foundations of synodality in her new book *A Synodal Church: The Christian Faithful on Pilgrimage* (2025). She argues that synodality represents a fundamental way of being Church—rooted in baptism and the Second Vatican Council’s vision of the Church as a pilgrim community. Rather than surface consultation, she calls for real transformation through communal discernment that empowers both clergy and laypeople to embrace diversity, dialogue across differences, and discern God’s will together.

More Than Meetings

“Synodality is not a chapter in an ecclesiology textbook,” Sister Susan writes. “It is an expression of the Church’s nature, her form, style, and mission.” She connects it directly to baptism: “Baptism sacramentally enacts the journey of a synodal church.... All of Christian life is properly baptismal.”

This challenges how Catholics see themselves. Sister Susan reminds us: “There is no such thing as laity in the Church, only Christians, some ordained, all missionary disciples.” Historically, she notes, “The earliest use of the threefold title ‘priest, prophet, and king’ applied first to Christ, then to the church as a whole for the first twelve hundred years.” All baptized Christians share in Christ’s mission as primary participants.

From Theory to Practice

Sister Susan clarifies the practice of inclusive participation in the church: “Full, conscious, active participation is not a democratic, but a liturgical principle.” True synodality means listening for how the Spirit moves through the community’s lived faith experience.

It involves what the Church calls *sensus fidelium*—the sense of the faithful. As Sister Susan explains, “The emphasis is on a lived integration of teaching, not merely a notional agreement... whether the teaching has transformative power within a faith community.”

Small steps matter: restructuring meetings so quiet voices are heard; asking “What is God calling us to do?” instead of “What do we want?”; a parish pastoral council understanding why families leave, rather than lamenting declining attendance, practices synodality.

Addressing Real Obstacles

Sister Susan acknowledges genuine barriers: disconnection between clergy and laypeople, distrust from past wounds, and clericalism. Synodality addresses each by emphasizing shared baptismal identity, building trust through patient listening, and emphasizing hierarchy as service.

“Discernment in common has the potential of being a transformative ecclesial practice,” she writes. Real change becomes possible when communities commit to this process.

Discerning Together

Living synodality begins with intentional choices:

- Listen deeply without planning your response
- Engage with parish decision-making—your baptism gives you both the right and responsibility
- Pray for the Spirit’s guidance in your community

Sister Susan’s message is, “The future of the Church depends on all of us—walking, listening, and discerning together.” This means rediscovering what the Church has always been called to be: a community of missionary disciples walking together, guided by the same Spirit. 🕊️



Sister Susan Wood, SCL, meets Pope Francis at the Baptist-Roman Catholic Dialogue in Rome, December 2021.

On Pope Francis and His Journey to Take the Church to the Peripheries

by Susan K. Wood, SCL

Pope Francis (Jorge Mario Bergoglio) (1936-2025) was Bishop of Rome and head of the Roman Catholic Church from March 13, 2013, to his death April 21, 2025. His unique stamp on the papacy did not stop with the singularity of being the first pope from South America and the first Jesuit to be pope. The changes effected by his papacy marked a new stage in the reception of the vision and reforms of Vatican II in the Church's turn from ecclesio-centrism to its missionary journey to the peripheries of the world

to announce the message of God's saving mercy.

That the reform of the Church would be central to his papacy was clear from the moment that Pope Francis announced his name after the papal election in 2013. Christ had told Francis of Assisi, "Repair my Church," and Pope Francis would attempt to do just that. This reform began with his emphasis on the priority of baptism and the call of all Christians to be missionary disciples and consisted in four

components: 1) a personal encounter of the mercy of God as a pre-condition of authentic proclamation of the Gospel, 2) the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation through the healing mercy of God, 3) doctrine that serves the pastoral purpose of the Church and this proclamation of salvation, and 4) the structural reform of the Church required to support the pastoral mission of the Church.

While eliciting the love and devotion of the ordinary faithful, his actions

at times evoked loathing on the part of some ecclesial elites. Controversy sometimes swirled around him for his emphasis on pastoral discernment by the divorced and remarried in *Amoris Laetitia*, his insistence that synodality did not just refer to an event in the life of the Church, but is an expression of "the Church's nature, her form, style and mission," and his emphasis on the need for pastoral conversion. While criticizing uncontrolled capitalism and consumerism, he advocated for migrants and refugees, apologized for the Church's complicity in the abuse of Indigenous peoples, and promoted the ecological protection of planet Earth. He denounced capital punishment as intrinsically evil. He declared that individuals in same-sex unions, but not the unions themselves, could be blessed outside of liturgical contexts. The more he preached the gospel of mercy and called for conversion, the more he evoked resistance in some quarters.

Pope Francis initiated a number of institutional reforms in the Church. One month after his election he formed an international Council of Cardinals to advise him on governance. With the document *Praedicate Evangelium* (2022), he reformed the structure of the Curia with a focus on evangelization, expanded roles for lay women and men in top leadership positions, and eliminated the previous distinction between congregations and councils, giving them all the title of "dicastery."

Initiating a financial reform, Francis restructured the way money is managed in the Vatican, expanding the work of Pope Benedict XVI to monitor transactions, standardize budgeting procedures, and ensure that the Vatican bank and other financial entities are not being used for illegal activity or money laundering. He established the Council for the Economy in 2014, a group of eight cardinals and bishops and seven lay experts, "to consider policies and practices and to prepare and analyze reports on the economic-administrative activities of the Holy See." He then established the Secretariat for the Economy that reported to the Council for the Economy, and that had authority over economic and administrative activities within the Holy See and Vatican City State, including a review of financial reports.

Pope Francis issued two documents on liturgical reform, *Traditionis Custodes* (2021), which limits the use of the pre-Vatican II liturgy and thereby adjusts the trajectory on this issue taken by his papal predecessor, and a letter on liturgical formation titled *Desiderio desideravi* (2022), that reaffirms the reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council while at the same time calling for a spiritual renew-

al with respect to the liturgy. With *Spiritus Domini* (2021), he opened the instituted ministries of lector and acolyte to both men and women, and with *Antiquum Ministerium* (2021) established a new instituted ministry of catechist, also open to women and men.

His last legacy was the Synod on Synodality, announced on March 7, 2020, and concluded on October 27, 2024. It was the first synod to use listening circles and discernment as a method of proceeding, to permit lay people, including women, to vote, and for the final document to become part of the ordinary magisterium of the successor of Peter. Hopefully, this legacy will live on in the continued implementation of synodality as the way for the Christian faithful to accompany one another in their journey as a pilgrim Church.

Above and beyond any institutional reform of the Church, Pope Francis leaves a legacy of reminding us of God's abundant mercy and the joy that comes from encountering the Lord daily and living as recipients of that mercy who now extend it to others. Francis' final social media post the day before he died was "Christ is risen! These words capture the whole meaning of our existence, for we were not made for death but for life." 🕊️



Pope Francis,
© L'Osservator Romano



Pope Leo XIV, then-Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, OSA, is pictured with Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth and representatives from other religious communities in August of 2024. Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth in Peru are identified as Hermanas de la Caridad de Leavenworth and use the initials HCL. From left to right are: Sister Ana Walsh, Franciscan Missionary of the Immaculate Conception; Sister Marilú Córdova Compoverde, Benedictine Sister; Cardinal Prevost; Hermana Clorinda Timaná Martínez, HCL; and Hermana Nery Lourdes Abad Pulache, HCL.

Sisters Share Recollections, Prayers, and Hopes for New Pope

by *Therese Horvat, SCLA*
 Reprinted with permission from *The Leaven*

Hermana Nery Lourdes Abad Pulache, HCL, tried not to get her hopes up about Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, OSA, in the recent conclave.

She regarded him highly, based on his many years of ministry in Peru. But she prayed only that the Spirit would guide the cardinals in their selection.

With the official proclamation of the name “Prevost” from the balcony, however, she was overcome with surprise, gratitude, and a profound sense of joy. So much so, that she found it hard to contain her excitement in her classroom of fifth graders in Chalaco, Peru.

Meanwhile, in the United States, Sister María de los Milagros Orozco Olaya, SCL, heard the election’s outcome — and cried tears of joy.

Then, she called friends in this country and in her native Peru and excitedly repeated, “It’s Bob! It’s Bob!”

Several Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth (SCLs) — both those who are native Peruvian Hermanas (HCLs) and those who were U.S.-born missionaries — have happy recollections of now-Pope Leo XIV, formerly Cardinal Prevost, and before that “Father Bob.”

They had met him at liturgies, meetings, and social gatherings when he was serving in Peru. A few even had talked one-on-one with the Augustinian priest who had just become the 267th pope of the Catholic Church.

As recently as last summer, two HCLs attended an August 2024 celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Diocese of Chulucanas at which Cardinal Prevost presided. Hermana

Lourdes was invited to proclaim the first reading at the Mass. She recalls that the cardinal’s homily that day was very profound. And she treasures the photo taken on that occasion with him and another HCL.

“He conveys serenity,” said Hermana Lourdes, “and is attentive to people and everything that is happening around him.”

Years ago, Sister María met Father Bob at gatherings of clergy and religious in Peru. As a young Sister in formation, she heard him speak to men and women pursuing religious vocations. At diocesan pastoral meetings, he spoke knowledgeably on a range of topics. Sister Maria, who has served in the United States for the past 21 years, was impressed by Father Bob’s simplicity, humility, and closeness to the Peruvian people.

A missionary in Peru for 44 years, Sister Regina Deitchman, SCL, once enjoyed lunch and conversation with the future pope at the HCL convent in Chalaco. Chalaco was a mid-point for Augustinian priests traveling distances between parishes, and a good stopping place for a meal break with the Sisters and the local pastor.

Although she never worked directly with Pope Leo, Hermana Esther Vilela Gutiérrez, HCL, director of the Community’s Latin American missions in Peru, understands him to be a person characterized by simplicity and kindness. She recognizes his commitment to social justice and as a voice of common sense and practical concern for the church’s work on behalf of the poor. She, too, acknowledges his love of and dedication to the people of Peru.

Sister Helen Therese Mack, SCL, who served 42 years in Peru, remembers the new pope as a very unassuming person. But she also recognized in him someone who is direct and doesn’t skirt the issues. She describes him as attentive and a good listener and considers him “exactly the person to continue the synodal process in the church.”

While she couldn’t believe the cardinals would elect an American pope, Sister Regina is very happy that someone with ties to the United States and Peru was elected.

“Pope Leo is an international person who can communicate in different languages,” she said. “I think he will be very, very good in his new role.”

Sister Helen Therese’s prayer is that Pope Leo will assume the mantle of leadership with humility and awareness of the needs of the world and the church. Hermana Esther prays that he will continue the reform, transformation, and renewal of the church.

Hermana Lourdes believes his whole life has prepared Pope Leo for this new and monumental ministry.

“He is a pope for our time,” she said. “My prayers are that he will continue to listen to the Spirit of the risen Christ and be open to the different calls of the signs of the times.” 🙏



No One Dies Alone: A Ministry of Presence



Sister Virginia Jakobe, SCL, offers a quiet, loving presence to the dying—ensuring no one takes the final steps alone.

Sister Virginia Jakobe, SCL, believes her work is “a gift God gave me.” For decades, she has sat beside hospital beds in Livingston, Montana, ensuring that patients do not die alone. Sometimes she holds their hand. Sometimes she simply sits quietly. Her nursing background helps her explain what is happening to worried families when doctors and hospice workers cannot be there. In retirement, her ministry is spent accompanying people through their final hours.

Sister Virginia’s path to this calling began with loss and a dream deferred. She says, although she spent 20 years teaching school, “I’d always wanted to be a nurse.” When her mother died of cancer, the experience gave her the push to ask the SCL leadership for permission to change careers. She graduated from nursing school in November 1983 and found her way to Livingston, where she has lived and served the community for over 40 years.

The move to Livingston connected her nursing skills with end-of-life care in unexpected ways. While waiting to start nursing school, she had volunteered with hospice in Billings. When Livingston’s hospital began developing its hospice program, it needed evening shift nurses, and Sister Virginia was ready. As the only Catholic Sister in town, she quickly became known throughout the community.

Even before formal training, Sister Virginia found herself staying overtime to sit with dying patients. “I would stay overtime and sit with patients who were dying and help the families,” she explains. After the hospital built a new facility in 2015, she took classes in “No One Dies Alone,” which trains volunteers to ensure no patient dies without someone present. But by then, she had already been doing this work for years.

Her approach to accompaniment adapts to each person and situation. “I respect their religion and their practices,” she says. With patients, “if they want to sing or pray or talk, then we do that. If they’re unable or they don’t want to, I just sit quietly with them and I do the internal praying.” Her training taught her about different faith traditions so she can offer appropriate comfort.

“I respect their religion and their practices. If they want to sing or pray or talk, then we do that. If they’re unable or they don’t want to, I just sit quietly with them and I do the internal praying.”

- Sister Virginia Jakobe, SCL

Through years of this ministry, Sister Virginia has learned that dying follows no set pattern. “Everybody dies differently,” she emphasizes. “Everybody has their own way of going through the dying process.” She has observed that patients often control the timing of their death, sometimes waiting to die until family arrives or dying once loved ones leave the room.

Her own family experiences taught her about this timing. When her mother was dying, her father had been at her bedside for months but had stepped out of the room. When they called him back, “she was alive for just seconds and then she passed away.” These moments show her that “it’s their decision” when to let go.

Sister Virginia has also witnessed what she describes as spiritual struggle during dying. Some patients become restless and agitated as death approaches. She believes her presence during these moments can “help them know that there is somebody around them who cares for them.”

The emotional weight of this work requires intentional self-care. Sister Virginia takes “quiet time” to think about each

experience. She asks herself, “could I do something better or not do something at all?” Prayer, country drives, and walks help her process what she has witnessed. This ministry has made her “a deeper religious person” with “a deeper prayer life.”

Her accompaniment work has changed how she sees daily interactions. She also ministers as a greeter at the hospital, where she has learned that small gestures matter greatly. “You never know what little thing you’re going to do to help somebody,” she reflects. When she simply says hello to someone, “the gratitude on their face comes back to me. So it works both ways.”

This insight shapes her approach to everyone she meets. “It’s just the little things rather than great big things that help,” she says. The work has made her “much more aware of the individuality of people” and taught her “not to judge others.”

Her greatest wish is that others would understand this individuality when it comes to death. Sister Virginia has observed that each death is unique. Her ministry gives the assurance that people do not have to die alone. Through her presence, Sister Virginia helps make the dying process less frightening for both patients and their families. 🕯️



Ministry of Prayer and Presence

“The soul that truly loves God seeks nothing more.”
-Saint Louise de Marillac



Sister Katherine Mary Westhues

Sister Katherine Mary Westhues reflects that her early prayer and faith life were shaped by her father’s faith. “God was always near him. It was a normal part of life,” she says. Her family practiced daily prayer through the rosary, meal blessings, and weekly Sunday Mass.

Sister Katherine Mary’s spiritual journey led her to religious life. “I felt the reason I came to religious life was for God. Teaching was secondary. God was my first reason, and if I didn’t have a relationship with him, the rest of it wouldn’t be any good,” she explains.

The Blessed Sacrament has been central to her spiritual life throughout her years of service. In her current prayer ministry, she treasures daily Mass attendance and expresses gratitude for this blessing each night. Rather than focusing on specific prayer intentions, Sister Katherine Mary prefers to praise God and surrender outcomes to divine wisdom, acknowledging the overwhelming number of worthy causes in today’s troubled world. 🌿

Sister Mary Geraldine Yelich

Sister Mary Geraldine Yelich says that people look forward to prayers from the Sisters, which makes her take their requests very seriously. She says her primary mission these days is to pray and be present for others.

This understanding of prayer took a considerable amount of time to develop. Sister Mary Geraldine says she didn’t have the advantage of Catholic schooling, and her parents weren’t particularly religious. Despite this, her mother always ensured that her children attended religious education classes taught by the Sisters during the summertime.

These days, Sister Mary Geraldine finds joy in the many opportunities at the Mother House and Ross Hall to nourish her prayer life. She feels blessed that Father Dennis Schaab, C.P.P.S., is on campus and can say Mass every day for the SCL Community. Most of all, Sister Mary Geraldine thinks, “We can be nourished every day with the Eucharist. And I think that should bring the most joy that we can receive Jesus every day.” 🌿



Climate Action on the SCL Campus

What started as a simple waste-tracking system in an institutional kitchen has grown into something more ambitious. On the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth campus, a composting pilot program diverts organic material from landfills every month while cutting expenses and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The transformation didn’t happen overnight. When Nick Keehler arrived at the Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) two and a half years ago, he thought composting would be a straightforward, simple process. Meanwhile, Chef Maria Soto in the Morrison Food Service kitchen at USM was already tracking every pound of food waste, categorizing overproduced meals and vegetable scraps through a system designed to control costs.



Nick Keehler, JPIC Community Engagement Coordinator

What neither initially realized was how their separate efforts—environmental vision and financial stewardship—would converge into a comprehensive waste-to-resource program that may reshape the community’s approach to sustainability.



Chef Maria Soto Maria Soto, chef for the SCLs and USM, partners with the community to serve the earth.

Tracking Scraps and Meal Donations

Soto explains that in the Morrison Food Services kitchen, her team’s waste-tracking system categorizes vegetables, leftover soup, and overproduced meals, all tracked through a machine called “Waste Not.” The tracking

isn’t new, as Morrison has been monitoring food waste for years as part of its contract with the Sisters of Charity and the University of Saint Mary.

“If I waste 10 tons of food, it’s like the money for this company just walking out the door, out of control,” Soto explains. When corporate representatives review the data and see significant waste, “the corporation comes in and does an assessment of me. ‘Hey, you wasted like a thousand pounds last week. What’s going on?’”

The system separates materials into categories: vegetables and eggshells that can be composted, and items like bones that cannot be processed in their current system. But until recently, both categories ended up in the same place—the dumpster.

Morrison Food Service has long had a program for overproduced meals. Whenever this occurs, the excess meals are frozen and collected by Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope. The organization provides meals and other services for those in the city who are suffering from poverty.

Even though waste tracking and meal donations helped with cost and was good for the community, the environmental potential remained untapped. Keehler began working on a simple idea that would involve the collaboration of several people.

The Two-Year Learning Curve

“I, in my naivety coming in, saw that food items were going directly in the trash,” Keehler admits. “I thought, ‘Oh, it’s easy enough. I compost at home.’”

Easy it was not. The planning for this project stretched across two years of coordination, stakeholder management, and myth-busting. Keehler had to wait for leadership transitions at Morrison before approaching Soto about changing established kitchen routines. Meanwhile, Kenny Davidson, the SCL grounds coordinator, worked with facilities management to find a location that wouldn’t alarm the SCL or USM community members.



A Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope volunteer picks up frozen meals from Morrison Food Service overages.

“If you start mentioning food waste, then people start thinking smells,” Keehler explains. However, when a compost pile is appropriately managed and frequently turned, the smell is kept to a minimum. Nevertheless, concerns about odors and wildlife meant finding a spot “far enough away from people that they wouldn’t have to know it existed.”

The location Davidson cleared sits behind a parking lot, up the hill from the softball field, away from student and resident areas, but accessible for his equipment. The current composting area measures approximately 20 feet by 20 feet and is about 5 feet high.

This trial phase is small—just vegetable scraps and fruit peels in 32-gallon compostable liners, transferred to 65-gallon bins on the loading dock before Davidson’s crew hauls them to the pile.

“We don’t want it to get to an unmanageable level if we’re not ready to turn that,” Keehler says. The next phase will add starches like bread and pasta, gradually scaling up as they master each component.

Beyond Composting

The program aligns with the SCL’s commitment to the Laudato Si’ Action Platform, addressing Pope Francis’ call to care for “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” The finished compost takes a minimum of three years to make, with careful management, and could eventually support local agriculture and food security initiatives.

“When food waste decomposes in landfills under anaerobic conditions, it generates methane, a greenhouse gas that is 80 times more powerful in its first 20 years than CO₂ as a greenhouse gas, but it is shorter-lived in the atmosphere,” Keehler said, citing a 2012 report from the United Nations (<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/methane-emissions-are-driving-climate-change-heres-how->



The controlled compost area is located in a woody area on the SCL campus.

reduce-them). In an aerobic compost pile, those same materials break down without releasing methane into the atmosphere, keeping nutrients “sequestered in the soil.”

Because methane is shorter-lived in the atmosphere than CO₂, the climate benefits of composting appear more quickly than other carbon reduction strategies. “We’re kind of running out of time to make changes,” Keehler notes.

Davidson’s operation does more than just composting. The SCL Community recently invested in a wood planer for the grounds crew, which transforms trees that must be removed from the property into usable lumber. The lumber is planed, edge-sealed, and dried for future projects. The process generates substantial sawdust, which can be mixed into the compost. “We have resources that we think are trash that can be repurposed into good soil with good nutrients,” Keehler says.

Nothing Goes to Waste

The collaboration has the potential to transform waste management across the campus. Soto’s team now separates materials with composting in mind while continuing their precise tracking for cost control. Davidson provides equipment expertise and materials from his ongoing landscape maintenance.

“So we don’t waste anything,” Soto says with satisfaction. The program has created what she calls “big benefits for everybody”—cost savings for Morrison, environmental benefits for the SCL and USM communities, and potential resources for local agriculture.

Looking ahead, Keehler envisions expanding individual composting to serve the broader Leavenworth area. As he notes, “As far as I’m aware, there are no composting options in the Leavenworth community.” But the deliberate approach continues: “We are doing this slowly and intentionally incorporating all the stakeholders.”

In the cleared woodland space, the composting pilot program continues its slow progress from waste to resource. Meaningful change, however challenging to implement, is achievable through persistence and collaborative problem solving. 🌱



Kenny Davidson, SCL Grounds Coordinator, explains how the wood planer operates.

GOLDEN JUBILEE

a Celebration of Charity

by Sister Sharon Smith, SCL



“I want a talking baby doll!” So said my sister, Linda. My folks were kind enough to accommodate, and I was born on February 26, 1953, in Missoula, Montana. My parents, Ben and Marie (Mueller) Smith, had four children: Sandy, Steve, Linda, and myself.

Growing up in the ‘50s, we lived in a neighborhood where everyone knew one another, and we could walk to the public school just down the street. My favorite time of year was summertime, when we would load up the car on weekends and head to Flathead Lake. My brother had been diagnosed with polio, and the doctors told my parents the best medicine would be swimming. For years, we rented a cabin in a cherry orchard until my folks purchased a piece of property where we moved into a trailer with no water or electricity. Those were idyllic times in my life. My sister currently lives on this same piece of property, and it’s always a destination place for me.

In 1964, we moved from the Garden City (Missoula) to the Mining City (Butte). It was a total change in scenery and culture, and yet I am forever grateful for that move. It was in Butte that I first encountered Sisters, first the BVMs at

Saint Ann’s in Butte and then the SCLs at Girls Central. There were at least a dozen Sisters at Central at that time, and it was during those years that I considered a religious vocation, though I couldn’t name it as such. I just knew I was attracted to the Sisters and their way of life. They were wonderful teachers and were doing something worthwhile with their lives.

After graduating from high school, I attended Montana State University in Bozeman. I graduated in 1975 with a Bachelor of Science degree in physical education and a minor in secondary education. In February of 1975, I applied to enter the SCL Community and was accepted that spring.

August of 1975 saw Jean Harrington and me boarding a plane for Kansas City. I had never been to Kansas, and many questioned why I would leave Montana for the Midwest. That’s a question I still ask myself today, especially in July and August! Not knowing what lay ahead of me in Kansas or the Community, it was only by the grace of God that I came.

Sister Kathleen Wood was my formation director. I can take partial credit for a few of her gray hairs. While I was raised Catholic, I was not particularly pious or religious. The second day in the novitiate, Kathleen asked us to meet with her and to bring our Bibles. Bible?? I didn’t bring a Bible, nor

did I own one! I soon adjusted to this new culture and got into my novitiate classes and classes at Saint Mary College.

After leaving the novitiate I taught high school for two years at Saint Pius in Kansas City and two years at Immaculata in Leavenworth. From 1981 to 2002 I was in Butte, serving in pastoral ministry and parish administration. This was a perfect role for me. There were many diverse responsibilities, and I was able to establish relationships with so many wonderful people! It was also during these years that I earned my master’s degree in spirituality and ministry from Seattle University.

In the summer of 2002, I came back to Leavenworth to be the director of vocations and director of Associates. That was a rich ministry for me as I learned so much about Vincent, Louise, and our Vincentian charism. It was a privilege to walk with those who were drawn by this charism.

In 2011, I ventured back to Montana, this time to the Crow Reservation south of Billings. Sister Mary Lou Mendel and I wanted to minister with those on the margins, and God could not have brought us to a better place. Father Randolph Grazyk had been at Saint Charles in Pryor for 40+ years. He was a wonderful mentor. In time we learned about the Crow culture, customs, and traditions. We were invited to take part in these, and we welcomed the opportunity. It was also at this time we were adopted by our dear dog Shep who has been a faithful companion ever since. Our 10 years with the Crow people was a highlight in my life. I miss them to this day.

God has been so good to me! My calling to this Community has been among my greatest gifts. What a blessing it has been to be in the company of the Sisters for these 50 years! These have been years of change, challenge, and growth. I am filled with joy and gratitude! 🌸



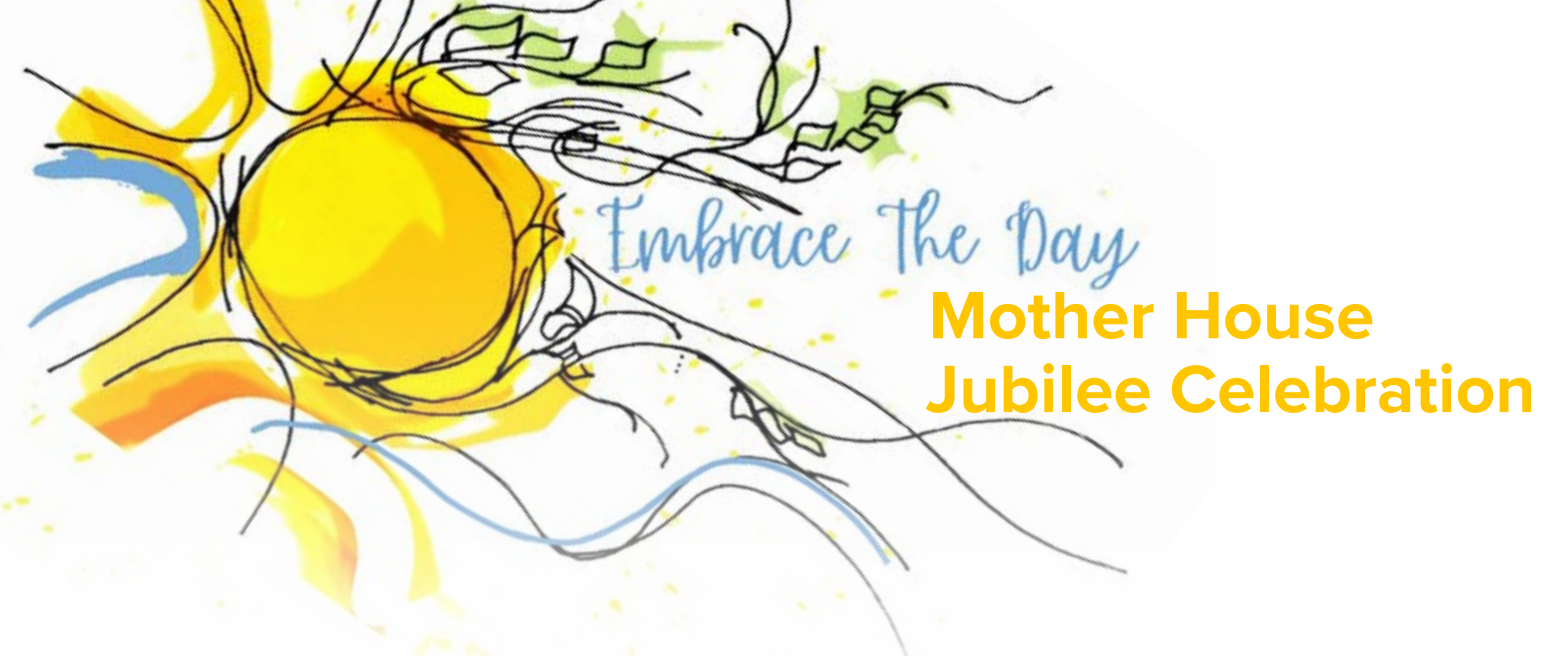
Sister Sharon Smith receives her veil and SCL *Constitution* upon her entrance into the Novitiate, August of 1976, from Sister Mary Kevin Hollow (1922-2006) and Sister Mary Serena Sheehy (1924-1992). At that time, Sister Mary Kevin served as the Community Director and Sister Mary Serena as the First Councilor.



Sister Sharon Smith, Shep, and Sister Mary Lou Mendel were treasured fixtures in Montana for many years on the Crow Reservation. Photo by Susan Berard.

The Mission Mountain Range near Pryor, Montana. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.





The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth joyfully celebrated the Jubilees of Sisters marking 85, 75, 70, and 60 years of vowed religious life, on Saturday, June 28, 2025. Sister Pam Hinkle, SCL, created the Jubilee artwork.



70 year Jubilarians: **Front row I-r:** Sisters Kathleen Marie Henscheid, Paula Marie Tweet, Mary Jo Coyle, and Diane Hurley **Back row I-r:** Sisters Margaret Hogan, Mary Rachel Flynn, and Angela Rose Barbieri



Sister Mary Elizabeth Strecker, 75 year Jubilarian



Sister Celine Kobe, 85 year Jubilarian



60 year Jubilarians: **Front row I-r:** Sisters Linda Suzanne Roth, Lucy Walter, and Mary Patricia Johnson **Back row I-r:** Sisters Margaret Ellen (Peg) Johnson, Rita McGinnis, Mary Patricia Lenahan, Mary Jo Anzik, and Janet Cashman



Sister Noreen Walter with her sister, Jubilarian Sister Lucy Walter



Sister Mary Jo Anzik and her sister, Rosemary Anzik



Sister Eileen Hurley with her sister, Jubilarian Sister Diane Hurley



Sister Kathleen Marie Henscheid and her sister, Debbie Povlsen

A Family Affair

Celebrating Sister Siblings

The day included a Mass of thanksgiving celebrated by Father Phil Winkelbauer, who also celebrated 50 years of priesthood. Mass was followed by a luncheon, honoring the Sisters' decades of faithful service and commitment to God's mission. Several of the Jubilarians were joined by relatives from near and far. 🌸



Sister Paula Marie Tweet and her sister, Kathleen Goggin



Sister Mary Patricia Lenahan (front) with her sisters, Therese Lenahan and Joanie Porter



Sister Margaret Ellen (Peg) Johnson (in black) with her sisters, I-r: Beth Pascuzzi, Dorothy Nichols, and Joan Minor



by John Shively, SCL Executive Director of Mission

On a cold and typically windy day in February 2022, I gathered with English- and Spanish-speaking sponsored ministry leaders, vowed women religious, board chairs, and Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth (SCL) staff in a conference room at a Kansas City hotel. We were there to reflect on a question rooted in the SCL charism and prompted by our current context: *How do we act collectively to care for creation and those most vulnerable?*

I still remember the response I heard so many times that day from the Hermanas from Peru, who serve a deeply vulnerable community facing extreme climate-related hardships:

*“¿Cómo no responder a lo que está sucediendo?”
How can we not respond to what is happening?*

In many ways, the Community has always answered that missional call through a legacy of service and prophetic witness. But on this day, the SCL leadership invited us to think bigger and respond differently. Inspired by the 2022 Chapter Directional Statement (inside cover) and *Laudato Si’*, we began to imagine the future we could shape if we integrated all our gifts—our social capital, knowledge, experience, relationships, and tangible resources—to act as one.

That day, a vision came into focus: create lasting, transformative change by empowering marginalized communities to participate fully in improving their own lives by building learning communities to address urgent social and environmental challenges.

Our answer to the SCL leadership’s question and call was the Integral Ecology Initiative (IEI).

A New Way of Thinking

The IEI is not just a program—it’s a new way of expressing our mission. Functioning as an integrator, connector, and convener, it unites the SCL Community, the Offices of Mission and Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), the Centro Pastoral San Vicente de Paúl (CPSVP), other

Answering the Call: A Shared Commitment to the Earth and One Another

sponsored ministries, and like-minded partners in Kansas and Peru to respond to the urgent “Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor.”

Our two bold goals speak directly to our shared commitment to the planet and people:

- Achieve carbon neutrality by 2030
- Ensure access to basic human needs—housing, water, energy, food, safety, and health—so individuals and communities can thrive

These goals reflect the SCL’s belief that caring for creation and caring for the vulnerable are deeply interconnected ones. We understand that true transformation must be holistic, systemic, and spiritual.

Resources in Action

Since that winter day not so long ago, the IEI has made meaningful progress toward our goals and forged deeper connections across ministries, borders, and disciplines.

Working to break down silos and embrace integral ecology as a shared expression of our mission, SCL, CPSVP, and JPIC have identified our first major collaborative project: co-creating an education and formation curriculum in integral ecology that draws on our collective strengths.

This curriculum will be designed for English and Spanish speakers, with education and experiential opportunities for intellectual and spiritual growth that incorporate JPIC’s ongoing land justice, anti-racism, immigration reform, and community organizing efforts. It will also leverage the IEI’s expertise in building inclusive learning communities and CPSVP’s ability to connect directly to the lived realities of those we serve.

In July, the IEI officially launched its comprehensive effort to develop a *Sustainability and Energy Efficiency Plan* for the combined SCL and University of Saint Mary Cam-

pus. Sustainability consultants Verdis Group were selected through a competitive RFP process to create a plan that builds on the SCL’s environmental groundwork and aligns closely with our broader strategic and IEI goals of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. This long-term roadmap will guide the SCLs in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening its infrastructure, and enhancing the Community’s ability to adapt to climate change. We are also excited to share that Verdis is bringing Dan DiLeo, a moral theologian whose work focuses on Catholic Social Teaching and climate change at Creighton University, onto our project team.

Verdis will solicit critical community input through workshops and dialogues to ensure the process and outcomes are equitable and reflect the SCL’s mission and values. The process will span 11 months and culminate in July 2026, resulting in a dynamic, actionable plan with measurable goals, prioritized action items, and clear timelines to hold the SCLs accountable for making meaningful changes.

The IEI is also building external partnerships to combine local action on climate change with serving basic human needs. Together with Kansas-based nonprofit and SCL

Charity and Systemic Change Fund recipient Climate and Energy Project (CEP), the SCLs, CPSVP, and JPIC are conducting a joint landscape analysis and stakeholder mapping to explore the potential for establishing a Climate Resilience Hub in Leavenworth and Piura, where vulnerable populations could access essential services, education, and climate preparedness resources.

A Journey Rooted in Relationship

The Integral Ecology Initiative is still young, but it is gaining momentum. The IEI is not something we do *for* others; it is something we do *with* others. It is built on relationships across geography, language, and ministries. And it requires courage, patience, and the willingness to do things differently.

This is sacred work. As we continue this journey together, we do so knowing that our efforts reflect the heart of our vocation: to be in communion with God, one another, and all of creation.

Through the IEI, we are dedicating our resources in the most meaningful way possible—by investing in the future of our planet and all God’s people. 🌱



Thriving Communities: A Holistic Model in Action

Following the severe flooding of the UPIS—La Florida community in Piura, Peru, CPSVP launched a Social Aid Campaign in partnership with the Lions Club, National University of Piura, and the local Archdiocese.

In June 2025 the campaign provided more than 200 residents with dental and vision screenings, psychological counseling, clean drinking water, legal support, and more. Community members also participated in an Ecotrueque program to exchange recyclable materials for eco-friendly goods, blending ecological awareness with direct support.

This is integral ecology in action: healing people and planet through solidarity and service.



Mattias “Matti” Lopez stands at the Spires goal post—a University of Saint Mary first-generation student, football player, and mentor helps others navigate college life with resilience and purpose.

USM First-Generation Mentor Helps Others Navigate College Life

For most first-generation college students in the United States, the path to graduation is filled with many challenges, including navigating financial aid and managing family expectations without a roadmap. University of Saint Mary soon-to-be senior Mattias “Matti” Lopez is changing that story, both for himself and other students.

Learning to Be a Campus Leader

Lopez, an exercise science major and football player from Reno, Nevada, remembers his own difficult transition to college life. “One of the biggest things for me was the pressure of it all,” Lopez explains. “I never wanted to disappoint my family. I always knew I was here for a reason—to get an education and make them proud.”

Like many first-generation students, Lopez initially assumed his high school study habits would suffice in college. Reality quickly set in. “When I hit my other courses, I actually had to take my time and study,” he says.

Financial challenges compounded his academic adjustment. During his freshman year, Lopez faced difficulties balancing the costs of education with other responsibilities. His challenges were not unusual for first-generation students and influenced his decision to become a mentor in the first-generation program at USM.

Turning Personal Experience Into Mentorship

Nearing his senior year, Lopez uses his early struggles to help younger students. As a mentor in Saint Mary’s first-generation program, he works with 25 underclassmen who are the first in their families to attend college.

“With the first-generation program, I wanted to help students make that transition and not make the same mistakes I did,” Lopez says. “It’s about creating a support system and forming friendships that help students navigate everything from managing stress to finding campus resources.”



First-gen students relax during small group discussions.

The program offers participants a \$1,000 per semester scholarship. It provides freshmen and sophomores with upperclassmen mentors. Juniors and seniors continue their scholarship by becoming mentors. The university provides them with professional development opportunities, including Certified Peer Educator training from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). Ken Slover, USM’s Vice President for Strategic Initiatives, notes, “The mentors earn some credentials with it.” This training helps mentors working in small groups learn how to identify challenges happening in the student community.

Addressing Common Challenges

Through his mentoring sessions, Lopez has seen common obstacles that first-generation students face.

“Many students feel the need to work a job for excessive hours,” he notes. “When they’re working too much, it takes focus off their education, and grades start slipping.”

Lopez recognizes the critical importance of retention. “Since I’ve been here, I’ve seen some students drop out after freshman year,” he says. “My role is letting them know they can succeed here.”

The mentoring relationship creates valuable connections beyond academic relationships. As Slover explains, mentorship allows students to “be able to find a connection with somebody that’s not your coach, who’s not your faculty member or advisor. It’s another student who may be completely random, who’s not going in the same circles.”

Slover emphasizes that the program’s focus is on survival skills: “The first year experience is, almost, how to survive college. It could be anything from stress management to understanding the resources of the community.”

Building Community That Keeps Students Engaged

For Lopez, community has been central to his college experience. “My friends are one of the main reasons I come back every year—just seeing them and knowing I’m not alone out here.”

This sense of belonging is precisely what the first-generation program aims to cultivate. When it began four years ago, the program served about 20 students. Now, Slover anticipates approximately 275 participants next semester, supported by 34 mentors like Lopez.

“Overall, we’ve had pretty positive results from a retention standpoint,” Slover says, noting that student retention is the university’s number one strategic initiative. The program requires a GPA standard of a 2.5 for mentors and includes attending regular sessions.

As he looks toward his senior year, Lopez plans to finish strong academically to prepare for the university’s physical therapy graduate program, while continuing as a first-gen mentor.

For students like Lopez and the underclassmen he mentors, this dedicated support system can help students achieve academic success and build a stronger university community. 🍷



First-gen students listen to a speaker in Saint Joseph Dining Hall.



Growing Justice: USM's Integral Approach to Food Sustainability

Nearly one in eight Americans faced food insecurity according to a 2022 U.S. Department of Agriculture report. The University of Saint Mary is cultivating solutions through a simple greenhouse restoration that has blossomed into a food justice initiative, embodying Pope Francis' call to hear both "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor." Through the efforts of two USM faculty members, students will have a practical experience of caring for the earth and the poor.

Integral ecology, a concept introduced by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, says that all relationships impact people and the earth.

The university's project began as separate ideas, but Ken Slover saw the opportunity to bring them together. "Everything is connected," explains Slover. "We have a transformational experience for a student to see. Not just, 'Hey, I'm here growing things for my own use,' but how it can impact the community."

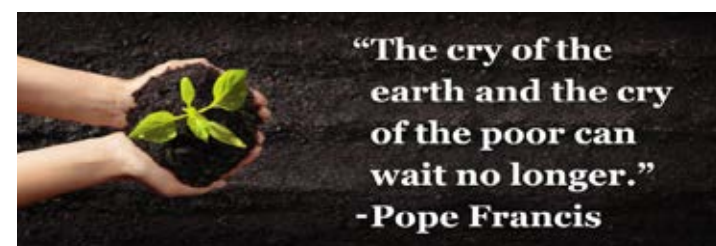
When Dr. Nicole Lindor Walker, assistant professor of biology with a PhD in plant biology, joined USM last fall, she eagerly took on the challenge of revitalizing the university's greenhouse. "I really wanted to bring plants back into my

courses. I wanted a place where we could house them, do student research, and grow food and teach students how to grow food," she explains.

A basic cleanup project quickly evolved into a club called "Leafing a Legacy," named to honor the Sisters of Charity's legacy of sustainability. The club has grown from two students at the first meeting to over 20 members, most of whom are first-year students who hope to remain engaged in the project throughout their academic careers.

"The students had such a great time," Walker notes. "They're always looking for opportunities to volunteer. They are always looking for opportunities to actually put their hands in the dirt."

Meanwhile, Lucy McIntyre, director of and instructor in the social work program, is developing a food justice course



"The students had such a great time... They are always looking for opportunities to actually put their hands in the dirt."
- Dr. Nicole Lindor Walker

that will launch next year. Drawing on her professional background in social welfare and personal experience running a community pantry, McIntyre's course will explore how historical policies and practices have made access to food easier for some and harder for others.

The course will combine theory with hands-on practice as students create a campus garden and develop a sustainability plan. "I want it to be a really hands-on class where we're going and doing," McIntyre explains. "They're actually building and working on developing the garden in addition to some more traditional academic work."

McIntyre plans to focus on racial justice aspects and how food systems are impacted. "I feel like access to healthy, sustainable food is a human right. But we don't often talk about it like that," she says. This perspective places USM's initiative within the broader national food justice movement, which addresses how food production, distribution, and consumption reflect and reinforce social inequalities,

particularly in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods often described as "food deserts."

Each of the professors hopes these efforts could expand beyond campus. One idea is to partner with the business program to sell produce at farmers' markets or invite K-12 students to learn about community gardening. Walker sees tremendous potential in this collaborative approach: "It's not just one person's course or one person's work, but we really are interdisciplinary with our projects."

As the project continues to develop, sustainability remains a priority. The team is considering offering stipends for student leaders and finding ways to maintain the garden beyond McIntyre's course. Their goal is to address food insecurity both on campus and in the wider Leavenworth community.

"We gotta dream big," says Walker. "I think this is something that's actually doable. It's plausible. We've already started it. We just need to continue down this path. And while students are interested, it's when we need to capitalize."

Through the greenhouse revival, student club, and food justice course, USM is nurturing a new generation of students who understand the interconnection between environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

Those interested in learning more or contributing to these efforts can contact Ken Slover at kenneth.slover@stmary.edu.



The inside of the USM greenhouse at the end of the 2025 spring semester.



Building Community Across Distances: The SCL Associate Speaker Series

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in Clancy, Montana, Linda McCray, a Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth Associate (SCLA) found herself feeling isolated from the broader SCL Community. That sense of disconnection sparked an initiative that has since evolved into a vibrant virtual gathering connecting Associates and Sisters across the continent.

From Small Beginnings to Nationwide Connection

With limited in-person gatherings, Linda joined forces with Sister Mary Jo McDonald, SCL, and fellow Associate Bobby Lavinder to launch a monthly Zoom gathering for SCL Associates in Butte and the Northwest United States.

“We modeled it after how Sister Paula Marie Tweet had monthly gatherings in Butte when she was here,” Linda explains. The format followed a familiar structure—opening prayer and song, followed by a presentation, discussion, and fellowship—all within a 90-minute timeframe that worked well in the virtual environment.

Two years after its inception, the group expanded its reach, broadening the invitation to include all Sisters and Associates. For the 2023-2024 season, the gatherings featured a retreat on discipleship, stand-alone presentations on topics such as “Season of Creation” and “Discerning Our Mission,” and a spring book study of Joan Chittister’s *The Time Is Now*. This past year, the initiative evolved further with the

launch of a dedicated monthly speaker series that runs from September through May.

Building Bridges of Faith and Fellowship

The monthly gatherings have become a new staple of SCLA activities. “The goal truly is to connect Sisters and Associates from anywhere,” Linda says. “And we do have people coming from the East Coast all the way to the West Coast.”

Last year, gatherings averaged 16 attendees. With the introduction of the Speaker Series for 2024-2025, participation more than doubled, now averaging 35 people per gathering.

As attendance has grown, the format has adapted. Open discussions have transitioned to breakout rooms, allowing for more intimate conversations even as the number of participants increases. May 2025’s gathering drew nine Associates and 21 Sisters.

Through shared prayer, presentations, and the technology that connects them, participants find spiritual nourishment and human connection, which, for many, is a critical need in today’s often fragmented world.

An Open Invitation

The speaker series embodies the SCL spirit of inclusivity. “We want to invite everyone,” Linda emphasizes. “Truly, all

are welcome.” This openness to all welcomes not only current Associates and Sisters but also introduces newcomers to the Associates.

Each month brings new perspectives and insights as different speakers share their stories. The 2024-2025 series has featured diverse topics, including “Living in Hope” with Father Kevin Cullen, S.J., “Coping in a Divided World” with Tina Carpenter, and “Representing the Charity Federation as NGO Representative at the UN” with Jimmy Walters, PhD. Seasonal spiritual themes are also incorporated, such as Sister Maureen Hall’s reflection on the Advent season and Sister Phyllis Stowell’s “Lenten Journey through the Lens of the Commandments.”

Behind the scenes, a planning team meets monthly to develop future programs. This team, comprising Katie Kilbourne, Bobby Lavinder, Linda McCray, Sister Mary Jo McDonald, Tish Starbuck, and Don Stubbings, is already working on programs for the upcoming 2025-2026 season.

While distance creates barriers to in-person gatherings, the SCL Associate Speaker Series builds bridges of connection, ensuring that no Associate or Sister feels isolated, regardless of their location. By bringing together faith sharing and modern communication tools, the series is an expression of serving people with available resources. For more information, please contact Don Stubbings, Director of SCL Associates at dstubbings@scls.org.

Associate Days in Leavenworth

Associates gathered at the Mother House in Leavenworth for prayer, fellowship, and service, July 25-27, 2025. Pictures provided by Don Stubbings, SCLA.



Associates Don Stubbings, Linda Powers, and John Shively at the social hour.



Associates Sandra Miley and Blanca Esparza at the social hour.



L-R: Associates Blanca Esparza, Stephanie Nash, Keith Hustings, Ellen Hustings, and Sister Eileen Haynes, SCL, make meals for those experiencing food insecurity.



Associate Carol Anne Schmidt prepares dessert bags for those experiencing food insecurity at Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope.



Sponsor Sister Judith Jackson, SCL, welcomes new Associate Janet Hiebl with the SCLA pin during Mass.

Carrying the Mission Forward:

An Associate in Healthcare

In healthcare settings across the country, religious communities that once owned hospitals have sold their facilities to secular or other faith-based, non-Catholic organizations. This transition raises questions about how Catholic missions and values can continue without direct religious ownership. At Saint Mary's Regional Hospital in Grand Junction, Colorado, one woman's story exemplifies how Catholic healthcare remains vibrant.



Gretchen Gore, SCLA

Gretchen Gore's journey into healthcare mission began through a personal relationship that would shape her career. "I was drawn to become a Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth Associate (SCLA) through my friendship with Sister Barbara Aldrich, and I credit her with my call to the mission integration role," she explains.

Becoming a Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth Associate provided spiritual formation that would later inform her professional approach to healthcare administration at Saint Mary's Regional Hospital, where she now serves as mission integration leader.

In her current role, Gore works to embed the hospital's Catholic mission throughout its operations. "I would define mission integration as the intentional process of embedding Catholic mission and values into every aspect of our operations, decision-making, and culture," she explains. This comprehensive approach includes orientation of new caregivers, formation with leaders, a robust ethics committee and ethics response team, and a values-based decision-making process for strategic decisions.

Although the Sisters of Charity no longer own Saint Mary's Regional Hospital, their legacy continues through storytelling and celebration. "We share their stories. We have so many wonderful stories of our founding, we tell these stories at every orientation, our hospital birthday, and on November 11th every year as we celebrate Founder's Day," Gore explains.

Associate Identity Shapes Leadership

Gore's formation as an SCLA influences her healthcare leadership philosophy. "The identity shapes my work in many ways, but especially in seeing Christ in the patients we care for," she says. "I deeply believe in the Vincentian spirituality and trust in Divine providence. God is present in every encounter and challenge."



Saint Mary Leaders gathered at the 2025 May Crowning: Victoria Grasmick, Manager of Community Health, Western Colorado Market, Intermountain Health; Gretchen Gore, Vice President of Mission Integration, Saint Mary's Regional Hospital; Deacon Alonso Kennedy, Chaplain Saint Mary's Regional Hospital; Bishop Stephen Berg, Diocese of Pueblo, Colorado; Deacon Dan Leetch, Diocese of Pueblo, Colorado; Alan Amos, Manager of Spiritual Care and Mission Integration, Saint Mary's Regional Hospital

This spiritual foundation translates into a leadership approach rooted in "serving others, humility, and a commitment to the poor and vulnerable," while focusing on "the inherent dignity of every human life" and providing compassionate care that addresses physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

Living the Mission Through Leadership

As mission leader, Gore impacts institutional decisions through the lens of "Catholic Core Commitments (faith, love, service, and justice)." When facing complex choices, the hospital implements "Mission Due Diligence," ensuring decisions align with Catholic values.

This mission-centered approach manifests in practical ways throughout Saint Mary's operations: the Rose Hill Hospitality House provides housing for traveling families, memorial services support grieving parents, and partnerships with organizations like Project CURE and Toilet Equity extend care to the vulnerable—examples of how Gore's mission role influences the hospital's commitment to serve "especially the poor and vulnerable."

Sustaining Catholic Mission in Secular Settings

"As SCLAs, we can and should continue to be the prophetic voice that challenges systems when we see injustice," she says.

Her vision for lasting impact centers on maintaining visible Catholic values in healthcare delivery. "I hope that my legacy is one that others see as an ongoing presence of the Catholic values and compassionate care that is central to whole person care," she says. The hospital's mission remains "to reveal and foster God's healing love by improving the health of the people and communities we serve, especially the poor and vulnerable."

Working in hospital mission integration, Gore demonstrates how non-vowed lay people can assure Catholic identity and values in complex institutional settings even after ownership changes. 🌹

Hope for Hurricane Victims



Lloyd Hale
When the residual storms of Hurricane Helene devastated western North Carolina in late 2024, SCL Director of Facilities Lloyd Hale watched the images of destruction flooding news channels. The scenes of washed-out roads, collapsed homes, and displaced families brought back memories from a 2005 volunteer experience in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Memories of those experiences left a mark on Lloyd and motivated him to act once again.

Lloyd had recently retired from motocross racing, a hobby that required specialized transportation equipment. Sitting unused in his driveway was his “toy hauler” – a trailer for motocross bikes equipped with a small living area, including bathroom and kitchen facilities. As he watched coverage of families who had lost everything in North Carolina, Lloyd realized his toy hauler could provide immediate shelter for someone in desperate need.

The connection came unexpectedly through social media. While scrolling through Facebook, Lloyd encountered Chris Hensley, a man whose North Carolina home had been destroyed by Helene’s floodwaters. Though Chris and his wife had the good fortune of a second home in Texas, where they could stay temporarily, he was actively seeking ways to help his neighbors who weren’t so fortunate. Many remained in the disaster zone with nowhere to go.



The toy hauler, once used for motocross, now offers shelter and hope to families recovering from Hurricane Helene.

Lloyd contacted Chris with his offer to donate the toy hauler. As they discussed logistics, Lloyd realized there was an additional opportunity to involve the SCL Community and employees. Working with the SCL HR department, Lloyd initiated an organization-wide donation drive focusing on critical supplies – water, toilet paper, diapers, and cleaning products – items the Big Ivy Community Center in Barnardsville, North Carolina, had identified as urgent needs.

SCLs and employees responded enthusiastically, filling the toy hauler with essential items. Once loaded, Lloyd and Chris met in Arkansas on January 31, 2025. Chris then completed the journey, delivering both the trailer and supplies to North Carolina, where they would make an immediate difference.

The Big Ivy Community Center now manages the toy hauler as a community resource. Their plan ensures that as one family’s home is finished, another displaced family utilizes the temporary shelter.

Lloyd’s desire to repurpose an unused possession will help several families. The toy hauler, once used for recreation and sport, now provides shelter and hope for families working to rebuild their lives after catastrophic loss. 🏡

The SCL Community and employees continue to look for opportunities to help those who have been affected by flooding in Texas, and recent flooding in Kansas City, Kansas.



SCL staff fill the donated toy hauler with essential supplies for families displaced by Hurricane Helene in North Carolina.



Charity Federation Communicators, **Back row l-r:** Spalding Hurst (Sisters of Charity of Nazareth), Beata Gesicka (Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish), Lynn Wagner (Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill), Rosemary MacDonald (Sisters of St. Martha of Prince Edward Island), James Rowe (Sisters of Charity of New York) **Front row l-r:** Erin Reder (Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati), Margaret Haik (Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth), Sister Pat Poole (Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception), Melissa Falle (Sister of Charity of Halifax), Michelle Bley (Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati), Stephanie Nash (Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth)

Federation Communicators Meet in New York



Margaret Haik and Stephanie Nash from the SCL Communications Office attended a gathering of communicators from across the Sisters of Charity Federation held in New York earlier this year. The previous October, during a Communicators for Women Religious conference, Federation communicators gathered during a free period and determined there was a great opportunity for collaboration. The idea was shared with Sister Grace Hartzog, the Federation’s executive director, who had just the opportunity.

The February meeting was already scheduled for the Federation’s non-government organization (NGO) liaisons to meet and attend the United Nations Civil Society Forum. Federation communicators were invited to meet for brainstorming and planning for collaboration, followed by meetings with the NGO liaisons.

Federation NGO Representative to the United Nations Jimmy Walters facilitated the meetings. The group worked to name strengths as partners in communication. They discovered the diversity of talents within the collective, underscoring the value of in-person collaboration.

Thursday was particularly productive as communicators began to plan for future communication efforts. Storytelling and cross-communication were identified as key to strengthening both individual congregations and the Federation as a whole. To maintain momentum, communicators committed to bimonthly Zoom meetings to develop a #ThisIsCharity social media campaign and other initiatives. Communicators serve as resources as they advance the mission and efforts of their respective communities. 🏡



SISTERS OF CHARITY
OF LEAVENWORTH

Cantwell Hall
4200 South 4th Street
Leavenworth, KS 66048-5054

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
BLS

VOICES — OF CHARITY

A Publication of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth

www.scls.org