

Staying Connected

Volume 22 - Issue 6

December 11, 2025

Sisters of St. Francis
of Mary Immaculate

Immaculate Conception-December 8, 2025 *St. Patrick's Residence*

About 125 sisters, associates, residents and staff gathered together at St. Patrick's Residence to celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. A Holy Day and a very special feast day for both the Sisters of St. Francis and the Carmelite sisters of St. Patrick's. Members of both congregations renewed their vows during the Mass. Afterward all enjoyed a delicious Chinese meal and a yummy chocolate cake!





Message from LSAP Goals 1, 4 Subcommittee

Associate Carol Batanski, Associate Janine Hicks, Associate Pam Leddy and Sister Jane Nienaber invite you to inquire about being a part of this Laudato Si' Subcommittee. We've begun to meet via Zoom, hoping to accommodate anyone at a distance. Inquire with any of our members.



Thanks to Catholic Climate
Covenant for:

Creation Care Corner

Laudato Si' on the Incarnation

In the Encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis encouraged us to be open to awe and wonder when viewing the natural world that God created, in which He was incarnated, and of which we are a part. (*Laudato Si'*, 11)

Further, he reflected, "In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: 'All things have been created through him and for him' (Col 1:16). The prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) reveals Christ's creative work as the Divine Word (Logos). But then, unexpectedly, the prologue goes on to say that this same Word 'became flesh' (John 1:14). One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy." (LS, 99)

***Joy to you, and to the whole world,
this Christmas Season!***



ARC

By Lois Prebil, OSF

SAVE THE DATES for SHARING CULTURES 2026



Sharing Cultures was so well received in 2025 that JPIC and ARC will co-sponsor Sharing Cultures once again. Mark your calendars for 6:00 – 7:30 pm Central time on these Wednesdays – February 25th, March 25th, April 22nd, May 27th.

Sharing Cultures is a series of four monthly Zoom gatherings with real people telling us what's special about their cultures!



From the Archives - Sisters Are Remembered Fondly in Ft. Lauderdale

By Elizabeth Piskorski, Archivist



Sisters at the opening of Cardinal Gibbons High School, August, 1961 (OSF Archives)

Recently, as part of an ongoing effort to process and rehouse mission records, I have been going through all 51 boxes of mission materials present in the archives. As part of this push, I have been contacting schools where sisters were missioned to rehouse some materials.

All the schools I have contacted have accepted the records graciously. Some schools, however, go above and beyond, and I get to hear from people whose lives were touched by the Sisters.

One such case was with Cardinal Gibbons High School in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. I inquired if there was anyone who had a dedicated job of looking

after history materials. The school's history page makes mention of one special Sister—Sister Marie Schramko—who was the first president of the Girls Division at Cardinal Gibbons. This made me think the school knew of its history and cared deeply about it.

Sure enough, the history keeper of Cardinal Gibbons wasted no time getting back to me. She shared that she personally remembered three of our Sisters. "Sister Marie and Sister Janet were not only my teachers and later colleagues, but also my neighbors," Kristin Hanke wrote to me. She also shared that Sister Helen Zulka made her baptismal gown, and it is now a family heirloom that will be passed to her grandnephew upon his baptism. The gown is about to make its way through three generations of relatives.

Through this work of contacting schools, it has been wonderful to see that people cherish their memories with the Sisters. Hopefully, by recreating these connections and sending over some small pieces of history, the memories of the Sisters will be carried ever forward.



Sister Helen Zulka in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, circa 1965. She taught at Cardinal Gibbons from 1964-1975.



Sister Marie Schramko in Ft. Lauderdale, circa 1984.
She taught at Cardinal Gibbons from its opening in
1961 until 1916.



Sister Janet Rieden, who
taught at Cardinal Gibbons
from 1963-2016.

Sonnet in the Shape of a Potted Christmas Tree

By George Starbuck

*

O

fury-

bedecked!

O glitter-torn!

Let the wild wind erect

bonbonbonanzas; junipers affect

frostyfreeze turbans; iciclestuff adorn

all cuckolded creation in a madcap crown of horn!

It's a new day; no scapegrace of a sect

tidying up the ashtrays playing Daughter-in-Law Elect;

bells! bibelots! popsicle cigars! shatter the glassware! a son born

now

now

while ox and ass and infant lie

together as poor creatures will

and tears of her exertion still

cling in the spent girl's eye

and a great firework in the sky

drifts to the western hill.

Franciscan Human Trafficking Joint Committee



Submitted by: Associate Therese Griffin



Monthly Reflections December 8, 2025

Advent Reflection:

Hope Unfolding

by Katie Boller Gosewisch

Executive Director

Alliance to End Human Trafficking

In the Advent season, we are invited to believe that hope is not only possible but already unfolding among us. Advent reminds us that light grows gradually, often quietly, through the steady work of communities committed to compassion and justice.

This year, our education and outreach efforts expanded nationwide, reaching thousands through presentations, training sessions, community events, and a growing roster of our Speakers Bureau. These programs equip individuals, parishes, schools, and organizations with practical tools to recognize exploitation and strengthen prevention. We participated in major conferences nationwide and hosted a robust series of webinars to help communities better understand the realities of exploitation and pathways to prevention.

Throughout 2025, we launched new resources designed to strengthen prevention at every level and broadened our advocacy presence, including meaningful participation in Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C., where our members engaged directly with lawmakers on critical anti-trafficking legislation. We also hosted national conversations, such as the NFL Anti-Trafficking Symposium. We

deepened partnerships with congregations, survivor leaders, dioceses, and grassroots networks, ensuring that our work remains informed, grounded, and responsive to real needs.

Our February conference, Pathways to Prevention, brought together leaders, advocates, and practitioners for shared learning and collective action. We look forward to building on that momentum at next year's conference, United in Prevention: Current Trends and Prevention Strategies, as we continue to expand our national reach and deepen our collective impact.

As we look back, we are grateful for engagement, prayers, generosity, and unwavering belief that every person deserves safety and dignity. Nothing we accomplished this year happened in isolation; it happened because people across the country chose to stand with us.

Advent challenges us to prepare for what comes next. In the year ahead, the Alliance will continue to expand programming, strengthen survivor-centered initiatives, and expand national advocacy. With shared commitment, 2026 can be a year of stronger prevention and more profound collective effort.

May this Advent move us closer to a world where every person lives free from exploitation.



Archives Donations

Needed: Personal Histories

Dear Sisters,

Hello from your archivist! Things are well underway here. I have been loving the process of updating storage and bringing further organization to the beautiful archives of the Joliet Franciscans.

Our archive is a place where all files of the Sisters who have passed through this congregation are held in perpetuity. In essence, this is where the memory of a Sister is held when her peers are no longer able to hold it. We want these files to be rich and tell the story of the Sister as well as we can. I have noticed we are lacking in documents that share a Sister's personal **voice**.

I am requesting Sisters to submit a brief personal history to the archive (as well as you are able). This can be as long or as short as you prefer. Imagine if you were to choose what about you is remembered by future generations. What important qualities have you shared with this congregation? What do you think is important to know about your work? What strengthens your faith?

Sisters who feel that they are unable to handwrite or type a personal history should reach out to me, the archivist. I would be delighted to meet with Sisters and assist with typing or writing.

Once you have written these personal stories, please send them by mail or deliver them personally to the archives. They will be stored in your file.

If you have further questions do not hesitate to reach out. I am happy to share details and further explain what gets saved in the archive.

Archivist Phone Number: 815-725-8735 x 120
Address: 1433 Essington Road, Joliet, IL 60435
(address to Elizabeth Piskorski)
Email: episkorski@jolietfranciscans.org

Thank you for continuing to share the joys of your history with me, Elizabeth.

P.S. Another way we can make our files richer is by **labelling photographs**. The best way to do this is with a Number 2 pencil. Or, you can put a sticky note on the back with the names and let me label them with my archival pen.



From JPIC: KIVA Update

By Sr. Peggy Quinn

In 2011, we as a congregation became involved in KIVA, a microfinancing opportunity to help serve the underserved entrepreneurs globally to alleviate poverty. We have concentrated on loans to women and women with children. We wanted to update you on the loans we were able to make this year and give a refresher course on KIVA itself and our statistics.

Kiva was founded in 2005 by Jessica Jackley and Matt Flannery, who were inspired by entrepreneurs they met in East Africa and a lecture by microfinance pioneer Muhammad Yunus. Their goal was to create the world's first person-to-person micro-lending website, which they launched to connect lenders with underserved entrepreneurs globally to alleviate poverty. Kiva's online platform allows individuals to lend as little as \$25 to small businesses in developing countries through partner microfinance institutions, with the first loan being made to a woman in Uganda in March 2005.

Over the past 15 years we have made 699 loans to over 78 different countries. We have been able to donate over \$45,000. Every time our small donations are repaid, we are able to relend that money. It started with an initial amount from our One Heart project and then it keeps on giving as we are repaid.

This past year we made donations to 13 women, with donations ranging from \$25- \$150. The countries we reached this year were the Philippines, Vietnam, El Salvador, Peru, Solomon Islands, Palestine, Columbia, and



Kenya. Most of the projects were farming or running a small general store. One business was a milk delivery service and she need to finance a motorcycle to help with deliveries. One woman had a tailoring business. These are small business women trying to earn money to support their families.

Besides the individuals we give some money each time we loan to the management of the program. We gave \$167 in donations this year plus the \$950 in loans.

We can continue to pray for these women: Melie, Katherine, Erlinda, Xuân, Rezel, Mary, Maureen, Lydiah, Saria, Linda, Intesar, Rosario and Marleny.

Epiphany Party

Join our sisters and associates as we celebrate Little Christmas with fellowship and snacks.

Tuesday, January 6, 2026, at 1:00 p.m.
Joliet Franciscan Center

*No RSVP required.
Please contact Darcy
with any questions.
708-508-7795*



National Say It Now Day ~ December 17

National Oatmeal Muffin Day ~ December 19

December 17 is National Say It Now Day as a day to tell friends and loved ones how important they are to us by expressing gratitude for all the ways they've impacted our lives. With the year winding down, it's the perfect time to show gratitude to those around us for all they have done during the year.

We all need to make time for gratitude. National Say It Now Day gives us a chance to pause and reflect on what people mean to us. We encourage people everywhere to take a moment to tell their friends and loved ones how much they mean to them while they are still around to hear it. Don't wait! Say It Now!

CELEBRATING NATIONAL SAY IT NOW DAY

National Say It Now Day presents the perfect opportunity to express our gratitude to those who have played important roles in our lives.

There are so many ways to show gratitude. Think about making a phone call or writing a note to show appreciation for someone who has helped you. You can show appreciation for your family by inviting them over for dinner to let them know you're grateful for being in your life. You can also start a gratitude journal and begin with a list of things you are thankful for.

Enjoy a delicious breakfast or snack on National Oatmeal Muffin Day. It's an excellent way to celebrate on December 19th annually.

Known for its health benefits, millions of people start each day with an oatmeal muffin. Oatmeal includes health benefits for our hearts. Finding ways to incorporate it into our diets increases the opportunities to reap those benefits. Oatmeal muffins are another way to enjoy oatmeal.

The American muffin is similar in size and shape to a cupcake. Recipes for oatmeal muffins began to appear in American cookbooks in the mid-1800s. Raisins, bananas, blueberries and other healthy fruits often compliment oatmeal muffins. Add nuts for even more health benefits and texture, too.



See Oatmeal
Muffin
recipe on
page 12!

Associates Gathering

By Sheila Greuel

Seven of nine Effingham area Associates gathered at Sister Sandra Sudkamp's home for prayer on Wednesday November 12, 2025. We shared a special memorial prayer service in honor of Associate Eileen Hartke's husband Mike. After prayer we gathered at a local restaurant to share supper and lively conversation. The group is planning to meet every other month to share prayer. It is always such a blessing to be together to share and pray!



Christmas Rituals from Around the World

Iceland~Reading by candlelight after Christmas dinner

In Iceland, publishers release a flurry of new releases in the run-up to Christmas – a seasonal phenomenon known as the *jólabókaflóð*, or "Christmas book flood". The tradition dates back to World War Two, when most goods were rationed except paper, making books the most practical Christmas gift. Today, it helps support the niche Icelandic publishing industry; strengthens a love of the Icelandic language, which is at risk of dying out; and delights booklovers nationwide.

On 24 December, families exchange presents, eat Christmas dinner and then spend the evening reading their new books by candlelight, perhaps with a box of chocolates and a drink beside them. It's a ritual that feels distinctly Icelandic, but one of the easiest to replicate anywhere.

Japan~Spoiling your other half

As a largely non-Christian country, Japan celebrates Christmas in its own distinct way. Instead of a family-centred celebration, Christmas Eve plays out more like Valentine's Day – a romantic evening for couples. The wintry streets glow with Christmas lights, restaurants offer special menus and luxury hotels often book out. Christmas food is quite different too: Japanese people celebrate by eating *kurisumasu keki*, a light layered sponge with cream and perfectly cut strawberries. To borrow the spirit of the tradition: carve out a little dedicated time for your partner amid the usual family chaos.



<https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20251208-the-anti-materialist-christmas-rituals-around-the-world-that-swap-gifts-for-meaning>

Continued on page 11

Australia~Playing cricket as a household

Christmas Day in Australia centers on sunshine, food and family. It's also a time to grab a tinny (a can of beer), a bat and some stumps, and indulge in a great Australian family tradition: the Christmas cricket match. Everyone is invited and all ages are welcome. For one day only, cricket isn't about winning, it's about everyone taking part. Rules vary from household to household, with some more ruthless than others.



Finland~Visiting the ancestors

Honoring deceased relatives is central to the Finnish Christmas. On Christmas Eve, families visit cemeteries to light candles for loved ones who have passed away. According to *This Is Finland*, three-quarters of Finnish households take part, transforming graveyards into serene landscapes of snow and flickering candlelight. Cemeteries can be crowded at this time, but it's still seen as a rare moment of peace and reflection during a hectic season. Cemetery visits are often followed by another cherished Finnish tradition: the Christmas Eve family sauna.

Ukraine~Celebrating spiders

In Western Ukraine, the most typical Christmas decoration isn't a bauble or a star but a bejewelled spiderweb. The custom stems from The Legend of the Christmas Spider, an Eastern European folktale in which a spider decorates the Christmas tree of a woman too poor to afford ornaments. She wakes in the morning to find it glittering with silvery webs, and from that day forward, her family is never in need again. Ukrainians craft delicate webs from paper and wire and wrap them around their tree like tinsel. Finding a real spider or cobweb on a

tree is considered to be good luck, and it's customary to not sweep them away during this period. The easiest way to adopt the tradition: leave the cobwebs undisturbed.

Denmark~Making homemade decorations

A *klippe klistre* day – literally "cutting and sticking" – is an essential Danish ritual. Homes, schools and workplaces across the country hold crafting sessions to make elaborate garlands, braided stars and paper hearts to bring Christmas cheer to classrooms, offices and living rooms. It's a chance to *hygge* (*create a cozy, contented mood*) together and build a sense of community through creativity, all fuelled by *æbleskiver* (small Christmas doughnuts), cookies and *gløgg*, Denmark's potent mulled wine.



Venezuela~Getting your skates on

Christmas church services in Venezuela are joyful, communal and often lively, accompanied by bells, firecrackers and sometimes fireworks in the run-up to Christmas. But the most distinctive custom is how people often arrive: on roller skates. The tradition centers on skating to the early-morning Misa de Aguinaldo (Early Morning Mass) held between 16 and 24 December around 05:00 or 06:00. Children often go to bed early so they're ready for the dawn service, and many adults skate through the night to reach the church together. It's a beloved ritual that turns a solemn moment into something light-hearted and communal, with neighbors gliding through quiet streets side-by-side. If skating isn't an option, joining a local mass or community event can bring a similar sense of shared celebration.

Recipe Corner:

Oatmeal Muffins



- 1 1/2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted and cooled
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1/2 cup lightly packed brown sugar
- 1/4 cup diced dried apricots
- 1/3 cup white chocolate chips
- 1/4 cup dried cranberries

- Combine the oats and milk in a large bowl and let stand 30 minutes.
- Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Line 10 cups of a 12-cup muffin tin with paper liners
- In a separate medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, cinnamon, baking soda and salt.
- Stir the melted butter, eggs and brown sugar into the bowl of oats and milk until well combined. Stir the flour mixture into the oat mixture until well combined. Fold in the white chocolate chips and dried apricots.
- Using an ice-cream scoop or 2 large tablespoons, divide the batter among the 10 lined muffin tins. Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center of a muffin comes out with some crumbs sticking to it, about 20 minutes. Let the muffins cool 5 minutes in the tins before removing them to a wire rack to cool completely.

Facebook Prayer Authors

December	Sr. Marianne Saieg
January	JPIC-Daily Intentions
February	Sr. Marianne Saieg
March	Sr. Karen Berry
April	JPIC-Sr. Jane Nienaber

Volunteers needed for later in 2026 to be a Facebook Prayer Author!

Please contact Karen Garifo at kgarifo@jolietfranciscans.org.

Thank You!

Staying Connected

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If you would like to submit an item for *Staying Connected*, or if something you have requested to be published is inadvertently omitted, please e-mail Sister René Simonelic at rsimonelic@jolietfranciscans.org or Renée Cipriani at rcipriani@jolietfranciscans.org