



# PRESENTATION DOORWAYS

*offering hospitality to the world*



# The COMMITTEE

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY by the  
Sisters of the Presentation  
2360 Carter Road  
Dubuque, Iowa 52001-2997 USA  
Phone: 563-588-2008 Fax: 563-588-4463  
Email: info@dbqpbvms.org  
Website: www.dbqpbvms.org

## DOORWAYS COMMITTEE

Jane Buse-Miller, director of communications;  
Sister Carmen Hernandez; Sister Elena Hoye;  
Sister Maura McCarthy; Sister Joy Peterson;  
Karen Tuecke, partners in mission coordinator;  
Radie Roberts and Colleen Venter, associate  
partnership co-directors.

## The PURPOSE

The purpose of Presentation Doorways is to further the mission of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and our associates by sharing the news and views of the congregation with our partners, families and friends. Through this publication, we hope to share the charism of our congregation and to invite others to become involved in our mission.

## Your THOUGHTS & COMMENTS

We invite your input. Please send or email photos, stories and information about our sisters, associates, former members, family and friends, or any ideas which relate to the purpose of this publication. Submit to:

Editor, Presentation Doorways  
2360 Carter Road  
Dubuque, Iowa 52001-2997  
info@dbqpbvms.org

## Cover PHOTOS

The doorways represented on the cover are snapshots of significant doors in the Presentation history and present day ministries: (Left to right) Doorway of Hotel Hope, a nonprofit hotel for homeless women and children in New Orleans, Louisiana; Doorway of St. Vincent's Academy (now St. Columbkille) in Dubuque, Iowa, in 1879; Doorway of Céad Mile Fáilte (100,000 Welcomes) located on the property of the Presentation Motherhouse at 2360 Carter Road in Dubuque, Iowa; Doorway of the Presentation Motherhouse at 2360 Carter Road in Dubuque, Iowa; Doorway of Casa Betania, home for retreats and a gathering space for students in Tarija, Bolivia.

# PRESENTATION DOORWAYS

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## Cover PHOTO

Presentation Sisters and associates come together annually to participate in the Community Days gathering. Left to right: Sister Jessi Beck, Associates Lisa Schmidt and Bridget Lahart, Sisters Raeleen Sweeney and Joetta Venneman.

# A MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

by RITA MENART, PBVM

Transformation is a concept that we have addressed in the last few Doorways. It is a key word in religious community life as reality shifts and God invites us to understand deeply our call and mission. By nature, transformation is messy and lacking in clarity. God has given us examples to help us understand it, such as the caterpillar going into its cocoon. The caterpillar doesn't seem to have an inkling of the disintegration and reconstruction it will go through or what is on the other side. How does the caterpillar prepare for this unknown transformation? In my wonderings, I have also discovered other examples of transformation.

In Margaret J. Wheatley's book, "Who Do We Choose to Be? Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity," a chocolate chip cookie is an example of transformation. She writes, "Consider the ingredients: flour, butter, eggs, water, salt, chocolate chips. None of them taste the way the cookie does; none of them can predict the flavor of the cookie. Yet when they all mix together in the right proportions, reliably and wonderfully, you get a delicious cookie. It has a deliciousness that could never be predicted if you studied the parts, no matter the level of analysis. You can't find a cookie in any one of the ingredients."

In these two examples, the end product is completely unknown and impossible to predict. The caterpillar is a caterpillar, the flour is flour and all the other ingredients are themselves. They give all they are to their identity until they are not that anymore. Perhaps we, in these uncertain and changing times, need to be who we are. Hopefully, that identity is love. God is love and we are to be love as well. We seem to struggle with this identity as a human community. God said love and we build bombs. God said love and we refuse to share by saying, "It's mine, I worked for it." Maybe our preparation for transformation is to be sure we are actually who we say we are.

Our Community Days gathering, which you will read about in this issue, was about transformation. We did not choose the chocolate chip cookie for the symbol, but chose instead the image of going through a door, passing over a threshold. We must all bring our best loving selves to this opportunity to transform and risk stepping through the threshold into the unknown. What will we become? Chocolate chip cookies? Butterflies? We do not know, but my experience with God let's me know it will be better than I imagined if I bring my true self to the transformation. My experience with God also let's me know there will be struggles, uncertainty and risk on the journey.

I bring one more thought to this hodge podge of reflections. In July, I had the opportunity to see the Vincent Van Gogh Immersive Exhibit in Davenport, Iowa. Van Gogh was a famous painter of the 1800s who had a difficult life. The immersive experience was enjoyable and many quotes touched me. The quote at the entrance was, "Love always causes trouble, that's true, but in it's favor, it energizes." (*To Theo Van Gogh from Vincent Van Gogh, March 1884*). Maybe love is the energy that transforms us as heat transforms the ingredients into a cookie. I agree that love causes trouble sometimes as we attempt to love well, but it also gives us the energy to continue to make this world a heavenly place. So let us continue the struggle to be love on this journey of transformation.

*Sister Carmen Hernandez Sister Rita Menart Sr. Mary Im Speck Sr. Julie Cannon*



SISTERS  
OF THE PRESENTATION  
of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
DUBUQUE, IOWA

## Our MISSION

We, the Sisters of the Presentation, are called to evangelize, offering hope and love to our broken world by incarnating the hospitality of God, confronting injustice and working for peace.

## Our DIRECTION

We, the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Dubuque, Iowa, Associates and Companions in Mission, are called to live our charism of radical hospitality in response to the cry of women and children made poor, our wounded Earth and all creation.

## Our COMMITMENTS

We invest time, energy and resources to a process of inner work, opening ourselves to personal and communal transformation.

We listen and respond to the cry of women and children and advocate for racial equity and immigration reform.

We foster connections with people and land to nurture healing of our wounded Earth.



Left to right: As part of the morning ritual, Sister Donna Demmer receives a blessing from Sister Marie Barth.



Left to right: Sisters Ann Jackson, Janet Stelken and Beth Driscoll enjoy time to reconnect; Sister Hermann Platt places paper hearts from her table that hold sharings of threshold experiences in a bowl; Sisters Linda Reicks and Brigid Stanley smile for a photo op during break.

# Standing at a New Threshold Community Days 2023

by JENNIFER RAUSCH, PBVM

Presentation Sisters, associates and administrative staff gathered at Mount Loretto in Dubuque on July 20-23, 2023, to participate in the annual Community Days experience. The opening prayer stated, "As we gather, we find ourselves at a new threshold, grateful for all that has brought us to this place. This holy journey we take together in faith, knowing that God's promise to be with us gives us the hope and the courage to step into an unknown future."

Those present literally stepped across a threshold into the gathering space to symbolize that they were stepping into new territory. They were asked, "Are you willing to ... step with trust into this sacred space ... allow the Spirit to take you to places you might not imagine ... do your part to contribute to the unfolding of God's dream for the world?"

A chorus of energized voices called out, "We are!" And so began the sacred journey of transformation of hearts, transformation of passions and transformation of dreams. There was an enthusiasm evident in the group assembled.

Sister Jean Ann Meyer states, "There is a strength and gentleness in being together as sisters, associates and staff imagine how we can bring Nano's love to the world."

Associate Janet Leonard reflects, "As I looked around the room and saw the beautiful women and men of our community, I felt so blessed by God to be a part of this loving group."

Associate Deborah Barrett shares, "Living in California, I try to participate in as many Zoom and online Presentation programs as possible. It is wonderful to sit down in person and have meaningful conversations."

Associate Maureen Utter concurs, "It is always a gift to be here with sisters and associates in this beautiful place."

And so a lively beginning provided a readiness to absorb the words and spirit of speaker Sister Nancy Schreck, OSF, of Okolona, Mississippi. She highlighted that any

crossing-over a threshold into new territory requires a transformation. To leave one's comfort zone requires a sense of adventure and courage. To live sacred lives is to be at the edge of what we do not know. There are times when transformation includes the gift of collapse on a personal, communal or societal level. Former constructs evolve into soul-stirring new ways of being together.

**As we gather, we find ourselves  
at a new threshold, grateful for all  
that has brought us to this place.  
This holy journey we take  
together in faith, knowing that  
God's promise to be with us  
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to step into an unknown future.**

In this new-found connectedness is an invitation for "thick speech" which Sister Nancy defined as making time and space for heart-centered sharing of who we really are, how we really feel and how we can empower each other to "dive deeply" into one another's dreams ... dreams for justice ... dreams for our world. Sister Martha Donnelly expresses, "Sister Nancy nurtured hope and challenge for us."

Transformation happens at the speed of trust. Once a new threshold has been crossed, some skills needed to continue on the path of transformation include commitment, reverence for time, finding comfort in the process of discernment, letting go of whatever is being held too tightly, development of a mystical prophetic presence and deep regard for wisdom. Sister Louann Doering muses, "I was reminded of our baptismal call to be a mystical, respectful, prophetic presence."

Sister Julianne Brockamp expresses sincere appreciation for "the profound input by Sister Nancy which engendered respectful, energetic dialogue and openness to the slow evolutionary process of emerging new life in the midst of collapsing current and past obsolete systems."

Sister Carrie Link formulated this stirring question for Presentation Sisters, associates and staff, "Where do we invest our giftedness and imaginations in addressing the needs we observe in our culture, a culture that is experiencing so much collapse?"

Another discussion focused on documents evolved from several previous community-wide conversations under the auspices of Plante Moran consultants, Erin George, Sister Mary Pellegrino, CSJ, and Jerry Gumbleton. They presented "Catalytic Moments for Radical Transformation" which includes positioning community intentionally for mission; broadening scope and definition of community; enlivening the Chapter call to transform ourselves and embrace radical hospitality; and creating new ways for Mount Loretto to be an internal expression of mission.

These points will be realized through expanded strategic interaction with the local civic community and local agencies engaged in human services.

Attention centered on a discussion of an approach to member wellbeing and vital living for Presentation Sisters. Emphasis was given to the expression of the community's values and hopes for each sister to live her vocation to the fullest wherever she is and whatever her circumstances. This focus will guide the development and implementation of new and/or renewed resources (organization, personnel, systems/structures) to ensure the ongoing holistic wellbeing of every sister.

Participants appreciated the various modes of communication that were implemented by facilitator

# Toward a Culture of Radical Hospitality

by CARMEN HERNANDEZ, PBVM

As women religious, we have been challenged to take a hard look at our history, to reflect on our roots, to embrace our story and, more importantly, to create a plan to carry the roots of our story forward.

For over two years, our Presentation community has been working with consultants from Plante Moran – discussing, questioning, dreaming – in an effort to develop such a plan. This often feels like a long, daunting task yet we know it is essential to trust in the slow work of God, especially when we desire to make a difference in the lives of others. It can be easy to become discouraged when we do not see immediate progress; however, we continue to trust that the seeds we are planting will bear fruit.

Inspired by the life of our foundress, Venerable Nano Nagle, we honor the profound impact and rich legacy she entrusted to us. Nano's example of working for justice and serving those most in need, especially women and children, has always been at the core of our story, central to our vision and a common thread of our ministries. As we respond to these changing times, a passion statement was created to help focus our work and decisions as we move forward: *"We imagine a world in which women and children are loved, valued as equals and feel safe wherever they are."*

Our Presentation community is excited about bringing this passion statement to life. Conversations with various partners have begun as we seek ways to directly accompany those in need and address what changes need to be made to affect systemic change that promotes resiliency for those in crisis.

As Presentation Sisters, mission has always been at the forefront of our lives. In an effort to guide our community in future conversations, a direction setting statement was established to provide intentionality and accountability in our planning: *"Dubuque Presentation Sisters would like future planning for building, property and resources to focus on use for mission, with sisters vitally living in community in the Mount Loretto building as long as it is feasible."*

To live vitally means to sustain a sense of purpose over one's lifetime; recognizing, celebrating and sharing one another's gifts. Sisters participated in several small and large group conversations to determine what is needed to ensure a culture of vital living and life-long engagement of all sisters. Recommendations were formulated to guide the community's efforts in supporting each sister to live her vocation to the fullest, wherever she is and whatever her circumstances. Looking at Mount Loretto through the lens of mission, with the priority of sisters living vitally wherever they are, will be our stepping stone as we begin to make important future decisions.

With excitement, we continue to look forward as we engage in meaningful conversations and dream about the viable possibilities. We believe we are at a place of great transformation in our community that holds significant potential for growth. Trusting in God's love, we continue to be inspired by Nano whose prophetic vision called her to take the next step, even when she couldn't see beyond it.

## Transformation

**On the cusp  
between known and new  
possibilities and resistance  
leave-taking and embracing  
clothed in ritual  
are the telltale signs in sacred space  
of the one sure thing  
something is afoot  
ready or not  
and we will never be the same.**

Corine Murray, PBVM



Sister Kate DuVal, SSND, of the Mankato, Minnesota province. Alternating sharing in groups of two, three or five persons provided an opportunity to exchange meaningful conversation in multiple settings. Sister Kate gave careful attention to prefacing each sharing session with significant contemplative silence so that each person could speak from her heart as she expressed any resonance, resistance or resolution she experienced regarding the topic at hand.

Sister Marge Loughren shares, "I like questions that do not have a single right answer."

Associate Carol Kane offers, "Each participant has the freedom to express oneself in a table group or the large assembly."

Theologian John O'Donohue wrote, "Because a threshold embodies a great complexity of emotions such as confusion, fear, excitement, sadness, hope, these vital crossings are always clothed in ritual." Thus Community Days prayer was punctuated with sacred symbols of living water, weaving of textiles and holy oil.

Sister Donna Demmer observes, "Morning prayer set the theme for each day." An evening gathering provided a time for fun, music and laughter that calls forth healing for the soul of all.

Community Days closed with a symbolic threshold crossing that propelled sisters and associates from their sacred meeting place into their sacred world. Sister Jessi Beck affirms, "The world in so many areas is at a threshold as we are in religious life. How we navigate changes with authenticity and vulnerability has the potential to contribute to the life of the world."

The threshold has been crossed as we journey into the future on the path of transformation.

Left to right: Sisters Leanne Welch and Martha Donnelly smile for the camera; Sister Carmen Hernandez hands out a commissioning card as a symbol to continue on the path of transformation as new thresholds are crossed; Sisters and associates spent time visiting and enjoying time with one another: Sisters Lynn Marie Fangman and Julianne Brockamp; Sisters Louise Scieszinski and Rita Cameron; Sister Mery Cari Paz and Associate Barb Ressler; and Sisters Jane Conrad and Cheryl Demmer.



## Presentation Associate Gathering Community Days 2023

by RADIE ROBERTS and COLLEEN VENTER, ASSOCIATE PARTNERSHIP CO-DIRECTORS

Presentation associates joyfully meet in person and via Zoom on Saturday, July 22, for the 2023 Community Days gathering. Led by Associates Donna Ewy, Billie Greenwood and Carol Witry, the group discussed personal experiences of transformation and were challenged to identify ways they live out the Presentation charism of radical hospitality in response to the cry of women and children made poor, our wounded Earth and all creation.

Using Ted Dunn's book, "The Inner Work of Transformation," the speakers explored transformation and set the tone for the deep sharing the group would experience. Dunn states that we have to break down and let go of what was to make room for breaking through to new life, like a butterfly has to break down that chrysalis in order for the lifeform of the butterfly to emerge. Based on a document by Robert Gass, "Transformation is profound, fundamental change, altering the very nature of something. Transformational change is both radical and sustainable. Something that is transformed can never go back to exactly what it was before."

Associate Donna Ewy explained, "We have all had experiences in which life went a different direction than we planned. Perhaps it was painful or confusing. How did you break through to some new understanding or experience?"

Associate Carol Witry blessed the group with a personal sharing illustrating a quote by Dunn that states, "Pain brings us to the crossroads, but love pulls us through." Using the knowledge of transformation and Carol's

inspiring story, associates then shared personal experiences of having to move past an event and an attitude or a way of doing something that had to break down in order for something better to come from it. The group participated in sacred listening, which is a time to listen to others deeply with open hearts, honoring each sharing with reverent silence.

In the second part of the gathering, Donna discussed Biblical references to transformation, such as the imagery from Luke 5 when Jesus heals the leper, from Luke 13 where Jesus heals a woman who had been crippled by a spirit for 18 years, and the story of Jesus restoring the sight of Bartimaeus in Mark 10. Donna then transitioned to the story of Nano Nagle, Presentation foundress, and her personal conversion story. Nano came from a wealthy family, but turned from that life of ease to start schools for Catholic children in Ireland, who at the time, could not be educated. Years later, associates gathered still find Nano's conversion relevant to their own personal stories of transformation.

Presentation associates are called to share in and live out the Presentation charism and mission within their personal vocations. Donna challenged associates to think about ways they embody the Presentation spirit and how they may need to be transformed in order to live more fully.

As the gathering came to a close, associates discussed what was in their heart – the session was inspiring, bringing new

Presentation associates spent time getting to know one another better through conversation and sharing. Left to right: Associates Janet Leonard, Rose Rauch and Anastasia Nicklaus; Associates Mary Lou Mauss and Shirley Lanners; Associates Billie Greenwood, Donna Ewy and Carol Witry; Connie Bellaver, associate orientee, and Associate Carol Kane.

### **The Way Knows the Way**

**You don't have to know the way.**

**The way knows the way.**

**You don't have to plan the way,  
trust the way, feel your way.**

**The way knows ... the way knows ...  
the way knows the way.**

*Lyndsey Scott*

awareness, rekindling old friendships and developing new ones, experiencing feelings of openness and gratitude and a sense of learning to embrace transformation. With the help of Associate Billie Greenwood, the group joyfully finished the gathering by singing Lyndsey Scott's song, "The Way Knows the Way."

### **Presentation Associate Identity Statement**

Dubuque Presentation associates are women and men called to share in the life, spirituality and mission of the Dubuque Presentation Sisters. Grounded in prayer, we support and encourage one another as we seek to embody the Presentation charism of radical hospitality both individually and communally. In the spirit of Nano Nagle, we reach out with hospitality and compassion as we seek justice and respond to the needs of the world.



Associate Partnership co-directors Colleen Venter and Radie Roberts

## With Gratitude

After two years of service as co-director of the Presentation Associate Partnership, Colleen Venter has decided to officially retire. Retiring from 33 years in nursing in 2018, Colleen accepted this co-director position in 2021.

Colleen shares, "Hard to believe, it has been over two years since I was 'called' to share in the associate co-director position. I am so grateful for the opportunity to have worked with my awesome team, Radie Roberts and Sister Joan Brincks, my fellow associates, all of the great Mount Loretto staff, sisters and leadership team members. I believe the Presentation Associate Partnership is stronger and continues to evolve because of the commitment of the associates and the sisters to get to know one another better and to carry Nano's light into the world.

"I will miss the drop-ins, conversations in the office and throughout the building. There is no warmer, welcoming hospitality to me than what we share with one another in person, through email, Zoom, texts, photos, phone calls or mail.

"I promise to continue to tell the Presentation story and to carry on the charism and mission. I may not be working in the office but I will continue as an associate in the Joyful Servants of the Light group and help out as I can.

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all your support and prayers, both personally and for my family."

May God bless you, Colleen, with peace and joy as you journey into retirement.



The Conference of Presentation Sisters from Aberdeen, South Dakota; Dubuque, Iowa; New Windsor, New York; and San Francisco, California, participated in the 2023 International Presentation Association (IPA) Assembly held in St. John's, Newfoundland.



Left to right: Sister Lily Pushpam from South India performs a ritual dance as part of the closing ceremony. As a symbol of all Presentation beginnings, Sister Carmen Hernandez placed a rose in the harbor where daughters of Presentation Foundress Nano Nagle first arrived in North America. Dubuque Presentation Sisters Joetta Venneman, Mary Lou Specha, Carmen Hernandez and Joy Peterson gather around the IPA display.

# Listen! God of the Universe Beckons

## 2023 IPA Assembly

by JOY PETERSON, PBVM

In June 2023, nearly 70 Sisters of the Presentation and women and men associated with the various congregations from 16 countries gathered for seven days in St. John's, Newfoundland, for the 8th Assembly of the International Presentation Association (IPA).

Thirty-five years ago, leaders of Presentation congregations from around the world gathered in Los Gatos, California, to establish the IPA with a commitment to deepening a corporate understanding of the Presentation charism. With a desire to share in an ongoing conversion toward serving those living in poverty, the Los Gatos participants committed to developing a process for speaking and acting collaboratively for justice.

Coming together every five years, Presentation Sisters and Presentation people acknowledge and celebrate the ongoing work of IPA and join in focusing the common commitments to the works of justice going forward. Sisters Carmen Hernandez, Mary Lou Specha, Joetta Venneman and Joy Peterson, representing the Dubuque Presentation Sisters, were among the attendees in Canada.

Dr. Jesse Rogers, Scripture scholar and Dean of Theology in St. Patrick's Pontifical University in Maynooth, Ireland, was invited to break open the assembly's theme of listening to God's beckoning in the universe. Her reflections reminded the group of the interconnectedness of the universe as a reflection of God's unifying love. Drawing from Scripture stories of

God's faithfulness, she challenged listeners to perceive God's actions and invitations in these times.

This framing of the work of the assembly opened the way for the following days of listening to the stories of the efforts of Nano Nagle's daughters and sons who work for justice on six of the world's continents. Sister Mary Lou describes the experience of hearing those stories, "The IPA assembly reconfirmed my commitment to serving as a daughter of Nano. We shared many stories of the cries of women and children around the world desperately needing our love to heal so many injustices. There is a unique spirit that is joy-filled and contagious when a group of apparent strangers meet but know we are deeply connected to bring hope to our world."

One of the common efforts of IPA has been the support of a non-governmental representative at the United Nations. Taking the corporate concerns for the work at the United Nations and at the grassroots, Presentation people respond to the cry of Earth and to those made poor by embracing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a human rights framework, addressing the issues of women and children, care of Earth and indigenous peoples. Speaking about the global goals of IPA, Sister Joetta states, "One of the aspects that touched me was how those gathered made efforts and progressed at being together interculturally. We sought to understand more clearly our collective identity as IPA."

From hearing stories of the care for Bedouin women in the Holy Land, to the work of the Papua New Guinea sisters who help women heal from trauma, to the efforts to educate Roma children in Slovakia, and so many more stories, came a sense of solidarity in believing that because one Presentation person is there offering care, the whole Presentation family is giving support.

At the 2017 assembly in Sydney, Australia, there was a call for developing a new structure for IPA. This new structure established the position of an executive director along with a team working together to promote the work of the United Nations, to network the efforts of the justice contacts and to provide support through meaningful reflections of Presentation spirituality and charism. While COVID-19 interrupted plans for meeting physically, under the guidance of Sister Ann Marie Quinn, executive director, multiple Zoom meetings were held to develop a strategic plan of action to direct the work of the justice contacts. These virtual gatherings strengthened the sense of collaborative international efforts to eliminate violence against women and children, attend to care of creation and deepen advocacy for indigenous and tribal peoples. The assembly offered time for the justice contacts to meet and share their resolve to continue their work toward these commitments.

Recognizing that the communities of sisters in Europe, Australia and North America are diminishing, the assembly called for a governance structure that will expand participation in the continuance of Nano's charism of love and service. For the first time, a board of directors made up of sisters and Presentation people with passion for the mission will be established to guide IPA into the future. Nano's dream of serving those made poor "in any place in the world" will be the guiding light for this new board.

During the assembly, the participants frequently reminded each other that, "We are all IPA no matter where we live." Sister Carmen captures that outlook in her words, "The IPA Assembly was filled with great energy and provided me a new appreciation of the work that is being achieved all over the world by Presentation people. The conversations and diversity of peoples left me with a deep sense of unity that we are all in this together trying to carry on IPA's mission."

# An Abundance of Gifts to Share

by KAREN TUECKE, PARTNERS IN MISSION COORDINATOR



Partners in Mission Ann Wertz and George Sztajer

Ann Wertz and her late husband David began supporting the Sisters of the Presentation decades ago. The Wertz children grew up attending St. Columbkille Grade School and benefitted from many of the Presentation Sisters who taught there. David's brother, Tom, fondly remembers how they "controlled the rabbits" in the sisters' vegetable gardens. Being taught math by Sister James Marie Gross was a special memory for David. She always had a greeting for him when he visited the Presentation Motherhouse.

In their adulthood, Ann and David frequently attended Mass at Mount Loretto. Ann shares how she met and continues to be a friend of the sisters. "I have so many connections. I do not know where to start, so I'm going to attempt to go in chronological order."

Prior to meeting David at the University of Iowa, Ann was from Keokuk, Iowa. After David and Ann married, they settled in Dubuque. "We became parishioners at St. Joseph the Worker, where we met Sisters Beth Driscoll and Marilyn Breen. Both of them were key to getting us involved in parish ministries and programs. They were always inviting and hospitable. Over the years, Sister Beth and I came to treasure an occasional breakfast after morning Mass at the Village Inn."

The connections that Ann and David had were many. "We were parishioners at St. Joe's until I became director of faith formation and then pastoral associate at St. Mary's and St. Patrick's. During those years, I had the pleasure of working alongside Sister Jeanette McCarthy who was the leader of Hispanic ministry. I remember Sister Jeanette as a spitfire, full of joy and always available to help."

After David passed away in 2010, Ann went to work at Loras College as the coordinator of service and leadership with the Breitbart Catholic Thinkers and Leaders Program. This program was initiated under Father Douglas Wathier, who was also chaplain at Mount Loretto. Because of this connection and the hospitality of the sisters, the program held annual retreats at the Presentation Motherhouse. In addition, a number of their musically gifted students cantored at liturgies.

"In the past, I have volunteered with candy making at Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey. That is where I met Sister Anne McCormick. We just connected in an easy way. I remember a time that we took a sister to Rockford so she could catch the bus to O'Hare. Sister Anne and I were able to bond during that trip. I miss those days."

"I also know some of the Presentation associates who continue to be a presence in their communities. These faith-filled people carry on the good work of hospitality and serving the needs of others. It takes 'eyes that can see and hearts that care' in many situations."

Ann is now remarried and lives in Texas with her husband, George Sztajer. "I have lived most of my adult life in Dubuque. My late husband David was a Dubuque native.

As time passed after David's death and my retirement from Loras College, I sensed a transition in my life. I met George. We were both widowers and we both had worked at colleges, me at Loras and he at Mount St. Claire in Clinton, Iowa. We had a lot in common and we married in 2018."

**We care deeply about the sisters and want to contribute to the Presentation mission. When we think about all the good work the sisters do and their mission, contributing makes us feel like we are a part of their journey.**

Ann Wertz

Ann and George contribute to the Presentation Sisters through Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD) from IRAs. "David died before his retirement, and he had saved for it. George and I feel very blessed and we want to give back. We choose to give through a QCD because it makes sense for us financially and benefits charitable organizations that mean something to us and make a difference."

"We care deeply about the sisters and want to contribute to the Presentation mission. When we think about all the good work the sisters do and their mission, contributing makes us feel like we are a part of their journey."

Ann continues, "Honestly, I think about Nano with her lantern, going out, finding the needy and offering help. The sisters are so generous. They are helping men, women and children. I see them helping the men at the Rescue Mission, the women and children at The Presentation Lantern Center and Opening Doors: Maria House and Theresa Shelter ... not only helping but making their lives better. It is that kindness and personal relationship that prompted me to support their mission."

"I am impressed by the orders of women religious. They embrace change – they observe and make changes in their ministries. They sacrifice to care for people. The sisters are aware of what is going on in society, what is happening today and what the needs are. They make great decisions with the ever-changing world. The Presentation Sisters carry on the mission of Nano and truly are ladies of the lantern!"

## All Souls' Day

Remember Your Loved Ones on November 2, 2023



*Walk forth  
you who weep and mourn  
into the Presence  
of the Holy One.  
There,  
discover your loved ones  
dwelling in peace,  
and clothed in light.*

CARRIE LINK, PBVM

In Catholic tradition, November is a month of remembrance of our deceased loved ones. The month begins with the Solemnity of All Saints on November 1 and the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day) on November 2. During the month of November, the Sisters of the Presentation would like to make a special remembrance of your loved ones that have meant so much to you.

The Presentation Sisters will remember your loved ones in daily prayer throughout the month. Remembrance cards will be mailed in late September and we encourage you to return the card with names of those you mourn.

Intentions can also be submitted to Karen Tuecke at [partnersinmission@dbqpbvms.org](mailto:partnersinmission@dbqpbvms.org) with the following information for each loved one:

Name of Loved One \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Death \_\_\_\_\_





Sister Richelle Friedman speaks in front of the Supreme Court at the Poor People's Campaign Rally for voter and economic rights.

## Reflections on the Journey

# Sister Richelle Friedman

by RITA WATERS, RSM

**God will not forget your work and the love you have shown as you have helped his people and continue to help them.**

*Hebrews 6:10*

In her work in Washington, D.C., Sister Richelle Friedman confronted injustice and worked for legislation to benefit people who are living in poverty or have low incomes. Advocating for the poor is not new to the Sisters of the Presentation. As Nano Nagle took her lantern into the streets of Cork, Ireland, she met the needs of those in poverty. Yet, poverty was not confined to her time. As the fourth leading cause of death in our country today, "Poverty is a moral travesty and a detriment to the soul of our nation," states Bishop William Barber of Poor People's Campaign. "There's not a scarcity of resources, but a scarcity of political will. Until our nation's leaders invest the great riches of this nation in ensuring equal justice for all, beginning with the poor and low-wealth of this nation, we cannot be silent."

And silent Sister Richelle was not! She became a fierce champion of rights and equity, lobbying senators and congressmen/women to pass legislation beneficial to people of lower income status, such as adequate food and housing, livable wages, healthcare, child tax credit, immigration and more. Jann Jackson of The Annie E. Casey Foundation asserts, "They may never know Richelle's contribution, but millions will suffer less because of her work."

These values of justice, steeped in integrity and passion, so in line with the Presentation mission, were innate to Sister Richelle. She was nurtured by parents who believed that human rights were for all. Her mother Evelyn was a driving force in establishing a workers union at Ertl Toy Company. Upon seeing a homeless person in Chicago, her dad noted, "You are no better than that person. Nor are you less than the President of the United States." These principles of equality and respect guided Sister Richelle's interactions. Senator Chuck Grassley once told her, "We often disagree on the issues, but you always do so respectfully."

Perhaps this sense of justice was the impetus in 1964 for her to join the Sisters of the Presentation whose mission is "to offer hope and love to our broken world by incarnating the hospitality of God, confronting injustice and working for peace."

Sister Richelle's first 20 years of ministry were in teaching. She valued teaching the principles of Catholic social justice: the preferential option for the poor, economic justice, the common good, meeting basic human needs, and respect for all people.

In his social justice papal exhortation, "Joy of the Gospel," Pope Francis wrote, "The Church, guided by the Gospel of mercy, hears the cry for justice and responds to it with all her might. This includes eliminating the structural causes of poverty and promoting the integral development of the poor, and solidarity in meeting the real needs we encounter." Sister Richelle told students, "If your gut is telling you that 'something isn't right' about a particular situation, follow that feeling to its origin and you will likely discover an injustice."

This was true for her as well as she witnessed the hardship of vulnerable populations while doing volunteer work. At a shelter for abused women, Sister Richelle encountered a woman with cerebral palsy who had been abused by her spouse. The woman's mother told her she needed to return to her husband because "he was the best she could do." Sister Richelle remembers, "I watched as she stumbled down the stairs, carrying everything in one paper bag, to return to the abusive situation. Back at the convent, I went to my room and wept." On Saturdays, Sister Richelle distributed bread donated by a local bakery. One Saturday, she witnessed people waiting for the bread to arrive. They stood in the freezing rain for over an hour for a few loaves of bread. At the Catholic Worker House, a woman lamented to Sister Richelle that she would apply for a job, but did not have money for a bus ticket to the application site, nor clothing appropriate for the interview. No decent clothes, not even 35 cents for the bus!

### *Mission and Politics Interwoven*

Believing that the root causes of these situations must be addressed, Sister Richelle set off for Washington in 1989 to carry out the Presentation mission through political ministry at the national level. This is consistent with Pope Francis' conviction, "I engage in politics because everyone must engage in politics. And what is politics? A way of life for the polis, the city. The Gospel has a political dimension, which is to transform the social mentality of people so that it is directed to the common good."

She joined the effort to eliminate structural causes of poverty and often led the charge. Amelia Keegan of Friends Committee on National Legislation said, "I have always admired Richelle's tenacity to chase down senators in the hallways and to consistently call for what is right. She was a lobbying force, and at the same time, showed compassion and care for the people around her, asking about our lives and families, making us feel seen and valued."

Sister Richelle's political ministry consisted of working with four organizations: NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice; McAuley Institute, a Sisters of Mercy entity that provided loans to develop affordable housing; Children's Defense Fund; and the Coalition on Human Needs. Sister Richelle relays, "I always felt blessed to be with organizations whose missions correspond to our



Sister Richelle Friedman joins the broad faith-based advocacy community to rally for just immigration policies.

Presentation mission with its emphasis on systemic change and transformation of society. I felt I was continuing Nano's work of acknowledging the dignity of each person and the right to have basic needs fulfilled."

Julie Bodnar of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops agrees, "Richelle has been an incredible witness of what it means to live out one's values and to bring them into the public square."

When asked what were some of her most poignant encounters, Sister Richelle enthusiastically responds, "Many interactions impacted my perspective and deepened my commitment; but talking with Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) was definitely a highlight. He shared that after the beatings the civil rights marchers endured crossing the Edmond Pettus Bridge in Selma, Catholic sisters took them in and bound up their wounds. It made me proud to be a sister."

When the vote on the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was imminent, then House Speaker Nancy Pelosi asked Sister Richelle to accompany her to speak with Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH). Rep. Kaptur, a Catholic who was debating whether or not to support the ACA along with six other Catholic Democratic members, ultimately voted "Yes." Sister Richelle recalls, "For Speaker Pelosi, my presence as a Catholic Sister was significant."

Sister Richelle's co-worker Nicolai Haddal notes, "I will always be inspired by Richelle's spirit of perseverance, optimism and determination. It is a spirit that we must hold onto as we continue the eternal pursuit of justice."

After 33 years, Sister Richelle completed her political ministry in D.C. She plans to continue working for justice back in Iowa and urges everyone to get involved. "Do advocacy wherever you are and whatever your ability," states Sister Richelle. "Decisions are made on every level of government and affect virtually every aspect of our lives. Your involvement matters!"

# Social Justice Actions

*This statement appeared in the March 28 edition of the Telegraph Herald in Dubuque, Iowa.*

## The Leadership Teams of Local Women Religious Call for Support of Trans Youth



The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) website reports that transgender people face discrimination obtaining accurate identification documents such as driver's licenses and passports. One in five trans people report being refused medical care that they need. 78% of trans people experience harassment in K-12 settings.

We call on lawmakers to pass laws that will provide legal protections for trans youth and reduce harassment and bullying in schools. No one deserves bullying in school, at the doctor's office, or at home. Making schools safe is not something trans youth can do on their

own any more than racial or ethnic respect is a one-sided effort. The safety and rights of all LGBTQ+ people need to be protected and their contributions to society deserve to be recognized. Schools need to be a safe place for all students.

Our charisms call us to educate others about the God who created them and loves them so that they might freely respond to God's call to be a loving presence toward others and call out the injustices that must be resolved with care for the other.

Learning respect for all people is especially needed in our globalized world. Teaching respect prepares students to interact in a manner that avoids stereotyping and condemning.

Being made in the image and likeness of God, God loves you for who you are. Being trans is not a defect. All children deserve dignity and respect.

It is important to listen first. Listen to young people and help them sort out their feelings. Be nonjudgmental, compassionate, and empathetic. Put aside your own fears and prejudices. Listen for their fears and other issues they are dealing with.

March 31 is Transgender Day of Visibility. Let us speak up in support of our youth, the one down the street, our family members. Let them know that their visibility is important; their lives are worth living and they are treasured by our loving God.

**Congregational Leadership Teams of the**  
Sisters of Charity, BVM  
Sisters of the Presentation  
Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque  
Sinsinawa Dominican Leadership Council

### Sponsored Earth Mama Performances

In August, the tri-state area women religious congregations sponsored two performances of Joyce Johnson Rouse, a.k.a. "Earth Mama." Joyce is a singer-songwriter, educator and environmental activist whose music is used around the world for ecology, peace and justice education. Both performances celebrated and focused on care of the earth through the arts and music. The events were free and open to the public.

Sister Rita Menart states, "Michaelangelo said, 'My soul can find no staircase to heaven unless it be through Earth's loveliness.' Earth Mama's message of we are one with each other and with Mother Earth communicates that message as well. We hope the music moves people to make choices to live in harmony with each other and Earth to grow closer to God."

### Sponsored Film Wins Best Documentary

The Sisters of the Presentation and Catholic Sisters of the tri-state area collaborated to co-sponsor the documentary, "Labeled: The Missing, Murdered, and Forgotten" at the Julien Dubuque International Film Festival held on April 24-28 in Dubuque, Iowa.

"Labeled" is a journey into the lives of three Indigenous women who were exploited and tormented during their time in the Canadian sex industry. This raw exposé, written and directed by Justin Kueber, informs viewers of the atrocities committed against over 4,000 women and girls who are missing, murdered and forgotten across Canada.

### Sister Richelle Friedman Receives Human Needs Hero Award

Each year, the Coalition on Human Needs (CHN) gathers its advocates in Washington, D.C. to celebrate the organization's commitment to promote federal policies that address the needs of low-income and vulnerable people, and to bestow its Human Needs Hero Award. On July 13, Sister Richelle Friedman was honored as the 2023 recipient of this award.

The coalition describes Sister Richelle's mission, "As director of public policy for CHN, her passionate commitment to justice was a guiding light for countless human needs advocates. As determined as she is personable, Richelle's tenacity ensured that key policymakers and their staff had to confront the realities of those living on the margins and could not ignore the policy solutions that work. Her tireless work contributed to real progress in fighting hunger and poverty. Her work brought together the human needs community and nurtured the next generation of policy advocates."

Sister Richelle received a plaque from the coalition that reads, "Richelle Friedman 2023 Human Needs Hero: With passion, determination and an effectiveness, you have demanded justice in meeting human needs and have made a difference in millions of lives. Your friends and colleagues could not be more grateful for your leadership."

Laura Peralta, Sister Richelle's colleague, wrote, "It has been my lifetime honor to work so closely with Richelle since my time at NETWORK. She is a hero – a woman of integrity, strength, kindness and justice. She has the respect and friendship of so many on Capitol Hill and our community because of who she is."



*Sister Richelle was presented with a framed Congressional Record which includes heartfelt praise from Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Committee.*



# GIVING TUESDAY

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2023**

GivingTuesday is an opportunity for people around the world to use their individual generosity to remain connected and support their communities. It's not just one day – this is a global social movement that's working every day to fuel more generosity in order to build a more just and equitable world.

This year, on our annual day of celebration on Tuesday, November 28, 2023, the whole world comes together to give back in many different ways: through acts of kindness, gifts of voice, time, talent or treasure.

In this time of uncertainty, stress and even despair, one thing that gives us hope is that crisis is catalyzing innovation and collaboration like we have never seen before. All around the world, we are joining forces and leaning on each other – and this generosity tells us that we will achieve the better, more just world that we all seek.

During GivingTuesday, every act of generosity counts – whether it's helping a neighbor, advocating for an issue, sharing a skill or supporting your favorite cause.

**Please consider supporting the Sisters of the Presentation on GivingTuesday as we continue our mission to help those most in need.**

To learn more, contact Karen Tuecke at [partnersinmission@dbqpbvms.org](mailto:partnersinmission@dbqpbvms.org) or visit [www.dbqpbvms.org/give-back/givingtuesday](http://www.dbqpbvms.org/give-back/givingtuesday).

# Radical Conversations

by ELENA HOYE, PBVM

True wisdom often finds its voice in great conversations. What makes conversations significant? Conversations can communicate a sense of self worth, enhance the maturing process, encourage cooperation and spark ideas. Conversations are the life-blood of relationships.

During the 2022 General Chapter, the Sisters of the Presentation unanimously promised to invest time, energy and resources into a process of inner work, opening ourselves to personal and communal transformation. We envisioned a transformation that would generate actions on behalf of women and children, Earth and racial equity. Our commitment to communal transformation began only after having serious and ongoing conversations.

Conversations can be the doorway to change. They are reminders that no one is right about everything all of the time. Conversations teach us to listen. Sometimes conversations trigger new and exciting ideas. And importantly, sisters and associates know that serious conversations can be the first step toward transformation.

Sister Julia Wingert reflects, "These conversations are an opportunity to engage with others, learn and grow together. Listening to the knowledge, thoughts, experiences and insights of the participants and sharing with one another can help to expand how we see and understand one another and the wider world in which we live."

During 2023, on the third Thursday of the month, associates and sisters are joining in Zoom meetings to participate in "Radical Conversations." These conversations foster communication that encourages the transformation of thoughts and words into meaningful action. Sisters and associates joined together to reflectively challenge themselves to embrace personal and communal transformation. Some conversation topics were:

- Violence against Women and the Mental Health Impact: A Global Perspective – One of the community's goals is to eliminate violence against women. Participants examined violence against women from a global perspective, and looked at the intersection of violence in mental health.
- Anti-Racism – The meaning of systemic racism was examined. Participants looked deeper at the ways they supported and benefited from systemic racism, and reflected on steps needed to organize in order to become an anti-racist institution.

**Be brave enough to start  
a conversation that matters.**

*Margaret Wheatley*

- Community Living Beyond the Horizons – Community living was explored and participants examined new ways to welcome new members to the community.
- Justice Goals and Our Commitment to the International Presentation Association – This session invited everyone to embrace the community's justice goals and to participate in the work of justice.

Conversations scheduled for the rest of the year include: Steps toward Communal Transformation; Laudato Si' (an encyclical of Pope Francis) and Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples. The format guiding these conversations includes: introductory input, small group discussions with specific questions and guidelines, reports from the small groups and, finally, sharing in the large group.

Associate Sister Virgie Luchsinger believes that these conversations connect associates with the larger community of sisters. "I encourage others to come to these Zoom meetings because they open all of us up to current theology and concrete options for living."

Such conversations suggest that we cannot be right about everything all the time, but together we will be right some of the time.

**Loving God, strengthen our commitment  
to hear your words woven into the words  
that others speak, and to recognize  
You at work in our conversations.**

**Guide us to hear where Your Spirit  
is leading and bless us with courage  
to follow You and set each other free.**

**Amen**

# Mount Loretto AND BEYOND

Featured below are special times in the lives of Dubuque Presentation Sisters and associates.



## A Place to Heal and Recharge

Rachel Carson Newton states, "Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts." The new waterfall feature in the Mount Loretto courtyard offers the opportunity to rest, to enjoy its beauty and to experience the peaceful sounds of nature. Much gratitude for all the effort that went into bringing it to fruition.



SHOW LOVE. OFFER HOPE. LIVE HOSPITALITY.  
**EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY**

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Contact Sister Jessi Beck at [vocations@dbqpbvms.org](mailto:vocations@dbqpbvms.org)

### PLEASE CONNECT WITH US.

For updated information about the activities and events of the Sisters of the Presentation, please visit our website at [www.dbqpbvms.org](http://www.dbqpbvms.org) or call 563.588.2008.

### PLEASE JOIN US.

#### Vocation Events Coming Soon

Please visit our website at [www.dbqpbvms.org](http://www.dbqpbvms.org)

**November 28, 2023**

Giving Tuesday

### PLEASE PRAY WITH US.

**November 2, 2023**

Feast of All Souls

**November 5-11, 2023**

National Vocation Awareness Week

**November 13, 2023**

Foundation Day (1874)

**November 21, 2023**

Presentation Day

**November 23, 2023**

Thanksgiving Day

**21st of each month**

Pray for Vocations

**25th of each month**

Pray for Benefactors



**SISTERS**  
OF THE PRESENTATION  
*of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

2360 CARTER ROAD  
DUBUQUE, IA 52001-2997

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or call us at 563.588.2008. Thank you.*

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## PRESENTATION SISTERS CELEBRATE 60 AND 85 YEARS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE



SISTER JANET STELKEN (60)

SISTER DAMIAN O'BRIEN (85)

SISTER JULIA WINGERT (60)

SISTER JOY PETERSON (60)

We honor and give thanks for the lives and ministries of four Dubuque Presentation Sisters who celebrated their jubilee on July 19, 2023. Sister Damian O'Brien observes 85 years of religious life and Sisters Joy Peterson, Janet Stelken and Julia Wingert observe 60 years.

Walking in the footsteps of Presentation foundress, Nano Nagle, these four extraordinary witnesses of endurance, grace and dedication have been a blessing for many – family, students, parents, community members, parishioners, professional colleagues, the sick and elderly – through their gifts of loving service. We are grateful for their combined 265 years of faithfulness and the impact they have in our lives.

**Read more about each sister at [dbqpbvms.org/news-events/jubilees](http://dbqpbvms.org/news-events/jubilees).**