

Ursulines of Cincinnati Visions

Christ-Centered Women in a Changing World



Spring 2017

CINCINNATI URSULINES SUPPORT BUS TRIP TO WOMEN'S MARCH

Soon after the idea of a 2017 Women's March on Washington, planned for Jan. 21, became national news, Jennifer Mertens, a St. Ursula Academy religion teacher and occasional "Young Voices" contributor to *National Catholic Reporter*, began dreaming of organizing a bus trip for the event. Jennie's experience at St. Ursula forms the context for her NCR articles. Her interest in raising her own voice and helping others to do the same at the Women's March, then, was not surprising. Jennie and her friend, Laurel Fiorelli, shared enthusiasm for creating the opportunity. The two talked with others about the idea and it gained momentum and shape. The group would be intentionally inclusive. Financial assistance would be needed.

This is where the Cincinnati Ursulines became involved. Enthusiastic about the venture, Sr. Mary Jerome Buchert proposed a grant from the Ursulines' Starfish Project to provide "scholarships." The Ursulines' ongoing interest in comprehensive immigration reform and Laurel's connections with the local Hispanic community made

outreach to that population a perfect fit. In the end, funding from the Ursu-



Women's March bus trip organizers Jennie Mertens and Laurel Fiorelli stop to breathe before joining their companion travelers on the bus to Washington, DC.

lines and others allowed 11 Hispanic women and family members, as well as several other individuals needing assistance, to join the busload of 55 women and men and to add their presence and voices to those of the thousands of others in Washington.

All participants in the bus trip and March were powerfully affected. "It was an unbelievable experience!" is a comment echoed by many as they met up with waiting family and friends

upon their return to Cincinnati. In a post-march debriefing with Srs. Mary Jerome and Margie, Jennie described the emotional response of the group members during their post-march reflection time. One Hispanic woman stated that sharing in that session was the first time she felt fully included in our country as an immigrant.

Jennie herself said, "I've never had such an experience of female identity" in a civic demonstration. She reported that many families were present, and the atmosphere was peaceful, compelling, and joyful, yet imbued with a sense of urgency about a broad range of topics facing our country.

A spirit of community was built during the marchers' days together, and follow-up activities are in the works. What happened in Washington will have a lasting impact, both on individual lives and, hopefully, in the political atmosphere all over America. "This is what democracy looks like!" And "I cannot be silent!" are themes that will echo in action going forward.

SISTER EILEEN PLANS FOR TRAVEL TO INDIA

The itinerary is still being finalized, but Sr. Eileen Connelly is already excited about plans to travel to India in late July with a small delegation from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. Other members of the group are Mike Gable, director of the archdiocesan Mission Office, Tony Stieritz, director of the Catholic Social Action Office, and Walker Gollar, a theology professor at

Xavier University. Sr. Eileen, news editor for *The Catholic Telegraph*, will be reporting on their experiences.

The travelers will begin their visit in the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore with Archbishop George Antonysamy, then proceed to Changanasery/Cochin, Goa, and, finally, Mumbai. Goals for the trip include inter-religious dialogue and exploring ministries related to

social justice and empowering women. Visits to Catholic Relief Service projects, Jesuit sites and with other Ursuline Sisters are also planned.

"This is an incredible opportunity," said Sr. Eileen. "I'm looking forward to visiting and learning more about our sisters and brothers in a part of the world I never imagined visiting. It will be a privilege to share their stories."





Dear Friends,

Grateful to be free of the walking boot that limited my physical activity for several weeks this winter, I've had recent occasions to venture into my neighborhood at "ground level." Considering its evidence of climate change, the early spring has both up and down sides. But there are some heartening signs. In addition to the green leaves of daffodils and crocuses sprouting forth, a growing number of tri-color,

tri-language signs are appearing in yards. Their message: "No matter where you are from, we're glad you are our neighbor."

As you will read in this issue of *Visions*, we Ursulines have been about welcoming our neighbors who are immigrants and those who are marginalized in any number of ways. Srs. Barbara and Mary William find meaningful ministry in their work with St. Vincent de Paul within their respective parishes. As a community, we are helping to support affordable housing for immigrant families. And our Starfish Project provided funding for several women and young people to take part in the Women's March on Washington, giving them a sense of empowerment and a unique opportunity to participate in our democratic system. Also in this issue, Sr. Eileen shares an introduction to her upcoming trip to India with a delegation from the Archdiocese, taking outreach to the neighbor well beyond our continent.

In his message for this year's World Day of Peace, Pope Francis described "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace." There he implores, "In the most local and ordinary situations and in the international order, may nonviolence become the hallmark of our decisions, our relationships and our actions, and indeed of political life in all its forms." We Ursulines believe that by our outreach to, and building relationships with, various communities, we are contributing to a culture of peace and nonviolence. We support you in your own efforts toward peace.

Sr. Margie Efkeman
General Minister

Our Mission Statement

We, the Ursulines of Cincinnati, are a community of Christ-centered women transforming lives with compassion and creativity. We pledge to respond to the needs of our times through our diverse ministries and in collaboration with the laity. We will respect the dignity of each individual, nurture their unique gifts, and be present to them as we all seek a deeper and more personal relationship with God.

Ursulines of Cincinnati

Sr. Margie Efkeman, OSU,
General Minister

Editor

Sr. Eileen Connelly, OSU

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for design



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR Welcome

Please feel free to write letters to our editor on anything you might like to say about articles that appeared in *Visions* or anything else that is of interest to you.

We welcome your opinion.

Please address letters to:

Eileen Connelly, OSU
Ursulines of Cincinnati
1339 East McMillan Street
Cincinnati, OH 45206

SISTERS LEND HELPING HAND THROUGH SVDP

Assisting Those Most in Need



Srs. Mary William Luxford and Barbara Niehaus are both lending a helping hand through their volunteer efforts with the Society of St. Vincent De Paul (SVDP).

At the heart of SVDP's ministry is the "home visit," where trained volunteers, known as "Vincentians," work in teams of two to visit those in need on their schedule to determine the exact nature of assistance required. Sr. Barbara has been volunteering with the St. Bernard-Spring Grove Village SVDP Conference for several months, making visits with her partner, Jesuit Father Joe Folzenlogen.

Vincentians make thousands of in-home person-to-person visits each year and are able to see firsthand, the exact situation in which a person is living. SVDP assistance is tailored to each person's or family's needs and may include food, clothing, furniture, rent, utility, transportation, medical, emotional or spiritual support.

"We've walked into some homes, and the people have nothing, not even a table, so we stand at the

kitchen counter," Sister Barbara said. "These are people who have been



Sr. Barbara Niehaus poses with her St. Vincent de Paul partner, Jesuit Father Joe Folzenlogen, after completing their home visits in Winton Terrace on a recent Saturday morning.

homeless, or are coming out of shelters, and are just trying to get their lives back together."

"At the end of our visits, we give them the option of saying a prayer if they would like to," she added. "They pray for their families, but also for us, which really touches your heart. Being involved with this ministry has given me a tremendous sense of gratitude for the life I've had."

Since its inception more than 15 years ago, the SVDP Conference at St. Phillip the Apostle Parish in Morrow has grown from around half a dozen volunteers to around 20, said Sr. Mary William. Although she no longer makes home visits, she serves as moderator for the conference, attending all meetings and leading the group in prayer.

The St. Phillip Conference serves the areas of Morrow, Maineville and South Lebanon. "Our volunteers always take enough food for a meal or two on their visits. They go to a lot of mobile homes, where there may be cars outside, but the people have no money for gas, or we visit retirees with medical issues."

Other assistance is offered through a food pantry at the parish and donation weekends when St. Vincent de Paul trucks visit. "We usually fill up a truck or two," said Sr. Mary William. "It's rewarding to know that we're helping people in the community who are most in need."

CINCINNATI URSULINES HELP FUND HOUSING FOR IMMIGRANTS

The Cincinnati Ursulines have seized an opportunity to help fund an affordable housing project for Hispanic immigrants in one Cincinnati neighborhood. La Amistad, Inc. had been formally incorporated as an IRS tax-exempt Ohio non-profit in 1995. The purpose, as stated in the Articles of Incorporation, was: "To provide aid to the poor of Central America, whether these poor reside in their native countries in Central America or are residing abroad." In 2012, under new leadership, La Amistad became more specifically focused on providing high-quality, safe, affordable housing for immigrants. Improvement of existing units and expansion through acquisition of new properties would require new funding sources. Board members developed a plan for a companion loan pool to help provide those funds.

La Amistad Board members and an immigrant family residing in one of the housing units are members of the parish where Srs. Barbara Niehaus and Margie Efkekan worship. Sr. Margie's past experience with the Hispanic population and her interest in comprehensive immigration reform led her to investigate the possibility of the community becoming a lender to the new La Amistad Loan Pool, LLC. Her proposal was unanimously accepted by the Sisters. The empowerment aspect of the project was a selling point. La Amistad residents are very responsible, as described by Mark and Cathy, two of the board members. Residents typically will remind them to pick up their rent payments when they're due. They contribute to the upkeep of the properties, inside and out. In short, they are

good neighbors and tenants! The hope is that some of the resident families will eventually become property owners. They may also be potential parish members!

At this time of worldwide refugee crisis, the Ursulines were seeking a way to have an impact. Although La Amistad residents are not technically refugees, they are in need of a supportive community. La Amistad housing and the empathy offered by Loan Pool members and the surrounding neighborhood can help provide that. The Ursulines are very pleased to be a part of that support system. To learn more about the Loan Pool and/or how to contribute, contact Sr. Margie at mefkeman.osu@fuse.net or at 513-961-3410, ext. 139.

Lunchtime Composting Efforts Expand



The “green efforts” at St. Ursula Academy that the Ursuline Sisters provided funding to initiate are continuing to grow. The composting project recently received a grant from the Hamilton County Recycling and Solid Waste District. There are plans to buy reusable plates, cups, and utensils to bring the school cafeteria closer to a zero waste operation. The Academy is now down to two trash bags at lunch and hopes to use just one when the disposable plates and cups are replaced. In addition, some of the drinking fountains are being retrofitted with spigots so students can easily refill their water bottles, and electric hand-dryers will be supplied for the restrooms to reduce the paper towel waste. Visitors from St. Xavier High School and Mercy Montessori have also expressed an interest in starting composting in their cafeterias. Pictured here are SUA student helpers doing their part to help with the effort.

The Ursulines
of Cincinnati



St. Ursula Convent
1339 McMillan Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45206
<http://cincinnatiursuline.org>

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