

Ursulines of Cincinnati Visions

Christ-Centered Women in a Changing World



Autumn/Winter 2021

AN ALTERNATIVE VISION FOR THE FUTURE Ursuline Companions Pledge Commitment

By Peggy McCormick Platz
(SUA '84)

Any vintner, worthy of the wine-making craft, knows grapes. The vintner takes pride in the melding of varietals, grown on vines of various ages, seasons and soils. Precise combination of the grapes yields flavorful wine which bears trademarks of the vines' first fruits.

St. Angela Merici often used her expertise in cultivating grapes as imagery to infuse her Companions in their holy work. A modern adaptation of St. Angela's original image took root through the formation of the Ursuline Companions, an extension of the mission and ministries of the Ursulines of Cincinnati. Original members began discernment and development of the group three years ago, culminating in a simple commitment ceremony in October. After recalling St. Angela's directives, members personally shared their journey to membership and pledged to support the spiritual, ministerial and financial needs of the time, so as to further the work of the Ursulines of Cincinnati. Members completed their commitment by signing their names in an enrollment book. Sr. Margie Efke and Sr.

Sandy Sherman of the Toledo Ursulines witnessed the ceremony and congratulated each new member with a glass keepsake, depicting "The Women at the Well," designed by Companion Mary Ann Meyer.

Following the ceremony, members enjoyed dinner together. The past, present and future were linked through the evening of inspira-



The Companions pose for a photo with an image of St. Angela Merici.

tional prayer, dedication and community. Since St. Angela's 16th century inception of the Ursulines, work in the vineyard of the Catholic Church has evolved from relational experiences and influences of its members.

But St. Angela was also visionary, seeing the need for both pruning and grafting to maintain vitality of God's vineyard. The history, spirituality and ministries of the Ursulines of Cincinnati remain firmly rooted, intertwined and fruitful, growing into the future with the Ursuline Companions.



Ursuline Companions Jane Knudson, left, and Mary Ann Meyer are pictured during the ceremony.



Dear Friends:

As we prepare this 2021 issue of the autumn/winter *Visions*, that reference alone presents a photographic metaphor for the transition that we Cincinnati Ursulines have embraced. The



colors of autumn in their dazzling beauty remind us of the many ways the Sisters, our Companions and collaborators have shared the light and grace with which God has so generously gifted us.

At the same time, we are also reminded that transition, done well, leads to transformation. And transformation asks of us a certain amount of giving up and giving over to God, just as the colors of autumn are given over to the barren trees and snow covered grounds of winter, beneath which new life is slowly nurtured.

The Ursulines of Cincinnati are experiencing transitions that promise new life. In this issue of *Visions*, you will read about changes in our community leadership and our continuing relationship with Saint Ursula Academy and St. Ursula Villa, as adapted to the needs of our time. As has been said before, we Cincinnati Ursulines have been pioneers in some of the changes that most women's religious communities are just beginning to live into. We value your friendship as we move into the future with God's grace.

There are new and exciting developments for our Ursuline Companions, whose commitment to St. Angela and her spirit seed hope for the future. Our former members also continue to carry the spirit of St. Angela in their lives and value continuing relationships with us. You'll read about both in this issue.

Collaboration with our lay partners and with other congregations is integral to future life in the Church. You will read about our participation in the Day of Service, recognizing the role of religious women and men in the history of our Cincinnati archdiocese, and also about Sr. Eileen's new ministry as Director of Communications for the Franciscan Friars of St. John the Baptist Province. As we live into our new roles as Pontifical Commissary and Local Congregational Representative, we open ourselves to the transformation to which we are called and invite each of you to journey with us.

With love and prayers,

Sr. Sandy Sherman and Sr. Margie Efke

Our Mission Statement

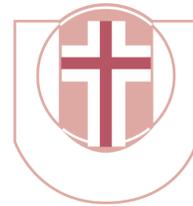
We, the Ursulines of Cincinnati, are a community of Christ-centered women transforming lives with compassion and creativity. We pledge to respond to the needs of our times through our diverse ministries and in collaboration with the laity. We will respect the dignity of each individual, nurture their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

Sr. Margie Efke, OSU
Local Congregational Representative
Sr. Sandy Sherman, OSU
Pontifical Commissary

Editor

Sr. Eileen Connelly, OSU

Special Acknowledgment to
Stephanie Lang Beckmeyer (SUA '89)
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.

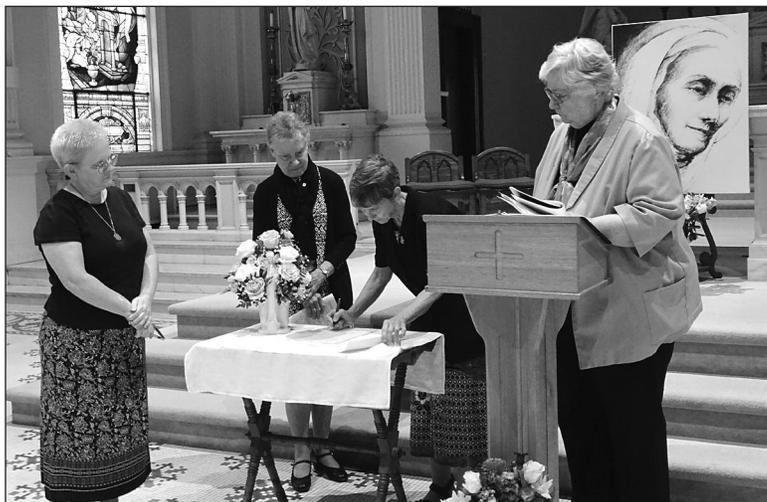
Please address letters to:

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MAKING CHANGES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE TIMES

By Eileen Connelly, OSU

Our beloved foundress, St. Angela Merici, was known as a woman of adaptability, foresight and courage, who encouraged her successors to make changes according to the needs of the time.



Sr. Sandy Sherman, pictured third from left, officially accepts the role of Commissary, with Cincinnati Ursuline Sisters Eileen Connelly, Margie Efke and Mary Jerome Buchert looking on.

Taking that to heart, the Ursulines of Cincinnati prayerfully and carefully discerned the future leadership of the community and sponsorship of Saint Ursula Academy and St. Ursula Villa amid the reality of diminishing numbers of Sisters in many religious orders worldwide. For many decades, the Cincinnati Ursulines provided an outstanding education and instilled the Ursuline charism in students, staff members and parents at both schools. During a special ceremony in June, the community welcomed Sr. Sandy Sherman, current President of Ursuline Sisters of Toledo, as their Pontifical Commissary, as well as marking the transition of both the Academy and Villa to independent Catholic schools in the Ursuline tradition, beginning July 1, 2021.

“We welcome the leadership and partnership of Sr. Sandy in this ‘next step’ in a process initiated several years ago by the Sisters to secure their jour-

ney into the future. It frees the Cincinnati Sisters for mission and ministry to the people of God,” said Sr. Margie Efke, who will now serve as Local Congregational Representative for the community.

“The Ursulines of Cincinnati affirm our special relationship and shared history

with Saint Ursula Academy and St. Ursula Villa and enthusiastically bless their educational ministries,” she added. “The administrators and Boards of Saint Ursula Academy and St. Ursula Villa and the Sis-

ters collaborated closely with each other to identify and select the model that will carry the schools into the future. The Sisters will continue in relationship with the schools, but in a less formal arrangement.”

The petition process began in 2014, explained Sr. Margie, when the North American Ursuline Leaders (NAULC) began to explore together some possibilities for Ursuline collaboration around leadership options for the future and sponsorship possi-

bilities for their schools. “The support of the NAULC leaders was critical to our process and remains so as we actually make the transition.”

“The Toledo Leadership Team members each came to our first planning meeting with our Cincinnati Sisters in our hearts and minds,” Sr. Sandy noted. “Within our first year, we extended the offer of my services as Commissary, realizing that the Sisters needed time to accept and then time to prepare. As Sr. Margie and I began to discuss it more seriously, it became clear to me that this was a gesture of not just Ursuline to Ursuline, but of Sister to Sister. I congratulate them on the fine job they have done in doing all the footwork needed to take this step.”

“The Cincinnati Sisters are extremely grateful to Sandy for offering to serve us in the role of Commissary,” Sr. Margie said.

“Now that my role of Commissary is official, I see the first and primary goal to build relationships with each member of the community and to continue to educate myself by reading their rich history and their documents, by being a privileged witness to their lives, and presence to the people of Cincinnati and to their culture and their legacy,” said Sr. Sandy. “This includes their Companions and their schools who continue in the tradition of these wom-



Sr. Margie Efke and Sr. Sandy Sherman pose with administrators and Board members from Saint Ursula Academy and St. Ursula Villa.

en of faith who continue to live the charism of Angela Merici in their time and place.”

FORMER MEMBERS REUNITE VIA ZOOM



By Sr. Margie Efke and
Cynthia Heinrich (SUA '66)

“Among Margie’s many gifts, I especially appreciate her care and concern for not only the ‘nuns,’ but also the ‘formers,” said Cynthia Heinrich, a former Cincinnati Ursuline.

In spring of 2020, COVID-19 caused the cancellation of the Ursulines’ traditional celebration of Holy Thursday, to which local former Ursulines had long been invited. Sr. Margie reached out to the group and shared an article about another religious order that had convened a gathering of their current sisters and all those who’d spent part of their life journey in the community. Judy Wimberg responded and suggested it was time for the former members to gather again. Discussion via email of possibilities led to offering a Zoom meet-up of all who were able. Cynthia sent out the invitation and Mary-Cabrini Durkin offered to host the meetings.

Fast forward 18 months. Six former members and Sr. Margie have met about every other month via Zoom on a Friday afternoon. “I’ve enjoyed hearing news about grandchildren and spouses, discussing some world events, learning about our personal interests/passions and sharing the many joys and challenges of getting older,” Cynthia said. “I especially enjoyed the chance to get to know Anne Helmick Werdel, who, thanks to the miracles of the internet and Zooming, has been able to participate from her home in North Carolina.”

“It has been a very graceful thing to be in touch, not just with the folks on Zoom, but through them with all that they represent in what I loved about Saint Ursula and my years there,” Anne said.

Through the various networks among the former members, the group has tried to keep up with those unable to manage the technology or the schedule. Barb

Cooke, known as Sr. Mary David, and Kathy Beimesche are two of whom the “Zoomers” receive occasional reports on. Not all news has been good. When Judith Brown (formerly Sr. Benedict) died of cancer on July 29, Barb Rivers Hite alerted the group to her obituary. Less than two weeks later, Marilyn Crone Ifcic’s husband called Cynthia to relate her very unexpected passing. The deaths of these two former members of different generations, each a church musician and each a beloved former teacher at Saint Ursula, touched all deeply. The group collaborated to provide an Ursuline presence at each of the funerals.

Mid-summer, a small group managed an outdoor lunch with Kathy at the care facility where she now lives. They eagerly anticipate the time when all can safely gather in person. Relationships formed years ago continue to unite current and former members in one Cincinnati Ursuline family.

Donation of Art Supplies



The Ursuline Companions recently collected more than \$435 worth of art supplies that were donated to Lighthouse Youth & Family Services. Jill Cahill (SUA '84) is pictured here with Jessica Wabler, Vice President, Homeless Youth Services, at Lighthouse.



EMBRACING A NEW MINISTRY WITH GRATITUDE AND JOY



A casual dinner conversation two years ago with a longtime colleague recently led to a new ministry opportunity for Sr. Eileen Connelly.

Over a meal in the summer of 2019, Sr. Eileen and Toni Cashnelli, then Director of Communications for the Cincinnati-based Franciscan Friars of St. John the Baptist Province, caught up on professional matters and shared personal interests. Sr. Eileen had just left her position as a longtime editor/writer at the *The Catholic Telegraph* and was discerning new ministry possibilities. Toni mentioned that



Sr. Eileen chats with Fr. Al Hirt, OFM, currently pastor of St. Francis Seraph Parish in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine.

she planned to retire in the next few years and hoped Sr. Eileen would consider being her replacement.

Since the timing wasn't quite right, Sr. Eileen admits she promptly forgot the conversation and went on to accept a position as Associate Director of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's Mission Office, coordinating fundraising, communications and social media efforts to support local missionaries serving domestically and abroad. It was rewarding work for Sr. Eileen, who has traveled to mission areas in the United States, El Salvador, Honduras and India.

Fast forward to a Friday afternoon this past June when Toni emailed Sr. Eileen to say she had announced her retirement, effective July 31, and hoped her colleague would consider the position. Sr. Eileen knew it was an opportunity she needed to prayerfully consider.

"It all happened rather quickly and unexpectedly. God works that way sometimes," she said. "The friars' love

for the poor, respect for and acceptance of all people, focus on peace and justice issues, care for creation, and active living of the Gospel values align with my personal values and those as an Ursuline Sister. Our foundress, St. Angela Merici, joined the Third Order of St. Francis as a young woman, desiring to live a life of simplicity and service, something we still strive for today."

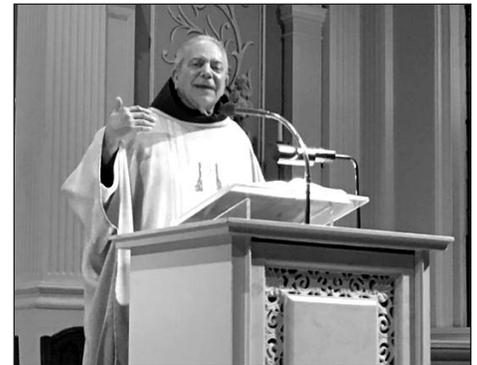
"Eileen and I had known each other for years through our media connections and our work in the animal rescue community," Toni said. "'She's an excellent reporter and a terrific person' is what I told my friar bosses. But I also knew that Eileen's love for creation gave her a special connection to St. Francis, and to me that's essential in communicating his charisma to the world."

During her time at *The Telegraph*, Sr. Eileen had interviewed many of the friars, among them Fathers Jim Bok and Blane Grein, both missionaries serving in Jamaica and the Southwest, respectively. Fathers Cyprian Berens and Valens Waldschmidt were retired from active ministry when she spoke with them in 2012, yet still finding ways to share the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi and reach out to other residents at St. Paul's Archbishop Leibold Home for the Aged. Fr. Cyprian was a cheerful presence as he tooted around the Home on his scooter, greeting residents and employees with a smile and words of encouragement. Reflecting on his ministry over the years, Fr. Cyprian shared a sentiment Sr. Eileen said she can definitely relate to: "Obedience sometimes means you go kicking and screaming into something and it turns out wonderful because of God's hand in it."

The Cincinnati Ursulines were thrilled to learn about Sr. Eileen's chance to work with the friars. For many years, Sr. Elizabeth Lang, who passed away in 2016, was an active parishioner at St. Monica-St. George and raved about the homilies by then-pastor Fr. Al Hirt. Prior to COVID-19, the Ursulines of Cincinnati were blessed to have Fr. Dan Anderson as the presider at most of their community

liturgies. Fr. Dan is definitely an Ursuline in spirit and brings a special understanding of St. Angela to his celebrations with the Sisters.

After several meetings with the friars' provincial leadership, Sr. Eileen accepted the position and began her new full-time ministry on Aug. 2. As Director of Communications, she serves as the link between the friars themselves and administration and staff, handles everyday external communication from the province with other organizations – secular and religious – and with the media. "Simply put, I share the friars' news and stories," she explained.



Fr. Dan Anderson, OFM, gives the homily during the Cincinnati Ursulines' celebration of the feast of St. Angela in January 2017.

"Sr. Eileen stepped into the important staff position as head of our Communications Department, quickly taking on all the major duties without missing a beat," said Fr. Bill Farris, Provincial Vicar. "It is not easy to replace a 25-year veteran and to find someone who fills the role so competently."

During a recent video shoot with Fr. Ric Schneider, the 89-year-old friar shared the joy he has experienced through his vocation as a friar and priest. "Shooting the video took all of five minutes," Sr. Eileen said, "then we talked for an almost hour about a variety of ministerial, spiritual and church related issues. I'm incredibly humbled by the friars' trust, and am inspired by their faith and humility on a daily basis. And, I'm beyond grateful for God's goodness and the amazing sense of timing that led to the chance to become part of the Franciscan family."

ACTIVITY IN THE ARCHIVES



The amazing Archivists for the Cincinnati Ursulines are always busy preserving the Sisters' history and sharing their stories. These dedicated alumnae are:

Elaine Besterman Semancik (SUA '54), Anne Kennealy Gutzwiller (SUA '61), Kit Rettig Overbeck (SUA '61), Janet (Jan) Buchert Hirst (SUA '67), and Nancy Strottman Broermann (SUA '68).

On Oct. 3, for example, Nancy and Frank Farmer Loomis, a Rookwood Pottery expert, co-led a class about Maria Longworth Storer at the University of Cincinnati campus on Victory Parkway. After class, the group returned to Saint Ursula Academy for a tour of the parlors, chapel and archives.

Anne provided the narration for a video shot by Andrea Brunsman (SUA

'90), Vice President of Ursuline Identity at Saint Ursula. Traditionally, the students visit the archives as freshmen. Due to the pandemic and the Academy's block schedule, some seniors have not had that opportunity. They will have a digital tour of the archives either in their religion classes or on their Faith in Action Day.

The Archivists recently hosted a special visitor from South Dakota. Suzanne England was interested in learning more about her great aunts, Sisters Mary Evangelista and Mary Grace Joerger, who entered the Ursuline community from Aurora, Ind., in 1926 and 1931. As part of her visit, Suzanne was able to see an example of the habit worn by the Sisters, thanks to the talents of a friend of Kit's, who made two for a 2014 Academy play featuring the relationship between Maria and the Ursulines.



Kit Overbeck models an Ursuline habit.

And, as always, the Archvists are keeping the community's historical items and belongings secure and well-organized for current and future visitors and research.

Do something
Get moving
Be confident
Risk new things
Stick with it
Get on your knees
Then be ready for
BIG SURPRISES!
—St. Angela

A PRAYER REQUEST

Jill Foster (SUA '14) is a Maryknoll lay missionary currently serving in Haiti. She recently shared about the situation there and the faith of the Haitian people. Please keep them and Jill your prayers.



With everything happening around me in Haiti, it's sometimes hard to see the bright side of things. Since coming to Haiti, the country has only ever been in crisis mode and things are slowly getting worse, although Gros Morne always seems to be the calm in the middle. I feel very blessed for that and for my community. The people here endure. Every day they endure and they thank God and put all their trust in Him, because they have literally no one else they can trust. No security net, nothing. God is the only one who can provide. What an amazing faith that is, a faith that I



don't know if I could ever achieve because of the privilege I was born with, of where I come from. While I live in Haiti, I still carry an invisible backpack of provisions: a U.S. passport, health insurance, the ability and resources to leave. The Haitian people are truly amazing.

SHINING A LIGHT THROUGH SERVICE TO OTHERS



In order to celebrate 200 years of faith in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, local women's and men's religious communities came together to recall their ministry with day of service. They were joined by area schools and parishes for the Oct. 9 event dubbed "Let Your Service Shine." Many groups also participated in outreach activities before and after the actual date.

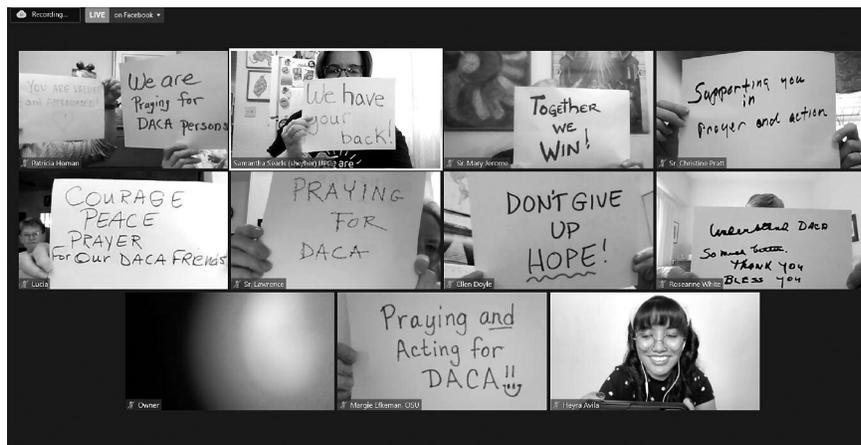
As part of the day, Sisters Mary Jerome Buchert and Margie Efke were among the 57 participants in an online educational event on "Immigration in our Day," planned by the Brown County Ursulines. Sr. Christine Pratt organized the program, which was led by Samantha Searles, Immigration Program Manager for the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center (IJPC), and Heyra Avila, a DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) speaker. Heyra presented a very clear picture of what it's like to live with the temporary nature of DACA provisions, noting the challenge of planning for the future with the potential of deportation looming and the uncertainty of continuing permission to work in the United States.

While the latest proposed new rule purports to preserve and fortify DACA,

in reality it leaves open the possibility that the right to work could be taken away. A permanent solution that includes a pathway to citizenship is proposed as the answer. Participants in the program were encouraged and given the tools to submit a public comment during the open comment period before the new rule is finalized.

cue," during which they learned about the plight of refugees in war torn Syria and reached out to our neighbors in Christ. The project involved three components: education, action and prayer. Every day during the first week of the program, students had the opportunity to do an age appropriate exercise/activity relating to the chal-

lenges a refugee family would encounter, as a means of building awareness, compassion and empathy. During the second week, students were asked to be "worker bees," doing a few works at home to help out and earn a few dollars to donate to the Franciscans' Name



Sisters Mary Jerome and Margie took action immediately following the program.

Participants via Zoom also had the opportunity to communicate their support to DACA recipients by writing a brief message on a blank paper and holding it facing computer screen. A screen shot was taken then shared with the DACA community in the Cincinnati area.

At St. Ursula Villa, the students engaged in a two-week-long service project titled "Operation Refugee Res-

and Future program, which helps children from Aleppo, born during fighting and conflict, to become legally recognized. The Villa community also named special intentions for the refugees in the world and those helping them and prayed the Hail Mary.

Saint Ursula Academy hosted a Lunch-n-Learn featuring several speakers to mark the day of service, along with holding a personal care drive and mission collection, raising \$588 to benefit the Afghan Institute for Learning and the International Rescue Committee.



Lunch-n-Learn

To mark the archdiocesan-wide service day, Saint Ursula Academy hosted three guests from Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio, who addressed the topic of "Protecting Our Neighbors: A Global Response to Migration." The event kicked off the Academy's Immigration Awareness Week. Pictured from left are: Mary Anne Wimberg Bressler (SUA '78), Elizabeth Clapp (SUA '98) and Laura Herschberger.



Celebrating the Feast of St. Ursula

Saint Ursula Academy celebrated the feast of St. Ursula on Oct. 21. One school observance included gathering in the chapel to learn beautiful music from early times. The school community was grateful to their guests from the early music ensemble group Heri et Hodie for joining them to teach their ensembles about an early music composer named Hildegard of Bingen.

Credit card contributions may be made by using the enclosed envelope or by calling Allison McGraw at 513-961-3410 ext. 146

Email: sisters@ursulinesocincinnati.org
 Phone: (513) 961-3410, ext. 146
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