

# FELICIAN



The MAGAZINE of the FELICIAN SISTERS of NORTH AMERICA



Justice and Peace

Compassion

Solidarity with Those in Need

Respect for human dignity

Serve where you are needed

Transformation

Mission

Faith

Community

Charism

# FELICIAN

The MAGAZINE of the FELICIAN SISTERS of NORTH AMERICA

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Provincial Minister  
Our Lady of Hope Province

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FELICIAN SISTERS  
OF NORTH AMERICA

## OUR MISSION

As Felician Sisters we are called by God to cooperate with Christ in the spiritual renewal of the world.

## 2021-2027 PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

Elected by the sisters to oversee the lives  
of the sisters, ministries and governance  
of Our Lady of Hope Province:

**Sr. Judith Marie Kubicki**  
Provincial Minister

**Sr. Janet Marie Adamczyk**  
Provincial Vicar/1st Councillor

**Sr. Suzanne Marie Kush**  
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**Sr. Mary Rosita Brennan**  
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5th Councillor

**Sr. Mary Catherine Ryzewicz**  
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## OUR LADY OF HOPE PROVINCE

Founded in Poland in 1855, the Felician Sisters  
are a congregation of women religious inspired  
by the spiritual ideals of their foundress, Blessed  
Mary Angela Truszkowska and Saints Francis of  
Assisi, Clare of Assisi and Felix of Cantalice. The  
first Felician Sisters arrived in North America in  
1874. They established eight provinces across the  
United States and Canada and in 2009 united  
into one: Our Lady of Hope Province.

Pioneers of social services, the Felician Sisters of  
North America founded and continue to sponsor  
or minister in more than 50 ministries throughout  
North America and Haiti. Constantly evolving  
to meet the needs of the time, they continue  
to follow God's will and Blessed Mary Angela's  
directive to "serve where you are needed."

The Felician Sisters and their partners are  
more than a presence—**they are a force  
for good in today's world.** In this issue of  
*Felician* magazine, we celebrate their vibrant  
energy, steadfast dedication and creative  
spirit as they respond to the challenges and  
opportunities of our time. Through inspiring  
stories, we see how faith in action transforms  
lives, uplifts communities and reminds us  
that our mission is not just history—it is alive,  
thriving and rising to this very moment.

Follow Us!



Sign up for our monthly electronic  
newsletter at [Felician.org](http://Felician.org).

Stained glass created by Sr. Mary Ann Therese Kelly

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## Cover

Embodying our theme, *Rooted in Mission; Rising to the Moment*, the cover envisions a tree where our core values branch outward, sustained by the spirit and foundation of the Felician Sisters.

Cover art by Pittsburgh-based artist Jeanine Murch, an illustrator known for her whimsical style, vibrant color and hand-lettering. Her art reminds us that, as a tree draws nourishment through its roots, we too thrive when grounded in our values.





## Dear Friends,

The current issue of *Felician* magazine offers a glimpse of how Our Lady of Hope Province continues to embrace mission and ministry with renewed openness to the challenges of today's world. We are committed to widening our tent and creating new pathways of collaboration within and beyond the familiar, the tried and the true. Given the current political climate across the globe, such a vision requires large doses of courage and compassion. . . *perhaps very large doses of courage and compassion.*

What, then, is required of us? The prophet Micah expressed it simply when he explained that God requires only three things—that we act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). The stories in this issue include numerous examples of efforts to act justly and love tenderly as we seek to respect the dignity of every human person. Increasingly, the choice to do so requires a courage and compassion that is found deep in the recesses of our hearts. It is there that we discover the strength and the willingness to serve wherever we are needed, especially among the persecuted, the voiceless, the invisible and the desperate. We are called to walk humbly with our God by walking humbly with our sisters and brothers in need. We are also called to walk humbly and gently on our common home, planet earth.

Where do we find Felician Sisters, associates and ministry partners today? We find them in the desert of the Southwest, the U.S. Capitol, immigration detention centers, hospice facilities, food pantries and affordable housing projects. We find them supporting and collaborating with young people in Seeds of Hope and Volunteers in Mission. We find them in higher education and after school programs, health services and pastoral and social service outreach. These are the formidable frontiers of the present moment.

**In the end, we are called to be messengers of hope in a world torn by violence, hate, greed and despair. Each day we encounter generous, courageous and compassionate persons who heed the cry of the poor and God's invitation to become instruments of peace and reconciliation for humankind and for our planet.**

Each of you is part of the Felician story. We thank you for partnering with us in this vital and sacred work. We are blessed by your continued support and participation.

Peace and all good things!

*Sr. Judith Marie Kubicki*

Sr. Judith Marie Kubicki, CSSF  
Provincial Minister, Felician Sisters of North America  
Our Lady of Hope Province

## Dear Felician Sisters...

### Adventures with My Aunt



I met †Sr. Virginia Sztorc in Rome in July 1982, while touring Europe and staying at the convent as arranged by my aunt, †Sr. Mary Augustinia Sliwinski (Buffalo, 1921-

1997). Both were in Rome for various assignments. Sr. Virginia was a marvelous tour guide and I have fond memories of our trooping about the major sites of Rome—in 114-degree heat! Especially warm in my memory is our day trip to Assisi. In a small chapel under the main basilica, the sisters, in a moment of spontaneity, decided to renew their vows in both English and Polish. I will never forget it. As strange as it sounds, it was the first time in my life that I saw my Aunt Blanche as a nun. Sr. Virginia and I corresponded for a while after my trip and even later, our lives connected through my work in archives, starting my federal career with the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. I would like to think she nods approval at my career choice.

- C. Jean

### Joyful Helpers



In June 1986, we were to pick up our adopted Korean daughter at the Detroit airport. We were from Wisconsin and knew no one in that area. Then my husband thought to call †Sr. Helen Marie Strawa and †Sr. Therese Marie Sonnenfeld in Livonia. Sr. Therese said to come to Livonia and they would help us. We spent a wonderful day with them before heading to the airport. A room was reserved for families awaiting the arrival of seven Korean babies! As we waited, I saw Sr. Helen laughing so hard that tears were rolling down her cheeks. I asked

her what happened and sister managed, through tears and laughter, to say that someone asked her if her daughter was waiting for a baby! Sr. Helen and Sr. Therese continue to bless our family. Thanks also to Sr. Marcita and Sr. Maria too, for keeping us connected to Sr. Helen and others.

- Edith

### Mary's Shrine



When I was a student at St. Turibius School, my 2nd grade teacher, †Sr. Mary Danielitta Lewandowski, had us make May Altars. I was staying with my aunt, uncle and cousins because my mother was hospitalized after breast cancer surgery. When my dad came from the hospital to see me, I was in tears saying how I had to make a May Altar and the relatives didn't know how and had no supplies to do it.

My dad set to work. Out of a Reese's Peanut Butter Cups carton and Reed's Rolls candy box (the base on which Mary stands), he fashioned an altar, painted it blue (Mary's and his favorite color), added corrugated paper and flowers and finished by the due date. My May Altar won the prize. I always wondered why, as I obviously had not made it myself, but I received a medal of Mary on a chain as my prize. Years later, when my son Nicholas was young, I explained what appeared every May on the dresser was my May Altar and how it came to be. I no longer crown Mary as I did, but she still has a place of reverence each May.

My father, who had a great devotion to Mary, attended the Sorrowful Mother Novena for years and prayed the rosary daily until his death at age 70 (1985) of colon cancer. This May Altar is my connection to

my dear teacher, to my father and the faith he practiced and to the Blessed Virgin who watches over me (her namesake). Even though they say, "You can't take it with you," I hope to do just that.

- Mary Ann

### To All the Teachers Who Touched Our Lives

I remember Sisters †Noel Labiak, †Ruth Koralewski and †Alan Popielarz from St. John Vianney in Wyoming, Michigan in the early 1960s. All were positive influences, but today I want to write about †Sr. Mary DeChantal Truskowski. She taught me English and music. From her I learned to love reading, poetry, journaling, choral responses and special music for church. She would smile, lift her eyes to heaven and say "That is *super-spongologicalissima!*" when she liked something.

- Joan

### A Positive Attitude

I can't tell you how indebted I am to the sisters who taught me at Villa Maria Academy in Buffalo. They were instrumental in instilling a positive attitude in me toward my Catholic faith and their expert instruction prepared me not only for college but for many years afterward to this day. I fondly recall †Sr. Dulciana Plewniak explaining the difference between ironing and pressing a garment. Sr. Claudette filled the blackboards with notes on European cultures and I remember †Sr. Eligia Bialkowski's rosary beads swinging from her waist as she hurried into Latin class.

- Mary

SEND YOUR THOUGHTS, MEMORIES AND PICTURES to [FelicianMagazine@FelicianSisters.org](mailto:FelicianMagazine@FelicianSisters.org) or via mail to: *Felician* magazine, Felician Sisters of North America, Office of Mission Advancement, 871 Mercer Road, Beaver Falls, PA 15010-6815.

# Cross Planting in the Desert

During a recent trip to Tucson, Arizona, Sr. Suzanne Marie Kush joined artist Alvaro Enciso on one of his cross-planting journeys in the desert. She was visiting Sr. Maria Louise Edwards, who ministers with Águilas del Desierto, a volunteer group assisting migrants who become lost or stranded while crossing the desert regions along the border. Each cross honored a migrant who died after crossing the border—lives lost in search of hope.

Sr. Suzanne was deeply moved by the rituals at each site: names spoken aloud, stones placed, rosaries draped, rosemary offered and holy water sprinkled—a quiet tribute to courage, loss and human dignity.

Alvaro, who sees this as his way of giving back, said, “They didn’t show up on the news. This was what I did to remember.”

That day, crosses were planted in Altar Valley, AZ, for three people:

- Orey, who died August 2007; his body was recovered three weeks later.
- Valentine, a 30-year-old man who died while crossing.
- Maria, age 32, who died in July 2006; her body was found less than a week later, most likely died from exposure and dehydration.

Through the compassion of Alvaro and the volunteers who accompany him, each cross becomes more than a marker—it becomes a sign of remembrance and a prayer for those who never made it home. Their work transforms the desert into sacred ground, honoring the humanity of every life lost along the journey.



# Never Nuke

Editorial written by Sr. Melanie Marie Bajorek  
Coraopolis, PA

Published June 29, 2025, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

With continuing cycles of violence in the Middle East, Haiti, Ukraine, India and Pakistan and those executing the many civil wars in countries among innocent civilians, we are once again hearing global leaders threaten use of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear weapons detonated anywhere in the world would impact us all. Even a very limited nuclear war, for example between India and Pakistan, could destroy worldwide food production and millions would die worldwide, including in the United States.

Just as smoke from the Canadian wildfires crossed national and state lines to Pennsylvania recently, so too will fallout from detonated nuclear weapons.

Congressman Chris Deluzio can address the growing danger of nuclear war by joining those who have already sponsored H. Res. 317, calling on the U.S. to enter into negotiations with the other eight nuclear armed countries for a verifiable agreement to eliminate their nuclear arsenals according to an agreed upon timetable. This resolution supports the aims of the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which has been signed by 122 nations.

H. Res. 317 also calls for taking nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert in the United States and cutting the funding for modernizing our nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

The late Pope Francis stated that nuclear weapons create nothing but a false sense of security.

We need to heed these warnings and of U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres that the world must wake up and understand the need to eliminate these doomsday weapons.

# Felician Sisters Bring Their Voices to the Capitol

On June 24, Felician Sisters Maryann Agnes Mueller, Mary Antonelle Chunka and Dong Hong Marie Zhang joined more than 200 Catholic sisters in Washington, D.C. to advocate for a more just national budget and more compassionate immigration policies.

They gathered on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol to pray, bear witness and deliver letters signed by Felician Sisters who could not attend. The group raised concerns about proposed budget cuts that threaten healthcare, food assistance and other essential programs, as well as about increased funding for harsh immigration enforcement.

After a time of prayer and reflection, the sisters visited the offices of senators from Illinois, New Jersey and Connecticut to hand-deliver the letters. Despite the 100-degree heat, their message was clear: policies must uphold the dignity of every person and reflect the values of justice and compassion.

To raise your own voice for justice, compassion and peace, contact your senators and representatives by visiting [congress.gov/members/find-your-member](https://congress.gov/members/find-your-member) and enter your zip code.

# Providing *Spiritual Support* to ICE Detainees

Felician Sisters are offering spiritual support to individuals in immigration detention. Parishioners at Immaculate Conception Parish in Spotswood, NJ have made thousands of rosaries and holy card packs, which Sr. Mary Antonelle Chunka delivers monthly to the Elizabeth, NJ detention center.

Sr. Carol Marie Saladin also prepares rosaries and prayer cards from Our Lady of the Angels Convent for the same center. These items are given to the roughly 300 men and women detained there as well as to family members visiting loved ones who may soon be deported.

In addition, Sr. Antonelle joins local peace groups at a daily nonviolent vigil outside Delaney Hall Detention Facility in Newark, NJ. Organized by Pax Christi and other partners, participants take shifts from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., offering a peaceful presence and prayers for compassion and dignity.

As Felician Sisters, we invite you to join us in the ministry of compassion—by keeping detainees and their families in your prayers, standing with those who seek dignity and justice and supporting local efforts that bring hope to the most vulnerable.





## Finding Community in Grief:

### Angela Hospice Launches New Support

For 40 years, Angela Hospice has supported grieving families and friends with Christ-like compassion. Now, its Waterford, MI location is offering a new way for neighbors to support one another through loss: a new peer-to-peer grief support group.

The group will be led by Colleen Mott, a retired Troy police officer and licensed professional counselor who has volunteered at Angela Hospice for three years. Inspired by the care her aunt received and her own experience with peer support groups, Mott believes healing is often found in community.

“Often, people who are grieving feel like they are alone,” she said. “By being around others who have suffered similar losses, they can receive support from others who understand what they are feeling and going through and it helps ease the loneliness that accompanies significant loss.”

Peer-to-peer groups have long been part of Angela Hospice’s mission. According to grief counselor Keely Rhiannon, these gatherings offer participants a safe place to share their stories, connect with others and know they are not alone.

“Our grief is unique to each of us,” Keely explained, “and it is important to witness that while seeing that others in our community may not know exactly what we are experiencing but have had similar experiences.”

The Angela Hospice Grief Support Group will meet monthly on the second Thursday in the conference room at Angela Hospice’s Waterford Care Center. All are welcome.



## Felician Villa Opens Its Doors in Rio Rancho

In June, under clear blue skies often referred to as “Mary’s mantle,” the Felician Villas I and II celebrated their open house and ribbon-cutting in Rio Rancho, NM. Built on the back ten acres of the former Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Province, the apartments were made possible through a partnership between the Felician Sisters and Catholic Charities Housing.

Felician Villa I—now fully occupied—offers affordable, comfortable housing for seniors ages 55 and older, with a waiting list already forming for Villa II. Mayor of Rio Rancho, Gregg Hull and other project partners shared remarks during the ceremony. Representing the Felician Sisters, Sr. Rosemarie Goins spoke about the 150th anniversary of the congregation’s presence in North America and 50 years of ministry in New Mexico.

The celebration concluded with a ribbon-cutting, model apartment tour and reception—marking not just the opening of new homes, but the continuation of the Felician mission to “serve where you are needed.”



# Madonna University Leader Receives Top Award



## Hope House at St. Felix Centre Brings New Beginnings

St. Felix Centre in Toronto, ON recently celebrated the opening of Hope House, a permanent housing development offering 31 affordable, supportive units for women, including those with children, experiencing homelessness or fleeing intimate partner violence. The building includes barrier-free units and dedicated spaces for Indigenous women, reflecting the Centre's commitment to inclusion.

For the first resident to arrive, the moment was unforgettable: "I was overwhelmed with joy. I was the first person to arrive and all the staff were clapping and cheering as I came in. Everyone was just as excited as I was—and I recognized every face."

## Brother Bishop's Coat of Arms



When Bishop Bruce A. Lewandowski, C.Ss.R., was named Bishop of Providence, RI he turned to his sister, Sr. Mary Francis Lewandowski, to design his personal coat of arms. An artist and graphic designer, she drew from their shared Redemptorist upbringing—shaped by a congregation founded to bring the message of redemption to the poor

and most abandoned—and from his deep spirituality to create a unique and meaningful design. The Eucharist, God's mercy, the Holy Spirit and devotion to Mary are central themes. His motto, "Because by Your Holy Cross," reflects his Redemptorist roots and missionary spirit.



Sr. Nancy Marie Jamroz, co-director of the Center for Catholic Studies and Interfaith Dialogue at Madonna University, in Livonia, MI received the 2025 Distinguished Woman in Higher Education Leadership Award from the Michigan American Council on

Education (MI-ACE) Women's Network. This prestigious honor recognizes those who champion women beyond their formal roles, distinguishing themselves as advocates and catalysts for change.

Sr. Nancy was nominated by Madonna University President Chris Dougherty, who described her as "the quintessential embodiment of that pioneering spirit of the Felician Sisters." Chris Benson, vice president for Student Affairs and Mission Integration, added that Sr. Nancy's dedication to mentoring and uplifting women in higher education is "legendary and priceless."

The award was presented on June 17 at the MI-ACE Women's Network Annual Conference in East Lansing where Felician Sisters and members of the Madonna community gathered to celebrate her achievement.



## Sister Leads Chinese Faithful to Annual API Marian Pilgrimage

**O**n May 3, Sr. Dong Hong Marie Zhang (above photo, far left) led a group of Chinese faithful from the Archdiocese of Newark and the Diocese of Metuchen to the 22nd Annual Asian and Pacific Island Catholics Marian Pilgrimage at the Basilica of the National Shrine in Washington, D.C.

The pilgrimage began with a vibrant procession of more than 30 groups representing diverse Asian cultures, each carrying statues or images of Mary adorned with flowers and banners. For the third consecutive year, the Chinese Catholic community of New Jersey offered the “Call to Prayer,” a sacred performance of song and movement

presented before the Basilica’s altar. Sr. Dong Hong described the liturgical dance as a joyful expression of faith, likening it to King David dancing before the Ark.

Mass was celebrated by Bishop Efrén V. Esmilla of Philadelphia, who encouraged pilgrims to follow Mary’s example of openness to God’s will. Prayers of the faithful—written by Sr. Dong Hong—were offered in eight languages. Reflecting on the experience, she told the *Catholic Standard*, **“Our solidarity with others reflects the Jubilee Year of Hope. We want to be witnesses of God’s love, share our culture and learn from others.”**

## Volunteers in Mission and Felician Sisters Share Joy at The FEST

The FEST, an annual Catholic family festival near Cleveland, OH brings together thousands for a day of music, faith and community. The Felician Sisters were once again a joyful presence at the event, offering both fun and opportunities for spiritual engagement.

This year, Volunteers in Mission (VIM) summer volunteers brought great energy to the Felician booth, running the popular spin-the-wheel and handing out fun giveaways like tote bags, sunglasses, fans, koozies and more. Beyond serving, they fully embraced The FEST experience—especially cheering for headliner Danny Gokey, alongside Maverick City Music, Ben Fuller and Seph Schlueter. Each time Gokey passed by in a golf cart the volunteers waved excitedly, making it one of their highlights of the day.

Visitors were also able to speak with several sisters in attendance—Sisters Judith Marie Blizzard, Melanie Marie Bajorek, Mary Bernadette Kapfer, Felicity Marie Madigan, Grace Marie Del Priore and visiting sister, Maria Theresa Lan Kim Trinh, FMSR—where visitors could learn more about vocation opportunities and the work of the Felician Sisters. Maryville Retreat Center staff spread the word about upcoming retreats and renewal opportunities at its location in Holly, MI. (See back cover for upcoming programs at Maryville).

With thousands of people in attendance and a beautiful summer day, The FEST reminded us all of the joy that comes from sharing faith and being together.



## Spinning the Wheel of Fun: Game Show Celebration at Wellspring

On Tuesday, August 26, the halls of Wellspring in the Mother of Good Counsel Convent in Chicago, IL rang with applause, laughter, game show music and playful sound effects as Felician Services, Inc. (FSI) hosted a lively game show event for the sisters in honor of the ongoing 150th anniversary celebration.

Two crowd favorites—*Wheel of Fortune* and *Let's Make a Deal*—set the stage for an afternoon full of fun. Members of the FSI team stepped into character as Pat Sajak, Vanna Whites and Monty Halls, keeping the energy high and the games unforgettable. Costumes were encouraged, leading to creative appearances from “Everything but the Kitchen Sink,” Chicago Cubs phenom Pete Crow Armstrong/Prayer Compassion Angela, “Da White Sox Pope” and many more. The sisters showcased their clever costume-making skills while also enjoying the excitement of playing games and winning prizes.

The festivities concluded with an ice cream social featuring both an ice cream stand and a nostalgic ice cream truck. To ensure everyone could share in the sweetness, FSI team members also delivered treats to sisters in the care center.

It's safe to say the event was a hit—so much so that if the sisters had one more spin on the Wheel of Fortune, the puzzle board might just reveal this message: **PLEASE HOST GAMESHOWS AGAIN!**





# Celebrating Blessed Mary Angela's 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday Across the Province

To mark the 200th anniversary of Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska's birth, Felician Sisters across Our Lady of Hope Province held tree-planting ceremonies at the Provincial House and at all of the former provinces. Dogwood trees were planted as living symbols of her legacy, each accompanied by a memorial plaque to commemorate the occasion. In gratitude for their employees, each convent also donated to a local charity chosen by their staff. While each ceremony reflected the unique spirit of its community, all shared a sense of joyful remembrance and gratitude.



**B**ooks have a special way of guiding us—inviting reflection, sparking conversation and offering hope. Whether through parish book clubs, personal devotion or historical research, Felician Sisters continue to find inspiration in reading. In this edition of Good Reads, several sisters share the titles on their shelves and explain why these works hold meaning for them.

**"Hanging onto Hope: Reflections and Prayers for Finding Good in an Imperfect World"**

by Melannie Svoboda

**Sr. Mary Joyce Frances King**  
Pastoral Associate  
Our Lady of Pompeii Parish Campus  
Lancaster, NY



"Our parish Women's Book Club selected *Hanging onto Hope* after it was recommended by a friend. I was drawn to it because I appreciate the author's uncomplicated, enjoyable style. Each chapter includes an inspirational prayer and thoughtful discussion questions, which enrich our conversations.

With all that is happening in the Buffalo Diocese and throughout our world, this book has been a source of strength, keeping us centered and focused on serving God's people. We truly need the hope and inspiration that it offers."

**"Mary, Take Over!"**

(Fourth Edition)  
by Denis and Suzel Bourgerie

**Sr. Jeanne Marie Akalski**  
Local Minister  
Webster, MA

"'Mary, Take Over!' is more than just a title—it is a truth I have experienced. I placed my last two surgeries under Mary's watchful care and even the doctors were amazed at how well I came through. I know it was Mary's intercession.



She is our heavenly Mother, always ready to protect us, guide us and bless us. If we confide in her, she will never fail us. Mary is our treasure on earth and she will lead us safely to heaven."

**"Pope Francis: Hope — The Autobiography:"**

with Carlo Musso

**Sr. Marilyn Marie Minter**  
*Felician Mission: Haiti*



"I chose this book shortly after the death of Pope Francis. I loved his writings and homilies and in this Jubilee Year of Hope, I wanted to stay connected to his spirit. Pope Francis lived, breathed and proclaimed the Gospel with his life. What inspires me most is how his family and immigrant background shaped his leadership of the Church and his deep commitment to the 'culture of encounter.'

Here in Haiti, living among the poor, I carry his words in my heart: 'Being close, living in true harmony, means being unafraid even to go into their night.' His witness sustains me with hope that does not disappoint.

I recommend this book to anyone searching for ways to respond to today's challenges—racism, civil unrest and immigration struggles. Pope Francis reminds us that we are called to build bridges, not walls and to live in authentic relationship with one another."

**Around the Province: Preserving History**

Two recent publications highlight the history and legacy of former Felician provinces:

**"God's Marvelous Deeds: The Felician Sisters in New England, 1976–2009,"** by Sr.



Constance Marie Tomyl, secretary general, celebrates the story of the former Enfield Province. At a dinner and book signing, sisters praised her work as a "masterpiece" and a "treasure" that beautifully captures the former province's legacy.

**"Be Sister to All: The History of the Felician Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Province, Coraopolis, Pennsylvania, 1978–2009,"** by Kerry A.



Crawford, documents the former Coraopolis Province. With a cover designed by Sr. Mary Francis Lewandowski and a title inspired by Sr. Virginia Marie Klonowski, the book reflects the woven lives and memories of the sisters.

Together, these histories ensure that the dedication and witness of Felician Sisters will continue to inspire future generations.

**Through personal reflections and historical works alike, these sisters remind us that reading can deepen faith, inspire hope and preserve the rich legacy of the Felician mission.**

# THE BITTERSWEET TRUTH ABOUT CHOCOLATE

ADVOCATING FOR ETHICAL COCOA

Chocolate is often associated with joy, celebration and comfort. But behind the sweetness lies a bitter truth: much of the world's cocoa is harvested by exploited workers, including children.

As part of the Felician Sisters' commitment to human dignity and justice and in alignment with our stance against human trafficking and all forms of forced labor, we are raising awareness about the unethical labor practices embedded in the global chocolate industry—and encouraging readers to take simple yet impactful action.

## Child Labor in Cocoa Production

**More than 1.5 million children in West Africa are estimated to be working under hazardous conditions to produce cocoa**, according to multiple human rights organizations. Many of these children are trafficked or forced into labor, deprived of education and exposed to dangerous equipment and chemicals.

This exploitation continues despite major chocolate companies making public pledges over the last two decades to eliminate child labor from their supply chains. Unfortunately, many of the largest brands still source cocoa from farms that do not meet ethical labor standards.

## Choosing Chocolate with a Conscience

Thankfully, many smaller, mission-driven chocolatiers are committed to ethical sourcing and transparency. These companies ensure that farmers are paid fairly and work under safe, voluntary conditions—often through Direct Trade, Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance certifications or bean-to-bar production.

## Who Is *Not* on the List?

Unfortunately, some of the most recognizable chocolate brands are still associated with unethical practices. Companies such as: Mars (M&M's, Snickers, Twix); Nestlé (Kit Kat, Butterfinger); Hershey's; Mondelez (Toblerone, Cadbury); and Ferrero (Nutella, Kinder) have all been cited in reports linking them to cocoa harvested by children or forced labor. Despite long-standing promises, meaningful progress has been slow—and accountability remains limited.

*"We must not remain silent in the face of injustice."*

—Blessed Mary Angela Truskowska

By making ethical choices—even in something as small as a chocolate bar—we participate in building a more just and compassionate world.





## What Can We Do?

### 1. Educate Yourself and Others.

Awareness is the first step toward justice. Learn about the cocoa supply chain and share information with your community.

### 2. Make Conscious Purchases.

Support ethical brands that value people over profit. Look for Fair Trade, Direct Trade or Rainforest Alliance certifications. As an example, the Felician Sisters will be offering fair trade chocolate at their November Assembly—a thoughtful and just-in-time Christmas gift idea!

### 3. Advocate for Change.

Reach out to chocolate companies. Ask them to publicly disclose their supply chains, ensure independent audits and commit to a living wage for workers.

### 4. Pray and Reflect.

As people of faith, we are called to protect the vulnerable and uphold the dignity of every human being. Let us pray for those caught in cycles of poverty and exploitation and for the courage to act with compassion and justice.

## Available in U.S. Stores or Online

Below is a list of ethically sourced brands and where to purchase them.

### Tony's Chocolonely

[www.tonyschocolonely.com](http://www.tonyschocolonely.com)

Widely available (Target, Whole Foods, online). 100% slave-free mission with transparent sourcing.

### Alter Eco

[www.alterecofoods.com](http://www.alterecofoods.com)

Organic, Fair Trade certified and climate-friendly packaging. Available at most health food stores and online.

### Divine Chocolate

[www.divinechocolate.com](http://www.divinechocolate.com)

Farmer-owned cooperative (Kuapa Kokoo in Ghana). Available online and at natural grocers.

### Equal Exchange

[www.equalexchange.coop](http://www.equalexchange.coop)

Worker-owned cooperative offering a wide selection of Fair Trade chocolate bars and cocoa.

### Theo Chocolate

[www.theochocolate.com](http://www.theochocolate.com)

Organic and Fair for Life certified. Based in Seattle; available in stores and online.

### Unreal Snacks

[www.unrealstsnacks.com](http://www.unrealstsnacks.com)

Healthier candy-style chocolates with ethically sourced cocoa. Available at Whole Foods and online.

### Endangered Species Chocolate

[www.chocolatebar.com](http://www.chocolatebar.com)

Donates 10% of profits to conservation. Rainforest Alliance certified.

### Raaka Chocolate

[www.raakachocolate.com](http://www.raakachocolate.com)

Unroasted, bean-to-bar chocolate made with transparent trade practices.

### Beyond Good

[www.beyondgood.com](http://www.beyondgood.com)

Sourced directly from Madagascar. Certified Direct Trade.

## Where to Find These Brands

### Natural/Organic Grocery Stores:

- Whole Foods, Sprouts, Fresh Thyme, Earth Fare

### Mainstream Retailers:

- Target, Walmart and CVS

### Online Retailers:

- Amazon, Thrive Market or direct from each brand's website

### Fair Trade/Church/Community Shops:

- Ten Thousand Villages, SERRV International or your parish holiday markets



# Faithful Farewell, Hopeful Beginning

## *Honoring Pope Francis and Welcoming Pope Leo*

**A**s a Felician community rooted in faith and service, we pause in prayerful remembrance of Pope Francis, whose life and papacy profoundly shaped the Church and our world. At the same time, we look ahead with open hearts to welcome Pope Leo XIV, the newly elected bishop of Rome and shepherd of the global Catholic Church.

Elected in 2013, Pope Francis brought a deeply pastoral and prophetic spirit to the papacy. His humble leadership, consistent call for mercy and courageous witness for the poor, the vulnerable and the planet inspired millions. Through encyclicals such as *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti*, he called the Church to ecological conversion, global solidarity and a renewed commitment to Gospel-centered living.

For the Felician Sisters of North America and all those connected to our mission, his words were more than teachings—they were invitations to action. His life echoed our call to live as joyful witnesses of God's love, in compassionate service to others. His emphasis on "a Church that goes forth" affirmed our own commitment to being present at the margins, where hope and healing are most needed.

With hearts full of gratitude, we now commend Pope Francis to the loving arms of God. His legacy endures—in the people he touched, the justice he preached and the mercy he lived.

### Honoring Pope Francis' Legacy Through Prayer and Action

That legacy is finding new life in the next generation. On October 6, St. Joseph Basilica in Webster hosted the commissioning of the "Little Missionaries of Pope Francis' Legacy," founded by Sr. Jeanne Marie Akalski. Inspired by the bond her fifth-grade students formed with Pope Francis through letters, illustrations and cards during his illness, the children transformed their grief after his passing into a mission of prayer, compassion and hope.

"Our mission is simple yet powerful," Sr. Jeanne Marie explains. "We want our children to know they can make a difference in small ways—especially through prayer." Petitions, called *Letters to Heaven*, will be mailed or dropped off at St. Joseph School, where the children will pray over them daily and include them in a monthly service. In November, all intentions will be sent to Pope Leo to be placed at Pope Francis' tomb, with the hope that miracles may come through his intercession. "The prayers of little children may be the seeds of miracles and perhaps even a step toward Pope Francis's canonization," she added.





## Welcoming Pope Leo XIV: A New Chapter in the Church

At this sacred moment of transition, we joyfully welcome Pope Leo XIV, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Known for his contemplative spirit, pastoral presence and multilingual fluency, Pope Leo has already shown signs of a papacy deeply rooted in encounter, simplicity and joyful witness. His recent engagement in August with over a million youth gathered in Rome for the Jubilee for Youth offered a glimpse of his authentic and spontaneous leadership.

Breaking from his usually scripted style, Pope Leo surprised young pilgrims with an impromptu address delivered in English, Spanish and Italian—proclaiming, “You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world!” His voice echoed across St. Peter’s Square, connecting deeply with the crowd and affirming a Church that listens, responds and walks alongside young people.

For the Felician Sisters in Chicago, the election of Pope Leo was a moment of joy and disbelief. Gathered in the dining room at Mother of Good Counsel Convent after seeing the white smoke, the sisters strained to hear the name of the new pope read aloud. Could it truly be Cardinal Robert Prevost—a man they had known and worked alongside? A few sisters had collaborated with him during his time as Director of Mission and Vocation Director at Providence High School in New Lenox, IL. Sr. Mary Katherine Fax even recalls being

pen pals with him until he departed for missionary service in Peru in 1985. “He was always a humble, kind and compassionate man,” she remembers. For them, the election of Pope Leo XIV is not only the Church’s joy, but a personal one, as they now see a familiar face elevated to shepherd of the global Church.

In his messages, Pope Leo has already emphasized the importance of true friendships, a personal relationship with Christ and the dangers of digital culture when driven by consumerism and division. At a time when the world is scarred by war, he lifted up the voices of young people from Gaza, Ukraine and other places of suffering, saying: “You are the sign that a different world is possible—a world of fraternity and friendship, where conflicts are not resolved with weapons, but with dialogue.”

For the Felician community—sisters, associates, employees, donors and friends—Pope Leo’s early expressions of pastoral closeness, concern for the marginalized and emphasis on synodality resonate with our charism and mission. His witness reflects the compassion of Christ, the joy of the Gospel and the spirit of Blessed Mary Angela, who calls us to meet the needs of the times with unwavering trust in God.

As we give thanks for the life and witness of Pope Francis and pray for Pope Leo’s leadership, we remain steadfast in our own call: to live the Gospel with love, humility and hope.

# Faith-First Investing: How the Felician Sisters Use Investment Capital for Good

*In* our current culture, money moves the world—and it can also help mend it.

The Felician Sisters of North America are part of a growing movement transforming the role of investment capital in society. Known as *faith-first investing* or *social impact investing*, this approach uses financial resources not solely for return, but as a moral force for good. Rooted in Catholic Social Teaching, faith-first investing seeks to build economic systems that protect human dignity, promote justice and care for creation.

## A Legacy of Moral Investment

Decades ago, women religious were among the first to challenge exploitative financial practices, asking a groundbreaking question:

**How can we use our resources to advance our mission?**

That bold legacy continues today. The Felician Sisters—and many other Catholic institutions—intentionally align their investments with Gospel values. They avoid industries that harm people or the planet and actively seek out opportunities that foster thriving communities, sustainability and human rights.

***It's not charity—it's stewardship.***

To strengthen their impact, the Felician Sisters partner with networks such as the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) and the Francesco Collaborative. These networks provide tools, guidance and shared learning opportunities, empowering Catholic organizations to revise policies, explore opportunities, and put their capital to work for justice, peace and ecological renewal.

## Faith in Action: Real-World Examples

The Felician Sisters' commitment to faith-first investing is more than symbolic—it creates real impact. Recent examples of value-aligned action include:

- Supporting the protection of the Okefenokee Swamp, a biologically rich ecosystem under threat from industrial development.
- Advocating for accountability from Chemours, a major polluter of drinking water through PFAS or “forever chemicals.”
- Investing in funds with the objectives of reducing carbon emissions by one gigaton and providing water services to underserved communities in Latin America.

While the sisters may not lead every campaign, their support for like-minded shareholder efforts sends a clear message: Catholic investors have a moral stake in corporate responsibility and environmental justice.

## Guided by Values, Grounded in Faith

“Our investments are not just financial decisions—they are moral decisions,” says Sr. Mary Jean Sliwinski, Sustainability Coordinator/Socially Responsible Investment Coordinator of the Felician Sisters of North America.

*“Through faith-first investing, we are living our call to be stewards of God’s creation and protectors of human dignity.”*

This commitment shows in how the sisters structure their investment strategy, aligned with Catholic Social Teaching.

Every decision reflects core values:

- Human Dignity
- Care for Creation
- Peace and Justice
- Solidarity with the Marginalized

This includes screening out harmful industries—like fossil fuels, weapons and exploitative labor—and prioritizing sectors like clean energy, affordable housing, equitable healthcare and sustainable agriculture.

### Invested in Values-Aligned Opportunities

The sisters channel their investments into areas such as:

- Environmental protection (e.g., forest and wetland preservation)
- Water justice (e.g., addressing PFAS pollution)
- Community development (e.g., affordable housing projects)
- Health equity (e.g., expanding access to care)

### Amplifying the Catholic Voice in Finance

Felician Sisters and their collaborators engage actively as shareholders—filing resolutions, voting proxies and raising ethical concerns. Through this advocacy, investing becomes a form of witness.

### Growing the Economy of the Gospel

Ultimately, every values-aligned investment helps build an economy rooted not in extraction, but in care, cooperation and compassion.

As Pope Francis reminded us in *Laudato Si'*:

*“The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.”*

Faith-first investing is one response to that call. It represents a shift from passive investing to purposeful investing—from simply avoiding harm to actively creating good.

## Want to Learn More?

If you feel inspired to explore values-based investing in your own life, you don't have to start alone. Many investment advisors and financial firms now offer Socially Responsible Investing (SRI) or ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) options.

Resources to explore include:

- Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR): [www.iccr.org](http://www.iccr.org)
- Francesco Collaborative: [www.francescocollaborative.org](http://www.francescocollaborative.org)
- USCCB Guidelines for Socially Responsible Investments (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops): [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)

Speak with your financial advisor about aligning your portfolio with your values—or explore firms that specialize in socially responsible investing.

Every dollar carries influence. Together, we can use that influence to build a more just, compassionate and sustainable world.

# Creation's Voice:

## *Recognizing God in the Everyday*

Reflection by Sr. Judith Marie Blizzard

Coordinator of Spiritual Direction and Programming at Maryville Retreat Center  
and Vocation Outreach Minister for the Felician Sisters of North America

**A**s a child growing up in the city, most of my surroundings were concrete—except for a nearby park and our tiny backyard, where my mom lovingly tended tomato plants, petunias and portulacas. My three brothers and I, eager to enjoy the outdoors, took our parents' bribe of playtime if we finished our homework first.

The Catholic faith and its liturgies shaped our lives. We attended May and October devotions, Forty Hours, Stations of the Cross and Mass. Yet my earliest and deepest experiences of God came through nature. I sensed God's love in the stars, God's watchful eye in the full moon, God's presence on the baseball diamond as I whispered confidences and God's majesty in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. These encounters helped me recognize God's presence in creation, which reflects its Creator. No wonder Jesus used the natural world to describe the Kingdom of God. He too spent much time outdoors, communing with the Father in sacred natural spaces.

My Cherokee ancestors also taught me reverence for creation, seeing the earth as our Mother and every gift from her as sacred. We show respect and care so that all creation may share her gifts. Jesus Himself chose the simple fruits of the earth—bread and wine—to become His Body and Blood. At every Mass, these ordinary elements are transformed into

the Eucharist. God's presence there is so real that I felt its absence as a young sister. Once, entering a church in the South Bronx with my spiritual director, I said, "This church feels so cold, so empty." He replied, astonished, "Sister Judy, there is no Blessed Sacrament here." That realization deepened my awareness of God's presence in the Eucharist.

As a child, I believed these moments with God—in nature and in church—were given only to me. I was the center of the universe, the apple of His eye. With maturity, I came to see that God gives Himself to all and that each of us is the apple of His eye. We need only to receive Him and let His love take root and grow within us.

Perhaps the crisis of faith, faced by so many in today's world, stems from the tendency to remain indoors, absorbed by electronic devices that distract us from the simple ways God reveals Himself. I pray that all can echo the words of Psalm 19:1,

***"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge."***



# A Summer of Service, a Lifetime of Faith

**G**rowing up, Alice Price often felt isolated as a Catholic. This past summer, she came to America in search of a community where her faith could flourish — and found it through Volunteers in Mission (VIM) at Deo Gratias Ministries in Detroit.

**"I'm around so many people who also have faith and love God,"** said Price, a 23-year-old university student from England.

Price spent her early childhood in China before moving with her family to Sherborne, England, when she was school age.

She recalls attending Mass in Sherborne and hearing the elderly priest's prayers echo through a nearly empty church.

**"I never had any Catholic friends [as a kid],"** she said. **"My faith has always been a very private, almost secret thing. It felt like it was being extinguished bit by bit because I didn't have anyone to share it with."**

Price, now a history major at Queen's University Belfast in Northern Ireland, learned about VIM from another student, Ciara O'Gara. Ciara had volunteered with Deo Gratias in 2024, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., prepping and restocking supplies before the doors open. In the midst of discerning whether to become a sister, Price wanted to spend time with the Felician Sisters and experience their ministry, but admits it was a hard decision.

**"I was terrified about coming to a new country—America seems so big and scary—and I was uncertain of what to expect from VIM and Deo Gratias,"** Price said. **"But I found out it's all so much better than I ever imagined."**

In 2018, Sr. Felicity Marie Madigan and Sr. Shelley Marie Jeffrey founded Deo Gratias Ministries, which serves the Regent Park neighborhood of northeastern Detroit. The first two Volunteers in Mission were welcomed in 2022.

**"Regent Park is one of the most disadvantaged areas in Detroit,"** said VIM coordinator Juliette Darocha. **"Many of the people who come to us may not have eaten in days. Most of them have very little education, if any at all."**

Deo Gratias operates out of the first floor of the St. Jude's parish building on Seven Mile Road. It has a small café, a food pantry, a room for donated items and spaces stocked with books and art supplies. Outside in the community garden, 15 raised beds brim with vegetables and herbs.

The mission is open daily from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., serving hot meals cooked by Capuchin brothers. The food pantry is open two days a week and children's art classes are offered on Tuesdays.

The café seats 20-plus people and fills up quickly. Darocha estimates Deo Gratias serves about 150 people a day, but added that the crowd size has surged in recent months.

**"We had 230 people today,"** Darocha said one afternoon last August. **"When I arrived at noon, there was a line of people out the café door and down the hallway."**

This past summer, Darocha managed 10 volunteers, including four from Europe. She would have welcomed more, but the Most Holy Trinity rectory, where VIM members stay, ran out of space.

Price and the other volunteers work from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., prepping and restocking before opening the doors. In addition to serving meals, they guide guests in the food pantry toward healthy choices, teach art classes and tend the garden.

They also assist Sr. Shelley with a stray cat sanctuary at the back end of the garden.

**"Working with the sisters, I saw their unbridled fervor and enthusiasm,"** Price said. **"My first day, I was pouring coffee and handed two sugar packets to one of the guests. Sr. Rita [Marie Vondra] said, 'No, we do it for them. They're guests, so we need to make them feel special and cared for.'"**

**That's lovely because it shows how even tiny actions can be acts of service."**

One moment stayed with her. A man waiting patiently in the long lunch line told her he hadn't eaten in three days. When Price handed him a meal, his face lit up.

**"He was so polite and so thankful,"** Price said. **"It was so lovely to make that difference in someone's life."**

The six-week stint at Deo Gratias deepened Price's awareness of poverty, even in a wealthy country like the United States. It showed her how a small, dedicated community can make a lasting impact.

Price expects to graduate from Queen's University in 2026 and plans to rejoin VIM. She continues to discern whether to become a Felician Sister.

**"Alice was absolutely amazing and would thrive in community life,"** Darocha said.

*Alice Price (right) holds a praying mantis while tending to the Deo Gratias Ministries community garden.*





# Taking the Torch *Forward*

It's a *transformative time* for our Felician Associates. They're *ready to lead*.

The 150-year anniversary celebration of the Felician presence in North America wouldn't be complete without acknowledging the amazing work of our associates.

Since 1990, these women and men have committed themselves to live the Felician mission, partner with the Felician Sisters and carry the Felician charism into the world.

We are forever grateful to them for their service and their leadership.

We recently caught up with five of the original class of associates, all of whom made their first covenant—a formal commitment to live in mission and prayer with the Felician Sisters—in the 1990s. Here are their stories.

**Natalie Preischel**  
Made covenant: 1990  
Location: Buffalo, NY



*"Remember, this is not a social club—it's a way of life."*

**What drew you to the associates program?**

I was a Felician Sister for nearly 10 years in the late 50s and early 60s, then I left the order to start a family. My husband and I raised four boys.

Many years later, I realized I needed more time for my spirituality. A Felician Sister introduced me to the new associates program and I knew it was what I wanted to do. It has allowed me to grow in my faith, develop a deeper prayer life and get closer to Christ.

**What has been the best part of being an associate?**

Being able to grow spiritually and be around people of such strong faith. When you're facing challenges, you can always talk to an associate or sister about it. Being an associate has been incredibly meaningful for me.

**Any advice for someone considering joining the program?**

Think carefully about this decision—it involves commitment. Study the Felician charism, learn about St. Francis, St. Felix, Blessed Mary Angela and the history of the Felician order. Talk to other associates and the sisters. Remember, this is not a social club—it's a way of life.

**How does the associates program need to change to stay current?**

The sisters have emphasized that associates need to step up into leadership roles. We're in a period of transition and fresh ideas are needed to move forward. A torch has been passed and we need to take hold of it—and we need new members to help us do this.

**Virginia Mendez**  
Made covenant: 1995  
Location: Pomona, CA



*"My commitment has grown stronger over the years and so has my fervor."*

**What was your early experience as an associate like?**

There were 12 of us at the beginning here in California and we met at the parish church in Pomona. Sr. Denise Maria Amato recruited us and led the formation classes.

She was a natural teacher—very creative and inspiring. It was such an exciting time for us. We felt privileged to be part of this religious experience.

**What has been the best part of being an associate?**

It's hard to pick one thing. I'd say it's how it has centered my prayer life and the close bonds I've formed with the other associates. We've gone through a lot together.

**Has your time as an associate evolved for you personally?**

My commitment has grown stronger over the years and so has my fervor. I know I want to keep doing this as long as I can.

**Lorraine O'Shei**  
Made covenant: 1990  
Location: Buffalo, NY



*"I always felt welcome, like we were family. It has continuously nourished my spirit."*

### Why did you become an associate?

It was a natural extension for me. I've felt connected to the Felicians my entire life. I attended Villa Maria Academy for high school and my math teacher, Sr. Barbara Marie Juskiewicz, inspired me greatly. She later told us about the new associate program. I joined and have been uplifted by this group ever since.

### What has been the best part of being an associate?

Knowing that I belong and that I am following my calling. Every time I've been with the associates and the sisters, I've felt I was on the right path.

### How does the associate program need to change to stay current?

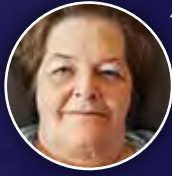
With the number of sisters decreasing, this is a critical moment. We've learned so much from the sisters and now it's our responsibility to carry that forward. It's a passing-of-the-torch moment and we need to act accordingly.

### Any advice for someone looking to join?

If you feel called to play a bigger role in the Church and its outreach, this is the place for you. Pray on it, reflect deeply and be ready to lead. The work is rewarding but not for the faint of heart.



**Frances Doda**  
Made covenant: 1996  
Location: Mississauga, ON



*"Being an associate all these years has been a constant source of joy."*

### How did you first get involved with the associate program?

It was by chance. When I was little, I wanted to be a nun, but as an adult, I met my future husband and my plans changed. Our first house was just up the street from the Felician convent. I met the sisters at my parish and bonded with them immediately because we were both Polish. Years later, one of them invited me to join the associate program. I said "yes."

### What's been the best part of being an associate?

Being in the service of God, knowing Him, loving Him and feeling His love in return. Being an associate all these years has been a constant source of joy.

### Was there an especially challenging time for you?

Yes. A few years ago, I became quite sick and now use a wheelchair. Despite this, the sisters and associates have supported me. Sr. MaryAnne Olekszyk visits monthly and keeps me up to date with newsletters and calls. I'm patched into every meeting by phone and always feel included.

### How has your service changed as an associate?

I'm a prayer specialist now. People call me with prayer requests—from helping someone find work to guidance in life. Of course, I also pray for bigger concerns, but this has become a meaningful way to serve.

**Cottee Harris**  
Made covenant: 1995  
Location: Chicago, IL



*"Blessed Mary Angela was Polish and lived in the 19th century. I'm Black and live in the 21st century. But I have always felt a real connection to her."*

### What made you want to join the associate program?

In the mid-90s, I worked with a Felician sister at Misericordia Hospital. She invited me to meet the sisters at the convent. I was struck by their closeness, love and meaningful conversations. When the opportunity came to become an associate, I took it.

### What has been the best part of being an associate?

I love following the teachings and living a simple lifestyle. When I face challenges, I reflect on Blessed Mary Angela's life and strive to serve marginalized people with joy, hope and compassion.

### What was your most challenging time?

I had serious heart trouble and underwent a heart transplant. Twenty years later, I'm still here. God has always guided me and I've been able to continue serving others through nonprofit work.

### Any advice for someone considering becoming an associate?

Pray and let the Lord guide you. You'll discover many rewards in sharing the charism of Blessed Mary Angela and in learning about love, service and sacrifice.

## Join the Journey

If you feel called to serve, grow spiritually and carry the Felician charism forward, we invite you to learn more about becoming a Felician Associate. Join us in taking the torch into the future!



**F**rom the moment Blessed Mary Angela founded the Felician Sisters, their directive has been clear: **"serve where you are needed."** For more than 150 years, the sisters have walked alongside those on society's margins—feeding the hungry, sheltering the vulnerable, educating the underserved and bringing hope to communities in crisis.

Today, that legacy continues through Felician Services, Inc. (FSI)—the sole corporate member of more than 30 Felician-sponsored ministries across the United States. Acting as the bridge between the sisters' Our Lady of Hope Province (OLHP) leadership and the diverse ministries they sponsor, FSI ensures the charism, values and Catholic identity of each ministry remain strong while empowering leaders to meet modern challenges with creativity, compassion and faith.

## What is Felician Services, Inc.?



FSI provides governance, mission integration and strategic oversight for sponsored ministries in healthcare, education, housing, senior services and social outreach. In partnership with OLHP leadership, FSI:

- Provides expertise for informed sponsorship decisions.
- Safeguards the Felician charism and Catholic values of each ministry.
- Acts as a bridge of continuity across provincial administrations.
- Guides boards and executives through leadership transitions, strategic planning and sustainability planning.

Their support spans mission formation, governance development, risk management and canonical compliance—all aimed at helping ministries meet today's challenges without losing the essence of what makes them Felician.

## Innovation in Action

FSI's role isn't just administrative—it's transformative. Across the country, Felician-sponsored ministries are breaking new ground, often with seed funding and strategic guidance from FSI's St. Francis Fund, which invests in new initiatives that address unmet needs in their communities.

### St. Clare Foundation—Behavioral Health for Youth Centralia, IL



Continuing the sisters' commitment to holistic care, the St. Clare Foundation is working with community partners throughout Illinois in Marion, Jefferson and surrounding counties to address critical gaps in behavioral health services for youth and adolescents. By convening local stakeholders, the Foundation ensures resources are better aligned and more accessible, helping young people receive timely support before crises escalate.

**"Innovation is at the core of the St. Clare Foundation's reason for existing. As the needs of the Southern Illinois community have changed, the Felician Sisters responded by creating the St. Clare Foundation which seeks to address these needs in a new way. Rather than providing direct services related to youth and adolescent behavioral health, the St. Clare Foundation serves as a funder, ambassador and facilitator supporting and strengthening existing agencies and resources in the community."**

- Clare Kessler, MPH, *Executive Director*

# INNOVATING FOR THE FUTURE:

## How Felician Ministries Are Adapting to Meet Today's Needs

### St. Ignatius Community Services—Serving Seniors

Philadelphia, PA



For many older adults in West Philadelphia, navigating fragmented health and social services is overwhelming. St. Ignatius Community Services is stepping in as a navigator and relationship-builder, initially serving residents of Angela Court and Francis House. The ministry will expand to nearby neighborhoods, identifying gaps and

launching entirely new programs when no suitable services exist.

**“Rooted in their long history of ministry in Western Philadelphia, the Felician Sisters will continue to share their presence through St. Ignatius Community Services (SICS). In the gentle spirit of Blessed Mary Angela, SICS will offer more than housing for the elderly—it will be a place of care, compassion and community, where body, mind and spirit are nurtured.”**

- Sr. Mary Aquinas Szott, *Executive Liaison*

### Affordable Housing—Building Stability and Community

Felician ministries are taking bold steps to address the nationwide shortage of affordable housing for seniors:

- Angela Gardens—45 units on the Enfield campus in Connecticut, repurposing the former St. Felix Center.
- Villa St. Clare—68 units on the Presentation of Blessed Virgin Mary Convent campus in Livonia, MI.
- Angela Court I & II—Renovating 121 senior apartments in West Philadelphia.

These projects do more than provide shelter—they foster community, stability and dignity for older adults, reflecting the sisters' longstanding commitment to compassion and justice.

**“As many religious organizations are struggling to maintain underutilized real estate assets, FSI on behalf of the Felician Sisters, is intentional in the creative repurposing of underutilized real estate in support of providing quality affordable housing for senior citizens.”**

- Chet Jackson, *FSI Vice President, Real Estate Ministry Development*

### Creative Solutions to Emerging Needs

Some of the most innovative ministries are reimagining care and engagement models that blend tradition with forward-thinking approaches.

### Angela Hospice

Livonia, MI

#### Bridge Program for Young Families



End-of-life care for young patients or parents of small children carries unique emotional and financial burdens. Angela Hospice's proposed Bridge Program for Young Families will provide emergency financial assistance—covering rent, utilities, groceries and childcare—so families can focus on time together rather than survival needs.

The program also offers memory-making experiences like keepsakes, storybooks and wish-granting outings to help families create lasting, healing memories. Serving about 50 families annually, the initiative reflects the Felician values of compassion, dignity and solidarity with those in need.

## MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

### Religious & Cultural Sensitivity Training

Recognizing the rich diversity of Wayne County, MI—including large Arab American and Muslim communities—Angela Hospice is developing a religious and cultural sensitivity manual for caregivers. This resource will guide staff, volunteers and partner organizations in delivering personalized, respectful care, even when patients cannot voice their wishes. By extending the training to community partners, Angela Hospice fosters broader cultural competence across the healthcare landscape.

### Felician Village

Manitowoc, WI

#### Music Therapy for Whole-Person Care



At Felician Village in Wisconsin, board-certified music therapists are using the power of music to reduce pain, anxiety and agitation in residents with dementia, those in hospice and even patients in short-term rehab. The program integrates therapeutic music into care plans at no cost to residents, improving quality of life and fostering emotional connection where words may fail.

### Villa Maria College

Buffalo, NY

#### HYPE: Helping Youth Proclaim Excellence



In Buffalo, Villa Maria College is tackling chronic absenteeism and low academic engagement by linking school attendance to studio time in a professional music production program. Through a Saturday Academy, students learn beat-making, branding, entrepreneurship and production skills while earning time in a recording studio—an incentive tied to maintaining grades and attendance.

The program serves at-risk students from low-income districts, many of whom are waitlisted from vocational training programs. HYPE blends creativity with accountability, inspiring students to see education as relevant, empowering and connected to their passions.

### Stewarding the Mission for the Long Term

FSI's work extends beyond launching new initiatives. They help ministries:

- Explore sustainable operational and financial models.
- Implement shared services to maximize resources.
- Plan for leadership transitions to ensure stability.
- Align governance structures with canonical mission and civil law.

### Looking Ahead

The Felician Sisters' ministries have always adapted to the times—from opening schools for immigrant children in the 19th century to building affordable housing, navigating healthcare reform and developing culturally competent care today.

Through FSI's leadership and the strategic investment of the St. Francis Fund, these ministries are equipped not only to survive change but to lead it—rooted in mission, rising to the moment.

**With faith as their compass and innovation as their tool, Felician-sponsored ministries are shaping a future where service, justice and mercy continue to transform lives—just as Blessed Mary Angela envisioned.**



### St. Francis Fund: Fueling New Possibilities

The St. Francis Fund of Felician Services, Inc. provides financial support for innovative initiatives that address unmet or underserved community needs, bringing hope where it's needed most. Participation reflects a commitment to the Felician charism—loving God boundlessly, serving compassionately and responding to the evolving needs of the world—continuing Blessed Mary Angela's legacy.

# BEYOND THE HABIT:

## Keith Famie's Calling to Tell Their Story

When director and producer Keith Famie set out to make *The Calling*, he knew it would be unlike any other documentary he had produced. Known for his award-winning human-interest films, Keith had spent two decades telling the stories of war veterans, end-of-life caregivers and cultural communities—but this time, he was stepping into sacred territory: the world of Catholic sisters.

For many, the image of a Catholic sister might conjure scenes from *Sister Act* or the gentle strength of Mother Teresa. Others may recall the strict discipline of a classroom sister from their childhood. But as *The Calling* powerfully reveals, sisters are far more complex, deeply rooted in service and often misunderstood. They are educators, nurses, environmentalists, social justice advocates and spiritual leaders—women who have quietly shaped our nation's conscience.

In this PBS documentary, Keith and his team at Visionalist Entertainment Productions venture beyond the convent door, shedding light on the history, humanity and enduring impact of women religious. With characteristic respect and curiosity, he traces their legacy from medieval Europe—where sisters cared for the poor and buried the dead—to the pioneering hospital founders of the American frontier and into the present-day ministries where sisters are still transforming lives.

Felician Sisters play a vital role in this narrative. Through candid and heartfelt interviews, the film features Sr. Mary Andrew Budinski, Sr. Nancy Marie Jamroz, Sr. Shelley Marie Jeffrey, Sr. Judith Marie Kubicki, Sr. Felicity Marie Madigan, Sr. Joyce Marie Van de Vyver. Their voices bring forward the deeply personal dimensions of religious life—the joys, the sacrifices, the spiritual grounding and the continued relevance of their call to serve.

Historically, religious life provided one of the few paths for women to be educated, lead institutions and shape public discourse. In the United States, sisters established more than 500 hospitals by the early 20th century, many serving immigrants and the poor. They taught generations of children, ran orphanages and cultivated communities of compassion. While their numbers have declined since the 1960s, the calling to serve God and others continues.

Today, sisters are working in domestic violence shelters, low-income housing, prison ministry, hospice care and at the

forefront of environmental protection. *The Calling* captures this evolution—not as a farewell to the past, but as a powerful meditation on vocation, visibility and legacy.

### From chef to documentarian, Famie tells the story of modern-day spiritual leaders.

Formerly known as a celebrity chef and TV host, Keith Famie shifted his career in 2004 to documentary filmmaking, driven by a desire to help people tell their stories.

That decision has since led to him and his team at Visionalist Entertainment Productions receiving 27 Michigan Emmy Awards and a long list of acclaimed documentaries. Yet *The Calling* stands apart—not just in subject matter, but in spirit.

In listening to the lives and witness of women like the Felician Sisters, Keith Famie invites audiences into a rarely seen world of spiritual conviction, human compassion and humble leadership. *The Calling* is not simply a documentary—it is an invitation to see these women as courageous, contemporary disciples responding to the needs of the world.

Keith Famie doesn't just document lives—he listens deeply. And in this latest project, he gives voice to a community of women who have spent a lifetime listening to the needs of others.

### Featured Orders:

Chaldean Sisters, Daughters of Mary Immaculate

Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist

Felician Sisters of North America

Sisters of Mercy

Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

To learn more about *The Calling* and watch the trailer, visit [www.thecallingdoc.com](http://www.thecallingdoc.com).

The premiere takes place on **December 1, 2025**, at the Emagine Theatre in Novi, MI.

Tickets can be purchased directly through the Emagine Novi website.



# FINDING FAITH, FRIENDSHIP AND FEARLESS LEADERSHIP

## How Seeds of Hope *Lit the Way* for Fernanda Zamora’s Journey—and Is Inspiring a New Generation of Women Leaders

When Fernanda Zamora walked into her first Seeds of Hope Young Women’s Leadership Experience as a high schooler, she was searching—not just for answers about leadership or spirituality, but for something more personal.

“I was in the process of discovering my identity and deepening my relationship with my faith,” she recalls. “The program gave me a chance to explore both in a way I hadn’t before—and it changed everything.”

Hosted by the Felician Sisters, Seeds of Hope is more than a summer program—it’s a launchpad for young women discerning their values, voice and vocation. Through reflection, service, community and hands-on leadership experiences, the program empowers participants to step into their authentic selves and begin shaping the world around them.

“I’m so glad I pushed myself to take that first step,” Fernanda says. “It was truly transformative.”

### BEYOND THE LABELS

For Fernanda, one of the most powerful lessons was learning to embrace who she was—fully and confidently. “It’s okay to be different from what’s considered ‘popular,’” she says. “Your true self is not only valuable but necessary.”

That spirit of authenticity has carried her into every leadership role since—from mentoring at her university to leading in the workplace with purpose and compassion. “Seeds of Hope laid the foundation,” she explains. “It gave me the confidence to lead with integrity.”

### LESSONS IN TRUST AND CHALLENGE (COURSES)

Ask Fernanda her favorite part of the program and she won’t hesitate: “The challenge course!” she laughs. “It was more than just fun—it helped build trust and encouraged teamwork. We were cheering each other on, lifting each other up—literally and figuratively.”

But even with all the energy and excitement, the experience required vulnerability.

“Opening up in such a short timeframe was tough,” she admits. “But the more I embraced the discomfort, the more I grew. Seeds of Hope taught me that leadership requires both courage and connection.”

*Top: Fernanda Zamora is a Seeds of Hope alumna. Middle: Fernanda with her small group. Right: Attendees engage in a trust exercise at the Maryville challenge course.*



**“I can honestly say this experience will change your life, You’ll laugh, you’ll grow and you’ll make friendships that last. But most importantly—you’ll realize you’re not alone.”**

- Fernanda Zamora



## REAL LEADERSHIP. REAL RELATIONSHIPS. REAL IMPACT.

Fernanda's story is just one example of how Seeds of Hope is shaping a new generation of female leaders grounded in faith, service and self-awareness. The program introduces participants to diverse leadership styles and helps them identify their own strengths.

"It helped me understand how I lead best—and how I can keep growing," Fernanda says. "That kind of self-awareness is so important."

She also cherishes the lifelong relationships she formed through the experience. "One of my friends flew across the country to visit—we went sightseeing and bungee jumping!" she says. "And I still keep in touch with former mentees. The connections I made through Seeds of Hope are truly lasting."

## A SPARK FOR MISSION AND PURPOSE

Beyond leadership, Seeds of Hope helped Fernanda discover a deeper calling: mission work. "It made me realize how much I love volunteering," she says. "After I finish my doctoral program, I hope to join the sisters in missionary work. It's become part of my life's goals."

## FROM PARTICIPANT TO PEER MENTOR

One of the most meaningful chapters in Fernanda's Seeds of Hope journey came after her initial experience—when she returned to serve as a peer mentor and later as an assistant coordinator to the program. "Coming back in a leadership role was incredibly fulfilling," she says. "It was a chance to give back and walk alongside other young women, just as someone had done for me."

What stands out about Fernanda is how she took what she learned and paid it forward. Becoming a peer mentor and then a program assistant wasn't just a next step—it was a sign of how deeply she internalized the values of Seeds of Hope and wanted to extend them to others.

As a mentor, Fernanda modeled servant leadership and provided encouragement to newer participants navigating the same path she once walked. Her presence reinforced the program's mission: empowering young women not only to lead but to lift others as they rise.



July 11-18, 2026 is the next Seeds of Hope Young Women's Leadership Experience at Maryville Retreat Center, Holly, MI. For more information (including past speakers, daily Mass and day of service) visit [Seeds-of-Hope.org](https://Seeds-of-Hope.org)

## ADVICE TO FUTURE PARTICIPANTS: BE BRAVE, BE OPEN.

What would Fernanda say to someone thinking about signing up? "I can honestly say this experience will change your life," she says. "You'll laugh, you'll grow and you'll make friendships that last. But most importantly—you'll realize you're not alone."

Her advice? "Be open-minded. Be vulnerable. You never know who you might inspire just by being yourself."

From courage on the challenge course to compassion in the community, Fernanda Zamora is living proof: **when you give young women space to grow in faith and leadership, the seeds you plant can change the world.**



*Thank you*

to our 2025 Seeds of Hope sponsors  
for your generous support and unwavering  
commitment to our mission.

**Trailblazer Sponsor**  
Felician Services, Inc.

**Servant Sponsors**  
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Eleanor and Stephen Ash

MISSION IMPACT

# SERVING WHERE CALLED: The Felician Sisters in *Haiti*



*Haiti is a land of resilience and faith, where daily struggles of poverty, political unrest and natural disasters are met with extraordinary courage. In Jacmel, a community shaped by hardship yet alive with hope, Felician Mission: Haiti provides children with learning, families with support and the sick with care. Rooted in compassion and dedicated to human dignity, the mission accompanies the Haitian people on their journey toward justice, peace and a brighter future.*

*In 2022, worsening violence and instability—even prompting the U.S. Embassy to order all American citizens to leave—forced the Felician Sisters to withdraw temporarily. Yet by empowering local staff and partners, the mission continues to serve with compassion, solidarity and steadfast hope.*

## AND THE *Sisters* RETURN!

During this Year of Hope, Sisters Mary Inga Borko, Maria Julitta Kurek and Marilyn Marie Minter have returned to the mission, even with the country still in chaos and without a stable government. Below is their message.

Life in Jacmel has changed dramatically over the past three years. The city has had no electricity, which previously charged the batteries that power the mission’s inverter. Now, the batteries are weak and cannot operate at the same capacity as when the mission began 12 years ago.

When the mission complex was first built, a few hours of city electricity each day powered the buildings and enabled internet access. Today, the sewing school shares an inverter with the volunteer house, as well as an additional inverter was secured to ensure reliable electricity for the rest of the convent, clinic, activity center and computer lab.

Even without full electricity, the mission continues to serve. Many Haitians come to charge phones or battery packs, otherwise living in darkness. Like everything else, the mission shares what it has—including electricity.

For almost three years, *Felician Mission: Haiti* has operated virtually, maintaining daily contact with staff, the mobile clinic, computer lab and sewing school. The Haitian people demonstrate remarkable resiliency, always full of hope—a hope that does not disappoint. No matter the circumstances, they move forward with what they have, trusting that more awaits them.

The people of Jacmel experience that hope through *Felician Mission: Haiti*. Longtime supporters witness the difference their presence makes. During this Year of Hope, Sisters Inga, Julitta and Marilyn



have returned to the mission, even with the country still in chaos and without a stable government.

It is said, “**Fear is useless; what is needed is trust.**” We hear that call repeatedly as we serve the marginalized and vulnerable in Jacmel. Mother Angela told her sisters to “serve where you are needed.” The need in Haiti calls the sisters to be a sign of hope, saying, “**We have not forgotten you; we believe in you; we are here for you.**”

Reflecting on the lives of the Haitian people, one cannot help but think of the Hebrew people walking the desert to the Promised Land, seeking dignity and liberty. God revealed Himself then through people, experiences and crises—and He continues to do so in Haiti, choosing us to care and serve where needed.

Whether through prayer, financial support, remote aid, advocacy, or re-entering the country, God is present; God is with us. Despite the crises, Haitians experience hope because of many disciples who believe serving God means serving His people.

It is because of you that we can be a beacon of hope—a light in the darkness. Presence brings life, enters relationships and inspires hope—and hope does not disappoint.

We are all missionary disciples in one way or another. Some are physically present to the poorest of the poor. Others sustain the mission through prayer and some through generosity, changing lives in miraculous ways. This is the work of the Felician Sisters, together with their companions and partners. We serve where called with compassion, creativity and courage. We hope you can accompany and support us through your prayers and, when possible, your treasure.

**Mesi anpil! Thank you! Bondye beni ou! God bless you!**



# HOPE AS A SPRINGBOARD: RISING TO MEET THE MOMENT

**N**early 300 women religious under the age of 65, representing congregations from around the world, gathered in Rome this summer for HOPE 2025, a week of networking, dialogue and discernment on the future of religious life and the role of women as leaders in the Church. The event, held June 3-7 and coordinated by the HOPE Leadership Collaborative, was designed to foster unity, strengthen leadership skills, and renew commitment to the challenges of our time.

Felician Sisters Grace Del Priore and Maria Louise Edwards attended the international gathering, joining a global community of younger sisters seeking to connect more deeply with the Church and one another.

Sr. Grace reflected that it was nourishing to be in relationship with others and to contribute as members of a vibrant sisterhood. She noted that both the purpose of the Collaborative and the gathering itself were to help participants become more deeply rooted so that they could rise.

One of the core elements of the HOPE Leadership Collaborative's mission is connection. Between sessions, sisters enjoyed one another's company, formed friendships and participated in synodal-style sharing that opened new perspectives and strengthened understanding across cultures and charisms.

Throughout the weekend, participants reflected on their original calls to religious life. Remembering those beginnings rekindled the graces of their vocations—the love and passion that first drew them to follow Christ. They also took time to lament losses and celebrate blessings, recognizing that God's presence is found both in joy and in challenge.

The gathering offered space for honest conversations about the realities of religious life today. Many sisters shared what it is like to be among the youngest in their communities and to minister during a time of great transition in the Church and the world. Stories of service revealed both the weight of responsibility and the deep sense of purpose felt by sisters working on the front lines of human need.

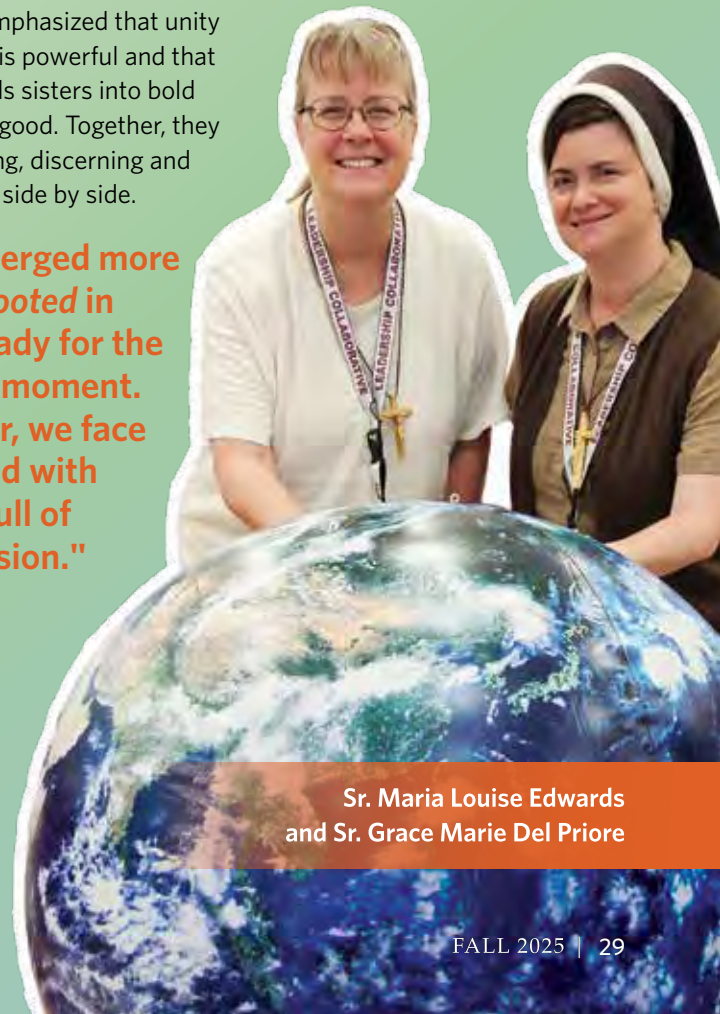
Despite differences in language, culture and community life, the sisters experienced profound unity. They came from diverse backgrounds and congregations yet found belonging through shared hopes and experiences. The program included witness reflections and small-group discussions that allowed participants to listen deeply, share freely and appreciate both individual and collective wisdom.

Sr. Maria Louise explained that their involvement with *Giving Voice*, a peer-led organization for younger Catholic women religious, had already shown them the strength of younger sisters in the United States, and this gathering helped them see that same spirit alive on an international level.

Being rooted enables sisters to rise. The HOPE 2025 experience renewed a shared vision of global sisterhood—one that creates connections for community and ministry, compassion and action. The sisters returned home refreshed and inspired to carry that energy forward in their daily lives and ministries.

Sr. Grace emphasized that unity in diversity is powerful and that hope propels sisters into bold choices for good. Together, they rise—praying, discerning and ministering side by side.

**"We emerged more deeply rooted in faith, ready for the present moment. Together, we face the world with hearts full of compassion."**



Sr. Maria Louise Edwards  
and Sr. Grace Marie Del Priore

## 150TH CELEBRATION



Felician Sisters  
of North America  
*Serving where needed  
since 1874.*

### 150 Years of Faith and Service: *A Year of Commemoration Across Our Province*

Thank you to everyone who helped us celebrate the remarkable milestone of the Felician Sisters of North America—150 years of faith, community and service. Across the province, sisters, associates, employees, donors, family and friends joyfully came together to honor this rich heritage through inspiring celebrations and vibrant gatherings. Each region hosted events that reflected the spirit and mission of the Felician Sisters, offering opportunities for fellowship, gratitude and renewal.

Highlights included joyful liturgies led by local bishops and three special occasions that captured the heart of the anniversary:

- Month of Remembrance, honoring sisters who have gone before us.
- Day of Service, held in Blessed Mary Angela's memory to *"serve where you are needed."*
- Day of Gratitude, sharing stories of blessings.

The year-long celebrations brought renewed energy and hope as the province looks confidently toward the future, rooted in a strong past.

The grand conclusion will take place in Livonia, MI on November 21, the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The event will include a Mass, a ribbon-cutting for the new Heritage Center and a banquet honoring sisters, associates, employees and benefactors who have sustained the Felician mission.

As we close this chapter of celebration, *we give thanks for 150 years of blessings—and recommit ourselves to a future of compassionate service.*





## ■ 150TH CELEBRATION

As we celebrate 150 years of Felician presence in North America, we invited sisters, associates, employees, ministry partners, donors and friends to share the blessings that fill their hearts with gratitude. Their reflections—*Stories of Gratitude*—shine with joy, love and faith, reminding us that *gratitude is at the center of who we are*. This spirit was especially present on October 10, 2025, when the Felician family marked a Day of Gratitude on the Feast of Blessed Mary Angela, whose vision and mission continue to inspire us to recognize God's abundant blessings in our lives and ministries.

# STORIES OF *Gratitude!*

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YOUR BLESSINGS.

YOUR STORIES.

OUR CELEBRATION!

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"I am grateful to the Felician Sisters for changing the trajectory of my professional life. Before entering social services, I worked in the for-profit world and was dissatisfied. **Being exposed to the sister's charism transformed my worldview and led me to pursue a career in supporting the community.** The sisters also gave me my first work opportunity—and now, 13 years later, I'm still here! Thank you!"

Brian H., Toronto, ON  
*St. Felix Centre employee*

"My daughter graduated from Our Lady of the Sacred Heart High School in 2013. Today, as a thirty-something, **I see her living out the Felician Core Values in her work, friendships, opinions and in practicing our faith.** Gratitude doesn't seem to be a strong enough word to express my appreciation!"

David I., Coraopolis, PA  
*Felician Associate, parent of a student*

"Sr. Mary Romuald Bednarczyk was a gift to the Felician community. After teaching elementary school briefly, she became a social worker and later spent many years at St. Joseph Hospital in Bangor, Maine, where she established an excellent mission integration program and a hospital-based hospice program. **A woman of prayer and great insight, Sr. Romuald was loved and respected by all those who encountered her.** I am grateful she was my friend and sister."

Sr. Mary Norberta M., Enfield, CT  
*Felician Sister, Medical Driver/Phone Ministry Evangelization*

*It was all smiles as our Coraopolis sisters completed the City of Gratitude puzzle—just in time for the Day of Gratitude celebration! This puzzle, filled with more than 30 messages of gratitude, was saved especially for October 10. A shoutout to Sr. Mary Justice Przybocki and Sr. Melanie Marie Bajorek for putting in the final pieces!*



"I live in gratitude for the grace of God allowing me to hear and respond to His call to serve. The story of the great catch of fish from the Gospel of Luke is my story. Even in these challenging times in the Church and society, God allows me to cast the net into the deep and invite people to come close to Him. People come, are drawn to Jesus and there is nothing greater!"

Sr. Mary Joanne S., Lancaster NY  
*Felician Sister, Director of Faith Formation, St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Niagara Falls, NY*

"Celebrating my 60th Anniversary as a Felician Sister in 2023, I was invited to speak about my vocation at the diocesan celebration of Jubilarians. My talk reflected gratitude, centered on our communal life, charism, mission and Felician Franciscan spirituality. My gratitude deepened when one sister from another community approached me afterward and said, 'If I weren't already a sister and I heard this reflection, I would have become a Felician!' Amen!"

Sr. Mary Rebecca P., Edison, NJ  
*Felician Sister, Pastoral Associate, St. Helena Parish/Staff Assistant, St. Helena School*

"Sr. Mary Liliose (my mother's sister) and colleagues would lunch at our house each time they traveled between Coraopolis and Shamokin. We were always very proud to host them. Once while I was still in grade school, she gave me college level books on China and India. Who could have imagined that later in life I would spend more than 20 years living and working in Asia? Thanks for the inspiration, Sr. Lil!"

Richard W., Vico Equense, Italy  
*Relative of a sister*

"In my years of theology in the 1960s, as a seminarian at Christ the King in Olean, NY, I taught religious education with two other seminarians for three years with the Felician Sisters at Transfiguration School. The seminary and school are now closed, but it was a wonderful experience to witness the sisters' dedication to their students and to learn about their lives and loving community."

Rev. Robert F., Palm Springs, CA  
*Worked with a sister, retired priest*

"I was introduced to the Felician Sisters as a child when my mother went to work at a nursing facility run by the order. I attended high school taught by them and later worked alongside them as a nurse's aide and nurse. The formation I received guided my life. I owe my successes first to my parents and second to the Felicians. I am grateful to now have the opportunity to contribute to them."

Mary L. S., Wild Rose, WI  
*Employee, former student, worked with a sister*

"I wish to convey my unending gratitude to the Felician Sisters for the great impact they have had on my life—sharing my humble charism of feeding the poor, helping the elderly sisters at mealtimes, praying together and joining in reflection and retreat. May the Felician Sisters be blessed for all the good they do to serve and pray for the marginalized."

Imelda F. A., Chicago, IL  
*Felician Associate*

"I worked with Sr. Genevieve at the pantry for a couple of years starting in the late 80s and early 90s. It was a lot of fun and Sr. Genevieve was always very nice and generous to me. Also, Sr. Angelica was teaching me Polish and Sr. Jean was teaching me how to budget and save my money. They were both very kind to me."

Walter H., Denver, CO  
*Friend of a sister, worked with a sister*

## DISCOVER *More Stories* OF GRATITUDE

Scan the QR code to explore heartfelt messages and inspiring moments of thankfulness for the Felician Sisters, shared in celebration of their 150th anniversary.



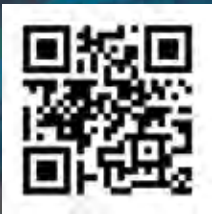
# Poland Pilgrimage

## Walking in the Footprints of Blessed Mother Angela

In honor of the 150th anniversary of the Felician Sisters' arrival in North America, pilgrims traveled to Poland to walk in the footprints of Blessed Mary Angela. They stood where Sophia Truszkowska became Sister Angela, prayed where she once served the poor and honored her devotion to Our Lady of Czestochowa. *This sacred journey brought Felician heritage to life, a reminder that every step we take in love and service continues the mission she began.*

Beyond these initial 12 footprints, pilgrims visited several meaningful sites that deepened their spiritual and historical understanding: the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa, the Holy Door at Wawel Cathedral, Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, the St. John Paul II Museum and Church and the Wieliczka Salt Mine. They also explored the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and visited Felician convents in Warsaw and Kraków. Each stop added rich context, reflection and reverence, making this pilgrimage truly unforgettable.

Scan the QR code below to learn more.



### Holy Cross Church



*Where young Sophia Truszkowska attended daily Mass and began caring for the poor—seeds of the Felician mission were planted here.*

### Church of St. Joseph (Visitation Sisters)



*Here, Sophia first dreamed of religious life, inspired by her mother's connection to the Visitation Sisters.*

### 10 Koscielna Street



*The first Felician gathering place. On Nov. 21, 1855, Sophia and Klotylda offered their lives to God before the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa.*

### Church of St. Casimir



*Sophia likely received her First Communion here, deepening her love for the Eucharist.*

26/28 Mostowa Street



The Institute of St. Felix was founded here. In 1857, Sophia and her companions donned the Felician habit.

Jasna Góra, Częstochowa



Blessed Angela's devotion to Our Lady of Częstochowa endured. A Felician presence remains near this sacred shrine.

Transfiguration Church



A spiritual home for Sophia, where she met Fr. Honorat, became sister Angela and the Felician name—honoring St. Felix—was born.

Sister Samuela's Kitchen



In the 1870s, Felicians fed the hungry at the gate—including university students—launching student meal programs.

Danilowiczowska Street



The first motherhouse. Felicians cared for orphans, converts and the poor—serving Warsaw until the Congregation's suppression in 1864.

Museum of Blessed Mary Angela



Mikolajska Street in Kraków preserves her legacy through personal artifacts and historical archives.

Our Lady Queen of Poland Convent



After years of exile, Felicians returned to Warsaw and established a province in 1922, continuing their mission in gratitude.

Immaculate Heart of Mary Province Convent and Church



Mother Angela's final home. Here, the sisters built a church to honor the Eucharist. She lived and died in this sacred place.

## 150TH CELEBRATION

In the quiet of summer, beneath the shade of trees and the watchful presence of crucifixes and statues, Felician Sisters across North America gathered in cemeteries to honor those who came before them.

Throughout August, as part of the 150th anniversary, the Felician Sisters of North America observed a Day of Remembrance. The ceremonies celebrated the pioneering women whose courage, sacrifice and unwavering faith laid the foundation for the province we know today.

At each gathering—large or small, urban or rural—the sisters prayed with gratitude among the final resting places of their Felician foremothers. In solemn procession, they placed flowers, lit candles, sang hymns and recited prayers—not only for those first brave missionaries who arrived in 1874, but also for the women who followed in their footsteps.

*“These ceremonies were not just moments of memory,”* reflected Sr. Mary Sharon Iacobucci. *“These were opportunities to highlight the fidelity of our sisters who have shaped our Felician story for over 150 years through lives of love, sacrifice and service.”*

The Day of Remembrance offered a sacred space to reflect on the lives devoted to education, healthcare, pastoral ministry and outreach to the poor and marginalized. At each site, sisters remembered the stories that shaped their communities—stories in perseverance during hardship, joy in shared life and deep devotion to prayer.

The observance also witnessed the ongoing journey of Felician life and mission. Just as those buried here once stepped forward with courage into an unknown, today's sisters—and the ministries they lead—continue to respond to the needs of the times with the same dedication.

As the province celebrates its 150th year, the Day of Remembrance served as a quiet, yet profound reminder: **the spirit of those first sisters is not only remembered—it lives on in all who follow in their footsteps.**

# Day of Remembrance: HONORING THE WOMEN WHO CAME BEFORE US

Held across the Province throughout August  
as part of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration





150TH CELEBRATION

# (How to) SERVE LIKE ANGELA

In celebration of the Felician Sisters' 150th anniversary in North America, sisters, associates, employees, partners in ministry and friends from across the province came together to "Serve Like Angela."

In late summer, an invitation was issued to roll up sleeves and put compassion into action for the Felician Sisters' Day of Service in September. Teams of volunteers across convents and ministries of all sizes answered the invitation and stepped forward to serve where they were needed, following *the powerful and enduring example of Blessed Mary Angela*.

Each site chose a project reflecting its community's needs. At the Response to Love Center in Buffalo, NY volunteers assembled personal care gift bags and served a meal. At Holy Name of Mary Convent in Mississauga, ON their apple harvest became a gift for others—boxed for outreach centers and baked apple crisps for St. Felix Centre. The Felician Associates at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Convent in Coraopolis, PA lifted spirits through visits, cards, and a sock drive for the Kingstree Outreach Mission. Whether large or small, each act echoed the legacy of love and mercy that has defined the Felician mission for 150 years.

## The Spirit Continues

While the official Day of Service has passed, the spirit of "Serving Like Angela" lives on. Ministries are continuing to plan monthly service activities, deepen partnerships with local charities and engage staff and volunteers in the Felician core values of compassion and justice.





# CELEBRATING Generosity

Stories of Faith in Action



*The mission of the Felician Sisters of North America thrives not only through their tireless service but also through the generosity of those who share their vision. Across the country, donors give of their time, talent and treasure to support the sisters' ministries and mission. The following stories highlight just a few of the individuals whose faith and dedication are making a tangible difference in the lives of others.*

## Steven and Penelope Birckett



Steven and Penelope Birckett's story is a powerful example of how a family's experience with a Catholic grade school inspired a lifetime of gratitude and giving. Members of the 1874 Society, the Bircketts support the Founders Fund of the Felician Sisters of North America, which provides resources the sisters can use where and when they are most needed.

For the Bircketts, giving is a way to honor the Felicians who taught their sons, Owen and Aaron, at St. Joseph's Elementary School in Pomona, CA.

**"It's our way of saying thank you," Penelope said. "We appreciate the role they played in our sons' lives. Supporting the Founders Fund continues that relationship and ensures other families can have the same experience."**

When the family moved from Colorado to California in 1990, Owen entered fifth grade and Aaron second. Transitioning from public school, Owen at first found the structured Catholic environment challenging, but soon adapted, made friends and thrived. Aaron quickly bonded with classmates, one of whom remains a close friend today. Both boys chose to remain in Catholic schools through high school—a testament to the foundation they received at St. Joseph's.

For the Bircketts, the school became more than academics; it was a community. They admired the leadership of Sr. Carol Marie Wiatrek, who welcomed parents as partners: "We are here to educate your children, but you are their primary educators. We are here to support what you want." This philosophy resonated deeply, giving the family a sense of belonging and respect.

Impressed by the sisters' passion and sacrifice, the Bircketts became active in parish life, with Penelope later serving as a lay associate. Now retired in Las Vegas, Steven and Penelope remain generously supportive.

**"Donating to the Founders Fund is our way to help continue their mission," Steven said.**

## Ed and Robin Wojtys

Before their first mission trip to Haiti in 2012, Ed and Robin Wojtys knew the country was poor. But seeing it firsthand was overwhelming. "When we got there, it was far worse than we ever could have imagined," Ed said.

Robin worked at an orphanage in Jacmel while Ed, an orthopedic surgeon, treated patients at a clinic and hospital. The experience was life-changing. **"Someone told us before we went, 'You won't be the same when you come back.' It's true," Robin said. "The people's joy, faith and love of family despite such poverty stays with you."**

Over the next five years, the Wojtyses returned to Haiti four more times. But the pandemic and escalating violence—culminating in suspended U.S. flights to Port-au-Prince—brought their visits to a halt. Still, their desire to help remained strong, rooted in deep Catholic faith and Ed's family ties to two Felician aunts, †Sr. Mary Alexander Hedwig Mikolajczyk and †Sr. Mary Euphemia Mikolajczyk.

That faith led them to Sr. Marilyn Marie Minter, who helped establish *Felician Mission: Haiti* after the 2010 earthquake. The mission has since grown to provide education, healthcare and vocational training, empowering Haitians to build sustainable lives.

**"When we heard what the Felicians were doing, we knew we had to help," Ed said. "They don't just give handouts—they give a hand up."**

The Wojtyses now support the mission financially, believing it is the key to lasting change. **"Our donations help educate the next generation with skills for jobs and stable families," Ed said. "And I hope they find more Sr. Marilyn's—strong, faithful people who can keep changing the world, one step at a time."**



## Mary Lou Wyrobek



When Mary Lou Wyrobek was 11 years old, she gazed into the eyes of a saint. In 1969, as a seventh-grader at Assumption School in Buffalo, NY, she was chosen by the Felician Sisters to greet visiting Archbishop Karol Józef Wojtyła of Kraków with roses and a short speech.

Nine years later, he became Pope John Paul II, and was then canonized in 2014.

This early experience, rooted in the Felicians' dedication to faith and education, began a lifelong bond. Over the years, her family grew close to several sisters in the neighborhood. Later, while working at M&T Bank as custodian of the Felicians' investment account, she became a steady partner to the congregation and a trusted friend to †Sr. Mary Augustinia Sliwinski, their treasurer.

Her involvement deepened through service. She assisted with Villa Maria College's fundraising events and joined the Felician Associates program, traveling to the Felician Center in Kingstree, SC, for hands-on projects. **"Sometimes we had to work pretty hard, but we enjoyed it,"** she said. **"The sisters have done a remarkable job educating children, caring for the poor and even engaging the wealthier population in Kingstree to see and respond to those needs."**

Wyrobek's trust in the sisters has naturally evolved into consistent financial support. She is confident her contributions are well used, whether locally or abroad. **"You can trust that the money is well spent,"** she said. **"I've met some of the sisters in Poland, so I know it's being used properly."**

For Wyrobek, giving is a continuation of her work at the bank—only now, she provides the capital herself, knowing her donations **are a force for good.**



## Judith Levan

It's been nearly 50 years since Judith Levan graduated from Villa Maria Academy, the all-girls high school in Buffalo, NY, yet the spirit of the school—and the Felician Sisters who taught there—remains alive in her heart.

**"I felt comfortable there. I felt welcomed,"** Levan said. **"It provided the basis of what I still believe. The things I do now were instilled in me back then."**

That foundation shaped her career as a meteorologist and inspired her ongoing support of the Felicians' Seeds of Hope ministry, which empowers young women through personal and spiritual development.

Levan is active in Villa Maria's alumnae association, which continues to support the sisters financially and through small acts of kindness, like assembling Christmas gift bags. She still gathers regularly with classmates, a testament to the lasting bonds formed under the sisters' care.

She credits the supportive, all-girls environment and the Felicians' encouragement with giving her confidence — crucial when she became the only woman in her college meteorology program. **"Nobody ever said, 'You can't do that because women don't,'** she said. **"It was always, 'You can do anything you want.' That gave me the confidence to do it."**

For Levan, donating to Seeds of Hope is a way of extending that same gift to today's young women. **"Those high school years are so important,"** she said. **"If you instill values and confidence at that age, they'll carry them throughout their whole life."**

Now retired in Buffalo, Levan treasures reunions with alumnae and former teachers.

**"It's a testament to what the sisters did then and what they're still doing,"** she said. **"That's what keeps me going back—to see everyone gather and share those good memories."**

## A Legacy of Faith and Generosity

These stories are a testament to the profound and lasting influence of the Felician Sisters. Through the support of donors like the Bircketts, the Wojtyses, Mary Lou Wyrobek and Judith Levan, the sisters are enabled to continue transforming their ministries: educating the next generation, serving the marginalized, inspiring faith and empowering communities. Each gift, each act of generosity, is a step forward in building a future grounded in faith, hope and compassion.

You, too, can create your own Felician legacy. Consider making a gift today, becoming a monthly donor, or including the Felician Sisters in your estate plans—***your generosity can impact lives for generations to come.*** Visit [Felician.org/Give](https://www.felician.org/Give).



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# MARYVILLE

## Retreat Center

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23**  
4:30 - 6:30 p.m.

**Community  
Thanksgiving Dinner**

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4**  
10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

**Advent Day  
of Reflection**

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7**  
9:30 a.m. MASS

**10:30 a.m. BRUNCH, GAMES  
AND PHOTOS**

**Brunch with  
St. Nicholas**

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9**  
7:00 p.m.

**Advent Taizé  
Prayer Service**

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10**  
7:00 p.m.

**Time for Healing:  
Advent Healing Mass**

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20**  
1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

**Christmas Time  
in the Woods**  
Guided Hike

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 3**  
1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

**Wintertime in  
the Woods**  
Guided Hike

*Registration required for all  
upcoming events.*

*Find full program descriptions,  
leader bios and costs at*

***MaryvilleRetreatCenter.org***



**You can also:**

- Rent event space, especially during the holiday season!
- Be renewed with a directed or self-directed retreat.

We have this  
**hope** as an anchor  
for the  
**Soul**  
firm and  
secure.

~Hebrews  
6:19

