



THE MESSENGER

of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, Kansas

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JULY 2010



Growing hope

Had the spring weather been a little drier, the crops in the new Concordia Community Garden of Hope might have ranged from arugula to zucchini. But rain delayed opening the 28 garden plots on the northeast corner of the Motherhouse property, so the A is missing and the gardeners have crops ranging from beets to zucchini. And broccoli to zinnias.

Concordia gardeners claimed all the plots, and were able to get to work by the end of April.

The new project is coordinated by Cecelia Thrash and Sister Betty Suther, and has a community board to write the rules and make other decisions. The idea is to give gardeners a place to grow their own crops and to teach them about organic gardening.

For information on the project, call Cecelia or Sister Betty at 785/243-4428.

SISTER AGNES DREHER SISTER CELESTINE RUDER SISTER LIBERATA PELLERIN SISTER MARIE COLEMAN
SISTER VIATORA SOLBACH SISTER THERESE BIRCHSTETTER SISTER TEO FRANCIS WINBINGER SISTER RITA PLANTE
SISTER VERONICA ANN BAXA SISTER ALICE MARIE SPALBER SISTER JAMIE KIRCHER SISTER MARY JEAN ASSELL
SISTER LILA MARIE SCHMIDT SISTER JUANNE MCKENNA SISTER BUCK STOVEL SISTER JOCELYNE DE SILVA NEVES

Our 2010 Jubilarians

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'Vision' of 2010 reflects sisters' lives today

In 1989, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia were coming to the end of a period that could have been devastating to them.

It was 24 years after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council and 20 years after the congregation's "renewal chapter" (in which we planned the required updating and modernization mandated by Vatican II). The sisters had closed Marymount College (in 1983), divested ourselves of all our hospitals (by 1985) and by 1989 closed or sold most of our convents. From 1965 when Vatican II ended through 1989, the congregation had lost a third of our members through death or dispensation of vows.

But the president of the congregation, 48 years old and in office just two years, saw that year as a chance to look forward instead of back. "By 1989, we had realized that the only renewal was to follow Jesus," Sister Marcia Allen says today.

For the first time in the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph — which dates back to 1650 in France — American sisters had accurate English translations of our founding documents available to us, and realized that simply following Jesus was exactly what our original charism called us to do.

With all that on her mind and in her heart in 1989, Sister Marcia joined leaders of women's and men's active apostolic religious communities from across the United States to reflect on what was happening in their communities. The result was a paper titled "Transformative Elements for Religious Life in the Future: 2010."

Sister Marcia sums up how the leaders identified the seeds that existed in 1989 and visualized about how they could grow in the next 20 years:

"Religious communities had become more contemplative in their approach to their work.



Our greatest desire is to partner with others who aspire to a just and peaceful world and a sustainable earth for all. We invite you to join us in these endeavors. We welcome your suggestions and your presence among us. Write us, call us with your ideas. Join us, invite us to join you, in works that free the world and earth for what God desires for us all — fullness of life.

— Sister Marcia Allen
mallen@csjkansas.org

"They became advocates on behalf of the poor, the environment and of disenfranchised people in general.

"They reorganized so that they could become more adaptable to contemporary circumstances.

"They created other forms of membership, not relying solely on the canonically specified traditional forms. They joined in collaboration with other groups, within and outside of the Church in order to work more effectively to eliminate human and environmental poverty.

"They were more educated in contemporary theology and more committed to the healing of the world and earth through diverse ministries.

"They were flexible and more ready to adapt to the changing needs of the times."

Today, Sister Marcia is again president of the congregation. (She served in that role the first time from 1987 to 1995; in 2008, the congregation that now numbers 147 canonically vowed members and four agrégée sisters elected her its president for a new four-year term.)

So when the region's leaders of women religious came together this spring at Manna House of Prayer in Concordia, and those 20-year-old "Transformative Elements" were on the agenda,

she was again a part of the discussion.

And, she says, she was struck by how well that 20-year-old document describes the Sisters of St. Joseph and many other congregations of religious women today.

"We thought we were being so visionary," she says with a laugh. "But instead of looking 'out there,' into the future, we were just taking a prayerful look at what was already happening."

At that Manna House meeting, there might still have been a temptation to look back. But again, Sister Marcia and the other leaders gathered there looked to the future — and the "Transformative Elements" that are now being discussed in congregations across the country for the year 2020.

"We see what is already developing in our religious communities of women here in the middle of the country," Sister Marcia explains, "and we envision our communities in 2020 as:

- 1) catalysts for global transformation, influencing both church and civic dialogue through nonviolent action for peace and justice;
- 2) advocates for justice and integrity within the church;
- 3) sources of spiritual nourishment, making the mystical tradition of the church available to all;
- 4) voices for the voiceless and marginalized, especially those in poverty; and,
- 5) collaborators who influence society and church using technology, personal contact and congregational gifts and resources to foster relationships, especially on behalf of women and children."

But, she notes, "These five points are not goals for some future, rather they are already present in women's religious communities, including ours. We are seriously engaged with the needs of the world and at the same time seriously examining our consciences personally and as a congregation so we can more effectively be Christ in our world."

Seminar outlines 'Second chance for the Church'

Dr. Terrence Rynne will bring the ideas from his 2008 book, "Gandhi & Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence," to this summer's Theological Institute at Manna House of Prayer.

The weeklong institute — titled "Recovering our nonviolent discipleship: A second chance for the Church" — begins July 19 at the retreat center in Concordia.

Dr. Rynne is the founder of the Marquette University Center for Peacemaking.

He has served as a parish priest in the Archdiocese of Chicago, on the faculty of the Mundelein Seminary in Illinois and later as a hospital administrator. He retired as founder and president of Rynne Marketing Group, a nationally recognized consulting firm that has served more than 600 leading hospitals and health care organizations, to earn a Ph.D. in theology and pursue his passion for peace.

During the Theological Institute, Rynne will lead participants

If you plan to attend

WHAT: 2010 Theological Institute

WHEN: July 19-24

WHERE: Manna House of Prayer, Concordia

COST: \$425 for room, meals & registration; or \$40 one-day attendance plus \$8.50 noon meal.

(A limited number of partial scholarships are available for lay participants; contact information below.)

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: July 12

FOR INFORMATION: Call 785/243-4428 or email retreatcenter@mannahouse.org



through an exploration of the practice of nonviolence by Martin Luther King Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi in relationship to Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God and the way that Jesus confronted the "powers that be" of his time.

The early church understood nonviolence to be the hallmark of the "Way" of Jesus as the first Christians confronted the Roman Empire and built their faith communities.

But from 312 AD, when Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity,

the Church became entwined with the Empire, and blessed violence against other Christians and war against the Empire's enemies.

Rynne argues that only recently has the Catholic Church shifted away from an emphasis on "just war" toward a renewal of gospel nonviolence.

Discussion topics for the week include Gandhi's satyagraha, or practice and philosophy of nonviolence; a variety of contemporary witnesses to gospel nonviolence; and nonviolence in an age of terrorism.

Motherhouse hosts free public lecture for Year of Peace

The public is invited to a free lecture by Dr. Terrence Rynne on Sunday, July 18, at the Motherhouse Auditorium.

The program begins at 2 p.m. Dr. Rynne will present a reflection based on his latest book "Gandhi & Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence."

The program is part of the Concordia Year of Peace, and is the latest in a number of activities dedicated to peace and nonviolence.

For information on upcoming Concordia Year of Peace events, go to www.csjkansas.org and click on the "Year of Peace" tab or call Sister Jean Rosemarynoski at 785/243-2149.

EWTN to air 'Interrupted Lives' documentary in August

"Interrupted Lives: Catholic Sisters Under European Communism," the award-winning documentary based on the research of two Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, will be broadcast on EWTN in the United States in August.

The one-hour documentary that received a 2010 Gabriel Award has already been aired in Europe and England.

The U.S. broadcasts will be on Aug. 15 at 1 a.m., Aug. 18 at noon and Aug. 21 at 1 p.m. (all times listed as Central Standard Time).

John Elson, director of program acquisitions and co-productions for EWTN, said "the history and heroism" of the stories told in "Interrupted Lives" make it significant for EWTN viewers.

"Documentaries like 'Interrupted Lives' that present the story of individuals who have made great sacrifices for the Faith — even to the point



of death — force each viewer to ask the question, 'Why did they die?'" Elson said. "The consideration of that question and these examples of heroic witness" may lead people to a deeper appreciation of the people who suffered, and to the Church.

Elson noted that EWTN — the world's largest religious media network, airing 24 hours a day to more than 148 million homes in 144 countries and territories — has broadened its programming in the past three or four years. "We're trying to tell different stories," he said, "that present the truth about the Faith in different historical periods and that recount the lives, spirituality and sacrifices of various Catholic individuals."

To that end, potential programming is reviewed by a group of theologians — all of whom saw the "power and importance" of the story told in "Interrupted Lives," Elson said.

The documentary was written and produced by Sister Judy Zielinski, a Sister of St. Francis of Sylvania, Ohio, and was aired nationally as part of ABC's "Vision and Values"

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Gone but not forgotten

October reunion will recall sisters' history in Abilene

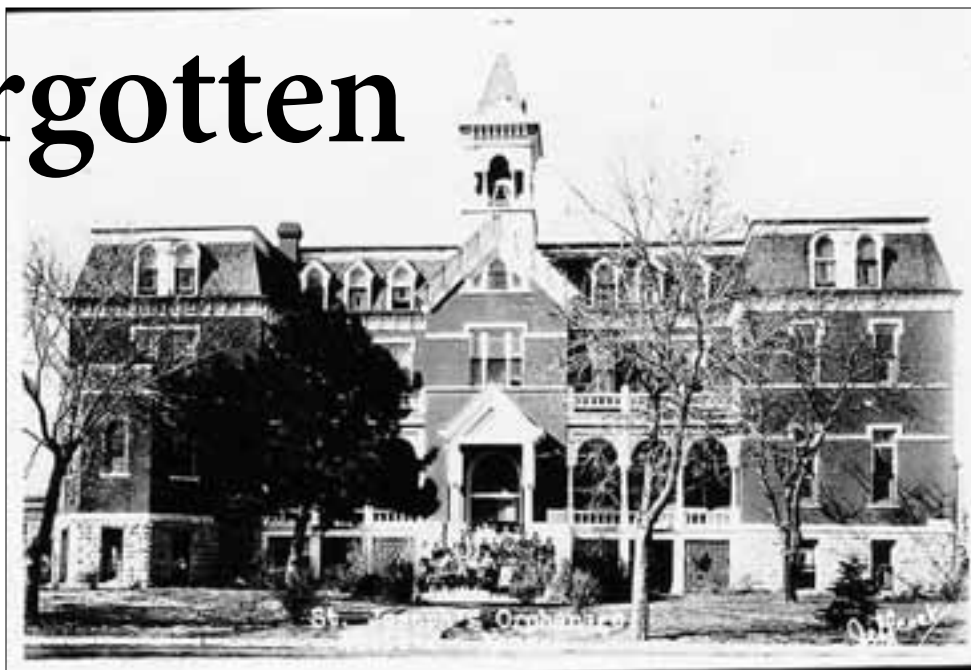
Fifty years ago, Kansas lost a piece of its history: St. Joseph Home and Academy in Abilene was torn down. What could not be as easily erased are the memories of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia who served there and the multitude of children who lived there, and the interest of family and friends who want to know more about their lives in the orphanage just north of town.

To help everyone share their experiences, the Sisters of St. Joseph are hosting a "reunion" of sorts Saturday, Oct. 2, for anyone with a connection to St. Joseph Home.

In 1887, the fledgling Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia sent a few sisters to the flourishing cattle town of Abilene to open a school for girls.

But as the state of Kansas was divided into three (and eventually, four) Catholic dioceses, the sisters' Motherhouse was in one diocese while the Abilene school was in another — and each bishop wanted control of the sisters under his jurisdiction.

So in March 1888, the six sisters at the new Abilene school had to decide whether to remain there and become a separate congregation under the



This undated photo shows the front of the St. Joseph Home on North Buckeye Avenue in Abilene, Kan. The building was torn down in 1959.

Bishop of Leavenworth, or return to Concordia.

Two returned to the Concordia Motherhouse, but four remained and became the nucleus of what would become the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wichita. The Wichita Sisters operated Mount St. Joseph's Academy in Abilene until

See **OCTOBER REUNION**, page 15.

Touching new book gathers loving memories

As Marie Coleman tells the stories, life for a little girl in the 1920s at an Abilene, Kan., orphanage was a daily adventure as she discovered the many kindnesses of the Catholic sisters who were in charge.

The stories also make clear this was a different world, at least from our 21st century perspective. Early deaths were not that unusual, hand-me-down clothes were the norm and "begging sisters" helped ensure there was food on the table.

The 24 stories in "The Sisters Who Loved Me" offer Marie Coleman's tender and touching memories as an "orphan" in the care of the Sisters of St. Joseph, combined with a nuanced view of how tough times really were in the years she lived at St. Joseph Home in Abilene.

She was just a year and a half old when she arrived in 1922, after the death of her mother; she would remain at the Home until 1934. And the rest of her life story makes it clear that she was shaped by those years: In 1939 she joined the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia. She was formally accepted into the congregation — or, as they called it then, "took the habit" — a year later. This year she celebrates her 70th anniversary as a Sister of St. Joseph.

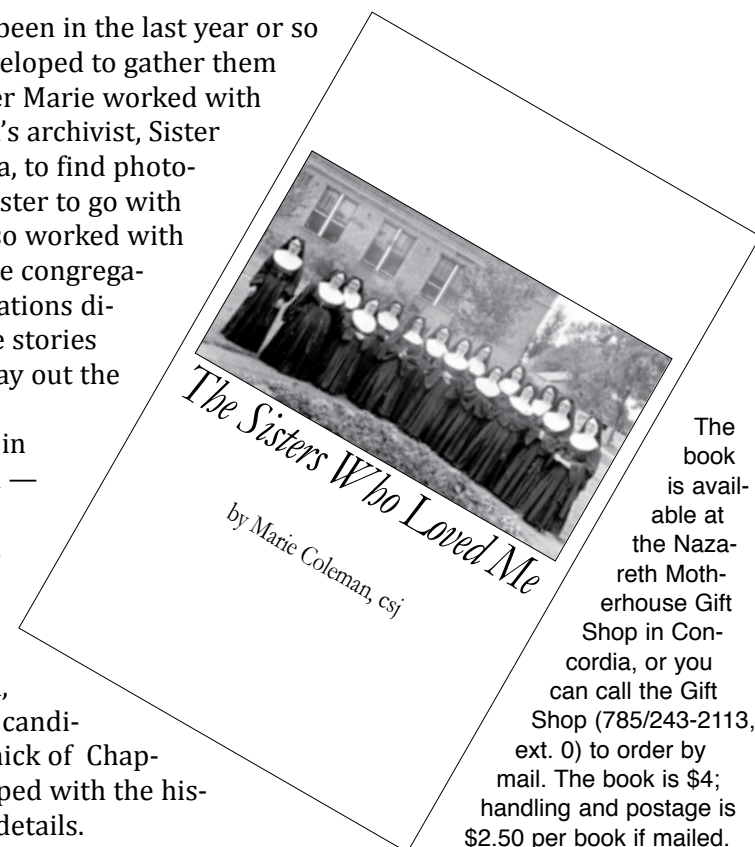
Sister Marie, who is now 89 and lives at the congregation's Motherhouse in Concordia, says she started thinking about gathering the stories from her childhood about 10 years ago. At the urging of Sister Bette Moslander, also of Concordia, she began writing them down.



SISTER MARIE COLEMAN

But it's only been in the last year or so that the idea developed to gather them into a book. Sister Marie worked with the congregation's archivist, Sister Bernadine Pacht, to find photographs of each sister to go with her story. She also worked with Sarah Jenkins, the congregation's communications director, to edit the stories and design and lay out the book.

Many others in the congregation — including Sisters Marcia Allen and Lucy Schneider, both of Concordia; Sister Jodi Creten of Atlanta, Ga.; and agrégée candidate Jan McCormick of Chapman, Kan. — helped with the history and factual details.



The book is available at the Nazareth Motherhouse Gift Shop in Concordia, or you can call the Gift Shop (785/243-2113, ext. 0) to order by mail. The book is \$4; handling and postage is \$2.50 per book if mailed.

Sign of welcome

New center for women opens in downtown Concordia

Several women stop by the Catholic Thrift Shop and manager Verleta Moon suggests they come next door to see what's happening here.

Another woman with two young children has been directed here by the folks at DVACK, Domestic Violence Association of Central Kansas.

Yet another comes in to take a much-appreciated show-

er; her hot water heater is broken and she can't afford to fix it until her next payday. And an older woman drops in to see if there is a basic computer skills class on the schedule. (There is.)

Welcome to Neighbor to Neighbor, a new center for women and women with young children in downtown Concordia.

All the women who come in are welcomed by three Sisters of St. Joseph — Jean Befort, Pat McLennon and Ramona Medina. These three are the driving force behind this project that began in April 2009 with the purchase of the two-story building at 103 E. Sixth St.

Renovations took just over a year, with help from church groups and other volunteers throughout Concordia and Salina. The bulk of the work

was coordinated by Greg Gallagher, facilities administrator for the Sisters of St. Joseph, and completed by maintenance staff from the Motherhouse.

Neighbor to Neighbor opened May 5, and the finishing touch — the outside sign over the front door — was finally placed June 4.

But even without the sign, women had been finding their way to Neighbor to Neighbor. And they continue to.

Every day the sisters offer sessions for exercise and wellness as well as various arts and crafts. They have also scheduled classes or practice sessions in basic computer skills, bobbin lace-making, parenting skills and cooking and baking. Plus, they have a plot in the Community Garden of Hope and women can join them there to learn the basics of growing vegetables.

"We have women who just stop in for a glass of water, and to chat for a few minutes," says Sister Jean. "Then there are women with true needs, who are truly struggling with their lives. And we're here for all of them — we just welcome them and listen and try to be there for them, whatever their needs."



ABOVE: (From left) Sisters Ramona Medina, Jean Befort and Pat McLennon pose with the Concordia Chamber of Commerce "Scissors of Success" after the official ribbon-cutting at Neighbor to Neighbor May 20.

AT RIGHT: Curtis Mansfield, with his back to the camera, and Renn Allsman place the new sign over the center's entry on June 4.

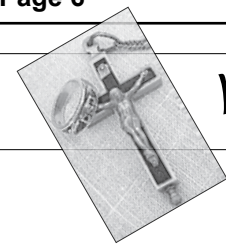


Neighbor to Neighbor is at 103 E. Sixth St., Concordia

We are open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 9 am-4 pm, and Thursday 1-8 pm

All services, workshops and classes (as well as just listening) are FREE.

Our phone number is 785/262-4215 Our email is neighbortoneighbor@csjkansas.org



We are with you on the journey, and we will never leave you..

The very different life paths taken by three very different women brought them together in Concordia Sunday, June 13, to profess vows as Sisters of St. Joseph.

Julie Christensen, 28, has completed one year as a postulant and two years as a novice and has now made her temporary profession as the youngest Sister of St. Joseph. This profession will be in place for three years, when she will make the decision whether to make final vows.

Jean Ann Walton and Ann Ashwood-Piper pro-

fessed vows of fidelity to God and to the congregation as agrégée sisters. With their professions, the number of agrégées in the Concordia congregation is four, with another four women in various stages of formation to become agrégées.

Family and friends came to the Sacred Heart Chapel at the Nazareth Motherhouse for an afternoon ceremony and Mass honoring the three women.

In these three stories, each woman talks about her life path and how she arrived at the ceremony in Concordia.

Sister Julie Christensen

As a child in Concordia, Julie Christensen was familiar with several of the Sisters of St. Joseph. "We'd come help (Sister) Annie (Glatter) in the garden sometimes, and my mom was good friends with (Sister) Margaret Schreck," she recalls.

"But sisters were all old and not relevant," she concludes with a laugh, "and I wanted to be relevant."

By the time Julie had reached high school, she knew she wanted to be of service — perhaps as a social worker — and while at Kansas State University she had a chance to visit Mexico and see religious women doing social justice work.

While there the students visited a convent and even played volleyball with the sisters, "And I thought, 'Huh! These nuns are pretty cool!'" Julie says.

But, she adds quickly, "I also thought, 'Me? A sister? Religious life? What's that all about?'"

Yet she started going to vocation talks at St. Isidore's Church in Manhattan and meeting younger women who were interested in religious life. And she got to know Sister Anna Marie Broxterman, who at that time was vocation director for the Sisters of St. Joseph.

"It spiraled from there, but it was a very slow spiral," Julie explains, laughing. "Anna Marie was

relentless — but it was relentless in helping me find my way."

After Julie graduated from K-State in 2004, her restlessness took hold: She lived for 10 months with Anna Marie and Sister Carolyn Teter, then completed a graduate certificate in conflict resolution. But she started and stopped work on another graduate program, and then she and a friend moved to Portland, Maine, for three months.

On one hand she was living the reasonably carefree life of a young college graduate who has not quite found her place in the world; on the other hand she was increasingly drawn toward the Sisters of St. Joseph.

She says now, "I was pretty certain I was called to religious life when I was 18 — but nothing about it made sense. The majority of sisters were elderly, the minority were in their 50s and 60s; there was nobody in her 20s. It didn't seem normal for a 20-something.

"It wasn't a fun and crazy atmosphere — in fact, it seemed almost the opposite of what I was used to."



Julie Christensen places an artistic version of a white cabbage butterfly — the symbol she chose for her life — on the altar in the Sacred Heart Chapel as Sister Missy Ljungdahl reads Julie's story explaining that symbol.

And at the same time, she says without laughing, "It felt so right, but I couldn't explain it.

"It took a while for me to own this; this is what I've been called to be."

So in the fall of 2007, Julie became a postulant of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia. A year later, she began her two-year novitiate.

It was also in 2008 that she joined with seven

We are with you on the journey, and we will never leave you.



The three newest Sisters of St. Joseph are lost in the midst of the other members of the congregation who gather around them to bless them and sing "We Are With You on the Journey" during the June 13 ceremony.

of Concordia

other novices from congregations of St. Joseph around the country to take part in a formation program in Orange, Calif. When that 10-month program ended in May 2009, Julie returned to Concordia to prepare for her temporary profession June 13.

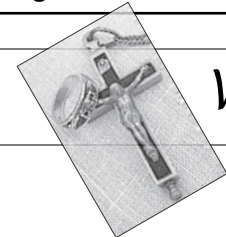
Today she lives at Manna House of Prayer, where in August she will become a staff member. She expects to lead confirmation retreats at parishes throughout the Salina Diocese, and will continue work on a master's degree in Christian spirituality through Creighton University.

"I am always restless, always looking for something that will capture all of my energy, and my spirit," she says as she reflects on vow ceremony. "This is it; this captures all of me."



ABOVE: Sister Julia Christensen, with her parents Keith and Jane Christensen, listen to part of the June 13 ceremony in which she professed her vows as a Sister of St. Joseph of Concordia.

LEFT: After the ceremony and Mass, Sister Julie poses for a snapshot with her friends Crystal Borhani, left, Mary-Christine Sandners. Julie's cousin Shane Champlin is taking the picture. Many friends and almost all her large family came to the Nazareth Motherhouse to congratulate Julie and celebrate with her.



We are with you on the journey, and we will never leave you...

Sister Jean Ann Walton

Jean Ann Walton literally began life with the Sisters of St. Joseph: She was born almost 61 years ago in the Sabetha, Kan., hospital then owned and operated by the Concordia congregation.

Her family soon moved to Augusta, Kan., where she grew up and lives today. After graduating from high school in 1967, she enrolled at Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kan.

While there, she says, the young woman raised in a Protestant family "became aware of Catholicism." By the end of her second year in college, she had converted.

But as she left her childhood religion behind, so did she leave behind college. In 1969 she enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and served for six years.

Returning to Kansas, she began a spiritual quest that led her — eventually — back to the

Sisters of St. Joseph. She spent a year at Manna House of Prayer as a lay volunteer, but she also spent time in the inner city of Houston as a volunteer with the Jesuits.

By 1982, she believed she was ready for a total commitment to religious life, and entered the Concordia congregation as a postulant. In 1985 she professed temporary vows, but two years later asked that those vows be dispensed with.

"I came to realize that I wasn't called to religious life at that time, even though I was grateful for what I learned from the sisters," she says now of her decision to leave. "What I didn't realize was that they planted a seed in me for down the road."

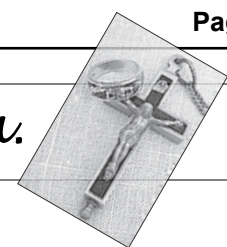
And, she notes with some lingering pain,



Sister Jean Ann Walton, left, signs her profession statement June 13 as Sister Marcia Allen, president of the congregation, looks on.

"When I left, I also basically left the Church. But I never left God. And God never left me."

About seven years ago, Jean Ann explains, "I began to feel a need to go back to church — and I found a church where they are very mindful of



We are with you on the journey, and we will never leave you.

of Augusta, Kan.

'the dear neighbor,' as the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph puts it."

That was St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church in Andover, Kan., roughly 12 miles from her home in Augusta.

"Because of that welcoming church," she says, "it began to tug on my heart to come back to this community."

It was then she learned of the agrégée program launched in 2006 by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia.

"I went to the very first 'Agrégée Information Day' (about three years ago) and here I am," Sister Jean Ann notes with a laugh. "It's been an awesome journey."

It hasn't been a journey that's taken her away from Augusta, however.

After the June 13 ceremony, she will return to her job as a shipping clerk for Aerospace Logistics at Hawker Beechcraft in Wichita. She will also continue her service at St. Vincent de Paul, as a religious education teacher, lector, eucharistic minister "or anywhere else God calls me to be."

"There won't be any huge changes because I already carry the charism within me," she says. "This really is a calling from God. And what God wants, God gets — even if it takes a lifetime."



Newly professed Sister Jean Ann Walton, left, chats with Sister Carolyn Teter after the June 13 ceremony and Mass at the Nazareth Motherhouse in Concordia.

What is an agrégée, and how did this form of



A June 2010 meeting at Manna House of Prayer brought together all four agrégées and the four candidates, as well as Sister Marcia Allen, president of the congregation, and Sister Bette Moslander, who coordinates the agrégée formation program. **BACK ROW, from left:** Sister Marcia, Sister Jean Ann Walton, Agrégée Candidate Lorren Harbin, Sister Rosabel Flax. **MIDDLE ROW, from left:** Agrégée Candidate Kathy Schaefer, Agrégée Candidate Sharon Hayes, Sister Rosemary Foreman. **FRONT ROW, from left:** Sister Ann Ashwood-Piper, Agrégée Candidate Jan McCormick, Sister Bette.

In reaching back to our roots in 17th century France, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia have discovered — and revitalized — a type of committed spiritual life for women known as "agrégées."

The order, which has grown worldwide over the centuries and now has autonomous congregations in more than 50 countries, began in the French city of LePuy in 1650.

Based on research into the original constitution and rules for the congregation, written by founder and Jesuit priest Jean-Pierre Medaille, the sisters now recognize that in addition to vowed members of the order, there were also "agrégées," from a French word meaning "attached to" or "aggregated with."

An agrégée — pronounced *ah-gre-ZHEY* — did not make vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. But she lived according to the rules of the Sisters of St. Joseph, and was recognized by the local people and the local churches as a Sister of St. Joseph.

In the past decades, the modern Sisters of St.

membership develop with the Concordia sisters?

Joseph of Concordia studied our origins and our original spirituality, and have now revived that early practice based on what we learned. The Senate of the Concordia congregation approved agrégée membership in 2006.

The first modern agrégée — Rosabel Flax of Ness City, Kan. — professed a vow of fidelity to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia two years ago. Last year Rosemary Foreman of Topeka, Kan., became the second agrégée to join the Concordia congregation.

On June 13, Jean Ann Walton of Augusta, Kan., and Ann Ashwood-Piper of Grand Junction, Colo., professed their vows.

Four other women are currently agrégée candidates.

Agrégées are defined as those persons who commit themselves to active and inclusive love of God and the dear neighbor as expressed in the spirit and spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia. In almost every aspect, they are viewed as full members of the congregation, meaning they

have a voice and a vote on congregational issues.

There are three significant differences, however.

► "Vowed sisters" profess the canonical — meaning governed by Church law — vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. As part of the vow of poverty, an individual sister relinquishes all personal wealth and income; at the same time, the congregation assumes responsibility for her economic well being for the rest of her life.

► "Agrégée sisters" profess a vow of fidelity to God, to live according to the spirit and charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia.

But it is a noncanonical vow, meaning that it is not part of Church law and is instead a private commitment between that sister and the Concordia congregation.

It also means that the agrégée does not relinquish her finances to the congregation, and the congregation does not assume financial responsibility.

*Feel called to learn more?
Come to 'Info Day' Aug. 28*

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia invite those interested in learning more to an "Agrégée Information Day" Saturday, Aug. 28, at the Nazareth Motherhouse.

The day begins with registration at 10:30 a.m. and will conclude by 3:30 p.m.

Both agrégées and canonically vowed sisters will take part in the program, and will be available to talk with throughout the day.

There are now four agrégées and four agrégée candidates in the Concordia congregation.

For information or to attend, contact Sister Bette Moslander at 785/243-4428 or bmoslander@mannahouse.org

See **AGRÉGÉE**, page 16.

We are with you on the journey, and we will never leave you...

Sister Ann Ashwood-Piper

Ann Ashwood-Piper was born in Moline, Ill., but her family soon moved to Phoenix, and then to Indiana. That pattern, it turned out, would repeat itself over and over for half her life.

Ann, now 65, graduated from high school in a suburb of Milwaukee and then enrolled at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minn. While there, she spent a semester at Knoxville College, a historically black college in Mechanicsville, Tenn. ("It was the '60s and I was one of three whites on a campus of 900 blacks," she recalls. "And I was exactly where I wanted to be.")

When she transferred to Marquette University, she had a different kind of immersion experience: Raised as a Presbyterian, she was surrounded by Catholic students and Jesuit priests. She was struck by importance religion played in the lives of her classmates. "I really admired their faith," she says. "These were college kids who went to daily Mass."

She also became acquainted with the Jesuit priests who taught at Marquette — "very bright, very committed men," Ann recalls — and ultimately



Newly professed Sister Ann Ashwood-Piper listens to the Mass honoring the three women June 13 at the Nazareth Motherhouse.

asked one of them for instruction in the Catholic faith, and she eventually converted.

While at Marquette, Ann also met the man who would become her husband, and the driving force behind several more moves in the coming years as he launched his career. First the couple moved to St. Paul, Minn., and then "to the outback of West Virginia." It was there they adopted their first child, daughter Rebecca, now 36.

The next move took them to Minneapolis, where they adopted son Zachary, who is now 35.

Then, 33 years ago, they made one more move — to Grand Junction, Colo., where Ann still lives. There they adopted Hannah and then a year and a half later added brother and sister Tony and Abby to the family. Hannah and Abby are both 30 now, and Tony is 31.

("My last three kids are all within 10 months of each other, so it's kind of like a litter," Ann wisecracks.)

And Ann was doing more than tending the growing family. She completed a master's degree in pastoral studies from Loyola University, taught in a number of Catholic schools, then taught in public schools for 17 years, eventually earned another master's degree — this time in educational administration from Northern Colorado University — and seven years ago took over as principal at Grand Junction's Holy Family Catholic School,



As the vow ceremony begins June 13, Ann Ashwood-Piper carries toward the altar a plate painted with a house, representing the symbol she chose for her life: a home and family and children. Each of the three new sisters chose a symbol for her life and wrote a statement that was read during the vow ceremony, explaining what that symbol means to her.

We are with you on the journey, and we will never leave you.

For a photo slideshow from the June 13 profession ceremony, go to

www.csjkansas.org/?p=5858

of Grand Junction, Colo.

which has some 420 pre-school through eighth-grade students.

It was during those years that Ann and her husband divorced, and a year later he died.

She had always been active in her local parish, but it was through her role as an educator that she got to know Sisters Pat Lewter and Faye Huelsmann, who live and work in Grand Junction. After Ann became principal at Holy Family, she invited Sister Pat to work there as a part-time counselor.

"About four years ago, I went out to dinner with them and (Sister) Nancy Meade, and Faye told me about this new form of membership their congregation was introducing," Ann recalls. "The more I heard, the more I felt it was designed exactly for me."

Ann came to Concordia in 2008 to begin the formal process of becoming an agrégée sister. She returned in the summer of '09 to take part in an intensive monthlong seminar on the history and origins of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

And this summer she is here to profess her vow of fidelity to the congregation.

"I love God and I love God's people, and this is my avenue for expressing that love," she explains. "Being an agrégée is about my relationship with God."

That is not something that her five children necessarily understand. There is a hint of sad-



Father Jack Schlaf, chaplain for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, shakes hands and welcomes each of the three new sisters at the end of their vow ceremony June 13. Family and friends packed the Sacred Heart Chapel at the Motherhouse for the ceremony and Mass.

ness in her voice when she explains that none of her children, or her six grandchildren, attends any church regularly.

But, she adds, they support her decision to become a Sister of St. Joseph even if they don't completely understand it. "I have a very loving family, and by loving me, they allow me to make choices for myself."

Those choices include adding "Sister" before

her name when she returns to her job this fall. "I'll be Sister Ann as a witness, both to the kids and to their parents, of service to God and the dear neighbor," she explains.

But with Ann, the seriousness doesn't last. "This has to be an authentic choice directed by God," she says before adding with a laugh, "Whoever heard of a 65-year-old mother of five kids becoming a sister?"