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# Heart

20<sup>th</sup>

anniversary issue

A JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART, UNITED STATES - CANADA



# heart

*Heart* is published two times a year to highlight the mission and ministries of the Society of the Sacred Heart United States – Canada Province for a wide circle of friends.

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The Society of the Sacred Heart, an international community of women religious, was founded by Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat in post-revolutionary France and expanded to North America by Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne. Our mission is to discover and reveal God's love in the heart of the world through the service of education.

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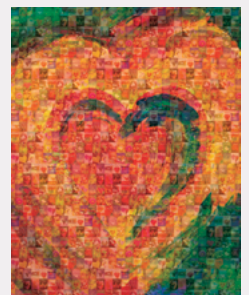


The *Heart* magazine team would like to hear from you. To share comments, ask questions or suggest articles for future issues, please email: [editor@rscj.org](mailto:editor@rscj.org)

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This cover commemorates 20 years of *Heart* magazines, most of which feature a heart in nature on the cover. One year ago, *Heart* magazine underwent a full redesign, when the provincial and editorial teams made the decision to expand on this iconic cover tradition and utilize artwork on the cover. Thus, this cover features a collage of all *Heart* magazine covers to date combined with this piece entitled *Abstract Heart* by stellalevi. Artwork from [istockphoto.com](https://www.istockphoto.com).





# from the Provincial

## Dear Friends and Family of the Sacred Heart,

We offer you this 20th anniversary issue of *Heart* magazine in the spirit of gratitude. Our desire has been consistent. Through story telling that is focused on the mission of the Society of the Sacred Heart in the United States – Canada Province, in its ever-changing dimensions, we strengthen our common desire and mission to discover and make known God’s love for the sake of God’s people and the well-being of our world.

We are grateful to all who have contributed to these stories, in this and every issue that has come before, through their words and images and, most importantly, through their lives. We hope that you, our reader, have seen that at the heart of each story is the Holy Spirit calling us from the depths of our relationship with God to contribute and build a future characteristic of Christ’s dream for humanity.

As you read this special issue of *Heart*, we invite you to listen for the echoes among the generations as they tell their stories of manifesting the love of Christ through acts of respect, kindness, graciousness and thankfulness. Narratives of encounter and accompaniment speak of a common instinct to adopt a loving awareness of one another and of God’s creation. It is this awareness that enables us to live mission. Like our founder Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, we know that God who loves us counts on our revealing this love to others.

Being true to our call to be the Love of the Sacred Heart is daunting. It is my hope that these stories and reflections offer encouragement to each of us as we engage in this holy work of transformation. To each of you who has supported us through sharing your talents, your time, and your treasure, we thank you. As we look forward to the creation of a new Province inclusive of Canada, Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, Puerto Rico and the United States, let us continue to pray for one another and encourage each other to be true to our call as those united in the Heart of Christ.

United in One Heart,

Suzanne Cooke, RSCJ



We are grateful to all who have contributed to these stories, in this and every issue that has come before, through their words and images and, most importantly, through their lives.”

## LOOKING BACK 20 YEARS:

# The Origins of *Heart* Magazine

## A *Heart* Years in the Making

By Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ, former Provincial of the Society of the Sacred Heart United States Province; Provincial at the time the first *Heart* magazine issue was published.

While the first issue of *Heart* magazine was published in 2003, the need for such a publication had begun many years earlier in the Society's wholehearted response to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). That gathering of bishops from across the world addressed all aspects of the Church's life and mission and invited new beginnings and fresh approaches as the Spirit moved among us. Regarding religious life, the bishops invited religious communities to recover and enliven the original spirit of their founders and to modify their Constitutions and ways of life after a careful dialogue between the founder's intuitions and the needs of the contemporary world.

The Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ) addressed this challenge with energy and enthusiasm. They embraced a variety of ministries with eagerness and excitement. The ministry of teaching in Society schools joined direct work with those experiencing poverty, activities of human development, the promotion of justice, pastoral work, and guidance in the faith. RSCJ established communities in

cities and rural areas, alike. Some travelled overseas, to Africa and Asia, to work internationally in schools or other ministries. Others took on new, challenging teaching roles in seminaries and parishes. Some went to work in non-governmental agencies, including at the United Nations.

Alas, in the United States Province, at that time, little was done to make our discernment and decisions transparent to those who knew and loved the Society. Many of our constituents were baffled. *Why had the nuns abandoned the schools?* We were so busy living into this new and rich reality that we were all but impervious to the criticism that our choices had occasioned. What we had failed to communicate was that Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat had anticipated that we would have not one but four broad avenues to living the mission: formal education, work with those experiencing poverty, spiritual formation, and collaboration with others in achieving our mission. Over the years, our schools had become the place where most of us lived out Sophie's vision. Vatican II nudged us

into the realization that we would be truer to Sophie's original intuitions if we embraced all four of the means she had proposed.

As we became acutely aware of this communication vacuum, we asked ourselves, *How would we go about addressing the gap? How might we make known who we are as Religious of the Sacred Heart in this twenty-first century? How might we advance our mission and make known our ministries both old and new?*

We were eager to reach out to our families, colleagues and friends across the country and beyond, to gather them into one great heart, bound together with us by the vision of Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, the courage and daring of Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne and the charism common to all who are part of the family of God's Heart.

Twenty years ago, those were our hopes and dreams. But how would we accomplish them? Whom would we find to take this challenging vision and help us to achieve it?



# Communicating with Heart

By Pamela Schaeffer, former Communications Director of the Society of the Sacred Heart United States Province

When Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ, and her Provincial Team hired me in late 2001 to be the first communications director for the United States Province, I came with skills acquired in thirty-some years as a journalist and a sense that I would enjoy working with the RSCJ. I was installed in an office on the first floor of the provincial house, then an aging three-story brownstone in a historical area of St. Louis; and soon, as often happens when someone begins a new job, I felt at a bit of a loss. *Where to start? How do I meet the needs the Provincial Team had expressed?* One of my few early instructions had been to travel around the Province, to get to know the sisters and their constituents.

My “aha” moment came in a conversation with the alumnae director of an out-of-town Sacred Heart school, who told me ruefully, “We miss the nuns in the schools. No doubt they’re out there doing good things. But it would be nice to know what those things are!”

That clinched it! I understood that people who loved the RSCJ were hungry for their stories. My job was to tell them. What could be more fun? But there was a lot of catching up to do. The RSCJ had been moving into new ministries for at least three decades. We needed a vehicle that would demonstrate a sincere effort to close a big gap. And so, the RSCJ on the Provincial Team and I decided to produce a high-quality magazine in which we would tell the family of the Sacred Heart not only what the sisters were doing, but why. What were their motivations? What was in their hearts?

Lacking the budget to hire photographers to take the high-resolution photos a magazine cover requires, we decided to use stock photos of hearts in nature. How better to portray the Society’s contemplative dimension and to express its charism to discover and reveal the love at the heart of the universe. So it was that when the first magazine appeared in 2003, it featured a big green heart-shaped leaf on its cover.

At first, many RSCJ were hesitant to take the limelight, but gradually their reticence gave way as they began to realize that this, too, might be a work of the Spirit. Our readers, the family of the Sacred Heart, expressed gratitude at learning about the many paths the sisters’ lives had taken as they followed the Spirit over the years.

Meanwhile, I saw how right I had been to think I would enjoy working with the RSCJ. I continue to treasure memories of many special moments with the sisters I came to know; and after I retired, I joined the Associates of the Society of the Sacred Heart in order to continue to experience the many ways in which the RSCJ enlarge and enliven my own heart.

Over time, this magazine has evolved, both in its editorial content and in its look. But it remains true to its early purpose: to portray the mission of the United States – Canada Province in its ever-changing dimensions, as a force for love, peace and justice in our imperfect world.



Twenty years of Heart magazine covers in chronological order, beginning with the first issue in the top left corner.

# Community & Connection *Across Cultures*

By Donna Collins, RSCJ

In September of 2022, I responded to an invitation from Mieko Uno, RSCJ, Provincial of the Japan Province, to spend several months in Sapporo. While there, one of my tasks was to prepare a group of twelve eighth and ninth grade students from Sapporo Sacred Heart School to participate in a study tour to St. Charles and St. Louis in the spring of 2023. Each Saturday morning, the group met to learn some history, culture and new vocabulary that would enrich their experience. With a little translation when needed, the group gained confidence in their ability to understand and speak English. Already aware of their sister schools in Japan, the students were introduced to the wider Sacred Heart network of schools around the world and, more specifically, those they would have the opportunity to visit.

Late on the evening of March 18, 2023, the students, accompanied by Yasuko Taguchi, RSCJ, and Akiko Ichikawa, an educator at Sapporo Sacred Heart School, stumbled off the last flight after more than 24 hours of travel. Sandy Ahlheim, director of the Shrine of Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne, and Mary Glenn, shrine assistant, as well as Jack Ahlheim, husband of Sandy and former board chair of the Academy of the Sacred Heart in St. Charles, joined me as the welcoming party. After heavy suitcases were juggled into cars, we drove the tired travelers to St. Charles where they would stay for the duration of their visit.

Over the course of the week, the students toured St. Charles on foot, took the Metro train downtown to visit the Museum of Westward Expansion under the Gateway Arch, went out on a paddle steamer on the Mississippi River and traveled to Springfield, Illinois, to visit former United States President Abraham Lincoln's Historic Village.

The group also visited the Lewis and Clark Museum in St. Charles, where Academy alumnae and founder of the museum, Mimi Jackson, greeted them enthusiastically. Sandy and Mary also provided a wonderful tour of Philippine's Shrine as well as the historic part of the house where Saint Philippine had lived.

The girls also had the opportunity to spend the better part of three days visiting their sister schools in the area, Villa Duchesne School of the Sacred Heart and the Academy in St. Charles. This time gave the Sapporo Sacred Heart students a chance to experience a school day in the United States and created a space for cultural exchange.

The Sapporo students gave presentations, sharing about their school and the city of Sapporo; and at every grade level, I witnessed enthusiastic participation as they taught the correct use of chopsticks, how to greet and count to ten in Japanese and demonstrated how to write several Japanese characters. Informal time allowed the students to relax and ask questions of one another and, of course, exchange e-mail addresses to stay in contact.

These visits organically began to reveal wider connections that lie within our Sacred Heart communities, some international. For instance, one teacher at Villa Duchesne told us that she is a graduate of the Sacred Heart school in Bogotá, Colombia, and a student from Villa Duchesne who volunteered as a host for the day shared that her mother had been to the school in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Teachers from both the Academy and Villa Duchesne talked about their multiple Sacred Heart connections — many were alumnae, mothers of students, even grandmothers of current students.

Prayer, contemplation and reflection were also a constant throughout the week. Each morning the group gathered for prayer in front of the 1866 painting of Mater done by Pauline Perdrau, RSCJ, in the library at the Academy. Several evenings the group prayed in the Shrine near Saint Philippine's tomb. After each day's journey, time was set aside for reflection and sharing. The girls often spoke of how friendly and helpful they found the people they met. They were impressed with Saint Philippine's persistence in the face of frontier hardships. The theme of consistent effort in the face of difficulty was repeated when they shared about what they had heard regarding Lincoln's efforts against the





system of slavery and the arduous journey of Lewis and Clark. They were also surprised at the number of different nationalities that had been involved in the westward expansion in the United States.

Near the end of their trip, what was most poignant for me was hearing from a number of the students that they had finally come to understand what it meant when people spoke of the *Sacred Heart Family*. It was no longer just an abstract concept but a lived reality for them.

*“I want to continue to be part of the Sacred Heart family when I graduate.”*

One student explained, “When I was in Japan, I didn’t really understand the term ‘family of the Sacred Heart’ even though I knew there were other schools in Japan. However, when I came to America all the students and teachers welcomed us with a smile and now I understand the meaning.”

Another reflected, “Many alumnae continue to contribute in various ways. I want to continue to be part of the Sacred Heart family when I graduate.”

Administrators and faculty from both schools expressed how wonderful this experience was for themselves and their students, and how grateful they were to be able to host exchanges like this, especially after the long pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It’s these experiences that continue to open us up to a wider world and allow us to build bridges across cultures.



(top left) The students from Sapporo Sacred Heart School along with Sister Taguchi (left), Sister Collins (top row right) and Akiko Ichikawa (front row right) pose for a photo with an original Mater painting by Pauline Perdrau, RSCJ.

(top right) One student helps teach a fourth class student origami.

(middle) Ninth grade students enjoy a tasty treat with their new friends at Villa Duchesne.

(bottom) Sapporo students listen to the story of Philippine during a tour of the Shrine of Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne.

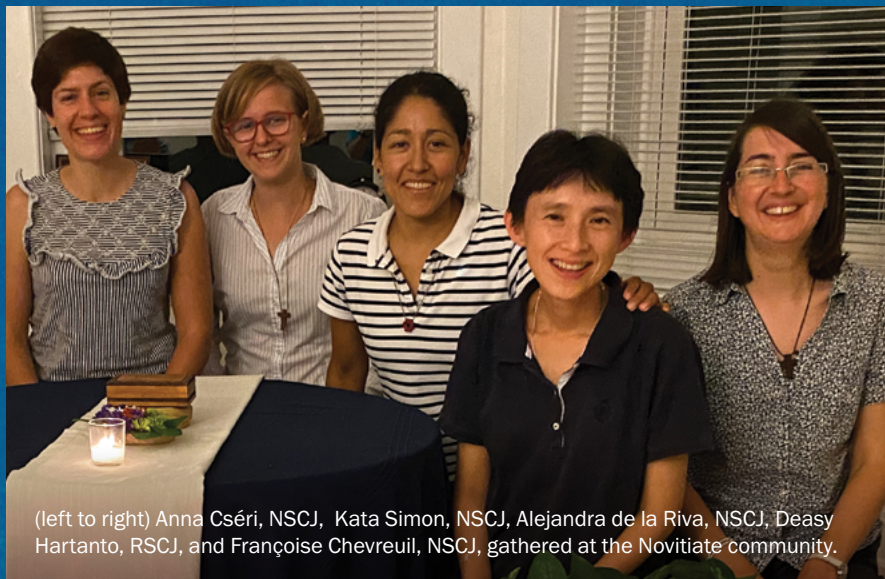


# news

FROM THE • •

# novitiate

By Erin Everson, Communications Project Manager for the Society of the Sacred Heart United States – Canada Province



(left to right) Anna Cséri, NSCJ, Kata Simon, NSCJ, Alejandra de la Riva, NSCJ, Deasy Hartanto, RSCJ, and Françoise Chevreuil, NSCJ, gathered at the Novitiate community.



The novices visit the Society's USC Province Archives in St. Louis.



## The Novitiate

Over the last year and a half, Novices of the Sacred Heart (NSCJ), Françoise Chevreuil, Anna Cséri, Alejandra de la Riva, and Katalin “Kata” Simon, have been a part of the International English-Speaking Novitiate community located in Chicago. Novitiate is a term used for both the physical community as well as the two years of religious formation in which novices in the Society of the Sacred Heart live in community, come to know the Society intimately, take classes, gain ministry experience, and are accompanied spiritually as they prepare to profess first vows.

The four novices have been accompanied in their formation in the United States – Canada (USC) Province by the current novice director, Ellen Collesano, RSCJ, as well as by Anna “Panni” Csókási, RSCJ, from the Central European (CEU) Province, who will take over as novice director this fall.

Françoise, who is from the Society’s BFN Province (comprised of Belgium, France and the Netherlands), returned home to France this past winter for her three months of ministry experience and continued discernment.

Sister Csókási, along with Anna, Alejandra and Kata — who as novices completed their three months of ministry experience this past spring — share a little bit about their life before moving to the USC Province as well as the impact their time here has had on their ministry and formation journeys, respectively.



## Meet Anna “Panni” Csókási, RSCJ

Sister Csókási hails from Hungary and has a vast amount of experience in formation ministry. For nine years in her home province (comprised of Hungary, Austria and Germany), she has been responsible for the formation of professed of temporary vows (PTV), Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ) who have professed first vows. During this time, she worked closely with other PTV formators in the Society’s European provinces, meeting monthly to reflect and evaluate past formation periods and prepare for those upcoming. At these same meetings, Sister Csókási explained, the formators were also in dialogue with the European provincials in order to help shape the formation process. “What we can do together, we shall do together” was a slogan the European PVT formators took to heart.

Now having worked in the USC Province for over a year, Sister Csókási shares that working with and accompanying novices is a completely different service from working with sisters who have professed first vows. She explained that in the novitiate, the main focus for two years is on deepening their relationship with God and Jesus, learning about the charisma, history and spirituality of the Society of the Sacred Heart, and discerning their own vocation. The PTVs, having already made their first vows, are, rather, working on how to live their daily lives as RSCJ.

“It is a privilege to be with somebody who’s longing for and seeking God, wishing to become a Religious of the Sacred Heart. It brings me joy,” says Sister Csókási. “The life of the novice reminds me of one of our mottos ‘courage and confidence.’ I try to walk beside them, to face challenges and to be with them in the challenging moments, to let their questions touch me or challenge me too, to share their joy and happiness as well.”

About her time spent with Sister Collesano, Sister Csókási says that what has been most meaningful is “her openness to introduce me to everything in this service. Her availability has helped me to learn the essence of this ministry, and from the first moment we worked together we formed a trustful relationship.”

As she continues working with and accompanying novices, Sister Csókási says that she hopes she can be an instrument of God — that she can help these and future novices to know themselves better, to know God’s love better and to deepen their knowledge and love of the Society.



## Meet Anna Cséri, NSCJ

Anna is also from Hungary and the CEU Province. She met the Religious of the Sacred Heart first when she attended a workshop on vocation and discernment during her final year in law school. “I was drawn by the sisters’ personalities,” says Anna. After getting to know the RSCJ better, she began participating in their community events. “I felt at home.... My spiritual life deepened. I felt I could discover my own call, and the RSCJ were always accompanying me.”

For Anna, the Society’s charism felt authentic and close to her. She admired how RSCJ live in the present moment and in reality. “It was easy to talk to them about anything,” says Anna. Anna spent two years as a candidate in Hungary, and participated in formation via Zoom before coming to the USC Province in December 2021.

Anna notes that the majority of RSCJ in Hungary are younger in age than the majority in the Society. This is because religious had to flee the country in the mid 1900s – returning after the end of the communist regime in the early ‘90s. So it was important to Anna to go through her novitiate in a bigger province, to meet more RSCJ and, especially, learn from the older generations.

Most notable of her time in the USC Province, Anna shares, was being able to attend the Province Assembly – an all RSCJ meeting – that took place in 2022. That week she was glad to have been able to meet so many RSCJ, remarking, “They were so open and welcoming.

The spirit of the Society is in the core of the RSCJ. There was something deeply connected between us even though we didn’t know each other.”

Even more significant to Anna, she shares, was making her thirty-day silent retreat. During this retreat, she appreciated the opportunity to spend time in prayer and silence and remarks that she received so many graces – inner-peace, freedom and healing – and felt much more grounded in where she stood with God.

Anna also expresses her gratitude to Sister Collesano who “created a space where we could grow and go through this process as smoothly as possible. I learned a lot. It was about transformation for me, healing and being more rooted within myself and in God.”

An important novitiate experience is taking part in three months of ministry.

Anna spent this time in San Diego serving in two capacities. The first was at Casa Cornelia Law Center, a local organization, where she assisted in legal services for refugees, asylum seekers, unaccompanied children and victims of violence. Anna notes that she was touched by being able to be involved in the mission of the law firm and learn about these vulnerable populations. Her second ministry was at Our Lady’s School, where Ruth Cunnings, RSCJ, teaches. There Anna tutored and helped with school liturgies twice a week. She valued having both an experience working with children as well as an office experience. She remarks, “They were totally different, but think I needed both.”



## Meet Alejandra de la Riva, NSCJ

Alejandra is from Bolivia but moved to Spain as a young adult to continue her studies in medicine — specifically sports medicine and physical education. In Spain she met the RSCJ. Before that, she shares, she was questioning and seeking her purpose in life; at the same time, she strongly rejected the Catholic religion she grew up knowing, one of condemnation, rigidity, patriarchal in nature. She did not identify with this.

During an Easter retreat in 2014, however, Alejandra had a strong experience of encountering God. From then on, she was looking for ways to respond. She remembers finding and reading a book by a Spanish RSCJ and then another religious article by an RSCJ — both awoke something in her. She was “amazed by the way they wrote — so tender and so real.” Her journey to religious life took time and progressed over the next four years as she continued to dive in and engage with her faith. During this period, Alejandra says she began to identify more fully with Jesus.

In 2016, she went on a Holy Week/Easter silent retreat rooted in the spiritual exercises. There she met an RSCJ for the first time in person. What attracted her to the Society, she says, was her experience of the RSCJ. “They related with people. They work in the world with people. The way they live, their relationship with God and Jesus are central to their lives, with love, tenderness and closeness with God, and this matched my first experience with God.”

Alejandra spent time visiting the RSCJ communities in Madrid where she lived, and then, in 2018, she committed to two years as a candidate. Initially, Alejandra was to begin her novitiate in Granada, Spain, but there were several delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After plans changed once more, Alejandra completed a third year of candidacy before moving to the United States in December 2021 to begin her novitiate. At that time, all of the Society’s European provinces had decided to unify their novitiate and send all the novices to Chicago.

Reflecting on her time in the novitiate, Alejandra points out that this is her second time being away from home. “For me it is a huge gift; it has opened my heart, my mind, my understanding of life. It changed my life being in Spain and being here, I am not the same anymore.”

Most recently, Alejandra completed her three months of ministry in Berkeley, California, where she, like Anna, served in two different ministries. The first was at St. Elizabeth School, where she worked with kindergarten and first grade students. She says, while this ministry

was amazing and joyful, it was also a challenging experience. In her role, Alejandra served as an aide to the teacher and primarily supported and encouraged students who needed help with their schoolwork. In her other ministry, she worked in aquatic therapy with children with disabilities. She has been a swimmer her whole life, so this activity came naturally to her as she assisted children with exercises and therapy in the pool.

“It was very enriching and it was challenging,” says Alejandra, “Because we all came from different cultures and we don’t speak English as a first language, we were forced to get out of our comfort zones to help us grow and discern if we really wanted to be here.”

## Meet Katalin “Kata” Simon, NSCJ

Kata, like Sister Csókási and Anna Cséri, is from Hungary and the CEU Province.

In her own words, Kata shares that her journey to religious life was a long and winding path. The first time she thought about becoming a religious was in high school, but Kata’s dream from a young age was to be a chef. So, she pursued this dream and went to a professional school and after that University to study tourism and hospitality.

Kata finished her degree in 2016, and again the idea of religious life came back to her. She continued to explore what it meant to have a closer relationship with God, while she studied for her German language exam, a typical prerequisite to a career in the tourism and hospitality field.

Kata worked as a part-time chef and began searching for community. She first encountered an RSCJ when she attended a vocation event held at an “escape room” (an in-person puzzle game, where a group must work together against a timer to find clues and ultimately a way out of the room). Kata says when she saw the logo of the Society of the Sacred Heart, “something drew and captured me... it was a powerful moment.”

Now having been in formation for several years, she shares, “during my formation I began to understand that God opens our hearts to Him and to others, and I am still in the process of discovering this.”

After meeting the Society, Kata continued to work and study German while discerning the call to religious life. She attended a couple of silent retreats led by RSCJ during this time and says she knew it was a transforming time in her life. Her experience in 2018, in particular, stood out. “I had a very deep and powerful



prayer experience at the end of the retreat. I saw the open heart, and didn't have much more information, but the heart was open – inviting," she recalls.

It was during this time, Kata also met and befriended Anna Cséri. Kata entered the Society as a candidate in December 2018, and after two years as a candidate, Kata was delayed in entering the novitiate due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She began to participate in formation via Zoom a few months before joining the novitiate in Chicago in December 2021.

Once she was able to travel safely to the U.S., her departure was quite rushed. Even with that, Kata shares that "God had guided me. I received a lot of support from the sisters during that time and God help me to see beyond the circumstances."

She was full of joy when reflecting on her time in the USC Province and on her three months of ministry. Kata spent her ministry time in two different cities and volunteered with multiple organizations.

She first lived and served in White Plains, New York, where she spent some time volunteering at Sacred Heart Greenwich, helping out in religion classes. "It was a great experience because there aren't any Sacred Heart schools in Hungary, so it was great to see that the network here is very alive and energized. And the students were excited to meet a younger person discerning religious life," she shares. Kata also volunteered at the RDC Center for Counseling & Human Development, an organization serving predominantly mothers and children and immigrants, and offers counseling and other individual and group services. Kata assisted in preparing meditations for the Mother Daughter group workshops as well as helped develop a social media plan for the center.

The second part of her three months of ministry took place in Washington, D.C., where she had three assignments. Kata assisted the USC Province Young Adult and Vocation Ministry Office in developing materials for pilgrimages that took place or have yet to take place this summer. She also spent part of her time with the Franciscan Action Network, gaining experience of the Catholic Worker Movement and Catholic Charity Network with Diane Roche, RSCJ. Lastly, Kata volunteered at the Franciscan Monastery garden and greenhouse.

Of her time in Washington D.C., Kata says, "It was great to be among nature, meeting different people and listening to stories, connecting with and experiencing the healing and embracing of mother earth. I am also so grateful to have had a brief experience of the refugee care system and face together the challenges of language within the system."

## Looking Ahead

Anna, Alejandra and Kata will close out their time in the USC Province this summer, after which they enter a period of re-integration in their home provinces before professing their first vows in the Society of the Sacred Heart. Novices who profess first vows are then known as Religious of the Sacred Heart and begin an additional several years of study, ministry and formation in preparation for final vows.

At present, there are two candidates from European Provinces discerning a request to join the novitiate in Chicago later this year.

This fall Sister Csókási will begin serving as novice director for the USC Province. Sister Collesano, at that time, will continue her ministry in formation as novice director in the Society's Philippines District.



# Reconnecting with My Sacred Heart Roots at the Mexican Province Assembly

By Kristi Laughlin, Associate of the Society of the Sacred Heart, Member of the Associates Leadership Team

Having the opportunity to travel to Guadalajara, Mexico, this past January as part of the team to represent the Society at the Mexican Province Assembly was a precious gift. This trip was returning home to the place where I fully fell in love with the Society of the Sacred Heart.

Back in 2001, Barbara Dawson, RSCJ, paved the way for me to stay with the Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ) community in the remote town of Ayutla, Guerrero, in southern Mexico. At that time, Reyna González, RSCJ, was serving as coordinator of the community and the Popular Education Project Sofia Barat. Reyna warmly welcomed me into the community of six RSCJ and three other lay mission partners. She wasted no time incorporating me into the various work teams dedicated to community development, youth leadership, teacher training and economic development.

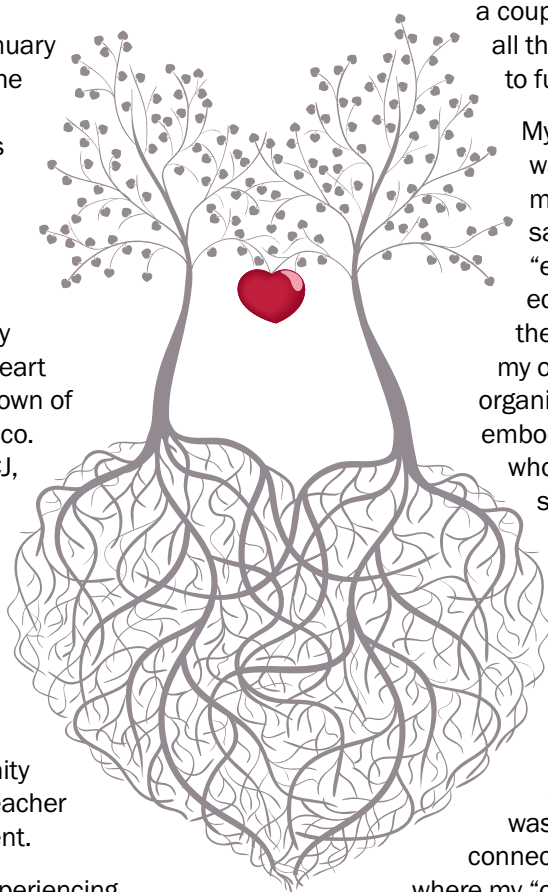
In this place, where many were experiencing poverty, I witnessed the vitality of the Society's mission. The community was manifesting the love of Christ in palpable ways to people on the margins. I still recall their weekly Sunday treks to the isolated pueblo of Tutepec, where the roads were washed away in the rainy seasons and it took masterful driving to avoid the car-sized craters. I was definitely caught by the RSCJ charism — the spirit of this mission — after three months of immersion experience. Though I had begun my journey as an Associate of the Society of the Sacred Heart almost three years prior, I was still grasping the full picture of the place this mission had in my life. I had no history within Sacred Heart schools and had known only

a couple RSCJ. This experience in Ayutla all those years ago was a wonder for me to fully “taste and see.”

My time there was formative; it was when I truly committed to my vocation as an Associate. I saw better then how I fit in as an “educator” in the line of popular education. The RSCJ ministry at the margins resonated with me and my own chosen path as a community organizer. I witnessed the community embody the phrase “wholly apostolic and wholly contemplative,” and in doing so, I became more committed to my own contemplative life and sought a spiritual director upon my return to the United States. I remained drawn to the Society's internationality and this much-needed model of building sisterhood beyond borders.

So, almost two decades later, it was a grace to go back to Mexico and connect with the people and the country where my “conversion experience” took place.

After 23 years into my Associate journey, and almost six years of serving on the Associates Leadership Team, I was feeling a little depleted. I certainly felt strains in my relationships due to three years of communicating predominantly by Zoom. There had been no recent Society spirituality forum to recharge my spiritual batteries, if you will. The challenges of our world and the shifting sands brought by the Society's Special Chapter in 2021 had me wondering where the Associates in the Society fit. The Society's call to *be and act as One Body* and to realize mutuality among Associates and RSCJ seemed elusive to me.





(above) All attendees of the Assembly gathered for a group photo.

(right) Kristi Laughlin (left) with Magna Espinosa, RSCJ, and Sister Velazquez (right).

With this on my heart and mind, I arrived at a retreat center outside of Guadalajara a few hours early. I found myself in the ironic position of being a greeter when all the RSCJ arrived: I offered words of welcome and assistance with their luggage as each one stepped out of her vehicle. They came up the walkway and greeted me also with a smile and warm embrace, in spite of not really knowing who I was. The dozens of abrazos were a beautiful beginning to the week.

At this Assembly — a province-wide gathering of all RSCJ — the Associates and lay mission partners did not participate in meetings until days three and four. In the days before then, Lourdes Velazquez, RSCJ, the provincial of the Mexican Province, graciously scheduled two days for me “in the field,” where I could meet other lay mission partners. During this time, I met Ena Covarubbias, the director of both Comunidad Crece and Centros Educativos Oblatos. She gave me a memorable tour of these two long-standing Sacred Heart popular education projects located on the periphery of Guadalajara.

The socio-political realities she shared with me were stark, especially in the wake of the pandemic and amidst the waves of violence perpetrated by gangs and Narcos in the area. Yet the centers serve as beacons of light. I was inspired by the school of traditional medicine that has trained 400 people, and the collective of women who now create and sell their own line of natural products. On the second day, I was hosted by the principal, Karola Laguna, and the staff of the Sacred Heart school, El Colegio Guadalajara. I loved learning about their integrated programming to teach kids a culture of peace and seeing the early stages of their interactive technology and robotics learning center.



By the third day, I was eager to jump into the Assembly meetings with seven other lay mission partners. We were introduced and began with community-building exercises, each of us part of a different table with the RSCJ. The day began with context-setting. RSCJ present from Haiti, Puerto Rico and the United States shared briefly about the socio-political realities of their country. Most of the day was then dedicated to discussing four apostolic priorities — Education, Formation, Spirituality and JPIC (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation) — what each of these meant to us. We were each asked to rank them in order of personal priority. Then we were directed to discuss them in the reverse order, beginning with our lowest ranked priority. The room was buzzing, everyone huddled around butcher papers, brainstorming key elements of each priority. Everyone’s insights and perspectives enriched our understanding of each priority and affirmed the interdependence of all of them.





(left to right) Sister Espinosa, Tere Torres, Julieta Lopez, Kristi Laughlin and Ena Covarrubias enjoying getting to know one another during a celebratory meal.

On day four, we moved from theory to praxis, determining concrete action steps in each priority area. Each table group offered clear proposals on WHAT we might do, HOW it would be done, and WHO could do it. Additionally, we had the chance to offer constructive amendments to proposals from other tables. Later in the day, the whole assembly reviewed all the ideas, debated them and prioritized a few key steps in each area. Quite a feat! And I sensed that the Assembly concluded with all feeling bonded and energized.

I certainly found the Assembly to be food for my soul. I marveled at how down-to-earth, participatory, and inclusive it felt to be in the midst of the Mexican RSCJ, sharing ideas and input, and listening to their ideas and plans for the future. There we were: Associates, lay mission partners, province staff and vowed religious. Women from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Haiti and the U.S. working together, dreaming together, breathing together. It was such a gift to share in an experience of mutuality, of *being One Body*. I feel grateful for this rejuvenating experience and hopeful about what may emerge as we look ahead to the formation of a new province, and our journey to greater global solidarity and kinship.

# Thank you, Peggy Gorman & Lori Wilson!



We thank you for your six years of dedicated leadership of the Associates of the Society of the Sacred Heart in the United States – Canada Province.

As the Co-chairs of the Associates Leadership Team (ALT), you supported the launch of two new virtual Associate groups and a new Associate group in St. Charles, Missouri. Along with the ALT, you supported the Associates during the pandemic, helping groups transition to virtual gatherings and organizing virtual retreats, meetings and an all-Associates virtual conference in 2021. You created an Associates Newsletter, meaningfully participated on various Province committees, and collaborated on joint prayer celebrations with the Religious of the Sacred Heart for many important feast day celebrations including the Feast of the Sacred Heart, the Feast of Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, and the Feast of Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne. Most recently, you have helped lead the Associates' contemplative visioning process launched in 2022, which, along with the 2021 Associates conference, has laid the foundation for the future of the Associates program.

For all of this and for sharing your time and talents most generously, we extend our deepest gratitude.

Gratefully,

#### The Provincial Team

Suzanne Cooke, RSCJ

Imma De Stefanis, RSCJ

Marina Hernandez, RSCJ

Lynne Lieux, RSCJ



# Letters from the Heart

By Erin Everson

Educators at the Academy of the Sacred Heart in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, conceived of an extraordinary intergenerational project this past winter. Stephanie Hamilton and Renee McNally, who have been educators at the Academy for 23 and 30 years, respectively, spearheaded a letter writing project that involved the entire school community, from early childhood through high school. The recipients of these letters were the Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ) across the United States – Canada Province.

A fourth grade teacher, Stephanie exuded joyful energy when speaking about the Religious of the Sacred Heart and the impact they've had on her life as an educator. Not only that, both of her parents attended Sacred Heart Schools (Sheridan Road) in Chicago, so Stephanie recognized the important role RSCJ have played in multiple generations of her family.

"I hold a love for vowed religious," said Stephanie, who herself was educated by Ursuline Sisters. "Even though they are persons just like me, they also have an aura, a presence, that is so special." She went on to say that it felt important to her that the students connect with the RSCJ, the women who have helped pave the way for the education they now receive. She also thought it was a good opportunity to remind students that there are other ways to spend one's life, to live a vowed life as RSCJ do.

Stephanie explained that this project drew inspiration from the head of school, Damian Hermann, who has continually expressed a deep desire



for the Academy students to connect with and come to know the RSCJ.

"We are deeply committed to the mission and philosophy of Sacred Heart education, and we take very seriously the responsibility to continue the legacy left to us by our RSCJ sisters. It is so important to us that we maintain a relationship with the RSCJ and that they understand how grateful we are to them," said Damian. He exemplified this belief last year when he incorporated the book *Seeking the One Whom We Love: How RSCJs Pray*, an anthology of essays by RSCJ, into his senior religion class.

Notably, in the fall of 2019, the Academy celebrated a commissioning Mass to mark the time RSCJ would no longer be working or teaching on campus. At the heart of the ceremony was commissioning the RSCJ lay mission partners – Educators of the Sacred Heart, faculty, staff and administrators, who continue to foster and carry forward the mission of the Society as articulated in the *Goals and Criteria* of Sacred Heart education.

"We miss them, that connection, and they hold a very special place in our hearts," shared Stephanie, as she elaborated on the driving force behind this project that, fittingly, took shape just in time for Catholic Schools Week.

Importantly, the RSCJ remain committed to spiritual accompaniment in Sacred Heart school communities by way of visiting classes and offering week-long Busy Persons Retreats for faculty and staff throughout the school year. This project was one way to expand on these connections and an opportunity to engage each and every student in the community.

The idea was for every student to participate by writing a letter or creating a piece of art, and for each RSCJ in the Province to receive two letters, one from a younger student and one from a middle school or high school student.

In addition, pre-Kindergarten teacher Cathy Dawson had her students develop a booklet of handprint artwork of which she made copies for each RSCJ community. By mid-February, letters began to arrive in RSCJ mailboxes across the Province and soon after elicited many joyful reactions as well as return pieces of correspondence:



*Everyone loves to get hand written notes, especially in these days of emails and texts. And I love to write hand written notes. So thrilled was I that I got a note from a fifth grade*





Joan Magnetti, RSCJ, reads a card from one of the students.



Sally Rude, RSCJ, enjoying the contents of a student's letter.



Angie Bayo, RSCJ, happy to read a letter from an Academy upper school student.

*girl at Bloomfield Hills, Ellanora. My curiosity was stirred since I don't know any children there but hold the school in my heart since I served there in the late 1970s and early '80s as a trustee, when Susan Maxwell, RSCJ, was headmistress. Ellanora thanked me as an RSCJ "for your dedication for teaching us more about God..." I pondered that. We know with assurance that the heritage of Sacred Heart education has now been passed to lay teachers, administrators and trustees, but Ellanora kept her comment in the present tense. As if we RSCJ were still teaching her. And we are. Just like the Risen Christ who is now present more powerfully than he was when walking the hillsides of Judea. This is hard to explain, but I believe Sophie's work is more powerful now than ever.*

- Joan Magnetti, RSCJ

*I received a lovely hand-made card from 8th grader Zara who loves to play soccer! It touched me that she said "I appreciate your dedication to educating people about the love of God." We RSCJ make a fourth vow committing ourselves to the Education of Youth. Although I am now 83 years old and have not been in the classroom for many years, I still renew that vow every morning*

- Clare Pratt, RSCJ

*It was very thoughtful of the students to write and we enjoyed their pictures and notes!*

- Sally Rude, RSCJ

*I enjoyed seeing the booklet and especially seeing that Cathy Dawson (pre-kindergarten teacher) had annotated the pages with info about the students' mothers and grandmothers — I remembered several of them as children and now they have kids and grandkids at the school — how time flies!*

- RSCJ from Oakwood Community

*Our house was really touched by the messages from the students at Bloomfield, and this writing project gave the possibility of a way to "connect" personally. I knew, of course, that several teachers obviously had been behind the whole effort, and so I hope they get some credit, too!*

- Deanna Von Bargen, RSCJ

*I wrote to the elementary teacher and hope that the older girls whose letters were enclosed received our gratitude. They are so dear. I try to imagine how the teachers are introducing them to these elder RSCJ living far away from them. Many of them may never have met one of us. Not only Bloomfield Hills, but Sacred Heart Greenwich and Convent of the Sacred Heart, 91st Street, have written to us at Christmas time over the years. Surely it is an effort on their part but very worthwhile for all of us. We appreciate being connected with our students, even from afar, and I hope that it means something to them to learn about*

*the sisters who love them, pray for them and hope that they will be wonderful Sacred Heart women and men who spread God's love and compassion wherever they are.*

- Gwen Hoeffel, RSCJ

*It was a wonderful surprise and a joy to receive mail from students at the Academy of the Sacred Heart, Bloomfield. It was especially heartwarming to read about how much Sacred Heart education means to students and their families. What a beautiful way to keep connected across generations in the mission of the Sacred Heart!*

- Sheila Smith, RSCJ

Stephanie confirmed that at least every learning community at the school — early childhood, lower school, primary school, middle school and high school — received a response in some form from an RSCJ. "Now that we've done this and now that we see the impact on our kids and the sisters, I believe we will do this again."

As for this inaugural school-wide effort, it seems so fitting that during a week celebrating Catholic education, the Academy community came together to share gratitude and love in a way that harkens back to the time of Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, the founder of the Society, who herself wrote thousands of letters. Surely, her gratitude and spirit were present in this effort.



## COR UNUM LEGACY SOCIETY PROFILE

# Helping Generations Come to Know the Society's Mission

By Nat Wilburn, Head of the Conference of Sacred Heart Education

***How do you know when your career has indeed become your vocation?*** I remember the moment this occurred for me.

A little over a decade ago, during my first few years serving as head of schools at Sacred Heart Schools, Sheridan Road in Chicago, I visited Stuart Hall for Boys in San Francisco, the place where my career as a Sacred Heart educator began in 1994. During my visit, it was fun to walk the halls and see so many of my former colleagues who knew me first as a campus minister and then as dean of the middle school. I remember the student uniforms were the same; and if not for the passage of time, it seemed as though the spirit of the boys and young men in the hallways was as it had been years before.

One moment stuck with me, however. I was walking down the hallway, and a young adult in a tie greeted me, "Welcome back, Mr. Wilburn." His face was somewhat familiar, but I was at a loss for his identity. "You don't remember me, do you?" he said. "I am sorry, I don't." So, he re-introduced himself, and it turned out that this young man was a student I had known since his days as a kindergartener, and I then remember shaking his hand at his eighth grade graduation. "What brings you here?" I said.

Then with a smile, he said, "I teach here now." I know my expression could not have captured the absolute joy I felt at that moment; it was as though I was caught up in the 200-year mission of the Society of the Sacred Heart. Another generation of Sacred Heart educators had stepped into the role of sharing the Society's mission and Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat's vision, making the love of God visible through the service of education. That was the first time I deeply experienced the meaning of passing on this mission.

Nearly thirty years ago, when I met the Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ) for the first time, I remember vividly Sisters Be Mardel, Ellen Hoffman, Ann Conroy and Susan Maxwell welcoming me into the Sacred Heart Family. They were the first to share with me this mission, and I remember sensing in them a joy in welcoming me into



my role as a Sacred Heart educator. Perhaps, as in my encounter with my former student, they sensed that while much about how living the Society's mission has changed throughout the centuries, the mission itself continues and is re-energized with each new generation.

For me, to experience your vocation is to realize that your work extends beyond the personal fulfillment of a career; rather, it allows you to know that your efforts are for a mission much larger than anything in your personal life. It is knowing that you are on a path rooted in God's will for you. Having a vocation as a Sacred Heart educator is continuing this mission of Christ as Sophie teaches us. It is stepping into the work of ushering in the Reign of God through the educational mission of the Church. The beginning of my career brought me through the doors of Stuart Hall; today, living my vocation as a Sacred Heart educator is my life's work.

Since first meeting the RSCJ, I have served in many different positions in the schools that are members of the Network of Sacred Heart Schools. I've also worked on many committees and task forces for the Society of the Sacred Heart United States - Canada (USC) Province. Drawing on these experiences, I was excited to take on the position of head of the Conference of Sacred Heart Education about two years ago. In this role, I work with the USC Provincial and her leadership team, the provincial team, to ensure the vitality of the Society's mission in our 25 Network member schools. I do this primarily through educating boards of trustees, chairs of boards, heads of schools, and leadership teams to know and understand more deeply this mission of discovering and revealing God's love, its history and how it looks in today's world. In doing this, I continue to play a part in passing on the Society's mission to leaders of these school communities and, through them, to new generations of leaders.

Since that day of encountering my former student in the hallway of Stuart Hall, I have had the blessing of seeing other former students begin their careers and join in the





© Photos by Up in the Air Films



mission of Sacred Heart education. It is a deep joy to see each one of them become a Sacred Heart educator, and my hope for them is that one day, they will come to find that what began as their career has, indeed, become their vocation.

My vocation, my life's work, my experience living out and sharing in this mission is why I chose to remember the Society of the Sacred Heart in my will. Most simply, I am the beneficiary of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, who continue to help form my faith and nurture my vocation; and I pray that my work and my financial support of the work of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, too, will continue to sustain and advance this mission. I sincerely believe that we as a community of the Sacred Heart offer the best promise of passing along an informed faith to the next generation in that, like Sophie, we make the love of God visible.



© Photo by Adam Roy

(top left) Nat Wilburn celebrating liturgy with students, faculty, staff, and parents at The Regis School of the Sacred Heart in Houston.

(top right) Nat alongside Head of School Steven R. Turner, Jr. (right) chats with Regis students.

(bottom) At Sacred Heart School of Halifax, Nat (right) chats with Lisa Philips, Head of School Dennis Philips and Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth Brian Joseph Dunn.



together as one heart

The Cor Unum Legacy Society honors those individuals who have made a planned gift to the Society of the Sacred Heart so that future generations can carry our mission forward.

Please consider a gift to the Cor Unum Legacy Society.

To learn more, contact:

Anne Wiehagen, Director of Mission Advancement  
314.880.0551 | awiehagen@rscj.org

[rscj.org/bequests](https://rscj.org/bequests)

# WELCOME

## Room at the Table: Welcoming Young Adults

By Diane Roche, RSCJ

For most of us Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ), responding to the needs of the young is fundamental to our personal and collective story. We have taught, we have supervised dormitories and dining halls, we have planned *congés* (surprise holidays) and detentions and guided the young to a “personal and active faith in God.” In recent years, we have also honored our “priority for youth” in ways that invite young people to join us in our mutual search for just, life-affirming communities, both locally and globally.

One way (among many) that this is happening in the United States – Canada Province is through a network of four welcoming communities: Heart of Oak in **Boston, Massachusetts**; Rebecca House in **White Plains, New York**; Sophia House in **Berkeley, California**; and Anne Montgomery House in **Washington, D.C.** Each of these communities offers programed events and informal gatherings with young adults seeking to engage deeply in spirituality and social concern. Each has evolved distinctively in response to unique circumstances of geographic location and the interests, gifts and availability of the women religious who reside there.

Two (Rebecca House and Anne Montgomery House) offer a live-in experience. Others offer a program of evening or daylong gatherings for prayer, hiking retreats, garden volunteering, festive meals and spirituality study. But they all have come to share four basic characteristics:

### 1. Intergenerational

Whether at a potluck dinner or at the breakfast table, members share insights, questions and stories that are mutually enriching.

### 2. Inter-congregational

Heart of Oak collaborates with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston, taking turns hosting and planning evening programs. The community also welcomes live-in sisters from other international congregations who study or teach at Boston College. The core community of Anne Montgomery House includes two RSCJ and a Sister of Charity of Cincinnati. The community also collaborates closely with the “Nuns in the Neighborhood” group and with “Nuns and Nones,” groups that have often met at the Stuart Center for Mission, a nearby ministry of the Province. Several of the women who share in the prayer, spirituality and ecological programs at Sophia House include women from other religious communities who are students or faculty in Berkeley.

### 3. Inter-faith/Ecumenical

Programs at all four houses have attracted participants who may have no particular religious affiliation or who may be Jewish, Protestant, Muslim, Buddhist or Catholic. Because of Sophia House’s location near the Graduate Theological Union (GTU), gatherings are regularly ecumenical and interfaith.



#### 4. International

All four houses have welcomed young people from a wide variety of countries, including RSCJ from other provinces who take part in a six-month international experience before probation (the time spent in preparation for final vows in the Society) or who are here to learn English. RSCJ at Rebecca House, being fluent in Spanish and English, have worked closely with the RSCJ International Volunteer Program and hosted young adults from abroad in years past as well as facilitated numerous programs. These programs and word of mouth across the broad Sacred Heart network provide a channel of interest among young adults for an extended experience that is closer to a pre-professional experience. Extended experiences are typically in areas where they are building their professional careers and lives. Rebecca House, uniquely, welcomes male volunteers to the community. Sophia House welcomes numerous international students from the GTU who participate in programming.

*“the most important and characteristic element of all four welcoming communities is a delight in table fellowship”*

But perhaps the most important and characteristic element of all four welcoming communities is a delight in table fellowship. In some cases, the young people bring parts of the meal. At other times, all share a meal prepared by the core members of the community for their guests. The sharing of food is always preceded or followed by prayerful reflection on some topic of concern to the participants: It might be some aspect of the liturgical year, a reflection on welcoming the stranger or on nonviolence. But it is always heartfelt and nourishing.

Are you a young person or do you know a young person in these areas who may be interested in participating in our welcoming community programs or offerings? We'd love to hear from you!



Visit [rscj.org/welcoming-communities](https://rscj.org/welcoming-communities) to get in contact and get involved.

# Expectation

By Bonnie Kearney, RSCJ

We, too, young, and old,  
Are waiting to give birth,  
Are waiting to recognize the Birth  
that changed everything,  
Are waiting.  
Shall we not seek each other,  
Recognize the new life in each one,  
Bless it and rejoice that we are blessed.  
We do not need to wait to do this.  
Something new is coming.  
We, together, today, now  
Dream in expectation and  
Act to bring it about.  
(dream-now-act)

# Staff Q&A

## Getting to Know Debbie Vespa-Schutz

By Erin Everson

**Debbie Vespa-Schutz** currently serves as the Medical Benefits Manager for the Society of the Sacred Heart United States – Canada Province. A native of Springfield, Illinois, Debbie is the oldest of five girls. Fascinatingly, when in middle school, Debbie’s family moved to Rochelle, Illinois, for a short time where they lived in a former convent. Debbie shares that this was so memorable because it was the only time growing up that she and her four sisters could each have her own bedroom, and there were still even a couple to spare!

The Society was not the first congregation of women religious she came to know. When she was in high school, Debbie worked in the dining room and was responsible for various cleaning jobs for the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis. She recalls that the time she spent in this job helped her realize that religious were just like everyone else, serious, fun and a mix of personalities.

In 1987, Debbie moved with her soon-to-be-husband Ben to St. Louis where she has resided since. She has worked in medical benefits for the Province for the past 13 years, walking with, guiding, educating, and advocating on behalf of the Religious of the Sacred (RSCJ) as they navigate the financial side of their health care needs. In her position she not only serves each RSCJ, she also works with the Provincial Team, advising them as they ensure that every RSCJ’s medical/health care needs are met.

### How did you come to know the Society of the Sacred Heart?

I started a new job search in the fall of 2009 and in December of that same year, I was approached by the job search agency I was using regarding a position with the Society of the Sacred Heart as a Medical Benefits Administrator. I had not heard of the Society of the Sacred Heart before, and a brief search revealed they were an order of religious nuns with a background in education. I got the job, and thus began my work with the Society of the Sacred Heart in January of 2010. Thirteen years later, I still enjoy every minute!

### What about working for the Society of the Sacred Heart USC Province appealed to you?

I had previously worked behind the scenes in a doctor’s office, in customer service and with insurance companies. I had seen numerous times where seniors, in particular, were being taken advantage of by doctor’s offices and insurance companies or their representatives. In my next position, I wanted to be able to advocate for those who were trying to navigate the insurance minefields to ensure they were treated fairly.

And on a personal level, I was blessed with two fabulous women as grandmothers; and I viewed this position as an opportunity to advocate, work and care for, in a way, 200 “grandmothers,” — at least those RSCJ who, at the time I began my work, were older and more often navigating the medical field — and that was a huge honor from my perspective.

### For those who may not be familiar with medical benefits, what does an average day look like for you?

I enjoy my role because it is ever-changing from day to day. One day I will be working with insurance representatives or a grant program to get a prescription copay covered for a sister; the next I’m a liaison between a sister and the providers’ office to work out payment and insurance coverage. Sometimes I spend my day contacting billing offices to ensure the proper insurance is billed or just to help solve whatever the problem may be. I am also an educator of sorts when it comes to informing the sisters about their benefits and how they work. Sometimes I am here to “just listen” to a sister’s concerns, anxieties or general feelings of her current or anticipated changing situation. I also work with our Elder Care, Health, Wellness and Eldercare Committee, health and wellness professionals on staff and the provincial team to ensure the sisters are covered and receive the best care possible.





(above) Debbie and extended family at her son and daughter-in-law's wedding.

(right) Debbie and her husband Ben (left) with daughter-in-law Clara and son Debyn.



### What do you find most meaningful about your work?

From my first day working with the sisters, it has been a very rewarding, educational and life enhancing endeavor. The sisters are complex, educated women, and learning about and navigating the nuances of each sister's experience has been deeply gratifying. My goal in this role continues to be to alleviate any hassles associated with paying medical bills, completing or advising on enrollment in health plans, acting as an advocate with insurance, be a listening ear, a resource for the Provincial Team or truly whatever is needed on any given day to allow the sisters to focus on carrying out the mission of the Society.

I truly feel appreciated for the work I do with and for the sisters and on behalf of the Society. I often hear after working through a problem with a sister, "What do people without a Debbie do?" That makes every day worthwhile.

### What brings you joy?

My husband Ben and I have a son, Debyn, and a daughter-in-law, Debyn's wife, Clara, who live in Minnesota. Spending time with family and friends is my greatest joy and past-time. I also enjoy reading, cooking, baking, eating and a great lake view. I will read just about anything, but lean towards historical fiction, murder mysteries, cookbooks and anything recommended by my sisters.

### Being a big reader, what book would you suggest to our *Heart* magazine readership and why?

I would recommend *Still Alice* by Lisa Genova. It is the story of Alice and her life after being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. It is as insightful as it is heart wrenching. The author gives us a look into the life of Alice and her family as her mind is slowly taken from her. One of my grandmothers had Alzheimer's, and now my aunt is living with the disease. This book helped me to realize that the person I knew has now been hidden from me by the disease, and the disease is what embodies our loved one. It is important to remember that the person we know is still there, as in the title, *Still Alice*. She was still my grandmother. She is still my aunt. I just have to look a little harder, a little deeper, and she appears, just as I remember her.





# LIVING OUR MISSION: *Connecting Generations*

By Amanda Codina, Director of Student Programs and Special Initiatives for the Network of Sacred Heart Schools

In early November 2022, students and educators from Network of Sacred Heart Schools member schools traveled to the Pallotine Renewal Center in Florissant, Missouri, for “Living Our Sacred Heart Mission,” a program aimed at engaging participants in intergenerational dialogue on the mission of Sacred Heart education and the history of the Society of the Sacred Heart in North America.

Suzanne Cooke, RSCJ, Provincial of the United States – Canada Province, opened the program with a presentation on the life of the founder of the Society, Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, and her vision for education. Participants then spent two days in small group conversations with Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ): Reyna González, Sharon Karam, and Diane Roche.

During these small group discussions, participants explored the implications of Vatican II for Sacred Heart



education and heard stories about the sisters’ personal call to religious life and the stories of their vocations. The group also heard from Sheila Haggas, executive director of the Network of Sacred Heart Schools, on the importance of partnering in our shared mission, and Carolina, a senior from Convent of the Sacred Heart (91st Street) in New York City, on the role many RSCJ have played in her life.

The students had the opportunity to visit Villa Duchesne School of the Sacred Heart and educators visited the Society’s United States – Canada Province Archives in St. Louis. The program wrapped up with a prayer service and ceremony at the Shrine of Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne in neighboring St. Charles, at which the RSCJ presented all participants with their “Sacred Heart Inheritance,” a pin symbolizing their role in carrying out Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat’s vision.



# in their own words

## **PARKER**, tenth grade student

Convent of the Sacred Heart (91st Street) | New York, NY



In November of 2022, I had the privilege of being chosen for a Network Leadership Program in St. Louis. During my trip, I was able to form close relationships with my fellow students, our chaperons, and the RSCJ. The community gathered

radiated a profound sense of welcome, passion, and appreciation for education. I truly enjoyed comparing aspects of my school to the schools of my newly made friends. Although we found that each Sacred Heart school had its own traditions, classes, and extracurriculars, the love and pride we all shared for our community was overwhelming and consistent throughout each student's school life.

After learning more about Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat from Sister Cooke on the first day of the program, I was surprised by the rich history of our school's goals and left feeling extremely connected to Saint Madeleine Sophie's expectations for me as a child of the Sacred Heart. I now have a better understanding and appreciation for the educators and faculty of my school, as my participation in the program helped me to acknowledge their essential role in spreading the values of the Sacred Heart community.

My most memorable experience while in St. Louis was listening to the inspiring stories from the RSCJ. Sister



Karam, Sister Roche, and Sister González radiated joyfulness to everyone in the room and were clear examples of how important intergenerational exchanges can be. Each sister shared remarkable stories, which helped me to better understand the significance of prayer and strengthened my connection to the Holy Spirit. Since returning to ever-busy New York City, I have found myself more capable of noticing and appreciating the little blessings in my life. Whether it be a person who offers me a smile in the hallway or the number six train running on time after school, this experience has assisted me in perceiving the world in accordance with God's Spirit. I now can use the lessons learned from all the RSCJ to live out God's calling for me and continue the legacy of Sacred Heart.

## **MEG RUSSELL**, educator

Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart | Bethesda, MD



The mission of Sacred Heart education, the *Goals and Criteria* of Sacred Heart education, and the way each clearly guides and is present in the community at Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart is why I wanted to join the faculty and staff. They drew me in — gently, with an

embrace of sorts — and they felt obvious, as though they were meant to be my mission and goals and they had been waiting for me to catch up!

While I was participating in the Living Our Mission program this past fall, it became clear that I have much more to learn and understand about the Society's mission, goals, and our beloved RSCJ. Happy to be humbled, I gladly sat at the feet of amazing women and men who live and serve the charism of the Society and the mission of Sacred Heart education. Both those who sat before me and those about whom they taught us felt equally present in this sacred space, and I felt connected to the Sacred Heart mission in a new way.

Having the opportunity to share these days with two Stone Ridge students also allowed me to see and learn through their eyes and perspectives. What a joy to see them inspired by Sophie, by the mission, by the sisters and by their fellow Network students. It has been





powerful, too, to come back to Stone Ridge and see the myriad ways they carry that inspiration here: lecturing at Mass, helping lead a middle school retreat, in their studies and friendships, in our social action program, and undoubtedly in many more ways of which I am unaware.

Receiving our pins on the final day together, in Philippine's Shrine, was a powerful moment of invitation and responsibility. As a Sacred Heart educator, I am entrusted with and empowered by a call to reveal God's love to my students and to educate them as whole people. Though that call feels occasionally overwhelming, my time at this program inspired me to trust that through God's grace and with the support of the entire Sacred Heart Family to which I belong, this is possible.

### ALEXANDRA (ALEX) & RUBY, ninth grade students

Academy of the Sacred Heart | Bloomfield Hills, MI



We feel it is important to continue to have opportunities like the Living Our Mission program, because when we learn more about the Society, create meaningful connections, and learn about our history as a Sacred Heart school, our eyes are opened to the amazing people who came

before and shaped Sacred Heart education into what it is today. These lessons still shape the Sacred Heart community, and these programs give us the chance to understand those lessons more deeply.

This experience helped shape our understanding of being students of the Sacred Heart by showing us that we aren't alone, and others are working towards the same goal and share a similar drive for education, love, and community. Meeting students from other Network schools was interesting because some may think that we would have only 'going to Sacred Heart' in common.

What became apparent to us was that Sacred Heart schools instill a mindset and offer an experience that we could all relate to. We may have arrived thinking that since we go to different schools, our goals may be different; but once we got to know one another better, we learned that we shared core beliefs. This was a little unexpected but also very inspiring.

Being in ninth grade, this program was such a great way to start the year. We bonded with many girls from other Network schools and with the RSCJ in a way we believe we could not have experienced any other way. We saw the RSCJ as people we could talk to, when beforehand, we had put them on a pedestal and had forgotten that they are just like us.

### DIANE ROCHE, RSCJ



In this post-covid time when many people of all ages are struggling to push through feelings of brain-fog and existential anxiety, it is important for those of us who share the Sacred Heart charism to create spaces where young people can hear words of encouragement from

those in the generations above them and the young can offer their creativity and energy in return. This is exactly what happened at the Living Our Mission gathering.

To paraphrase Acts 2:17, we are living in a time when young men and women are taking to the streets (and to social media) to communicate a shared vision of a better future; and the older generation is right with them, sharing this dream. What was most unexpected was the pure delight that each group took in hearing from the other and the extraordinary expressions of gratitude that were a part of the closing prayer service.

The very practical prototypes for intergenerational sharing of the Sacred Heart charism are something that I am delighted to see being picked up and integrated into programs like this one, as well as the SacredHeartDNA initiative, which recently launched earlier this year. It's exciting and hopeful to see such synergy emerging at this critical moment in our Province and in our world.

## DIVE DEEPER

Watch a video about the "Living Our Mission" program and hear from more participants about their experiences and insights at [rscj.org/lom](https://rscj.org/lom)





(top left) Students and educators gather for a photo with RSCJ after presenting their group project.

(top right) Grace, a student at Villa Duchesne, responds to a question posed to the large group.

(middle row) Sister Karam reviews students' presentation; Sister Roche shares an insight with a group of students; Sister González works with a student on a presentation.

(right) Students review their presentation before presenting what they learned from their time with the RSCJ.





# SacredHeartDNA Launch

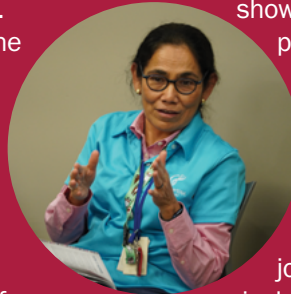
By Amanda Codina, Reyna González, RSCJ, and Karla Reyes

Community. Love. Hope. Vision. Opportunity. These, among many others, were some of the words that our guests used to describe the SacredHeartDNA project during its launch party on Friday, February 24, 2023.

SacredHeartDNA is an initiative that brings together a group of Religious of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ) and young people connected by the mission and charism of the Society of the Sacred Heart. This group aims to create spaces and opportunities for young people (ages 17-35) to connect and engage with RSCJ and others rooted in a shared purpose that is unique to the Sacred Heart. This project is a platform for intercultural and intergenerational dialogues, and also a safe place for young adults who are looking for an opportunity to make their ideas, dreams, and hopes for the present and future visible.

We, the SacredHeartDNA team, believe SacredHeartDNA is within everyone. It is the inheritance received from Society founder Madeleine Sophie Barat, Rose Philippine Duchesne and many other RSCJ who continue to inform and forge our path.

During the launch we presented the purpose of the project, the core values of SacredHeartDNA and



showcased the work we've done so far, including programs we have hosted and the launch of our Instagram account.

Notably, we announced and released the digital version of the SacredHeartDNA passport, an interactive spiritual resource that guides you through a twenty-week reflective journey. We also introduced our next steps, including multiple pilgrimage opportunities.

In addition to sharing these dynamic engagement opportunities, we shared how SacredHeartDNA is also a tool to connect young people with spiritual resources and programs that RSCJ have already been offering and care to expand. Twenty-three RSCJ in the Province have committed to being involved with the SacredHeartDNA project and/or to help coordinate new events and programs in the future.

We launched SacredHeartDNA both virtually on Zoom and in-person at the Society of the Sacred Heart United States – Canada Provincial Office in St. Louis. There were 150 participants between both launches, representing a variety of countries including Canada, England, India, Mexico, and the United States.







(above) SacredHeartDNA team members, young adults, students, RSCJ, Network of Sacred Heart Schools and USC Province staff members gather together after a successful launch event.

(right) Amanda Codina presents on the five core values of SacredHeartDNA.



We are thankful to all who connected virtually and in-person to join us for this important day. We hope to continue helping to reveal the SacredHeartDNA of many more — especially young adults — in the world with your help.

*Reyna González, RSCJ, is the Director of Young Adult and Vocation Ministry for the Society of the Sacred Heart United States – Canada Province. Karla Reyes is the Young Adult and Vocation Ministry Assistant for the Society of the Sacred Heart United States – Canada Province.*

## Belong & Act as One: Discovering Our SacredHeartDNA

In late summer 2023, young adults from Chile, Hungary, Poland, Mexico and the United States, along with Religious of the Sacred Heart, will travel to Europe for a pilgrimage rooted in Society of the Sacred Heart history, active citizenship and informed faith. This two-part pilgrimage will begin

at the Society’s Villa Lante Center for Lay and Religious Formation in Rome and culminate at the Pope’s World Youth Day (WYD) in Lisbon, Portugal. This historical event, sponsored and organized by the Young Adult and Vocation Ministry Office of the Society of the Sacred Heart United States – Canada

Province, exemplifies the exciting and renewed energy around the Province’s commitment to young people. The experience will serve to connect members of the Sacred Heart Family — RSCJ, young adults, students and alumnae/i of Sacred Heart schools — at the international level.



**From: Margaret Morgan Ashton**

Your magazine is always a welcome arrival in our home. However, the most recent brought me tears ... of laughter and memories. In 1960, I was a member of the first graduating class at CSH (Convent of the Sacred Heart) Greenfield Hills, El Cajon, California.

One of my deepest memories of the school, which is long since closed, was walking to my car in my senior year and seeing Virginia [McMonagle, RSCJ] sitting quietly on one of the stone benches breathing in the glorious sunset. In that very quiet space, I felt enclosed in His heart. Most of my classmates have gone home to the Lord. I do thank you for reminding me of the Gift that began with my great grandmother, Kate Curtin, a student at CSH, St. Joseph, Missouri, in the 1870s; her son, my grandfather, a student at the Cathedral School for Boys in St. Joe, staffed by the RSCJ; his first cousin Katherine Curtin, RSCJ; my mother and my aunt who graduated from CSH in the 1930s; and my sisters and myself who experienced El Cajon — in its “early days.”

“Walking into the Future Together” reflections give me much hope:

**Maureen Glavin:** *“We walk into our future together.”*

**Reyna González:** *“The capacity to collaborate in a spirit of authentic mutuality.”*

**Anne Wachter:** *“Be whole-hearted or stout-hearted, never half-hearted.”*

**Bridget Bearss:** *“We must live transformative values.”*

**Yannina González Samilpa:** *“Helping others own their own power.”*

I am reminded of a long-ago song from the 1970s “And the beat goes on!” But I would reword the lyrics “AND THE BEAT OF HIS HEART GOES ON.”

Blessings and MERCI MILLE FOIS!

Margaret Morgan Ashton  
El Cajon Class of 1960  
University of San Diego Class of 1964



Taken in 1961, students and Religious of the Sacred Heart line up for the dedication of Convent of the Sacred Heart in El Cajon.





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