

BVM Perspective

2023–2024 Annual Report
Office of BVM Development

Dear Friends,

Greetings again from the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary! I cannot believe another year has gone by so quickly. As I reflect back on these past 12 months in my capacity as director of development, one word keeps coming to mind over and over again. That word is *justice*. Thanks to your generosity, the BVM Congregation is able to live out this core value of justice throughout its mission and ministry efforts.

“Justice helps us recognize the dignity, equality, and rights of all persons. It calls us to be faithful to the demands of a relationship. It is to be concerned about the oppressed, the marginalized, and the person without access to resources” (*BVM Core Values*). Throughout this issue, *Salt* highlights some of the ways your contributions promoted justice.

BVM grants for programs in the United States and around the world focus on justice. The congregation has a lengthy history of partnering with non-profit or community-based organizations that empower marginalized, oppressed, poor, and/or powerless individuals. Programs benefiting women, children, and families are particularly compelling. Grants have also been approved for programs or projects that lead to systemic change as well as those that provide assistance in the areas of basic human needs including food, water, and emergency necessities.

The BVM Council introduced you to one of our recent grant recipients, Dandelion House, in their “Seasoning” article. An intentional community located in Portland, Ore., the organization is responding to urgent and crucial issues that many find themselves struggling with in today’s society but doing so through the lens of justice and nonviolence. See p. 16 for a closer look.

Over the years, BVM scholarships have helped

women with limited financial resources realize their full potential, thereby creating a more just society. Many view their education as an opportunity to “pay it forward” by lifting up others much like the BVMs have done for them. One such former scholarship recipient is Sophia Hey. You can learn about Sophia’s amazing journey by reading her profile on p. 18.

In the following pages, we also draw your attention to two donors who attended The Immaculata High School in Chicago. While Susan Sylvan spent just a brief period of time with the BVMs, Vicky Gehling not only graduated from The Immaculata but went on to earn her undergraduate degree from Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa. Although choosing two different paths in life, both women were touched by the BVMs and their commitment to education as well as justice issues. Interestingly enough, Susan and Vicky each majored in the sciences and became educators themselves. Discover more about Susan and Vicky by reading their respective articles.

Words cannot express just how truly thankful we are for your prayers, charitable donations, words of encouragement, and small acts of kindness that serve as a source of inspiration and help us to further the BVM mission. Your support gives meaning to the BVM core values of freedom, education, charity, and justice. Please know we hold you close in our hearts and give thanks for your presence in our lives on a daily basis.



With gratitude,

Jean A. Tucker

Jean A. Tucker
Director of Development

Contact the Office of Development

1100 Carmel Drive
Dubuque, IA 52003-7911
563-585-2854 | development@bvmsisters.org

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All financial information in this report has been reviewed by Eide Bailly LLP.

Donor Profile: Vicky and Virgil Gehling

A Lifelong Commitment to the BVMs

by Kari Litscher

Vicky and Virgil Gehling's connection to the Sisters of Charity, BVM spans over five decades, rooted in their shared commitment to education, faith, and social justice. Their story is one of deep appreciation for the BVMs and a lasting relationship that continues to this day.

Deepening Ties

Vicky's journey with the BVMs began at The Immaculata High School in Chicago, where she graduated in 1965. During her years there, Vicky was influenced by many BVMs, but

some stand out in her memory. "I fondly remember many BVM sisters from those years: Pat (Frederick Mary) Nolan, Irene Marie (Aurelius) Brennan, Josepha Carton, and Emmanuel Fitzpatrick," Vicky recalls. "Of course, there were many others." These women shaped Vicky's early years, not only as educators but as role models of faith and service.

A Family Legacy

After high school, Vicky continued her studies at Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa, where she met Virgil, a student at Loras College.

Their connection to the BVM

community only deepened during their time in Dubuque. "Sister Marguerite (Christine) Neumann was an important influence on me at Clarke," Vicky remembers. "And Sister Sara (Philip Mary) McAlpin was my freshman counselor in Mary Fran Hall. She was such a wonderful support." Vicky graduated in 1969, and Virgil, who graduated from Loras, stood by her side throughout her academic journey.

Education and faith remained central to their family's values. "Clarke has had quite an impact on our family," Virgil says with pride. "Our son Joel graduated from Clarke, and his wife and her siblings are all Clarke grads. We've had generations come through!"

Continued Tradition

The Gehlings regularly visited Clarke over the years. One of the highlights was always time spent with Marguerite. "Sister Marguerite loved showing our children around the science building when we visited," Vicky recalls.

"We have always been impressed by the social progressiveness of the BVMs. They are truly committed to the welfare of all, and we like being a very small part of that."

—Virgil Gehling



Donors Virgil and Vicky Gehling on a recent trip to Prague, the capital city of the Czech Republic.

BVM Inspiration

The Gehlings have been deeply inspired by the BVMs' commitment to social issues. "We have always been impressed by the social progressiveness of the BVMs," Virgil says. "They are truly committed to the welfare of all, and we like being a very small part of that." Their admiration for the sisters' work, both locally and globally, has motivated their ongoing support of the BVM mission.

Coming Full Circle

Recently, they made the move into the Terrace Apartments at Mount Carmel Bluffs, which felt like a natural

step in their ongoing connection with the BVMs. "After attending the May benefactor event and taking a campus tour, we knew it was time to move," Vicky explains. "It felt like coming full circle, and we're so happy to be part of the BVM community again."

Mission Minded

Living in the heart of the BVM mission has allowed Vicky and Virgil to witness firsthand the continuing commitment of the BVMs to their communities and the world. "We have been donors to the BVMs for more than 30 years," Virgil says. "It's an honor to support their efforts

wherever it's needed. They depend on the generosity of their benefactors to continue their work, and we're grateful to be able to contribute." ■

About the author: Kari Litscher is a communication specialist for the Sisters of Charity, BVM in Dubuque, Iowa.

Donor Profile: Susan Sylvan

A Brief Encounter, A Lasting Impact

by Kari Litscher

For Susan Sylvan, her connection

with the Sisters of Charity, BVM began at a pivotal time in her life—when she needed stability and support the most. Susan's life was upended when she suddenly moved away from her mother and brother to Chicago to live with her father's Catholic sisters after an unexpected family loss.

In 1954, her aunts, devout Irish Catholics, enrolled Susan at The Immaculata High School, a Catholic girls school founded by the BVMs in 1921. Susan ponders if her quick acceptance to the school was credited to her cousin, Peggy Butler, being an Immaculata student leader and athlete. Susan quickly realized that the BVMs provided her with more than just an education—they gave her a sense of security and care that she needed at the time.

A Moment in Time

"I was one of two non-Catholics in the school. The other non-Catholic was the only Black student," Susan remembers. "It was NOT a good time in my life. Going to a school with uniforms and prayers at the door of the classrooms was a very new, strange experience for me. But the sisters were smart and good teachers. They were kind to me."

Though Susan's time at Immaculata lasted only a semester, the impact the BVMs had on her was lasting. "They made very different choices in life," Susan reflects. "I admired them for that. They were impressive women who set an example for me."

After her semester at Immaculata, Susan returned to live with her mother. She went on to earn degrees in science and history, and then, inspired by her own desire to make a difference, joined



Susan Sylvan gives back to her community and supports the BVM mission and social justice causes.

the Peace Corps. She taught English in Kazakhstan in Central Asia and later taught social studies, history, and English in Pakistan.

A Chance Meeting

It wasn't until two decades ago that Susan's connection with the BVMs was rekindled. A chance encounter with a woman who had also been educated by the BVMs caused her to reflect on her time at Immaculata. "By talking with her, fond memories resurfaced. I thought, 'I should support these women,'" Susan says. "You share what you have."

Donor Profile continued on p. 28.

A Lasting Commitment

Since that moment, Susan has been a dedicated donor, grateful for the stability, intellectual engagement, and kindness the BVMs had shown her at a crucial time in her life. “I admire the work they do,” she says simply. “The BVMs are smart women doing good things.” She is particularly inspired by the sisters’ advocacy for causes like land justice and their work to combat human trafficking—efforts that resonate with her own commitment to social justice.

Now living on the Upper East Side of New York, Susan continues to give back to her community in her own way. Always carrying \$20 bills in her pocket, she is ready to help those struggling with homelessness. She is also deeply involved in her faith, regularly attending Bible study in her community.

Reflecting on her time at Immaculata, Susan remembers the small details that made a lasting impact: “I can still remember the veils the sisters wore, and the dress I wore to Mass,” she says. Her dress, a wool

garment with a white collar and cuffs, remains vivid in her memory.

While her Catholic aunts had hoped she would eventually embrace the faith, Susan’s connection to the BVMs transcended religious boundaries. “I never became Catholic,” she says, “but I admire the BVMs for their intellect, their dedication, and their commitment to making the world a better place.” ■

About the author: Kari Litscher is a communication specialist for the Sisters of Charity, BVM in Dubuque, Iowa.

BVM Sisters’ Development Network



Jean (Jean Allan) Beste



Mary Anne (Leslie) Bradish



Alice (Alissio) Caulfield



Mary Lois Dolphin



Mary Jean (St. Christopher) Ferry



Maureen Patrice Fury



Marie (David Therese) Greaney



Mary A. Healey



Florence (Floretta) Heflin



Katherine (St. Wilma) Keating



Joanne Marie (Michael Mary) Lucid



Bernadette (Lucinus) McManigal



Judith Terese McNulty



Julie O'Neill



Diane (Malia) Rapozo



Margaret (Paul Joseph) Sannasardo



Vicki (Marie Stephen) Smurlo



Mary (Valerie) Waddell

The BVM Sisters Development Network (SDN)

serves as a key connection between benefactors and the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Founded in 1987 with an original group of 11 sisters, today SDN has 18 active participants, 15 of whom have been corresponding with donors for more than five years.

Connections between sisters and donors are long-standing. In fact, many of the donors are former students of BVMs. To maintain these unique bonds which are based in shared values and respect for the BVM mission, SDN members frequently communicate with donors through letters, cards, phone calls, and email. ■

In Memory

The BVM Congregation would like to acknowledge our SDN sisters, Marjorie (Herberdette) Heidkamp and Marcelia Maglinte, for their tireless efforts to support the BVM Mission. May they rest in peace.



Marjorie (Herberdette) Heidkamp
1934–2024



Marcelia Maglinte
1939–2024

Celebration of Generosity

by Jean Tucker

On May 8, 2024, more than 200 people gathered at Mount Carmel Bluffs in Dubuque, Iowa, for a Celebration of Generosity donor appreciation event. Due to construction on campus and the COVID-19 pandemic, the last time a similar event took place was in 2019.

BVM sisters, associates, friends, relatives, alumni, and former BVMS were among the constituents in attendance. While more than half of those present were from Dubuque and the surrounding communities, approximately two dozen guests arrived from the Chicago metro area. Others traveled from Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. Some even joined virtually.

The afternoon began with a prayer service in the Mary Frances Clarke Chapel. BVM President LaDonna Manternach extended a warm welcome to attendees, sharing, “BVM sisters have lovingly served in classrooms and offices, in parishes and retreat centers,



BVM Kathleen (Richard Marie) Conway (r.) visits with friends Tom Schneider and Renate Reichs.

in food pantries and shelters for the unhoused . . . to live out the mission of the Gospel, ‘to love one another.’ We met you in these places and through our family connections. We are grateful for the relationships which have richly blessed our lives.”

Following the prayer service, guests were invited to make their way to St. Joseph Hall for a reception in their honor. Afterwards, guests were given the opportunity to visit the cemetery via golf cart shuttles, and tours were available to visit the new Terrace independent living apartments.

The day was filled with lots of love, laughter, fellowship, and gratitude. As Associate Diane Kopp remarked, “What a beautiful celebration! I am blessed to be part of this circle of friends!”

To watch the prayer service, visit: tinyurl.com/2jc86b2n. ■

About the author: Jean Tucker is the development director for Sisters of Charity, BVM in Dubuque, Iowa.



BVMs Rose Mary (Sebastian) Meyer (l.), Bernadette (Lucinus) McManigal, Marie (David Therese) Greaney, and Alice (Alissio) Caulfield greet guests to the Celebration of Generosity prayer service held in the Mary Frances Clarke Chapel at Mount Carmel Bluffs in Dubuque, Iowa.



Visitors travel by golf cart to visit the Mount Carmel Cemetery.

Donations at a Glance

Fiscal Year: 2023–2024

Thank you for your generous support and friendship.

The Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and those we serve are truly blessed that you have joined us in our mission. It is with sincere gratitude that we present this accounting from the Office of Development.

Total receipts for the 2023–2024 fiscal year were \$5,506,277 with 5,721 gifts from 3,054 donors.

Fundraising Campaigns

Birdies for Charity

TPC Deere Run in Silvis, Ill., served as the host site once again for the John Deere Classic and Birdies for Charity golf event, which took place July 1–7, 2024.

Thanks to the generosity of our many donors over the past two decades, this tournament has helped raise funds for a variety of projects including building renovations, upgrades to the HVAC system, the installation of LED lighting and new carpeting, the purchase of AV equipment, a transport van, golf cart and utility vehicle, as well as the construction of a commercial grade kitchen in the Motherhouse.

This year, donations received in conjunction with Birdies for Charity were designated for mission and ministry. Thousands are helped as a direct result of the scholarships and grants that are awarded by the congregation each year.

Annual Appeal

The 2023 Annual Appeal marked the culmination of the year-long celebration surrounding the 190th anniversary of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It harkened back to 1833, when five Irish laywomen, led by Mary Frances Clarke, emigrated from Dublin,

Ireland, to Philadelphia to teach the children of Irish immigrants. This was just the beginning.

The group quickly formed a religious community that expanded their educational ministry to Iowa, Chicago, and California. Over time, BVMS staffed more than 300 schools across the U. S. and three foreign countries, providing thousands of students a quality education, opportunities for development, and solid grounding in Catholic values. In the 1960s, ministries grew to include healthcare, community advocacy, and parish administration. Nearly 5,000 women followed Mary Frances Clarke's call.

We are incredibly grateful to all those who have been part of our story, history, and legacy of love over the past 190 years. Although most BVMS are no longer involved in active ministries, we continue to honor our core values of freedom, education, charity, and justice through student scholarships and grants to not-for-profit organizations, community-based organizations, and religious communities both here and abroad. ■



Funds from Birdies for Charity and the Annual Appeal support organizations such as Dandelion House (top) and scholarships to women like Sophia Hey who are featured on pages 16–19.

Bequests
\$3,966,213

Miscellaneous Giving
\$1,162,973

Birdies for Charity
\$76,913

Fall Appeal
\$213,395

Salt Magazine
\$86,783

First Time Donors
296

Donors of Distinction:

- **Monthly Partners:** 120
- **Legacy Partner:** 671
(Donors who have included the BVMs in their estate plans: 493 deceased, 178 current)
- **Mary Frances Clarke Society:** 995
(Total lifetime giving of \$10,000 and over)
 - 545: \$10,000–\$24,999
 - 193: \$25,000–\$49,999
 - 105: \$50,000–\$99,999
 - 93: \$100,000–\$249,999
 - 59: \$250,000 and over
- **Mount Carmel Partner:** 332
(Gifts totaling \$1,000 and over during current fiscal year)

If you plan to spend several months of the year at a secondary residence or vacation home, please provide us with your seasonal address. This will help ensure you don't miss any important updates or opportunities to engage with our mission, including receiving your copy of *Salt*.



Contact the Development Office with your alternate mailing address at:

563-585-2854
development@bvmsisters.org

Thank you for your continued support and for being a valued part of the BVM community!



Prayer Association Cards

Show your love and concern for family and friends by sharing the gift of prayer. Choose from an assortment of unique greeting cards for any occasion featuring the artwork of our BVMs. The recipients of these cards will be enrolled in the BVM Prayer Association and included in the monthly Masses and prayers of the Sisters of Charity, BVM.

Check out our online ordering page:
bvmsisters.org/prayer-association

For more information, contact the Office of Development:
563-585-2854 or
development@bvmsisters.org



Join us for Prayer

Masses are livestreamed at:
stream.prestosports.com/bvmsisters