

From Our Associates

Dear Circle of Friends,



Being Pilgrims of Hope

This year has been declared to be a jubilee year by Pope Francis with the theme of Pilgrims of Hope. Many organizations are exploring how to implement that theme into their work. Locally, the Dubuque Area Vocations Association (DAVA) created a discernment poster with the words, "Carried by love, seeds of hope can

spread far and wide." These words resonate with me as they so clearly illustrate the way BVM spirituality has traveled from the sisters to the associates and beyond.

Starting in March, I will facilitate in-person get-togethers of associates, discerners, sisters, and friends who want to explore "Being Pilgrims of Hope" in their communities.

The time together will focus on prayer, community building, and explore how associates can be

supported through local volunteer leaders. More details will be sent out as the various locations and times are solidified. The first meetings will be in the Chicago area on the weekend of March 1-2.

There will be no fees to attend. If you need travel and/or accommodation assistance, please submit a request to the Mrs. Berkeley Fund: members.bvmsisters.org/offices/associates/mrs-berkeley-fund.

—Suzie Wright,
Associate Coordinator

2025 Associate Calendar

February

- 18 Zoom Meet and Greet with Vicki Smurlo, BVM
- 19 Cyber Cluster hosted by Jeanie Fritscher

March

- 1-2 Pilgrims of Hope Prayer Gathering, Chicago Area
- 9 Associate Day of Prayer
- 13 Associate Steering Committee
- 18 Zoom Meet and Greet with Vicki Smurlo, BVM
- 19 Cyber Cluster hosted by Jeanie Fritscher

April

- 10 Associate Steering Committee
- 12 Pilgrims of Hope Prayer Gathering, Location TBD
- 15 Zoom Meet and Greet with Vicki Smurlo, BVM
- 16 Cyber Cluster hosted by Jeanie Fritscher

Associate Steering Committee Update

The Associate Steering Committee has been working hard to move the associate transformation process forward. At a multi-day planning retreat held in October, three focused working groups were established: Interim Structure/Support for Transformation, Organizing Frameworks, and Communications. These groups have been meeting regularly, sharing updates, and collaborating closely with the Associate Steering Committee.

Among their significant achievements is the creation of a mission and vision statement.

VISION

We envision a compassionate world community living in freedom, strengthening relationships, deepening spirituality, and committed to justice.

MISSION

To provide opportunities for individual and collective growth through the sharing of spirituality, social justice actions, and community, uniquely grounded in the spirit and charism of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the core values of freedom, education, charity, and justice.

The accelerated progress of these transformation efforts underscored the need for dedicated leadership in this area. To address this, a proposal for a leadership role was submitted and approved. The individual in this role will report to the Director of BVM Life and Mission and work collaboratively with external consultants, the Associate Steering Committee, and the working groups.

We are deeply grateful to the volunteers who have generously shared their time and talents throughout this process. Your commitment has been essential to the progress we've made. We look forward to continuing this journey together and sharing more updates as we shape the future of the BVM Associate Relationship.

—Eileen O'Shea
Associate Relationship Steering Committee Chair

Save the Date

Associate Commitment Ceremony



M.J. Meister

July 11, 2025
Time TBD

Ceremony is in the Mary Frances Clarke Chapel. Social following in St. Joseph Hall.

We Remember Our Associate



Marilyn Roche

Corryton, Tenn.

Oct. 7, 1931–

Dec. 29, 2024

Accepted April 23, 2006

Obituary:

bvmsisters.org/associate-obituaries.



BVM Mary Jean Ferry (front row, l.), new Associates Paul Schultz and Mary Sack, BVM Marge Sannasardo; Associates Norm Freund (back row, l.), Mary Moothart, Eileen O'Shea, Sharon Scully, Marybeth Coleman, and Jo Clauer celebrate in the Mary Frances Clarke Chapel at Mount Carmel Bluffs in Dubuque, Iowa.

Introducing Two New Associates

We welcome Mary Frances Sack and Paul Francis Schultz as new associates. They reside at Mount Carmel Bluffs in the Terrace Apartments.

Mary and Paul have an interesting story—they changed their middle names to saints: Frances (Cabrini) and Francis (of Assisi), while keeping their original surnames. They have two adult

children and are grandparents. Their marriage has been filled with adventure. They co-founded Chicago's Francis of Assisi Catholic Worker and later started Sunshower Organic Fruit Farm in Michigan, where they raised sheep and organized co-ops.

They moved to Dubuque to explore new educational opportunities and provide healthcare for low-income young women through Mary's work as a nurse practitioner and Paul's work

in sustainability and climate advocacy. Today, they continue to be involved in growing supportive communities and working for justice.

Associate Eileen O'Shea and BVMs Mary Jean Ferry and Marge Sannasardo were their discernment companions. In her letter of affirmation, Mary Jean stated, Mary's "strongest gifts are her beautiful loving heart and her joyful spirit." Eileen shared, "Paul has shared a deep spirituality . . . I am confident that he will generously share his gifts with us, and I welcome him into the BVM Associate Relationship."

Mary and Paul are already engaging with local associates and wider BVM community activities. Their commitment ceremony was held on Jan. 2. It is available at: stream.prestosports.com/bvmsisters.

Associates in Action



Montrose Cluster members Associates Nancy Niles (front row, l.), Clara Schwartz, Faith Holland, BVM Marguerite Murphy; Associate John Bromberek (back row, l.), Fr. Olin Mayfield (from St. James), Associates Lia Avila, Teresa Tiffany, Kathleen Hebron, Peggy Daze, and Dolores Bromberek gathered at Saint James the Less in La Crescenta, Calif., to renew their Associate Promise. After Mass, the cluster enjoyed a meal and a delightful visit. Image by Phil Tiffany.



Northern Illinois Cluster members Helen Gabel (front row, l.) Joanne Yerkes; Jane Pohl (back, l.), Kausar Khokhar, Mary Vallyely, Razia Khokhar, Mo McGrain, and Andy Fitzpatrick gathered at Mary's home on Dec. 6 for their annual renewal of Associate Promise.

BVMs and Associates Join People's March

As this was my very first march, I had no idea what to expect. There was a bit of concern that there could be retaliation or counter-protest to our march, but that was not going to stop me. It only made me more aware and mindful.

As we boarded the plane at Chicago O'Hare, I was aware of the many individuals heading to Washington, D.C. The clothing made it clear what events they would be attending. I found myself becoming quieter, lowering my voice, not wanting to cause any confrontations.

After settling in our hotel, we gathered to pray Friday night and Saturday morning. The weather had warmed, thank goodness, but rain was expected. Our destination was McPherson Park to join the "People's March." As a light rain began, we donned our rain gear and unfurled our banner.

The square was full, mostly with women but also a few men and several children. The clothing and signs were creative. Everyone was friendly, and respectful. Individuals smiled and posed for photos with their signs.

Knowing I would not be able to walk and stand for several hours, I borrowed a walker that had a seat so I could rest when needed. A woman came forward and said, "Clearly you have mobility issues, thank you for being here." I began thanking the men around me for the support they showed us by being present.

At the Lincoln Memorial, a volunteer parted the crowd and escorted me and my companions to a seating area near



Associates Andy Fitzpatrick (l.), Mary Vallely, Mo McGrain, and Michele Miller participate in the People's March in Washington, D.C.

the stage. We heard from those who were concerned with climate change, LGBTQ+ issues, war, hostages, immigration, and reproductive freedom.

After four hours and a five-mile walk, we began our journey home. We passed the Vietnam War Memorial. I would have

liked to stop for a moment and touch the names of those who sacrificed their lives for freedom. As they look down on today's world, I wonder what they would say or feel. Would they give their all again for where we stand today as a nation, or would they take issue with the decisions of Washington, D.C.?

My fears of standing up and speaking out were unfounded. As I marched, I knew I was surrounded by like-minded individuals. I felt safe. Those around me had my back as I had theirs. Respect for all people, no matter their race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, or location in the world, mattered to the 75,000 people who attended. They gave their time, talent, and treasure to say our planet, our environment, and our people matter.

As associates we oppose oppression; we demand justice and seek respect for our planet. We are not alone.

—Associate Mary Vallely



San Jose People's March Discerner Nancy Moreno (l.), Associates Francis De Carvalho, Carol De Carvalho, a friend, Associate Kay Harrison and two more friends demonstrate their support for justice during the People's March in San Jose, Calif.