

Associates live the call to make one

By Suzy Blackburn, Director of Associates, Atlantic-Midwest Province

As carriers of the vision of Blessed Theresa Gerhardinger, SSND associates have heard the call to make one and integrated the mandate to build community in their lives and ministries. Across the Atlantic-Midwest Province, they have put the spiritual heritage of the School Sisters of Notre Dame into action wherever they live or work.

Marsha Burkhardt, associate director of St. Ann Place in West Palm Beach, Florida, working together with sisters and other associates, sees the SSND charism as something to be shared. At St. Ann Place, they minister to the homeless, “people living in abandoned buildings, behind storefronts, tents in the woods. They come to us for clothing, food, showers, and help in restoring some normalcy in their lives.”

For Marsha, association with SSND, especially with **Sisters Mary Oliver Hudon and Carleen Cekal**, co-founders of St. Ann Place, is like being with family. The sisters and associates meet every four to five weeks for prayer and community. They make retreat together once a year for re-covenanting.

“There is a sense of security in knowing that we are surrounded by people in tune with God,” Marsha said.

Associate Christine Oates of Ontario, Canada, summed up her first encounter with SSND in one word: “Wow!” This former parole officer long incorporated Christ’s compassion into her career of working with the wounded and marginalized.

After retirement, she found a new focus when she met the SSNDs who were part of the Stop Human Trafficking group. As Christine sees it, the mission to stop human trafficking “embodies everything Theresa and Caroline embodied,” including education and out-

reach. Christine and 17 others go to schools and other venues to spread the word about human trafficking.

Associate Jean Fredricks of Stratford, Connecticut, teaches pre-kindergarten children at Caroline House, an SSND-sponsored institution offering classes in English and social skills to poor, mostly Latino women and their children in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

“I fell in love with the children,” she said, “and felt it was truly the work I should be doing. The sisters and I have a unique opportunity to foster Mother Theresa’s charism that ‘all will be one.’”

Associate Libby Keady has deepened her connection through her work in SSND-sponsored ministries in Maryland. She recently accepted a position as a campus minister and religion teacher at her alma mater, Notre Dame Preparatory School in Towson.

Previously, she served as the grants manager at Marian House in Baltimore. Marian House provides housing and services to about 200 homeless women and children every year, as her mission.

“On a personal level, Marian House has been such a blessing to me because it is empowering to have meaningful work,” Libby said.

She hopes to pass on the inspiration she gets from association with SSND to her young daughters.

At the Atlantic-Midwest Province’s annual associates’ meeting in 2016, area coordinators were asked to incorporate the focus of the four province commitments – water, Haiti, immigration and anti-human trafficking – in their programming. A year later, all areas could report that they had moved forward on this goal. Associates have not only heard about the charism of Blessed Theresa, they live it every year. □

