



On IHM Sisters Mission

A publication of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Malvern, PA

Our Mission: to evangelize, to catechize, and to teach



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at Villa Maria Academy High School*

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In memoriam

As Pope Francis opened the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica to officially begin the Year of Jubilee, he said, "*With haste, let us set out to behold the Lord who is born for us, our hearts joyful and attentive, ready to meet Him and then to bring hope to the way we live our daily lives.*" Pope Francis, in proclaiming the theme of this Jubilee Year as "Pilgrims of Hope," reminds us that this special year presents an opportunity for us to pause, reflect and reconnect with our spiritual roots while looking forward with hope.



This invitation rings true in the hearts of every IHM as we are fully aware of our unique gift of the IHM Charism bestowed on our founders in 1845 by the working of the Holy Spirit. We articulate this Charism as Love, Creative Hope, and Fidelity. Within these pages of *On Mission* you will encounter some of the various ways the IHM Charism is expressed in the everyday lives of our sisters and those who join us in living out this unique gift.

The students at Villa Maria Academy High School offer us inspiration as they, in their youthful enthusiasm, embrace what it means to integrate into all aspects of their lives the IHM Charism graces of Love, Creative Hope, and Fidelity that permeate their school community. It is no coincidence that their mission-centered focus this year, "Lifted by Hope," mirrors our Holy Father's exhortation.

Sister Laura Downing, our IHM Vocation Director, and Sister Koreen Cote, Assistant Director of the National Shrine of St. John Neumann, are also familiar with the Holy Father's invitation to view ourselves as "Pilgrims of Hope." These two sisters know that the IHM Charism reflects the importance of journeying with others in faith, offering support and uplifting others to know God's Provident love in their lives.

The efficacy of the IHM Charism is seen clearly in the lives of others who continue to live out their faith through concrete acts of love and service. Our volunteers at Camilla Hall and our recent Fideli Corde and Servientes Corde recipients witness so clearly that our IHM personal vocational calling is reflected back to us through the lives of others. It is a profound gift to the IHM Congregation.

May this year of Jubilee bestow on our Church and our world abundant graces and blessings as we find new ways to love and serve others and to be for one another joyful messengers of hope. "*Let us go in haste!*"

Happy Jubilee,

Sister Mary Ellen Tennity, IHM
General Superior

Take the Word of God with You

As You Go

“BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER”

John 19:27

As we approach Lent, we will be thinking and praying about Jesus' passion and death on the cross. It always amazed me that while Jesus was dying on the cross for us, he was still thinking about others and loving us. Not only does he ask his father to forgive his persecutors while they are torturing him, but he also forgives a repentant criminal from the cross, and finds a home for his mother. The Church teaches us that when Jesus gave Mary to John as his mother, Jesus was also giving his mother to each one of us.

My grandfather died when I was 10 and his prayer card had a picture of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on it. I kept that card in the mirror over my bureau and even as a teen, I would take it and gaze at her image, admiring her purity and who she was. I wasn't a devout Catholic at the time, but I always had a profound respect for our Blessed Mother.

When I was about to enter religious life as a Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I was packing up my personal belongings and I took the prayer card, still in my mirror, and gazed at it again. It occurred to me that all those years when I had been looking at the Immaculate Heart of Mary, she was looking with love at me!

Years ago, there was a billboard in Norristown, Pennsylvania that said, "Pray one Hail Mary." My older brother Frank mentioned it to me on the phone one day. He said, "Every time I pass that billboard, I do just that. I pray a Hail Mary." I told him I did that too. When we ended our phone calls, Frank would say, "Let's pray together." We would pray an Our Father, a Hail Mary, and a Glory Be.

When Frank died very suddenly and tragically, I was more than heartbroken. Then, I remembered how we prayed the Hail Mary together the week before he died. Although I wasn't praying for Frank at the time of his death, Mary was. Every time we conclude the Hail Mary, we pray, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of death." I was immediately comforted by the fact that because Frank asked for Mary's prayers at the hour of his death, she was praying for him and looking at him with love.

Behold your mother. She is beholding you too.



Sister Emily Vincent Rebalsky
Program Director
Villa Maria by the Sea Retreat Center

Capturing the "Spirit" of the IHM Charism



The concept of “charism” at Villa Maria Academy High School (VMAHS) is not just a spiritual term, it is a lived experience. *Charism*, derived from the Greek word *charis*, meaning “gift,” embodies the unique mission, spirit, and values that distinguish a particular Congregation. The Charism of Love, Creative Hope, and Fidelity embraced at VMAHS is deeply rooted in the legacy and vision of the IHM Congregation. Villa Maria Academy High School students, faculty, and staff have captured the spirit of the IHM Charism and found creative ways to incorporate the Charism into their classrooms, departments, and the broader school community.

BEGINNINGS

“The IHM Charism is alive and well at Villa Maria Academy High School!” says Sister Marie Claire Matsinger, the school’s Director of Mission and Ministry and Chair of the VMAHS Faculty Charism Committee. Sister’s enthusiasm reflects the school’s dedication to embodying and deepening the values of Love, Creative Hope, and Fidelity, hallmarks of the IHM tradition. In 2012, Sister Regina Ryan, Head of School, founded the IHM Charism Committee. Her vision was to foster a deeper awareness and understanding of each aspect of the IHM Charism within the school community and to put it into practice. Building on this foundation, the school initiated an Advisory Board Charism Committee in 2013 to further keep the Charism vibrant and alive. This committee created a publication called *A History of our IHM Principals since 1872* which serves as a valuable resource for further understanding the legacy and impact of the IHM Charism over the years as exemplified in these religious women.

HERE AND NOW

The IHM Charism truly shines at Villa where teachers, staff, and students are immersed in its spirit. At every Board meeting, following the opening prayer, Sister John Evelyn DiTrollo, a



The most recent IHM Sisters who have faithfully served at Villa are pictured from left to right. Back row - S. Mary Jo Ely, S. Marie Claire Matsinger, S. Stephen Anne Roderiguez, S. Regina Ryan. Front row - S. Dolores Margaret Murray, and S. Anne Marie Lavan and S. Kathleen Dunn (both now residing at Camilla Hall)

member of the IHM Congregational Leadership, presents a “Mission Moment,” a timely reflection on living the IHM Charism here and now. At every Induction Meeting (a monthly meeting of teachers and staff who are new to Villa Maria), Sister Stephen Anne Roderiguez, Associate Head of School, begins the meeting with the IHM Charism prayer, followed by a “Mission Moment” showing how the IHM Charism is embedded in the Villa mission. “Our mission is to sow and nurture the seeds of Love, Creative Hope, and Fidelity in imitation of Mary, the woman who said ‘yes’ to God,” adds Sister Marie Claire.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Today, there is a Faculty Charism Committee as well as a Student Charism Committee. The Faculty Charism Committee consists of 12 members who meet at least once a month. The Villa Student Charism Committee consists of 98 students for this academic year who are divided into small groups of eight or nine with a moderator from the Faculty Charism Committee. These students have a general meeting twice a year and meet with their individual moderators on a regular basis depending upon the initiatives they have undertaken.

CHARISM IN ACTION

Beginning with the 2019-2020 academic school year, the Faculty Charism Committee introduced a four-year school cycle with a central theme focusing on each aspect of the Charism. The themes include “Anchored in Love,” “Lifted by Hope” (the current theme for this year), “Called to Fidelity,” and “Walking with Mary.”

This year’s theme of hope encourages faculty, staff, and students to envision themselves following in the footsteps of Mother Theresa Maxis (a co-founder of the Congregation) and her pioneering spirit. “We hope the school community will keep their eyes, ears, and hearts attuned to opportunities to serve in prayer, presence, acts of kindness, and support of one another,” says Sister Marie Claire.

While the IHM Charism in its “entirety” is discussed throughout the school year, Sister Marie Claire acknowledges that during a student’s four years at Villa Maria, she will be immersed in all four dimensions of the Charism “through a variety of resources – spiritual, academic, social, and emotional.”

Students seek to deepen their awareness of and understanding of each aspect of the IHM Charism in many ways including:

- visiting the IHM Motherhouse and Camilla Hall (the healthcare and retirement home of the IHM sisters) at least once during their time at Villa.
- responding to and participating in the Founders' Day celebration marking the founding of the IHM Congregation on November 10, 1845.
- collaborating with the Faculty and Student Charism Committees to spread the message of the IHM Charism through monthly challenges.
- engaging in regular conversations, projects, and outreach with their moderators.

Throughout the year, all faculty members seek creative ways to bring aspects of the Charism into their classrooms. The spirit of the IHM Charism is reflected in morning and afternoon prayers (many written by students) and in the music ministry and numerous prayer services and liturgies held throughout the year. This year's theme, "Lifted by Hope," has inspired a technology teacher's students to create brochures demonstrating the power of creative hope in their lives; students in math classes create classroom prayers asking for God's help in lifting others up in hope. The Fine Arts Department paints, dances, and makes music to lift others' spirits; the Theater Department's fall production was a dinner theater focusing on hope and the theme of the Christmas concert was "Together in Hope." In addition, 23 seniors serve as Eucharistic Ministers at daily Communion services before each lunch period, "lifting one another in hope." An intention book in Chapel, filled by student requests for prayers, attests to their hope in the providence of God. All students, along with faculty and

staff, bear the current "Lifted by Hope" logo on the back of their ID cards as a constant reminder to embody the steadfast spirit of Mother Theresa Maxis.

Students are recognized by the Admissions Department for their embodiment of the IHM Charism through the creation of a Charism Scholarship offered to a recipient from each of the elementary feeder schools. In addition, Charism Awards are presented to students at graduation who have followed in the footsteps of the IHM patrons and founders – St. Alphonsus, Mother Theresa Maxis, and Father Gillet.



"Our students will be the first to tell you that they learn 'Creative Hope' by seeing it come alive in their teachers, their counselors, their administrators, and the various members of the staff here at Villa Maria."

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Outside of the classroom, each student Charism group forms a special bond with an "adopted sister" at Camilla Hall who has devoted her life to these values. Throughout the year, the students keep their adopted sisters close in heart and mind. "The students

look forward to meeting their 'sister' and hearing how Love, Creative Hope, and Fidelity have played a part throughout her many years as an IHM," Sister Marie Claire says. "They remember their 'sister' with cards and small gifts, especially on her birthday, her feast day, and times of seasonal celebrations."

RIPPLE EFFECT

Creating a culture where the IHM Charism is central to life at Villa Maria has profoundly affected students, faculty, and staff, as well as the wider Villa community. "Students at Villa Maria are learning to 'drink deeply' of the legacy they have been given as daughters of Mary," shares Sister Marie Claire. "Our faculty and staff, likewise, open their hearts to the power of God dwelling within and among them." Sister has also found that Charism initiatives such as annual retreats for faculty, staff, students and alumnae alike are "safeguarded and appreciated as opportunities to see and make use of the gifts we have been given."

Reflecting on her role as Chair of the Faculty Charism Committee since its inception, Sister Marie Claire says that "it is a joy to step back and see the IHM Charism at work – seeing the legacy we have been given alive and flourishing. Hopefully, like a mustard seed, the seeds of the IHM Charism grown here in this 'House of Mary' (Villa Maria) will continue to grow and spread far beyond the boundaries of this campus. Truly, we are beholding and listening and walking together in a 'new creation' as joyful bearers of God's redeeming love."

Photos on next page - Villa students embody the IHM Charism by serving in many ways such as at the annual Camilla Hall Craft Fair and Oktoberfest (top) and at the St. Agnes Day Center (bottom).



*"Our mission is to sow and nurture the seeds of
Love, Creative Hope, and Fidelity in imitation of Mary,
the woman who said 'yes' to God."*

— Sister Marie Claire



IHM Spotlights

*Sister Laura Downing, Vocation Director
Malvern, PA*



“The call to religious life is really a great calling! I absolutely love my ministry!”

What is the key to living a fulfilling life? For Sister Laura Downing it’s living her vocation as an IHM and following her deep desire to lead others to Christ. “Living your vocation, whatever it is, is the greatest and most fulfilling adventure you can have,” says Sister Laura as she reflects on her current ministry as Vocation Director for the IHM Congregation.

GREATEST DESIRE

“My greatest passion is helping young people develop a meaningful relationship with God,” Sister Laura says proudly. In her current vocation ministry, she is able to do just that as she offers guidance and support for women discerning a call to religious life. Sister assumed her current position in the summer of 2024 and has been involved with vocations as an IHM Vocation Committee member and as committee chair during the 2023-2024 academic year.

Feeling drawn to work with young people and heeding her call as an educator, Sister Laura began teaching Theology at Bishop O’Connell High School in Arlington, Virginia, followed by teaching positions at Cardinal Gibbons High School in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Immaculata University. Beyond the classroom, she has led high school retreats and served in campus ministry, creating spiritual spaces for young people to deepen their

faith. She recognizes how the various roles and experiences throughout her vocational journey have continued to shape her approach to guiding others in faith. “In hindsight, I can see how my previous mission assignments have worked together to prepare me for this ministry.”

DAY-TO-DAY

Sister Laura witnesses firsthand how discerning and committing to one’s calling can lead to deep fulfillment. She meets with women who are interested in religious life but not yet formally discerning



As Vocation Director, Sister Laura participated in the Diocese of Richmond’s Fiat Days and explained how to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.

a call to the IHM Congregation. For those who wonder what life as an IHM looks like, she plans “Come and See” events throughout the year to meet the sisters, ask questions, and explore what an IHM vocation entails. She also travels to high schools and university campuses to spread the word about vocations. She attends vocation-related events and works diligently to build relationships with women discerning the call through young adult outreach efforts and through social media. She also collaborates with the IHM vocation team in Peru, the IHM Congregational Vocation Committee, and with local vocation representatives.

Anyone who has met Sister Laura can feel the unmistakable energy she brings to her role in vocation ministry. “The call to religious life is really a great calling!” she says with a smile. “I absolutely love my ministry!” She hopes to build upon the culture of vocations fostered by former IHM Vocation Directors and to build relationships between young women discerning religious life with those (sisters, clergy, and laity) who have guided them on their vocational journey. “I am humbled by the responsibility and opportunity that this work entails both for the Congregation and in the lives of the women whom I meet. It gives me great joy and peace.”

CHANGING TIMES

Like any job, the role of Vocation Director comes with challenges especially in a time of fewer religious sisters and with the cultural influence of social media. “So much of discernment happens online now,” Sister Laura adds. “So many of the young women that I speak with have no “in-person” experience of religious sisters, IHM or otherwise. Everything they know comes through the Internet or social media. Because of this, creating a consistent, authentic, and attractive online presence that



Sister Laura enjoyed her time serving in campus ministry at Immaculata University.

appeals to the communication style and preferences of millennials and the Gen Z population is so important. I am constantly looking to our youngest members for their insights.”

RELIGIOUS CALLING

Sister Laura’s personal calling to religious life began in fifth grade when she had a sense that she would one day be like her principal, a Benedictine sister. After that, she says the thought of religious life “popped up occasionally” despite attending public school and not having interactions with religious sisters other than her aunt (a Religious Sister of Mercy), and the sisters she encountered during her Irish dance competitions whom she later discovered were IHMs. Her calling became more persistent during her time at Immaculata College (now University), and she slowly found herself “attracted to the joy and holy normalcy of the IHMs.” She began formally discerning the call to religious life in the fall of 1998 and entered the IHM Congregation at the start of her senior year at Immaculata in 2001.

She credits her family, particularly her father and grandmother, for instilling values of self-sacrifice and generosity. She is also deeply grateful for the support and guidance of her religious community including Sister Elaine Glanz, her sponsor, and Sister Kathleen Ann Donnelly, her Vocation Director. She remembers those who influenced her academically (such as

Dr. Elizabeth Nagel and Msgr. Christopher Schreck) by fostering a love of Theology, scripture, and the saints. She describes Saint Maria Goretti as the first saint she ever learned about who made her feel like a holy life was possible for “regular” people.

PERSONAL LIFE

Outside of her ministry, Sister says she is a “nerd at heart” who enjoys reading and learning different languages including Koine (New Testament) Greek. She also enjoys the theology of ministry and how that shapes who we are and what we do. Many people might not know that she was a former Irish dancer until a fall and a torn Achilles tendon (in front of a pep rally of 1,400 students!) led to the end of dancing competitively.

COMING FULL CIRCLE

These days, besides helping young people grow closer to God, Sister Laura is living out her calling to “help all people (young and not-so-young) find their place and role within the Church and providing them with the opportunities and formation to do that well.” She has found that a fulfilling life is not found in external accomplishments but in following God’s call. She hopes to help others experience the joy and peace that she has found in her calling, creating a legacy of inspiration and encouragement that will nurture vocations for generations to come.

Sister Koreen Marie Cote

Assistant Director

National Shrine of St. John Neumann



Below St. Peter the Apostle Church in North Philadelphia is the shrine of Saint John Neumann, the fourth Bishop of Philadelphia and the first American male to be canonized. Once the Redemptorist burial crypt, this sacred space was chosen by Bishop John Neumann himself as his final resting place, marking it a site of profound significance for the faithful who gather here.

Sister Koreen Marie Cote is Assistant Director of the shrine and ministers alongside Father Jack Kingsbury, CSsR, Shrine Director. The shrine is a piece of history but also a living testament to Bishop John Neumann's mission to serve and uplift all people. It is a place of pilgrimage and prayer open to all who desire to learn more about the life and legacy of St. John Neumann.



In 1859, St. John Neumann invited several IHM sisters from Monroe to come to Philadelphia to teach.

PRIEST OF THE PEOPLE

"The Shrine is a place of welcome for all," says Sister Koreen. "The Shrine reflects the spirit of Bishop John Neumann who in his days of ministry was known to be very approachable. He was a priest of the people!"

Born in 1811 in Bohemia, John Neumann was ordained a priest in New York in 1836 and joined the Redemptorist order in 1840. In 1852, Pope Pius IX named him the fourth Bishop of Philadelphia where he served a rapidly growing immigrant population, offering spiritual counsel to those seeking a new life. Known for his humility and accessibility, he spoke ten languages and warmly welcomed those who sought his spiritual advice.

IHM CONNECTION

Bishop Neumann was committed to Catholic education. During his time as Bishop, he organized the first Catholic diocesan school system in the United States. Through this endeavor, he also established a connection with the IHMs. In collaboration with Redemptorist priest, Father Louis Gillet, and Mother Theresa Maxis (co-founders of the IHM Congregation), Bishop Neumann invited the IHM sisters to come to Philadelphia to teach in the city's diocesan schools. This partnership not only strengthened the mission of both the Redemptorists and the IHMs but also laid a foundation for the IHM sisters' widespread influence in education and evangelization including opportunities to minister outside the United States. Bishop Neumann went on to found more than 80 parishes, over 34 schools, and initiated the yearly practice of the Forty Hours Devotion. He served in his role of Bishop until his death in 1860. He was canonized in 1977.

ALL ARE WELCOME

The shrine welcomes pilgrims of all ages and from all geographical locations including those who journey from outside the U.S. from as far away as Canada, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Students frequently visit the shrine as do parish groups, Knights of Columbus members, as well as senior and youth groups. "Last year, we had over 100 different pilgrimages enter this sacred space," adds Sister Koreen.

St. John Neumann's gift of hospitality and ministering to people of all walks of life is evident in the shrine today and exemplified by the Redemptorist Fathers who staff the Shrine and St. Peter the Apostle Church. "The Spirit of St. Alphonsus, their founder, known as the "tireless worker for the abandoned poor" is quite evident in the shrine through the priests' visible presence and their warm hospitality," Sister adds.

PURPOSE

Those visiting the shrine for the first time can delve deeply into the life and legacy of St. John Neumann. For others, the shrine inspires them to bring their deepest needs before Christ through the intercession of the popular saint. For many, the shrine is a beacon of hope as they pray for physical or spiritual healing in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament or leave their petitions near the body of St. John Neumann or by the icon of the Our Lady of Perpetual Help (whom the Redemptorists have had a special devotion to since 1866). Others regularly attend daily

Mass and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The shrine is a place where history and spirituality intersect inspiring everyone who enters.

SHRINE MINISTRY

Being a part of the shrine ministry team since August of 2023, Sister Koreen is privileged to meet people from all geographical areas and all walks of life. She says, “Those who enter unite physically and spiritually with other pilgrims and create a community of prayer. They sense an inner transformation, an ongoing spiritual metamorphosis as they “breathe in” all that speaks to them in this sacred place. With lighter hearts, with greater confidence that their petitions have been heard and greater hope for the days to come, pilgrims return to their daily life and share their blessings with others.”

At the shrine, Sister schedules and plans pilgrimages, serves as a guide (in English and Spanish) when needed, assists with financial matters, communicates with shrine constituents, collaborates with other shrines in the area, and helps plan special events such as the Feast Day of St. John Neumann (January 5), Holy Hours, Healing Services, and Annual Appeals. “Our goal is to maintain the stability of the shrine while exploring different avenues to enhance our online presence,” she shares. “This

year’s Annual Appeal focuses on improving the shrine’s social media presence to reach a broader audience, especially those who live far from the shrine and those who are homebound so that they may receive spiritual support through the intercession of St. John Neumann.”

Sister is currently working towards her certification in Spiritual Direction. She will be able to offer this ministry in English as well as Spanish (thanks to her time serving in Peru as well as attending Maryknoll Language School in Cochabamba, Bolivia where she learned the Spanish language) to those shrine visitors who request it. Most important, she is a visible IHM presence as she extends a warm welcome to all pilgrims who pass through the doors of St. John Neumann Shrine.

FORMER ROLES

Before ministering at the shrine, Sister Koreen was a teacher, vice-principal, principal, formation director, youth minister (in Peru) and caregiver (for her father). She grew up in a mission church, which later became Our Lady of Good Hope Parish in the small town of Camden, Maine where her family was surrounded by many priest and religious acquaintances. In her youth, she had an interest in missionary work. When her family moved to Miami for her father’s job, it was there that she met the IHMs as a student at



Sister Koreen serves at the shrine alongside Father Jack Kingsbury, CSsR, Shrine Director.

Notre Dame Academy. “I appreciated the joyful presence, genuine interest, and constant support of the IHMs during my time at Notre Dame Academy,” Sister recalls. Her college years were spent at Immaculata University where during an interim she was offered the opportunity to work with the Glenmary Missionaries in Kentucky. “We visited the poor in the “hallows” of the Ohio Valley located in the Appalachian Mountains. I was surprised by the great poverty of these families as well as the lack of basic education,” she says. After this experience, the call to do something “different” with her life became pivotal in her decision to enter religious life.

A MISSION FOR ALL

Reflecting on her shrine ministry, Sister shares, “I am energized to minister alongside the Redemptorist Fathers as we collaborate to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and his redeeming love to all and to inspire people to bring their deepest physical and spiritual needs to Jesus through the intercession of St. John Neumann.” She hopes all pilgrims will come to know and understand the saint’s famous quote: “Everyone who breathes has a mission, has work. We are not sent into this world for nothing. We are not born at random. God sees every one of us. He creates every soul for a purpose. He has an end for each of us.”



The shrine welcomes pilgrims from all walks of life and all geographical areas including this group of young adults from Texas.

Powerhouse Presence

CAMILLA HALL

Camilla Hall is known as the IHM Powerhouse of Prayer. Every resident and employee will attest that while prayer and care is at the heart of Camilla, it is a busy healthcare center serving as many as 200 sisters. Every resident is well cared for, and, as sisters are able, they in turn care for the needs of others by assisting at meal time, helping in various offices, delivering mail, or taking time to visit a sister whose mobility is limited. Every employee is welcomed as a partner in the ministry and mission of the Congregation and serves with heart and mind rooted in the IHM Charism of Love, Creative Hope, and Fidelity. But even with the sisters' assistance and the tireless efforts of the dedicated staff, many needs at Camilla would remain unmet without the vital support of a cadre of volunteers.

We invite you to read the inspiring story of one Camilla volunteer (and former journalist), Steve Crowe, as he shares his journey of joining the Volunteer Program at Camilla Hall.

Many years ago, I was taught by a very wise professor at Penn State who said that the best way to write a story is to tell a story. So, I begin with sharing my story of how I became a Camilla Hall volunteer.

REUNITED

I was recently retired and looking for something to do with my newfound time away from travel, meetings, and hectic schedules. One day, while riding along Route 352 in Malvern, I noticed the sign for Camilla Hall, the home for the retired IHM sisters. I wondered if any sisters remembered me from my days as a young boy at St. Madeline Parish and School in Ridley Park, PA.

I made a phone call and introduced myself to the Volunteer Director at Camilla Hall, a wonderful, kind woman named Sister Mary Gibbons. She welcomed my offer to visit weekly to play bingo with the resident sisters. One week later, I

came early to the third-floor parlor to find one of the sisters already there, head down, and waiting for the game to begin. I was a bit nervous getting started having not played bingo in many years. Then I thought to myself, "how hard can this be?" I greeted the sister but could not see her face. When sister asked me where I was from, I told her I was originally from Ridley Park where I attended school at St. Madeline's. She told me she once taught there and asked me if I remembered my favorite teacher. I answered quickly that it was Sister Maria Prudens, my eighth-grade teacher. With that, she raised her head and smiled at me. It was she! I will never forget the look on her face as long as I live. It brought tears to my eyes as I had not seen her in nearly 50 years! I knew that this was where I was called to be.

BRINGING JOY

For over 10 years, I have been volunteering to play bingo with the



Current Volunteer Director, Sister Anne Marie Burton (left), and former Volunteer Director, Sister Mary Gibbons (right), are grateful for the many past and present volunteers who serve at Camilla Hall.

sisters. Bingo is just one of many activities at Camilla Hall where volunteers can serve. Each week, the bingo game brings as many as 15 to 20 players. This weekly activity is headed up by Helen Johnston, who has been volunteering at Camilla for 31 years and also has a twin

sister residing there. Along with the help of Sister Jean Annette Eno, Helen makes sure that the tables are set and the penny prizes are ready to be awarded. There is genuine excitement among the players each week. The big weekly winners get to pick from a bag of prizes while all receive special treats such as water ice or scratch-off lottery tickets.

“I never really think about my own happiness when helping with bingo but when one of the sisters who plays yells “bingo,” I feel smiles in my heart,” says Sister Jean. Helen adds, “I feel very happy seeing the sisters come to bingo and enjoying the game while meeting up with other sisters they don’t get to see so often.”

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Originally shepherded by Sister Maureen Agnes and Sister Mary Gibbons, the Volunteer Program at Camilla Hall is now led by Sister Anne Marie Burton and assisted by Sister Georgiana Connell. Both sisters are dedicated to providing a variety of activities for the resident sisters to enjoy. Today, the Volunteer Program boasts of more than 125 men and women who visit daily or weekly in service to these wonderful sisters who have served God and



A longstanding volunteer at Camilla Hall, Helen Johnston (center) looks forward to bingo games with the resident sisters, Dorothy Goodrich (left) and Eileen Dugan (right).

the community for so many years. Some volunteers help serve meals in the dining room while others visit with the sisters to brighten their day. Former nurses also volunteer their time and assist the current nursing staff with overall care. It is interesting that many of the volunteers note that the sisters and administrators walking through the building are often thanking them for volunteering. Yet, these same volunteers feel that they should thank the sisters for allowing them to visit and be a part of their lives.

also welcomes help over the holiday seasons for volunteers to visit and spend time with the sisters.

A BLESSING

In the end, the real story within this written story is that there are many wonderful women who have spent their entire lives in service to God. In many ways, they have made our world better and continue to make us better people by allowing us to serve them. Who knows? If you volunteer at Camilla, you might just find that classroom teacher who made such an impact on your life too.



Sister Jean Annette Eno enjoys organizing and playing bingo with the resident sisters.

“Our volunteers are so generous with their time, and they bring such joy and a happy spirit to the sisters,” says Sister Anne Marie. Although the current volunteers do so much on a daily basis, Sister Anne Marie is always looking for ways to expand activities and provide support for all who reside at Camilla Hall. Sister Anne Marie hopes to add additional volunteers to help support the Dining Services staff on weekends or evenings. She

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***To learn more about
volunteer opportunities
at Camilla Hall,
contact Sister Anne
Marie Burton at
(484) 321-5629.***

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2024

Fideli Corde and Servientes Corde Award Recipients

On November 10, four outstanding friends of the IHM Congregation and one special group of healthcare professionals were recognized with a Mass and ceremony honoring the Fideli Corde ("Faithful Heart") and Servientes Corde ("Servant Heart") awards. Congratulations to the Fideli Corde award recipients John Clark, Deacon Leonard DeMasi, Joseph Glackin, and Alvin Walton and the Servientes Corde award recipient, the staff of Paoli Hospital.

Fideli Corde Award Recipients

John Clark



A casual conversation with one of the IHM sisters ignited a fire in the heart of John Clark, which led to a life-long commitment to the IHMs. John asked how he might volunteer his time to the Congregation and a sister suggested that he consider volunteering at the

White Elephant table at Camilla Hall's Spring Bazaar (an event now held in the fall and called Oktoberfest). Sister's suggestion led to John meeting Sister Eunice Timoney, who spearheaded the White Elephant table and the rest, as they say, is "history." Working together with Sister Eunice, John became a steadfast partner in organizing the White Elephant table and the two forged an enduring friendship. Over the past 40 years, John's steadfast commitment to this important Congregational fundraiser helped secure thousands of dollars toward the maintenance of Camilla Hall. John works countless hours before, during and after the event and is always available when needed. He also extends the IHM "mission to the poor" by bringing donations that are not purchased at the White Elephant to a variety of other charitable organizations for their benefit. John is also called upon throughout the year to help distribute or sell additional items donated to the Congregation. Over the years, John has forged a bond of friendship with many IHM sisters.

Leonard DeMasi



Deacon Leonard DeMasi has been associated with St. Monica Parish and the IHMs since he was three years old attending St. Monica Daycare and continuing on to St. Monica School. Leonard gratefully acknowledges that it was at St. Monica

School that he had "the most dedicated and competent teachers" which inspired him to pursue a career in education. After graduating from St. John Neumann High School, Leonard entered the Archdiocesan Cadet Teacher Program where he pursued his degree at St. Joseph's University while also teaching. Leonard went on to teach alongside the IHMs at St. Rose of Lima School in West Philadelphia for 40 years. After his retirement from classroom teaching, and while serving as the parish Deacon, Leonard assumed the role of Director of Religious Education in St. Monica Parish. Leonard has demonstrated in countless ways his deep gratitude, love, and loyalty to the IHM sisters through generous gifts, delicious dinner treats, support of the Camilla Hall Oktoberfest, and promotion of the IHM Spiritual Treasury for all his Christmas, Easter and birthday cards. It's an honor to recognize Leonard's 52 years of faithful love and service to the people of God and the IHMs.

Joseph Glackin



Joseph Glackin began his long history with the IHMs at an early age when his two sisters entered the IHM Congregation. Joe has demonstrated the IHM Charism grace of Fidelity in his desire to be of service and to bring God's redeeming love to those he meets. As a

North Catholic High School student, he and his friends spent the summer painting Holy Innocents Convent which launched him into a lifetime of loving service to the IHMs and many others. As Joe got older, he assisted his sisters and their friends in moving to their new assignments. When his sister was missioned in Peru, he volunteered at the annual South American Yard Sale each year. He never forgot his allegiance to North Catholic and served in recruiting students and supporting the school's activities until it closed. When his daughter attended Little Flower High School, Joe was her daily chauffeur to and from the long commute from Maternity BVM. He served on the Little Flower Advisory Board promoting fundraising efforts, supporting the school's activities, and recruiting new school families. Joe also assisted with socials at St. Joseph's Manor, fundraising for Our Lady of Confidence School, serving supper at St. Francis Inn in Kensington, driving retired Grey Nuns to doctor appointments, distributing food at Little Flower during COVID, and working the White Elephant at Camilla Hall's Oktoberfest.

Alvin Walton



When asked who is at the heart of the Transportation Department at Camilla Hall, the answer from our sisters is always, unequivocally, Alvin Walton. Alvin has been both a driver and a coordinator in the transportation department at Camilla Hall for over 24 years. The

sisters who work with Alvin emphasize his dedication and competence, his flexibility and his gentle sense of humor. They describe him as "always willing to go above and beyond" in every situation he encounters. Alvin's day usually begins at 5:30 a.m. but on occasion he comes in at 4:00 a.m. His day can sometimes extend beyond closing time. Nothing is too much trouble for Alvin and his motto is always "we can work it out." Not only does Alvin mentor new drivers, passing on to them the importance of the quality of care that is expected, he also oversees the maintenance and care of the vans and cars that are used to transport the sisters. Alvin is a living example of the IHM Charism in action and is always willing to go the extra mile literally and figuratively. He is regarded for his patience, kindness, gentleness, and compassion. In the words of one of the Camilla residents, "Alvin is a constant, caring presence within the Camilla Hall community. His gentleness and patience inspire trust and confidence in each sister he encounters."

Servientes Corde Award Recipient

Paoli Hospital Group **Jim Paradis, President**

Paoli Hospital (formerly called The Homeopathic Hospital of West Chester) opened its doors in 1913 with seven rooms and a children's ward. In July of 1966, this little community hospital moved to its present location, was renamed Paoli Hospital, and celebrated its new ability to serve more patients with greater resources than ever before. Today, Paoli Hospital has a 249-bed capacity, 1,344 full time employees, is a level II trauma center, and has an Emergency Room that treats 48,800 people in the course of one year and operates numerous departments that specialize in exceptional medical and surgical services. The IHM Congregation is grateful to the doctors, nurses, administration, and staff of Paoli Hospital who have cared for our sisters for almost six decades with reverence, compassion, and love. The staff at Paoli have helped "nurse" our sisters back to health and accompanied many through treatments, testing, and procedures with loving care. One of their most sacred tasks is to hold a sister's hand, reassure her, and attend to her in the last minutes of her life. The Congregation has great confidence and peace in knowing our sisters are in the hands of so many wonderful professionals who "serve with love, care, and compassion."



Meet Samantha Scharf, Postulant

For Samantha Scharf, the call to enter religious life seems like a natural one. Surrounded by IHMs for most of her life and desiring to be a teacher, Samantha has found her home with the IHM Congregation since entering as a Postulant in September of 2024.



IHM PRESENCE

"I have known the IHM sisters my entire life," says Samantha, who attended St. Cecila School in Philadelphia where the IHMs minister. "I always admired the sisters and felt that there was something special about them. I watched the sisters serve us students so generously and saw their deep faith. They were some of the happiest people I knew and were always there to listen or answer my questions,"

AN EARLY CALL

Samantha says that, "Growing up, the idea of religious life would come and go, but it was always there." While attending Saint Cecilia Elementary School, she told her friends that one day she would be an IHM sister. Since she didn't attend an IHM high school, that desire faded a bit but the

turning point in her discernment came during her senior year. After not seeing the sisters regularly for a few years, one day they called to invite her for pizza. At the time, she didn't want to go, but thankfully her father insisted. "It was December, and I was deciding where to go to college with Immaculata being one of the options. After that night, I chose to attend Immaculata."

COLLEGE YEARS

In the presence of the IHMs once again at Immaculata, Samantha explored the idea of religious life more intently. "I reconnected with the sisters and saw their generosity, joy, and love for God in a more mature way. I was studying education and knew I wanted to be a teacher, so the fact that many of our sisters still worked or had worked in education drew me to them." At the end of her freshmen year, she connected with the IHM Vocation Director. "It was a blessing, and I truly felt that this was where God was calling me to be. I have felt joy and peace and continue to feel that way since entering."

During college, Samantha student taught for a semester at Saint Lucy School for Students with Visual Impairments in Philadelphia and also worked as an instructional aide. "I loved working with the students," she says. "They taught me more than I could teach them. I saw first-hand how they could do anything they set their minds to." She was amazed by her students who were fully immersed in school life despite their visual challenges. "The students at Saint Lucy's do not know what the word 'can't' means. They have taught me not to let anything be a burden or

an obstacle to achieving my goals as they do not let their disability get in the way of their life," she adds.

FAMILY INFLUENCE

Samantha credits her grandfather with influencing her religious calling. "My PopPop was a holy person and seeing how he lived his life was an inspiration to me." His faithful witness and his devotion to his family deeply affected Samantha's own faith journey. "He gave everything to his family. His faith was central in his life." When her grandfather retired, he lived a life of service helping those in need by driving people who needed rides to their doctor's appointments. "My grandfather would always say that Jesus would do the same," Samantha recalls. She knows her grandfather would be happy with her decision to enter the convent.

PRESENT DAYS

Samantha is currently furthering her studies in Theology at Immaculata and working at St. Patrick School in Malvern in their resource room with first through eighth grade students who have learning accommodation needs. One day a week she visits the sisters at Camilla Hall. "It's incredibly beautiful to visit and hear their stories of how they have freely given themselves to God, and how God has worked in their lives," she says. The resident sisters at Camilla are hopeful as they witness young women answering the same call they did so many years ago. Samantha recalls one sister's words of wisdom, "If you have half as wonderful a time as I had in this community, you will have a beautiful life."



Companions in Prayer and Ministry

On December 2, 2024, the sisters at Sacred Heart Convent in Havertown, PA welcomed the IHM Companions from St. Pius X Parish, Broomall, PA to become a blended group of Companions from the two parishes. What a delightful greeting each Companion experienced as she entered Sacred Heart Convent!

As Sister Bridget McCullough from Sacred Heart convent gave a name tag to each member upon arrival, little did she suspect that many women already knew each other. Some realized they had gone to the same high school together (West Catholic Girls High School, Philadelphia) or had been coworkers in the past, or grew up blocks from each other as children. The laughter could be heard throughout the convent and probably throughout the neighborhood!

Upon entering the chapel, everyone settled into a quiet and peaceful mode. Sister Marianne Guiniven opened the formal presentation by leading the group in praying Vespers, Evening Prayer of the Divine Office. Following this, Sister William Therese explained a devotion inspired by the spirituality of Saint Alphonsus known as the Courts of the King. Each companion was invited to draw a card on which would be a name of a person or object associated with the Nativity narrative, such as Mary, shepherds, the stable etc. A prayer and practice associated with the person or object is also on the card to be pondered



United in faith! IHM Companions from Sacred Heart Parish in Havertown and St. Pius X Parish in Broomall unite to become one Companions group.

and imitated throughout the year. Sister William explained that the IHMs choose a Court of the King on Christmas Eve, but since the Companions would not meet until after the New Year this was a perfect time for them to choose a New Year's practice for the 2025 Jubilee Year.

Sister Jean Miriam Alfonsi took photos at the gathering while Sister Patricia Long and Aspirant, Irene O'Connor, joined in on all the festivities. It was a perfect blend of IHM Companions and IHM sisters.

May God bless this newly "united" Companions group.

**For more information about
*Companions in Prayer
and Ministry,*
contact
S. Francis Helen Murphy**



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ihmcompanions@gmail.com**

Oktoberfest Success!

The 2024 annual Camilla Hall Oktoberfest and Craft Fair held on October 5 was a huge success! Sunny skies and smiles were seen throughout the day. Participants enjoyed creative finds, games, good food, fellowship, and some special prizes all in support of Camilla Hall, the convent home and healthcare center of the IHM sisters. Thank you to everyone who came out to support this family-fun event.



New Director of Education at Camilla Hall

Theresa Kuhar, BSN, RN, CCM joined Camilla Hall as the new Director of Education. In this role, Theresa will help the nursing department with training and education. Theresa received her BS in Nursing from Holy Family University School of Nursing. She started her nursing career at Holy Redeemer Hospital as a staff nurse in the Emergency Department. Theresa also worked as a Clinical Coordinator for the ALS Center of Hope at Drexel University and a Clinical Instructor for Holy Family University School of Nursing. Before joining Camilla, Theresa worked for IKOR of Eastern Pennsylvania, a private financial and medical advocacy firm serving seniors and individuals of all ages with a variety of disabilities. As a graduate of St. Martin of Tours Elementary School and Little Flower Catholic High School for Girls, Theresa is thrilled to be a member of the Camilla Hall team taking care of the IHM sisters. She looks forward to giving back to the sisters whom she has loved since first grade in Sister Francis Helen's class to whom she credits much of her success. Welcome, Theresa!

First Villa Maria House of Studies Lay Retreat

On October 24, the leadership staff at Villa Maria House of Studies, Camilla Hall, Immaculata University, and the IHM Center for Literacy were invited to attend the first ever *IHM Presence* lay retreat. During the daylong event, sisters presented sessions on the history, Charism, and mission of the IHM Congregation and offered an informative tour of the IHM Heritage Room, chapel, and Vocation Education Wall. Response from the retreatants was positive with lay leadership being able to take what they learned and share it with their staff. We are grateful for the presence of our lay colleagues and hope to offer more retreats on various topics in the future.



Dwelling now in light, yet ever near



*S. M. Joseph Helen Fullam
12.20.24*



*S. Incarnata Maria DiPilla
12.3.24*



*S. Mary Faith Lawler
10.29.24*



*S. M. John Christi D'Alessandro
10.28.24*



*S. Diane M. Richner
(S. M. Margaret Raymond)
10.27.24*



*S. Marian Leo Morris
10.22.24*



*S. Marian Vincent Morris
9.26.24*

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Mission Statement

*Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate
Heart of Mary of Immaculata,
Pennsylvania, proclaim the Gospel
message in the spirit of Jesus
the Redeemer.*

*Strengthened by a life of
vowed consecration, nurtured by
prayer and the Eucharist,
and sustained by community
living, we radiate joyful
service and promote Gospel
values, offering compassion
to all God's people through our
mission to evangelize, to catechize,
and to teach.*

IHM Sisters – On Mission Magazine

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Suzanne Misciagna

Editors

Sister Carolyn M. Dimick
Sister Jeannine M. Norton

Sippin' for the Sisters SAVE THE DATE!



Mark your calendars for the annual **Sippin' for the Sisters** tea fundraiser on **Sunday, March 9** at the Meehan Center at SS. Simon and Jude Parish, West Chester. Join us for tea, food, fellowship and most of all – fun!



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