

Mercy Northeast is a bimonthly publication for Sisters of Mercy, Companions in Mercy and Mercy Associates of the Northeast Community. Send comments to: [cvanaken@mercyne.org](mailto:cvanaken@mercyne.org).

The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
Albany ■ Connecticut ■ New Hampshire ■ Portland ■ Providence ■ Vermont

## CCASA Community Leadership Team

The inaugural leadership team for the CCASA Community was elected at its 2009 Assembly in February in Argentina.

**President Dina Araceli Altamiranda Ortega, RSM**  
**Carolee Chanona, RSM**  
**Julie Matthews, RSM**  
**Patricia Mulderick, RSM**

## New Northeast employees in Cumberland office



In mid-January, **Jill Gemma** joined the Northeast Community as its director of finance. Jill brings to the position four years of experience as the director of finance for the Town of North Smithfield in Rhode Island, and five years as controller for the

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## Northeast Community supports Jubilee USA's campaign for debt cancellation

The Mercy community responded with great enthusiasm to the invitation from Jubilee USA to send valentines to Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner asking for immediate debt cancellation to address the abject poverty in Haiti.

Sisters, associates and companions, residents of our long-term care facilities and motherhouses, students in our sponsored schools and colleges sent postcards or red homemade hearts to request an immediate change in policy toward the most impoverished nation in the Western Hemisphere.

The handmade hearts, postcards and online messages gathered for the campaign were personally delivered to Geithner by a delegation of prominent religious leaders on Valentine's Day.

The next step is legislation that will be proposed to the House by Rep. Maxine Waters (D. CA) in late February or early March. Then, Sen. Robert P. Casey (D.PA) will propose similar legislation in the Senate. When this legislation is ready, you will be notified so you can contact your representatives in support of the bills.

Last year, as a senator, President Obama was an original signer of this legislation.

The goal is to have U.S. legislation enacted and ready to submit to the G8, the eight leading industrialized nations (Germany, Canada, the United States, France, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and Russia), by July 2010 in Canada. **By Sister Kathleen Pritty**



Supporting immediate debt cancellation, from top, Sisters Helen Yonkers, Jane Carr and Frances Kosier

## Joanne Bibeau, RSM receives Partners in Excellence Award



Sister Joanne Bibeau received a Partners in Excellence Award at a special ceremony at the North Shore Medical Center (NSMC) in

Salem, Massachusetts in December. The award was presented to her and 11 other members of the Institutional Review Board of the North Shore Medical Center by Robert G. Norton, president of NSMC, and James J. Mongan, MD, president and CEO of Partners Health Care. The award was given "...in recognition of outstanding performance and commitment to excellence."

The NSMC is one of several major medical centers in the Boston area, including Massachusetts General Hospital, Brigham and Women's Hospital, and Newton-Wellesley Hospital, affiliated with Partners Health Care. Each center has its own institutional review board to review protocols involving medical research with human subjects to be conducted at the center.

Joanne is one of two members of the board without a medical or scientific background and unaffiliated with any of the hospitals associated with Partners Health Care. At least one of these members must be present for the board to have a quorum.

Joanne has served on the NSMC review board for 12 years.

## Leadership Team Message

Catherine's passion to serve the needs of those who are poor provides us, during the Lenten season, with a backdrop to be ever more mindful of the suffering which surrounds us today. As women of Mercy, as people of faith, we recognize that our lives are lived within the Paschal Mystery – the dying and rising. Knowing that God is a God of abundance, we know too of the scarcity which faces people today. While we may not be in a position to "do" more or to "be" more because of circumstances, it is a time to look with fresh eyes at how we can best serve God's people today. This reality allows us to be people of *HOPE* in the midst of so much suffering. Can we extend this hope to people who are unemployed; who are homeless due to recent foreclosures; who are struggling to meet their most basic needs? Our society is in desperate need of hope and Catherine's legacy – trust in divine providence. This hope could be the gift we offer as we journey through these six weeks of Lent.

The Northeast Community Leadership Team (CLT) recently participated in the Institute Leadership Conference (ILC) meeting held in Miami. It was a time full of rich conversations. Several of the issues we focused on were these: the global challenges in the world and church; our learnings as community leadership teams; financial planning; sponsorship; and our ongoing influence in our ministries. As an ILC, we continue to engage in reflections about refounding, reimagining and ongoing renewal in order to explore the question: What does it mean to be Sisters of Mercy at this time in our history?

As a CLT, we continue to work on the projects we spoke about during the fall Community meetings, along with a number of other initiatives about which we will update you during the spring Community meetings. In addition to facing the unexpected challenges which come our way, we are already preparing for our upcoming Assembly. Does it seem possible that the Assembly will be held a year from this March?

Know of your continued remembrance in our prayer, and of our gratitude for you and the many ways you extend Mercy to a world in such need of God's Mercy. God's Blessings.

Ellen, Marie, Maureen, Kathleen, Eileen & Michele

### Lobbying: Try it, you might like it

The Institute is gearing up for another round of lobbying in April, and the new U.S. administration is offering hope to those involved in immigration reform. When the bills are ready we will receive information from the Institute Justice Office and share it with you. At that time, we will be asked to visit the local offices of our representative and senators. For some, face-to-face lobbying may be challenging. If you think you might like to try it, however, we have copies of NETWORK's excellent video, *Your Voice Counts*, a practical lesson on how to lobby. **By Sister Kathleen Pritty**

## Kathleen Harrington, RSM, touches many with her “energy and spirit”

The Fall River Chamber of Commerce in Massachusetts has selected Sister Kathleen Harrington as the 2008 Roger Valcourt Memorial Outstanding Citizen of the Year.

Kathleen has served countless children and their families since 1967. It was in that year that she began her career at the John E. Boyd Center for Child Care and Development.



Kathleen has been instrumental in making the center what it is today: a comprehensive early childhood learning center with six locations throughout Fall River where more than 350 preschool children and their families are served by a staff of more than 100 professionals.

Under Kathleen’s leadership, the center became the first in Fall River to be accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. She also took steps to implement teacher competency guidelines.

Together with then Senator Joan Menard, Kathleen worked to achieve Campus Child Care on all the campuses of the Massachusetts University/College system. She was also one of the founders and the treasurer of the Atlantis Charter School in Fall River.

Besides her important contributions to early education, Kathleen has volunteered her time and talent to be a member of the Massachusetts Board of Regents and a trustee of Bristol Community College in Fall River.

The chairman of the board of directors of the Fall River Chamber of Commerce is quoted as saying: “I cannot imagine honoring a person more deserving for the award than Sister Harrington. She has touched so many lives over her long career, and has done so with unlimited energy and a caring spirit.” **By Eileen Keegan, Northeast Communications Office**

## New employees

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Meeting Street School, a nonprofit organization, also in Rhode Island. Jill’s contact information is [jgemma@mercyne.org](mailto:jgemma@mercyne.org); (401) 333-6333, Ext. 27.



**Brigitte Buxton** is an accountant in the Finance Office. She is married and has two children, a son and a daughter, who are 10 and 7

years-old respectively. Brigitte earned her degree in accounting from the University of Rhode Island.



**Margaret (Peggy) Shaw** was hired in August, 2008. She is a finance assistant whose responsibilities include payroll. Peggy is married

with two children and six grandchildren, and is in the process of earning her Bachelor of Science degree. Previously, she worked at Ocean State Harley Davidson as an administrative assistant.



**Kimberly (Kim) Risko** began working as a medical benefits coordinator in October 2008. She coordinates medical insurance

benefits for the sisters, resolves medical billing issues and supports the Member Services Office. Kim lives in Cumberland with her husband, David, and their seven-year-old daughter, Hannah, who attends Mercymount Country Day School.



Institute Communications Coordinating Committee meets with liaisons and advisors in Miami, Florida, prior to ILC meeting to discuss strategic communications

## Inspired by the skating nun

*This column, which appeared in the January 5, 2009, edition of The Boston Globe, is reprinted with permission of the author, Ernest Hebert, a freelance contributor to the Globe, a professor of English at Dartmouth College and the author of 10 books.*

She was my first love. The moment struck me in the fourth grade at St. Joseph School in Keene, New Hampshire I was in my classroom on the second floor. The night before we'd had a freeze following a January thaw and the flooding in the parking lot had frozen solid.

It was the lunch hour and because of the ice we weren't allowed on the playground. I gazed wistfully out the window. Three sisters emerged from the convent and made their way to the parking lot. Two of the sisters appeared to be assisting the tallest sister who I thought might be injured.

These were Sisters of Mercy. They wore long black gowns from head to toe and what looked to me like giant white bibs. You could see their faces, but nothing else, not even their hair, so from a distance it was hard to tell who was who.

The sisters pushed the tall sister onto the ice. The sister began to glide, picked up speed, twirled, her black gown expanding. Long before the movie "The Flying Nun," I had grasped the concept. It took me a full minute to realize that the sister was ice skating.

I had this great feeling and I didn't want to tell anybody about it, just wanted to savor it and so I have for more than half a century.

Then a few weeks ago I was talking to my cousin, Anne

Vaccarest, a Sister of Mercy in Manchester, New Hampshire. The sisters were celebrating their 150th year in New Hampshire.

I told Cousin Anne my story of falling in love with the sister on the ice, who I thought was Sister Charles. Cousin Anne made a couple of phone calls, and I learned that my flying nun was actually Sister Gregory, who had been my favorite teacher. Of all my teachers at St. Joe's, she was the only one left. I knew I had to see her.

We met the next day at her elderly housing apartment in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. I found Sister Gregory quite stylish, wearing dark slacks and a bright red top, curly white hair short but nicely coiffured. The apartment was small but neat and bright with Christmas decorations. Penny, the cat, ignored my presence and remained sacked out.

"We have two sisters in this building, the grand lady upstairs and me, the noisy one," Sister Gregory said with a laugh. She pointed, "That's my prayer corner where I say my breviary, but I have to get there before Penny does."

"I didn't know you could skate," I said.

"Or course I could skate – I'm from Berlin [New Hampshire]."

Sister Gregory is the daughter of a couple born in Ireland, who came to the States via Canada.

Inspired by Sister Celine, a nun "with a wonderful sense of humor," Isabelle Pickford at age 24 left a good job in the office of Brown paper mill for life as a Sister of Mercy. She has since obtained a master's degree in education.

"It was absolutely the best thing for me," she said. "I've never had a moment of regret."

Sister Gregory is 84. She retired only last year, but she's still very active, especially with STOP (Sisters Together Oppose Poverty).

The key word for the Sisters of Mercy in STOP is "together." The sisters have a tremendous camaraderie. Though they no longer live together in a convent, but in separate apartments, they still work together and keep in close touch. Once a year, 15 or so Sisters of Mercy in New Hampshire congregate for a special occasion to visit and celebrate. The day is Super Bowl Sunday. Who would have guessed?

The order, sometimes called the "walking sisters" because they did much of their work outside the convent, have a history of service, teaching children, teaching the illiterate, and helping the poor. However, today few young women take the vows.

The sisters are not quitting. They might not be young, but they're strong and want to continue to serve. Their motto for the year: *Sisters of Mercy in New Hampshire: 150 years – An Unfinished History.*



Sister M. Gregory Pickford

## Mercy presence continues at St. Joseph School in Keene

The Sisters of Mercy arrived in Keene, New Hampshire, in 1887, and opened St. Joseph School in St. Bernard Parish. In addition to teaching in the school, the sisters gave religious instruction at St. Bernard and a number of other parishes in surrounding towns. They also visited sick parishioners in their homes, in hospitals and nursing homes.

By 1975, there were no longer any sisters on the faculty at St. Joseph's, but the school did not close. Rather, it remained open with lay administration and faculty. Then in 2003, after a gap of nearly 30 years, the Sisters of Mercy returned to the school in the person of Sister Laura Della Santa, who took over as principal. Laura was principal at Mater Christi School in Burlington, Vermont, for 12 years.

When the 2008-2009 school year began, two more Sisters of Mercy arrived. Sister Barbara Parent now teaches first grade and Sister Clare Hennessey volunteers in the pre-school three days a week. Barbara and Clare came to Keene from Concord, where they had taught at St. John's School for several years.

There are 135 students in St. Joseph's, pre-k through grade 8. Enrollment has been increasing in recent years, says Laura. The school has received significant funding from generous donors and the Friends of St. Joseph. Its child care program received a 2008-2009 grant from the Northeast Mercy Ministry Fund.

There is a family feeling to the school. The pastor of St. Bernard Parish is a graduate, as is one of the teachers – and her mother and grandmother, as well. Now, St.



Northeast Sisters of Mercy who live in Winchester and work in Keene, New Hampshire, from left, Laura Della Santa, Barbara Parent, Clare Hennessey, Kathleen Haight

Joseph's also has a Northeast Community feeling about it, as Laura is from the Vermont area, Barbara from the Portland area, and Clare from the New Hampshire area. They live in a former rectory in nearby Winchester. The fourth member of their community is Sister Kathleen Haight, who works in parish and community outreach with New Hampshire Catholic Charities. While Kathleen is from the New Hampshire area, she points out that she is a native New Yorker, making the Northeast character of this community even broader.

Kathleen's ministry intersects with that of the sisters in the school. Her office is on the St. Joseph campus, and her outreach work takes her once a week to a local Catholic Charities nursing home where she meets with staff and residents. Clare often accompanies her and, in the Mercy tradition of the early sisters in Keene, visits the nursing home residents. Kathleen has also started a St. Vincent de Paul outreach program in Winchester where the sisters live. The Mercy Northeast presence is thriving in southwestern New Hampshire. **By Sister Anne Vaccarest**

### Northeast Association meets with leadership in NH

The Community Leadership Team (CLT) met with the Northeast Associate Council (NAC) in Windham, New Hampshire, on February 8 for an evaluation of NAC's first year. The members of the NAC presented accomplishments of their first year and goals for the future. The achievements included working drafts of a Northeast handbook and manual, which establish common practices by combining best practices. Creating a common Northeast brochure and evaluating the NAC structure are goals for the future. The CLT thanked the NAC for their work and characterized the meeting as energetic and positive. The associate co-director from each area and one sister representative comprise the NAC. They are: Nancy Burke, Aggie Gagnon, Carole Luce, Sister Grace Mannion, Joni O'Donnell, Debby Patterson, and Kathy Swift.

## From blacktop to vernal pools

Sophia Academy, located in Providence, Rhode Island, is a non-profit, non-denominational private middle school for girls. Founded in 2001 by Sister Mary Reilly, the school provides an educational experience for girls in grades 5-8 who are most at risk of repeating the cycle of poverty.

Under the tutelage of Mary and Gigi DiBello, head of Sophia, the eighth-graders study issues contained in the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy. Last year, the topics were immigration and poverty, and the study culminated in a trip to the United Nations and Ellis Island. This year's theme is the global environment with particular focus on water. Part of the curriculum included a fall and winter excursion to the New Dawn Earth Center in Cumberland, Rhode Island.

Sister Denise Turcotte, CSC, director of the center, noted how rewarding it was to host the girls because of their enthusiasm. "We hiked through the woods observing different species of birds and trees until we came to the vernal pool," she said. "How excited they were to learn that these are seasonal pools with no inlets or outlets, no fish and no predators, except for the occasional turtle. This is important because these vernal pools are the mating habitat for wood frogs and salamanders who deposit their eggs, then leave. When the eggs hatch, the young are on their own to survive."

Upon returning to the center, the group built a fire from the wood they had gathered and toasted marshmallows, which was a new



Sister Mary Reilly, second from right, and Sophia Academy students

experience for some of the girls.

Sister Mary Reilly observed, "The New Dawn Earth Center has become a special place for them. Walking through the woods, noting deer tracks, spotting a hawk, and

seeing the vernal pool has opened up a new world for them. The question on the way home was, 'Can we go back? We need to respect our Earth.'"

By Sister Marjorie Connolly

## Silver Jubilarians celebrate in Portland, ME



Nine jubilarians were honored in Portland, Maine, in August 2008. Pictured above, Sisters Catherine Mary Walsh, left, and Carol Lachance celebrated their 25th jubilee. Sister Christina Hackey's jubilee was held at St. Joseph's Manor.



## Earth as a Living Being By Mary Pendergast, RSM

Mercy Northeast Ecology Ministry offers this reflection for Lent and in preparation for the 2009 Spring Mercy Circles.

*Earth is a being covered by, comprised of and permeated with living matter.*

*Earth acts as a set of living processes with sentient and unified intention.*

*Earth is a self-regulating living system which both reacts and responds in order to maintain critical balance.*

*Edwin Hubble and Albert Einstein discovered that the Universe is expanding and that it emerged from a single point.*

*We are just beginning to comprehend that Earth is one phase in the great unfolding of the Universe.*

*Since the sun first whirled Earth around as molten lava, Earth has developed such a level of complexity that she is now considered to be alive in her own right.*

*As Brian Swimme says: "Earth who was once molten rock, now sings opera."*

*With that emerging understanding, we can say that the Universe, and, in particular, Earth, has reached such a complexity that she actually awakens matter into life, and, as such, contains all of the components of life.*

*We humans are Earth just recently awakened into life and into the conscious realization that we exist.*

*We are the Universe reflecting on itself. We are Earth become conscious and that changes everything.*

*We have gained a new insight into the structure of reality, and, like Einstein, we are becoming aware that the reality of the Universe is not what we thought it was!*

*This causes us to take a good, hard look at everything.*

*We need to return to, (actually, become embedded in) the community of life out of which, we have just recently realized, we emerged.*

*In the words of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme: "Earth is the primary context. We take our life out of Earth's life, we are derivative."*

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### SOURCES

Berry and Swimme, *The Universe Story*

Miriam MacGillis, *The New Cosmology*; DVD

## Q & A: Land Conservation

**What is a land trust?** A land trust is a private non-profit organization that, as all or part of its mission, actively works to conserve land by undertaking or assisting in land or conservation easement acquisition, or by its stewardship of such land or easements.

**What are the limitations of partnering with a land trust?** When one partners with a land trust one does so in order to protect the land into the future without giving up private ownership and appropriate private uses. By granting a conservation easement to a local land trust, an owner may be assured that the natural resources and any water on the property will be protected, the biodiversity will be maintained and thrive, and quality habitat for plants and animals will be enhanced.

If we put a piece of property into conservation easement, we choose to restrict development on that piece of land, but we can do what we want on the other non-conserved land.

**Can you sell the rest of the property later?**

Yes, you can sell the total piece of property, but the restriction on development is binding on any future owner. In many instances, putting pieces of our property in conservation would provide green space in areas that would be desirable to a buyer.

**What would be the ramifications for our neighbors?** Our immediate neighbors, the wildlife, the plants, the wetlands, the woodlands, the watershed, the entire ecosystem that supports the life on our land would remain undisturbed and thrive. Our nearest residential neighbors would enjoy the benefit of living next to the Sisters of Mercy who have left a certain portion of their land exactly as it has been since they acquired ownership.

**What are the legal costs and financial ramifications?** Each situation is different. Generally the landowner is asked to contribute an endowment to generate sufficient income from the interest to monitor the land into the future. Each state has different suggested contribution amounts. Other costs would involve legal documents, such as a baseline documentation and a conservation easement. The land trust has its legal counsel and the Sisters of Mercy would use its own legal counsel.

## “Go Red for Women”

On February 16, the Motherhouse in Albany, New York, was monochromatic – RED. Ann Marie Turo, coordinator of health services there, organized a “Go Red for Women” luncheon to raise awareness about heart disease and stroke in women, the first and third cause of death in women, respectively.

On this National Wear Red Day, diners learned about the prevalence of heart disease and stroke and won prizes for their knowledge about heart disease risk factors.



From left, Sisters Mary Agatha Smith, Josephine Reynolds, Marion Rafferty



From left, Sisters Doris E. Rogers, Arlene Boyd, Rita Carr

## Calling all sisters, associates, companions

*The Sisters of Mercy believe that God continues to call women from all cultures and backgrounds to vowed membership in the Sisters of Mercy. We also believe that by being a visible witness to the Mercy of God in our Church and our world, women will be attracted to joining us in our ministry of service to the poor, sick, and ignorant as well as in our life of prayer and community.*

– “For the Love of Mercy,” excerpt

The Northeast vocation ministers ask the Community to this “ministry of witness” in the following ways:

- *Would you be willing to speak about vocation to religious life during your parish liturgy, or in an alternative parish setting? We have a detailed outline of what could be said in a five-minute talk.*
- *Do you know any women who you think would be interested in participating in a meal, prayer and sharing on a monthly basis? Would you be willing to invite them? We are working collaboratively with other religious communities to facilitate monthly discernment groups in various areas throughout the Northeast.*
- *Would you encourage anyone you know to attend such a weekend? We are planning “Come and See” weekends for women ages 21-45 who would like to experience community, prayer and an introduction to Mercy ministries.*

Please consider the above and contact either Sister Elaine Deasy, [edeasy@mercynone.org](mailto:edeasy@mercynone.org), 860 594 8619; or Sister Dale Jarvis [djarvis@mercynone.org](mailto:djarvis@mercynone.org), 207 774 1490).

The Northeast vocation ministers will visit Maine, Providence and Vermont in the spring. We thank you for your prayerful support, and anticipate hearing from you.

### MERCY

### Northeast

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