

## **SSM Milwaukee Province- Associate beginnings**

In 1983 the congregation of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, Milwaukee (WI) Province, accepted its first five men and women into the SSM Associate Program. This program allowed lay persons of deep faith to respond to their baptismal call to universal holiness by associating with the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother. So what did it mean to be an Associate? This was a burning question in the 1970s as religious congregations searched for new signs of life. As a result of the 1960s' Vatican II call for new initiatives for the laity, religious congregations began to explore the idea of Associate Programs. By the late 1970s a national religious formation group reported that, of 150 questionnaires sent out nationwide, 80% of congregations responding had either begun an Associate Program or were considering the idea. Although

programs were developed with different guidelines, many had similar components. Most congregations wanted shared prayer with Associates. Some invited Associates to retreats and were guiding them in spiritual direction. Many congregations shared the spirituality of their founder/foundress, their history, goals, and mission. Several congregations offered more specialized opportunities such as service to the poor and preparation and placement in ministry. Many either shared congregational communications with Associates or developed special means of communicating select congregational news with Associates. A multitude of other details of the associations were determined individually by each congregation. But a constant theme throughout all programs was the idea of religious and lay persons supporting and praying for one another as they lived the Gospel message.

The nurturing of lay Associates in the 1970s was not a new idea to the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother. It had, as its basis, a very early initiative in the SSM Congregation in its beginning days in the United States, and had also been presented in the directives of the Second Vatican Council by Pope John XXIII in the 1960s.

The historical account of the earliest lay association with the Sisters, entitled the *Devout Society*, was written and published by Sr. Raphael Narcisi, Associate Director, in the December, 2005, copy of the Associate newsletter, “News from the Director” as follows:

*When our early Sisters came to the United States to collect funds for the growing needs of the community, they were joined by women who wanted to contribute to their noble work. In this way the Society of the Sorrowful Mother came into existence. It was a Society, and therefore, not subject to Canon Law. Then, on July 6, 1888, the Most Reverend Cardinal Vicar, Lucidus Maria Parocchi, approved this Society and permitted the printing of an appropriate text on a picture of the Sorrowful Mother to distribute to these pious women. The members of this Society then received a written “diploma” of their affiliation with the Sisters. The*

*purpose of this devout society was, as we know from their membership card, to support the young congregation in their caring for the poor and helpless sick persons, and the education of young abandoned girls. They assisted not only in a spiritual and financial way, but also by praying daily seven Hail Marys and the prayer Holy Mother, pierce me through... Then, in 1911, the Sisters wrote the following to Pope Pius X: "The Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother most humbly ask that His Most Holiness graciously will have His High Name enrolled in the Devout Society of the Sorrowful Mother. This was established at their Motherhouse here in Rome by His Eminence, Cardinal Vicar, Lucidus Maria Parocchi." The response received from the Holy Father: "Very voluntarily, we enroll our name in the Devout Society of the Sorrowful Mother with great trust in everything to the fellow brothers and fellow sisters. We approbate the Devout Society in the Lord,*

*Signed: PIUS PP.X, May 2, 1912*

The call for new initiatives for the laity, having been strongly encouraged by the Second Vatican Council, was highlighted by Sr. Raphael in her "Theological and Historical Perspective of the Associate Movement", (Appendix A) written in response to a request by the Provincial of the U.S./Caribbean Province, Sr. Dorothy Ann Dirx, in 1999. With the early Devout Society of

the SSMs and the Vatican II directives as the background on which to base a movement of lay people in association with the Sisters, the SSM Associate Movement began to take shape in the Milwaukee Province in the late 1970s.

In 1977, Sr. M. Dorothy Bruder, Provincial of the Milwaukee, Wisconsin province, received a written proposal from two lay persons, Elizabeth Guy and Mary Miron, requesting that the community examine the possibility of establishing a group similar to an associate program. Several other Sisters had also been approached by people interested in being more closely identified with the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother. Sr. Myra Smith wrote an early detailed study for review by the Provincial and her Council in regard to the idea. A group simply calling itself *the committee* was established to explore the idea. It included Srs. Dorothy Ann Dirx, Cathy Hanegan, Judy Beck, Rita Adlkofer, and Paula

Jacobs. The possibility of forming such an association was discussed at length at the Provincial Assemblies, gatherings of all the Sisters in the Milwaukee Province, in November, 1978, and February, 1979. Sisters were enthusiastic, yet cautious, about the goals and expectations of such an association.

In February, 1980, the Provincial Council recommended that *the committee* consider ways of providing *experiences* to meet the needs of this group rather than structuring a formal organization. At the May, 1980, session of the Provincial Assembly, a policy was approved which asked Sisters at both the local and at the province level to offer opportunities for persons to share in gatherings and celebrations with the Sisters. Sisters were also encouraged to share SSM values and goals with persons interested in a commitment as Associates. The Assembly asked everyone to discern more extensively how this association might come into

formal existence. The first opportunity for inviting lay persons who might be interested in becoming better acquainted with the SSM Congregation, referred to as *Friends of the SSM's*, was connected with the SSM renewal program, A Day of Sharing, on June 28, 1980. The results were positive, with about twenty-five lay people attending.

By the October 11, 1980, meeting in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, *the committee* had become the Associate Committee. The five Sisters were joined by Elizabeth Guy, Lois Knope, Lorraine Glodowski, Tom Fischer, Dave Sauer, Agnes Kellaher, Shirley Fischer, and Bradley Roark. In this initial meeting the description of the Associate Program read as follows: "Similar to the kind of community which the early Christians had toward one another: openness, hospitality, common serving, opportunity to pray together, to grow in knowledge of values and goals held by one another: a

continual kind of relationship, a bondedness, a relatedness that is communicated to others and that makes working for the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother or being associated with the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother different from being associated, for instance, with Amoco Oil.”

The 1980-81 goals of the Associate Committee were to plan regional meetings at which presentors would explain who the SSMs were, their philosophy and mission, who the Associates were, their goals, and how new Associates were to be identified. The Committee also wanted to develop a packet of materials containing the history, philosophy, and goals of the SSMs.

Associates were invited to another Day of Sharing at the Mother of Sorrows Convent on December 6, 1980. The content of these days was spiritual enrichment and prayer, with both Sisters and Associates participating

together. Throughout the remainder of 1980 and into the spring of 1981, the Associate Committee continued to have regional meetings around Wisconsin. They planned a slide presentation on the history and philosophy of the SSMs and the Associates. They also planned a personal witness section at each meeting to discuss what the Associate Program could mean to both the SSM Community and to Associates and what the future structure might be. The first of these regional gatherings was held in Marshfield, Wisconsin, in August, 1981. In the fall of 1981 there were more regional meetings and follow-up meetings to evaluate, redefine, and discuss materials to be developed, such as brochures, to further define the program. The Associate Committee did a presentation at the November, 1981, Provincial Assembly in Milwaukee. It was decided to have informational meetings for interested people in the Milwaukee area throughout the winter of 1981-82.

In June, 1982, a position of Associate Director was created by the Associate Committee and approved by the Provincial Council. The position was part-time and the Director would report directly to the Provincial. In October, 1982, Sr. Paula Jacobs announced that Sr. Raphael Narcisi had accepted the position, along with her role as Director of Ministry Planning for the SSM Milwaukee Province.

In September, 1983, the Provincial Assembly approved the fourth and final draft of the “Milwaukee Province’s Associate Proposal”. The Generalate in Rome approved the proposal in October, 1983, and a letter of congratulations was sent by Sr. Catherine Marie Belongia, General Superior, to the Milwaukee Province, as well as to the first Associates received into the Program. Elizabeth Guy, Lorraine Glodowski, Lois Knope, Tom Fischer, and Dave Sauer signed a one year covenant to become the first SSM Associates. The

reception ceremony was held at Mother of Sorrows Convent in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in October, 1983.

The Associate agreement consisted of some basic understandings. Associates were not to be considered members of the SSM Community and thus would not be supported in any way financially. Associates were lay men and women who, while not members, shared in some of the spiritual heritage of the SSM Congregation and brought their giftedness to the congregation.

Associates were invited to share SSM values and goals in a unique way. These lay persons were to continue their own ministries, while at the same time using their gifts, talents, and prayers to further the SSM Mission. They were expected to complete an orientation program, before making their commitment in which they studied SSM charism, the life and spirituality of Mother Francis Streitel, foundress of the SSM Congregation, and the SSM way of life.

The Sisters were committed to sharing prayer, spiritual guidance, and scripture study with the Associates. They were asked to find creative ways to foster deeper bondedness with Associates through inviting them to social events, celebrations, and other activities. Associates had already begun to learn much of the SSM mission and history through such events as Days of Sharing and had joined in celebrations such as Sisters' jubilees.

During the next year, 1984, Sr. Raphael was busy with development of Associate materials and with travel. Recruitment materials, meeting notices, definitions of the program, slide presentations, and prayer services were produced and taken to meetings around Wisconsin. One of the earliest communication pieces was the "Outreach", a newsletter developed by Sr. Raphael and first printed in May, 1983. The result of educating, informing, and then inviting lay persons to join was that

nineteen men and women were received as new Associates on October 21, 1984, at Mother of Sorrows Convent. At this same ceremony, the original five Associates from the previous year renewed their annual covenant.

The following year was equally busy. More recruitment material was developed as the Program gained definition and identity. A “Membership Directory”, listing all the Associates, was provided to each Associate. The directory listed Associates by each geographic area of the state, which included Rhinelander/Tomahawk, Stevens Point, Marshfield, Oshkosh, and Milwaukee. These area groups were informally called *clusters*. In 1985, there were two Days of Sharing held in Wisconsin for Associates and Sisters. One was held in Oshkosh in February and one in Stevens Point in May. In addition, a Retreat Day was held in Milwaukee in July. Invitations went out to

Associates to take part in SSM Community workshops and seminars throughout the year. On October 20, 1985, seventeen new Associates were received into the Program at Mother of Sorrows Convent in Milwaukee, and twenty-four renewed.

The culmination of 1985 was the first Associates' Conference for Tomorrow (ACT), held in Stevens Point in November. The purpose was to bring together Associates and Sisters to refine the vision of the Program and to give direction and input. The needs of each of the Associate clusters were addressed. It was an opportunity to foster the bondedness between Associates and Sisters. The issues addressed were the clarification and communication of the ongoing role of Associates and the role the Sisters play in the Program, the spiritual development of Associates, and how the sisters might be able to share their resources, both material and human. The large participation by both Sisters and Associates at

this conference signaled strong commitment to the Program.

There were two Days of Sharing in 1986, the first of which was held in Oshkosh in February. As was typical of these days, usually about thirty-five to forty Associates and Sisters were in attendance. In addition, everyone was invited to bring guests, whether prospective Associates or not. On this day the speaker was Sr. M. Regina Bruen, SSM. Her topic was *A Call to Ministry*. Her talk outlined the history of the church, comparing pre-Vatican days of everything being delineated by ordained clergy to post-Vatican days, with the church becoming universal and calling all people to the ministry by their baptism and confirmation. Sr. Regina elaborated on many forms of ministry and ended with comments affirming the energy and commitment of the Associates. She confirmed the *rightness* of using the many gifts of the laity.

A second Day of sharing in 1986 was held in Marshfield, Wisconsin, in May. A Retreat Day was held in Stevens Point in September. The “Outreach” was again published by the Marshfield cluster, as had been done in 1985. As Sr. Raphael began her service as a member of the Milwaukee Provincial Council, Sr. Marcella Winkels became Associate Director in the late summer. In October, 1986, nine new Associates were received into the program at a ceremony at Mother of Sorrows Convent in Milwaukee.

The next year, 1987, saw more changes. The Marshfield numbers dwindled significantly as some members moved to other locations. The “Outreach” was now published by some of the Milwaukee Associates. Days of Sharing were held in Oshkosh (March), Stevens Point (May), and a Retreat Day in Tomahawk / Rhinelander in September. At the end of March, Sr. Marcella regrettably resigned as Associate Director

because of the time commitment needed in her role as principal of Mother of Perpetual Help School in Milwaukee. She continued to attend meetings throughout the summer as a new Director was sought.

At the SSM Assembly in September, 1987, the decision was made to have a Council liaison coordinate the Associate Program but not be designated as the Director per se. Again Sr. Raphael was asked to assume that position. Sisters at the local level were asked to make a commitment to facilitate the Program in their areas. The Associates were asked to become more responsible for the Program. In October, 1987, three new Associates were received and forty-two Associates renewed their commitments at a reception held in Milwaukee.

Another highlight of 1987 was the second Associate Conference for Tomorrow (ACT) held in Stevens Point in December. The conference was very well attended by

both Associates and Sisters. The first result of this conference was the reaffirmation of the goals of the prior ACT Conference. These included the opportunities for spiritual growth for Associates and the focus on missions, recruitment, and communication. Much of the meeting was spent in developing ideas for local programs, such as meeting schedules, locations, topics, and local ministries. Most of the work of the former Director position was assumed by the local Sisters and Associates. Sr. Raphael was asked to assist in coordinating communication between clusters, provide recruitment brochures and materials for discussion, and help with the orientation and education of new members.

## **New SSM Associates in other U.S. Provinces**

In 1988 there was a Day of Sharing in Stevens Point in May, a speaker and a picnic in Oshkosh in June, and a Retreat Day in Tomahawk in September. During this same year the Sisters in the Southwest were preparing their first group of men and women to become Associates by holding a retreat on August 27 and 28 for prospectives from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Wichita, Kansas. It was held at the Acuto Center on the grounds of the Kansas Newman College, Wichita, Kansas. The theme was *With Christ in the Marketplace*. Sessions included *Universal Call to Holiness*, *Scripture as Food for Our Journey*, and *Values in our Vision*. The retreat was conducted by Sr. Roseann Koskie, with the help of Janet Schreiner who was co-director of the Acuto Center for Renewal and Prayer. Virginia Cervantes, a prospective Associate, wrote an article for the October-

November, 1988, “Outreach” expressing thankfulness for the day.

In October, 1988, as the sixth Milwaukee Associate Reception was being held, the Wisconsin Associates were happy to celebrate the reception of new Associates in other areas of the United States. In September, 1988, four Associates made their initial commitments in Denville, New Jersey. Sr. Dorothy Bruder was in charge of their formation and served as their contact sister, their connection to Sr. Raphael and the other Associates. In Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, sixteen men and women from both the Tulsa area and Wichita were received. Their contact sister, Sr. Roseann Koskie, said of this event, “This individual beauty (of Associates) now blended and bonded with the Sisters creates a marvelous giftedness for ministries”.

The Milwaukee Associates joined an organization called Wisconsin Kindred Spirits (WKS) in 1988. This

group was made up of Associate Directors and representatives from approximately a dozen religious orders in the state. Sr. Raphael and Tom Fischer attended the first meeting with the group. In early 1989, the WKS meeting was hosted by Sr. Raphael and Diane Wegner at Mother of Sorrows Convent in Milwaukee.

In January, 1989, the three Sisters in charge of the Associate Program across the United States met to discuss mutual concerns. These included Sr. Dorothy Bruder, Denville, Sr. Roseann Koskie, representing the Southwest, and Sr. Raphael. Their goal was to coordinate the Associates' activities throughout the United States. These Sisters worked throughout the year to produce a Handbook for Associates and a directory of all the Associates in the United States. Both items were distributed in early 1990 to Associates and Sisters.

Men and women from Roswell, New Mexico, were received as that area's first Associates in 1989. In an

article in the December, 1989 “Outreach”, David Balzer expressed the beauty of the first commitment ceremony for Roswell Associates. He thanked Sr. Roseann Koskie and all the Sisters at Our Lady of Sorrows Convent in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, for hosting the reception. He wrote special thanks to Sr. Loretta Marie Hall for her invitation to join the Associates. He told of how their long night drives between Roswell and Broken Arrow in Sr. Loretta’s van had brought them closer together as a cluster. With these new Roswell Associates, the count in December, 1989, was nine active clusters in the United States with 113 total members. That included three in the East, seventy in the Midwest, and forty members in the Southwest.

The Sisters and Associates in Denville, New Jersey, held one of their first retreat days in the spring of 1989. Associate Louise Ulan described it in an article that was published in the May-June, 1989, “Outreach”. She

stated that Sr. Mary Ellen Joyce's selection of music and prayer set the stage for the St. Francis' Ministry and for the Bishop's letter urging them to respond to the call of Jesus. Sr. Dorothy Bruder followed with an overview of the Associate program and especially its response to the SSM missions. Sr. Jean Marie Kruger gave an explanation of the SSM Mission Statement. Sr. Catherine Marie Belongia and Sr. M. Gordiana Ney elaborated on the SSM Faith Center. Louise made special mention of the abundance of coffee and home-baked snacks provided by Sr. Winfreda Bayer and Sr. Laetare Nieberle.

There were other new happenings in 1989. The first two-day Associate retreat was held at De Pere, Wisconsin, in September. However, a significant change came about as Mother of Sorrows Convent in Milwaukee was sold and Sisters relocated to SSM Franciscan Courts in Oshkosh in October. Therefore,

the 1989 Associate reception for the Midwest was held at St. Raphael's Church in Oshkosh in October, 1989.

Another major change occurred in 1989 for the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother. The entire SSM Congregation was restructured in early summer. The Denville, Midwest, and Southwest Provinces and the Caribbean Region all became one U.S./Caribbean Province, served by one Provincial Council and headquartered in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Although the restructuring did not affect Associates per se, they too soon experienced a change. By late 1989, the role of Associate Director was assumed by Sr. Roseann Koskie, who was located in the Southwest. Across the United States each cluster of Associates was now to be coordinated by a local contact Sister or Sisters. In the Midwest these included Srs. Lela Mae Fenton and Paula Jacobs, Rhinelander; Sr. Alice Fehringer, Tomahawk; Srs. Josepha, Colette, and Clare Wartner, Stevens Point;

Srs. Dorothy Dirkx and Catherine Kaufmann, Oshkosh;  
and Sr. Beth Hancock, Milwaukee. In Denville, the  
contact sister was Sr. Dorothy Bruder. In the Southwest  
the contacts were Sr. M. Loretta Jacobs in Broken  
Arrow; Sr. Loretta M. Hall in Roswell; and Srs.  
Sebastiana Langecker and Angelica May in Wichita.

## **Growth in The 1990's**

The decade of the 1990s was a time of growth of activities in individual clusters of the Associates across the United States. The role of Associate Director was held by three different sisters throughout the 1990s. These included Sr. Roseann Koskie, Sr. Theresa Gil, and Sr. Dorothy Ann Dirkx. Their tasks as director included travel across the country visiting clusters and coordinating aspects of the program. Communication and coordination was also accomplished through the “Outreach” newsletter which continued to be published by the Milwaukee cluster into the early 1990s. By the mid-1990s the “Outreach” was published in the Southwest by Srs. Theresa Gil and M. Gordiana Ney.

The SSM Community grew in its support of the Associate Program throughout the 1990s. This was expressed in the March-April, 1992, “Outreach” by two

Sisters. Sr. M. Regina Bruen said, “They (Associates) saw their association with the SSMs as a way to help them grow and develop in their relationship with God and people...this was a mutual experience that we are grateful for”. Sr. Lucille Flores wrote in the same newsletter, “I am proud to be a part of one of the numerous congregations that is visionary enough to sponsor an Associate Program, for it is one of the means of carrying the SSM spirit, the SSM charism, the SSM vision and mission into the future”.

Sr. Roseann Koskie served as Associate Director during the first two years of the 1990s. She solicited input from Associates in her meetings with clusters and made some recommendations that were published in the September-October, 1992 “Outreach”. She recommended a National Board be created which would be made up of a Sister and a representative Associate from each region. She also called for a national

gathering to be held within the next several years, with one to follow every two or three years.

In the November-December, 1992 “Outreach” Sr. Theresa Gil was welcomed as the new Associate Director. She was located in the Southwest at that time but also traveled throughout the United States to attend meetings and Days of Sharing and recommitment ceremonies. On September 1, 1996, Sr. Dorothy Ann Dirx of Oshkosh, Wisconsin was welcomed as the new Associate Director. Sr. Dorothy was elected to the position of Provincial within the next year. By January, 1998, Sr. Raphael was, once again, appointed as Associate Director.

The rich development of bondedness in the 1990s culminated with the request of the Provincial, Sr. Dorothy Ann Dirx, asking Sr. Raphael to write the “Theological and Historical Perspective of the Associate Movement”, in 1999. Sr. Dorothy wanted this history

presented to the Provincial Council and then to the Sisters in order to gauge Sisters' support of the Associate Program. She also wanted to elicit feedback regarding creative ways to integrate SSM Associates into the SSM Community activities, celebrations and other events. Sr. Raphael did meet with the Sisters and Associates in each geographic area, the East, Southwest, and Midwest, within the next year to share the document and to do visioning and planning for the furtherance of the Program. From 1983 to this point, 1998, structures had been in place in the Associate Program: a mission statement, logo, pin, handbook, orientation manual, recruitment materials, and a monthly newsletter. In 1998, as Sr. Raphael began visiting clusters, she gathered input on questions of needs, process, and future vision. Then, in July, 1998, a representative group of thirteen Associates and six Sisters met at Our Mother of Sorrows Convent in Broken Arrow for what would be

the third Associate Conference for Tomorrow. This group used the input Sr. Raphael had gathered to design and redesign some vital pieces and processes of the SSM Associate Program.

The meetings focused on *Who are the SSM Associates today?* Sisters and Associates worked on revitalizing the logo, the definition of Associates, the Associate Handbook and the Orientation Manual. One of the first things decided was that the Associates were not a Program but, more accurately, were a Movement. The group also updated the guidelines by which Associates mutually worked with the SSM Community. There were many discussions regarding charism, the struggles of Mother Foundress, expectations of both Sisters and Associates, the baptismal call, and the gospel values. The group set new direction with a two-year, 1998-1999, plan. This plan included a few changes for the Associates. The new Associate newsletter was

entitled “From the Desk of the Director”. The new logo was a different but similar design with an expanded explanation. (Appendix B) Sr. Raphael was asked to create yearly themes and send supportive materials to help facilitate geographic area meeting discussions in light of those themes. A suggestion was made to have a calendar of events for meetings, gatherings, reflection days, etc. printed with each newsletter. A majority of the plan was approved by the Provincial Council in August, 1998.

As a response to the request for a theme, 1999 began as the year of the *3 Rs: Revisited, Revitalized, and Refounded*. *Revisiting* was a call to begin to study and use the Associate Resource Manual, a result of the work of the third ACT Conference, as a rich guide to attaining full understanding of many aspects of the Associate Movement. That study would cause a *Revitalized* sense of life and purpose for the Movement. Sr. Raphael

urged the Associate Movement to be *Refounded*, just as the Sisters in the early days of the SSM Congregation rededicated themselves in response to the rise of new ministerial needs.

Sr. Raphael also created and published her first study guide which was sent with the monthly newsletter in March, 1999. It was entitled 1A, *Life of Mother Frances*. This new feature was to encourage the local clusters to discuss specific topics relevant to SSMs in order to build a strong unity and bondedness by studying the same things. Between 1999 and 2007 study guides that Sister published included- *Our Heritage, SSM Mission Statement, Philosophy of Apostolic Service, Who Are Associates?, Associate Logo, SSM Associate as Prophetic, Spiritual Leadership in the SSM Associate Movement, Intentional Covenanted Community, Lived Expression of Commitment, Values and Faith Center, Faith-Sharing, Collaborative Ministry, Contemplation,*

*Meditation, Relationship, St. Clare of Assisi, and Mary-Faith filled Woman.*

Perhaps one of the biggest changes came with the idea that Associates take more responsibility for the Movement by choosing representatives to become Team Leaders in each cluster. These leaders would work with the contact Sister to plan gatherings, to keep up communication with the other members, and to coordinate activities of the cluster. Sr. Raphael made plans to develop leadership materials to facilitate empowerment and educate for leadership. Parts of the Leadership Manual were distributed and used from 1999 to January, 2002, when the complete manual was printed and distributed to local clusters. In June of 1999, the new Associate Resource Manual was sent to each Associate and to each Sisters' convent.

Activities that continued throughout these years were the outreach ministries accomplished by Associates in

each geographic area. Also, each area continued to plan Days of Sharing and other events regularly held with Sisters, Associates, and invited guests in attendance. Geographic areas held their annually scheduled commitment and recommitment ceremonies, as agreed upon at the ACT Conference, with no change to the wording of the annual commitment. The Midwest Associates maintained their close affiliation with the Midwest Kindred Spirits.

## A New Century

In July, 2000, further visioning and planning for the Associate Movement was accomplished in Broken Arrow at the fourth Associate Conference for Tomorrow. The four major themes were: 1) Spirituality, community and ministry; 2) gatherings and content areas; 3) communications; and 4) future direction.

As it relates to ministry and community, it was decided that each cluster would choose the local projects in which to be involved. However, all of the U.S. Associates would support a larger project focused on the English and Spanish-speaking Caribbean. It was also decided that each area would hold a retreat day at least once a year in addition to their Day of Commitment.

The term *gathering* replaced the word *meeting* in reference to the monthly Associate get-togethers. It was

decided that prayer was an integral part of the gatherings, and various forms of prayer should be used. It was also decided that quality time should be devoted to faith-sharing at each gathering. The study guides from Sr. Raphael were being used and appreciated as an inspirational resource. It was suggested that a “Blue Book” of the gifts and talents of both Sisters and Associates be created as a resource for both the Sisters and the Associates.

Regarding communications, it was decided that the newsletter was vital to the Movement. However, it was to have a new look and a new name. As of the March, 2001, edition it became the “News From the Director”. Associates were encouraged to wear their Associate pins to identify themselves whenever possible and to use their title of SSM Associate as identification when publishing articles, letters, etc., in diocesan, hospital, or parish publications. Lastly, it was suggested that Sr. Raphael

might choose a book and theme for each year that the Associates could all read and discuss. Visioning for the future included a focus for upcoming retreats related to topics that aligned with SSM spirit, such as St. Francis, St. Clare, Mother Frances and the SSM charism and values. Sr. Dorothy Dirx, SSM Provincial, challenged Associates to get involved in and support SSM social justice issues. And, as a result of a Provincial decision in 2001 to have Associates serve on SSM committees, in 2002 Mary Ann Mand of Oshkosh was asked to serve on the Chapel Renovation Committee for the new Franciscan Courts. Diane Wegner, Milwaukee Associate, was asked to serve on the Provincial Global Justice Committee.

In response to the request for a theme and book to study, Sr. Raphael introduced From Violence to Wholeness, from Pace e Bene, in February, 2002. This book was also recommended by the Provincial Global

Justice Committee for study by all the Sisters in the United States/Caribbean Province.

The years of 2003-2004 saw a continuation of study of From Violence to Wholeness. In addition, study guides were published periodically and sent with “News from the Director” to bring more unity to the Associate clusters. The monthly newsletter began to include the SSM Franciscan Courts Monthly Activity Calendar. In addition, an Associate website was being created.

Associates in each area continued their many ministerial outreaches. As well as work in their local communities and parishes, many Associates created opportunities to bond with Sisters by planning parties and celebrations, by gifting them, working with them, and journeying with them. Associates accepted the opportunities to serve on committees and boards, both provincial and hospital, and as volunteers in doing projects.

Resumption of annual Midwest gatherings occurred in September, 2003 with a gathering for Sisters and Associates in Oshkosh. Twenty-three Sisters and Associates attended. This was a planning meeting and the resulting plan covered the following: 1) learning, preparing, mentoring, and integrating prayer and service; 2) global justice issues; 3) communication and the website; 4) transition to team leadership; and 5) being a strong representative of and with the Sisters. As a result of the call for team leadership, the following teams of Sisters and Associates began their leadership. In Tulsa the initial team was Sr. Rosella Romero, Mary Anne Axsom, Virginia Cervantes, Gene and Loretta Ruggeri, and Marty McNamara. In Roswell the team was Sr. Roseann Koskie, Aurelia Garcia, and Geneva Dominquez. In Wichita the team was Sr. Sherri Marie Kuhn and Judy Dusek. Denville's team was Sr. Joan Phillips, Rose Ann Porzio and Louise Ulan. In the

Midwest the Oshkosh team was Sr. Helen Marie Brand, Sr. M. Gordiana Ney, Mary Ann Mand, Pat Ostertag, and Tina Schulte. The Stevens Point team was Sr. Mary Lou Slowey, Lois Knope, Lorraine Glodowski, and Donna Warzynski. The Tomahawk team was Sr. Maria Vinton, Pat Johnson and Janine Samz. The members of the Milwaukee team were Sr. Raphael Narcisi, Lori Baker, Deanna Braun, and Diane Wegner.

The year 2004 was made very special by the reception of the first Associates on the island of St. Lucia. Their journey had begun in May, 2002, when eighteen men and women came together at the Sisters' convent. Sr. De Lourdes Lopez, Sr. Angella Samuel, and Sr. Fortunata Abraham all took part in the prayer and presentation of the SSM History and Heritage. Sr. De Lourdes ended the meeting reminding everyone to "Be a gift and a Benediction". A number of gatherings

followed, and in February, 2004, thirteen men and women were received as SSM Associates.

## The Missions

The first call from a sister in the missions to all the Associates had come in the mid-1980's from Sr. Bernadette Marie Palma. She was serving the SSM mission in Brazil. The SSMs had gone there in 1963 in response to a request for teaching Sisters for the Prelacy of Cristalandia in the state of Goias, Brazil. The Sisters ultimately were doing work in four locations in Brazil, which included the following ministries: pre-schools, small health clinics and parishes, and working with Bible groups, youth groups, and in the Native Indian ministry. Sr. Bernadette asked for used eyeglasses, baby vitamins and ointment, and children's clothes. The response from the Associates came from what was then called the Core Committee, which endorsed the development of a relationship with the missionary Sisters. The call went out in the February, 1984 issue of

“Outreach” from Sr. Raphael for the Associates to begin identifying and responding to the needs in the missions.

Since that early response, at least three major mission projects that involved the whole SSM U.S./Caribbean Province have been accomplished. In Spring, 1999, Sr. Raphael received word that the Associate cluster in Wichita had gathered 1000 signatures for the beatification of Mother Frances Streitel. Sister followed this news by asking all clusters to begin to gather signatures as she sent prayer cards to the clusters. Many Associates collected signatures from friends, parish members, and many co-workers who had numerous experiences with the SSM Community. By the end of that year, Sr. Raphael had more than 1200 signatures to send to Sr. Therese Marie Mueller in Rome.

The second major project was a series of mission efforts which grew out of the commitment from the ACT 2000 Conference decision to work more closely with the

English and Spanish-speaking Caribbean. A few examples of the responses in 2001 and 2002 included Denville Associates packing suitcases for Trinidad that held toys, clothing and activity books for the street children and AIDS victims. The Roswell Associates sent clothing, soft toys, and school supplies for the Caribbean. The Associates in Tulsa held a garage sale to raise funds. The Stevens Point Associate cluster sent \$230 to the Dominican Republic for educational purposes. All of the clusters began to gather *Pennies from Heaven*, which resulted in \$485 being sent to Grenada. In October, 2001, Sr. Raphael printed a letter in the Associate newsletter from Sr. Roselyn Nichols who was serving with the poor near the villages in Haiti. She asked for money to purchase 800 filters at \$9 U.S. each for families in forty-eight villages along the Haitian border. Thirty-eight of the villages were in the Dominican Republic and ten were in Haiti. Sister stated

that contaminated water was the principal cause of illness and death of children in the campo villages. Most water was contaminated with waste from the hospital upstream or from animal waste. People used the river for bathing and for washing their clothes and cooking utensils. She also stated that the people who used the contaminated water were actually the lucky ones because others did not have ready access to any water. By the summer of 2002, the Associates had responded to the *Funds for Filters* in the amount of \$4662.

In a listing of the activities of the Associates for the years 2003-2004, Sr. Raphael summarized the mission activity of the Associates. A total of \$3,600 had been sent to the English and Spanish-speaking Caribbean for the education of poor children. Toys, pens, and balls had been sent to Sr. Velorna Marie Gervais to use for one of the youth activities in St. Lucia. Twelve Bibles were sent to Sr. De Lourdes to give to patients for whom

she ministered at St. Jude's Hospital in St. Lucia. In response to the Milwaukee Archbishop's appeal to place a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in every classroom, \$100 was provided for a school in the Milwaukee area. The people in Grenada were helped by a \$2,000 response to the need for help in recovering from Hurricane Ivan. In addition, Associates in different geographic areas participated in many local Social Justice missions, such as jail ministry, *Peace House*, ministry to victims of AIDS, and *Operation Bootstrap*. Many Associates maintained a close relationship with Sisters, with visits, cards, gifts, and celebrations.

In 2005 Sr. Raphael began talking about her dream of a mission trip to St. Lucia which she closely planned and coordinated with the St. Lucian Sisters and Associates throughout that year. She also began asking Associates throughout the U.S. to either make plans to go along or send items from their clusters that would be delivered.

Entitled *Hands and Hearts Across the Seas*, the trip happened July 24<sup>th</sup> through the 29<sup>th</sup> of 2006. The four Associates who traveled from Tulsa were Bart and Beth Bartholomew, Marty McNamara, and Mary Anne Axsom. The three travelers from Wisconsin, accompanied by Sr. Raphael, were Pat Ostertag, Angie Driscoll, and Diane Wegner. Each one carried at least one extra suitcase that had been filled with items from every cluster in the United States. These items included sheets, towels, rosaries, spiritual booklets, children's books, and many pounds of school supplies of all types. The St. Lucian Associates had prearranged projects to be done at the St. Jude Hospital in Vieux Fort. These included yard work, and sewing and painting for the beautification of the patient rooms. A secondary result of the trip was the bondedness that was created between all Sisters and Associates.

In conclusion, over the years of SSM history, many of the Associates have worked in SSM ministries or directly with Sisters in other ministries before becoming Associates. In addition, since 1983, the Associates have done hundreds of mission projects, far too many to record accurately in an abbreviated history. As a brief overview, the following is some of the work that Associates have done.

In each geographic area, Associates have collected non-perishable food, clothing, baby toys, linens, school supplies, children's books, used glasses, medical supplies, pennies, rosaries, and paper products. Associates have served at food kitchens, parishes, SSM celebrations, hospitals, AIDS shelters, jails, neighborhood centers, after school programs, and with the terminally ill. Associates have organized prayer groups, celebrations with and for SSMs, retreats, meetings with other religious communities, work on

housing needs of the local poor, garage sales, bake sales, and bingo. Several Associates have served directly in SSM missions overseas, traveling to the Dominican Republic, St. Lucia, Grenada, or Africa. Some of the projects over the years have been entitled *Operation Bootstrap*, *Hello Dolly project*, *the Cricket Box*, and the *Ministry of Prayer*. Hundreds of prayers, cards, and telephone and email greetings have gone back and forth between Associates and Sisters over the years in support and affirmation of their mutual giftedness. Some of this activity was captured in the *Mission on the Move*, a new feature which Sr. Raphael began to print in October, 2005, and sent out with the newsletter. This feature relied on the Associate clusters to submit accounts of their accomplishments regarding their mission work. The clusters seemed to hesitate to celebrate their work, perhaps from a stance of humility. However, the feature

has recently come back as a result of Sr. Raphael's vision plan of 2007.

The year 2008 was one of very special significance for the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother and their Associates. It marked 125 years since the founding of the SSM Congregation and 25 years since the beginning of the Associate Movement. Tulsa Associates Bart and Beth Bartholomew, Mary Anne Axsom, and Margarete Galster served on the province-wide planning team with Sr. Maria Vinton and Sr. Roseann Koskie. They helped in the creation of timelines, materials, and publicity for the year-long celebrations. They also coordinated the province-wide celebration held in Oshkosh, Wisconsin on the second weekend in July, 2008. In addition, Associates throughout the United States and the Caribbean participated with Sisters in planning special celebrations in many of the geographic areas, which

included Tulsa, Wichita, Denville, Roswell, Milwaukee, Stevens Point, and Rhinelander/Tomahawk.

The history of the SSM Associates is rich with struggle, inspiration, and commitment. It has grown from an inner yearning to do more and be more into a vibrant movement with an abundance of growth and accomplishments. The term *movement* was and is intentional as an indication of the creative journey that the Associates travel. As the Associates celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup> year of existence they are eager to turn the page and embrace the next chapter of their history.