

SUMMER 2025



School Sisters of Notre Dame Atlantic-Midwest Province

Blessings

Nuns in the Nun Study: What Their Yes Means Today

New Insights
New Treatments
New Hope



TRANSFORMING THE WORLD THROUGH EDUCATION



School Sisters
of Notre Dame

Blessings is a publication for family, friends and benefactors of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. SSNDs in the Atlantic-Midwest Province express their mission of unity through education, which enables persons to reach the fullness of their potential.

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Dear Friend,

As School Sisters of Notre Dame, we are educators at heart, believing the world can be changed through the transformation of persons.

Our Sisters educate in all they do. This is apparent in their jubilee stories, excerpted on pages 8–9, where they share wisdom from their classrooms and outreach ministries, as well as from their retirement.

Many of our Sisters continue to teach, even after death, through their participation in the Nun Study (pages 10–11).

Sponsored by the National Institute on Aging, the Nun Study was designed to research Alzheimer's through data gathered from its 678 SSND volunteers. The data included annual physical and mental evaluations, medical records, archived documents, and, at death, the Sisters' brains.

Behind their sacred gift — and the critically important discoveries that are continuing to be realized through the study — are the Sisters who volunteered for it. Here, we learn the stories of two treasured SSNDs who participated in the study. Sister Genevieve Kunkel (pictured on our cover) became the study's de facto spokeswoman for a time (pages 10–11), and Sister Marie Alice Donnelly is the "Mother Abbess" profiled on pages 4–5.

The wisdom and stories shared in this issue of Blessings seem particularly meaningful during the Church's Jubilee Year of Hope. Together, let us be moved — even transformed — by them. Together, let us be Pilgrims of Hope.

With Grateful Blessings for All You Do and Are,

Charmaine Krohe, SSND

Provincial Leader, Atlantic-Midwest

P.S. Thank you for helping make our every Blessing possible. Special thanks to our Chicago area alumni and benefactors for making the Chicago Leadership Luncheon a success.

Province Happenings

Red Dress Day in Ontario

SSNDs helped memorialize the lives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls across Canada on Red Dress Day.

"After drumming, singing and smudging, the Indigenous shared their experience of the murder of family members, being trafficked, or having a daughter trafficked in our region," Sister Barbara Paleczny said. Sister Celeste Reinhart said the 2025 event was the best yet — "It was very powerful."



Practicing Prayer and Presence



Two Chicago-area Sisters are showing us all how to help each other through the aging process.

At 93 years old, Sister Lucy Giacchetti is hearing-impaired but can see. Her dear friend, 94-year-old Sister Julice Bots is vision-impaired but can hear. Together, they can do both: read newspapers, navigate the outdoors, and enjoy the peaceful simplicity of living in the present moment at Marian Village.

Wrapping Soap to End Human Trafficking

Sisters and Associates gathered in March to label hotel room supplies with the National Human Trafficking Hotline Number. They wrapped 3,000 bars of soap and 1,000 make-up remover packets with the hotline number, hoping trafficking victims will see the number and be able to call for help. The wrapped supplies were delivered to area hotels and motels.



Never Give Up!



When Sister Kate Kinnally heard that Caroline House in Bridgeport, CT, needed six white boards for their classrooms, she decided to donate the proceeds from her craft sales from the Senior Living Hospitality holiday fair. All looked well until she fell and fractured her femur. The setback didn't last. With the help of volunteers, Sister Kate raised the exact amount needed for the boards, underscoring the attitude of Caroline House women: Never Give Up!

Mother Abbess

EMBODIMENT OF HOPE

— Sister Mary Roy Weiss

When I was asked to write on hope for this issue of *Blessings*, my dear friend Sister Alice Marie Donnelly, SSND, came to mind. She was the embodiment of hope in the way she lived, led, and interacted with everyone she encountered. Alice touched more lives than I can imagine, even in death.

As a participant in the Nun Study (page 4), Alice donated time and, in the end, her brain, to benefit humanity's understanding and treatment of dementia in perpetuity. Her hope lives on in — and for — us all.

“Mother Abbess” was the title affectionately given to Sister Alice Donnelly by our young, new SSND member, Sister Rebecca Tayag. Rebecca had come to St. Leo Convent in Irvington, NJ, in the mid-1970s, where Alice served as community leader and guidance counselor at St. Leo Elementary School. (We Sisters taught and ministered at St. Leo's and at Archbishop Walsh High School.)

Visionary, Determined, Fun

Alice's religious name had been Sister Aquiline. She chose to return to her birth name when we were given the option following Vatican II. Our “Mother Abbess” really did have ideal motherly qualities. She was generous, gentle, and caring. She made sure we had fresh fruit to eat, to maintain physical health as well as healthy minds and spirits. She was visionary, determined, and fun.

Alice lost her own mother while in high school. Perhaps that loss spurred all five of the Donnelly children to enter religious life (like Alice, Gertrudis chose to enter the SSNDs). The siblings remained close to each other, despite their sometimes-remote locations: Ruth (Sister Mary of the Immaculate Heart) entered the Dominican cloistered convent at the monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary in Buffalo, NY; and Dick and Arthur — both Redemptorist priests — served in Brazil and the Caribbean, respectively.

Her siblings' inaccessibility did not deter Alice from going to them. When Dick died suddenly, Alice was “driven out of love” to go to Brazil that same day — without a passport. (It took some connections with politicians in Massachusetts to get her back into the USA!)

Nor was Alice deterred from visiting her cloistered sister. I was witness to a joyful reunion among the siblings when Sister Rebecca and I accompanied Alice and Gertrudis to visit Ruth. Their brother, Arthur, also joined our group. We were able to visit with Ruth through the double grill.

Years later, in another example of Alice's determination, I traveled with her to visit Ruth as she was dying. We needed special permission from a male cleric in charge of the monastery to visit Ruth in the inner chambers of the monastery where the Sisters' infirmary was located. What a happy, joyful time for Alice, able at last to hug her sister after so many years of cloister restrictions!



Sister Alice Marie Donnelly (left) with Sister Mary Roy Weiss (right).

A Stance of Hope

Everything Alice did was powered not only by her determination, but by her stance of hope. She acted on hope, showing us all how and when and why to act.

Alice changed many SSND lives with her hope and vision. She led us to the Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia in August, 1976, where we participated alongside such greats as Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (the future Pope John Paul II), Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Dorothy Day, and Princess Grace of Monaco.

Alice twice brought the entire St. Leo's community to Harvey Cedars, NJ, to build community and set goals for the future.

Her concern for each of us was clear as she eagerly learned of our families and their life events. She attended my brother's graduation from the NJ State Police Academy, and my family reciprocated her affection. When she celebrated her 70th Jubilee, my mother and sister-in-law traveled to Wilton to celebrate with her. (I had helped her shop for the fun jubilee outfit shown here. We both loved that bright pink suit!)

"I love you"

When Alice left St. Leo's, she went to St. Mary of the Pines in Chatawa, Mississippi, for sabbatical time and personal renewal. She wasn't finished with ministering, though! She lived and worked full time as a pastoral minister in Leonia, NJ, for the next 19 years! When she finally retired, she served another five years in community service at our Motherhouse in Wilton, CT.

As Alice neared the end of her life at the Lourdes Health Care Center, she told her friend, Sister Adele Shea, that she was not afraid to die. Her last words to Adele, as the latter sat by her bed, were, “I love you and I am so glad you are here with me.”

Alice's generosity and compassion will live forever, serving people who will never know her name. Her donation of her brain to the Nun Study continues her service to all of humanity forever, in love and in hope. As I write this now, I say, “I love you, Alice, and am so glad and grateful you continue to be here with — and for — us all.”

Nun Study: Still Fueling Hope

In a quiet, brightly lit room at UT Health San Antonio, plastic containers holding 678 sacred specimens line the shelves. The specimens belong to 678 School Sisters of Notre Dame who donated their time, efforts, and, in the end, their very brains to support pioneering research that is still yielding insights nearly 40 years after it was begun.

The Nun Study on Alzheimer's was launched in 1986 by researcher David Snowdon, PhD, who hoped to light the way toward what he called "a prescription for hope."

Today, this study lives on in the lab of Margaret Flanagan, MD. There, researchers are still using critically important data collected from convent archives, Sister interviews, medical reports, and the participants' brains in the effort to uncover new hope in the fight against Alzheimer's.

Meet Sister Genevieve Kunkel, SSND

Sister Genevieve Kunkel was the eldest daughter of nine children born to "perfect parents." In her long career as an educator, she taught English, history, French and Spanish. She also coached the debating and oratorical clubs, gaining skills that proved useful during her retirement.

Sister Genevieve had volunteered for the Nun Study and inadvertently become a spokeswoman for it. "Having been an educator for many decades, it felt good that here and now an opportunity was mine — a golden and a unique one — to continue my teaching by contributing to this already promising project," she explained.



Sister Genevieve Kunkel, SSND in the candidate's habit.

The study on Alzheimer's gripped ordinary Americans, many of whose lives had been upended by their own or their loved ones' dementias. Might these nuns be discovering a cure? Time magazine put Sister Genevieve on its cover. Katie Couric interviewed her on the Today Show. Dr. Snowdon featured her in his book on the Nun Study, *Aging with Grace*.

Sister Genevieve was, at 90, a model of aging with grace. In a 2001 speaking appearance in Towson, MD, she joked she was proud to be "alert and vertical," before segueing into a discussion of hope. Hope, she shared, was the whole point of the Nun Study.

"For me, at 90, the indispensable virtue is hope. ~~Isaiah~~ Proverbs 29:18, prophesied that 'without a vision, the people perish.' Hope helps us to be visionaries, to dream

the impossible dream, and to count on it coming true."

Nun Study Shows Education Matters

Among the most intriguing findings of the Nun Study is the role of learning in cognitive resilience.

Dr. Flanagan shared some of the most valuable insights from the ongoing study during the recent SSND Chicago Women's Leadership Luncheon. She said the study has identified one particularly critical factor from young adulthood that may predict the onset — or the absence — of Alzheimer's symptoms in later life.

By comparing Sisters' autobiographies (written shortly before entering the novitiate) with their clinical exams and the images of their brains after death, researchers showed Sisters with dementia almost always had produced simple, list-oriented autobiographies rather than complex and "high-idea density" documents.

In other words, learning seems to have an important role to play in the development of symptomatic Alzheimer's, even when autopsied brains show the plaque and tangles associated with the disease.

So, the School Sisters of Notre Dame were right all along: education matters.

The Nun Study Today

The Sisters who volunteered for the Nun Study often echoed each other's words when asked why: They did it as a way to continue their lifelong mission to help and educate others. Even after death.

The ongoing learnings gleaned from this seminal research will continue to fuel as-yet unidentified new clinical practices,

such as personalized medicine, targeted therapies, and preventive strategies. Indeed, the learnings — from the lifelong educators who said "Yes" to students they never met — will teach and guide humanity for generations to come.



Sister Gabriel Mary Spaeth administers nun study testing.



Sister Genevieve Kunkel speaking at a seminar on the Nun Study.

Jubilarians 2025

Our Own Pilgrims of Hope

Our 45 Jubilarians have nurtured hope in all they have been and done in their lives as School Sisters of Notre Dame. They are true Pilgrims of Hope, and we are grateful to call them "Sister." Enjoy excerpts from a few of their stories here and visit atlanticmidwest.org/posts/jubilarians to read more!

80 YEARS

Clare E. Fitzgerald, SSND†

75 YEARS

Margaret Marie Giblin, SSND
Dorothy Mary Leising, SSND
Mary Elizabeth Orr, SSND
Ann Marie Whelan, SSND

70 YEARS

Mary Ann Bazata, SSND
Constance Marie Coulter, SSND
Maryrose Crowley, SSND
Mary Paulette Doyas, SSND
Mary Therese Feeley, SSND
Bernice M. Feinger, SSND
Elizabeth Mary Foster, SSND
Mary Henrita Frost, SSND
Pauline Girodat, SSND
Mary Guth, SSND
Jane Irons, SSND
Elizabeth Ann Kaletcher, SSND
Theresa Mary Linz, SSND
Maria Felipe Lopez, SSND
Marie C. Mack, SSND
Anne McCarthy, SSND
Francis Mensik, SSND
Joan M. Minella, SSND†



"We all want to be loved and respected. Let us do that for each other."
Sister Dottie Leising, 75 Years



"Special needs children have blessed and enriched me. They taught me about the meaning of simplicity of life."
Sister Maureen Ulatowski, 60 Years

Mary Jean Mulch, SSND
Mary Laurellen Nixon, SSND
Eileen O'Dea, SSND
Mary Judith Ring, SSND
Mary Adele Shea, SSND
Mary Maritia Smith, SSND
Rosemary Spodnik, SSND
Jo Ann Villademoros, SSND

60 YEARS

Marie Danielle Amspacher, SSND
Delia Mary Dowling, SSND
Constance Harkin, SSND
Mary Heather MacKinnon, SSND
Patricia A. McLaughlin, SSND
Patricia A. Murphy, SSND
Marie de Sales O'Dowd, SSND
Shirley Stockus, SSND
Maureen Ulatowski, SSND
Mary Josephann Wagoner, SSND
Mary John Vianney Zullo, SSND

50 YEARS

Kathleen Jager, SSND
Mary Ann Urch, SSND

25 YEARS

Susan J. Czaplicki, SSND

Sister Elizabeth Mary Foster, 70 Years

"I have learned the blessed value of implicit trust in the sometime soul-searing, sometimes very quiet, often-silent, and always-loving whisperings in my soul and heart."

Sister Henrita Frost, 70 Years

"Listen to the quiet stirrings of your heart, for that is where God speaks. Follow God's voice with courage, and you will find a life richer than you could have ever imagined."



Sister Maritia Smith, 70 Years

"Sister Sally Neale and I needed a loan to start a new ministry in Kentucky. The loan officer said, 'Remember, Sisters, you can't do it on faith alone.' We walked out the door and just howled with laughter. We couldn't have done it on anything else!"

CAPTION: *Sisters Maritia Smith (far left) and Sally Neale pose with children from Sarah's Place in Kentucky.*

Sister Shirley Stockus, 60 Years

"Living in community is what I find the most powerful — praying together, sharing everyday experiences, challenging each other to grow."

Sister Pat Murphy, 60 Years

It was January. I was in El Salvador, walking into town on a very hot day. Suddenly, it began pouring rain. My flip flops broke.

A woman was standing on the other side of a fence nearby. She and I talked in my very minimal Spanish. She left and returned with a basin and towel. She asked me to hand her my shoes which she washed and retied.

My feet were filthy. The woman led me to an area where I could put my feet through the fence. She washed and dried them, and then put my repaired shoes back on.

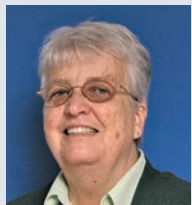
I experienced Holy Thursday at that moment. I remember her washing my feet every Holy Thursday.



Sister Connie Harkin, 60 Years

Here I am now, over 60 years with these wonderful women. I traveled. I knew Jesus as a friend. And I became an educator; one step in another's journey 'to reach his or her potential'.

In Memoriam



Eileen Weisman
August 6, 2024



Natividad Aponte
September 2, 2024



Judith Schaum
September 4, 2024



Mary Margaret Murphy
September 16, 2024



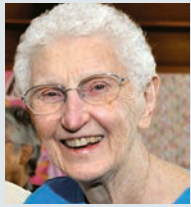
Irene Hughes
September 20, 2024



Carol Datz
October 17, 2024



Kathleen Kelly
October 17, 2024



Ellen Ryan
November 1, 2024



Ann Elizabeth Hartnett
November 7, 2024



Margaret Liethen
November 28, 2024



Celeste Swan
December 14, 2024



Lorraine Burns
January 11, 2025



Donita Mathis
January 14, 2025



Valentia Leibel
January 22, 2025



Clare Fitzgerald
January 27, 2025



Mary Kelly
January 27, 2025



Marie Vianney Gallagher
February 8, 2025



Mary Earle Doohan
February 12, 2025



Norma Loraditch
February 26, 2025



Joan Minella
May 9, 2025



Teresia Spodnik
May 15, 2025



Ann Louise Impink
May 30, 2025

MORE

Remembrances
can be read
here: [amssnd.
org/memoriam](https://amssnd.org/memoriam)

Easter Appeal

In this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis called us to be Pilgrims of Hope. He asked us to live with hope and to be a source of hope for others who are experiencing hardships. As we bear witness to what is happening in our communities and across our nation, may we accept this call to be messengers of joy, sources of new life and advocates of peace and justice.

Thank you to everyone who supported our mission with a gift to our annual Easter Appeal. Your gifts give us renewed hope that the work of SSND will continue now and into the future.



Events Around the Province

The second annual Connecticut Alumni and Friends event was held at St. Catherine in Trumbull, on June 1. We give special thanks to our wonderful committee, led by Sister John Vianney Zullo, Sister Maria Iannuccillo, Mrs. Nancy DiNardo, and Mr. Chris Caruso, and to our premier sponsors:

- The DiNardo-Aiello Family Fund
- The JKS Charitable Fund
- Fairfield Jesuit Community
- Sacred Heart University
- John McKeon and Johnna Torsone



Sister Justine Nutz (right) and friend share a laugh!

An SSND Lunch with the Sisters was held for alumnae, family, and friends in Burlington, Massachusetts, on June 14. Special thanks to volunteer Carolyn Gentile, alumna of Immaculate Conception Grammar School and Girls Catholic High School, for her help and commitment to SSND! We also thank our premier sponsors without which we could not have held this event:

- Mr. Donald Burke, Our Lady of Perpetual Help alumnus
- Mr. Robert Eskin and Mrs. Joan Shea



Sister Robert Marie Moser and Sister Maureen Ulatowski visit with alumnae at the Connecticut Alumnae & Friends Reunion.

Remembering Atlantic-Midwest Province School Sisters of Notre Dame in Your Will

Did you know there are creative ways to support the Atlantic-Midwest Province School Sisters of Notre Dame? Ways in which AMSSND, you, and your loved ones all benefit at the same time? Learn more here: atlanticmidwest.plannedgiving.org or call Director of Development, Laura Lang, 410-377-7774 x 1154.



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Atlantic-Midwest Province

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Tickets will be mailed in August!
31 Chances to Win!
\$5,000 Grand Prize!!!