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Word 
Gathering
Spring 2023



THE INTERSECTIONS OF
INTEGRAL ECOLOGY
WITH PHJC VALUES, AND DEI.

HealthVisions Midwest
Raises Awareness at Fundraiser 6

PHJC Motherhouse Marks
100th Year Anniversary 8

Sojourner Truth House
Receives Monumental Grant 13



<i>The Intersections of Integral Ecology with PHJC Values and DEI</i>	2
<i>Introducing Justine Johnson</i>	3
<i>Introducing Sue Wilhelm</i>	5
<i>HealthVisions Midwest Raises Awareness at Fundraiser</i>	6
<i>PHJC Motherhouse Marks 100th Year Anniversary</i>	8
<i>Sojourner Truth House Receives Monumental Grant</i>	13



IN THIS ISSUE

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THE INTERSECTIONS OF INTEGRAL ECOLOGY, *WITH PHJC VALUES, AND DEI.*

By: Sue Wilhelm, Executive Director of Mission Affirmation

This issue of Word Gathering is packed with invitations! There is the invitation to get to know the two new executive directors, Sue Wilhelm and Justine Johnson. Sue is the director of Mission Integration and Justine the director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). They each share a bit about their journey in this issue.

We have the continual invitation to deepen Pope Francis' call to recognize the Earth as our Common Home. In *Laudato Si'*, we are invited to see integral ecology as the on-going work of understanding how each of our decisions affects the planet and humanity. The Sustainability Pathway group of Poor Handmaid Sisters has been in the process of introducing foundational sessions on integral ecology to all groups who are closely associated with their ministries and/or part of their spiritual family. The principles of interrelationship, interconnectedness and integration that framework the vision of integral living intersect inherently with the Poor Handmaid values as well as with the determinants of diversity, equity and inclusion.

The work of diversity, equity and inclusion, is an invitation to widen our vision while honing our ability to see and honor the many kinds of diversity, to make choices that recognize that we

are all called to help each other thrive and that no one or any part of creation be excluded.

The other invitation is to reflect on the Core Values of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ: attentiveness to the Spirit, community, simplicity and respect and dignity for every person and all of creation. The core values offer us a foundation for living into the work of integral ecology as well as diversity, equity and inclusion. They are of the same cloth, a seamless garment.

As you read through the articles in this issue, consider the question: to what am I being invited? Another way to ask this is: how am I being invited to grow so that all people, all creation may thrive? Invitations are not always easy to respond to. Sometimes we have to choose between one invite and another. Sometimes we find ourselves on fire with joy and excitement with an invitation. At other times we may feel resistance.

The path of the Spirit that St. Katharina found herself responding to was a path ever-widening and always deepening in love for God, those in need, her Sisters and all along her path. May she accompany us on the journey of integrating into our lives *Laudato Si'*, DEI and the core values.

Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ



Partners in the work of the Spirit

INTRODUCING OUR NEW HIRE **JUSTINE JOHNSON**

THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI)

By: Arleen Peterson, Executive Director of Relational Services



Many times we ponder, why do you hire a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) executive director for your organization? What makes it so important, if we already have values and mission which reflects diversity, equity and inclusion? Bottom line – it legitimizes the significance of having a continuous and consistent focus on the attention required for this type of work.

The dedication to a strategy, programs and goals in DEI increases engagement, but it also provides a way to journey into changing aspects of our culture as an organization. It is all about working with ministries on self-transformation, transformational justice and responding to the needs of the times. It's about continuing the mission and charism of Saint Katharina Kasper who was inspired in her lifetime to serve the poor, needy and her commitment to integration of diverse cultures. It is crucial to state what she said in 1883 depicting her thinking about diversity, equity and inclusion:

"I know no foreign Countries and no foreign Sisters, there are only Handmaids of Christ, filled with the spirit of their vocation and truly working in blessed ways..." Saint Katharina Kasper to Sr. Bartholomea in America in 1883.

*So, as we take steps to walk in this journey,
we welcome our new Executive Director of
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion,*

Justine Johnson.



What drew you to this new role within the ministries of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ?

This position and the great work called me to apply and see where both the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work and I could grow. After much reflection, I was eager to accept after visiting with some colleagues and only seeing the tip of the iceberg of the vast amount of the work we do.

My excitement for this position is the commitment the Sisters and the community have made by creating a position focused on belonging and justice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion work has been integral to the PHJC ministries since formation and this role will help expand and strengthen that work in new ways. My experience in retreat work, higher education, and survivor support services will help give me the foundation to understand the complex and deep work our ministries do every day. Part of what drew me to this work was that I felt I could add my skills to the amazing expertise that is already here.

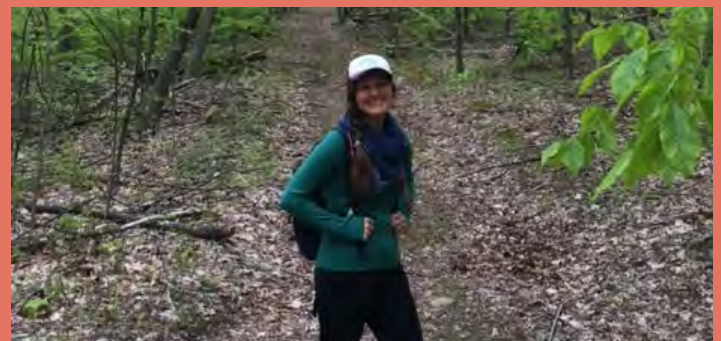
I'm grateful to work for an organization that is committed to unlearning and relearning, and through that process, empowering others.

What have you enjoyed the most so far in your new role?

Recognition that DEI work is a commitment, not a check mark. It is not one role, nor done in one year, but a long scope of legacy, present, and future. PHJC has made that value statement by creating this role. DEI work can sometimes become uncomfortable because we grow through learning and feeling, but it can also be joyful and exciting, I have already experienced the balancing act of holding both the growth and the joy.

What are your beliefs about motivating, influencing, serving and leading others?

I have much to learn from others. We all have our own stories which make us experts in our lived experience and I value hearing those stories! Our experiences help form who we are and I believe in listening to those around me to understand how to best motivate and serve them at the individual level. I usually start a process or project by listening to those in the room who have come before me, noticing who is not in the room and asking the question why, and leaning into curiosity while inviting others to do the same. I'm excited to continue to serve and walk alongside others at PHJC ministries in the coming months and years.





INTRODUCING SUE WILHELM

THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MISSION AFFIRMATION

What drew you to this new role within the ministries of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ?

I had been working at Lindenwood Retreat and Conference Center, a ministry of the Poor Handmaids, for about a year and a half, when the job description for Mission Integration came out. As I read through the job description, I found myself shaking my head yes and feeling this “nudge” from God. I asked a couple people to join me in prayer as I discerned if this might be where God was inviting me. I have been struck by the Vision and Core Values of the Sisters since I began, finding my own beliefs and values affirmed. Reviewing my life’s journey up to this point was another indicator for me that God had prepared me to walk with others on this particular journey.

What have you enjoyed the most so far in your new role?

I have really enjoyed building relationships with the co-workers, getting to know the Sisters better, and getting a broader understanding of all the ministries of the Sisters. I have much more to learn, and look forward to working beside all our partners in ministry!

What are your beliefs about motivating, influencing, serving and leading others?

Every person I know has particular gifts, struggles, hopes and dreams. The best leaders I know have been those who listen and observe so that in service, they can invite others to use their gifts, show them compassion and understanding in struggles while encouraging each to do their best. I can only influence those who feel heard and respected. We may not agree on everything but care for a person's dignity is foremost. I can only lead if I am willing to serve as Jesus taught us. How willing am I to wash feet as Jesus did? Not literally, but in approaching another with respect and humility. Tending to others needs while discerning the Movement of the Spirit will draw us into community, and assist us in serving simply, respectfully and joyfully.



HEALTHVISIONS MIDWEST RAISES AWARENESS AT HEALTH EQUITY FUNDRAISER

LEADERS DISCUSS OBSTICLES TO HEALTHY LIVING AND HONOR ADVOCATES WHO BREAK DOWN BOUNDARIES.

By: Sharon Tubbs, Executive Director HealthVisions Midwest Fort Wayne

Dr. Viva Combs Thorsen grew up south of downtown Fort Wayne. The daughter of a single mother of four, they didn't have many resources. When her mother was murdered and the children moved in with their grandmother, life worsened. They sought free and reduced-cost clinics for health care. Dinner often equaled burgers and fries that Viva and her sisters brought home from their jobs at fast food restaurants.

"We didn't eat many vegetables," Thorsen said. The description was part of her keynote address to nearly 200 supporters at HealthVisions Midwest of Fort Wayne's inaugural breakfast fundraiser in fall 2022. Despite those humble and tragic beginnings, today Thorsen is a social epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The event, including Thorsen's talk and a panel discussion about health equity in Fort Wayne, is a precursor for more HealthVisions discussions on the issue in 2023.

"It's time to really talk about health equity in Allen County," said Sharon Tubbs, Director of HealthVisions Midwest of Fort Wayne. "For so long, human services and health professionals have focused on health disparities, but we want to turn the page. It's time to talk about solutions that lead to health equity — everyone having the opportunity to live their highest level of health in America, regardless of their skin color, income, or what language they speak."

During the event, Thorsen shared how her lived experience in Fort Wayne compelled her to explore a career in public health. Her work with the CDC focuses on helping women in African nations overcome health inequities. Unfortunately, Thorsen says, she still sees similarities between conditions in African nations and in health inequities she lived through in Fort Wayne.

After her inspiring presentation, Thorsen also moderated the panel discussion about health equity featuring Sarah GiaQuinta, of Parkview Health; Nicholas Leonowicz, of Lutheran Health; and Stacy Grundy, of IU Health. To continue the discussion in 2023, HealthVisions plans to host special events, featuring experts who will discuss issues such as the effects of racism and of social integration on health.

Also during the fall fundraiser, HealthVisions Midwest awarded the agency's first Dignity Awards to community advocates for exemplary service to underserved people in Allen County. Chi Eta Phi, a sorority for retired and active nurses of color, and Yin Yin Moe and Win Tun Nyunt, a married couple who serve Burmese residents and farmers, were recipients.

A few characteristics for award winners include: listening attentively and responding courageously to the needs of the time; advocating on behalf of those who are underserved; using their own skills



and talents to help increase the overall health and life of others who are differently skilled; respecting and affirming others regardless of race, creed, sex, age, sexual orientation, status, or ability; believing that each human being has rights and responsibilities and must be treated equitably; collaborating with others who embrace a common mission to achieve the greatest impact, regardless of individual recognition.

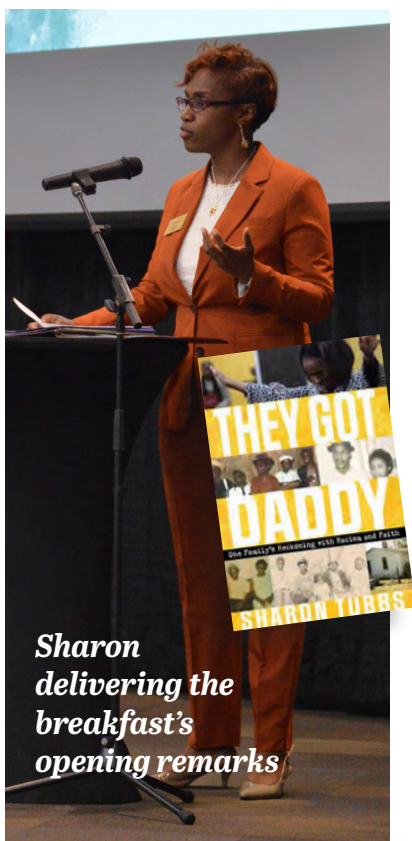
Yin Yin Moe and Win Tun Nyunt have worked with several local organizations to serve the Burmese community, including HealthVisions Midwest, Plowshares Local Food System Project, and the Language Services Network. They use their own time to raise awareness about health issues and act as volunteer liaisons, connecting Burmese refugees and families to needed community resources. Their efforts were crucial in promoting COVID-19 vaccination during the pandemic. They also work to connect Burmese residents and refugee farmers with local farm market operations. The residents are able to access fresh produce within their culture and Burmese farmers are able to earn money to support their families. Currently, the couple is also working with a group of farmers to help them become certified for transactions involving state

assistance programs, Women Infants and Children, for instance.

Chi Eta Phi, the local Zeta Eta Chapter, has also collaborated with many local agencies, including local churches, the NAACP, Parkview Health, HealthVisions, and more. The group often works behind the scenes in southeast Fort Wayne and was key during the pandemic in spreading the word about COVID-19 vaccines and helping people register for vaccination. For years, however, the group has volunteered at health fairs, partnering with agencies throughout the area, to provide health screenings at no cost. The goal is to normalize preventive care, empowering people to better manage their health. Phyllis Bragg, former president, accepted the Dignity Award on the sorority's behalf.

Bragg, Moe, and Nyunt expressed their gratitude for the honor, and tears were shed. They received plaques, which read: "For seeing innate worth in others, enhancing the overall health and value of the undervalued, and thereby strengthening our community." HealthVisions Midwest of Fort Wayne will award one Dignity Award recipient each year at the annual ReThinking Health fundraising event.

They Got Daddy: *One Family's Reckoning with Racism and Faith*



Sharon
delivering the
breakfast's
opening remarks

An unforgettable journey through racism and faith across the generations.

January 15, 1959—a day that changed one family forever. White supremacists kidnapped and severely beat rural Alabama preacher Israel Page, nearly killing him because he had sued a White sheriff's deputy for injuries suffered in a car crash. After "they got Daddy," Israel Page's children began leaving the Jim Crow South, the event leaving an indelible mark on the family and its future. Decades later, the events of that day fueled journalist Sharon Tubbs's epic quest to learn who had "gotten" her mother's daddy and why.

"They Got Daddy" follows Tubbs on her moving journey from Fort Wayne, Indiana, to the back roads and rural churches of Alabama. A powerful revelation of the sustaining and redemptive power of faith and unflinching testimony to the deeply embedded effects of racism across the generations, it demonstrates how the search for the truth can offer a chance at true healing.

Short Bio/Book Order Info

Sharon Tubbs is a writer, an inspirational speaker, and the director of a nonprofit organization that empowers under-resourced residents in Fort Wayne, Indiana, to live healthier lives. Her book, *They Got Daddy: One Family's Reckoning with Racism and Faith* can be found online through most book retailers.

Or visit Sharon's website at SharonTubbs.com.



PHJC MOTHERHOUSE MARKS 100TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY

By: Barbara Allison, Communications

Eight-million bricks and 100 years. While impressive, these statistics hardly tell the story of the 100 years of dedicated service of the PHJC presence in Marshall County. In 1922, the Poor Handmaid Sisters moved to their current location in Donaldson, Indiana, purchased from the Glunz family of Chicago. Ancilla Domini Chapel in the Motherhouse was dedicated on May 23, 1923. This year, the PHJC Community will celebrate that Centennial with a Mass and celebration on May 21.

Following the 1919 groundbreaking by Mother Tabitha and Larsen Danielson Construction, each postulant dreamed that her class would be the first to profess their vows at the new Motherhouse. That finally happened in 1922. The Sisters expanded their ministries in Marshall County and the surrounding areas, many of which continue the mission today, serving with a preferential option for the poor.

The main areas of their ministry, education, healthcare, childcare, senior care, contemplative prayer, volunteerism, art, and care for the Earth, are carried out to lift up those they serve.

Ancilla Domini College was founded in 1937 for the instruction of the Sisters in formation, who completed their first two years toward their degrees in education, social services, and healthcare.

Sister Symphoria Miller, the first Dean of Ancilla College and later Director of Education and PHJC Provincial was, according to a 1999 report by Sister Johnel Kunkel, "a modest financial wizard" known for her energy and for making the seemingly impossible happen. "Somebody has to do the pushing," Sister Symphoria said. She shepherded the college into a partnership with DePaul University in Chicago so Sisters could continue studies and graduate with their four-year degrees, going on to teach, staff hospitals, and provide social services throughout the region.

In 1937, Ancilla College received its own accreditation and granted three-year teaching degrees, which was the requirement at that time. In 1967, Ancilla College opened to members of the public, offering Associates Degrees to commuter

students throughout the area. 2015 and 2016 saw the construction of the first of two dormitories and Zirkle Commons Student Center, and in 2021, Ancilla College became Marian University Ancilla College through a partnership with Marian University of Indianapolis.

The PHJC Sisters lived in harmony with the land on their 36 acres. They began a poultry farm, which operated from 1918-1990 as a way to produce healthy, local food for the Sisters and coworkers. It soon expanded into selling sustainably raised eggs and poultry to PHJC-run hospitals and to the community. Long-time coworker Mike Falkowski, who retired from the Facilities and Grounds department in 2018, began his 46-year career with the PHJC as a delivery driver for the farm. Coworker Freida Conn, Environmental Services Manager, also began her career and served until its closing in 1990. Ancilla Beef and Grain Farm continues the mission today, as do the campus greenhouses and the Dietary Services team, who grow, harvest, and prepare fresh, nutritious meals from the bounty produced on site for the Sisters, residents, coworkers, and guests.

In 1970, Catherine Kasper Home began as the dream of Sister Symphoria Miller, who again raised funds to build a place for the Sisters to retire near the Motherhouse. That July, Sister Flora Offerle, followed by an additional twenty Poor Handmaid Sisters, became the first residents of Catherine Kasper Home. During that year, a total of 80 Sisters moved to CKH. In 1973 Sister Justine Buescher, CKH administrator, declared,

“This is not a place of retirement, but a place where Sisters are active in service to others.” It didn’t remain a Sisters-only home for long. CKH welcomed the first lay residents, John Kirchhoff and Clara Wagner, in 1978.

In the early days, Sister Sharon Marie Fox served as the Director of Nursing at CKH from 1975-1978 and returned as Director from 1990-1994. It was something new for her to nurture the Sisters in retirement with whom she had formerly ministered in hospitals. “It was good to get to know them in another way and appreciate all they contributed over the years,” she said. For Sister Sharon Marie, there was seldom a difference between caring for her fellow Sisters’ spiritual needs and their medical ones. “It’s the way I express my spirituality,” she said of her holistic approach to care. Sadly, Catherine Kasper



Home will close at the end of March.

Faith development, serenity, and a natural setting are what has attracted seekers of all ages, races, genders, and faiths to Lindenwood Retreat and Conference Center since its dedication in 1987. That year, over 2,500 guests utilized retreat accommodations there. Decades later, that number has grown, establishing Lindenwood as a premier Northern Indiana retreat facility. In 2017, Lindenwood had 565 programs and served 7300 guests. The site itself began as Villa Maria, where Ancilla Domini High School students lived while studying and discerning religious life with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.

In March of 1986, renovations began to transform the space into a retreat center with overnight accommodations, meeting rooms, private bathrooms, elevators, air conditioning, and spaces for quiet contemplation. A labyrinth modeled after the one at Chartes Cathedral just outside Paris, was added in 2008. During a renovation in 2009, Lindenwood added five spacious conference rooms with updated audio-visual systems, a bookstore, and office spaces.

“Catholic people are the models for these retreats,”

said Lindenwood Director Paul Mach, “but they appeal to many in their inclusivity and pastoral nature.”

Some examples of these are the recently completed Women Who Knew God series, which introduced attendees to some powerhouse women of the Catholic Church throughout the ages; and the Henry Nouwen series, which continues into 2023, led by Sister Joetta Huelsmann, PHJC, the newest addition to the Lindenwood team. That inclusivity has also led to the creation of unique retreats for the Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) community, and even a retreat designed to offer respite to church music directors, who are usually the ones giving of themselves to their congregations.

Earthworks, a natural outgrowth of the Poor

Handmaids commitment to Earth care, was founded by Sister Mary Baird and a group of like-minded individuals in 1988. Earthworks embodied a sustainable, locally focused, simplified model of living over the “bigger, more, and better” model of American consumerism, which benefits the rich over the poor. To that end, Earthworks educated the community, especially children, about the importance of living in harmony with rather than dominion over the Earth.





Indeed, the Earth became the classroom itself as children attended summer camps focused on growing their own food without pesticides or packaging and caring for farm animals in humane ways. Campers also learned how to cook their own delicious meals from their harvests.

Earthworks had numerous directors after Sister Mary. The longest-serving, Sister Sue Rogers, RSCJ, helped make it the premiere Earth education destination in the area, serving children for generations and as it expanded to include a market featuring fresh baked bread and sweets, and creating work opportunities for students with special needs. The market closed in 2016 and Earthworks closed in December 2018.

Maria Center Independent Living, founded in 1989, offers seniors the best of both worlds: independence and living in community. Seniors can maintain their independence, participate in a variety of activities, and live in community, all at a beautiful, faith-filled campus. What began as a community of six seniors has grown to over 30 residents, and the wait list is only growing.

Sharing in activities is a rich part of life at Maria Center. Residents meet once a month with Resident Services Coordinator Rhonda Overmyer and Activities Assistant Christine Leihy to plan fun and meaningful endeavors for the next month. They take Turtle Topper trips to spot eagles, visit museums, and other local attractions, and each trip includes a stop for lunch or ice cream. These activities help residents get to know each other on a deeper level.

After a resident's untimely death, resident Bill Burke thought "it would be nice to have a place to find out about one another besides the superficial small talk." To that end, he created one of their favorite activities, Spiritual Listening. It's five minutes of a resident sharing their story with no questions or interruptions. "We all came from different places. This is about what gives your life meaning," he explained.

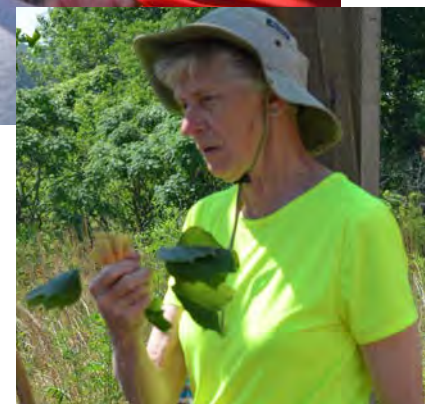
"We're like a big family here. The bonds of friendship quickly form when people see each other every day," Sister Leandra Welling, Maria Center's first director told "Word Gathering" when Maria Center opened. That's still true today.

Catherine's Cottage was established in 2006 to create a community for Sisters in the beginning stages of memory loss and Sisters who desire to form a loving, supportive community with them. In the past 17 years, it's grown into a living, loving reality. Two current residents, Sisters Jolise May and Joan Fisher, are also original residents.

The goal was the establishment of smaller, home-like settings for Sisters challenged by memory loss. Studies show people dealing with memory issues do better in smaller settings with consistency. Sister Jolise served as the first Sister Coordinator and recently returned to that role, and the late Sister Julia Huelskamp was its first Resident Assistant. All along, choices of activities such as gardening, sewing, and visiting have been offered, along with home-cooked meals. Cottage Homemaker, Bonnie Halsey prepares meals and dines with the Sisters



“We’re like a big family here. The bonds of friendship quickly form when people see each other every day,”



as part of their family. The Sisters who are able offer support to those challenged by memory loss, building community for all. Sister Jolise credits current Cottage homemaker, Bonnie with helping to create that community of caring for the Sisters. “We have fun and we share at mealtimes,” said Sister Jolise.

The long-time Catherine’s Cottage Chronicler Sister Joan began by helping others cope with memory loss, and now accepts help as she deals with memory loss. “I wouldn’t want to live at any place else,” Sister Joan said. “I love all the windows that look out into nature.” Sister Joan still sews in the sewing room and attends Mass at CKH, in addition to working on the Chronicles.

Under the mantra of Fearlessly Creating, MoonTree Studios began in 2010 as a place for intergenerational experiences featuring art, Earth, education, and spirituality. Over the past thirteen years, MoonTree has offered rich experiences in the arts, such as fibers, painting, glass, clay, and woodworking to the public, Sisters, coworkers, and residents. MoonTree Gallery also features several exhibits per year that showcase local and

regional artists.

MoonTree partners with other environmental groups in Marshall County to host Green Drinks, where participants share beverages and learn from presentations about environmental topics. Recently, coworker Liz Symon initiated a water quality testing program to monitor water from both Lake Gilbraith as well as Flat Lake in a partnership with the Indiana Clean Lakes Program. Coworker Rachel Hansen and recent summer intern Nicole McGee have assisted in sample collection. Samples are collected May through August each year and sent off for analysis of various water quality monitoring parameters such as depth, temperature, dissolved oxygen, nutrient loads, pH, and algae composition.

The ripple effect of service, community building, and commitment to the Marshall County area the Sisters have created is a much more compelling story than mere statistics could ever tell. It’s astounding to think of what the next 100 years of the PHJC presence in Marshall County holds.

**Sources: Ripples Timeline Tales columns 2016-2019; PHJC Chronicles, Notre Dame Archives; and Word Gathering, 1990-2023.*





SOJOURNER TRUTH HOUSE RECEIVES MONUMENTAL GRANT

By: Angela Paul, Executive Director

Sojourner Truth House (STH) is a ministry of hope and help for homeless and at-risk women and their children. Late last year it was announced that Sojourner Truth House received a \$1.25 million grant from the Bezos Day 1 Families Fund—the largest private gift in the organization’s history. Launched in 2018 by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, the Day 1 Families Fund issues annual leadership awards to leading organizations on the frontlines that are employing compassionate, needle-moving work to help families move from unsheltered homelessness and shelters to permanent housing with the services they require to achieve stability.

“At Sojourner Truth House, keeping families housed is our number one priority,” said Executive Director Angela Paul. “With this grant, however, we can do so much more to not just keep people housed, but to make them whole again.”



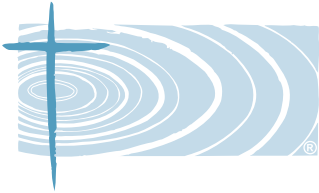
This one-time grant will help Sojourner Truth House in its tireless work to support families as they reel from skyrocketing rent costs, limited services, and insufficient incomes. Sojourner Truth House plans to use the grant funds to maintain secure stable housing for families when they need it by assisting with deposits on apartments and houses and providing rental, mortgage, and utility assistance. At least 80 additional families each year will receive diversion assistance.

Sojourner Truth House was selected as a Day 1 Families Fund grant recipient by a group of national advisors who are leading advocates and experts on homelessness and service provision. National advisors brought expertise on housing justice, advancing racial equity, and helping programs employ resources effectively to assist families out of homelessness.



“I have so much hope for the future,” said Sojourner Truth House client Isabel. “I love Sojourner, and so do my children. Sojourner Truth House is our family.”

Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ



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