



Word 
Gathering
Winter 2022

COMMUNITIES IN COMMUNION

Community Building
Begins at the Table
Maria Center 5

Fostering Communities of
Communion in Silence
Illuminata House of Prayer 9

A Community For All Who Seek
Lindenwood 13



In This Issue

3 *Communities* in Communion

5 *Community* Building
Begins at the Table

7 Cross Pollinating Seeds
of *Community*

9 Fostering *Communities* of
Communion in Silence

11 Sojourner Truth House

13 A *Community* For All Who Seek

15 In Loving *Memory*

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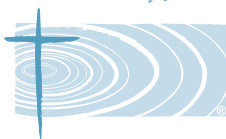
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By Sister Linda Volk, PHJC

COMMUNITIES IN COMMUNION

In the summer issue of Word Gathering we explored the phrase from the PHJC Vision Statement, “communities in communion,” and introduced a number of our ministries through that lens. In this issue we are featuring the other PHJC ministries through the same lens.

The meaning of being “in communion” takes a group deeper into the affiliation that is common to community. Pope Francis expressed this more intense relationship of communion in the social encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* (Brothers All) written in 2020. Setting aside the lack of gender inclusion in the title of the encyclical, we recognize that the Pope is prophetic in calling us to recognize our relationship in community as deeper than “neighbor” as perceived in its standard usage.

Globalization makes us neighbors by default, a term that we may or may not allow the scriptures to illuminate its deeper meaning for us. To signify the deeper connection of communion the Pope calls us to the relationship of “siblings”. This designates a stronger bond which implies inherent kinship, cohesion, solidarity, and interdependence. We are not just living side by side in harmony and tolerance, but we are journeying together in deep trust and radical care as siblings, as sisters and brothers of one beloved family.

In #129 of *Fratelli Tutti* Pope Francis uses four powerful descriptors that speak of a community intentionally striving to be in communion with one another and with those they encounter through service. These communities “welcome, protect, promote and integrate.” This is exactly what siblings in the Spirit are called to intentionally communicate in their everyday relationships and ministries.

The passage from neighbor by proximity to sibling in the Spirit through mutual encounter is a significant journey. The more recognition of interdependence in this journey, the deeper the communion.

When “in communion” with others, we give and receive from the lens of the heart and the spirit. We serve for our own wholeness and the wholeness of others. St. Paul described this as the body of Christ with no one member of the body less than another and all interrelated in mutuality and care for the common good. This is God’s beloved community in communion.



Poor Handmaid Ministry co-workers celebrated work anniversaries and appreciation for each other in September.

“We are not just living side by side in harmony and tolerance, but we are journeying together in deep trust and radical care as siblings, as sisters and brothers of one beloved family.”





COMMUNITY BUILDING BEGINS AT THE TABLE FOR MARIA CENTER RESIDENTS

By Barbara Allison, Communications

Sharing a table with one another for communal meals sets the table for many other ways of making connections at Maria Center Independent Living, located in the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ Motherhouse. Gathering information, sharing joys and sorrows, lots of laughter, and an occasional glass of wine, are also served up at these shared meals. "It's our family table," resident Elizabeth Gearhart said. "We socialize and get info. My first night, I met five people; it was so welcoming," she added. Fellow resident Ken Jamsa concurred. "It's one of the best things we have going," he said. In a 2016 Oxford University study, researchers found that people who share meals are more likely to feel better about themselves and have wider social networks capable of providing social and emotional support. That's evident at Maria Center.

Residents also open their table to others, including Sisters, Lindenwood retreat goers, and Catherine Kasper Home residents like PHJC Associate Anna Worth. "I'm grateful you accepted me," she said at a recent lunch. "Anna adds to our community," resident Pauline Pierson added. Additionally, the camaraderie helps residents know the communal table is a place where they can find common ground dealing with the challenges that growing older brings. "We're in the same boat," said Ken. "If you're alone, you'd

feel like you're losing it," Pauline noted. "Here, that's not the case." Loretta Kania, one of Maria Center's newer residents, agrees. "Everyone looks out for one another," she said. "If you're not down for meals, we're gonna check on you."

Humor is another big community builder at Maria Center too. Not surprisingly, resident Bill Burke is often at the center of things. "You never know when Bill starts talking whether he's teasing you or if it's real!", Roger Simmons laughed. Bill also belongs to a wine club, so every Friday evening, residents enjoy a new variety he's gotten, or one that Roger wants to share. "Friday nights is when we let our hair down and chat with anyone who joins us at the table," Bill said. "It's casual. There's not even a dress code, except that you have to wear clothes," he laughed. Residents even joke about timing their trips to the laundry room to precede fellow resident Lexi Feece. "If you time it right, she'll fold your clothes for you," Bill said with a laugh.

Sharing in activities is another huge 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 upcoming 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, extending the table, and community building off campus, too. These activities help residents get to know each other on a deeper level. After a former resident's untimely death, Bill thought "it would be nice to have a place to find out about one another besides the superficial small talk." That was the genesis of 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," Bill said. Pauline expounded on that, noting, "we've named each and every thing we're grateful for, and that's neat."

That's undoubtedly led residents to be comfortable enough with one another to share deeply of themselves and gain much-needed support from that sharing.

"Everyone here has had some suffering in their lives," said resident Doris Feiser. "We're compassionate to one another." She recalled how her fellow residents and the PHJC Sisters supported her and held her in prayer when her late son was undergoing a kidney transplant and recovery in a nursing home. "It meant a lot to him, and to me," she said. Bill, a caregiver for his wife Carol, who has dementia, feels supported as well. "If I have to be out, I have no problem getting people to help in taking turns caring for my wife," he said. "His relationship with Carol inspires us all," Ken added.

Elizabeth, who recently lost her dear friend and fellow resident David Burke, who passed away this spring, felt enveloped in support when dealing with losing him. Everyone at Maria Center was very supportive of

me and Dave's family," she noted. "Since I've been here, 25 people have passed," Ken added. "That's our reality. Elsa (Littman, also a resident) makes us more aware of the preciousness of life."

It's also a consensus that the presence of the Sisters is a huge component of community to the residents. "It's a special place," Elizabeth said. "Their values are part of our values," Ken added. "It makes me want to live a better life than if I was with lay people," Roger said. Loretta, who is Sister Jolise May's biological sister, has lived in many places throughout her life as she raised her family and became a caregiver to other family members. "I'm home now," she said of her life at Maria Center. "I've finally found my destination."

***Maria Center
caring for heart, mind, body
what a loving place***

Haiku by David Burke,
late Maria Center resident



*Amy donated
260 pounds of
produce to her
local food pantry.*



Amy Wallace
Carroll, Iowa



By Libby Riggs, Associate Director

CROSS POLLINATING SEEDS OF COMMUNITY

Both PHJC Volunteers and PHJC Associates create community among themselves.

But the seeds of call do not always end there. They cross pollinate as some volunteers have in time become Associates and a number of Associates have become part of the volunteer program.

Amy Wallace of Carroll, Iowa is a good example of this. As a PHJC volunteer she shared many service experiences with the Sisters and Associates. The charism of Saint Katharina that she saw present in both Associates and Sisters appealed to her. After discernment and formation Amy made her commitment to the Associate Community in 2022.

Living several states away from most Associates Amy considered how she could be in community with them through ministry that aligned with the Associate way of life. She started looking for opportunities in her own area to be neighbor to those in need.

In February 2022, Amy shared with her husband and another couple her love of gardening and her dream of developing produce to share with local food banks. Together the four formed community to help make this a reality. Both couples committed to being open to the Spirit to direct them in the steps ahead.

Their first garden seeds included fourteen different vegetables and five fruits sown in a heated shed under grow lights. The resulting bountiful harvest was then shared with many families and neighbors, and in addition 260 pounds of produce went to the local food pantry. Their passion and excitement have grown to set a new goal of 500 pounds of produce to share with the food pantry.

The combination of Amy's call to service as a volunteer with her commitment to a community that follows the ways of Katharina Kasper is a seamless example of communities in communion.

Amy is grateful that her experience as a PHJC volunteer led her to respond to the charism of Saint Katharina that she found alive in the PHJC Associate Community.

This cross pollination of attentiveness to the Spirit with care for neighbor is bearing a life-giving harvest of service in her life.



ILLUMINATA
House of Prayer & Hermitage

FOSTERING **COMMUNITIES** IN COMMUNION IN SILENCE

Sister. Deborah Davis, PHJC

Illuminata House of Prayer is a sacred space for women and men seeking silence and solitude to further explore and deepen the interconnection of art, nature, and creativity within.

Talk about Communities in Communion!

Where is this wondrous place? you ask. Illuminata House is a wheelchair accessible farmhouse located on the PHJC property surrounded by forest, prairie and walking paths along Lake Galbraith. Sisters, Associates and Maria Center residents are invited to enter into solitude and prayer in this setting, especially for those desiring a quiet atmosphere for reflection. For those wishing to settle in for a number of days bedrooms are available for overnight stays.

Several times, the four sisters on the Provincial Leadership team have been privileged to sample Sister Nancy Raboin's hospitality firsthand as they enjoyed quiet space for their "deepening days": evidence of a community in communion.





Two recent retreatants share their retreat experience and the hospitality shown by Sister Nancy. Sister Kathleen Quinn shares, "I spent six refreshing and prayerful days at Illuminata House. I love the surrounding beauty of the trees, the fall colors and the delightful swaying of the branches as I relaxed and enjoyed a variety of delicious meals. My time in prayer was spent in a diversity of available places ranging from the solitude of my room to the prayer area of the Blessed Sacrament, to the porch where my eyes feasted and my heart pondered God as the Universal Christ. I invite others to experience the gift of Illuminata House."

Sister Nora Hahn who has had multiple retreat experiences in the past, explains, "Retreat at Illuminata House was a combination of what is best for me in a retreat setting. In the past I made a retreat in a hermitage. It was quiet and in a beautiful area with lots of nature around, but not very handicap accessible. Cooking my own meals meant mostly hamburgers and hot dogs. The main chapel for Mass was also not handicap accessible and I ended up having to drive to the local parish for Mass.

Last year I stayed in my room/apartment for retreat where I was very comfortable. I could cook or get

meals in the cafeteria. Mass was available to me every day. But I simply did not have a feeling of "getting away" or a sense of freshness as I "retreated".

This year I combined the best of both worlds as I day-timed at Illuminata and night-timed in my own room. So, I had the opportunity for daily Mass in our chapel and was comfortable in the night, no packing needed. At Illuminata I was surrounded by nature, and by Sister Nancy's artwork, which I love.

Sitting on the deck surrounded by a variety of trees and a few squirrels was refreshing. I could also sit on the all-seasons porch when the weather was bad. Or I could pray before the Eucharist. For five days I became a vegan, meals all cooked from scratch by Sister Nancy. The food was both healthy and tasty.

Before or after meals Sister Nancy and I would have a special meal prayer or talk about what I was experiencing. She is a great listener. Will I make a return "visit" to Illuminata? Absolutely!"

The building of communities in communion continues in many and varied ways. Participating in retreat time at Illuminata House is just one more way. Dear reader, you may consider it for yourself.

SOJOURNER TRUTH HOUSE

25th ANNIVERSARY

Sister Shirley Bell, PHJC

The following is an excerpt from a speech by Sister Shirley Bell, PHJC during the Sojourner Truth House 25th Anniversary event.

Good Afternoon! It's my honor and pleasure to be with you today as we celebrate 25 incredible years of Sojourner Truth House. If you had a chance to view the slideshow you've already read a wonderful Cliffnotes version of the history of Sojourner Truth! The growth over these years has been amazing and there's still plenty of work ahead. I'd like share with you the humble beginnings of how this amazing ministry began. But before I do, I'd like to introduce to you the women who began this incredible journey!

First and foremost, Sister Joan Fisher; Sister Peg Spindler, Sister Kathleen Quinn, and Sister Loretta Schleper. Sister Ann Linzmeyer unfortunately is unable to be with us today. Sister Nora Hahn, the first chairperson of the board of directors in 2009.

The Poor Handmaids have a long history in Gary, back to when St. Mary Medical Center started in a row of four tarpaper buildings at the beginning of the 20th century. When the hospital closed it left a deep hole in the hearts of all who served there, especially the Sisters, and they wondered how ministry would continue in Gary.

But, of course, God has ways if we but listen attentively and soon Bishop Melczek asked the Poor Handmaids and the Victory Noll Sisters, both serving in Gary, to evaluate what was needed in the diocese. Poor Handmaids were still ministering at St. Mark's parish and Sister Joan Fisher lived there. Her background and heart has always been in advocacy programs for the poor and needy. She had a dream. She wanted and intended to do more.

Sisters Kathleen Quinn, Ann Linzmeyer and Loretta Schleper were also living in the Region and they too had hearts drawn to those in need. They began talking



together and searching out what was already going on and what was needed. The focus quickly became women with children who needed assistance. Initially it began by simply addressing the needs that presented themselves through their association with St. Mark's. Sister Francesca, a Victory Noll Sister, joined Sister Joan and together they began the work. Sister Francesca focused on the children and Sister Joan with the needs of the women. Homelessness and the lack of resources made it clear that the women needed the most help. With that sense of direction, Sister Francesca felt called elsewhere. And so the group of Poor Handmaids asked themselves, now what?

As they continued having conversations, they consulted others, like Mother Teresa's community and various social agencies in the area. The Sisters, in their researching and planning recognized that they, white and privileged, couldn't possibly know the needs of the women and their children that they hoped to serve. And so they put together an advisory group of women from the neighborhood to help them better understand the heartaches and needs of the women living in homelessness and on the margins.

Now, where could they begin their work? Saint Katharina Kasper, the foundress of the Poor Handmaids, had a dream to build a little house for her four companion Sisters. From there they would serve others. And Katharina did that beginning with just \$1.50. Through the Gary diocese, our Sisters and their partners heard that the former rectory of Holy Trinity parish was empty and they asked about the possibility of moving in there to begin their work. Wasn't our Sisters dream of a house to serve those in need also walking in Saint Katharina's shoes?

Now another synchronous event took place that summer when the Sisters' community held their Chapter and the direction was to focus on creating neighborhood centers. Soon they had the old rectory. That's a start, right? But now what to call it? It needed a name and in March of 1997 the group discerned and decided that Sojourner Truth House would be its name and Sister Joan, the director.

Now we Poor Handmaids know Sister Joan is a dreamer and well, not exactly the organizer type. Who would help get this ministry off on the right foot? She needed someone to complement her skills. Sister Joan, kept pondering and praying. And I quote, "I was at St. Mark's trying to figure all this out in my head ... and up the steps comes this beautiful woman with red hair and she introduced herself as Sr. Peg Spindler, and said, 'I'm finishing my studies at Catholic Theological University in Chicago. I was an 8th grade teacher at Holy Trinity... and I came back to see what's going on.' I thought, 'Well, I think the Lord has got something to do with this here.' We talked and I said, 'You want to go out for lunch?' and we went to Broadway Cafe. I told her what we were about and she immediately jumped at it because that's what she was really looking for, so we formed a partnership right then and there."

The first four Poor Handmaids plus Sister Peg soon were known as the Fabulous Five and by November 1997 the former rectory of Holy Trinity Parish was transformed into Sojourner Truth House.

Prior to the move of course, days were devoted to cleaning, cleaning and more cleaning. The building had been empty for awhile. But soon enough the place was Poor Handmaid clean.

The entryway was the office, the second floor was the convent for the five Sisters and the basement was converted into a room with four computers and a laundry room. The main floor was the gathering space and place of welcome for those who came. Children



were everywhere in those days and often the living room became the hangout. When cleaning day came it was obvious that children had been around. Kid prints were found all over the coffee table! And today we'd say, how in the world did they do it?

There were so MANY people who helped to make it happen over the years. As they grew out of the house they requested the hall. The roof leaked and the place was flooded with warped floor tiles everywhere. Jim Paul was a friend and jack of all trades who brought his wife, who had dementia, with him so that he could help make the hall usable. There was Butch Frigo too, from St. Catherine's hospital who came on his days off to spearhead the fix up and painting of the building. These men were just two of so many generous and dedicated hands-on volunteers, who over the years worked so hard to bring into reality the ministry and service you give today to women and children in need.

This was the founding dream of Sister Joan and the Poor Handmaids, to see lives not only changed but transformed!

To read the full version, please visit poorhandmaids.org.

"..so many generous and dedicated hands-on volunteers, who over the years worked so hard to bring into reality the ministry and service you give today to women and children in need."



LINDENWOOD-A COMMUNITY FOR ALL WHO SEEK

*A place where we offer human warmth, respect,
and love without distinction.*

By Barbara Allison, Communications

What sets Lindenwood Retreat and Conference Center apart from other centers offering retreats is their welcoming presence to **all** who seek a deeper spiritual life, not just Catholics and Christians. "We've tried to make sure that our sponsored retreats are open to all," said Paul Mach, Lindenwood Director. He cited Lindenwood's monthly Day of Rest and Healing as an example. "It's a beginner's how-to retreat. Even an agnostic asked to come. Everyone needs a day to rest and heal; it's what retreats are all about."

There's a thread of community building that runs through Lindenwood in both the people they serve and the team who serves them. "Our guests aren't just clients. We grow the relationships like they're family," Paul stated. He meets with the Lindenwood team daily to gauge where everyone's at in their lives and ministry. That's something that coworker Cheri Ringer loves. "The daily check-ins help us work as a team, and being a team builds community," she said. The Lindenwood team also sees the commitment that goes into

building a great retreat center: Paul noted that Lindenwood couldn't do what they do without the contributions of other teams like Dietary, Environmental, Grounds, and Reception Services, and the Communications team. "Even (Maria Center resident) Damon Center welcomes our guests in the Dietary Services line. That's so awesome," Paul said. "We can't be the community we are without the community here."

What Lindenwood also offers, according to coworker Kelly Palmer-Rodgers, is that it's welcoming of everyone. "In our sponsored retreats, we try to be inclusive to everyone who lives, works, and joins us here," she stated. "Catholic people are the models for these retreats," Paul said, "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, a Valentine's weekend couples retreat, and even a retreat designed to offer respite to church music directors, who are usually the ones giving of themselves to their congregations.

While the pandemic put a lot of retreat centers on hold, Lindenwood pivoted and used the time to take their offerings online, and to reach out to those they serve. "We made calls to our clients to check on them. We wanted to let them know we cared," Paul said. "Following the charism and example of the Poor Handmaid Sisters is also key to living out (the values) at Lindenwood," he added. Through dignity and respect to all who seek, in a clean, simple environment with an abundance of beauty and nature is the foundation that Lindenwood offers. "Everyone should know they're always welcome at Lindenwood," Kelly said.





Sister Pauline Bridegroom, PHJC

9/9/37 - 8/27/22

Sister Pauline Bridegroom, PHJC (Sister Mary Luke), Poor Handmaid of Jesus Christ, passed away at age 84 at the Catherine Kasper Home, Donaldson, Indiana.

She was born in Leiters Ford, Indiana to Paul Lough and Louise Genevieve Bridegroom (Emge). Her parents preceded her in death, along with her sisters Ann Toole Harrison and Jennifer Emge Bridegroom (Dodie) and niece Terri Vylee Esposita. Sister Pauline is survived by her brother Thomas Bernard Bridegroom, sister-in-law Jan and many nieces and nephews (including greats and great greats!)

Sister Pauline entered the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ August 22, 1956 and professed her vows July 16, 1959.

She ministered to God's people in a variety of ways: in education, pastoral care, as hospital chaplain, librarian, clerical assistant. She served at Angel Guardian Orphanage in Chicago, schools in Mishawaka, Fort Wayne, Gary Indiana and in Germantown, Illinois. She also served at St. Joseph Hospital in Mishawaka and Fort Wayne, McAuley Retirement Center in Farmington Hills, Michigan and John XXIII Retreat Center in Hartford City, Indiana. She retired to Catherine's Cottage in Donaldson in 2016.

She brought joy to many people through her stories and humor. One of the ways Sr. Pauline brought her playfulness to others was entertaining folks as the clown, 'Sweet Cheeks.' We are grateful for Sister Pauline and all the lives her life touched.



Sister Georgine Schleper PHJC

2/19/28 - 9/13/22

Sister Georgine Schleper (Regina), Poor Handmaid of Jesus Christ, died on September 13, 2022 at the Catherine Kasper Home, Donaldson, Indiana.

She was born in Trenton, Illinois to Henry George and Catherine Therese Schleper (Rakers) who preceded her in death along with her brothers Anthony, Alphonse, Herman, Albert, and George and her sisters Bernadine Emig, Josephine Rehkemper, Christine Hilmes and Sister Teresa Schleper, PHJC. She was the eighth child of ten children. She is survived by her niece, Sister Loretta Schleper, PHJC and 26 nieces and nephews.

Entering the Poor Handmaid Community on August 23, 1947 as Regina, she took the name Sister Georgine and professed her vows on June 25, 1950.

Sister Georgine became an RN in 1953 having graduated from St. Joseph School of Nursing, Fort Wayne, Indiana. She received her B.S. in Nursing from St. Francis College also in Fort Wayne. Sister Georgine also received her certification to become a Chaplain. As Chaplain she ministered at St. Elizabeth Hospital, Chicago, Illinois; St. Francis Medical Center, Peoria, Illinois; Mercy Healthcare, Homewood, Illinois; and Carlyle Health Center, Carlyle, Illinois.

In 2011 Sister Georgine retired to the Catherine Kasper Home at The Center at Donaldson to be near her sister, Sister Teresa Schleper, PHJC.

IN LOVING *Memory*



Sister Mary Carolyn Welhoelter, PHJC

2/20/42 - 9/21/22

Sister Mary Carolyn Welhoelter, Poor Handmaid of Jesus Christ, died on September 21, 2022 at Catherine Kasper Home, Donaldson, Indiana surrounded by her Sisters and friends.

As the second eldest of seven children of Hank and Imogene Welhoelter, Sister Mary Carolyn was born in St. Louis, Missouri, and was known to most as a die-hard St. Louis Cardinals fan. Her parents, brother Paul, her nephew, Sean, sister, Maggie Mercier, and her brother-in-law, Adrian Mercier all preceded her in death. She is survived by her sisters, Marilyn Jean Taylor, Martha Meyer, and Madelyn Kinnan, her brother Bob Welhoelter, and brothers-in-law Ed Taylor, Paul Meyer, and Dave Kinnan as well as numerous nieces, nephews and great nieces.

Sister Mary Carolyn entered the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ on August 8, 1962 taking the name of Sister DePaul for many years. She professed vows on August 6, 1965. With a focus on childcare, parish ministry, and a keen sense of justice for those most unfortunate, Sister Mary Carolyn served in a variety of assignments that included the following:

Angel Guardian Orphanage (1965-1968), St. Vincent Villa (1968-1971), Ancilla Domini High School (1971-1974), Project Renewal in Davenport, IA (1974-1975), Ancilla Domini Convent, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1975-1981), St. Mary Convent, East St. Louis (1981-1982), St. Boniface Convent, Edwardsville, Illinois (1982-1997), Mary Katherine Convent, Cairo, IL (1997-2016), and Catherine Kasper Home, Donaldson, Indiana (2016-2022).

Sister Mary Carolyn made friends easily and offered her creative energy, humor, and love for life at each of her ministries.

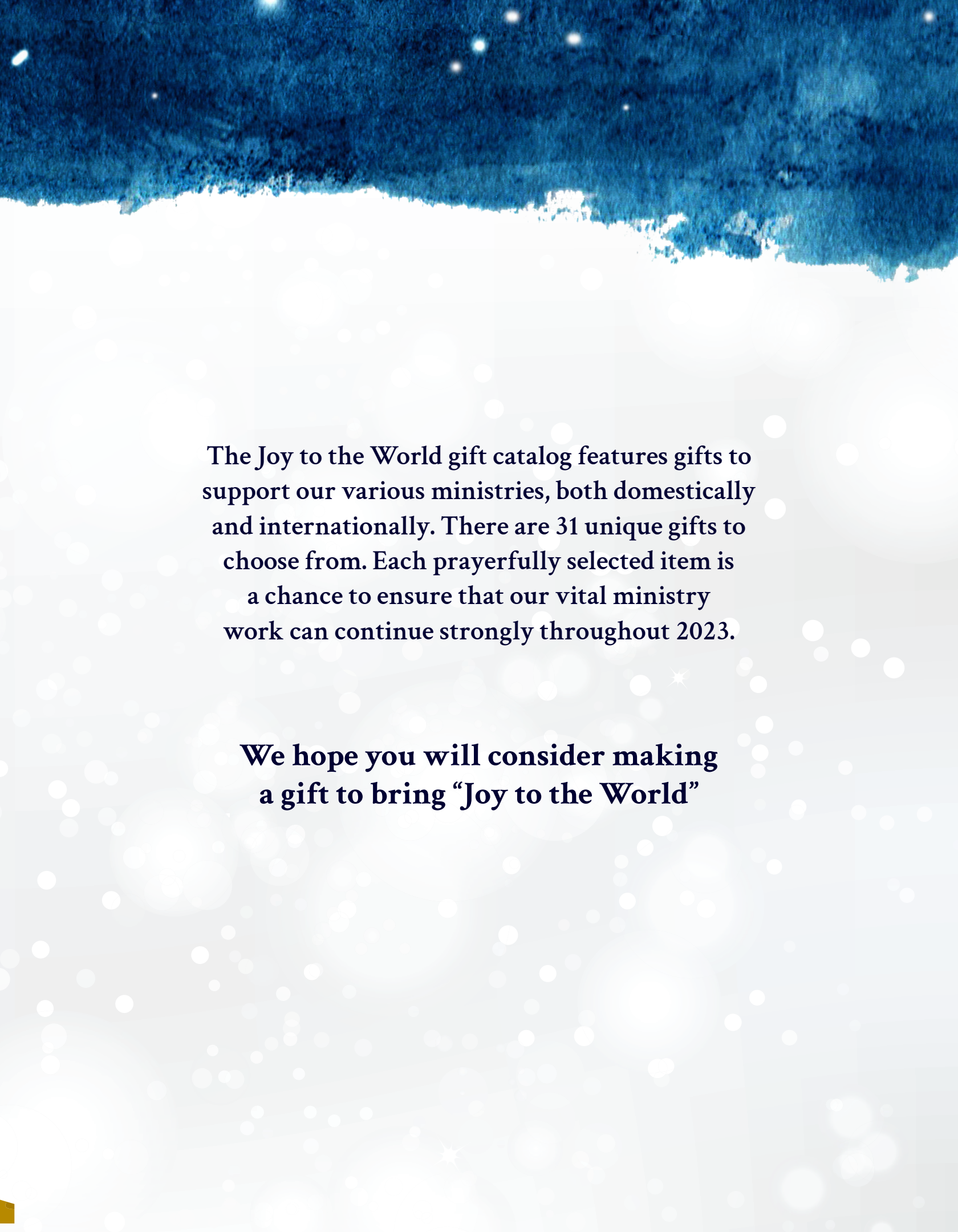
While rehabbing a house in Davenport, Iowa, she received a surprise guest, Saint Mother Theresa who was there locally for a speaking engagement. Another highlight of Sister Mary Carolyn's life was a service trip to Thailand in 1981, where she served in a relocation camp for Cambodian families displaced by Khmer Rouge. Each of her ministries provided her with great friendships, laughs and memories. Sister Mary Carolyn will be remembered for her love of friends, life and those most in need.



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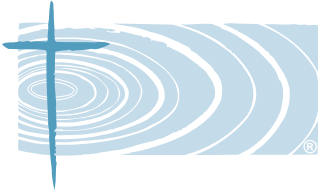




The Joy to the World gift catalog features gifts to support our various ministries, both domestically and internationally. There are 31 unique gifts to choose from. Each prayerfully selected item is a chance to ensure that our vital ministry work can continue strongly throughout 2023.

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a gift to bring “Joy to the World”**

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