



## NEWS from the Northside

### Our Ever Expanding Community!

Over four hundred years ago St. Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor of the Church and Founder with St. Jane de Chantal of the Order of the Visitation, wrote *The Introduction to the Devout Life*, a classic which has never been out of print over these hundreds of years! In the quaint language of his day he wrote in the introduction: "...My intention (in this book) is to instruct (in the devout life) such as live in towns and families and at court, and who by their condition are obliged to lead, as to the exterior, a common life." It is often commented that Francis was a **Vatican II man**. His strong conviction that every person

is called to union with God was articulated for posterity in two basic tenets of the Council: **The Universal Call to Holiness & The Age of the Laity**.

As the Church celebrates the **50th anniversary of Vatican Council II**, we, the Visitation Sisters of North Minneapolis, dedicate this issue of our newsletter to the hundreds of **lay women, men and children** who have partnered with us to root the gentle, peaceful, loving presence of the Heart of Jesus in the City. Let us continue to "build the City of God!" We invite you to hear from a few of our lay friends....

### Introducing Jody Johnson, Coordinator of Visitation Companions (VC)

At our September 8th morning of reflection, six individuals pledged their commitment to become Companions of the Visitation Monastery of North Minneapolis: Sonia and Fabio Anifrani, Bob and Khalilah Briscoe, Lisa Emery, and Christi Schmidt. "Companions" is the name given to the group of lay associates or oblates of the Monastery. We are people from all walks of life who feel a call to deepen our commitment to the ministry of the Visitation Monastery by studying Salesian spirituality, living its charism in our own contexts of life and work, and participating directly in the ministry of prayer and presence on the Northside. Our six new Companions joined an existing group of about 20.

I'm always inspired and deeply moved when people make commitments. It seems to me that there is something very holy at work when a person makes an offering of himself or herself to something greater than the self. Promises involve looking with the eyes of faith beyond what we can actu-



(L to R) Jody Johnson and Linda Goynes witness commitment statements from two new Vis Companions, Lisa Emery & Khaliah Briscoe.

ally see. This is especially true for the Companions now, as we step with the Sisters into the "bright darkness of the future," discerning together how the ministry of "Living Jesus" on the Northside may grow even as the Sisters age. Important questions face us: What does the monastic life mean for lay people? How can we take on more of the actual leadership of the ministry? What is the role of community in

our ministry? At the retreat, it was clear that, although none of us knows exactly what the Visitation Monastery of North Minneapolis will look like in the future, we share a deep desire to carry on the work that first touched our own hearts.

On that day, I also made a commitment: as the new Companions' Co-

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We are an urban monastic community. Please contact us for more information about our way of life.

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You can read the newsletter online at our website. If you prefer this format, please contact the Sisters at [vmonastery@aol.com](mailto:vmonastery@aol.com).



During her door ministry hour, Marsha welcomes Coretta McCoy to assist her and pray with her.

## Introducing Marsha West, First Monastic Immersion Experience (MIE) Participant

It was a year ago last summer that I came to Visitation Monastery in North Minneapolis for a week's retreat. I had read about the Sisters on their website and was curious to learn more about their life in this urban setting.

I am 74 years old. I was married for 53 years. My husband died in March of 2009. I have three children, eight grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. I have lived in the same house and been part of the same little Catholic parish in the Pacific Northwest for the past 38 years. I'm a retired teacher, and have a great group of friends, mostly other retired teachers. I've loved my life there.

After my husband's death, I began to experience a call to leave that life to give the rest of my life to God as a religious sister. But I am clearly too old for that. So the challenge has been to find a way to live out that call.

When I shared my story with the Sisters here, they invited me to become their first applicant for a new program called a "Monastic Immersion Experience." I accepted that invitation and asked to come and live here at Visitation Monastery for six months and be immersed in their monastic way of life.

Immersion means being plunged into something (ordinarily liquid); being filled up and soaked through. It has come to have an expanded meaning of a "deep mental involvement" in something. It's significant to me that there is a close connection between the words immersion and baptism. Baptism also means to be "plunged into, soaked, and filled." I came here this July to begin my "immersion" in monastic life. And in being here, I am also living out a new dimension of my own baptismal call.

I am plunged into their way of life, soaking in their pattern of prayer and spirituality, sharing their daily life in every way. I join them in the chapel four times a day to pray the Divine Office. I join them for Mass here at the monastery at least three days a week and go out with them to neighboring parishes for liturgy on the other days.

Each Sister spends an hour and a half each day in private prayer and another half hour in spiritual reading. I try to do the same. I share in the ordinary work of the household, assisting with cooking and clean-up; I also help in the library.

I am studying the writings of their founders, St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal, and soaking in this Salesian spirituality. I take my turn at what they call the "ministry of the doorbell." Every time the doorbell rings, a Sister goes to answer it, with the expectation of meeting Jesus on the threshold, with the intention of "being Jesus," to that person. I saw that happen last summer. I experience it every day here. I love it!

I love living in a situation where every minute of every day is totally centered toward a single end – to be "a peaceful, prayerful presence" in the neighborhood, to see Jesus in the face of the other; to be Jesus to others. That's what life here is all about. And I am so privileged to be here with them and to be part of it. This Monastic Immersion Experience is deeply satisfying to me. I wouldn't have missed it for all the world. ❀

## Introducing Anna Dourgarian, Visitation Internship Program (VIP)

Few laypeople can compare to the Visitation Sisters in joy, peace, and hospitality, but that doesn't mean we can't try. In fact, if we're aiming for Heaven, Salesian spirituality is a good place to start. Who can find God without simplicity or humility?

Sadly, embracing Salesian spirituality is no easy feat. I was raised in an amazing Catholic family, received a solid foundation of Salesian spirituality at Visitation High School (Class of 2008), and studied Psychology at the University of Minnesota ('11), so you would think that I'd have gotten the hang of being kind and everything. Unfortunately, I didn't. As I entered the corporate world, I was still struggling to reconcile God with my materialistic life. And where do you go when you can't find God? To your local saints on earth, of course: 1527 Fremont Ave N, Minneapolis, Visitation Monastery.



Family members joined Anna (second from right) for a ritual marking the beginning of her year of service as a VIP.

them that!) While they manage the house and provide reliable hospitality to their neighbors, I go spread the word that their gracious household exists. I get to be the "Out Sister," going where the Sisters cannot go and witnessing to those who would not otherwise see. In the likeness of Saint Francis' favorite animal, the Visitation Sisters are the queen bee, loving and blessing those who come to their door, while I am the worker bee, gathering those to be loved and blessed.

Organizations on the North Side have been blessedly welcoming. Of the six where I volunteer, four were eager to turn an acquaintance with the Sisters into a fuller partnership, and the other two were excited and generous in their response "No, I don't know the Sisters, but bring them here; I want to meet them and show them around!" Through these organizations, I get to care for the community just as the Sisters would if they had an extra forty hours each week.

Sometimes this vocation involves simply greeting people on the street. Sometimes it's a subtle suggestion, like when children ask about the faces on my necklace and I get to introduce them to Saints Francis and Jane. Sometimes it's a loud and clear announcement that I'm with the Monastery and you should come check us out!

In the year to come, I'll get to hang out with the Sisters, help them, and learn from them. I'm relieved to be serving instead of earning money. I'm excited to adopt a lifestyle steeped in Salesian spirituality. I, a layperson, get to live life to the holiest. ❀

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ordinator, following in the formative steps of Maryann Pearson. Like many others, I knew from the first moment I met these joyful Sisters that I had to find out more. And, when I first set foot in the Monastery, I had a powerful sense that this was my "spiritual home." Fifteen years later, this only feels more true and my passion to learn what it means to "Live Jesus" is undiminished. To my new role as Companions' Coordinator I bring an educational background in both theology and psychology and over 25 years in the mental health field. My husband, Bryce, is a United Methodist minister and an avid bread baker. We have three sons, ages 28, 25, and 18, and two grandsons, ages 2 and 1 and have just become empty nesters. I look forward with excitement to this new chapter in my own life and to walking with the Companions and Sisters into a future filled with God's possibilities! ❀



—St. Francis de Sales

“Serve God where you are and do what you are doing.”

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## Summer/Fall Update

Since our last issue, we have had the usual balance of a full summer, time for relaxation and of course, planning ahead!

Summer activities included several FAMILY focused events. A week at Catholic Youth Camp (CYC) for 85 children and youth culminating in a Family Day at the Camp, Summer Olympics for Families, a Family Day at Valley Fair, Neighborhood Night of Peace, and our annual Back to School Party all helped to support and bond our families. We have been asked by our parents to “do more with families;” we trust that these opportunities helped!

We Sisters were able to spend quality time with our own families over the summer months, and we are ever grateful for the quiet, prayerful and loving support they constantly give us. Sr. Karen’s mother, Agnes Chrenka, celebrated her 90th birthday in May, six weeks before her husband William entered eternal life.

We also said prayerful good-byes to beloved friends who have been strongholds to our community from the early years: Dale Timmerman, deacon and enthusiastic lover of his faith, and Aurora Juarez (“Grandma Aurora”), mentor to many, went “Home” this summer amid special celebrations of lives



A summer family dinner with the Sisters.

well lived. More recently, we celebrated the short life—one brief hour—of Xavier Jean Kiemde, son of Melissa and Francois Kiemde. Sister Mary Margaret had the honor, with Brian Mogren, of baptizing this beloved child. May these new members of our heavenly family intercede for us!

As we plan for our future, we are so very grateful to our expanding community! As a first step in that planning, we had a fall day of retreat with our Visitation Companions. Stay tuned! ✨