

# WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

A social justice newsletter of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Third Order St. Francis



## Special Interest Articles:

- Maxine Smith:  
Theme of  
November issue
- Equal Education  
for All?
- Clean Water  
Better Learning

**November:**  
*National  
Homeless  
Youth Aware-  
ness Month*



## Individual Highlights:

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- Southern Poverty  
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*Donna Wilhelm, Dorothy Pagosa, Marjorie White, Maxine Smith, Michele Richardson, Rose Grabowski, Rose Marie Bommer, Shannon Fox — Social Justice Committee*

## Equal Education for All? *by Associate Maxine Smith*

**A**s an educator for 30 years, I have seen first-hand the effects of poverty on a student's ability to learn and meet their academic potential.

Families living in financial distress are unable to provide their children with many things that aid in the learning process. Grocery stores are few and far between in the inner city so many parents must rely on fast food chains or convenience stores connected to gas stations to purchase food. Fresh, nutritional food is simply not available.

**C**hildren living in poverty do not have access to computers and other technological

learning aides. Schools in inner cities are underfunded because of the low tax base due to urban blight and the flight of businesses from cities. Parents cannot afford to take their children to museums and may not have a means of transportation.

**W**hile I have personally witnessed students unable to achieve high academic goals because of the circumstances spoken of, I have also seen citizens come together to help at-risk students and adults learn.

**Mercy Education Project** is a tutoring center located in Southwest Detroit dedicated to helping elementary school girls and adult women learn

and achieve. I have volunteered in the Girls' Program which tutors girls in Math and Language Arts. I currently assist as a volunteer tutor helping adult women who are studying and preparing to take their GED exam.

I believe every individual has the right to the best education available and am proud of the girls and women working so hard to achieve their academic potential at Mercy Education Project. ■

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***T***his issue of our social justice newsletter focuses on ***Justice in Education***.

*As always, we welcome your feedback.*

— Maxine

## Earth Talk: Questions and Answers about Our Environment *Information provided by Associate Rose Marie Bommer*

***E***arth Talk is a great resource for teachers teaching students to understand important environmental practices that will ensure the

sustainability of our planet.

Students are never too young to begin such practices. Students can assist in hands-on activities such as recy-

cling, community gardens, and food drives.

Older students can research ways to help their community take a "green" approach to living.

***Continued on p. 2***

*Earth Talk . . . (continued from page 1)*

There are many good resources for teachers to use in the classroom. The **Green Schools Alliance** can be reached online at [www.greenteacher.com](http://www.greenteacher.com). Other helpful websites are:

- [www.eia.gov/kids](http://www.eia.gov/kids); NAAEE
- [www.kidsgardening.org](http://www.kidsgardening.org)
- [www.greenschoolsalliance.org](http://www.greenschoolsalliance.org)

In his recent encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reminds us of the importance

of caring for our common home, and the risks to the impoverished and future generations if we as a people do not do this.

All students have the right to grow up in a world that is clean, and provides them with a safe home in which to live and grow. ■

## Southern Poverty Law Center *by Sr. Sandy LoPorto*



**The Southern Poverty Law Center** (SPLC) is an organization dedicated to *“fighting hate, teaching tolerance, and seeking justice.”*

SPLC publishes a quarterly, free magazine for educators entitled **Teaching Tolerance**.

This magazine contains

articles and helpful ideas for educators who want to promote tolerance in their classrooms and schools and is an excellent resource for all grade levels.

Some of the videos that have been produced to accompany the magazine have been nominated for an Academy Award.

Teachers of all grade levels can take advantage of this resource.

The address is:

**The Southern Poverty Law Center**

400 Washington Ave  
Montgomery, AL 36104

Information can also be found online at [www.splcenter.org](http://www.splcenter.org) ■

*“Stemming from our Franciscan values and the fact that all life is interconnected, members, vowed and non-vowed, are encouraged to be engaged in ministry with those living on the margins of society and struggling to live with dignity.”*

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments  
26<sup>th</sup> General Chapter



*November:  
Homeless Youth*

**November is National Homeless Youth Awareness Month.**

**A film that is recommended for viewing this month, related to this issue, is “The Homestretch.”**

*Three homeless teenagers brave Chicago winters, the pressures of high school, and life alone on the streets to build a brighter future. Against all odds, these kids defy stereotypes as they create new, surprising definitions of home. Can they recover from the traumas of abandonment and homelessness and build the future they dream of?*

**Click on this link for a four-minute preview:**

<https://kartemquin.com/films/the-homestretch>

## Clean Water: Better Learning by Maxine Smith

In 2014 the city of Flint, Michigan was having difficulty negotiating reasonable water rates with the Detroit Water Authority. As a result the city leaders decided not to purchase water from the Detroit Water Authority and purchase it instead from a municipal entity that uses water from Lake Huron.

While this negotiation was in progress the city of Flint pulled water from the Flint River and sold it to their citizens. Almost immediately the citizens began to complain that the water was brown, had sediments, smelled, and tasted bad.

A full year later the city has decided to return to purchasing water from the

Detroit Water Authority, but there are serious complications resulting from using the water from the Flint River. It turns out the river is heavily polluted with heavy metals. Many homes in Flint are old and have metal plumbing instead of PVC.

As the polluted water travels through the old plumbing, lead is entering the water along with other pollutants. Doctors have been testing the lead levels of the children in Flint only to find they are double the acceptable rate and sometimes more. Lead can and does cause physical and educational problems in children. High levels of lead can cause children to be anxious, have learning disabilities, and ADHD.

While the city has handed out water filters to the affected families, this is a band-aid fix. Many families cannot afford to purchase bottled water. Many citizens in Michigan are angry with the city of Flint, the Governor of Michigan, and any officials who told the citizens the water was safe, and that all they needed to do was boil it before drinking it.

Water is a basic necessity for life and in that regard it is a human right. This time the savings came at the expense of the health of many Michigan children.

I plan to watch the situation in Flint and in other cities that are looking for a way to save money. ■



## At Home – Fundraiser for Benjamin's House

Pre-orders are being accepted for the music CD, *At Home*, a fundraiser for **Benjamin's House Emergency Shelter** in Rice Lake, WI.

The CD features Jim Sockness and Robert Heinze as vocalists and Sister Jeanne Conzemius as pianist performing a variety of traditional and modern spiritual music.

Resident narratives are also recited by Sister Claudine Balio, Margaret Heinze, and Lexi Orr.

Production costs are being underwritten by Memory Pharmacy, LLC.

The CDs are \$20 each and 100% of the proceeds

go to Benjamin's House Emergency Shelter.

The discs are expected to be available by December 1.

To reserve CDs, please contact either Sister Jeanne Conzemius at [jconzemius@chibardun.net](mailto:jconzemius@chibardun.net) or Sister Claudine Balio at [sis@chibardun.net](mailto:sis@chibardun.net). You can also phone them at 715-234-4811. Provide your name, phone number, address, and the number of CDs desired.

The CDs are being produced by the Pine Hollow Recording Studio in Eau Claire, WI.

Understandings of "**At Home**" that are being incorporated into the CDs:

**At Home**... a place of belonging, of truth, of peace, of harmony. **May I be ...**

- ~ at home within the depths of my being,
- ~ at home with others,
- ~ at home within a building that nurtures my spirit and keeps me safe,
- ~ at home with what is mine to do in the time I have,
- ~ at home in quiet and in the midst of turmoil,
- ~ at home with this time in which I live,
- ~ at home with my country,
- ~ at home with the animals, the birds, the fishes, and all living creatures,
- ~ at home with the earth (air, land, water); and,
- ~ at home with my God.



### Music on the CD:

- A Moment Lost
- All Is Well With My Soul
- Amazing Grace/My Country 'Tis of Thee
- Ave Maria (Schubert)
- How Great Thou Art
- Lead Me Lord
- Morning Has Broken
- Our Father (Croskey)
- Pescador De Hombres
- The Homecoming
- There's A Beautiful Place
- You Are Mine
- Whispering Hope



**National Homeless Youth Awareness Month — November 2015**

**Franciscan Spirituality and Cosmology**

“Our Franciscan spirituality inspires and guides us in responding to any needs calling out to us.”

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments  
26<sup>th</sup> General Chapter

As many as 2.5 million youth per year experience homelessness ([The National Center on Family Homelessness](#)).

Along with losing their home, community, friends, and routines, as well as their sense of stability and safety, many homeless youth are also victims of trauma.

While trying to survive on the streets, youth are exposed to countless

dangers, with an increased likelihood of substance abuse, early parenthood, impulsivity, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and a vulnerability to being trafficked.

In support of **National Homeless Youth Awareness Month**, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) is providing resources to help communities, families, educators, mental health and child welfare profes-

sionals, and policy makers and advocates better understand and deal with homeless youth. ■

See below for Resources for Educators.



*Media Watch*

• **The War Room**

A 1993 American documentary film about Bill Clinton's campaign for President of the United States during the 1992 presidential election

• **The Homestretch**  
(see page 2 of this newsletter)

*Books of Interest*

- **Teaching for Social Justice: A Democracy and Education Reader**
- **Out of Bounds: Seven Stories of Conflict and Hope**

**Resources for Educators – Homeless Youth**

(Click [links](#) to access info):

■ **National Alliance to End Homelessness**

Helps prevent and end homelessness in the US through improving policy, building capacity, and educating opinion leaders.

**Fact Sheets on Homelessness:**

Age-appropriate information that addresses causes and solutions to homelessness and offers ways for students to become a part of the solution.

- [Homelessness Fact Sheet for Kindergarten Through Grade 2](#) (2010) (PDF)
- [Homelessness Fact Sheet for Students in Grades 3 Through 5](#) (2010) (PDF)
- [Homelessness Fact Sheet for Middle School Students](#) (2010) (PDF)

- [Homelessness Fact Sheet for High School Students](#) (2010) (PDF)

- [College Access and Success for Students Experiencing Homelessness: A Toolkit for Educators and Service Providers](#) (PDF)

■ **National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth**

A national grassroots membership association serving "as the voice and the social conscience for the education of children and youth in homeless situations." It connects educators, parents, advocates, researchers, and service providers to ensure school enrollment and attendance, and overall success for children and youth whose lives have

been disrupted by the lack of safe, permanent, and adequate housing."

■ **National Center for Homeless Education at the SERVE Center**

The technical assistance and information center of the U.S. Department of Education that deals with homeless education.

■ **Directory of State Contacts for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth**

Provides links to each state's contact information for:

- the state coordinator of Homeless Education,
- the state's Education of Homeless Children and Youth program, and,
- other statewide resources on homelessness and homeless education. ■

**REMEMBER...**

We welcome your submissions in the form of

- "Sightings"
- Brief write-ups of your activities, "prototypes," suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources.

Please send these to **Sister Donna Wilhelm** by the end of November for inclusion in the December issue of our newsletter, *We Commit Ourselves*.

~Your Social Justice Committee