



CONTEMPLATION

JUSTICE

COMPASSION



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## URSULINE SISTERS OF CLEVELAND

### WINTER 2024 NEWSLETTER

The *Ursuline Sisters News* is published three times a year for friends and supporters of the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland.

#### WOULD YOU RATHER RECEIVE THE NEWSLETTERS ELECTRONICALLY?

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#### DEVELOPMENT OFFICE SCHEDULE

Normal business day hours are  
8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Normally CLOSED on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Friday after Thanksgiving.

We may be closed during holidays, but our **WEB DONATION PAGE is always OPEN and SECURE!**

[www.ursulinesisters.org/support-us/donate](http://www.ursulinesisters.org/support-us/donate)

**LEAVE A LEGACY.** Remember the Ursuline Sisters in your will. For more information about planned giving, contact Development Director Cindy Johnson at cjohnson@ursulinesisters.org or 440-229-5634.

## MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

Dear Friends,

An unusual quote as an opener to this edition of *Ursuline News*? Not if you, like many other residents of Northeast Ohio, have marked your calendar for April 8, 2024, to observe the total solar eclipse. (The next one won't occur in our area for 440 years!) "Praise God in the heavens."

And we "Praise God on Earth" as well. You'll read in these pages how our sisters and colleagues are responding to the call of Pope Francis to "Care for our Common Home." The Pope's 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, and his recent follow-up exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, inspire our efforts.

*"In that day," declares God, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the Earth in broad daylight."*

Amos 8, 9a.

Joining us from the other side of Earth—from the country of Vietnam—are Sisters Trang Thi Tran and Thu Doan, who are studying at Ursuline College and living with us. They have become part of a 50-year tradition in our community to assist sisters from other places who are preparing to serve in education or healthcare when they return to their country. We are enriched by their presence among us.

Closer to home, we introduce you to Mary Ellen Downs, the 2024 recipient of the Merici Award. She is a member of a three-generation family who have allied themselves with the Ursulines in St. Jerome School, Villa Angela Academy, and Ursuline College. Mary Ellen is a most deserving woman of the church!

Since the last issue of *Ursuline News*, our community bid farewell to two of our beloved sisters, Sister Marie Cecile and Sister Anne Cecile. During their long lives they touched thousands of persons through their service in education and administration. Their faithfulness has been a witness to us and perhaps to you, too.

Nothing you read in these pages is accomplished by our community alone. We serve in union with persons like you. If you are a volunteer, a board member, or a generous donor, (or maybe all three), we thank you.

A solar eclipse is a symbol of both light and darkness. Continue to stand with us, the Ursuline community, on the side of light—the light of Christ which alone empowers us to lead lives that bring justice and love to our world.

In St. Angela Merici,

*Maureen Brady OSU*

Sister Maureen Grady, OSU



Sister Maureen Grady

**PLEASE HELP US keep our records current with your new or changed email address.**

You can call Sister Elaine at 440-229-5624 or EMAIL her at eberkopec@ursulinesisters.org.





*Left to right: Sisters Thu, Len, Susan Mary, Nga, Hoa, and Trang*

## Vietnamese Sisters find a home and an education with the Ursuline Sisters

By Sister Virginia DeVinne, OSU

We Ursulines of Cleveland are all growing older! What enlivens us is getting to know and love the Vietnamese sisters who have been living with our sisters at St. Mark's House and studying at Ursuline College. They have brought youth with a zest for life to our sisters as they earn degrees to prepare them to serve in ministry in their home country.

Currently, one Sister of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, Sister Thu Doan, and one Dominican Sister of Go Vap, Sister Trang Tran, reside at St. Mark's, our convent on the campus of Ursuline College, together with Ursuline Sisters Susan Mary and Etienne. On a typical day, they attend Mass with the sisters at Merici Crossings then attend their classes. In between classes they put in many hours of study but also help with the cooking and housework needed at St. Mark's.

Sister Susan Mary commented, "Sister Thu and Trang are blessing us by living with Sister Etienne and me this year. Although none of us were missionaries, we are doing mission work here by helping them learn our ways and language and by learning from each of the sisters. They also awakened in me the realization of some of what God is doing in other parts of our world. It is a joy to be with them and support them on their journey!"

*Continued >*

Recalling the time she lived with Sister Thu and Sister Hien last year, Sister Ann Winters recalls, "Their presence blesses. I experienced them as simple, genuine, loving. They are tenacious about their schooling, they are tender, loving and playful; always willing to help. They have brought out the youthful side of me which I love!"

*"They are tenacious about their schooling, they are tender, loving and playful; always willing to help. They have brought out the youthful side of me which I love!"*

– Sister Ann Winters

Sister Trang has just completed her first semester at the college as a nursing major. After a second semester of prerequisites, she will begin the sequence of nursing courses in the Breen School of Nursing and Health Professions. Her goal is to complete the program in 2027. When she returns to Vietnam, her community hopes to start a nursing home for their retired members.

Sister Thu is completing prerequisite courses to enter the college's Master Apprenticeship Program which culminates in a master's degree in education and the qualifications to sit for the licensing exam to teach in Ohio. Although she will be returning to Vietnam, her degree from the United States will be very valuable. Her goal is to become the administrator of a school back home. She is vivacious and never misses out on a new adventure!

Three more Sisters of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary are also completing prerequisites for the nursing program. Sisters Len Bui, Nga Tran and Hoa Le finished their first semester at the college in December 2023. Since St. Mark's could not accommodate them, they are living in a house on the near west side of Cleveland and commuting daily to their college classes. Ultimately their advanced studies in the U.S. will prepare them to hopefully open a clinic in North Vietnam, and to minister to the poor, mainly women and children, who live in the mountainous region of their country.

All five sisters agree that the need to learn new and difficult course content in English is their greatest challenge. For this reason they access tutoring services at the college and utilize their professors' office hours for individual assistance. They have greatly appreciated the supportive faculty and staff.

Compared to Vietnam, they have noticed that Ursuline College professors and administrators seem to view their students more as equals. The sisters were also surprised to see faculty members as well as students feel comfortable sipping from their coffee cups during class. And some students even bring their breakfast! This would not take place back home!

Despite the rigor of learning in a language not their own, all these sisters manage to keep a sense of humor! Sister Nga laughingly responded to a question, "What advice would you offer to your other Vietnamese sisters who might come to the U.S. to study?" with the quip, "Stay and study in Vietnam!" She went on to explain how difficult it is to study here and in English although she quickly added that the benefits outweigh this.

It's clear that their dedication to their future ministry to the poor in Vietnam is a strong source of motivation. And it's this ultimate goal that has encouraged our congregation to support them in their pursuit of a degree. In fact, the Ursuline Sisters have a history of hosting religious sisters from foreign countries as they complete degrees in the U.S. Beginning in 1959, members of the Antonine Sisters from Lebanon lived at the motherhouse and attended the college. The Ursulines housed Rosarian Sisters from Malawi starting in 1971, then later welcomed Polish sisters, Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate, in 1976. The Nigerian Sisters of the Sacred Heart, came during the 1980s and lived at Beaumont convent while attending John Carroll University. From Ghana, Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church, arrived to live at our motherhouse, beginning in 1982, while earning their degrees at the college.

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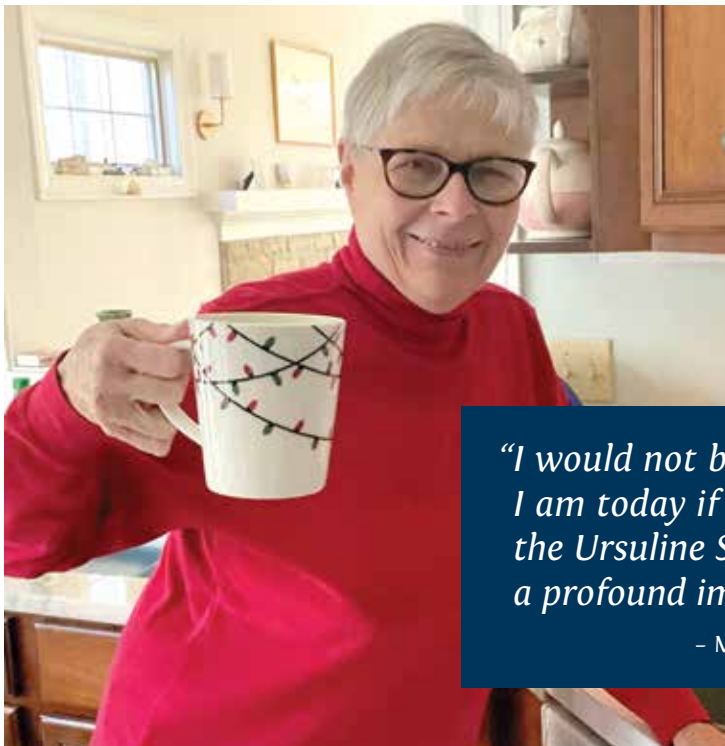
– Sister Virginia DeVinne

Now, it is the Vietnamese sisters we live with, pray for and support. As elders, most of us are no longer able to minister actively as we once did. Sisters Trang, Thu, Len, Nga and Hoa and their sisters who preceded them are the ones who can do so. We answer our ongoing call to ministry by supporting them as they prepare to serve God's people. They enrich our lives in numerous ways, ways that will last for a lifetime.

# Mary Ellen Iffarth Downs to be honored with Merici Award

By Mary Moran

Mrs. Mary Ellen Iffarth Downs will receive the 2024 Merici Award at Ursuline Derby Day, Saturday, May 4, at Cleveland Browns Stadium. This award was created in 2009 to recognize those who live and act in the spirit of Ursuline foundress Saint Angela Merici. Mary Ellen has exhibited that Merici spirit over the years through her generous support and valued friendship.



*"I would not be the person I am today if it weren't for the Ursuline Sisters. They had a profound impact on me."*

– Mary Ellen Iffarth Downs

Mary Ellen Downs

Mary Ellen's Ursuline story began at St. Jerome School on Cleveland's Eastside where she and her three sisters were born and raised. The four Iffarth girls Ann, Jean, Mary Ellen, and Maggie all went on to attend Villa Angela Academy (now VASJ High School) where they continued to be education by Ursuline Sisters. "The sisters are super stars at education" she said. "I would not be the person I am today if it weren't for the Ursuline Sisters. They had a profound impact on me."

That Ursuline impact continued as Mary Ellen obtained a bachelor degree in biology from Ursuline College. She speaks of her time at the Ursuline College with such a fondness and describes it as a special place where she began friendships that continue today.

"I believe that Ursuline mission and spirit brought us girls together and is responsible for our deep-seated relationship," she said.

Mary Ellen's older sister Jean entered the Ursuline community, which kept Mary Ellen's relationship with the Ursuline Sisters close to this day. Unfortunately Sister Jean, who served as a Canon Lawyer for the community and for the Diocese of Cleveland, passed away much too young in 2001. Mary Ellen is thankful that the Ursuline Sisters were there for the family during that difficult time.

"The sisters took such good care of my sister as she was dying. That should be remembered and acknowledged," she said.

After graduating from Ursuline College Mary Ellen went on to earn a certificate in physical therapy at The University of Pennsylvania. Soon after she began her career in physical therapy, Mary Ellen, while attending a party with friends, was introduced to a gentleman by the name of Paul Downs. Mary Ellen and Paul enjoyed a happy adventurous life together until his death 20 years ago.

[Continued >](#)



Sister Jean, Ann, Mr. Iffarth, Mary Ellen, and Maggie



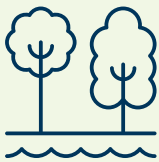


## LAUDATO SI GOAL 1:

The Response to the Cry of the Earth is a call to protect our common home for the wellbeing of all, as we equitably address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and ecological sustainability.

If you love someone/something, you bring your care and your compassionate presence to respond to the cry of suffering. This expresses well the relational spirituality of St. Angela Merici.

### The Ursuline Sisters have done the following in response to this call:



#### Conservation Easement

**Study:** Learned from The Trust for Public Land and The Western Reserve Land Conservancy about the value of conservation easements and the possibility of preserving our woods in perpetuity.



Community Kitchen attention is given to **local food use**, as possible, and some greenhouse food production, community.



**Green Burial** added to Ursuline burial options, including natural burial. Purchased a new section at All Souls Cemetery, Chardon, OH, that allows for natural burial.



Merici Crossings construction **reduced ecological footprint** from 250,000 sq. feet to 68,000 sq. feet and incorporated some green building techniques.



*Paul and Mary Ellen Downs*

After decades of a career in the medical field, Mary Ellen switched gears and began a new career as a lay ecclesial minister at her home parish, St. Ladislav, in Westlake, a job that brought her great fulfillment for many years. Currently, her commitment to the Ursuline mission continues as she serves on the Ursuline College alumnae board.

Throughout the years, Mary Ellen has never drifted from her loyalty to the Ursuline Sisters. "I will always support the Ursuline Sisters as long as I am able. I am a strong woman of faith due in part to them," She said.

On behalf of all of the sisters, congratulations and thank you, Mary Ellen, for your many years of friendship and support!

PLEASE  
JOIN US!

## URSULINE DERBY DAY

*A Kentucky Derby Party to benefit  
the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland*

♦♦♦ 15th Anniversary ♦♦♦

150th Run for the Roses  
**Saturday, May 4, 2024**  
5:00pm – 9:00pm  
Cleveland Browns Stadium

For more information and to purchase  
your admissions visit:  
[www.ursulinesisters.org/derby-day](http://www.ursulinesisters.org/derby-day)

## Sister Marie Cecile

Joanne Dolores Bauers was born in 1928 to Edward and Josephine, joining older sister Mercedes into the Cleveland family whose home parish was St. Cecilia's. She attended elementary school there, followed by her years at Beaumont School for Girls and a year at Ursuline College before entering the congregation in 1948.

Sister Marie Cecile happily served at St. Ann, St. Timothy, Villa Angela Academy and St. Philomena Schools. During this time, she also completed a B.S. in Music at Ursuline College for Women and a Master of Music degree at the University of Notre Dame. Her musical giftedness then led to 52 years of teaching private music lessons



*Sister Marie Cecile Bauers*

to students at the Ursuline Educational Center and Merici Crossings.

St. Cecilia is known as the patron of musicians who cherished beauty and her deep faith in God. Whether in poetry, song, love of nature or stories, we sense her presence in Sister Marie Cecile in her 74 years of life with the Ursuline congregation. May the Beauty that is ever ancient yet ever new embrace Sister Marie Cecile and each of us as we accompany her in prayer to eternal glory. May we hold one another in

prayer, remembering all who survive her in this life: her sister Mercedes Hronek, her nieces and nephews, the Ursuline Sisters, and countless students who called her friend.

## Sister Anne Cecile

Laetitia Ann Muldoon was born to be a delight to those whose lives she would touch. Though her baptismal certificate lists her as Laetitia, her birth certificate aptly names her the more colloquial Joy. Surely, she brought all of that to her parents, John and Laetitia, when she entered the world in 1927, younger sister to Margaret and, later, older sister to her brother John. She was a child of St. Patrick Parish (Bridge) as well, claiming her birthright in the first parish school served by the Ursuline Sisters.

After attending St. Stephen High School and working in the main office at Fisher's, Joy entered the Ursuline community in 1944.

Sister Anne Cecile's presence blessed many schools as classroom teacher, assistant principal, and principal: St. Jerome, St. Timothy, St. Catherine, St. Francis de Sales, St. Mary (Mentor), St. Charles, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Paul, and



*Sister Anne Cecile Muldoon*

St. Therese. During these years, she also attained both undergraduate and graduate degrees at St. John College.

After a brief stint assisting in congregational offices, Sister Anne Cecile returned to ministry with children, serving at Up With Kids Day Center for 16 years, beginning this loving service in her seventh decade of life. Into her nineties, Sister remained active, making her way to the congregational Development Office to assist with clerical duties, where she joyfully tracked rally

tickets, wrote birthday cards, and made countless gratitude calls to benefactors.

Sister Anne Cecile slept peacefully into the loving arms of God at Regina Health Center on January 4, 2024. She is survived by nieces and nephews, grandnephews and a grandniece, as well as her Ursuline Sisters with whom she shared 78 years of religious life.

For full obituaries, please visit <https://www.ursulinesisters.org/news>.  
Memorial donations may be made to the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland at [www.ursulinesisters.org](http://www.ursulinesisters.org).



DEVELOPMENT OFFICE  
URSULINE ACADEMY OF CLEVELAND  
6085 Parkland Boulevard, Suite 175  
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or email  
eberkopec@ursulinesisters.org.  
**Thank you!**



**Save a Stamp! Save Ink! No Muss! No Fuss!  
And Lots Of Gratitude!**

**JUST CLICK ON** the secure donation on our website at  
<https://www.ursulinesisters.org/support-us/donate>.

Visit [www.UrsulineSisters.org](http://www.UrsulineSisters.org) to submit prayer requests.

## Annual Fund supports ministries and care of retired, infirm sisters



### THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Please consider making a donation to this year's Annual Fund Appeal which launched on **July 1, 2023** and ends on **June 30, 2024**. We are most grateful for the support we receive for our ministries and to assist our sisters who are retired or infirm.

Remember: we rely on our working sisters and on our fundraising efforts for financial support.



**MAKING YOUR DONATION ONLINE IS SAFE AND EASY AT**  
**<https://www.ursulinesisters.org/support-us/donate>.**

JUST CLICK ON the secure donation page on our <https://www.ursulinesisters.org/support-us/donate> on [www.ursulinesisters.org](http://www.ursulinesisters.org). Click on the DONATE NOW button and complete the form. You will receive an automatic email confirmation of your gift. AND THANK YOU!

**For more information, please call Sister Elaine at 440-229-5624, or email her at [eberkopec@ursulinesisters.org](mailto:eberkopec@ursulinesisters.org).**