

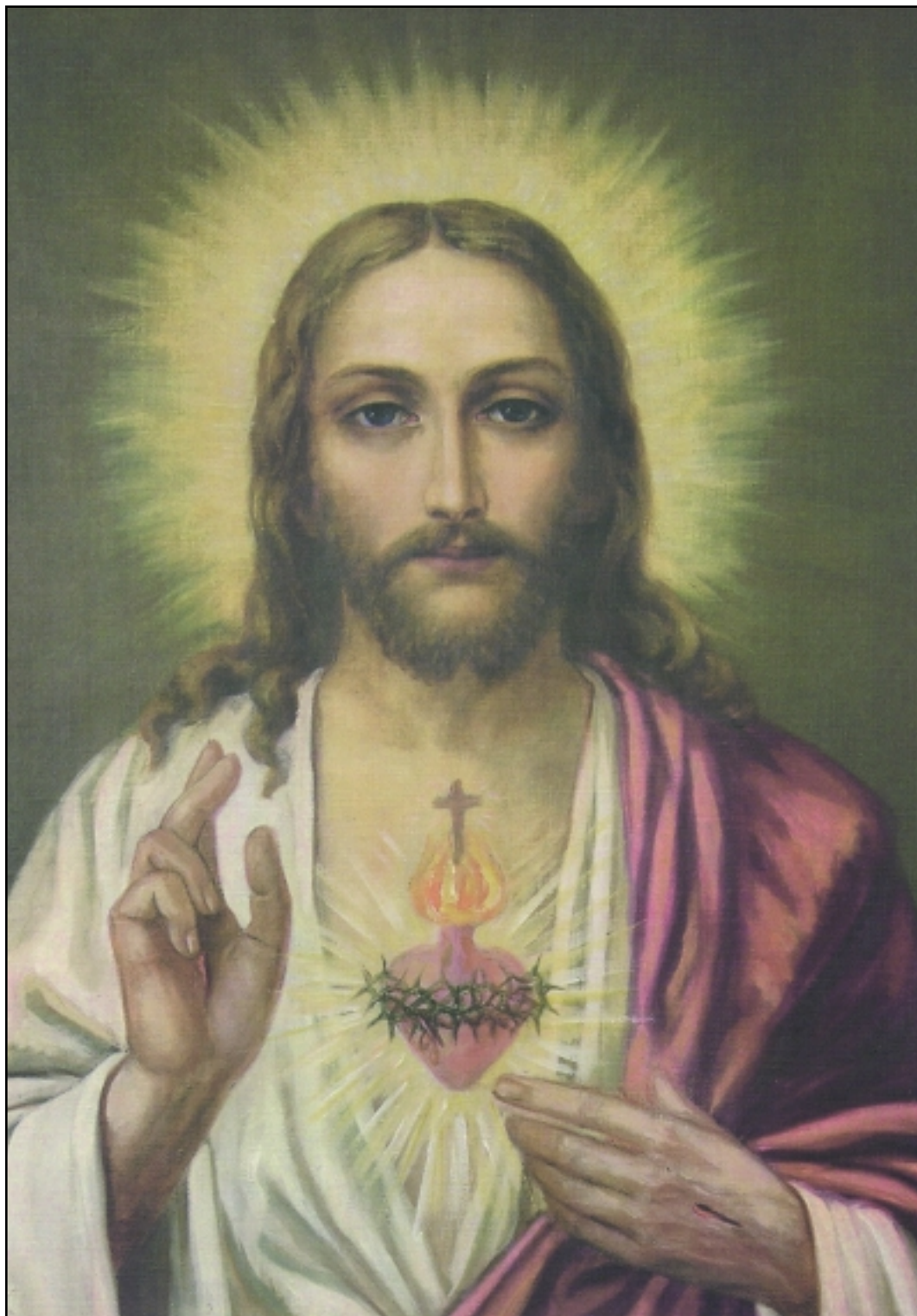
The Vine

Volume 1, Issue 1
Fall 2007

A newsletter of the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

I am the vine, you are
the branches. Whoever
remains in me and I in
him will bear much fruit,
because without me
you can do nothing.

(John 15:5)





Letter from Mother Ryszarda Wittbrodt, SSCJ Provincial Superior



Dear Friends in the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,

To begin something new is always exciting. There is joy, hope, and the anticipation of

good things yet to come.

We place in your hands this, our first newsletter of the American Province of the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, for which we have chosen the title, *The Vine*. This image of the vine and the branches, used by our Lord Jesus during the Last Supper, expresses well the kind of unity and relationship He wants for us—a unity with Him and one another that is intertwined and flourishing.

As vine and branches share the same life and are joined together, through each

newsletter we hope to remain and grow in our union with the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and in close relationship with one another so as to offer mutual prayer and support.

Joined to Christ who is the Vine, we can bear abundant fruit for the greater glory of His Kingdom. We, the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, are sent to bring this fruit of our union with God to those whom we serve in our different ministries: to children and youth, to the elderly, sick and poor, to those whom we meet in parish work

and outreach, to those on our soil and abroad. We realize that to fulfill our mission, we need you who are co-workers with us in the vineyard of the Lord!

In this newsletter, we would like to introduce to you our Sisters, and to describe at greater length our varied apostolates through which we aspire to fulfill the vision of our Founder, St. Joseph Sebastian Pelczar —*to love without limits so as to respond to God's immeasurable love, to seek to make reparation for sins, and to spread honor and love for the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.*



I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. ... If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.

(John 15: 5, 7-9)

Our Founder: Saint Joseph Sebastian Pelczar

Saint Joseph Sebastian lived a life that was simple but truly rich. It was a constant and determined striving to become another Christ. His life was a life of prayer, work, and knowledge.

Born in Korczyna, Poland, from childhood he was surrounded by a deep religious atmosphere. He was ordained a priest in 1864. After his studies in Rome, he taught in the seminary in Przemysl, and then was a professor of the Jagellonian University in Krakow for 22 years.

In his concern for the most needy and the spreading of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Father Pelczar founded the Congregation of the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred

Heart of Jesus in 1894. He himself formed the first members according to the needs of that time.

In the spirituality of the Congregation, his own desires and concerns were reflected: the glory of God in the Mystery of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, love of Mary, the Immaculate Virgin and Queen of Poland, charity towards the sick and abandoned, concern for servant girls in need of financial and moral help, and the religious training of children and youth.

In 1899, he became an auxiliary bishop and, in 1900, local Ordinary of the Diocese of Przemysl. He was beatified on June 2, 1991, in Rzeszow, Poland and canonized on May 18, 2003, by Pope John Paul II.



Joseph Sebastian Pelczar
1842-1924

Serving the Late Holy Father, John Paul II



In their many years of service to others, the Sisters count it a singular privilege to have served the late Pope John Paul II throughout the time when he was Cardinal Archbishop of Krakow in Poland and later, in Rome, during his entire pontificate.

With fidelity and love, the Sisters lived and worked in the papal household, serving as aides, secretaries, housekeepers and nurses to the late Holy Father – now the Servant of God — John Paul II. “Our Sisters were among those at his deathbed when the Holy Father was dying,” explains Mother Vicaress Amabilis Debicka, “and because he had no close living relatives for the funeral procession, in the place of his family were our Sisters, the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.”

Because of their many years of close relationship with the Holy Father, John Paul II, the Sisters can truly call him

their second earthly father after their Founder, St. Joseph Sebastian Pelczar. It was this pope, John Paul II, who beatified and canonized their Founder. (The cause of their co-Foundress, the Servant of God, Mother Klara Szczesna, progresses forward, and the Sisters pray for her speedy elevation to the glory of the altars as well.) Indeed, the Sisters pray through the intercession of their Founders and the Servant of God, John Paul II, not only for their own intentions, but also for all those who ask their prayers.

With that same love and dedication with which the Sisters served this great Pope so well at the Vatican, the Sisters seek to bring to everyone everywhere the love of God’s Heart – to families, schools, hospitals, missions, or wherever they may be called to serve God’s people, so that their motto may be fully actualized in their lives and throughout the whole world: Glory Be to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus!



Above left: Mother Vicaress Amabilis Debicka participates in the Offertory Procession of Mass of Beatification of Founder, Joseph Sebastian Pelczar, Rzeszow, Poland, June 2, 1991.

Above: Mother Vicaress Amabilis and Sisters with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. To the rear left of the Holy Father is seen Sr. Tobiana Sobodka, his personal aide.

Right: Surrounding him once again, the Sisters who worked for Pope John Paul II at the papal household are seen at his tomb in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.



Serving the Poor, Sick, and Marginalized

Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

The religious Congregation of the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus is an international religious community engaged in educational and charitable works, whose headquarters is based in Krakow, Poland. This Congregation was established in 1894 by Saint Joseph Sebastian Pelczar not only for the personal growth in holiness of its members, but also to meet the needs

of the poor, sick, and marginalized.

After its inception, the Congregation spread throughout Europe. In 1959, then general superior – Reverend Mother Henryka Panufnik sent Sisters to make their home on the North American continent and there to serve God’s people. The first three Polish Sisters came from one of the convents in France, arriving in America on January 17, 1959. They would soon be joined by four others. These first pioneer Sisters of the Sacred Heart established themselves in Erie, Pennsylvania where they served at a Vincentian Seminary and high school.

Through their zeal and ardent prayer but also through the generosity of others, on August 9, 1962, at the invitation of the late Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown, J. Carroll McCormick and then pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, Portage, Pennsylvania, the late Father

Bronislaw Worsa, the Sisters were able to open their own first mission post on American soil. In those early days in Portage, the Sisters were engaged in intense studies of the language and culture of America, while also serving each day in kindergarten training, sacristy work and nursing.

With the arrival of additional Sisters sent from Poland and the entrance of young American women joining the Congregation, the American foundation grew. The first American novitiate was established in Portage, Pennsylvania in 1968. Such growth in members allowed for the opening of several convents with their respective apostolates in the surrounding area. In 1986, the American foundation would reach the status of a Provincialate, with Mother Amabilis Debicka, being named first provincial Superior in the United States.

Presently, the American Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus has six religious houses and is comprised of 25 members (represented in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and in the Dioceses of Altoona-Johnstown, Pennsylvania, Wilmington, Delaware, and Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies.)

The Sisters of the American Province, ranging in ages from 24–82, have one common aspiration, namely, to extend the Kingdom of God’s love within themselves and in everyone.

To fulfill this aim, the Sisters are involved in educational work at all levels, work in parish offices and religious ministries, and serve in the field of personal health care – always with special emphasis upon the needy. Similar apostolates are undertaken by the Sisters of the American Province at their mission in Jamaica, opened in 2004.



Sister Margaret Mary Hill, local superior, who also serves as secretary in two parishes in Bridgeport, PA.



From left, Sister Mary Andrew Hooper, Administrator, and Sister Joanna Kmiecik, local superior and nurse, stand outside the John Paul II Manor. The Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus opened the facility in 2005 and have a full capacity of 45 residents. The Sisters serve the elderly, sick, and needy of the area.

Continued on page 5

Serving the Poor, Sick, and Marginalized *Continued from page 4*

The majority of Sisters live and work in Cambria County, Pennsylvania, serving in various capacities:

- **Work with the poor** through the Ministry of Caring's outreach to the impoverished, unchurched, elderly and sick in Wilmington, Delaware; ministering to the poor in Jamaica.; helping all those who come to us in our local areas.

- **Education** at the Congregation's kindergarten and pre-K in Portage, Pennsylvania and in kindergarten work in Wilmington, Delaware; in grade school teaching at All Saints Catholic School in Cresson, Pennsylvania.

- **Religious training** in parishes in Swedesburg, Portage, Lilly, and Cresson, Pennsylvania, in Wilmington, Delaware, and Maggoty, Jamaica, W.I.

- **Work with youth**, particularly in campus ministry work at St. Francis University, Loretto, Pennsylvania and in conducting retreats and summer camps. (This year marked the 10th Anniversary of our annual summer camp at St. Therese Parish in Wilkes-Barre, PA in the Diocese of Scranton.)

- **Parish work**, as secretaries and organists the Cresson, Pennsylvania area and its environs and in Bridgeport, Pennsylvania.




The American Province of the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus began a Jamaican mission in 2004 in the village of Maggoty. There the Sisters work in a medical clinic, teach local children and adults, and hold catechetical instruction classes.

In August, 2007, their area experienced the fury of Hurricane Dean. We received a kind response to our Jamaican appeal for which we are very grateful to so many of you. Each donation helps with the

recovery process and in continuing our outreach to the very poor of this island.



The Sisters assisted with a Bible camp in Nanticoke, PA, during the 2007 summer. Sisters who can be seen sitting with the children are (left) Sister Marietta Therese Hanley and Mother Ryszarda Wittbrodt.



Holy Mary, Mother of God, You have given the world its true light, Jesus, your Son – the Son of God. You abandoned yourself completely to God's call, and thus became a wellspring of the goodness which flows forth from Him. Show us Jesus. Lead us to Him. Teach us to know and love Him, so that we too can become capable of true love, and be fountains of living water in a midst of a thirsting world."

Pope Benedict XVI
Deus Caritas Est, 42



To contact us:

SISTER SERVANTS
OF THE MOST SACRED HEART
OF JESUS

SACRED HEART PROVINCE
866 Cambria Street
Cresson, Pennsylvania 16630

Email: sscjusa@pngusa.net

The Founding of the American *Sacred Heart* Province

While World War II is a distant memory for many Americans, Mother Amabilis Debicka was 13 years old when Germany occupied Poland. This girl, who would go on to found the American mission currently located in Cresson, PA, saw firsthand the brutal effects of the war.

Her father, a teacher and officer in the Polish military, was captured and imprisoned shortly after the invasion. Her brothers were taken by the Germans to dig ditches. Mother remembers how one day, while she was at school, her entire class was taken away to a farm near Berlin to dig potatoes.

After the potatoes were harvested, farmers came and chose the children they wanted to work on their farms. "A very sharp SS man took me, and their family wanted to adopt me," Mother Amabilis explained. "They needed permission from my father, and even said they would release him from prison if he gave them permission to adopt me."

Dad said, 'No! I'll never let you adopt my child.'" She pauses. "I was glad he said no. So glad." She lived with the family to the end of the war, but after her father refused to let them adopt her, "they were not so kind to me."

Mother Amabilis was 18 when the war ended. She and another girl walked home from Germany. "All my family survived," she said. "I was so thankful."

Upon her return home, Mother had to be hospitalized. This was the first time she learned about the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, from a nurse who had once been a postulant in the Congregation. Several years later, when she was looking at several different communities, Mother Amabilis remembered that meeting with the nurse, and visited the motherhouse of the Sisters in Krakow. She knew that was where she was meant to be.

Mother Amabilis entered the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1950, taking her first vows



Mother Amabilis Debicka

in 1953. In 1959, the Congregation felt called to begin a mission house in the United States. The first Polish Sisters who arrived from France worked in a Vincentian seminary and high school in Erie, Pennsylvania. Mother Amabilis joined them in 1961. The following year, the late Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown, J. Carroll McCormick, gave permission for the Sisters to establish a convent in his diocese in Portage, Pennsylvania at the invitation of the pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, Father Bronislaw Worsa.

Mother and another Sister arrived in Portage, PA, on a town picnic day. Everyone had gathered for the potluck, and they were able to meet many people. "It was a good day to begin mission work," Mother Amabilis smiled. "People were good and generous to us."

Almost immediately, the pastor asked the Sisters to start a kindergarten. "Can you imagine?" asked Mother Amabilis. "I didn't know much English! The priest helped and the parish people helped my English." She pauses, "and that was the beginning."

With the entrance of young women wanting to join the community, a novitiate was opened in Portage in 1968. "We lived a very simple life. We were very poor. But I was so happy!" says Mother Amabilis. "We taught religious education in little parishes of

the area. It was a good life." The growth of the Congregation in America allowed for the opening of other convents in the surrounding area and other apostolates, eventually leading to the establishment of Sacred Heart Province in 1986, with Mother Amabilis becoming the first Provincial Superior in the United States.

The Sisters have faced many challenges since coming to America. One of the times was when they needed a bigger chapel. It was a "very touching incident," according to Mother. The builders needed money, and told the Sisters they were going to stop work until they received \$10,000. "We prayed," Mother says simply.

There were two women from Cresson who knew the Sisters. One came and told Mother that her son from Philadelphia wanted to make a donation of \$10,000. "Was it possible?" Mother wondered. "Of course it was. It shows God taking care of us."

Mother Amabilis still serves the province she established – now in the role of vicaress and financial administrator. She enjoys praying, reading, and embroidery. She radiates joy to others around her and shares the wisdom of her long life experience.

Please remember us
when making
or revising your will.

Our name is:
Sister Servants of the
Most Sacred Heart
of Jesus

Our federal ID
number is:
75-236-912

Year End in View

By Robert J. Allen

In order to look ahead, we must look back and, when we do, we see more clearly how to plan. Often the question is, "What should I be doing to insure my future?" The answer is, "Trust in God", for we do not own anything, so we should not let anything own us.

Charitable giving is not a good deed; it is a necessary act if we live out our Christian values. Too often, we give because we feel obligated. I would like to offer this alternative approach: Give because what you have received from God is the choice to help others from your blessings.

The Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus trust in God for all they do. They reach out to the poor, children and youth, the elderly, marginalized and un-churched, because they are all God's people.

As you look to the future, unsure of the market or the investments, the Sisters, as a non-profit, can, through a Charitable Gift Annuity, assure you an income for life with a greater than 5% return guaranteed. You can give it away or keep it, not unlike the Old Testament passage. Insure your future by giving from your past earning and benefit not only from a guaranteed return, but help have a tax free income on a portion of the annual interest income returned to you.

For more information, send us your request for a Free Educational Illustration.

As you look to the future, unsure of the market or the investments, the Sisters, as a non-profit, can, through a Charitable Gift Annuity, assure you an income for life with a greater than 5% return guaranteed.



12 Promises of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will establish peace in their families.
3. I will console them in all their troubles.
4. They shall find in My Heart an assured refuge during life and especially at the hour of their death.
5. I will pour abundant blessings on all their undertakings.
6. Sinners shall find in My Heart the source of an infinite ocean of mercy.
7. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall speedily rise to great perfection.
9. I will bless the homes where an image of My Heart shall be exposed and honored.
10. I will give to priests the power of touching the most hardened hearts.
11. Those who propagate this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart, never to be effaced.
12. The all-powerful love of My Heart will grant to all those who shall receive Communion on the First Friday of nine consecutive months the grace of final repentance; they shall not die under my displeasure, nor without receiving their Sacraments; My heart shall be their assured refuge at that last hour.

Advisory Council Formed to Help Sisters



Members of the Advisory Council who attended the September 2007 meeting include:

Row 1: Sr. Joanna Kmiecik, SSCJ; Russell & Jeanne Krug; Joyce & H. Connell Lang; Mother Vicaress Amabilis Debicka, SSCJ; Mother Provincial Ryszarda Wittbrodt, SSCJ; Sister Mary Andrew Hooper, SSCJ.

Row 2: Sr. Mary Joseph Calore, SSCJ; Sr. Maria Kotch, SSCJ; Joan Gregg; Larry & Rosalind Servinsky; Kenneth Trimbath; T.J. Trimbath; Richard Prostejovsky; Fr. Louis Mulvihill; Ward Prostejovsky.

Not present are: Donald Gregg; Betsy Helsel; Angelitto Passaniti; Present but not in photograph Development Director, Robert J. Allen

In the past few months, friends of the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus were invited by the Sisters to assist them in their planning and fundraising. These individuals were chosen because of their dedication to the Sisters and their apostolates, and they will serve as advisors and promoters of the Sisters.

The group meets monthly. At their September meeting, these members of the council adopted the case statement (seen on the right) which they helped to formulate.

Case Statement of the Advisory Council

The Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus trust in God to provide for us in serving the needs of children and youth, the homeless, the elderly, the marginalized, the unchurched, and all who come to us seeking hope. Together with your support -- in prayer and financial sacrifice, we carry out our mission for the glory of God and the good of our neighbor.

“Since the day I met them, their spirit and enthusiasm made me want to be involved with them.

They embody everything I think a religious order should be.”

*– Rosalind Servinski,
Advisory Council member*

“The Sisters are better stewards of my money than I am.”

*– Richard Prostejovsky
Advisory Council member*

“They are a quiet force in the community. They are not an unknown entity. You know that when you give money, it’s not going to administrative costs or executives. It’s going where it’s needed.”

*Jeanne Krug
Advisory Council member*