

Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny  
Province of USA & Canada

# Connections

## Continuing our Jubilee Pilgrimage



### Anchored in Hope

“The image of the anchor is eloquent; it helps us to recognize the stability and security that is ours amid the troubled waters of this life, provided we entrust ourselves to the Lord Jesus. The storms that buffet us will never prevail, for we are firmly anchored in the hope born of grace, which enables us to live in Christ and to overcome sin, fear and death. This hope, which transcends life’s fleeting pleasures and the achievement of our immediate goals, makes us rise above our trials and difficulties, and inspires us to keep pressing forward, never losing sight of the grandeur of the heavenly goal to which we have been called.” –Pope Francis, *Bull of Indiction for the Jubilee*, #25

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**Cluny Connections**  
is a publication of the  
**Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny**  
**Province of USA & Canada**

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Whether you are bidding good-bye to summertime or anticipating it's arrival following springtime, we remain anchored in hope that just as one season of Creation leads into another and new life continues to emerge, so, too, we are held in the palm of the Creator who sustains us through all of life's changes.

This year, we continue to celebrate the Church's "Jubilee 25" theme "Pilgrims of Hope", a renewed focus on mercy, reconciliation, and hope in a troubled world—reinforcing foundational Christian beliefs. We are pleased to continue to focus on a variety of signs of hope in our midst: News of a synodality experience in the local church from Cluny Associates in Hamilton, Ontario; news from graduates of Cluny School in Newport, Affiliate Jack Grant's involvement in an important Newport community organization, and Sister Mavis' ministry that brings hope to prisoners in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

St. Paul taught, and Pope Francis reminded us: "Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Romans 5:5)

May you embrace new encounters and continue to discover signs of hope on your journey from season to season.

*Sister Marie*

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## News from Cluny Associates in Canada

### Synodality: Pilgrims of Hope in the Church

*Maureen Harper is affirmed in her ministry as a lay person* –By Cluny Connections Staff

The “Synod on Synodality” is described as the culmination of Pope Francis’s papacy and the most important event in the church since the Second Vatican Council. He launched this multi-year worldwide initiative in 2021 to redefine how the Catholic church “journeys together” through enhanced listening and wider participation and invited every baptized Catholic to participate. Moving away from a bishops-only format, he welcomed non-bishops to vote. In October 2024, the final document from these meetings, ratified by the pope, called for a range of spiritual and structural reforms, notably by empowering the laity and women in leadership.

Since Pope Francis launched the Synod, Catholics world-wide have gathered before, during, and after it in Rome to pray, listen, and reflect together. At the diocesan level, continued gatherings are being held to further the progress through welcoming, deep listening, and prayer.

In June, Maureen Harper, a Cluny Associate of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, participated in a Pilgrims of Hope Embracing Synodality event, “The Journey of Encounter,” sponsored by the Diocese of Hamilton at St. Jerome’s University in Waterloo, Ontario. Concerned Lay Catholics, an organization in which Maureen is involved, was a sponsor and provided facilitation, and was assisted by participants from the Synod on Synodality held in Rome in 2023 and 2024.



Maureen Harper (far right) taking notes.

Maureen reflected on the experience: “The Journey of Encounter was a powerful success by any measure. As we engaged in ‘conversations in the Spirit’ for three days, our group of 135 participants from across Canada experienced the working of the Holy Spirit among us as we prayed, listened, and reflected together. I felt excited and affirmed in my mission as a member of Concerned Lay Catholics and Cluny Associates to participate in the process of the conference, which sows seeds of a Synodal church style for Canada. It was a good feeling to be able to discuss the conference afterwards with my Cluny Associates and to respond to their insightful questions. May the Holy Spirit and the Will of God continue to be foremost in our lives.” †



Bishop Douglas Crosby, OMI, with First Nations women who participated in the conference.

The pine saplings, a symbol of hope, were presented to all of the participants.

Photos: Maureen Harper



## News from Our Past Students

### Finding Ways to Give Back

***Writer and editor Bernadette Brennan Bernon likes taking roads less travelled to find adventure and fulfillment***—By Cluny Connections Staff

The pathway to becoming successful at anything starts young, with a good foundation. Bernadette attended Cluny School for that foundation, including violin lessons with Sister Laetitia, and the mentorship of Sr. Loretto after Bernadette's young mother died of cancer. "Sister Loretto was so important to me that I took her name at my confirmation." She went on to St. Catharine's Academy, URI, then joined VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) for two years, working on grassroots issues as a community organizer in East Coast cities – "social justice values instilled in me during my days at Cluny."

She went on to work for Cruising World magazine, travelling the world writing features, until finally becoming Editorial Director – a career highlight in an industry that saw few women rise to the top of marine companies. She co-authored the book *Maiden Voyage*, about 17-year-old Tania Aebi, who circumnavigated alone, which was published in five languages, made the London Times best-seller list, and was chosen as a "Best Book for Young People" by the American Library Association.

Mid-career, for seven years Bernadette and her husband Douglas took off to see the world on a 37-foot sailboat, immersing themselves in different cultures, and writing articles along the way.

They got to Panama's San Blas Islands, craving a deeper connection. "The Kuna people were so welcoming and generous to us, when they had nothing. We saw many kids with conjunctivitis; men with deeply infected cuts on their feet, preventing them from fishing; albinos with no sunscreen or protective sunglasses. The need was endless. We stayed."

They helped the women to sell their extraordinary molas (reverse-applique panels that they sew onto the front and back of their blouses) to stores and galleries in the U.S., providing Kuna families with funds for necessities, and using



**Bernadette and Sister Marie Cooper on Bernadette's current boat, Narragansett Bay**

profits to stock clinics and schools throughout the remote islands.

When it was time to sail home, Bernadette became a freelance feature writer for national magazines, and was hired by BoatU.S. to create BoatU.S. Magazine, which now has a 700,000 circulation and this year won 12 excellence awards from Boating Writers International.

"When I was a child, before going to Cluny School, my first and dearest mentors were Sister Marie Cooper and her parents, who baby-sat for me while my parents were at work. We were Irish immigrants, and the Coopers were the most generous family we'd ever met here. Our families became lifelong friends. Their example helped to form who I wanted to be in the world. I followed Sister Marie to Cluny and always kept those core values I learned when I was young – charity for others being one of the most important."

These days, Bernadette helps high-school juniors from non-college families – especially refugee kids – apply to college or tech school, teaching them how to write essays, navigate applications, apply for aid and scholarships, and nurture their dreams. "Excellent teachers and mentors were critical in my life. This way, I can give back their precious gift." †

## News from Our Past Students

### Balancing Family With Military Work

*Siobhan Cunningham Kern came from a big family and continues to nurture her ties to Cluny School* –By Cluny Connections Staff

In 1967, Siobhan Cunningham Kern, one of nine children, relocated from New York to Newport, Rhode Island, with her family. Siobhan attended Cluny School from kindergarten through eighth grade, during which time most of her older siblings were also enrolled. Her mother, Dr. Colette Cunningham, a gifted neuropsychiatrist from Ireland, established connections with the Cluny Sisters due to their shared Irish heritage. Siobhan vividly recalls the excitement of daily attendance at Cluny, describing it as “my second family.” She maintains contact with her childhood classmates.

Siobhan fondly remembers the sisters: “Carmel, a kind-hearted principal; Rachael, who taught French; Loretto, a brilliant mathematics instructor; Angela, whose infectious smile was ever-present; Laetitia, who possessed a dry wit and unwavering strength as choir director; and Marie, whose beauty and inner joy continue to captivate her former students in Newport. Of course, there was also Mrs. Louise Costly, the gentle woman in the office who loved the students and enjoyed helping in any way she could. Cluny undoubtedly played a pivotal role in shaping my childhood.”

Siobhan has also remained in touch with former teachers. “Sister Angela, my dear mentor, teacher, and friend, spent her final days at St. Clare Home in Newport. One day, concerned that she might not remember me, I entered her room with a wide smile and greeted her with ‘Hello!’ She responded, ‘Siobhan, I would recognize those teeth anywhere!’ It was as if I’d never left Cluny School!”

Following her pursuit of higher education, Siobhan embarked on a successful career at NUWC (Naval Undersea Warfare Center), a division based at the Newport, Rhode Island Naval Station. Her professional journey extended beyond NUWC Newport, encompassing work at



Photo: Siobhan Cunningham Kern

From left: Siobhan, Gunter III, Gunter, and Angelika

the Pentagon and various military bases across the nation. Ten years ago, Siobhan retired to be able to make her family her primary focus. Siobhan and Gunter, who have been married for 25 years, have two children: Angelika, a 20-year-old daughter, and Gunter III, a 13-year-old son. They share a passion for outdoor activities, engaging in diverse experiences such as zip lining in the Adirondacks and paragliding on the waters of Newport.

Earlier this year, Siobhan dedicated a park bench to her mother as a poignant gesture. She expressed, “This bench serves as a reminder that service to God manifests in numerous forms: humanitarianism, selflessness, and nurturing one’s family and community.” Her family and friends, and Sister Marie Cooper were present to witness this meaningful ceremony. †

**NOTE:** If you are a past student, teacher, or co-worker, we Cluny Sisters who have taught you, and worked with you, whether in school or parish, are always delighted to hear from you and your families. So please send us news about yourself or others with whom you have been in contact. Thank you!



## News from Newport

### Turning Around Ministries

*When a helping hand can make all the difference* –By Cluny Affiliate Jack Grant

I initially became affiliated with Turn Around Ministries (TAM) during my time, in early 2000, working at Seamen's Church Institute, a human service organization on the Newport waterfront providing services to local and visiting mariners and members of the broader Newport community since 1919. Through mutual agency collaboration to meet the human service needs of respective clients I learned of and respected the mission and values of TAM and the resources it brought to assisting the neediest of the Newport community. I am honored to serve on TAM's advisory committee and to have been a mentor to a TAM client for over 15 years. Through my administration of a financial assistance fund I am able to assist TAM clients with rental security deposits, monthly rents, utility expenses, personal items, etc.

Through program diversity TAM is able to meet the unique needs of individual clients. That includes a day care gathering place for the homeless and individuals looking for socialization; case management to assist clients with organizing their social, medical, and financial needs; assisting with temporary and permanent housing; and providing food and clothing resources. In assisting clients to achieve independence and self-sufficiency TAM has initiated the PASS Program (Planting A Seed for Success) which is a 14-week job readiness/life skills program.

Graduates of the program explore their individual skills, interests and abilities as they relate to life choices, vocational choices and employment preparation. TAM is a successful faith-based, grass roots human service program that addresses the immediate needs of clients and provides opportunities for long term independence and stability. I find my affiliation with TAM and being active in community service as an extension of my faith and an opportunity to try and live one of my favorite Gospel passages (Matthew 25:40) where Jesus tell us "...whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."†



**Jack Grant and Cheryl Robinson, the Founder of TAM and Chair of the Board of Directors**

TURNING AROUND MINISTRIES (TAM) is celebrating a 20 Year Milestone.

TAM is a non-profit faith-based organization in Newport, Rhode Island, which has been providing services to under-served or at-risk people since 2005.

TAM's target populations are the homeless and formerly incarcerated, but services extend to anyone in legitimate need. TAM'S vision is that, through guidance, spiritual and emotional support, and providing critical services, previously incarcerated people returning to Newport County will have some of their acute reentry needs met in order to increase their potential for success.

TAM's goals are to lower the crime and recidivism rates, and teach people how to contribute to the community, which spurs economic growth.

TAM receives volunteer support from area churches and generous individuals, as well as wide support from state and city agencies. It's had a broad community impact, providing services for more than 1,000 people since its inception.

TAM is located in the heart of Newport's Broadway community on Dr. Marcus Wheatland Boulevard.

For more information, please see: [tamri.org](http://tamri.org)

## News from California

### *The PREP Team brings hope to parolees through the Insight Course* –By Sister Mavis Animah

Since I began as a Coordinator at PREP last year, (Partnership for Re-Entry Program) I was eager to join the team to visit some of the incarcerated men in Pleasant Valley State Prison in California for the monthly visit. I had never visited a prison before.

The journey to the prison served as a prelude to this transformative experience. On a picturesque morning, Sister Mary Sean Hodges, OPMSJ, the founder of PREP, and I embarked on a drive from Lincoln Heights to meet Skip, a close associate of PREP who provided transportation to PVSP. The picturesque mountains, adorned with lush greenery and vibrant flowers, instilled a profound sense of tranquility within me.

The day was particularly significant for the parolees participating in the PREP Insight Course and other transformative programs. Their aspirations were to become better individuals who would contribute positively to society upon their release.

The facilitators orchestrated a meticulously organized graduation ceremony for those who had successfully completed the PREP Insight Course. The celebration was both beautiful and unpretentious. Contrary to my preconceived notions, the inmates displayed a remarkable positivity and hope as they witnessed the transformative impact of their participation in the Insight Course. Their humility and friendliness fostered an exceptional atmosphere for our interactions.

The PARTNERSHIP FOR RE-ENTRY PROGRAM (PREP) is a Restorative Justice ministry in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. The goals of the program are to transform the individual to become productive members of society while reducing the populations of our jails and prisons to help lessen the financial burden on taxpayers. Our objective is to foster personal growth, accountability, and successful reintegration into society in a purposeful and meaningful way. We are resolute in our commitment to rebuilding lives and fostering safer, more empathetic communities.

For more information, please see: <https://partnershipforreentryprogram.org/>



From left:: Sisters Mary Sean, Mavis, and Cecelia at the PREP office

The presence of family members, particularly wives, children, and friends, was heartwarming. Their unwavering support provided hope and strength to the inmates, reminding them that they are not alone in their struggles.

Engaging in a casual conversation over pizza and cake with the inmates was an exhilarating experience. For a fleeting moment, we transcended the confines of the prison walls, reveled in the present moment and talked about their plans and dreams.

This prison visit has provided me with a deeper understanding of the prisoners and the significance of my work with PREP. I have developed a greater sense of compassion for them, while simultaneously recognizing that I am a beacon of hope for these children of God who were lost and seeking a path home to their God who offers a second chance to everyone. †



Photos: Sister Mavis

From left: Sister Mary Sean, Marsi, Sister Mavis, and Alfredo of the PREP Team



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*Bringing Hope & Compassion*

We welcome Pope Leo XIV,  
and  
assure him  
of our prayerful support.



Pope Leo XIV official portrait. Courtesy of the Vatican



*Leo P.P. XIV*

Please remember the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny in your will. Thank you.

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