**Live † Jesus**

**St. Louis Visitation Association of the Christian Faithful**

**Visitation Academy (St. Louis County, Missouri)**

**Thirteenth Annual Report: October 31, 2016**

**Members**

Mrs. Julie Ledbetter, Moderator; Mrs. Mary Anne Spruell; Msgr. John Unger, Chaplain (through May 2016); Ms. Mary Beth Concannon; Mr. Jeff Cupps; Mrs. Marilyn Fitzgerald; Mrs. Cathleen Fogarty; Mrs. Jennifer Germanese; Mrs. Julie Ivers; Mrs. Julie Ledbetter; Mrs. Chris Nassif; Mrs. Michelle Reagan; Mrs. Mary Ann Schwartz; Mrs. Kathryn Snodgrass; Mrs. Ginny Starke; Mr. John Sturm; Mrs. Kathey Taiclet; Sr. Veronica Haronik, Superior; Sr. Marie Therese Ruthmann, elected Superior July, 2016; and Sr. Mary Grace McCormack.

**Spiritual Formation Summary of the St. Louis Visitation ACF**

The St. Louis Visitation Association of Christian Faithful had an enriching formation experience this year with very good attendance at all sessions. We explored and discussed our summer reading book, *“God Desires* You” by Fr. Eunan McDonnel SDB at our first formation meeting. The next three formation meetings delved into the Salesian charism through the analysis and discussion of *“Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition”* by Wendy M. Wright. Discussion questions were provided through the DeSales Spirituality Center.

A full day ACF retreat was presented by Sr. Amy Hereford CSJ, JD, JCD on “The Role of a Catholic Sponsor in Education” on November 7th, 2015. This day focused on the necessary elements of Catholic sponsorship, pertinent canon law, the Catholic sponsor’s role, and reserved powers to maintain Catholic identity. Power point presentations and small group discussions occurred with time designated for prayer, reflection and commitment to our ministry as an Association of Christian Faithful. Mass with the family of ACF members concluded the day.

ACF members also attended an evening retreat with Visitation Academy’s Board of Trustees presented by Fr. Joseph Boenzi, SDB. The topic was: “Formation and Salesian Spirituality” with attention to incorporating formation at board of trustee meetings. Additionally, Fr. Boenzi gave a talk to the broader Visitation community on “Four Western Spiritual Traditions.” Attendance of the ACF, Board trustees and community was excellent.

The faculty retreat provided by Br. Mickey McGrath OSFS on “St. Francis de Sales” was open to ACF members this year with several ACF members attending.

**ACF Catholic Faith Formation planned for 2016-17**: Our summer reading and fall formation discussions will be focused on the books *“The Joy of the Gospel”* and *“On Care for our Common Home,”* both by Pope Francis. *“The Committed Life”* by Fr. William Meninger OCSO, which explores St. Francis de Sales’ Introduction to the Devout Life in modern-day language will also be discussed during the year. A full day retreat (date pending) will be held on Catholic Leadership and Formation.

**ACF Member Faith Formation Leadership in the broader Visitation Community**

Through our consistent participation and engagement in spiritual community opportunities, another layer of ACF spiritual formation emerged. Also, as facilitators and leaders of these programs, we experienced the richness gained from the spiritual discussions necessary to plan such opportunities.

* **Visitation Associates Community (VAC)**

Two ACF members serve alongside Sr. Mary Grace McCormack to provide leadership for the Visitation Associates Community. The initial formation for the those wishing to join the VAC is a two-year study of Salesian spirituality. This group meets monthly and deeply immerses as a group into *“Introduction to the Devout Life (IDL),”* by St. Francis de Sales. Currently, there are 15 new members who have committed to this two-year formation process.

In addition, those who have completed the two-year study of IDL (“Active Associates”) are invited to meet monthly to enrich their Catholic Salesian faith by reading and exploring Salesian spiritual writings. Last year, the Active Visitation Associates discussed *“Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition”* by Wendy M. Wright. The Active Associate group begins each meeting with night prayer from the Liturgy of Hours.

* **The Visitation Heart and Mind Center (VHM)**

The vision of the VHM is to provide a welcoming space, programs, and resources to support and enrich our unique Visitation Catholic and Salesian spirituality as we continue the Sisters’ ministry of Living Jesus. Through the VHM, the ACF strives to serve, engage, inspire, and educate our Visitation community. In fall of 2015, the ACF planned and facilitated two new spiritual enrichment programs for the community to launch the VHM program. The first program is Salesian Study Group, which is a sharing of faith that emerges from reading Salesian literature. Last year, the book “Praying with St. Francis de Sales,” by Thomas Dailey OSFS provided the topics of discussion. The second program is Salesian Prayer Group, which gathers in the Sisters’ meditation room in the monastery to pray the morning prayer from *“Give Us This Day - Daily Prayer for Today’s Catholic.”* Each group met monthly during the school year with very engaged participants. The VHM committee met prior to these sessions for planning purposes.

**Association of the Christian Faithful Business Meetings**

The Visitation Association of the Christian Faithful held 5 business meetings during this past year. Meetings had excellent attendance and members actively participated in discussions. Committee meetings were held outside of the business meetings. All ACF members signed an agreement of commitment and confidentiality at the beginning of the year. Complete meeting minutes are available for review upon request.

**Overview of Activities**

The Visitation Association of Christian Faithful diligently strives to meet our spiritual and fiduciary responsibilities. Our primary goal is to preserve and maintain our Catholic identity and Salesian spirituality at Visitation Academy and in the Visitation community. We strive to accomplish this goal with three main objectives of service:

* Catholic Sponsorship by participating in a governance structure that preserves and promotes our Catholic Salesian spirituality at Visitation;
* Spiritual Enrichment by providing a Visitation Heart and Mind center of Salesian knowledge and practice to engage the community and give opportunity to study and live the Salesian charism more fully;
* Collaborative support for the school in providing excellent education within a Catholic-Salesian environment.

In September 2015, the Visitation Sisters elected to name the ACF Moderator as a Member of the Corporation in the revised academy bylaws. By entering into co-sponsorship of Visitation Academy with the ACF, stable Catholic sponsorship without disruption can be assured should the Sisters become unable to continue in active ministry. The ACF Moderator served on the Board of Trustees with the Sisters. Designated ACF Members served on all Board of Director committees, including the ongoing Head of School search committee. The ACF participated in the interim Head of School interview process. In addition, the ACF participated in both the self-study and evaluation process by the Visitation Salesian Network to determine the level of the academy’s immersion into Salesian spirituality. This evaluation process occurs every five years under the supervision of the Visitation Salesian Network (VSN).

The ACF committees of Communication, Formation and Membership successfully met on a regular basis. The ACF Council (akin to an executive council) met regularly and frequently with the Superior and the Monastic Council to assist in leadership and monastery service, as needed. An Archive committee and Visitation Heart and Mind Center committee was established in spring 2016. In the broader Visitation community, an ACF member served as the Visitation Alumnae Association co-moderator with one of the Sisters during the 2015-2016 school year.

A three-year strategic plan for the ACF was completed in April 2016. Four strategic goals were established to guide our ministry: (1) Articulation of the reciprocal relationship between the Catholic sponsor and Visitation Academy in maintaining our Catholic and Salesian identity, (2) Sustainability of the Visitation Salesian charism, (3) Long-term financial stability for programs to support the preservation of our faith and charism, and (4) Sustainability of the St. Louis Visitation ACF as an Association of Christian Faithful.

**Accomplishments and Activities for 2015-16**

* ACF Moderator attended a nationwide meeting for education ministry sponsors;
* Traveled to Georgetown to collaborate further on Visitation network development and sponsorship agreement between schools and sponsoring bodies;
* Shared information and resources with the St. Austin ACF;
* Enrolled Visitation Academy administration, faculty, and staff into the Archconfraternity of Reparation to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus;
* Attended alumnae and academy sponsored events such as all school Mass, Adoration, Safari Annual fundraiser, May Day and graduation;
* Participated in the Associates’ Advent program;
* Attended the Mothers’ club day of reflection;
* Presented a reflection for St. Francis de Sales feast day at Catherine’s residence;
* Provided support and resource for the Salesian Coordinator;
* Initiated planning to provide further support for the community via a future Outreach program.
* ACF Council: ACF statutes updated with final approval from Archbishop Carlson given 10/2015; ACF mission statement updated and clarified; civil corporation of the ACF established; drafts of a Sponsorship Agreement with the Academy developed for further discussion; assisted and provided advisory for the Sisters in the Monastery Corporation’s civil requirements and legal discussions; networked with the Board of Trustees, Salesian Coordinator, Alumnae Association, VSN, Mendota and Georgetown Visitation Monasteries to keep communication active and share resources; policy book for the ACF established to support implementation of the ACF statutes; evaluation of the ACF as an organization and self-evaluation for individual members was created and distributed.
* Archive committee: Determined placement for relocation of archives; developed archivist job description and posted position; initiated planning to chronicle the Sisters’ biographies.
* Communication committee: Created branding phrase for ACF – Preserving Visitation’s Catholic and Salesian Spirit; initiated revisions and updates to expand the ACF website; networked with the academy to connect our websites and acquire listing the school’s directories; created a 60-second “elevator speech” of our ACF ministry; initiated work for an ACF logo; reviewed and updated the ACF power point slides in order to create individualized presentations for fall 2016.
* Formation committee: Assisted in the planning and presentation of Salesian Spirituality as part of the orientation process for new faculty, staff and board members; organized an update of the video presentations for Salesian orientation sessions; planned and facilitated the ACF retreat; worked with the Charism committee of the Board of Trustees to present a talk to the Visitation community by Fr. Boenzi; provided business meeting prayers and discerned formation content for the ACF membership; provided support for the Salesian study and Prayer groups; supported the Visitation Associates and Salesian Coordinator.
* Membership Committee: A slate of six candidates was presented for the Sisters’ approval. Candidates first participate in a one-year formation program and serve on ACF committees (ex-officio) prior to participating in ACF business meetings. Two members completed the one-year formation process in June 2016. A third has completed formation through the Visitation Associates Community.
* VHM Committee: launched two new Salesian programs as above; established good rapport with attendees, provided networking social time after each session; initiated job description development for a future VHM Coordinator; worked to further clarify the mission and objectives of the VHM with a booklet of information; worked collaboratively with the academy to create a new space for gathering students, faculty, ACF and community members called “Jane’s Place.”

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