



To seek out and advocate  
for the poor and needy,  
especially families,  
for the Kingdom of God.

# Holy Family Sisters

September  
2018

## Sisters' 146 years of Dedication and Commitment to Children

Selected ministries include: Day Homes and Catechetical Education to poor children and those with special needs; supporting immigrant children and their families; social workers and Court Appointed Special Advocates for children at-risk; teaching Braille to the visually impaired and blind children and young adults.



**Sister Ann Marie Gelles** began teaching in 1984 and found herself at the California School for the Blind [CSB] in Fremont in 1997. While not teaching full time anymore, she will be offering a short course class in March, 2019. Her Braille classes included congenitally blind and adventitiously blind students ranging in age from 7-21. Many students also had medical, educational, and/or intellectual disabilities.

As a youth in school, Sister Ann Marie's early impressions of her teachers were that they were inexperienced; she

thought she could do better, and set about to make it happen. By 5th grade she knew she would be teaching visually impaired and blind children. After all, she was already helping her blind peers!

Sister Ann Marie first started teaching in 1984, at first visually impaired elementary kids in Nevada and San Mateo County, California and then in 1997 she began teaching 12-16 year old students at CSB in Fremont. "They were the sweetest kids. They even made me a birthday card. No kids had ever done that before." After attempting to teach Braille to other CSB students on the side, the Administration finally decided to release Sister Ann Marie from her classroom responsibilities, so, by 2000 she was teaching Braille to 35-40 CSB students full-time. Because of her visual

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**Sister Joan Litch** worked as a Social Worker Practitioner with Child Protective Services for 17 years before volunteering as a Court Appointed Special Advocate [CASA] for five years. Volunteers are appointed by judges to watch over and advocate for abused and neglected children to make sure they don't get lost in the overburdened legal and social service system or languish in inappropriate group or foster homes.

As a CASA volunteer, Sister Joan stayed with each child's case until it is closed and the child is placed in a safe, permanent home. "I looked forward to every day, because it is the best feeling to know you are a part of making sure kids were safe."



# Prayer

## For families separated by I.C.E.

### *As people with compassion for the children...*

Be with the children, their mothers, their fathers who wear desert dust, who brave border crossings because they have no choice. Be with the families who flee the narrow places and find themselves stuck.

### *As people with compassion for the children...*

Protect the children torn from parents. Care for the parents who left to choose life over death, who are at the mercy of our government and its agents, a heartless state.

### *As people with compassion for the children...*

Save us from those who follow orders. Save us from those with hardened hearts. Save us from those who forget to remember the cruelty our country holds in its bones.

Children of African descent enslaved, stripped from their parents, owned, sold away. Native American and Japanese American children traumatized, interned, detained.

### *As people with compassion for the children...*

Help us to listen to the cries of the dead and the living immigrants and asylum seekers whose breath is one with Yours.

For the sake of all that is holy, all that is good, open our eyes, our hearts, our gates. Turn us around. Return children to parents, parents to children. Bring us to the streets. Bring us back to you.

*By Rabbi Annie Lewis, adapted.*



# TAKE ACTION

## Keep families together!

The policy of separating thousands of children from their parents – and incarcerating them – is inhumane, morally reprehensible and completely unnecessary. Legislation is moving through Congress to stop family separation under most circumstances. In the Senate, it's called the Keep Families Together Act – S. 3036 – sponsored by Senator Dianw Feinstein. A companion bill is being prepared in the House. You can begin by visiting [www.splcenter.org/keeping-families-together](http://www.splcenter.org/keeping-families-together) for more information and to see if your Congressional Representative has signed on to this legislation.

**PLEASE CALL OR EMAIL YOUR LEGISLATOR TODAY.**

# FACTS

# TATS

## Children Remaining in Care with Office of Refugee Resettlement [ORR] as of August 23, 2018

	Under 5 years old	5 years old and over	Total Number of Children
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Children separated from their families			2654
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Children have been reunited or released as of August 23.			2126
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As of August 23 numbers of <b>children still separated from their parents/guardians</b>	23	505	<b>528</b>
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Children remaining in care where the adult associated with the child is not eligible for reunification or is not available for discharge at this time:

Children who are still in care where further review shows they were not separated from parents by DHS	4	41	45
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Adult presently outside the U.S.	6	337	343
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Adult in other federal, state, or local custody	3	16	19
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Parent indicated desire against reunification or waived reunification rights.

<i>(NOTE: Many parents signed forms waiving their reunification rights while separated from their children and under duress this spring or without understanding them.)</i>		139	139
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Red flag, triggered by:			62
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Background check	9	26	35
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Safety and/or well-being		17	17
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Parentage	1	9	10
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impairment Sister ann Marie had to work hard to gain the opportunity to attend school. Even then, after gaining her place, she had to work that much harder than sighted children to just keep up. Teachers were not used to teaching blind children since Sister Ann and her peers were the first visually impaired kids allowed to attend school in Reno. Sister Ann loved school. She took Braille when she was in middle school and hated it because it was geared to adults and she had to attend class after school four days a week for 90 minutes. So when she became a teacher, she made it her priority to make learning fun and accessible. She has a series of short stories, entitled "Ann and Friends" available on the CSB website to help kids learn Braille. She also instituted and

hosted the Annual Braille Bee at CSB. Other Braille activities included contests, competitions and reading recitals involving the entire school. Students dined at the Motherhouse to celebrate their accomplishments.

Making the decision to leave teaching was difficult. She was torn between two paths, her love of the kids at CSB and teaching and her love of her Community. Ultimately she decided to serve her Community. She was elected to leadership in the last year. But she has not left teaching completely; next year she is teaching a short class on the newly adopted Braille code.

"I'd love teaching. I have been inspired by teaching and guiding blind and visually impaired children of all ages and abilities for many years. So many of my students had not been valued by society, but these kids are

great! While I never spoke about my religion at school, I lived it. My actions were my words. People at the school supported and sponsored me in our Human Trafficking Walk-a-Thon, and friends and Associates also helped the students by purchasing school supplies and clothing."

Sister Ann Marie wants blind and visually impaired people to have the opportunity to have rich and fulfilling lives, just like she has. "Too many people think that if you are blind, you cannot learn, or do things. I'd like to think that my generation paved the way for the younger generations to do more, live more, and learn more. When I started teaching, 80% of people who were blind were unemployed. Now the number is 70%. But, of those who *are* employed, 90% know Braille – knowing Braille is empowering."

## *New traditions reflect long-standing Sisters' commitment to children*

The Sisters of the Holy Family are establishing new traditions through our *Ministry of Connecting* while carrying forward ministries in new ways. Gifts to the SHF Mission Fund directly support ministries which reflect our long-standing commitment to the poor and needy, especially families. Aiding children to live happy, healthy, safe and fulfilling lives has been a main focus for our Sisters since 1872. *Listed are just some of what we have done in the past several of years toward this goal.*

- \$150,000 to Club Stride in Solano County for at-risk youth in October 2017
- Annual grant of \$35,000 to Los Angeles Ministry Project (LAMP) in 2015, 2016 and 2017
- \$35,000 to St. Catherine's Academy in Los Angeles for motel child scholarship
- \$5,000 to Saint Vincent's Day Home in February 2017
- \$13,250 to Holy Family Day Home in Spring 2017
- \$1,400 to Special Religious Education (SPRED) in Oakland, CA, August 2017
- \$205,000 to Legacy Academy for at-risk youth in Jan. 2017
- \$3,000 to Discovering East Africa to provide backpacks for children in February 2016
- \$10,000 to Saint Vincent's Day Home, February 2016
- \$10,000 to Holy Family Day Home in February 2016
- \$1,000 to Moreau Catholic High School for scholarship in May 2016