

# SISTERS OF SAINT JOSEPH EARTH CENTER

## June 12 Dedication Ceremony Features Procession, Drumming, Dance and Music



The Sisters of Saint Joseph Earth Center will be dedicated on June 12 in a ceremony which is part of the Sacred Earth Conference June 11 to 13. The program, from 3:30 to 5:00 pm, is free and open to the general public. It will include music in the summer pavilion by Heartful Ministries, African American dancers, and a procession with the Black Madonna.

Miriam McGillis, O.P., founder of Genesis Farm and keynote speaker at the Sacred Earth Conference, will speak at the dedication ceremony, as will Dominic Roberti, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus from Saint Joseph's University and a long-time supporter of the Earth Center and its predecessor, the Cecilian Center for Earth, Art, and Spirit.

Mary Elizabeth Clark, SSJ, Director of the SSJ Earth Center expressed satisfaction that the renovation has been completed and that the path is open to carry out a vision of integrating spirituality and sustainability in a holistic approach for SSJ-sponsored works, parish groups, school faculties, and community groups.

Previously located on Carpenter Lane in Mount Airy (Philadelphia) as the Center for Earth, Art, and Spirit, the Center provided an extensive program of courses in

ecological spirituality, meditation, music, and various forms of art, including papermaking and weaving.

Among plans for the newly-dedicated Earth Center is development of a graduate certificate program in sustainability at Chestnut Hill College along with outreach to students and faculty and the local community.

### House of Loretto Historical Background

*With the assistance of Sister Patricia Annas, SSJ Archivist, the following historical facts give additional meaning to the renovation of the House of Loretto.*

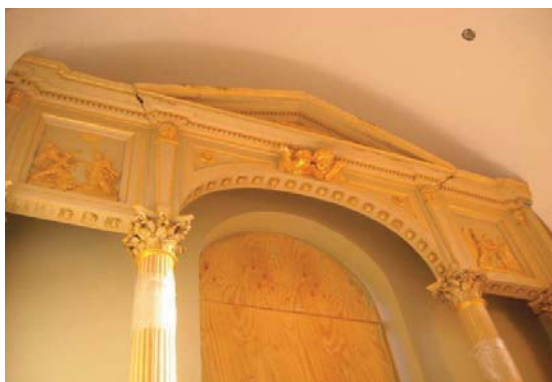
In 1894, the House of Loreto shrine in Italy was remodeled and the wooden reredos was replaced with marble. The wooden piece was sent to Chestnut Hill College.

On May 31, 1897 ground was broken for the House of Loreto at Chestnut Hill College to commemorate the approval of the Constitutions on November 20, 1895.

In August 1897, a member of the Alumnae Association of Mt. St. Joseph Academy presented Reverend Mother Clement with \$750 in gold as a remembrance of the Golden Jubilee of the Sisters of St. Joseph's arrival in Philadelphia.

This donation provided the funds to build an altar that would be suitable for the reredos from the original House of Loreto. At that time the Congregation numbered 445.

## Black Madonna Returned, Reredos Restored



The statue of the Black Madonna which rested in the original House of Loreto in Loreto, Italy, was restored by the Parish of St. Athanasius to a condition of exquisite beauty. A place of honor has been created on a wall in the Earth Center for this statue, an exact replica of the one in Italy. The original reredos that has been cleaned and mounted on the wall will be a fitting frame for it.

From ancient times, the Black Madonna has been associated with Mother Earth. The Christian adaptation to Mary Mother of God and devotion to her throughout the centuries provides a sacred patron for the critical ministry of the Great Work needed today.

Rev. Joseph F. Okonski, pastor of St. Athanasius/Immaculate Conception School, where the statue was on loan while the House of Loreto was closed, accompanied by parishioners, will process with the statue of the Black Madonna from Mount Saint Joseph Convent to the House of Loreto site of the Sisters of Saint Joseph Earth Center.

The procession will be accompanied by drumming and by African American Dancers Michael and Marcus Mahan. A concert by Heartful Ministries in the Summer Pavilion will follow the procession. Sister Mary Kay Kelley and Cathy Johnson co-direct Heartful Ministries. Sister Mary Kay also teaches music and coordinates liturgies at St. Athanasius/Immaculate Conception School.

## EARTH CENTER GOES GREEN

### Insulation Helps Seal Building

Thick insulation keeps the building warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Insulation made blown between the dry wall and the stone walls of the building insure what is referred to as a “tight envelope” that is the first priority in greening of a building.

Don Hull, an expert in geothermal work for many years, advised Sister Mary Elizabeth, “Before one thinks of adding solar panels or using geothermal, it is important to secure a tightly sealed space. In other words, make sure the heat is not leaking out through spaces around windows and doors or around pipes and hot water heaters. This can save a great amount of energy and not be a financial burden.

### Rainwater Captured and Reused

Rainwater that falls on the roof of the House of Loreto will flow through the columns to an underground cistern

that will store the water for use on the grounds. A hose will be attached to the cistern for watering the gardens. This arrangement will help avoid erosion of soil and runoff into the Wissahickon. In addition, a rain barrel will also collect rainwater for use on the property. Future plans include a rainwater garden.

### Geothermal Well in Place and Working

One of the major environmentally sensitive features of the renovation is the installation of a geothermal well for heating and cooling of the building. The geothermal heating is already at work. Geothermal energy makes use of the heat within the earth to provide space heating. Geothermal energy can also be used to provide cooling in summer.

This geothermal installation serves as a demonstration project to show what can be done to reduce the carbon footprint associated with burning fossil fuels.