



Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate

Sisters' Journey

Spring-Summer 2012

For I Was A Stranger and You Welcomed Me...



Sister Therese Cunningham comforts a young boy at the shelter.

Drawn by the dream of welcoming and serving immigrants, I set out for the Rio Grande Valley in the summer of 2005. I believe that it was God's providence that guided me to a shelter called **La**

Posada Providencia

in San Benito, Texas. The words of our foundress, Mother Margaret Mary, "Why should we fear, our treasury is Divine Providence which supplies the whole universe and is never exhausted," which I shared with Sister Margaret Mertens, the director at that time sparked a connection with the mission of the Sisters of Divine Providence. Sister remarked that those words resonated with their charism and mission as Sisters of Divine Providence.

My Ministry Today

The fact that I had many years of teaching experience, was fluent in Spanish and had a great desire to serve immigrants were factors that influenced my acceptance as a member of the staff of La Posada Providencia, and I began ministry there in September of 2005 as a client mentor and ESL teacher.

I believe that my present ministry to immigrants and asylum seekers is very much an expression of the charism and mission of our Congregation. These immigrants, our brothers and sisters in Christ, come to the U.S. searching for a better life and/or in the hope of being united with loved ones. Many come with only the clothes on their backs, tired, hungry and often bearing the scars of abuse

along the way. Most come long distances: from Africa, South America, Central America, Mexico, Asia and Europe. Some have suffered on the journey. Some have been tortured in their homeland. Having left behind their country and their families and all their belongings, they are poor indeed when they arrive at our shelter. What they have are their hopes and dreams that one day they can become citizens or permanent residents of this country.

As Client Mentor and ESL instructor I have the privilege of welcoming them to our country and assisting them in the process of enculturation. It is rewarding to teach them to take the first steps in learning English to help those who already know



Sister Therese assists a client at La Posada.

the language to learn about our country's history and government. I also enjoy teaching our clients about shopping, budgeting, gardening, cooking, and environmental concerns.

As many of our clients are anxious about their future and tend to be under stress, I incorporate music into our study program. Singing songs together helps the clients to relax and release some of their tension. It's amazing how readily most people join in singing. Sometimes we include some rhythm instruments and this adds to their

Continued on page 6



IN THIS ISSUE

Jubilarians 2012

60 Years

Sister Anne Finnerty

Sister Beatrice Donnellan

Sister Bernadette McNamara

Sister Mary Margaret O'Grady

Sister Mildred Gordon

Sister Sheila O'Sullivan

50 Years

Sister Christina Mitchell

Pages 3-5

In Memoriam: Sister Lucy Collins

Page 2

Come and See

Page 7

In Memoriam: Sister Lucy Collins

On March 20, 2012 Sister Lucy Collins slipped into the arms of her Beloved. Although Sister Lucy had not been well for much of the past year, none of us thought that she was so close to her journey home to God.

Though it was not her first fall, or her first time to be hospitalized since the beginning of the year, Sister Lucy fell as she was leaving the chapel after evening prayer on February 26th. For the next several weeks, she was in and out of the hospital, and her deteriorating condition made it clear that she was critically ill.

On Thursday, March 15, Sister Lucy told the medical staff that she did not want them to do any more treatments. She said to me that she was tired of them “poking and prodding her.” Several Sisters discussed options with Sister Lucy, and ultimately she decided to come home under the care of hospice.



However, before she could be transferred her condition worsened and several Sisters stayed with her and prayed to St. Joseph to come and take her home.

Sister Lucy's body was brought to the Motherhouse on Thursday afternoon, and she was buried following the Mass of the Resurrection on March 22. Many of her former students came for both the wake service and the Mass — they came from St. Mary of Carmel in Dallas and also from Edinburg. Additionally, representatives from Habitat for Humanities came and read a beautiful tribute to her at the wake. There were also many other tributes from her former students and the Sisters whose lives she touched.

She was known for her keen eye for decorating and design, and she was a caring Superior of the motherhouse. Additionally, Sister Lucy was one of the most powerful elementary school teachers and principals to have led our schools.

May she rest in peace.

SHSp Heritage Notes: Led By the Spirit

The following continues our series on the heritage of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate.



The first postulants to leave Ireland for San Antonio after World War II are depicted above. Depicted above, left to right are: L-R they are Sisters Florita Burke, Mary Walsh, Lucy Collins, Cabrini Joyce, Patricia Walsh, Gabriel Hession, Madeleine Cannon, Anita Lysaght, Bertha Dempsey, and Magdalen Kilbane. Accompanying the postulants is Sister Ignatius.

“The saga of Mother Margaret Mary appeals to the American respect for those who show tenacity in the face of great odds, especially for the purpose of bettering society.

Given the extensive labors on behalf of black education and the enormous demands of establishing a religious community, the achievements of Mother Margaret Mary Murphy remain singular.”

From an article by Anne M. Butler "Building Justice: Mother Margaret Murphy, Race, and Texas" *Catholic Southwest*, Vol. 13, 2002, pp. 13-36

Celebrating Our Jubilarians and Their Service



Renewing their vows (Left L-R): Sisters Christine, Beatrice, Anne, and Mary Margaret.

Also right (L-R): Sisters Sheila, Mildred, and Bernadette.



This summer, we honored seven Sisters of the Holy Spirit who celebrated jubilees in religious life. These women were called through the working of the Holy Spirit to consecrate their lives to God. Over the years, God has blessed and loved them in ways that prepared them to go forth and share that goodness with the people who are in most need of compassion. Sisters Beatrice Donnellan, Anne Finnerty, Mildred Gordon, Bernadette McNamara, Mary Margaret O'Grady, Sheila O'Sullivan are celebrating sixty years in religious life, and Sister Christina Mitchell is celebrating fifty years.

Sister Beatrice Donnellan: From a

young age I greatly admired the Sisters in my hometown Mount Bellew. Seeing photos of our Sisters in economically poor areas of the U.S. created an interest to be a missionary. In high school I perceived a community spirit among Sisters and postulants and decided to join them. My challenges early on centered around minimal communication with my family owing to the rules imposed upon us. My education has included a bache-



lor's degree and two master's degrees. One of my fondest memories was experiencing the enthusiasm, hope, and freedom in the community following the call of Vatican II to re-discover our charism and history and adapting to the changing circumstances of our time. My ministry in Mexico since 1988 has provided me with transforming experiences such as learning another language, different food, a new culture and way of life. Being surrounded by economically and/or educationally deprived people has helped me to live simply. Accompanying them as well as the people deprived of their freedom at the federal prison in Mexico has enabled me to be a more compassionate person.

Sister Anne Finnerty: I was only about ten years old when I first knew I wanted to be a Sister. Both my family and the Sisters in Mount Bellew influenced me, especially Sister Fidelis. She worked in the kitchen and I would see her when my mother sent me with milk or butter or eggs to give to the Sisters. When we arrived in the convent kitchen, Sister Fidelis would give us children nice tidbits to eat; and more than anyone else, she drew me to the SHSp congregation. My college education was obtained at a slower pace than most of our Sisters because I usually ministered in communities with no access to col-

leges. Still, for 18 years I plugged away at my bachelor's degree. I also earned a master's degree over four summers, and then enrolled at Fordham for my Ph.D. which took only two and a half years because I finally became a full-time student. One of the challenges I experi-



enced was working in the early days of transition in the Church from male to female leadership in education at the diocesan level. A fond memory: being the leader of the Congregation at the centenary celebration of our congregation in my home parish in Ireland. For 14 years, I was the superintendent of schools and the Vicar of Education in the Diocese of Brownsville and I had the distinction of being the first woman religious in the USA to be appointed to the Vicar of Education. My joy today is ministering to the people of Zambia and promoting vocations there.

(Continued on page 4)

Jubilarians Celebrate...

(continued from p. 3)

Sister Mildred Gordon: I was 15 years old when I felt my call to religious life. While attending Holy Rosary School in Mount Bellew with the Sisters of the Holy Spirit, I was inspired by Sister Ignati-



us. After many visits with her and my mother, I decided to join the Sisters. My father was resistant, but finally we agreed. My years of ministry have been very positive. First I taught elementary school, then I was principal of schools in Louisiana and Mississippi for 11 years. My second career began when I recorded the Hispanic census for the Diocese in Hillsboro, Texas. For the past 25 years, I have been at St. Stephen's parish in Weatherford, Texas. I began as a director of religious education and have also been the pastoral assistant. One of the highlights included our annual trips to our sister parish in Juarez, and while we are no longer able to travel there, we have similar outreach work with St. Stephen's mission chapel now.

Sister Bernadette McNamara:

When I found out that the Sisters of the Holy Spirit taught black children, I had a mental picture of missionaries in Africa and I was hooked. I was sixteen



years old when I set sail on July 4, 1950 on the Mauretania bound for Texas. I never asked questions, but when I arrived in San Antonio I had a rude awakening—but the Holy Spirit took care of that in a hurry. My main challenges were getting used to the extreme heat as well as missing my family. Still, I felt very close to God on my profession day. My education includes a bachelor's degree and two master's degrees. Over the past 59 years, I have been blessed to have had the opportunity to minister to the people of God and to have them minister to me. I have had several long tenures: 14 years at Our Mother of Mercy in Beaumont, 16 years at Holy Redeemer in New Orleans and 12 years at St. Peter in Pascagoula. It was especially difficult to witness the final days at both Holy Redeemer and St. Peter Schools.

Sister Mary Margaret O'Grady:

From the time I was a teenager, my thoughts were subtly permeated with the idea of being a nun. My mother had died when I was ten, and after my father's death, I had to say "Yes" either to God or to my boyfriend of three years! I almost changed my mind on the way to Mount Bellew, but I had told my family and myself that "this was it—for better or worse until the day I die!" My biggest challenge was getting up so early in the morning, but I have fond memories of those early years, such as Sister Monica Lonergan's potato salad



Holy Redeemer Church provided a beautiful backdrop for the renewal of vows.



Special music was an integral part of our celebration.



(Continued on p.5)

Jubilarians Celebrate... (continued from p. 4)

and our picnics. My ministries include 18 years in Zambia, where I experienced the joy of the people going to the outstation for Mass every few months. Later at the Teacher Training College, when I complained to my department head that my students and I did not understand each other, he responded "Sister, you are doing wonderful! They must train their ears to understand different accents." Soon, I got to love my work and felt accepted by staff and students. At our deepest level, people are the same everywhere: all have the same values, hopes, and dreams.



**Sister
Sheila
O'Sullivan:**

I was born in Recess, Connemara, County Galway, Ireland, and when I was in third grade, a visit from the Good Shepherd Sisters triggered my interest in the religious life. My parents' faith and prayer greatly influenced my openness to God's call. When I was seventeen and living in Kilrush, County Clare, I realized the call required my response. I earned a bachelor's degree from St. Mary's University, though I attended Dominican College in Houston as well as Our Lady of the Lake. As a young Sister, teaching first graders was a challenge as well as a fond memory: the innocence of the little children made an impression as did the stories of mission life recounted by our Senior Sisters. Most of my years of ministry took place in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. I experienced the onslaught of Hurricane Katrina, which

completely destroyed our church and school, St. Peter's in Pascagoula. Another moving experience occurred in 1996, when my novitiate companion, Sister Rita Mannion, died suddenly and unexpectedly. Life is precious!



**Sister
Christina
Mitchell:**

My call was sparked by a picture of Sisters in a mission magazine and my mother's explanation of who Sis-

ters are and the focus of their lives. I was only eight or nine years old, but I responded "When I grow up, I want to be one of these ladies." The spark became a compelling flame. I earned a bachelor's degree and discovered my passion for science. At the request of my Congregation, I switched to a master's degree in Theology. My fondest memories are teaching Religion and Science to junior high students for almost ten years at St. Pius X in Dallas. I loved the youth I taught and my deepest desire was to help them believe in themselves and their own beauty and goodness, and to enkindle in them a passion for God (through Religion) and life (through Science). After completing nine years as the formation director for the congregation, I then began a new ministry in the Diocese of Mongu in Zambia in 1988. There I have experienced the beauty and richness of people of different tribes and cultures, and I have come face to face with my own limitations and learned first-hand that ministry is always two-way.

COMING

NEXT YEAR:

Jubilarians 2013

60 Years

Sister Irene Arredondo

Sister Nora Gavin

Sister Kathleen Higgins

Sister Annette McHugh

Sister Elizabeth Ann Moran

Sister Jo Murray

Sister Maura Scarry

50 Years

Sister Dympna Clarke

Sister Thérèse Cunningham

Sister Geraldine Klein

Sister Miriam Mitchell

Sister Martha Readore

For I Was A Stranger...

(continued from p. 1)

enjoyment and relaxation.

Another area of my ministry that is rewarding is facilitating the reunion of our clients with family members already in this country.

When we gather around the table to eat a meal, I feel blessed to be seated with people from so many countries—at times 12 or more nations represented at the table. We respect each other's differences and try to learn from one another. Though we are gathered from many nations, our goal is to live as one family under the watchful and loving gaze of our Creator.

Another aspect of my present ministry that really excites me is the opportunity that I have to speak to groups who come here to be



better informed about the issues on the border. Through listening to the stories of the immigrants and working with them as tutors, they better understand why people come to the U.S. and their suffering at having to leave their homeland. It gives me great hope when students want to understand our complex immigration system.

One challenge with my ministry here is that I work 24/7 and live on site with the immigrants. Another challenge is maintaining a sense of joy and trust in God's Providence after listening to story after story of human suffering, struggle, oppression and abuse. Taking it all to God in prayer is a must each day.

My Early Life Journey

My life journey began on May 7, 1945 in a small town called Mount Bellew in County Galway, Ireland. I was the youngest child born to Mary and Thomas Cunningham. My father owned a general store in the town and was known for his hearty and contagious laughter. Both of my parents were great examples to me of "hospitality". Everyone was welcome at our home and customers were often invited to the kitchen for a cup of tea.

When my father died suddenly of a heart attack I was only 10 years old and my mother was left alone to take care of the family and manage our store. Though it was a very difficult time for my mother, her deep faith in God was strong. She tried to help us through this sad time by telling us that God never closes a door that he doesn't open a window or another door.

The seeds of my vocation to religious life were sown by God in a very subtle way. I grew up in a faith-filled family listening to stories



about priests and Sisters serving in mission lands, particularly Africa and Asia. My parents sold mission magazines in our store and I read them and enjoyed meeting missionaries when they came to visit my home. I was taught by the Sisters of the Holy Spirit, and they invited me to consider joining the community. I saw young women from my hometown and surrounding areas enter the Congregation and depart for Texas. When Sister Emmanuel came home for visits, I listened to stories of mission life in Texas. All of that was God's way of planting the seeds of a religious vocation in my heart.

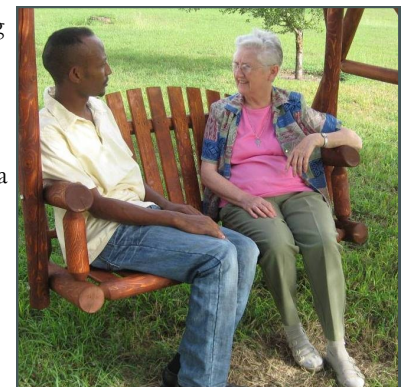
In August of 1961, I joined the Sisters of the Holy Spirit, and I was received as a postulant with four other young women on August 15th. Two weeks later we were in San Antonio, Texas. What a shock! The Texas heat was almost unbearable after the fresh and crisp air of Ireland, and I began to feel homesick. But gradually I adjusted to the hot Texas sun and the different food



My other ministry assignments include teaching at Saint Mary of Carmel Elementary School in Dallas, at Little Flower Elementary School in San Antonio, and at Notre Dame High School in Shreveport, Louisiana. I also served as director of religious education at Immaculate Conception Parish in Gregory, Texas for 14 years. From 2000 to 2005, I did missionary work in Mexico.

Hispanic Bishops Call to All Americans

In a December 2012 letter, the Hispanic Bishops called on all Americans to welcome newcomers with respect and Christ-like love. The bishops offered assurance that they are continuing to advocate for "just, humane and effective reform of immigration laws" aimed at respecting "family unity" and allowing "an orderly and reasonable process for unauthorized persons to attain citizenship." The Bishops also committed to working for a worker visa program that respects human rights. Today my passion is working for the rights of immigrants, sharing God's gifts with newcomers and being ever-mindful of Jesus' words:



"I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Come now into my kingdom."

Recent Activity at The Motherhouse

Scenes from the Latest Come and See



Come and experience what it's like to live in a convent! Participate in prayer, meals, and recreation with the Sisters. Walk in the shadow of Mother Margaret, our foundress. Learn about our charism, our ministries, our spirituality, and our great love for God's poor. Spend a day, a weekend, a week with the Sisters to learn first-hand how the Sisters live out their lives through the vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience.

We have two "Come and See" weekends annually, but if you feel you would like to visit at any other time, please let us know.

October 19-20-21, 2012

March 22-23-24, 2013

For more details or other vocation information, contact Sister Gabriel Hession at sghession@hotmail.com or check our website: www.shsp.com





Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate

*Founded in Texas in 1893
to be a passionate voice for justice*

300 Yucca Street
San Antonio Texas 78203-2399
Phone: 210-533-5149
Fax: 210-533-3434
E-mail: mmitchell@shsp.org

Dear Friends,

Summer is almost here – bursting from our mild Texas spring with great enthusiasm as we move into the month of June! Such enthusiasm describes your response to our last issue of Sisters' Journey. We greatly appreciate your generous financial support of our various ministries as well as taking time to write your positive comments in letters and e-mails.

Since our last issue, we had an enthusiastic response to our latest “Come and See” -- seven lovely ladies attended a long weekend for a glimpse into the life of a Sister of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate. As usual Sisters Gabriel, Genevieve and Eugenius did a wonderful job preparing so that the weekend was meaningful for the ladies who attended. Thanks also to all of the Sisters who assisted in a host of other ways: doing talks, walking with the ladies, sharing stories, preparing food, making sure rooms were ready, and so on. We now leave them “in the hands” of the Holy Spirit to continue the work in their hearts and lives.

There is great enthusiasm here at the Motherhouse at present: our Sisters are gathering for the Jubilee

Note: Our legal name is: Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate. We are a non-profit, 501 (c) 3 organization, and all gifts are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by federal law. Contact your financial or tax advisor for details relevant to your personal circumstances. If you would like to discuss your gift, I welcome you to contact me at holyspirit@shsp.org.

celebrations and our annual retreat, and we can feel the excitement in the air as we catch up with one another about the past and learn of the plans being made for the future. This week we celebrated jubilees of seven of our Sisters. We are grateful to God for the wonderful gifts of these Sisters, which truly gave us cause for celebration and thanksgiving.



We give thanks to you, too, for the blessing that you are as you minister with our Sisters through your prayers, presence, and generous financial support. We hope to continue to be deserving of your support, and we hope you will have a safe and restful summer. May God's peace be with you always and in all ways.

Gratefully in Christ,

Sister Miriam Mitchell, SHSp
Superior General

When you have finished reading this newsletter, kindly pass it along to a friend.