

## Associates and Sisters Are Welcomed back to Holly Springs, Mississippi!



The group of volunteers (sisters, associates, and friends) with Sisters Ramona and Julene who live in Holly Springs, MS.

From Sunday, March 23, to Saturday, March 29, a group of sisters, associates, friends and family spent time in Holly Springs, Mississippi, in community and service, meeting the needs of the time.

Sisters and associates have a long history in Holly Springs. Sisters Julene Stromberg and Ramona Schmidtknecht have been doing their best to meet the needs of this community for over 30 years.

Associate Maureen Hellwig taught teachers in the area to bring their own Civil Rights Movement stories to their

classrooms decades ago. For many years, associates and sisters from other parts of the country came to Holly Springs to offer their assistance wherever it was needed.

While associates and sisters still live in and work in the area, the long-time commitment for others from around the country to make the trip to Sacred Heart South Missions (SHSM) was interrupted and put on pause with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. A group began gathering in 2024 to determine the interest and ability to bring back an opportunity to participate in a mission trip.

The group, mainly from Wisconsin and Illinois, grappled over ideas of undertaking service projects at Maryville Academy in Illinois, Holly Springs, or Milwaukee. After gathering information, the decision was made to seek input from all associates regarding their willingness and ability to commit. The results of this outreach determined an interest to make the trip to Holly Springs as our first mission.

Nineteen participants gathered at Gregory House, a beautiful retreat center next to St. Joseph Catholic Church, both of which are served by the Priests of the Sacred Heart. The retreat center is about three blocks away from the home of Sisters Ramona and Julene. SHSM volunteer program director Melissa and assistant director Kermit provided the group with information about where and when they would be needed over the course of the week.

The assignments were quite varied. In two schools, associates performed student assessments, assisted in after school care, and taught the Stations of the Cross. There were many areas that needed cleaning, including the cafeteria, kitchen, and in St. Joseph

Church. Others spent time working at the Garden Café, which offers meals to those in need, and sewing blankets for adults and children.

There was also plenty of work to be done outdoors, including scraping and repainting shutters and a porch at the sisters' home. Yard work and painting of statuary also happened both at St. Joseph Church and at the sisters' home. For those who enjoyed gardening, there was time spent preparing garden beds and planting vegetables, weeding, and transplanting.

Each morning the group gathered for prayer; and looked forward to new opportunities to be of service, The evenings offered time to eat together and to gather in community for prayer and reflection. One evening, the group had the opportunity to meet with and share a meal with sisters and associates residing in the Holly Springs area. For some it was a reconnection, and others a chance to make new friendships. Everyone found a place to be of service, and everyone left feeling a deeper connection to the community and to each other.

The ability to participate, to be a part of something larger than oneself, outside of the predictability and comfort of normal day-to-day living, was a true blessing to all. Those who attended said they would love to do it again. The hope is to expand our reach to other services provided by SHSM next year, and to perhaps offer a little more time at the beginning and end of the week for more connection and exploration of the Holly Springs area.

Look for information coming soon about an opportunity to offer your time, talents, or treasure, as we look at a shorter, one-day mission opportunity at Maryville, meeting the needs of the time. Associates and sisters should look for an email in June with details. Be on the watch!



Associates, sisters, and friends in mission visit with associates and Sisters who live in the area.



Sister Ruth Gengler and Associates Karen Dosemagen, Vanessa Williams, James Rayford, Sr., Elvira Stevens, and Bridget McCallough shared after supper.