

Celebrating the Year of Consecrated Life

The following was a liturgical reflection given by Sr. Merita Dekat, SSS, at an Eucharistic celebration of the Year of Consecrated Life on May 3, 2015.

Thanks to all of you for being here today to celebrate with us “The Year of Consecrated Life.” It was proclaimed by Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, in a special hope-filled and beautiful message. (You can read it on the internet—it’s only 10 pages long!) The Year of Consecrated Life will end February 2, next year, on the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple.

During this past week—as I was thinking about today, a song from a famous musical kept running through my mind... Remember the musical, *Godspell*, in 1971? Remember that haunting song that Mary Magdalene sings to Jesus?

*“Day by Day...Day by Day,
O Dear Lord, three things I pray:
To see Thee more clearly,
To love Thee more dearly,
To follow Thee more nearly...”*

Does anyone remember this song?
Aren’t these longings found in every Christian heart?

Some people feel so strongly about these longings they feel called to follow Christ to its fullest possibility—and to serve as He did, to make the world a better place. These persons make it the whole focus of their lives—they join



This “Tree of Life” window adorns the chapel of the Sisters of Social Service District in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Original artwork is used with permission by the artist Sabau-Trifu Cristina.

others with similar desires in a religious community. Here they give their entire lives, all the love of their hearts, the energies of their minds and bodies, and their entire life and being to God, and to the mission of Jesus.

They want to be a co-worker with Christ. About this the Holy Father says: “Radical evangelical living is not only for Religious; it is demanded of everyone.”

But, he says, “Religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way.” And he continues, “This is the priority that is needed right now: to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth,” like the Gospel “light on a hill.”

Pope Francis asks religious “to create spaces where the Gospel approach of self-giving, sisterhood/ brotherhood,

embracing differences, and love of one another, can thrive.” He adds, “Because they (Religious) are free, they are beholden to no one but God, and they

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have no interest other than God.”

The message of Pope Francis is directed to every Christian community. He wants all Christians “to experience a moment of thanksgiving to the Lord, and grateful remembrance for all the gifts we continue to receive.”

Of course, it is also directed to members of Consecrated Life.

In the Holy Father’s words, “Together let us thank the Father, Who called us to follow Jesus by fully embracing the Gospel and serving the Church, Who poured into our hearts the Holy Spirit, the source of our joy, and the source of our witness to God’s Love and Mercy before the world.”

To the Brothers and Sisters of Consecrated Life: “You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things.”

As you see, the Message of the Holy Father is addressed to Religious in all forms of consecrated life (there are many forms) and to the whole Church, the whole People of God.

There are two forms specifically mentioned on the first page of the Pope’s Message. The first is “Institutes of Consecrated Life.” These are the Sisters who taught us in Catholic schools, who cared for us in Catholic hospitals, who ran orphanages, and other institutions. The second form of consecrated life mentioned is “Societies of Apostolic Life.” These are a newer form, which are like Religious Institutes, except with unparalleled freedoms. This is “us,” Sisters of Social Service.

When we first began in 1908 in Hungary, taking our present form in 1923, we needed extra freedoms than were permitted Sisters at that time, to do the work we were called to do in the social mission of the Church—to go out to the highways and byways to serve as Jesus did.



An early photo of Sr. Frederica Horvath, SSS, circa 1926

by our serving as Jesus did.

WHY THIS SPECIAL YEAR?

I think Pope Francis wants to bring back to people’s minds and hearts the importance of religious life to the life of the Church. He says from the past until today, “every form of consecrated life has been born of the Spirit’s call to follow Jesus as the Gospel teaches.” Religious life “belongs absolutely to the life and holiness” of the Church. “It is at the heart of the Church, a decisive element of her mission, inasmuch as it expresses the deepest nature of the Christian vocation: the yearning of the Church” (the People of God) to be united with Christ.

I think the Holy Father also wanted to make a public Sign of Peace with the Sisters in the United States, who have been so much in the news during the past 6 or 7 years.

It’s a teaching moment for the Holy Father. He even asks the bishops to accept and support members of all forms of Consecrated Life. He asks pastors to do the same, and to instruct the People of God, the faithful, in the value of consecrated life, so that, he says, its beauty and holiness may shine forth in the Church.

THE AIMS OF THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

The aims of the Year of Consecrated Life (as stated by Pope Francis) are very positive:

1. To live in the present, with passion and joy,
2. To remember the riches of the past, with thanksgiving to God,
3. To embrace the future with hope, trusting in God. “Do not be afraid. I am with you always.” (Jesus’ Words)

First, living in the present with passion and joy. To me, living the present with passion means to give everything I have to what I am called to do NOW with joy in the Spirit! (Remembering the Spirit is guiding me—is with me, is in me.)

Second, remembering the riches of the past with thanksgiving to God. Regarding this, one day this past week I asked a number of our Sisters individually representing the young, the middle-aged, the in-between, and the most elderly in our community the question:

“What are the riches of the past for which you wish

Radical evangelical living is not only for the Religious; it is demanded of everyone.

Sr. Margaret, our Hungarian foundress said, “To spread around us the spirit of love and prayer; this is the core of our calling.” Our basic mission is to bring God’s love into the world

A Message from Sr. Rochelle Mitchell



Dear Friends:

We are reaching the end of summer and moving into the beautiful season of autumn. These gifts of time and seasons are precious and how quickly they seem to come and go. The theme of time and change is in the forefront of my thoughts and prayers these days. A season, of sort, is ending for me and a new one emerging. For the past five years I have had the blessing of serving my Community as General Director along with a wonderful team of Sisters: Ellen, Celeste, Marie and Jennifer. We SSS had our General Chapter at Pentecost and elected a new leadership team: Sister Michele Walsh, General Director

and the Council—Sisters Ellen Hunter, Avigail Torres, Martha McCarthy and Jennifer Gaeta. I am grateful for the last five years: the many graces, opportunities, challenges, disappointments, surprises and miracles along the way. I am forever grateful to each one of you for your support in so many ways: time, talent, interest in our Mission, partnering in ministry and generosity.

As always, we remember and pray for you daily. ■

Gratefully yours,

— Sr. Rochelle Mitchell, SSS
General Director

to give thanks to God?" All were very happy to give their answers. Here are a few of them:

- Grateful to our foundresses, for their example and the SSS ideals, for our positive and pioneering spirit
- Grateful for the Holy Spirit (whom we all rely upon to guide us)
- Grateful for our Benedictine spirit, which includes our love of Scripture, our family spirit in community, the liturgical spirit in our lives, hospitality, and more...
- Grateful for the following of Jesus
- Grateful to witness to God by working in a secular environment...

I was a bit surprised by their answers, as I thought each might enumerate the success stories in their particular works as a Sister of Social Service. I know each has many they could tell, e.g: how many gang members, people struggling with addictions, homeless youth and adults they helped bring to a better life, etc.

Instead, most went back to the spiritual foundations and ideals given by the Holy Spirit to the foundresses of our community, which they passed on to us. As you see, we love the ideals, spirit and mission of our community!

Third, embracing the future with hope—and trust in the Lord. Pope Francis acknowledged that the numbers of Religious are diminishing, and there are often financial problems. However, he warned, "Do not yield to the temptation to see things in terms of numbers and efficiency...I urge you not to 'join the ranks of the prophets of doom.'" "Do not be afraid; I am with you always." (Jesus' Words)

Of course, we are diminishing in numbers and we don't know the future. (We never did!) I say, "Small is beautiful!" In 1926, our Community, the Sisters of Social Service, in Los Angeles, began with ONE Sister, our beloved Sister Frederica, who had come from our Buffalo house to California for her health. She was invited by Bishop Cantwell to come to the Cathedral to work. Later, Bishop Cantwell asked Sister Margaret in Hungary for more "sick" sisters. When I entered the community, we were small, probably not more than 50. We have always been small, but we have always had the help of volunteers, co-workers, auxiliaries and now associates, who add to the energies of spreading God's love to others.

According to Our Holy Father Francis, there is no room for prophets of doom, only room for prophets who witness to the following of Christ.

Our Holy Father says, "I expect that each form of consecrated life will question what it is that God and people today are asking of them." He tells us to listen carefully to where the Spirit is calling us.

LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT

I was surprised and excited when I read Pope Francis' saying that we in consecrated life should be listening very attentively to where the Spirit is calling us today. That is exactly the theme we have chosen for our Chapter (a general meeting for all our Sisters), which begins at the end of the

coming week.

This is our theme: "Unifying Spirit, God of compassion and mercy, where are you calling our small, diverse, and

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This is our theme:
"Unifying Spirit, God of
compassion and mercy,
where are you calling
our small, diverse,
and evolving Gospel
centered Community...
so that we both renew
our life together and
work to bring justice
to our violent and
fractured world."

For Further Reading on Pope Francis' Writings and Teachings

papalencyclicals.net

- ***Laudato si'***—Praise be to you: On Care For Our Common Home – Encyclical, Pope Francis (May 24, 2015)
- ***Evangelii Gaudium***—Apostolic Exhortation, On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, Pope Francis (November 24, 2013)
- ***Lumen Fidei***—The Light of Faith - Encyclical, Pope Francis (June 29, 2013)

w2.vatican.va

- **Letters, speeches, prayers, messages and homilies**—online, printable and available in 9 languages, including: Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis **To All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life**

Other Websites Addressing Various Social Needs of Our Times, Including the Environment

<http://cqrcengage.com/catholicbishops/home>

- USCCB's Action Center that addresses critical needs and encourages our participation with the statement, "Public advocacy from the Catholic community is a civic responsibility that serves the common good."
- See also the USCCB website page: usccb.org/environment

catholicclimatecovenant.org

- Catholic Climate Covenant is an educational advocacy group which "brings Catholic people and institutions together to care for the people God loves and to live justly on God's Earth."

<http://www.networklobby.org/issues>

- This is one of NETWORK's educational pages that clearly connects Catholic Social Teaching and our work and action together on the pressing issues of our times – especially the global movement for justice and peace.

justiceforimmigrants.org

- This site has many resources and links to USCCB and others' recommendations on migration issues and human rights.

<http://ncronline.org/feature-series/francis-environment-encyclical>

- There are several excellent articles illustrating how everyday people are putting Pope Francis' message into action in their work and lives.

www.news.va/en/sites/reflections

- Daily Meditations

— Compiled by Jamey Fitzpatrick
Development Director



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evolving Gospel centered Community...so that we both renew our life together and work to bring justice to our violent and fractured world."

Francis wants us to become "experts" in what he calls "communion" (meaning "union with"). "We are called to offer a concrete model of community, which by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective gifts, make it possible to live as brothers and sisters." We are asked to help bring the world to unity, to help bring about good relationships and unity in the world, especially in the intercultural, international, ecumenical areas, etc.

He asks us, "Go into all the world...teach all nations..." Mark 16:15. Francis quotes the last words of Jesus before He ascends into heaven.

Here are some words of encouragement from the Holy Father, "You will find life by giving life, hope, by giving hope, love by giving love." Dare I add one of my favorite Scripture quotations to those of the Holy Father? These words are quoted in the Acts of the Apostles as spoken by Jesus, "There is more joy in giving than in receiving." (You probably all have already experienced this.)

Let us continue to celebrate the riches of the past with thanksgiving and gratitude to God! *Day by Day*...let us "live the present, with passion" and joy, as we listen attentively to what the Spirit is saying, and let us embrace the future with hope and trust.

Most of all, *Day by Day*...may we remember we are one with Christ as we heard Jesus' words in John's Gospel today: "I am the vine you are the branches...Remain in me, as I also remain in you." (Jn 15:1,4), and lastly,

Day by Day...let each of us live with joy in the Spirit—Who is in us and with us, reminding us of all Jesus has said. ■

— Sr. Merita Dekat, SSS

First Promises and Renewals 2015

This year our Community has been blessed with several young women making their First Promises with the Sisters of Social Service—in the Philippines, Mexico and in the U.S. Each of the young women highlighted below has been living in community with our Sisters, working next to them in ministries and participating in daily life with us. These women are courageous, steadfast and deeply engaged in their communities and spiritual lives. Please celebrate with us their gifts and passion, and pray for their journeys as Sisters of Social Service until they renew their commitments in 2016.

United States—Los Angeles, California

On May 24, Sr. Naomi Cornejo, SSS, made her First Promises with the Sisters of Social Service. With family and friends gathered nearby, Sr. Naomi formally committed herself to a life with the Sister of Social Service. She has been actively involved with the Community, working with and volunteering alongside us for more than 16 years. To read Sr. Naomi's biography, please visit our website: sistersofsocialservice.com



Sr. Naomi Cornejo, SSS



Sr. Vangie Lasao, SSS



"We rejoice in the Lord for this important event for the entire community at this time. It is a renewal for each of us. These are moments of grace and sharing with all SSS, families, friends and neighbors in the community."

— Hna. Irma Murrieta, SSS

The Philippines—Amadeo

On May 23, two young Sisters of Social Service renewed their Promises—Sr. Vangie Lasao, SSS, and Sr. Camille Mantigue, SSS. They spoke to those gathered in Holy Spirit Chapel before renewing their promises formally, and thanked their family and the Community for their support and love as they continue their formation and ministry work within the Community. Sisters Vangie and Camille made their first promises in the Philippines earlier this spring.

Mexico—Morelia

On January 25, our Sisters in Mexico also joyously witnessed the First Promises of Sr. Maria Isabel Garcia, SSS. Sr. Isabel has been living with the Community and actively involved with SSS ministries in Central Morelia in the state of Michoacán in western Mexico. The liturgy was celebrated in a chapel in Morelia filled with friends, family and many community members. All of the Sisters of Social Service in Mexico planned and participated in the festivities as well as several guests from the U.S. including Sr. Rochelle Mitchell, General Director, and Sr. Jennifer Gaeta, SSS Secretary and General Council. ■



Sr. Camille Mantigue, SSS



Sr. Maria Isabel Garcia, SSS

— by Jamey Fitzpatrick
Development Director

For more information on our younger Sisters and their ministries, please visit our website at sistersofsocialservice.com.

Accolades

Below we are catching you up on some of the most visible highlights from the past year. To keep updated on all current SSS ministry work, challenges, joys and accolades, please subscribe to our free monthly e-newsletter. For details, please see page 14. Thank you!



Pacem in Terris

Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS and Executive Director of NETWORK, received the *Pacem in Terris*—Peace and Freedom Award last fall at Christ the King Chapel at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, IA. This interfaith award honors St. John XXIII and commemorates his

1963 encyclical letter, *Pacem in Terris* or *Peace on Earth*, which called on all people to secure peace among all nations that is built on the pillars of truth, justice, love and freedom. Sr. Simone was recognized for her decades of work to improve the lives of those living in poverty by raising awareness and impacting long-term systemic change at the regional, national and international level. Her advocacy and policy work at JERICHO, and more recently with NETWORK, as well as the comprehensive and highly visible Nuns on the Bus campaigns, have heightened understanding of the lived realities of those on the margins and offered a new forum for bipartisan conversations and collaborative solutions to their pressing needs.



Esperanza Community Housing 25th Anniversary Celebration

Last fall, Esperanza Community Housing celebrated their 25th anniversary by honoring their Foundress, **Sr. Diane Donoghue, SSS** at beautiful fundraiser at Mercado La Paloma in Downtown Los Angeles. Esperanza Community Housing was established in 1989 to support the residents of the Figueroa Corridor of South Central Los Angeles, whose homes were being threatened by encroaching construction. Today, Esperanza remains committed to investing in this vibrant community, offering support through five core program areas: Affordable Housing, Health, Arts, Education and Economic Development. Esperanza broadens and strengthens its impact through strategic partnerships with community members, nonprofits, businesses and policy makers. Esperanza currently serves 126,000 individuals a year, building hope through all of its activities.



Yadira Arevalo, Sr. Diane Donoghue, SSS and Nancy Ibrahim at the Esperanza Community Housing 25th Anniversary Celebration

Sr. Anne Arabome, SSS, is a doctoral student in systematic theology at the University of Roehampton in London, UK where she is completing her doctoral dissertation and working with Tina Beattie, one of the leading British Feminist Theologians. This June, Sr. Anne spoke in a plenary and on a panel at the annual meeting of the *Catholic Theological Society of America* in Milwaukee, WI. In July, she also spoke on a panel at the *Theological Colloquium on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa*. (Nairobi, Kenya)

Sr. Anne is pictured (right) during the panel discussion in Nairobi with Dr. Laurenti Magesa, Senior Lecturer in African Theology at the Maryknoll Institute of African Studies and the Jesuit School of Theology, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya. To read more about her work and writings, please visit our website at sistersofsocialservice.com.



Olga Sarabia, longtime friend and Sisters of Social Service Associate, was honored last fall by the Alhambra City Council for her leadership, community involvement and advocacy work. After 15 years of service on several committees including: Housing & Community Development, Parks & Recreation and most recently the Alhambra Arts and Cultural Events Commission, Olga resigned due to an impending move. We are grateful for Olga's commitment and support, both for the SSS Community and for all those she works with and for in the greater community.



Latino Heritage Month

Sr. Teresita Saavedra, SSS was one of the women honored at "Latinas Across Los Angeles" for their accomplishments, contributions and for the positive impact that they have had in Los Angeles. Sr. Teresita was



(Accolades, continued on page 14)

Happy Birthday to our Access Van!

Last spring, we asked a few of you for your help for two access projects—a mini-van for our elder Sisters and electronic doors. We wanted to thank you again for your help as we put these projects into place. According to all surveyed—they have been tremendously helpful! The doors ease the way for all who enter our Retreat Center and the elder Sisters who call the Villa Retirement Community their home. And the mini-van allows assisted entry and exit into the vehicle, new safety features and complete access for all riders. Thank you!

After three of our individual donors championed the beginning of our effort - Damaris Bradish as well as Ray Bidenost and Robert Lamkin from Chef Robért Motion Picture & Television Catering - we received help from 82 other generous individuals and two foundations. The Green Foundation and the Ahmanson Foundation were instrumental in offering resources for the retrofitting of the van. We were able to make it both wheelchair and scooter accessible, and to install a “Swivel Seat” which comes right of the van to meet the passenger as they stand next to the car. Aero Mobility, a nearby access vehicle provider, was incredibly generous with their time and expertise to help us choose the features that would most benefit our Sisters.

In November and May, we conducted more formal surveys to see how these access projects were helping the Sisters, their caregivers and other staff, as well as all of the people who frequent the Holy Spirit Retreat Center. Please see some of the responses below, from two formal surveys we conducted on how these access



Clockwise from top right: Sisters Sonia Delima, SSS, and Bertille Prus, SSS, with Mirna Hernandez peeking at the inside of the new van; Sr. Suzanne Simo, SSS, enjoys a moment in the back seat; and Sr. Marianna Halsmer tries out the new Swivel Seat with Craig Shearer at the controls from Aero Mobility.

projects were helping Sisters and visitors.

To all who helped us buy the mini-van or install the doors—thank you! Like many families, we sometimes don't have cash on hand when new innovations become available that dramatically impact the lives of our Sisters and visitors with physical challenges. What a beautiful thing it is to know that our friends and supporters were able to lend a hand and help open a door for Sisters and visitors who share our grounds! ■

— By Jamey Fitzpatrick, Development Director

Sharing Our Gratitude

“Both the mini-van and the electric buttons are a big help for our Sisters and staff. Most of our Sisters have to use canes, walkers or other aids—to be able to just push the buttons on the van or in the hallway—WOW—what a difference!”

—Sr. Shaun Marie Wise, SSS
Elder Care Liaison

“When you sit in the chair in the front seat, you have a broad view of what's in front of you—it's fun to be able to see! You are also not alone and can have a companion right next to you—even if you are riding in a wheelchair. This is something that was not possible with the old van.”

—Sr. Bertille Prus, SSS, Villa resident

“Sometimes now the Sisters will reach up for the button as we are getting close to the door and say, ‘I'll get that for you!’ with a beautiful smile on their faces. They really want to help us—and this gives them that chance.”

—Staff member in the Villa

“I injured my back and needed to ride in the motorized seat for the first time. I was amazed—it is really marvelous—so smooth. I expected it to be bumpy—and I had not one ounce of pain from the time I sat down, the chair pulled me in on the track, and I got out again at the doctor's office. I am so grateful.”

—Sr. Merita Dekat, SSS, Villa resident

“Physically this van has made a huge difference to the Sisters—and to the staff! Instead of concentrating on the physical effort of transferring them (into the van) I now can focus all my attention on the Sister—watching their feet, holding the walker, encouraging them, making sure they are okay. They are really grateful—we all are.”

—Mirna Hernandez,
Elder Care Coordinator

“I think that they have been a wonderful and essential addition to the Retreat Center.”

—Sr. Pat Nelson, CSJ, HSRC Staff



This Pentecost was a beautiful celebration in so many ways for the Sisters of Social Service. In the two weeks preceding, we completed our Chapter for the Community—gathering from around the globe to set our direction for the future, reflect on the world’s pressing needs and our work, and elect our new leadership. On May 23, two of our youngest members, Sr. Vangie and Sr. Camille, renewed their Promises, and the next day Sr. Naomi made her First Promises to the Community.

During Pentecost we celebrated the birth of the Church itself and honored our seven SSS Celebrants (their photos and biographies are on pages 10–11). **Between them they have served 362 collective years**—a mosaic of ministries that span from social work in busy parishes and vibrant neighborhood centers to university and youth educators, and even a Sister who helped place thousands of children in loving adoptive homes for three decades.

Our young Sisters and our Jubilarians feel blessed to serve as leaders in their communities, advocating for those without a voice and helping to strengthen networks and collaborations for greater social services for those in critical need. We are so grateful for their gifts, and the Holy Spirit’s guidance in our work and our lives as women religious. ■



Gifts of the



Learn more about our younger Sisters on page 5 and our Jubilarians on page 10-11. For more Pentecost photos and biographies, please visit sistersofsocialservice.com





PENTECOST 2015

Spirit

Thank you for your passion and commitment for all of our ministries, and for our Sisters themselves.



PENTECOST 2015

Celebrants

Sister Bertille Prus, SSS

77 YEARS OF COMMITMENT

The roots of my family tree are in Portland, Oregon. It was here that I spent my young years. There were five children in the



Prus family besides myself—Joseph, Elizabeth, Agnes, Helen and Beatrice. At the age of nineteen, I entered the Sisters of Social Service. I took final vows on June 1, 1952. I graduated from Immaculate Heart College with a BA. While going to school, I engaged in parish work at San Basilio and Santa Brigida. Before I went to Catholic U, I worked at Bayside in San Diego. I spent time as the Program Director at Stanford Home and at Catholic Social Service in Vallejo and San

Rafael. It was not long before I went off to the Catholic University of America where I obtained my MSW.

As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, I spent three years at Catholic Welfare Bureau in Los Angeles. The longest stint of my working life was spent at Holy Family Adoption Agency where I was the Executive Director for almost thirty years. During my time there, I expanded the services of Holy Family into Orange County, Santa Ana and Valencia. I have received numerous awards including the “Woman of Achievement” award from the Women’s International Network in 1988. Twice I was elected to be on the SSS Council. I retired in 1991. After I “retired,” I became the Director of the Villa Retirement Community for five years. Currently, I live with other Sisters in the SSS Villa Community and am an active member of the group. (By the way, one of my ‘claims to fame’ includes my delicious caramel corn!)



Sister Suzanne Simo, SSS

65 YEARS OF COMMITMENT

In a family of eight children, I was the eighth; my twin brother Ernest, of course, was the seventh. There were three girls, then three boys, then the two of us. After high school my brothers went to war and thanks be to God, all came home. Things were stirring in me, and with time, prayer and discernment I realized Religious life was for me. With more prayer and discernment and God’s



providential goodness, I met Sr. Columba, a Sister of Social Service from Buffalo, N.Y., who was staying at our parish convent. Eventually I visited the community in Buffalo and found myself taking the initial steps to join. At Pentecost of 1950, I was received as a postulant and took my first vows in 1953. My first assignments were parish census and weekend appeals. Afterwards for a number of years I served at St. Anthony’s parish in Lackawanna, NY and later at St. Anthony’s in Buffalo, NY. In 1973, I was reassigned to the Catholic Spanish Center in Miami, FL. Sr. Nikoletta, originally from Hungary, was already there with three Sisters who were from Cuba.

After 40 years in Florida, and living alone, it was time to move on to an Assisted Living Facility. I was about to take steps to get into St. Ann’s in Miami when word came to me that Sr. Rochelle from Los Angeles had invited two or three of us to the Encino Villa Community. I was told that it would be good if someone tried it out for a week and I was the lucky one to do it. I visited in October 2012 and it was wonderful! It was community, our spirit, mass every day, our prayers, space, people and solitude, beautiful terrain, and a spacious room with all needed connections. I moved in April 2013. It is the “Promised Land” and I am grateful.



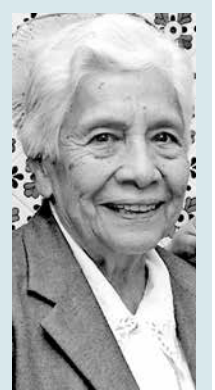
Sister Maria Teresa Velazquez Gutiérrez, SSS

50 YEARS OF COMMITMENT

On August 31, 1962, there was great excitement in Santa Ana Parish in my hometown of Zacapú, Michoacán Mexico. The reason was that some sisters from Los Angeles, CA were coming to visit. It was a big event and in those days I was a volunteer in the parish, so I was able to participate in some of the meetings with the Sisters and our pastor. My thoughts were that if some day God calls me to the religious life this is the group that I will go to. Later on in 1963, the Sisters decided to make a foundation in Zacapú. From the beginning I became very close to the Sisters.

Then in 1964, Sr. Celine organized a tour to California for a group of girls. We were very impressed with all the ministries the Sisters were doing. So more and more I was inclined to ask to be accepted. But it was not until 1966 that God gave me the gift and courage to answer His invitation to follow Him. It was not easy to come to another country.

My Novitiate was spent learning the English language and adapting myself to a new culture and way of life. I also learned how to laugh at my mistakes. Love to my Sisters in the community for all their patience and love that has helped me to arrive at this moment to celebrate 50 years.



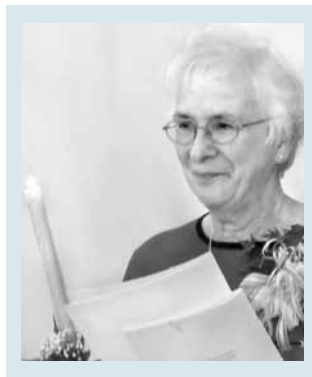
PENTECOST 2015

Celebrants

Sister Grace Boys, SSS

50 YEARS OF COMMITMENT

Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, with Mt. Hood in the distance, I am one of seven children and the oldest girl. We have a wide diversity of callings, my brothers mechanical engineer, taxidermist and pipe fitter; my sisters a teacher and education consultant and a juried quilter. In 1965, when I entered the Sisters of Social Service in Encino, California I hadn't a clue how my life would be changed forever. Active in scouting I was prepared to "give it all up" only to discover the SSS had camps and many Sisters were involved doing social work in parishes and neighborhood centers.



My ministry over the years has always been in social work, with groups at Guadalupe Center in Canoga Park, St. Andrews-St. Josephs Community Center in West Oakland, St. Andrews Parish in Portland Oregon, Bayside Settlement in San Diego, and teaching and research at the

University of Portland and Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan. From the beginning of my religious life, I was in the same group with several of our Sisters from Michoacán, Mexico, and soon came to know Sisters from China and Taiwan and more recently Sisters from the Philippines. For 15 years I was part of the Taiwan Community at the same time serving as the Secretariat for the Los Angeles, European and Canadian Branches of the SSS Federation. My life as a Sister of Social Service is one of continuous enrichment by people of many cultures. It was in Taiwan that I was introduced to Eastern Spirituality which continues to guide my prayer life and has led to my playing/praying the Native American Flute. Truly, "the Lord is my Strength and my Song."



Sister Teresita Saavedra, SSS

50 YEARS OF COMMITMENT

Born and raised in Boyle Heights (East Los Angeles), I am the eldest of three children. My parents immigrated to the United States from Michoacán, Mexico. I came to know the Sisters of Social Service through Sister Christa Salinas who worked at Assumption Parish, the parish where I grew up. It was Christa's warm welcoming Spirit, joyfulness, and caring personality that eventually drew me to enter the Sisters of Social Service. She was also very fun to be around. Meeting other SSS I noticed that they too had the same Spirit and yet each one had her own personality, gifts and talents. I believe that the Spirit led me to this Community through Christa and that the Spirit continues to lead me in this life.



My ministry has been in parish social work, community organizing, formation director, group work and early childhood development in Los Angeles, San Diego, San Ysidro, San Francisco and San Jose. I have also had the experience of working one summer in Zacapú, Mexico and in Cavite, Philippines. At the present time my ministry is at Regis House Community Center located in the Historic Filipinotown/Westlake area working with families. For me,

ministry is a give and take with the people one works with which calls forth an openness of acceptance of them and of oneself with all our human limitations. I am grateful for all the people in my life and the people I have met in the last 50 years who have been a great support in continuing my life as a Sister of Social Service.



Sister Carol Pack, SSS

50 YEARS OF COMMITMENT

As I review my life, I see that two definitive circumstances—both which occurred during my education at a small Jesuit college in Mobile, Alabama—helped me to discern a felt call to enter the Sisters of Social Service. The first experience was to be a part of the Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960s. The Jesuits helped me focus on the themes of justice and equality in the Social Teachings of the Church as the school pushed forward to complete integration.

The second experience came during my Junior year when two professors took 13 of us students to Europe. In an audience with Pope John XXIII, I was deeply touched with his call for the renewal of the Church to bring greater justice, peace and love into the world community.



Shortly after graduation, when I learned about the charism of the Sisters of Social Service, I was given a felt call to join the Community. During these past 50 years, I have had the support and inspiration from the Community to use my gifts and talents to bring compassion and love and justice into the world through my ministries. As a Campus Minister, Parish Social Worker, Religious Education Coordinator, staff at Wellspring Women's Center, Formation Director and, presently, as a Certified Hospital Chaplain, I continue to have the blessing to share with others the merciful love God generously gives to me. ■

— *Compiled by Barbara Chavez, Development Associate*

Remembering Sr. Laurita Wydra, SSS

Sr. Laurita entered the Sisters of Social Service on June 16, 1951. She came to the Community from Chicago, IL where she was born and raised. She and her twin brother John were born on February 25, 1925, the fifth and sixth of 7 children. Prior to her entrance into the Community in 1951, Laurita worked as a professional portrait photographer; so great was her love for photography that her father even had a dark room for developing pictures built in her own home. She was also a very active Girl Scout leader while she lived in Chicago.

Sr. Laurita's education which included a BA in pastoral ministry and a MA in religious studies, was put to good use. She became the Director of the Religious Education Office for the Los Angeles Archdiocese from 1969 to 1973. She also served in Pastoral Ministries in parishes in California, Oregon, Wyoming, and part of her ministry involved directing choirs. Sr. Laurita also transcribed some of our difficult Latin music pieces into English for the benefit of the community. Her other creative talents included writing poetry. Some of these poems were shared with the Community at Pentecost.

Towards the latter part of her life, Sr. Laurita was able to fulfill her passionate love



Sr. Laurita Wydra, SSS

of working on Indian Reservations in New Mexico, Minnesota and Oregon. She often described this as one of her most fulfilling ministries during her life as a Sister of Social Service.

Sr. Laurita moved to the Villa Retirement Community in 2009, where she enjoyed the companionship of her Sisters and the beauty of the Encino grounds until her death on March 22, 2015. ■

—by Sr. Rachel Shepard, SSS

Memories of Laurita



Sr. Laurita came into my life in 1954. It was at Camp Mariastella when I was an Apostle in her unit. The brave Sister killed a rattlesnake right before our eyes. No doubt this left a lifetime impression on a fourteen year-old camper.

As we journeyed through life, our paths crossed many times. I entered the Sisters of Social Service and we were together in the community. We shared our living experience in Portland, Oregon in 1985. Sr. Laurita had many talents. She loved working with the American Indians and taught at Chemawa Indian School in Portland. Later she went to Red Lake, MN to work with the Indians there. She was still the brave Sister I knew from camp days.

Our last encounter was at the retirement center in Encino. I helped Sister move from her Portland apartment. It seems that throughout her life her motto, *Veni Domine Jesu... Come Lord Jesus*, fitted her perfectly. She always looked for her God to be in her life and work. At last Jesus did come to her and has blessed all the wonderful work Sr. Laurita has done. ■

—Sr. Ellen Hunter, SSS
July 24, 2015



Top left picture: Sr. Laurita with her Girl Scout Troop, early 1950s; **Top right picture:** Sr. Laurita's Final Profession, 1954; **Bottom left picture:** Sisters Dilecta Pierini, Justina Flynn and Laurita at Pentecost 1979; **Bottom right picture:** Sr. Laurita working with Native Americans on a reservation.

Remembering Sr. Fidelis Frank, SSS

**“In Gratitude to Sr. Fidelis Frank,
Sisters of Social Service,
who for 28 years served
those who approached this
door in need.”**

So says the plaque that still hangs over the door of the Cathedral in Portland, where Sr. Fidelis worked for 28 years as a parish social worker or as she called it a “coordinator of caring.”

Sr. Fidelis (Margaret Frank) was born on October 10, 1919 in Mt. Angel, Oregon to William Frank and Anna Seeger who immigrated to the United States from Germany. Sr. Fidelis was the seventh of 9 children: 3 girls and 6 boys. She attended St. Mary’s grammar school in Mt. Angel, Mt. Angel Academy and Mt. Angel College where she received her B.A. in 1942, and later her M.A. from the University of Washington in 1947. Prior to entering the Sisters of Social Service, Fidelis taught in Portland, worked for the city, and at St. Rose Home for troubled girls. She belonged to the National Order of University Women.

In September, 1956, Fidelis entered the Novitiate of the Sisters of Social Service. After her profession in 1959, she moved to Kansas City, MO where she served as assistant librarian at the Catholic Community Library until 1964 and the Director through 1968. From 1968-1970, Sr. Fidelis worked at Catholic Social Service in Vallejo and St. Lawrence Parish in Santa Clara. In 1970, Sr. Fidelis returned to the great Northwest, to Portland, OR where she ministered at St. Mary’s Cathedral Parish for 28 years.

Although the area has changed now, when Sister worked in Portland, the situation was very different. Sr. Fidelis said that “Northwest Portland has seven times more chronically mentally ill people and any other part of the city. It also contains higher-than-normal levels of other problem-plagued groups—the elderly, former inmates, people who have run out of resources.

Sister set out to build an effective ecumenical effort to solve social problems. At one time or another she served as a volunteer director for almost very ecumenical helping group in Northwest Portland. Protestant, Catholic and Jewish were involved. It was said of her that, “her reputation for quiet but effective persuasion—and for dogged persistence in the face of stubborn bureaucracy—has won wide ranging respect.” (*Catholic Sentinel*, Portland, OR, Sept. 24, 1982).



Sr. Fidelis Frank, SSS

She was a parish social worker through and through who called herself “a caring coordinator.” She was deeply committed to the plight and needs of the poor, the elderly and the mentally ill. Sr. Fidelis always wanted to get to a deeper level. She said that the core issue of the poor was not lack of food but loneliness. She gave herself tirelessly to them.

Those who know Sr. Fidelis well, understood her passion and commitment. She believed that the Church must be involved with the social ills of society because of Christ’s instructions to care for our brothers and sisters and because the Church, in the end, is the place where people come for refuge. Pope Francis would have been very pleased with her.

In 1998, Sister retired due to ill health and moved to Los Angeles. She had a prolonged period of ill health

during which time she became almost completely blind and deaf. Although she didn’t complain, this was difficult for her because she had always been an avid reader of the news and kept a sharp watch on the political and cultural changes of our time.

Many of the caregivers in the Villa and Sisters read to her—to keep Sr. Fidelis abreast of current events and the challenges in the world. She wanted to keep in touch with the world and pray for those living in poverty. Libbie Brady (Mrs. Michael Brady), a dear friend of hers and Social Service Auxiliary member, also visited and read to her frequently. Sr. Fidelis cherished this time together and their long discussions about faith, politics and national and world events. She will always be remembered

(Sr. Fidelis, continued on page 14)



Left picture: Sr. Fidelis with Shauni, a friend and caregiver; **Right picture:** Sr. Fidelis as a Novice, her curiosity and inquisitive mind at play, circa 1958.



E-NEWS

Do you wish you could hear about the Sisters' news as it unfolds? Have a certain ministry you'd like more frequent updates from?

Join our e-news list! Every month or so you'll receive an electronic SSS newsletter – with the latest pictures, stories, reflections and updates. Some are written by the Sisters and staff – others by Associates, Juniors and Auxiliary Members.

Don't miss out! We promise, as always, not to sell, lend or give your contact info to anyone else. If you ever decide once a month is too much, you can unsubscribe and view the news on our website.

TO SIGN UP: Please email barbaraSSSdevelopment@gmail.com or call (818) 285-3376. No email? Call us and we would be happy to send you a hard copy in the traditional mail.

(Sr. Fidelis, continued from page 13)



Left top picture: Sr. Fidelis with Sr. Christine Banta, SSS, at the Catholic Community Library in Kansas City; **Left bottom picture:** Sr. Fidelis and Sr. Marianna Halsmer on a trip to San Francisco; **Right picture:** Sr. Fidelis with her father, circa 1925.



as a Sister who knew her mind, kept her values and accepted others with uncritical love.

To close we should read what Fr. Benedict said of her when he visited her on her sick bed at the end.

"Sr. Fidelis was confined to her bed. She had a wonderful smile on her face. She returned my greeting. We said a few things. Then it became evident that she had been at prayer. For she suddenly said, 'I adore you, O Hidden God. I lay aside everything unnecessary to get closer to you.' The expression on her face suggested that our Hidden God had become closer to her. She said several other things; these I do not remember. The one expression by

someone tremendously in love with the Blessed Trinity was unforgettable. She could not have said what she said unless, over the years, she had developed a close attachment to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

"Such an attachment is a very personal thing, in every sense of the word personal. Falling in love is a very personal thing. Sr. Fidelis fell in love with God. She had become completely comfortable with the Trinity. Now she has reaped the fruits of that love.

"While we can only pray, 'show us your face, O Lord,' Sr. Fidelis can say, 'How delightful it is to see your face. O Lord.'" ■

—by Sr. Paula Vandegaer, SSS

(Accolades, continued from page 6)

nominated by Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell from District 13 where Regis House is located. The ceremony took place at City Hall. The honorees were presented with a Certificate of Recognition in the Council Chamber and there was a breakfast reception and music by a mariachi group.



A new documentary, *Radical Grace*, was recently released, capturing the spirit and total commitment to social justice of three Catholic Sisters who serve those in need in the United States. This film will help illuminate the compassionate work, wisdom and dedication of the thousands of women religious worldwide, and their ministries and struggles both within and outside of the Church's walls.



Pictured at the Washington D.C. premier of the documentary are Rebecca Parrish (left), cinematographer and director, and **Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS.**

To watch the trailer or read more, please visit radicalgracefilm.com. ■

—Compiled by Barbara Chavez
Development Associate

Once again — a Sighting from *The ARC*

Did you ever wonder how it is that Sr. Frederica brought the SSS to California? Let me share some of the story with you from *The Arc*.

Sr. Frederica came to Buffalo from Hungary in 1923. It was here that Sr. Frederica became seriously ill. Her doctor said that Sr. Frederica's illness necessitated a transfer to a warmer climate in order to recover. So Sr. Frederica traveled to Texas where she stayed for several months and then made her way to Los Angeles for further recuperation.

In Los Angeles, she recuperated quite well. But as time went on, she needed to find some way of supporting herself. Initially, she became a nanny for a family in Oxnard. She is pictured below with one of her charges.

Eventually the Community in Buffalo requested her to return to Buffalo. Sr. Frederica complied with this request but within a couple of months she became ill once again. So she returned to California and was able to resume her work with the same family. While there, she received a letter from a Hungarian priest, in which he stated that he knew the reason for her return to Los Angeles—she was to become an angel to the Hungarian Immigrants!!

The priest also sent a letter to Bishop Cantwell, the Bishop of Los Angeles, who then, called Sr. Frederica to his office. At this meeting the Bishop asked Sr. Frederica to begin work at the



Cathedral under the direction of Msgr. Cawley. Msgr. Cawley was out of the city but had left instructions that Sr. Frederica was to take census among the Mexican immigrants. It is interesting to note that she spoke minimal English and no Spanish, yet somehow she was able to communicate with the people she met.

The story goes on to say that one day, as Sr. Frederica was taking census in the downtown Cathedral area, it was raining, so momentarily she stopped at someone's porch to keep dry. The woman of the house asked Sister to come inside. As Sr. Frederica and the woman tried to converse, the child did something that required a reprimand.

The mother corrected the child in Hungarian!!!!

What a beginning this was for Sr. Frederica who then, with this woman's assistance, was able to search out other Hungarian immigrants living in the area. Thus started what Sr. Frederica wanted to do in her heart of hearts all along.

When Bishop Cantwell went to Chicago to attend the Eucharistic Congress, he met Sr. Margaret. He greeted her with "I have been searching for you all day, and my request is not to be refused. Send me more Sisters." Sr. Margaret responded, "I have no healthy Sisters." "Then send me more sick sisters—like Sr. Frederica."

Sr. Frederica was joined by several Sisters from Buffalo. Soon the Sisters were able to purchase the "little brown house" in the Bunker Hill area of downtown Los Angeles. In time, this area was developed into our present day Music Center.

In 1926, the SSS were formally established with a Mass and blessing by Bishop Cantwell. Sr. Margaret and several other Sisters from Hungary were able to be present. Soon young American women, inspired by the spirit and work of Sr. Frederica, asked to join this new Community. To these Sisters—who are our heritage and our pioneers—we owe our deepest gratitude for bringing the Sisters of Social Service to Los Angeles. ■

—by Sr. Rachel Shepard, SSS

Left picture: Sr. Frederica with a girls' group from La Immaculata Parish, 1931; **Right picture:** Sr. Frederica serving as a nanny to a baby in Oxnard; **Top picture:** Sr. Frederica heads to work, Los Angeles, 1927.



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Spiritus Award 2015



In the spring, we honored Social Service Auxiliary member R-lene Mijares de Lang (pictured with her husband Gordon) for her outstanding commitment and generosity to the children and families of Los Angeles.

Photo by Rob Hewett, Sisters of Social Service Associate.

Look for these stories inside...



Pentecost Celebrants

(Page 10-11)



First Promises and Renewals

(Page 5)



A Sighting from *The Arc*

(Page 15)

The late Sr. Laurita Wydra, SSS, poet and artist, created this tapestry for our celebrations. See page 12 for her memorial. >>



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