

CONNECTIONS

Newsletter



May 2023

WELCOMING HOME THE BELOVED STATUES OF OLV

February 3, 2023 was a day to remember because the statues of Our Lady of Victory and the Good Shepherd moved closer to the Sisters! Both statues have graced the grounds of Our Lady of Victory Elementary School for many years and when the opportunity arose for them to move closer to the Sisters at OLV Center, a plan was decidedly formed. It was a huge project undertaken by a dedicated group.

On February 3, a group of movers arrived early in the morning. One at a time the statues had to be carefully strapped, hoisted onto a large flatbed trailer and driven to the new location. The ground also had to be prepared with concrete before they could settle into their new places.

It was an adventure involving

strategic know-how and powerful equipment, from the removal to the transport to the placement in the new locations. The process was especially challenging due to the four prior days of below-freezing temperatures and the chaotic ice storm across North Texas. Mud and/or freezing ground was a huge factor to be dealt with! Hungry and tired, the men were fed by some of the Sisters as they worked all day and into the night.

The Sisters are grateful to the generous donors who covered the cost of the project, which allowed the Sisters to keep their beloved and historic statues. The statue of the Blessed Mother was placed near the front of Marian House. The other, of the Good Shepherd, is now easily viewed from the OLV dining room.

Special thanks to the generous donors that paid for the statue relocation:

Thomas Murphy, Mary Martin, Allison Rix, Cindy Thompson, D. Timothy Thompson, Valerie Mahfood, Amy Matasso, Barbara Still and Diane Murray

Thank you to the people behind the monumental move: Tatum Crane, James at Fort Worth Monument, Cindy Thompson, Paul Valadez, Lisa Lasoya & David Gruver



Workers carefully steady the heavy statue as it moves by crane



HAPPY BIRTHDAY, SISTER RITA CLAIRE!

Sister Rita Claire Davis turned 95 on March 14, 2023. The Sisters at OLV celebrated with a birthday cake and a few small gifts. She was thrilled, but as soon as the party was over she literally headed to her room to begin preparing for her next series of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. (The work is never done for Sister Rita Claire!)

Ten years ago when Sister Rita Claire was 85 and moved to OLV Center, she saw a need and set out to “do a little good.” Her story is reminiscent of the first Sisters who came to Texas 150 years ago. Sister Rita Claire began by visiting parishes and proposing to teach ESL classes — but there were obstacles. All but one parish required a fee to use their facilities. Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, however, opened its arms to her and began a collaboration with the SSMN.



Sister Rita Claire Davis

Sister Rita Claire took charge and created a team to assist her. The project has now grown so much they have to limit the size of classes. They use 5-7 classrooms and a computer lab. Students, who are mostly low-income, only pay for their workbooks. The SSMN make a small contribution to the

church to assist with building and utility expenses. Teachers are all volunteers.

What started out with a tiny 85-year-old nun venturing out to create a class for people in need has truly made a difference in the lives of many.

Birthdays To Remember

- January 3 – Sister Camella Menotti
- January 15 – Sister Mary Fulbright
- January 26 – Sister Anselma Knabe
- February 6 – Sister Yolanda Cruz
- March 2 – Sister Ines Diaz
- March 14 – Sister Rita Claire Davis
- April 11 – Sister Rosemary Stanton
- May 28 – Sister Lola Ulupano

SR. ADELAIDA VALTIERRA

1928-2023



Sister Adelaide Valtierra

Sr. Adelaide Valtierra, 94, passed away Holy Thursday, April 6, 2023.

Adelaide Valtierra was born in Reedville, TX, to Tirzo and Maria Valtierra, a beautiful family who had immigrated to Texas, the fourth of seven children. She spent a happy childhood in Milsap, a tiny town near Weatherford. She had a loving grandmother who taught her to love the Blessed Sacrament. During her high school years she lived in the city and enjoyed being able to attend Mass frequently.

As she prayed, more and more she wanted to serve God. A friend who had graduated from OLV encouraged her to meet the Sisters at Our Lady of Victory in Fort Worth. She did and before long, she asked to enter the Sisters of St. Mary, which she did the fall of 1952. The routine of Mass, prayer and living with other young Sisters was a great joy to her.

She studied at the University of Dallas and Our Lady of the Lake in San Antonio, receiving a B.S. in Education as well as her Teachers' Certificate, and began teaching in the various schools staffed by the SSMNs. She was especially good with children in the primary grades and worked in the government “Head Start” and “Follow Through” programs.

In 1985/86, Sister participated in a Mexico Project led by the Maryknoll Sisters. Some years later she went

to Honduras with a medical team from Holy Family Parish as a Spanish translator.

After retiring from teaching, she became active in the Fort Worth Ceramic Guild and often had her works on display at their annual fairs.

As she herself said, “Now, when I am older, it is a joy for me to be with the other Sisters at Our Lady of Victory Center. I am blessed to have the time to admire and smell the flowers, and to absorb the beauty around us ... as prayerfully as possible.”

Sister Adelaide's love for the Blessed Sacrament was rewarded in her last moments, for she drew her last breath just as we were celebrating the closing minutes of the services for Holy Thursday in the chapel at OLV Center.

Sister is survived by a sister and many loving nephews and nieces.

OREMUS - LET US PRAY

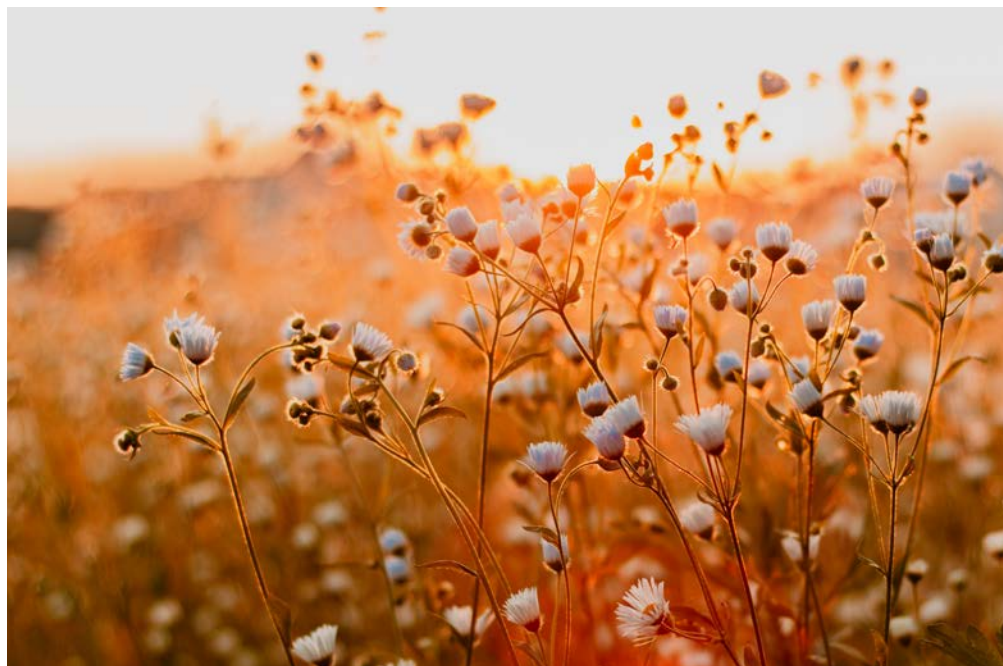
Spring is that glorious season when the earth “wakes up” and we are gifted with evidence of new life and the fruitfulness of the season through fragrant whiffs of blossoms, freshly mowed grass, a stunning Texas sunset and various shades of new green leaves. Natural beauty surrounds us.

With the biblical book, Song of Songs, we too can pray and rejoice that *“the winter is now past ... the flowers appear on the earth ... the song of the dove is heard in our land, the fig tree puts forth its figs and the vines, in bloom, give forth fragrance* (Chapter 2:11-13).

St. Bonaventure wrote, “[One] who is not illuminated by such the great splendor of created things is blind. Open your eyes, therefore ... that you may see, hear, praise, worship, glorify and honor your God.”

I would like to share with you a reflection I came across several years ago in *Presence Magazine*. It was written by Ellen Stratton and is entitled “Place as Prayer.”

“In my experience places are a medium through which God initiates



about receiving, listening, and waiting in a conscious opening of the self to God, who initiates communion and communication with us, as it is about speaking praise and petitions. The promise of this form of prayer is that it can lead to an appreciation of wonder, personal transformation, and empowering service. It is enough to momentarily be still. It is enough to watch the sights and smell the scents. It is enough to recognize the “thinness” of the place, the proximity of God, nearer than one’s own breath, and to be opened in awe and worship. It is enough to let the place work its transformation and power upon the spirit.”

“BASK IN THE BEAUTY OF CREATION.”

and maintains communion, while at the same time inviting me to increasingly lean toward God in a posture of openness. As prayer these places require no activity, but rather invite a *letting go of doing*, and simply *being*, in radical trust, welcoming what God wants to work in and upon me. To believe that *being* in a place is itself the practice of prayer is based on the confidence that prayer is as much

I suggest you give yourself a present. With our busy pace of life, make yourself a priority! If you know of a beautiful spot near you, set aside some time and bask in the beauty of creation. If there is not a lake, garden, nature preserve, hilltop, tranquil back yard near you, in your imagination revisit a (nature) place you have visited which impressed you. Take a “virtual” tour there and spend some time remembering its impact upon you. Let the experience awe you and let it fill your heart with gratitude. After a period

of contemplating the beauty of creation, you can bring your prayer to a close with a simple and heartfelt “Thank You,” *Laudato Si*. Praise be to God!

- Sister Dorothy

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150 YEARS *of* SERVICE

“WHERE THERE IS A NEED, WE WILL GO.”

With that quote, inspired by Dom Minsart (one of our Founders), the Sisters of Saint Mary of Namur’s Western Province and Our Lady of Victory Catholic School in Fort Worth have had a local, national and global impact for 150 years. Their work has centered on education, including the creation of Bishop Dunne High School in Dallas, and Nolan Catholic and Cassata in Fort Worth, serving the homeless and refugees, and prison ministry.

As they prepare to celebrate the history of SSMN’s 150 years in Texas, we’ve collected stories from the Sisters about their work as they have loved and served different communities. Enjoy the memories of three Sisters, Sister Rita Claire, Sister Miriam and Sister Charles Marie in this newsletter issue.

SISTER RITA CLAIRE

Sister Rita Claire Davis, 95, has dedicated herself to immigration and English as Second Language (ESL) assistance to Mexican, South American and Indian families for nearly 40 years — in Rhineland (1984), Knox City (1985), Crowell (1999), Wichita Falls (2005). By the time she left Wichita Falls and came to live in the DFW area, she had more than 4,000 applications completed or active.

She continued to grow her ESL community with five years in Mansfield before arriving in Fort Worth in 2013. COVID-19 proved a major disruption to the work, but she stayed in touch with the teachers and students to help as much as possible. In September 2020, she received a gift of 31 laptops to give to students. The program re-started during fall 2022 at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Fort Worth and has



Sister Rita Claire teaches English to a class of Spanish speaking students

approximately 40 adult students, ages 20s to late 60s.

In the late 1970s, Sister Rita Claire was called to teach business in a largely Black parish in Sumter, South Carolina. “A sister at the school had been transferred and they asked me to work with families.” A few years later, she was called to serve in Gifford, SC. At first, the local people were unsure of why the Sisters were there, and really didn’t want anything to do with them. Noticing how women in the area would get picked up in a bus to go and pick peaches for money, the Sisters decided

to join them, because they needed money for rent. They agreed that two would go, and one would stay to tutor children. “Over time the community came to accept us,” Sr. Rita Claire remembers.

It was in Gifford where Sister Rita Claire had one of her most memorable moments. Across the tracks was a family, and their little girl, Willa Mae, struggled in school. Sr. Rita Claire slowly made friends with the child and over time, Willa Mae’s parents began to trust her. “At the time, Willa Mae was in third or fourth grade and couldn’t read,

(continued)

SR. RITA CLAIRE (CONTINUED)

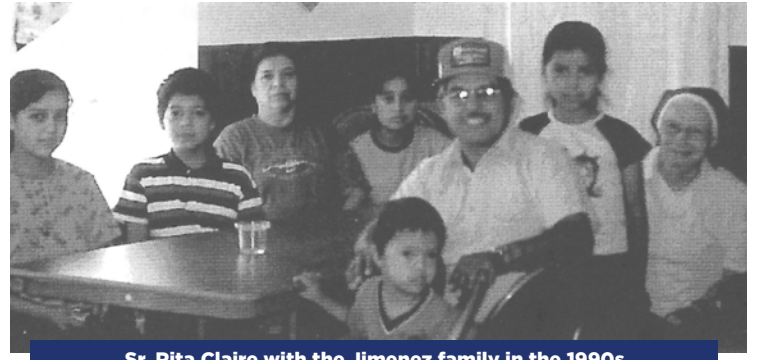
so I started tutoring her. We have stayed in touch ever since. Today, Willa Mae is a grandmother with two grandbabies. For years, she has driven an hour and one-half one way to her work, making a good living in spite of many challenges. It just goes to show that with a little help and a lot of love from the Lord, good things can come."

In many decades of service, Willa Mae is the example of what Sister Rita Claire would say is her greatest joy: "to see every little bit of knowledge that you have to teach another. There's such gratification in their successes."

Sr. Rita Claire (left) and Sr. M. Michael (right) with Patsy and Martin Quintera, a couple the Sisters befriended in Crowell, Texas.



Sr. Rita Claire with a few students and teachers



Sr. Rita Claire with the Jimenez family in the 1990s



SISTER MIRIAM

Sister Miriam Nesmith, 81, has spent much of her life asking questions and it seems each answer has led her to an additional cause to serve. After having worked in the AIDS community in Houston, she moved to Fort Worth in the late 1990s and spent the next 23 years working with the homeless in the parish, St. Rita Catholic Church, where they often spent time.

"Father Flores was very supportive of me working with the poor," she remembers. "Our outreach was parents having difficulty raising their children. The homeless were everywhere on East Lancaster."

"Individuals would come by the church and ask for things such as prescriptions ... gradually people needed food." Money came from parishioners during Sunday services.

Billy would come by once a week. "Where do you sleep at night?" she asked him once. "I sleep behind the 7-Eleven," he answered. "How do you wash clothes?" she asked. He didn't, was his answer. "So I started collecting quarters to use at the washateria," Sister Miriam remembers.

Sister Miriam organized a weekly lunch sack — a can of Vienna sausages, peanut butter and crackers, fruit and something sweet. "It started with 15 sacks and grew. I never kept count ...

just tried to have more and more sacks."

"One day, Father Richard took his shoes off near the front door. Later, he asked, 'You see my shoes?' Yes, I said. I just gave them away, but the guy is still outside if you want to talk with him." She gave away socks, too.

Billy didn't come by one week. He was in jail for fighting. The next week, he said, "It was kind of nice; had a bed and food."

Billy didn't want housing. "He told me, 'I like to be free.' Interestingly, most men didn't care about housing, didn't ask for rent money. But the women with children wanted housing. The women would always ask, 'Are you praying for me? Please pray for my children.'"

Sister Miriam says money, time and resources were and continue to be the biggest challenges. "How can we answer their needs and questions?" She says her greatest joy were the individuals themselves and what they

(continued)

SR. MIRIAM (CONTINUED)

shared with her. “And how God worked for them ... the most important thing is to treat the homeless with respect as human beings.”

She said if she had 20 more years, she would want to do more outreach where there is a need. “In Rome, Pope Francis has set up showers for the homeless. It would be nice to have an endowment with funding, a place for mobile showers. I also would work to find job possibilities for those who wanted to work.”



Sr. Miriam is passionate for serving women and children in need in her community.

SISTER CHARLES MARIE

Sister Charles Marie Serafino, 86, isn't shy about mentioning she is from Duncanville, Texas, the mecca of high school girls basketball. “I was a forward on the Duncanville team that made it to state finals in basketball in 1951 and 1952. We lost both final games by two points.”

She's been living with that same tenacity ever since, in “simplicity and helping the poor in the world.” Before doing anything, Sister explains that her decisions are guided by prayer.

Early in her service, Sister Charles Marie taught 7th grade geography and the history of Africa in an Arlington school. “I was using some films and I got real excited about the culture and geography, and felt the desire to share the lives of the poor.

“I asked the congregation leader about five times to go to our missions. God did not let up and neither did I.” Sr. Charles Marie put her feet on the ground in Rwanda on August 10, 1964. Work in Rwanda and the Congo would fulfill her life's new vision.

Arriving there from Belgium, she went straight to work. “The Sisters were



Sr. Charles Marie and Sr. St. John, 1995

trying to help me get settled. I could speak French, but never could learn African languages well. I started out teaching English to a class of students with high school senior equivalency.” Soon, a dispensary was built in Mbuga, Rwanda.

In Congo, our Priests worked with approximately 150 villages around the Parish of Djuma, helping lay folks to teach religion in the villages. When

a village seemed ready, four of us (Sisters) would go for four days of intense preparation for the sacraments. At night, the people made a fire, told stories, sang and danced.

Today, our Sisters teach English on Zoom to Sisters in Rwanda and Congo, as well as Brazil. Sister Charles Marie has two African students.

What has she loved most? “In Africa, our purpose was to spread the word of God. The way we do it is kind of secondary. Spreading the Word of God is what makes me happiest.” The Sisters that she formed in the Novitiate are now grown and running their communities in their own way. “That's my pleasure.”

“Africa, I lived there a long time — 38 years until 2002. It was home to me when I lived there.”



A group of Sisters and novices in Cameroon in 1994 after the genocide.

A Period of Intense Love and Prayer

Nothing in the history of my life can compare with the experience of the genocide in Rwanda. In April-June 1994, history was taking place with an intensity words could never describe adequately.

Perhaps as we huddled together trying to survive hour by hour, our most true selves were exposed to one another, our weaknesses, our strengths, our fears, our compassion, our generosity. Each of us tried to do whatever she could for others.

The Lord provided us with food, just enough for each day, like manna in the desert. Likewise there were no delicacies such as meat, sugar, etc. No one complained, though. Water was scarce. We made do.

Silent prayer seemed impossible, but we spent many hours praying the psalms that seemed real and new. Spontaneous prayer and song in any language was frequent.

Conventions and schedules were abandoned. It was just raw survival. Each hour was a waiting for death, to put it plainly. The sounds of slaughter, gunfire and cannons could be heard close by and in the distance.

Sometimes we hid in the kitchen, sometimes in the forest, sometimes all together in a few small spaces.



A group of Sisters and novices in about 1980 in Kiruhura

Sometimes we tried to play games. Nothing was as usual.

Where was God? Where were the people who could have stopped this terror? Where did such abominable evil come from? It was an unfathomable mystery.

One thing was certain: We clung to the Lord and to each other. In the end, He preserved us all, which was nothing less than a miracle. And we understood that His gift of life to us was an invitation to continue our history and dare to imagine a future.

And so, it came to be. Almost 30 years later, life goes on with new energy in its struggles and beauty.

Someone expressed her thoughts about our experience of the genocide a few years later: "That period of intense love and prayer could never be relived, but it remains an eternal memory of an indescribable nightmare, and at the same time, unimaginable Beauty."

- Sister Charles Marie



Some of Sr. Charles Marie's former novices in 2009 in Kibuye



Sr. Charles Marie and Sr. Philothée visiting with a neighbor in Kiruhura

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Welcoming Home the Beloved Statues of OLV

Happy Birthday, Sister Rita Claire!

Oremus — Let Us Pray

In Memoriam — Sr. Adelaida Valtierra

150 Years of Service — Memories From Three Sisters

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POETRY CORNER

Spring

In spring our Gardener God
Dances the earth to life.
Her rhythmic beat upon
The ground
Wakens the seeds.
The sound of her flying feet,
Rouses the sleeping bear from its cave
And becomes the thunder
Of April showers.
Blessed are you,
Gardener God of the Spring.

- Sister Anselma Knabe



Sister Anselma Knabe

My Mothers

I am blessed to have two mothers
Who are called by the same name.

One the Lord has given to me;
The other He lets me share.
I refer to them both as Mother
Though I sometimes call them by name.

They both bear the name Mary;
One bore and raised me;
The other loves and helps me from afar.

Now, both love and protect me
From the far-off heavenly realm;
Neither is visible to me now,
Except in my heart.

But one day, hopefully, we will All be
together

In that beautiful final dwelling
Called Heaven.

- Sister Teresa Honkomp



Sister Teresa
Honkomp
(1923-2023)