

CONNECTIONS

Newsletter



May 2024

SHARING THE PAIN: HOW ONE QUESTION CHANGED SISTERS OF ST. MARY'S MINISTRY - by Sr. Patricia Ridgley

Something unexpected occurred almost three years ago when the Sisters were able to reestablish our newsletter, *Connections*. With the help of Barbara Lamsens, **Oblate Diane Murray** and Kate Rindy, the newsletter has become a means to reconnect with alums, colleagues and friends, and to share news of the Sisters. A card was included in that first newsletter, as you may remember, providing space for updating mailing information and a means to contribute financially to the work of the Sisters.

The back of the card had space for a response to a simple question: How can we pray for you?

It was the overwhelming response to this offer that led us to reinvigorate a whole other facet of their Ministry. We were deeply humbled by the simple and forthright needs that persons sent back to the Sisters: descriptions of painful home situations, concerns for children and parents, health concerns, pleas for peace in the world, for care of the earth, prayers to join into celebrations and thanksgivings.

Yes, people have always asked the Sisters "to pray for them," and through the years, phone calls to OLV asked for prayers for a particular person



One of the stained-glass windows in the Chapel where the Sisters pray at OLV. (L) The Sisters' basket of intentions.

or situation. But the whole-hearted response to the card's question "How can we pray for you?" has led the Sisters to place a Prayer Basket inside the Chapel, into which all the cards are carefully placed. This allows any Sister, at any hour of the day, to pick up a card and to bring the particular intention described, into their heart and to the Heart of God.

This has called all the Sisters to delve

deeper into the meaning of Intercessory Prayer. Every Friday afternoon, during the time of Adoration, there is particular focus on these Intentions.

At each Mass, Fr. John Shanahan, the chaplain, makes special mention of "the intentions in the Prayer Basket and in the Prayer Book outside of the Chapel." The Constitutions urge the Sisters to "present to the Father the needs of the world," and this outpouring of responses from our friends and colleagues has deepened the Sisters' sense of solidarity with all our world.

MONSIGNOR DONALD ZIMMERMAN: A TRUE ADVOCATE FOR THE SISTERS

Monsignor Donald Zimmerman was pastor of Christ the King Catholic Church in Dallas for 26 years and served St. Monica Catholic Church for 10 years. He received the Bishop Dunne Voyager Award and the Pope Leo XIII Gold Cross of Honor for his Holy Land work.

In her first-grade classroom at Our Lady of Good Counsel (OLGC) in Dallas, Texas, **Sister Mary Pauline Ruyle** stood next to a 3-foot-tall copy of a reading book with her pointer. As each student read in turn, young Donald Zimmerman — usually the last to be called on — was memorizing every line. Unfortunately, just before she called on him, Sister turned the page. He recited the previous page anyway “thinking she couldn’t read well either!”

Msgr. Zimmerman’s father was also an especially loyal former student of the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur. When he helped with carpentry, plumbing and wiring repairs at the OLGC school and convent, a very young Donald would accompany his father.

Sister Mary Pauline Ruyle could teach a brick to read,” Monsignor Zimmerman recalls. “She was that patient and skilled.” **Sister Theresa Marie Payne** and **Sister Joan Marie Conlon** later prepared him for high school. He extols OLGC’s principal, **Sister Justin Fox**, who “could have run a university.” As an adult, Monsignor admires his teachers’ even tempers: “The invisible Grace of God is made visible in the way that we treat one another. That’s what the Church is meant to be, and that’s what the nuns taught me.”

At the University of Dallas, Msgr. Zimmerman was taught by **Sister Saint John Begnaud**, who taught Virgil and Homer and “made them come to life.” The newly ordained Father Zimmerman visited “everybody’s grandmother,” his second-grade teacher, **Sister Saint**



Monsignor Donald Zimmerman

Anthony Kennedy would say.

As a pastor, Msgr. Zimmerman remembered his roots, and the parish of Christ the King tithed 15 percent “off the top” to parishes and schools in the southern half of Dallas. This was especially welcome when St. Cecilia’s Church burned down from a lightning strike in 2007 and Holy Cross Church outgrew their worship space. “I didn’t think of it as Charity; I thought of it as Justice.”

While it’s sad to see religious orders declining in size, Monsignor reflected: “Maybe that too is in God’s plan. The

Sisters prepared the way for laypersons to serve.” Monsignor Zimmerman, a true advocate for the Sisters concludes, “The Sisters weren’t just teachers, they were friends, they were family.”



Our Lady of Good Counsel in Oak Cliff

MEET SISTER ROSEANN, VISITING FROM BUFFALO

Sister RoseAnn Cappola entered the Sisters of St. Mary in Buffalo, New York at the age of 18. She was a bright and compassionate young woman, and she knew she wanted to dedicate her life to helping others. After completing her formation, Sister RoseAnn was assigned to teach kindergarten and first grade in South Carolina. She loved working with the children, and she quickly became a beloved member of the community.

After 12 years of teaching, Sister RoseAnn felt called to do more. She wanted to continue to serve the poor, so she volunteered to go to the Dominican Republic. She spent 29 years living and working in the mountains, where she formed catechists and started a school for children who lived on the streets.

Sister RoseAnn's work in the Dominican Republic was challenging, but also incredibly rewarding. She loved living with and getting to know people from a different culture. She relied on her faith and her love of God to help her through the difficult times.

After her years in the Dominican Republic, Sister RoseAnn was ready for a new challenge. She volunteered to go to Rwanda, where she started a preschool to provide a safe and nurturing learning environment for young children.

Sister RoseAnn spent her career serving the poor and marginalized.



Sr. RoseAnn Cappola

She relied on her faith and her love of God to help her through the difficult times.

She was, and is, a tireless advocate for social justice, and she always puts the needs of others before her own.

Sister RoseAnn hopes that her story serves as a reminder that we can all make a difference in the world. No

matter how small our actions may seem, they can have a big impact on the lives of others.

Sister RoseAnn is now living at OLV in service to the Sisters in Fort Worth.

Former Student Spotlight: JOEY SIMMONS, BISHOP DUNNE, CLASS OF 1973

Joey Simmons built four businesses from scratch and has spent 50 years in youth sports, helping young athletes fulfill their dreams by getting college basketball scholarships and even professional careers in the sport. Recently, while organizing his Bishop Dunne 50th class reunion, he reminisced about the Sisters: "The Sisters at Bishop Dunne were part of what laid the foundation for my Catholic faith with their ways of gentleness and kindness. I have grown to be a very devout Catholic, and I owe that to my parents and my learning at Dunne." He remembers **Sister Maria Clark's** "passion to teach art" and his Spanish teacher, **Sister John Teresa**: "I loved her because I was not really

good with Spanish, but she was so patient with all of us."

While working with young athletes, Coach Simmons instills family values and the importance of God in their everyday lives. "We try to make the kids understand how important it is to always put God and family before basketball. While God and family will always be part of their lives, basketball will not. Basketball can help to mold them into better people by teaching them to work hard and become winners in many different ways."

When Joey is evaluating young athletes as a scout, he looks first at their character. "Does the athlete work hard? Do they work with their teammates? Do they have a good



Joey Simmons

attitude on and off the court? Do they exhibit good moral character? Do they come from a good family and have Christian characteristics? Of course, evaluating their basketball skills is of utmost importance, but one's character is the first thing I look at in a player."

Gifts From the Heart

As part of their preparation for Holy Week, the Sisters gathered together to create what would become lovely gifts for others. **Sr. Ginny**, with help from dear friends Jenna Askew, D'Lissa Cunningham and Corrine Hamre, organized everything, and the results were stunning. So many crosses, beautifully and tenderly decorated by each Sister. When they were finished, the Sisters decided to give each staff member a cross of their choosing. It was a wonderful way to prepare for the holy days ahead, and Christ's resurrection.



(L-R) Sr. RoseAnn, Sr. Charles Marie and Sr. Lupe



Sr. Anselma



Sr. Miriam



Jenna and Corinne



CABRINI: THE POWER OF SEEING YOURSELF ON SCREEN

Recently, **Oblate Ann Smith** organized getting tickets for several Sisters and friends to see the movie “Cabrini.” **Oblate Diane Murray** was one of the people who attended, and she talked about the experience.

“It was a joy to be with the Sisters as we watched ‘Cabrini.’ I could so easily see the story of the Sisters of St. Mary within the beautiful Cabrini story. In watching the movie, I kept thinking of how it must have been for our Sisters when they reached Waco, dragging their heavy habits through streets of mud, living in poor conditions, nursing the community. Even the similarity of beginning with one student. And while the Cabrinis were doing such wonderful work in New York, the Sisters of St. Mary rode the train to Waco and then traveled back to North Texas to begin more Catholic schools. Sometimes I forget that women religious are



Moviegoers: (front row, l to r) Clarice Peninger, Sr. Ginny Vissing, Sr. Patricia Ste Marie, Sr. Charles Marie Serafino, (back row, r to l) Ann Smith, Diane Murray, Sr. Dorothy Powers, Kate Rindy and Reyna Castelan

so strong and courageous. Both the Cabrini Sisters and the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur were pioneers in their time. Even today, in their later years, our Sisters of St. Mary pray fiercely for

those in need and help others through spiritual direction and ESL classes. The Sisters enjoyed the movie, admiring Mother Cabrini and seeing themselves in the story, too. What a gift!!”

HOLY WEEK AT OLV

Once again, the Sisters were blessed to celebrate the Holy Week of Easter in peace, reflection and joy. Fr. John Shanahan, T.O.R. was our celebrant for all of the services and we were grateful for his presence and for his daily caring of our Sisters. Good Friday was a day of silence and reflection for all of the community. On Saturday evening, Terry Rine returned to OLV to light the fire for the Easter vigil, so Fr. John could bless the fire and prepare the candle. Terry has faithfully done this for the Sisters for many years. It was beautiful watching the light of Christ spread through our small chapel as one and then another lit their candles. Many thanks go to Sean O'Reilly for opening the service by singing the Exsultet to proclaim the arrival of Easter. A lovely reception was held after the service with treats



Father John led SSMN's Holy Week services



provided by those in our extended SSMN family. The weekend concluded with the Sisters enjoying an Easter egg

hunt on Sunday afternoon. Truly a lovely week enjoyed by all.



Sister Joan continues to be an avid reader and learner.



Sr. Dorothy Powers with Sr. Joan

A PASSION FOR TEACHING

Sister Joan Markey, now retired, always had a passion for teaching. As a child in Wichita Falls she was somewhat afraid of the Sisters because she was terrified of failing and didn't want to disappoint. She soon realized the Sisters were there to help her learn and grow. She began to appreciate their dedication to teaching and their desire to make learning exciting for their students.

Sister Joan decided to become a teacher herself so that she could make a difference in the lives of children. She wanted to give them a sense of purpose and help them to discover their own passions. She also wanted to get kids excited about reading, something she learned to love as a child.

For Sister Joan teaching was about making learning exciting. She still

believes that every teacher can make a difference in the lives of their students. She says, "Every teacher does a little bit and another teacher comes along and does a little more." Those little bits add up in the lives of students.

Sister Joan's passion for teaching was evident in her classroom. She created a warm and welcoming environment where students felt safe to take risks and learn from their mistakes. She was always looking for new and innovative ways to engage her students and help them to reach their full potential.

In addition to encouraging all students to read, she was also there to offer her help and support. The students often trusted her as their confidant, like the time a student told her he didn't feel like living anymore.

What a gift she was to him. Sister Joan's students were fortunate

"Every teacher does a little bit and another teacher comes along and does a little more."

to have her as their teacher. She was a dedicated and passionate educator committed to making a difference in their lives.

Sister Joan taught in numerous junior high grades, in addition to university level teaching, but many probably remember her from Nolan Catholic High School. She was a dedicated educator who still believes in the importance of reading for all people. She reads voraciously and could, no doubt, advise you of a good book to read next.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



“Would you like to make a difference in the life of someone who needs you? You can!! Volunteer teachers are needed to teach English to adults. Classes are being offered at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, just next door to Catholic Charities at 201 Thornhill Dr. in Ft. Worth on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:15 am to 12:15 pm. Volunteers do not need to be bilingual, but that is a plus. High School education is required. For more information, contact **Sister Rita Claire** at (940)782-9018.”

That is the message Sister Rita Claire sends out when there is a need for



volunteers to help people learn English. You might see it in church bulletins, or on the Sisters' Facebook page. Never one to stop helping those in need, Sr. Rita Claire – who recently celebrated her 96th birthday – oversees the ESL program at Immaculate Heart. After Covid, Sr. Rita Claire had to begin again, and indeed she did. Starting with three students in the fall of 2022, there are now five levels of classes – all with the intention of helping immigrants become comfortable with the English language.

If you ask one of the instructors how they began teaching ESL, they often laugh and look at Sr. Rita Claire. Many

did not speak Spanish when they began teaching; Sr. Rita Claire would ask them to “assist” in a class, knowing that with time, they would learn enough Spanish to be able to engage with the students as they learned English. One person said, “If you see Sr. Rita Claire coming, be ready to start doing something – she will convince you that you will help others, and you’ll soon be a part of her blessed work on behalf of the Lord and those in need. She has made a difference in countless lives.”

If you are interested, reach out to Sr. Rita Claire at 940-782-9018. You will be glad you did.



Sr. Rita Claire teaching ESL

67 YEARS LATER...

In 1957, **Sister Mary Jean Warmuth** began her first assignment as a Sister of St. Mary: teaching first grade at St. Alice’s school in West Fort Worth.

Sixty-seven years later, three students from that very first class came to visit Sr. Mary Jean. They had not seen one another since that time, long ago – but of course Sr. Mary Jean remembered them: Ray Jones and his twin sister, Dorothy, and Thomas Kane. She has remained in their hearts all of these years, just as she has held them in hers.



Sr. Mary Jean with Ray & Dorothy



Sr. Mary Jean with Thomas Kane

TOTAL ECLIPSE — MONDAY, APRIL 8, 2024

On April 8, the Sisters gathered like so many others to take in the total eclipse. It was an awe-inducing afternoon at OLV.



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BIRTHDAYS TO REMEMBER

- May 28 - Sister Lola Ulupano
- June 14 - Sister Clara Vo
- June 19 - Sister Ginny Vissing
- June 23 - Sister Mary Jean Warmuth
- June 24 - Sister Jane Conway



Sr. Rita Claire turned 96 years young in March!

Many thanks
TO THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS:

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WHAT'S INSIDE?

- Monsignor Donald Zimmerman, SSMN Advocate
- Meet Sister RoseAnn From Buffalo
- Former Student Spotlight: Joey Simmons
- Reflections on "Cabrini"
- Sister Joan Markey's Passion for Teaching

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