

CONNECTIONS

Newsletter



February 2025

SISTER LUPE ARANDA: A SISTER WITH ENDLESS ENERGY FOR SEEING AND SERVING OTHERS

The Sisters of St. Mary have devoted their lives to serving people — as educators, medical professionals, missionaries in faraway countries, spiritual mentors and so much more. In responding to God’s call to serve His people, they have given of themselves beyond their specific “work” of being His presence wherever and however may be needed. In fact, for the Sisters, their desire to serve God and His people continues long after what may be considered for many to be retirement age. **Sister Lupe Aranda** is a devoted and inspiring example of not allowing anything to keep her from fulfilling her desire to be God’s presence to those around her.

As a volunteer for Catholic Charities, Sister Lupe works with young refugee children from Afghanistan, Africa and other countries as an ESL tutor at Clifford Elementary School two days a week. She also assists participants seeking opportunities at job search events sponsored by Catholic Charities. She has served as a facilitator of group discussions focused on inviting participants to gain a better understanding about homelessness and the homeless



project in Fort Worth. Catholic Charities does not hesitate to reach out to Sister Lupe for assistance in their many community projects, knowing she is available and wholeheartedly dedicated!

And if that were not enough to fill her days, Sister Lupe is a regular volunteer at the Southside Church of Christ Food Pantry. This group

also knows that Sister Lupe is available and committed to assisting in their other social events benefitting the local community.

And still, there is more! With her daytime hours full, Sister Lupe also volunteers as an evening catechist assistant at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish whenever she can. For Sister Lupe, her desire to help others goes beyond, “Can I help?” to “Please, tell me how I can help and show me the way!”

Finally, within the “walls” of Our Lady of Victory Center, Sister Lupe is the “go to” person in so many ways, from watching over the plants throughout

the Center to assisting her fellow Sisters with whatever they may need, including a listening ear, companionship or a trip to Braum’s! Sister Lupe has a seemingly endless reserve of energy to see a need and respond to it, no matter how large or how small, and always with a smile on her face and joy in her heart.

MARY SEAN O'REILLY: A FAMILIAR FACE, NOW OLV'S ADMINISTRATOR

Many people in this area and beyond know **Mary Sean O'Reilly**: for many years a Sister of St. Mary of Namur, an attorney, judge, mediator, friend — and now, our administrator at OLV. Accepting this position in August, Sean oversees and is responsible for staffing, operations and all business matters on behalf of the Sisters. She is a welcomed, trusted and familiar presence here. In many ways, it seems her life experiences and the hand of God led her here.

In an article she contributed to Dr. Madonna Kolbenschlag's book, *Between God and Caesar: Priests, Sisters and Political Office in the United States*, Mary Sean O'Reilly writes of her desire to spend her life working with people in a caring and creative way. Sean has without question fulfilled that desire in every path she has taken in her life, to include being a member of the Sisters of Saint Mary of Namur congregation for 16 years.

Sean is the second child in a family of nine girls and two boys; an Irish-Catholic family headed by two "exceptionally kind and educated parents." Her dad was a country club manager and her mom a nurse-educator. Sean attended St. Andrew's Catholic School in Fort Worth and Notre Dame High School in Wichita Falls — a relationship that led to her entering the congregation in 1966. In 1970, Sean's father died unexpectedly, and she took a two-year leave from the congregation to help her mother care for the family. As one of the older siblings in her family, Sean developed her skills as trouble-shooter, advocate and spokeswoman.

While a member of the Sisters of St. Mary, Sean earned her law degree at the University of Houston. Sean initially began her ministry in law as a religious woman working as a legal services attorney devoted to serving low-income women and families, being an advocate for those who lacked the resources and voice to speak for themselves.

In 1984, after a three-year discernment process, Sean left the congregation. She continued to work with low-income women and families, including many cases involving violence, throughout her career as a trial attorney and into her tenure as a member of the judicial system in Tarrant and Harris counties as a family court judge. In recognition of the esteem she earned from her peers, Sean was appointed by the family law judges as family court master for the Texas district courts.

After serving the family courts in Texas for more than 20 years, Sean opened a Houston-based mediation and arbitration firm, *The Conciliation Institute*. With the help of her sister, **Kathleen**, they operated that company until very recently (she finished her last mediation case in September). The accolades for Sean's work are most impressive — a colleague speaks of Sean being "a peacemaker throughout her entire career."

After serving as a full-time judge for 20 years and then working on special judicial assignments for



another 20 years, Sean resigned her judicial commission of 40 years, and on Aug. 19, 2024, joined the Sisters as administrator of the OLV convent. In truth, Sean has always been involved in the lives of the Sisters, as a member of the congregation, lending her legal expertise, and supporting them in whatever way needed. Sean has a deep love and respect for the Sisters, and the Sisters share that love and respect for Sean. Sean sees in the Sisters a group of women who have served others in myriad ways for 50, 60, 70 years and beyond; she describes them as honorable, wise women who have contributed immeasurably to culture and society. The Sisters see in Sean someone whom they can trust without question, someone who genuinely cares for them. "She's absolutely amazing, a ball of fire and incredibly generous, not just to us but to everyone."

SISTER RITA CLAIRE'S GARDEN



Window garden and its harvest by Sr. Rita Claire

As many of us remember, the temperatures last summer were relentlessly high. In an effort to conserve water, gardening was difficult if not impossible and the long, hot days persisted.

In **Sr. Rita Claire Davis'** garden, that meant fewer and smaller okra, onions, tomatoes, green beans, watermelon and cantaloupe. The Sisters gave thanks for the goodness that our Lord made possible. Most Sisters imagined that her beautiful garden might have decided to rest until spring.

The photographs of the tomatoes you see here were taken on Jan. 5, 2025 — a cold and windy day. As it turns out, the cooler fall weather was exactly what the tomatoes had been waiting for! This most recent "batch" of more than 100 tomatoes were brought in that January day! A few days earlier Sr. Rita Claire collected more than 170 tomatoes — most still green and of various sizes. Into her window they were lovingly placed, to let God's beautiful sunshine slowly ripen them. Ask any Sister how they tasted, and watch the smile on their face!

May we all remember that the Lord's bounty is always available to us. We only have to be patient and watchful.

THE GIFT OF THERAPEUTIC TOUCH

Thanks to the long friendship of **Sister Patricia Ridgley** and **Cindy Spence**, the Sisters were recently given a gift they would talk about for days after receiving it!

On Saturday, Dec. 14, Cindy, a licensed massage therapist with a master's degree in public health, and **Lisa Castillo**, a licensed massage therapist, spent the afternoon at OLV giving a 30-minute seated massage to any Sister who wanted one. As it turned out, every Sister in the house signed up!

Our thanks to Cindy and Lisa for making the drive from Dallas (where they both work at Faith Presbyterian Hospice) and for giving of their time, skills and experience to offer ease and relaxation to our Sisters.



EXPRESSIONS OF THE HEART

Anyone who knows the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur certainly knows of the immense musical talent, mostly through the piano, they have shared through the years. For many, **Sister Mary Crockett**, **Sister Jane Conway** and **Sister Ginny Vissing** come to mind. But not so many people are aware of the Sisters who had the gift of painting, mostly with oils and watercolor. At one time a few Sisters had an art studio on the top floor of the old OLV building. Some of their works now hang on the walls at OLV. In addition to the pictured artwork, other artists include **Sister Julianne Allen** (weaver) and **Sister Maria Clark** (potter, painter).



Sr. Mary Rose Lopresto



Sr. Gertrude Moore



Sr. Joachim Montpetit





Sr. Antoinette Fette



Sr. Mary Jean Warmuth

Heartfelt GIVING

In this beautiful season when we express our gratitude for God's blessings and celebrate the greatest gift of all, a baby born in a manger who would be Savior to us all, we have received an abundance of gifts from so many. Knowing we cannot mention every person and group who blessed us so wonderfully, these pictures are simply a reflection of all of you who gave us so much! To the Good Shepherd Catholic Church community, the Holy Family Women's Bible Study, Mike's Garden Center and the poinsettias that set the scene so perfectly for our celebrations, and the many, many benefactors who poured out their love upon us, there are no words to express our heartfelt gratitude. Please know we hold you close in our hearts; we thank God for the gift of you in our lives every day. A heartfelt thank you from all of us!



(l-r) Sr. Rose Ann Coppola, Sr. Charles Marie, Sr. Patricia Brown, and Terri Jones



Dolores and Sarah Gutierrez, Catholic Daughters, Court Louise

With our love,
The Sisters of St. Mary

PRAYER REQUEST LEADS TO RECONNECTION WITH SISTERS

A few months ago, Clifford and Claudia Cardoza reached out to the Sisters with a heartfelt prayer request. Clifford asked for prayers for all 125 members of the Cardoza family. In his message and a follow-up call, he shared a rich family history with the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur. The connection began with his uncle, Manuel Cardoza, who attended Sacred Heart Parish School in Hollister, California starting in 1909. Sacred Heart was founded by the Sisters of Charity in 1891; Sister Marcella was his teacher when he was just five years old. The Sisters of Saint Mary of Namur assumed leadership in 1930. Clifford mentioned that in those early days, many Portuguese families in the area sent their children to Sacred Heart. Clifford himself is the fourth generation of his family to attend the school and is now 87 years old.

Despite the Sisters of St. Mary moving back to Texas years ago, Clifford noted that Sacred Heart Parish School continues to thrive, even though there are fewer Catholic schools and the Sisters have aged. He fondly recalled watching the services for President Jimmy Carter on TV and remembering the reverence and respect taught to him by **Sister Benita Francis Curley** in the sixth and seventh grades. She influenced him in a way that continues to this day. For Clifford, the Sisters laid the foundation for his long and fulfilling life, much like the foundation of a house, and he remains deeply grateful.



Sacred Heart, Hollister, CA (Circa 1972)



In Memoriam

SISTER ROBERTA HESSE 1934-2024

OFFERING ALL TO THE LORD: SR. ROBERTA HESSE DIES OCTOBER 31, 2024

To say that Sr. Roberta's death left a tremendous hole at the heart of Our Lady of Victory would be an understatement. Of course this could be said with each farewell to beloved friends.

In Sr. Roberta's case, the acknowledgement of this loss came in notes from Sisters throughout the Congregation. Many Sisters wrote who had known and loved her from her decades of service in Africa as nurse, mentor, builder, confidant, mid-wife and so much more!

Born Irma Margaret Hesse in Muenster, Texas in 1934, she was the eldest of nine children and assumed a role of caregiver after both parents died early in the family's life. She nevertheless was able to pursue her vocation to follow the Jesus she had

come to know and love as a girl, in 1955.

That devotion and love became the driving force of a life which initially included simple services. To her surprise (she later wrote in a letter) she was asked by her superior to consider going to nursing school at the then-St. Joseph's Hospital. It was there that she recounted talking to a woman who asked if she were studying to "go to Africa." Sr. Roberta remembered that conversation as being the beginning of her life-long missionary calling.

Even after aging and health issues brought her back to Texas, Sr. Roberta was ever the advocate for the disadvantaged and marginalized of the world, especially in her beloved Africa. Active in the FW Diocesan Mission Council, and frequent volunteer at



Catholic Charities, it seemed that her large smile and heart just drew people from all walks of life.

The North Texas Catholic commemorated Sr. Roberta's death in its Nov. 12 edition, quoting fellow-missionary and friend, Sr. Charles Marie Serafino, "Sr. Roberta truly lived the motto of our Congregation, *'In the Simplicity of my Heart, I have offered all to the Lord.'*"

ANGELIC VISITORS

Students from Saint Maria Goretti Catholic School recently visited the Sisters at OLV and graced them with their beautiful voices and songs. Students expressed their appreciation for the Sisters and all that they have done — especially in the founding of their school — in a recent visit to OLV. Many thanks to Amy Utendorf, Principal, and Rachel Richards, Music Teacher, for facilitating the visit.

As the school writes on its website: "The Sisters of Saint Mary of Namur founded Saint Maria Goretti Catholic School in 1954 and provided all the principals and many of our teachers for SMG's first 36 years. The moral guidance, Catholic atmosphere and expectation of academic excellence they instilled are very much a part of our educational experience at SMG. We are forever grateful to these special women and owe their religious community a tremendous debt of gratitude."



BIRTHDAYS WE CELEBRATED



Sr. Camella



Sr. Louise



Sr. Miriam

BIRTHDAYS TO REMEMBER

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

June 14 – Sister Clara Vo

June 19 – Sister Ginny Vissing

June 23 – Sister Mary Jean Warmuth

Many thanks

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THE SISTERS OF SAINT MARY OF NAMUR
THE WESTERN REGION
909 W. SHAW ST.
FORT WORTH, TX 76110

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Meet OLV's New Administrator

Unexpected Growth in Sister Rita Claire's Garden

Works of Art by the Sisters

Remembering Sister Roberta Hesse

Prayer Request Leads to Reconnection

Angelic Visitors

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