

Mercy Northeast is a bimonthly publication for Sisters of Mercy, Companions in Mercy and Mercy Associates of the Northeast Community. Send comments to: [cvanaken@mercyne.org](mailto:cvanaken@mercyne.org).

The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
 Albany ■ Connecticut ■ New Hampshire ■ Portland ■ Providence ■ Vermont

**Acting in Harmony with all Creation**

*All human institutions, programs and activities must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship. – Thomas Berry*



Sister Eileen O'Connor (NyPPaW)

**“The ‘aha’ moment for me came when I saw the wisdom of Thomas Berry’s choice of the word *story*. There’s nothing childish about the Universe Story; it is foundational to our conscious life.”**

– Sister Patricia Ryan  
 (West Midwest)



**We are pleased to also mail our July newsletter to our benefactors, and hope they will enjoy catching up with our current events.**

Eighty sisters, associates and partners in ministry from every Community of the Institute gathered at St. Joseph’s College in Standish, Maine, from June 21-27, to explore the human-Earth relationship in response to the call of the Institute Direction Statement to “act in harmony with all Creation.” Sponsored by the Mercy Northeast Ecology Ministry, the week included presentations, discussion, prayer and ritual – all in a setting of striking natural beauty on the shores of Sebago Lake. Presenters and facilitators were Miriam Therese MacGillis, OP, founder and director of Genesis Farm in New Jersey; Chris Loughlin, OP, of Crystal Spring Center for Earth Literacy in Massachusetts; and Denise Turcotte, CSC, director of New Dawn Earth Center in Cumberland, Rhode Island.



Denise Turcott, CSC; organizers Mary Pendergast, RSM and Nancy Audette, RSM; Chris Laughlin, OP; and Miriam T. MacGillis, OP

Throughout the week, Miriam led participants into deep reflection on the Universe Story and their place in it. She emphasized that Earth is a unity and there is one community of life. The question for Sisters of Mercy is how we can respond, as Mercy, to the challenges facing the Earth Community now. The encouraging message was that it is not necessary for Mercy by itself to invent ways to address the ecological crisis of the times. Groups throughout the United States and around the world are organizing to address issues, and offer numerous opportunities for collaboration. Sisters of Mercy, drawing on the charisma of Catherine McAuley, can bring a unique perspective to the efforts of any group to work for change.

The week was seminal. The next steps will come through actions that will give concrete form to “acting in harmony with all Creation.” Some suggestions that came out of discussions included incorporating ecological principles into Mercy ministries, conserving land, and making decisions in relation to Earth. More action steps will be forthcoming. Participants came away with much to ponder. **By Sister Anne Vaccarest**

## P B & J ministry

Sisters who live at Mount Saint Mary's in Burlington, Vermont, have made over 800 bagged lunches to distribute to the Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS), the city's local housing and shelter program for the homeless. Peggy Trombley, Mercy Associate and Mount Saint Mary's staff member, started the volunteer project in March when she witnessed the ever-growing needs of hungry and homeless people. Peggy says, "I asked, 'What can we do?' And then we kept it very simple." Each Wednesday, a group of sisters makes cookies and wash apples. On Thursday, another shift makes and wraps peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, packs the lunches and delivers 80 meals to the shelter.

"The staff at COTS all holler, 'Peanut butter and jelly!' when we arrive," Peggy laughs. Participation in this project reaches beyond the sisters – associates, friends and businesses donate all of the ingredients necessary to make and pack the lunches. While busy making sandwiches, the sisters express gratitude for the donors. "All it costs us is a little time," adds Peggy. **By Trish Sweeney**



Sister Gladys Kinville, left, and Sister Theresa Malbourn make sandwiches for clients of COTS, a housing and shelter program for the homeless people

## Leadership Team Message

With the maturing of summer, we have reason to celebrate several events that give us joy in their growth.

We, the Sisters of Mercy – Northeast Community, are beginning our fourth year. At a recent gathering in Windham attended by about 100 sisters, the sounds of joyous greetings created an energy that permeated the day. Recognizing one another from every corner of the Northeast was a testimony to our coming together in spirit and love, and a movement far beyond our need to care for business only.

On July 1, 2009, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Caribbean, Central America and South America Community – our sisters and associates in Argentina, Belize, Chile, Honduras, Guatemala, Guyana, Panama, and Peru – will conclude a long journey toward the goal of forming the CCASA Community. With this merger, CCASA will join with the Mid-Atlantic, South Central, New York Pennsylvania and Pacific West, West Midwest, and Northeast Communities to complete the reconfiguration of our Institute. This momentous event should encourage us all to celebrate our diversity, embracing the 11 countries and one territory where our sisters and associates give life and energy to the mission and values of Mercy and the legacy of Catherine McAuley. This outcome was probably beyond Catherine's imagination when she founded the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin in 1831. However, her vision to serve poor, sick and uneducated persons, particularly women and children, continues with new life and energy, and we are all part of this story.

These last several months have also been filled with meetings and celebrations of other sorts. The Northeast Community Leadership Team has traveled throughout the Northeast to meet with members regarding finances, to participate in Mercy Circles, and to attend a variety of events for our sponsored ministries. Using telephone conferencing, we have extended our reach to members who live outside the northeast or who are unable to attend meetings because of their schedules. We also attended the Institute Leadership Conference (ILC) meeting hosted by the West Midwest Community at Mercy Center in Auburn, California, in early May. Ongoing communication with ILC members has been facilitated by using WebEx, a combination of video and telephone communications. These methods are both economical and efficient and we seem to be mastering their use.

Let us hold one another in prayer and gentle thoughts as we ponder all that the past three years have held for us, and anticipate our March 2010 Assembly.

Enjoy the summer months and the renewal of spirit generated by these lovely days.

Ellen, Eileen, Marie, Maureen, Michele and Kathleen

## 2009-10 Northeast Mercy Ministry Fund Grants

The Northeast Ministry Fund Council is happy to announce the 2009-2010 Northeast Ministry and Educational Assistance Awards. The purpose of the fund is to support ministries in which Sisters of Mercy of the Northeast Community serve persons who are materially poor. This year was a particular challenge because there was a 30 percent increase in requests. A total of \$400,000 has been awarded as follows:

### Educational Assistance Awards – for 33 students

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Academy of Our Lady of Mercy, Luralton Hall, Milford, CT | Mercy High School, Middletown, CT                |
| Bishop Maginn High School, Albany, NY                    | Mt. St. Mary Academy, Manchester, NH             |
| Catholic Central High School, Troy, NY                   | Saint Joseph College, West Hartford, CT          |
| College of Saint Mary, Omaha, NE                         | Saint Josephs College, Standish, ME              |
| Mater Christi School, Burlington, VT                     | Woodlawn Catholic Regional School, Pawtucket, RI |

### Ministry Awards

Academy of Our Lady of Mercy, Luralton Hall, *The Summer Academy*, Milford, CT  
Casa Corazon de la Misericordia, *Twenty-four Hour Complete Health Care Program*, San Pedro Sula, Honduras  
Catholic Charities West Virginia, *Linking Inmate Families Together*, Eckman, WV  
Clare Nsenga Foundation, *The Clare Nsenga Health Centre Outreach Project*, Kisoro District, Uganda  
Community of Vermont Elders, *Supporting Caregivers, Improving Care*, Montpelier, VT  
Flowing River Mercy Place, *Empowering the Gospel Message within Penobscot Culture*, Indian Island, ME  
Hospice St. Joseph, *Maternal Child Healthcare Program*, Port au Prince, Haiti  
Institute for Spiritual Development, *Project Transition*, Burlington, VT  
Joseph's House, *Catherine's Circle*, Burlington, VT  
Mater Christi School, *Before and/After-School Care*, Burlington, VT  
McAuley Corp., McAuley House, *Rental and Prescription Assistance Programs*, Providence, RI  
McAuley Corp., McAuley Village, *Housing Assistance & Parenting Program*, Providence, RI  
McAuley Corp., *Ward-Robe Operating Support*, Central Falls, RI  
Mercy Center, *School of Spirituality Scholarship Fund*, Madison, CT  
Mercy Connections, Inc, *Strengthening Connections*, Burlington, VT  
Mercy Housing and Shelter Corp., *Confronting Homelessness through Meeting Basic Needs*, Hartford, CT  
Mercy Northeast Ecology Ministry, *To Act in Harmony with all Creation*, Pawtucket, RI  
New Dawn Earth Center, *Heartbeats of Earth for the Young and Young at Heart*, Cumberland, RI  
Opportunities, Inc., *Power Path Program*, Burlington, VT  
Sophia Academy, *Social Justice Mission*, Providence, RI  
St. Mary Academy-Bay View, *Summer Ramp Up Program*, Riverside, RI  
St. Mary Home, Inc., *Lifetime Learning, Living and Growing Program*, West Hartford, CT  
St. Patrick School, *Urban Aftercare Program*, Providence, RI  
St. Vincent's Home, *Life Skills Program*, Fall River, MA  
Vermont Haiti Project, *L'eau D'Espoir (the water of hope)*, South Burlington, VT  
Vermont Interfaith Action, *Yes, In My Back Yard*, Burlington, VT  
The Family Outreach Center, Inc., *A Helping Hand*, Providence, RI  
The Way Home, *Linking Multi-Cultural Resources to Empower Low Income Women & their Families*, Manchester, NH

## Community takes corporate stand on water

The Northeast Community overwhelmingly approved a corporate stand on water in May. The next task is to use our corporate stand for the good of Earth, ourselves and future generations.

■ The city of Wells, Maine, recently sold the right to use the municipal water supply there to Poland Spring, a subsidiary of Nestlé. This sale jeopardizes the city's long-term water supply, threatens to add scores of bottles to landfills, and promises pollution from the transportation of the bottled water. Our sisters in Maine have written letters to the editor of the *Portland Press Herald* and are working in alliance with other environmental groups to have the town board revisit their decision.

■ Sisters of Mercy in Panama are fighting a David and Goliath battle with the developers of a hydroelectric power plant. The plant will be built in the jungle on land inhabited by indigenous people. These people will be displaced and their source of food, water and transportation will be destroyed or irreparably altered. **The electricity generated at the power plant will be transported across Central America, through Mexico and Arizona for use in Las Vegas, Nevada.**

We are in solidarity with our sisters in Panama as they work to uphold the right of the indigenous people with whom they share their lives. **By Sister Kathleen Pritty**

## Jane Gerety, RSM assumes leadership of Salve Regina University, Newport, RI



Sister Jane Gerety (South Central) became the seventh president of Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island, on July 1. Board of trustees chairman Joseph R. DiStefano, in announcing Jane's appointment, said that she was the "perfect choice . . . to lead Salve Regina University into its next phase of growth as a quality liberal arts institution founded on the principles of truth, justice and mercy."

Jane brings a rich variety of academic and administrative experiences to her new position. Before coming to Salve Regina, she was executive board officer for Saint Joseph's Health System in Atlanta, Georgia. She has been involved in healthcare since 1992, when she joined Saint Joseph's as senior vice president, sponsorship and corporate compliance officer.

Jane has served as academic dean of Carlow College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she was also associate professor of English, director of the Public Leadership Program and a learning skills specialist. She earned a bachelor's degree in French from Mount Saint Agnes College in Baltimore, Maryland, a master's degree in French from Middlebury College in Vermont, and a doctorate in English from the University of Michigan. She has also taught at the junior high and high school levels. She has been a member of Salve Regina's board of trustees since 1995.

When asked about her desire to serve as the university's president, Jane said, "I believe deeply in the mission of Salve Regina University and its commitment to excellence as an academic institution." She described it as a place where ideas and values are of equal importance. "I look forward to being part of the academic community and to working with Salve Regina students, faculty and staff as we face a future that I believe is full of hope." Not shying away from the obvious challenges of higher education during these difficult economic times, Jane pledged her commitment to "maintain Salve Regina's excellence as an academic institution in terms of the quality of students that are accepted and the programs that are offered."

### MERCY

### Northeast

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Send comments to: [cvanaken@mercynone.org](mailto:cvanaken@mercynone.org).

## Community's House of Mercy in Hartford, CT

One of the 1999 Chapter Acts requested the Institute to consider forming Houses of Mercy to resemble the first House of Mercy established in 1831 by Catherine McAuley on Baggott Street, Dublin, Ireland. This concept of returning to the heart of Catherine's work – living in solidarity with individuals who are in need – drew Sisters Jean Carroll and Nancy (Nan) McNamara, who both found themselves in a position for a ministry change.

More than a year and a couple of prospective sites slipped away before the House of Mercy in Connecticut opened in December 2002, at 102 Putnam Street, in Hartford. Sister Sheila Carney, a member of the Institute Leadership Team at that time, blessed the house at a ritual on January 8, 2003.

The Institute is a financial sponsor for the second and third floors of the three-story structure owned by St. Anne-Immaculate Conception Parish. Jean and Nan live on the second floor and guests for the House of Mercy live on the third floor. The first floor has been used for individuals connected with the parish – a priest and brother; parish custodian; and three sisters from Mexico.

Jean and Nan weren't sure who the first House of Mercy resident would be, but they learned early on to be flexible and open to the Spirit. It was mid-January when Sister Pat McKeon brought three women from Mercy Housing and Shelter, where residents were sleeping in the dining room because of overcrowding that bitter cold winter. Since then, the door continues to open in welcome to one resident after another.

Residents may come from prison or a shelter, or find themselves in need because of medical bills or a bank foreclosure, but the one thing they have in common is the need for a little time to get back on their feet.

Residents pay what they can in rent and curtail their stay to approximately one year. Jean and Nan help them in any way they can. Maybe it's assistance with a resume; maybe it's patient listening or gentle networking for services.

From the beginning, Jean and Nan considered themselves a part of the neighborhood, not just detached visitors. They were instrumental in getting their street named a "Pride Block Street" and in obtaining a grant to plant trees on their street. Both teach English to adults connected with Jubilee House and Notre Dame Learning Center, and all of their students are from other countries.

The current House of Mercy resident is Houria Chelali and her teenage daughter, Sarah, who attends the local community college. Houria is from Algeria and is a Muslim by tradition. She has been in the U.S. for seven years and a U.S. citizen for two years. "I always wanted to come here," Houria said, "but it seemed so far away, it could have been the moon."

Jean and Nan are grateful to the Institute, the Community and the individual sisters and associates who have made their ministry possible. They speak with one voice when they say, "It has been a grace to meet these people. They have enriched our lives. We never thought our retirement years would be so interesting and enjoyable."

**By Chloe Van Aken**



Sisters Jean Carroll, left, and Nancy (Nan) McNamara at their House of Mercy

### Mary Pendergast, RSM, is ecology coordinator



Sister Mary Pendergast has traded her kindergarten and special education teacher hat for a new ministry cap – Mercy Northeast

Ecology Initiatives Coordinator.

Mary's list of Earth-centered activities is impressive. It includes being on the coordinating committees for the Community-wide Mercy Circles land preservation presentation, and the Institute-wide Mercy Ecology gathering in Maine, June 21-27. She coordinates the Earth Committee in Providence, Rhode Island; writes for *Green Page*; and sings on Carolyn McDade recordings.

Congratulations, Mary. The Northeast Community may be your largest classroom yet.

## Springtime at Frances Warde Convent, Portland, ME

Rivers were flowing. Trees were sprouting. Flowers were in bloom. Five young girls in 1946 decided to celebrate their elderwood as Sisters of Mercy.

On April 23, 2009, still young at heart and fully alive, all knew it was springtime at Frances Warde Convent in Portland, Maine.

A toast to our former Mother General, appropriate career gifts, and a luncheon served with love and laughter commemorated an experience filled with memories, achievement and jubilation.

Where are we today? Daily, we praise the Lord and give thanks for so many blessings. Hopefully, we are carrying out the ministry for which we were created and called. Alleluia!



From left, Sisters Elizabeth Kilbride, Claudia Barbre, Mary Denis Schwartz (former Mother General), Mary Anastasia Skwara, Mary Gemma Connelly

Visit our new  
web site at  
[www.mercyne.org](http://www.mercyne.org).

## Extended justice team meets in Panama

The Extended Justice Team, the Institute Leadership Team liaisons and the Institute Justice Team met in Panama June 1-8. Participants were treated to visits to the ministries of our sisters there, where there was an opportunity to see the incredible work they are doing against huge odds. I couldn't help but think of Catherine's statement: "It commenced with two." The seven sisters, six of whom are native Panamanians, live in three parts of the country. Sisters Mercedes and Angelina reside in Panama City; Sisters Dina and Barbara live in Colon; and three live in the mountainous areas from which two of them go into the jungle to minister with the indigenous people. The jungle areas where Sisters Nevis and Edit travel are so remote that there are no roads; they walk, leading a horse packed with supplies. They live among the people for approximately two weeks at a time and then return home for the next week or so to the village where they live with Sister Tita. The sisters in the cities work primarily with women and children, providing education, skill development and child care. They offer spiritual care at nursing homes and do parish outreach and visitation. Sister Barbara, a native of Brooklyn, New York, walked justice team members through a slum, located across the street from their center. Each building accommodates about 20 families. Typically, an entire family lives in one room without running water; the water spigot is half a block away, as are the toilets and a shower. *Yes, one shower!* A small room at the end of the building has running water and serves as a common kitchen/cooking area. The gutters in the slum are rivulets of sewage; barefoot children blithely hop across them. The smell is unimaginable, exacerbated by the 90-degree heat and humidity. In the U.S., animals would not be permitted to live in such conditions.

Here you will find Mercy providing education and basic skills to the women and day care for their children. What an inspiration to everyone who visited the center in Colon!

This is a tiny glimpse into lives of those who are poor in Panama; lives enriched, given dignity and hope by the Sisters of Mercy who minister among them. **By Sister Kathleen Pritty, Northeast Community Justice Coordinator**



Sister Patricia Pora shows an interest in a young student's work at Our Lady of Fatima parish center, Panama City

## Seven women take a closer look at Mercy

*Come and experience Mercy for a week.* That was the Mercy Challenge offered to women across the United States to join vocation ministers and share the Mercy life of prayer, community and service. Seven women answered the invitation. Along with the five vocation ministers, the women spent the majority of their time at Loaves and Fishes, a program run by Sister Libby Fernandez in Sacramento, California. During that time, they did everything from serving meals to washing feet.

Amanda Carrier from Connecticut shared her experience at Mercy Challenge with her friends on Facebook. She filled them in daily about her experiences as she lived the life of a Sister of Mercy for the week. What better way to show you what it meant for Mandy and the women there, than to use their own words. Here are some comments from Mandy's Facebook.

- *The thing that I remember the most about my week in Sacramento is the people. They were in a tough situation to say the least – marginalized and cast out of society. Yet the hope that you could see in them, and in the community at Loaves and Fishes, made those people who were only in my life for a week stay with me even after journeying over 3,000 miles home.*
- *We go off to a place called Loaves and Fishes every morning and work from 9-3. It's an awesome place and you should all Google it because I know I can't describe it and do it justice. They provide so many services for the innumerable homeless and poor of Sacramento.*
- *On Monday I worked the front desk at Mary House, a center for women where they can have a mail box, receive counseling, showers, and toiletries and just have a place to be. I met so many women struggling so hard to get on their feet despite so many barriers and roadblocks in their lives.*

Mandy, along with the other women at Mercy Challenge, also had an opportunity to meet many of the Sisters of Mercy who live and work in California. They heard about the story of Sister Baptist Russell, the first Sister of Mercy there, and met the modern day women of Mercy who are still changing the lives of the people in California. As Frances Warde said in one of her letters: *What a joy it is to be a Sister of Mercy.* The women who accepted the Mercy Challenge were able to experience that joy for a week.

**By Sister Dale Jarvis, Northeast Community Vocation Minister**



Mandy Carrier, left, with Sister Karen Donahue at Mercy Challenge in California

## Ann McGovern, RSM joins vocation team



On July 1, Sister Ann McGovern began a full-time, three-year appointment to the Northeast Community's New Mem-

bership Team. Ann joins two other team members – Sisters Elaine Deasy and Dale Jarvis.

Anne says, "I am drawn to this ministry because of my love for the Sisters of Mercy, for religious life, for telling Catherine McAuley's story, for promoting discernment – a valuable life skill – and for inviting women to hear and follow God's invitation to join us as sisters, associates, companions, or perhaps in some other way in our many works of Mercy."

Ann's schedule already includes significant meetings into January of 2010. She will meet with Carol Mucha, Institute New Membership Office, for orientation on July 17; she will attend the National Religious Formation Conference orientation program for new vocation directors in Chicago, Illinois, the week of July 20, followed by a workshop entitled, *Entering Into and Understanding the Young Adult World*, with Father Chris Robinson, CM. In January, she will participate in a workshop, *The Heart of Multiculturalism*, at the Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC) in San Antonio, Texas.

Ann resides in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and can be reached at [amcgovern@mercyne.org](mailto:amcgovern@mercyne.org).

## Interest in Mercy Beyond Borders circles the globe

When it comes to acts of inspiration, you just never know how far they might go. This story of inspired action travels from California to Vermont, and leads ultimately to change in the lives of impoverished and displaced women in the southern Sudan.

The chain of inspiration began when Sister Marilyn Lacey of Burlingame, California, flew to Baltimore to give a short presentation about her ministry, Mercy Beyond Borders, to a conference of Mercy Associate directors from across the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Marilyn vividly explained the plight of the displaced people who exist in life-threatening poverty in the southern Sudan, and how her ministry works with women and girls so they may better their lives for themselves and their families.

In the audience were Associate Debby Patterson and Sister Ruth Ravey, co-directors of Northeast Association for the Vermont area. "I was struck with how closely Mercy Beyond Borders' work reflects Mercy founder Catherine McAuley's original mission," says Debby. "By asking the women who suffer from extreme poverty what they needed, the ministry became their partner by starting a school for young girls as well as establishing the Bicycle Project which provides women with something so simple and so necessary."

At the end of her talk, Marilyn asked the associate directors to imagine what over 3,000 associates from across the Institute could accomplish if each raised \$100 for the cause.



Steve Randolph gets a good luck kiss before racing for over \$3,000 for Mercy Beyond Borders in the Vermont City Marathon

Ruth and Debby brought this challenge home with them to Vermont. "Before, I'd felt overwhelmed by the needs of the people in the Sudan, especially when hearing about Darfur. This seemed like something we could do. I saw it not so much as fundraising, but how we, as a corporate body, could really make a difference," says Debby. Ruth presented the idea of raising funds for Mercy Beyond Borders to their group of associates and contact sisters and they readily took up the cause.

One of the many associates to rise to the challenge was Jean Markey-Duncan. Debby says, "Her enthusiasm and belief in this ministry was contagious." By e-mailing her friends and family about the ministry, she raised \$485. Other associates used creative fundraising techniques such as asking for a donation in lieu of Christmas gifts. In total, the group of associates raised \$2,000 for Mercy Beyond Borders during Advent and Lent. But the story doesn't end there.

Steve Randolph of Connecticut, brother-in-law of Jean, was so inspired by her request for support

that he decided to raise funds for Mercy Beyond Borders by running in the Vermont City Marathon. After he ran a 3-hour 35-minute race, Steve sent a letter of thanks to his friends and sponsors. "I'm glad that I could inspire you to inspire me," he wrote. "It was a nice circle. I raised a total of \$3,156 for MBB.... Thank you from the bottom of my heart and soles."

From California to Maryland to Vermont then Connecticut and back to Vermont, this chain of inspiration raised over \$5,000 for women and girls in the southern Sudan. When asked to comment on the results of this endeavor, Jean summed it up nicely: "The bigger story follows a theme that I believe in and that is, that we all make a difference every day. Hopefully we are choosing to make a positive difference. I use the quotation from Mahatma Gandhi as my mantra: 'Almost anything that you do will seem insignificant, but it is important that you still do it.'"

**By Trish Sweeney**

## Legacy commissioning ensures mission's future

In June, Holy Cross Hospital in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, held a Commissioning Ceremony for its first group of Legacy Leaders. The group of 20 women and men completed the two-year Legacy Institute designed in collaboration with Saint Thomas University to educate spiritually mature, effective and competent associates as leaders to carry Holy Cross Hospital's rich Catholic tradition of healing the whole person into the future.

For two years, these leaders participated in an academic and experiential learning process which included the foundations of Catholic thought, the heritage of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy, Catholic social teachings and the ethical and religious directives for healthcare institutions.

The Legacy Leaders also had opportunities to participate in faith sharing groups, an annual retreat,



Sister Rita Levasseur speaks at Commissioning Ceremony

theological reflection and value-based decision making.

Within the commissioning ritual each Legacy Leader pledged to carry on the Catholic heritage which is the foundation of the healthcare ministry of Holy Cross Hospital, and to uphold the Mercy tradition of caring for the sick with Christ-like compassion as envisioned by Catherine McAuley, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy.



John C. Johnson commissions Cynthia Leone as Legacy Leader

In the name of the Holy Cross Hospital community, John C. Johnson, president and CEO, commissioned the Legacy Leaders.

Another group of Holy Cross associates is in its second year of the Legacy Institute and a new group will begin the program in the fall.

Submitted by: Sister Margaret Crowley

Photo credit: Robert Mayer

## Elizabeth Dovidio, RSM; Martha and Tom White feted by OLMLC

The Annual Celebration of Life at Our Lady of Mercy Life Center on May 20 was by far the loveliest evening that month. The 10th Annual Celebration of Life honored three people: Sister Elizabeth Dovidio, and Tom and Martha White.

Elizabeth was recognized for establishing the culture of compassion, excellence and mercy OLMLC is known for today. She also received a New York State Legislative Resolution from Senator Breslin to mark the occasion.

Tom and Martha received recognition for being compassionate to the residents at OLMLC, for dedicating their time and talent, and for treating others with respect and kindness.

The awards were given in the chapel, and the festivities continued in the courtyard with fresh air and friendship.



Sister Elizabeth Dovidio with her father, Rocco



Tom and Martha White

## Sisters honored in Alaska for imparting Mercy Charism

In late spring, when **Sisters Kathleen O'Hara and Joyce Ross** left their ministries in Alaska, they were bid farewell with an outpouring of love and gratitude for their many years of service there.

Kathleen and Joyce left Albany, New York, in August 1972 to join three other Sisters of Mercy from Albany – Sisters Arlene Boyd, Mark Pennock and Eleanor Hine – to work as Directors of Religious Education (DRE) in the Archdiocese of Anchorage. (Arlene and Patricia Collins dedicated the majority of their ministry years in Anchorage, until health issues required their return to Albany within the past couple of years.)

In 1979, Sister Joan Barina, a Medical Mission Sister, and Joyce worked as DREs for all of the parishes on the Kenai Peninsula. The parishes were located in Kenai, Soldotna, Homer, Seward, Cooper Landing, Ninilchik and Seldovia. In 1988, they became the administrators at Our Lady of Angels Church, the only parish in Kenai. At that time, a traveling priest visited the parish every other week and Joyce and Joan were called to baptize and conduct Eucharist and funeral services.

To address numerous requests for food and clothing, they opened Clothes Quarters and collaborated with the Lutheran and Methodist churches in Soldotna. Joyce says that they kept prices low over the years, and oftentimes charged nothing.

Fundraisers at Christmastime and *Mardi Gras* were instrumental in supporting annual youth ministry trips to native villages for Vacation Bible School. This year, Joyce and Joan also helped to prepare children



A tender moment – Sisters Joan Barina, MMS, left, and Joyce Ross, RSM, wear shawls made by the children at Our Lady of Angels Parish in Kenai to celebrate their 30 years of service.

Photo: Courtesy of the *Catholic Anchor*

in the village of Marshall for First Communion and Confirmation.

Besides managing the Clothes Quarters, they were also involved with Love, Inc., the Christian clearinghouse for community service; the St. Vincent de Paul Society; prison ministry; hospital visitation; and day-to-day parish responsibilities.

Parishioners expressed their gratitude to Joyce and Joan for empowering them to build a community that will go on. "They started so much outreach and have recast the role of the church as one of service and loving inclusion," said parishioner Barbara Christian.



A mini-reunion in Albany, New York, of sisters with an "Alaskan Connection" – from left, standing, Kathleen O'Hara, Dianne Carlson, Arlene Boyd; seated, Carol Ann Aldrich, who continues to minister in Homer; and Patricia Collins

After 30 years of living and working together they embarked on another adventure in mid-June by driving cross-country to visit family and friends on their way back to their religious orders.



In 1972, Kathleen O'Hara began as a DRE for Holy Family Cathedral in Anchorage. She often traveled with Sister Arlene Boyd on weekends to set up religious education programs in Valdez and Cordova.

Kathleen's background in education, administration, counseling and theology kept her in demand, and, by the end of her first year in Alaska, Archbishop Ryan appointed her the head of the Office of Family Life for the Archdiocese. While in that position, she established Pre-Cana and Marriage Encounter programs.

In 1983, Kathleen became the principal of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School, and later became a pastoral associate at St. Benedict's Church. In 1990, she went to Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish as administrator. Kathleen's final ministry in Anchorage was at Horizon House, an assisted living facility for Providence Hospital. As mission leader and spiritual care provider, she created an atmosphere of compassion, respect and hospitality.

Kathleen was instrumental in designing and raising funds for the Horizon House chapel, which was dedicated this past January.

Kathleen currently resides in Albany and can be reached at 518-437-3056.

Kathleen's and Joyce's ministries in Alaska differ only in *where* they served, not in *how* they served – centered in God. **By Chloe Van Aken**

## Sister M. Benigna Viens honored with posthumous award

Sister Mary Benigna Viens, who died in 1997, was honored posthumously with the Lorraine Carroll Award, presented by the Literacy Volunteers of Bangor (Maine) in recognition of her contributions as co-founder of the program. Sister Mary Denis Schwartz accepted the award on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy at the organization's 40th Anniversary Celebration, June 2, 2009.

Sister Benigna and co-founder Agnes Beckwith started the Literacy Volunteers program in Bangor in 1969. They pioneered the development of a program that today, 40 years later, continues to serve people throughout the state of Maine.

In 1969, the Bangor unit of Church Women United, in which both women were active, sponsored Sister Benigna and Agnes Beckwith to participate in leadership training for literacy volunteers at the national headquarters of Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) in Syracuse, New York. The ecumenical duo – a Sister of Mercy and a devoted member of the Baptist Church – established the pilot program in the Bangor area, the first state affiliate of LVA.

Literacy Volunteers of Bangor (LV-Bangor) continues to thrive today. The program helps adults who want to improve their reading, writing, and/or English-speaking abilities. It seeks to empower them and break the cycle of low literacy within their homes so that their children may have different and better opportunities. LV-Bangor also recruits and trains volunteer teachers.

The seeds planted by Sister Benigna and Agnes Beckwith have touched the lives of thousands of people in Maine through Literacy

Volunteers of Bangor, which serves more than 200 adult learners in the greater Bangor community and 13 other affiliates in the state.

In accepting the posthumous award, Sister Mary Denis Schwartz said that Sister Benigna “was totally dedicated to Literacy Volunteers.... It was her conviction that if a person could read, and understand what the words meant, there was no limit to what could be accomplished.... In spite of the loss of sight she experienced during her later years, her record of service and accom-

plishment is one of which each Sister of Mercy is justly proud.”

By Sister Anne Vaccarest



Sister Mary Denis Schwartz accepts the award to Sister Mary Benigna Viens at the celebration on June 2.



**CIRCLES OF MERCY – Members of the Northeast Community Leadership Team, Sisters Kathleen Turley, left, and President Ellen Kurtz, accepted the 2009 Hope and Hospitality Award in the name of the Community at the annual *A Taste of Mercy* event sponsored by Circles of Mercy, Rensselaer, New York. The celebration, held on June 11 at Casey's Banquet House, honored the service of the Sisters of Mercy since 1863, when the first convent of Mercy was established in Rensselaer.**

## Martha O'Brien, RSM displays art in Institute gallery

Sister Martha O'Brien is the most current artist to have her work displayed in the Institute's Gallery in Silver Spring, Maryland. Mercy artists are invited to showcase their work there to inspire those who visit the Institute office and to show the creativity and diversity of talent which exists within the Institute.

Frequently, artwork from the Gallery is also featured on the back cover of *Viva! Mercy*, the Institute's bi-monthly magazine.

If you are interested in displaying your art in the Gallery, contact Sister Patricia Kenny at [pkenny@sistersofmercy.org](mailto:pkenny@sistersofmercy.org); or 301-587-0423.



Sister Martha O'Brien from Williston, Vermont, stands for a picture with one of her paintings while visiting the Institute Gallery in May

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## Mercy history honored in Rensselaer, NY

The Sisters of Mercy in the Albany Diocese were honored at a liturgy at St. John the Evangelist Church in Rensselaer, New York, on June 20. The liturgy marked the closing of the Convent of Mercy there. Bishop Hubbard recounted the importance of the sisters' presence in Rensselaer with a brief history of the arrival in 1863 of four sisters from New York City, to the spread of Mercy throughout the diocese.



After the liturgy honoring the Mercy presence in Rensselaer, New York, from left, Sister Jane Somerville, Sister Phyllis Herbert, Bishop Howard Hubbard and Sister Kathleen Turley, CLT

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