God loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of God’s unfailing love.
Psalm 33:5

Dear Friends,

There seems to be a collective sigh of relief as this remarkable year 2020 comes to an end. Throughout this year, we have grieved the loss of normalcy and connection, especially for our vulnerable populations whose daily lives have been most affected. We have grieved for those who have been personally touched by the pandemic, physically, emotionally, or financially, but we also have been pressed to accept our current reality and to decide how to move forward. The cover of this issue reflects one of the changes brought by the pandemic – our increased reliance on technology for connection with one another – and yet also reflects the constancy of God’s unfailing love and gift of abundance in nature. God’s love and the beauty of nature help to keep us grounded during this challenging year.

However, the start of a new year always fills us with promise and hope, and 2021 is no different. There is the promise of a vaccine to help end this pandemic, and the hope of recovery and healing for us all. In 2021, we look forward to continuing to plan for the future of our mission and ministries. In remaining faithful to our long history in education and justice work, we are exploring ways in which we can collaborate with current and new community partners in Houston to help ensure a more just and equitable education system for all our children, who, after all, will lead and determine the future of Houston in the coming years.

This issue of the Good News includes our annual report of gifts to our mission and ministries. We can never thank you enough for your generous support, and we know that you are instrumental in helping us carry on our mission today and tomorrow. Truly, your friendship is one of our community’s greatest blessings. You remain in our prayers as we continue to hold you in our hearts with love and gratitude. May God continue to bless you, heal you, and fill you with light.

With love and in prayer,

Donna M. Pollard, O.P.
Prioress

Sisters continue to gather online via Zoom, while nature continues to offer her hope generously on our Motherhouse grounds amidst a pandemic.

We gratefully acknowledge all those who contributed to this issue:

Sr. Eleanor Cresap, OP
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Study & Prayer
Ministry Report
Community
Annual Report of Gifts
FALL PRAYER

We miss gathering for Mass and prayer with our friends in the community while our Motherhouse grounds remain closed but have kept our prayer ministry alive through private, online, and social distancing services. In September, we remembered the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, the theme of which was Forced like Jesus Christ to Flee. This year’s theme focused on the pastoral care of displaced persons. Pope Francis urged us to learn about and listen to the reality of internally displaced people so that we may better understand, serve, and reconcile with the migrant community. We also continue to pray for the migrant and refugee families held in detention here in our country and for the more than 500 children that may never be reunited with their families.

During September we celebrated the Season of Creation 2020. The theme, Jubilee for the Earth, is rooted in Holy Wisdom that there must exist a just and sustainable balance among social, economic, and ecological realities. When one part of the Earth community is stressed, every part is affected. In 2020, the novel coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated this reality on a global scale. The theme of Jubilee brings together the need for a prophetic voice on climate injustice and actions for the restoration of Earth. The theme affirms the need for equality, justice, and sustainability and calls for a transition to sustainable economies.

We did not celebrate publicly our annual Labyrinth of Remembrance and Thanksgiving event for All Saints and...
All Souls Day. However, prayer and other materials were available at the Villa, and our sisters placed the names of deceased loved ones in a bowl in the chapel for November prayer.

On November 15th, we observed a time of prayer and reflection on the fourth annual World Day of the Poor. Pope Francis first established the World Day of the Poor in 2016, appealing to us that “The poor are not a problem: they are a resource from which to draw as we strive to accept and practice in our lives the essence of the Gospel.” This year’s theme, inspired by the book of Sirach, was Stretch Forth Your Hand to the Poor. Pope Francis observed that prayer to God and solidarity with the poor and suffering are inseparable. Observance of this day reminds us that we have a responsibility for each other and for the world and that we are called to carry the burdens of the weakest and most in need.

PEACEFUL ELECTIONS

During the weeks leading up to the election, our sisters joined hundreds of communities of religious women to pray for peace and for all participants in the election process, especially for those who are victims of racism. At the encouragement of the Leadership Council of Women Religious, sisters reflected on how the ideals of democracy are intertwined with the principles of our faith. On the morning of election day, our sisters, either remotely or while social distancing at the Villa, shared an hour of prayer with the Rosary, time for silent reflection and read A Prayer for Leadership, written by Joan Chittister, osb, a passage of which is below.

Give us, O God, leaders whose hearts are large enough to match the breadth of our own souls and give us souls strong enough to follow leaders of vision and wisdom.

In seeking a leader, let us seek more than development for ourselves—though development we hope for—more than security for our own land—though security we need—more than satisfaction for our wants—though many things we desire.
The Good News

FROM THE GARDEN

After twenty-five years of regular gardening with our volunteers, who could have imagined that on March 15 our garden leader, Pilar Hernandez, would ask the group not to come due to COVID-19! Whereas we thought this step would be short-term, it is still in place after eight months. Yes, for eight months, the garden has been tended weekly by two gardeners!

Undaunted, we have planted and harvested spring, summer, and fall. Produce total at mid-year was 803 pounds, and our regular donations to Star of Hope continue. Manna House, to which we also donate produce, closed due to COVID-19. However, thanks to the invitation of Ava Plummer, friend and Manna House volunteer, we have been able to continue our Third Ward support by participating in monthly food distributions at St. James Episcopal Church on Southmore Boulevard.

Mid-July was very special as Pilar undertook installation of a low-volume irrigation drip system. After an Urban Harvest class on this system, Israeli in historical concept and a conservative use of water, Pilar planned and accomplished an installation here. The system is working well for us, and we are grateful for this fine beginning of the garden’s twenty-sixth year!

Yes, the garden has prospered. We would like to say with no COVID ill effects, but unfortunately that is not the case. With eateries closed in the spring, the underground critters rampaged through our entire sweet potato crop – all four lanes! New and mysterious munching is now threatening recently planted broccoli and cauliflower. We have sonar repellers in place and the use of cages and nocturnal cameras — hoping the best!

Garden produce in 2020 is already over one thousand pounds, but we so long for the weekly return of our garden community.

JUSTICE CONFERENCE

In July, Ceil Roeger, OP and Laura Henderson attended the North American Dominican Justice Promoters conference, entitled The Common Good in a COVID World: The Work of Promoting Justice. The conference was originally scheduled to be held in St. Louis but moved to an online platform in light of the pandemic. Holding the conference remotely via Zoom had its advantages by allowing greater participation of Dominican justice promoters from around the U.S., Canada, and Europe.

Marie Dennis from Pax Christi International opened the conference with an update on Pax Christi’s Nonviolence Initiative. Launched in 2016, the initiative affirms the vision and practice of active nonviolence at the heart of the Catholic Church and is committed to the long-term vocation of healing and reconciling both people and the planet. Representatives from Dominican Sisters International and the Dominican Order to the United Nations reported on justice work being done around the world by the global Dominican Family.
Attendees also examined and strategized how the areas in which they preach and advocate, such as climate justice, migration, human trafficking, economic justice, and racism, intersect and need to be addressed in the midst of COVID-19 to reach the broader community. Participants broke out into small discussion groups throughout the two-day conference to brainstorm action steps for the coming year and decided to connect more frequently via Zoom due to the conference’s success.

THE STRUCTURE OF RACISM

The Center for the Healing of Racism co-sponsored our fall online workshop entitled, Causes & Consequences of Prejudice & Discrimination: A Complete Model, which was presented by Craig Ottenger, PhD. Now retired, Dr. Ottenger taught sociology at the University of Houston, Clear Lake for 35 years.

Dr. Ottenger’s model on the structure of racism shows both the psychological and structural causes and consequences of prejudice and discrimination. These factors link through a complicated process that resists change. Dr. Oettinger discussed these persistent patterns and explored with participants how change is possible. In small group breakout rooms, participants chose whether to share a difficult interaction or misunderstanding between people of different races that they were either a part of, witnessed, or knew of in detail. The groups then discussed how the incident related to the model presented and how their understanding of the model might reduce racially charged conflict or misunderstanding in the future.

After the workshop, several participants wanted to explore how to use the themes presented in the model further. Dr. Ottenger suggested watching Spike Lee’s 1989 movie, Do the Right Thing, and using the model to identify the different aspects of structural and psychological racism. The movie depicts an Italian American pizza joint in a Black neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. Everybody in the neighborhood loves the pizza, yet as structural and psychological factors develop, prejudice and discrimination intensify. Eventually, a racial earthquake erupts in the community, the police intervene, a community member dies while in custody, and the pizza parlor is burned down. As Dr. Ottenger observes, “Good people, good community, great pizza, but it all crumbles to ashes as prejudice and discrimination assert themselves. Sitting in the audience, imagine how you’d like to jump up, stop the action, and intervene.”
COMMUNITY LIFE

All is well on our campus and at the Villa. We continue to be vigilant in safeguarding against the coronavirus by taking temperatures daily, social distancing, wearing masks in common areas, and prohibiting visitors. The restrictions are inconvenient, but the Sisters are resilient, understand the seriousness of the situation, and manage to keep their sense of humor. The Villa's computer lab has been expanded. For convenience, there are now computers for common use on both the second and third floors so that sisters may connect with family and friends through email and video chatting. Exercise continues at the Villa and on campus thanks to our instructor Carrie who teaches class through her YouTube videos. Since face masks are with us for the foreseeable future, sisters and employees now have masks with the Dominican Sisters of Houston logo, as modeled by Sister Barbara White.

We have postponed our annual jubilee ceremony until we can celebrate in person but would like to recognize the year’s jubilarians nonetheless. Celebrating 60 years of religious life are Sisters Josephine Marie Godinich, OP, Mary Laura Rembold, OP, Mary Jean Olsovsky, OP, Barbara Ann Ćernosek, OP, and Mignonne Konecny, OP. Sister Miriam Oliveros, OP is celebrating fifty years of religious life, and Sister Mary Brenda, OP is celebrating twenty-five. We look forward to commemorating their jubilees hopefully next year.
We have successfully held three congregational meetings this summer and fall via Zoom. Our prioress, Sister Donna Pollard led the charge in instructing and encouraging sisters to learn the technology so that we could continue to meet as a community. Sisters at the Villa could choose to participate by viewing the Zoom meetings projected in our community room. Each online meeting went remarkably well and was an opportunity for us to improve our skills for our upcoming meetings in 2021.
DOMINICAN FAMILY

Amid these challenging times, the Dominican Family has not gathered in person but continues to find ways to connect and be involved in justice issues. Via Zoom, the Family gathers for its monthly meetings. Each Family member has been enrolled in the Dominican Charism Initiative, an enriching online series designed to share the charism considering contemporary culture, global reality, and the breadth of Dominican spirituality. At each gathering, members view, reflect upon, and discuss part of a module from the initiative. Topics include the life of Dominic, the call to preach, action and truth, and Dominican prayer and spirituality.

Committees also continue to meet. The communication committee remains busy keeping members connected through its newsletter. The poverty committee continues its meetings and book study. This fall, members formed a new committee with the mission to address the crucial issue of racial injustice through education and action by the Dominican family.

After the death of George Floyd this summer, millions of people around the country and the globe protested his murder and the racist treatment of the Black community by law enforcement. Due to the pandemic, our sisters were unable to join those in the streets seeking justice but continue to pray and work with our community partners for racial justice.
We are truly blessed to have such generous and loyal support from so many donors. Thank you for valuing the mission and ministry of the Dominican Sisters of Houston and for allowing us to carry out successfully our work for the people of God. Your gifts to our Partners in Mission Annual Fund are inspiring and support our sisters’ work. Your loyal support of San Vicente de Paul School in Guatemala helps to better the lives of so many children. And finally, your generosity towards our retired sisters is deeply appreciated. Thank you for honoring them for their many years of service. May God bless you, heal you, and fill you with light.

Thank you!

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We are deeply grateful to these individuals who gave leadership gifts of $500 or more to our Partners in Mission Annual Fund during the August 1, 2019 to July 31, 2020 fiscal year. We are blessed to have their faithful commitment to our mission.

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2019-2020 Gift Report

(Gifts received from August 1, 2019 – July 31, 2020)

Total Giving: $1,143,380.00
Partners in Mission Annual Fund: $542,690.00
Retirement Fund: $385,250.00
Guatemala: $177,400.00
Bequests: $25,640.00
Other: $12,400.00

THE GOOD NEWS | 14
Anna and S. J. Babin
Janie and Randy Babin
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Kathleen and Marc Beishe
Rosie Beniretto
Toni and Tom Blizzard
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Betty and Roy Kerstiens
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Robert Kreymer and Robert Card
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Joe Lachmainer
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Eugene Landry
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Lisa and Matt Lawrence
Colleen and John Lawson
Gil and Jen Lawton
Tung Ngoc Le
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Pauline Liggio
Anita Darlene Lombardo
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Joe Luevano
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Randall Roberts
We hope we have correctly recognized each gift and friend. If we have missed your name or if it is listed incorrectly, please accept our sincere apologies and call the Advancement Office at 713.440.3707.
In November, we helped Sister Raphael Bordages, OP celebrate her 99th birthday! She is pictured here with two of her sisters, Marie and Emily Bordages, OP.

More of nature’s beauty on our Motherhouse grounds
The Dominican Sisters of Houston’s legacy in Catholic education and service is deep rooted, and we continue today to serve and to preach the Gospel. When you name the Dominican Sisters of Houston as a beneficiary of your will, life insurance policy, trust, or retirement plan, you help ensure the future of our mission. If support of our mission and sisters is part of your legacy giving in your will or estate plans, please let us know. We would love to thank you for your generous commitment. If you are considering remembering the sisters as part of your estate planning, please contact us today at 713.440.3707.