

The Good News

SUMMER 2021

A PUBLICATION OF THE DOMINICAN SISTERS OF HOUSTON



THE FOUR PILLARS
of Dominican Life
PRAYER STUDY COMMUNITY MINISTRY

Greetings FROM THE PRIORESS



Prioress, Donna Pollard, OP

Dear Friends,

On the cover of this issue, our sisters are holding a banner proclaiming, “We Have Family in Iraq.” Dominicans in the United States have stood in solidarity with our Dominican sisters and brothers in Iraq since the late 1990s

when then Master of the Order, Timothy Radcliffe, OP, traveled to Iraq and reported the sisters there felt as if even God had forgotten them. In 1999, the first delegation of U.S. Dominicans, Voices for Veritas, visited Iraq at a time when the people had been suffering from the devastating impact of nine years of UN-imposed economic sanctions. Our Sister Jane Abell, OP traveled to Iraq as a member of that first delegation, bringing relief and comfort to displaced Iraqis. Our Sisters Ana Wood, OP and Therese Warden, OP joined subsequent delegations.

In March, Pope Francis traveled to Iraq for his first international trip in more than sixteen months. Before this historic trip, no Pope had ever visited Iraq. After the Pope’s visit, the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena in Iraq published a letter

in which they wrote that Pope Francis’ “presence among us made us live joy and peace beyond our expectations. We and all Iraqi people are not neglected but rather embraced by the whole world in the Pope’s arms.” The sisters reported that Pope Francis prayed with leaders from other Iraqi religious traditions “whose faith is rooted in the One God that Abraham worshiped.” Pope Francis urged religious and political leaders to serve and work for peace for the future of Iraq’s children.

We remain committed to remembering that “We Have Family in Iraq” and pray that Pope Francis’ call for peace and respect for human dignity will be heard, especially during this time of increased unrest and violence. Even if we were not physically present on one of the delegations to Iraq, we journey vicariously with our Dominican and Iraqi brothers and sisters. Being Voices for Veritas means that we are fearless and daring – to speak up and to speak out for what is right. As our sister, Catherine of Siena reminds us, “Preach the truth as if you had a million voices. It is silence that kills the world.”

We continue to hold each of you in prayer and in our hearts and pray that as our country has begun to see relief from the pandemic so may the rest of the world with whom we truly are connected. May God continue to bless you, heal you, and fill you with light.

With love and in prayer,

Donna M. Pollard, O.P.

Donna M. Pollard, OP
Prioress

Thank YOU

We gratefully acknowledge all those who contributed to this issue:

Heidi Clark, Sister Wellbeing	Sr. Carol Mayes, OP
Jacquelynn Conger, St. Pius X	Sr. Miriam Oliveros, OP
Sr. Eleanor Cresap, OP	Mary Perrotti, DF
Sr. Heloise Cruzat, OP	Sr. Donna Pollard, OP
Laura Grove, Archivist	Sr. Ceil Roeger, OP
John Hensley, DF	Sr. Lavergne Schwender, OP
Sr. Wanda Jinks, OP	Anna Sklut, DF
Sr. Lauren Lindee, OP	Kimberly Williams

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Ministry



GUATEMALA

Sr. Miriam Oliveros, OP, head of school at our mission school San Vicente de Paul Bethania, reports that COVID-19 infections remain high in Guatemala. Unfortunately, vaccinations are rolling out slowly, but Sr. Miriam and the teachers received their first dose in May.

The school children are doing well and keeping up with their schoolwork. The children continue to learn at home, but those who need special attention come to school twice a week to work with the teachers. Parents and teachers communicate through WhatsApp, Facebook, and parent-teacher conferences, and parents send teachers photos and videos of their children working at home, as pictured above.

The atmosphere in the school community has always been infused with gratitude, and this past year is no exception. Sr. Miriam commends the parents for doing a great job under difficult circumstances, and parents have appreciated the teachers for being always attentive to their needs, answering questions, and sending and receiving schoolwork. Sr. Miriam is pleased with the students' performance and "grateful for the teachers' good work and their willingness and motivation to continue doing their best for the children and parents."





WHY BLACK LIVES MATTER

In March, on the anniversary of Breonna Taylor’s murder, the Dominican Sisters of Houston hosted a conversation via Zoom on why Black Lives Matter. Brandon Mack, an organizer for Black Lives Matter Houston, spoke about the intent and origins of the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement seeks to validate Black lives in America and arose when, once again, Black lives were invalidated with the murder of Trevon Martin by George Zimmerman. “Black Lives Matter” is a simple, declaratory sentence that should not need justifying or spark controversy. We discussed how our country’s systems and structures were founded to benefit white people and how the violence at the capitol on January 6th of this year was a prime example of that unchecked white privilege.

The conversation touched on topics such as All Lives Matter and defunding the police. Those who coined the slogan All Lives Matter never intended for it to include all people. Rather, the slogan has been used to try to silence the Black community and to dismiss the issues detrimentally affecting Black lives. In response to questions about the movement to defund the police, Brandon asserted that “defund” is exactly the right word. If we do not advocate taking away taxpayer money from the police, then we are sanctioning police violence towards Black and Brown people. Proponents of defunding the police are asking us to be open to a new system and a new culture for public safety.

We discussed activism and how white people can collectively advocate with Black activists. Brandon addressed the difference between being an accomplice versus being an ally. An accomplice is deeply committed and connected with impacted communities and will not walk away when uncomfortable or inconvenienced. White people might have to give up comfort or status to speak out on behalf of Black Lives. Brandon challenged those attending to determine how to check the power of white supremacy and become accomplices with the Black community.

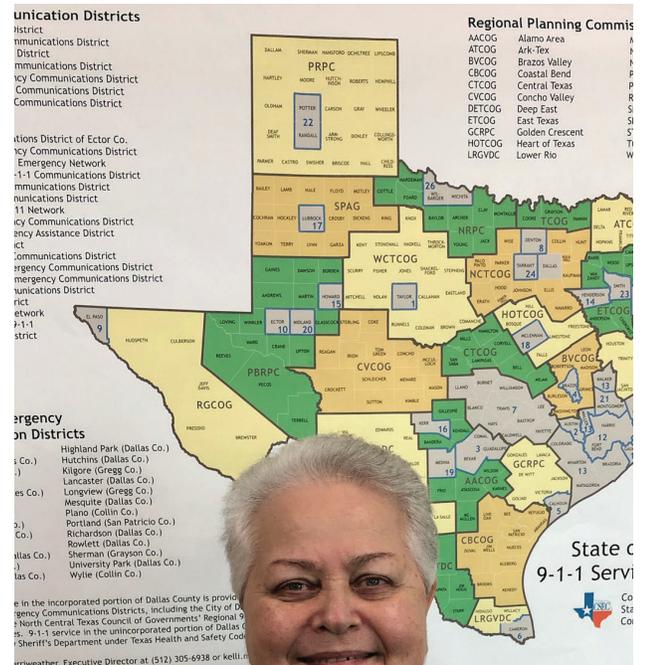
SISTER RETIREMENT

At the end of May, Sr. Lavergne Schwender, OP retired from her ministry as the Executive Director of the Greater Harris County (GHC) 9-1-1 Emergency Network, a position she has held for sixteen years. However, Sr. Lavergne's history with GHC 9-1-1 predates her time serving as executive director.

During her twenty-one years as an attorney in the Harris County Attorney's office, Sr. Lavergne oversaw local elections and ensured they complied with the requirements of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Justice Department. However, she also wrote legislation for the county. In 1983 – 1984, Lavergne's experience in both policy and election oversight converged when she both wrote the legislation and oversaw the election that created the county's emergency communication district, the GHC 9-1-1 Emergency Network.

Reflecting on her time as executive director, Sr. Lavergne remarked, "As you might imagine, an emergency communication district is steeped in telephone technology - not exactly my strong suit. However, more than technology, the executive director must lead the staff into becoming a productive, effective whole. Working with the GHC 9-1-1 staff has been one of the most rewarding efforts of my professional life. Not only has working with them been highly successful, but it has also been joyous. They are a staff I shall long remember."

At Sr. Lavergne's retirement party, a representative from the City of Houston read a proclamation from Mayor Sylvester Turner declaring Monday, May 31, 2021, Lavergne Schwender Day in honor of her work at 9-1-1. While Sr. Lavergne is retired from GHC 9-1-1, she continues to serve her community in numerous ways with both her business and legal experience.



TEACHING AWARD

Each year for the past 15 years, St. Pius X High School has bestowed the McMahon Teaching Chair honor on a teacher who teaches beyond the curriculum and fosters Veritas values in students to prepare them for life beyond the walls of St. Pius X. At the senior awards ceremony in May, Sr. Kelly Biddle, OP received this teaching honor.

Head of School Carmen Armistead described Kelly as a person of character, compassion, and candor, "known for teaching young men and women a challenging curriculum, underscored, always, through a lens of faith...Armed with an exuberant and contagious laugh and profound wisdom, [her] success lies in the ability to generate enthusiasm for her subject and her lessons." During her five-year tenure at St. Pius X, Kelly has captured the minds and hearts of her students and built community by her faithful presence at student activities and school events. Congratulations, Kelly!



Community



DOMINICAN FAMILY

The Dominican Family has met four times via Zoom in 2021. The Leadership Team selected programs that allowed the Family to consider its call to preach lovingly within the signs of the times. Gatherings included a wonderful presentation on *Fratelli Tutti*, the latest encyclical from Pope Francis; a presentation from the poverty committee and The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) on ideas for advocacy around issues such as COVID-19 and healthcare, police reform, education, immigration and more; and a presentation by the racial justice committee on systemic racism and its devastating impact on the Black community. At the March gathering, Megan Phelps Roper spoke about her book, *Unfollow*, which details her leaving the controversial Westboro Baptist Church and her entire family behind when she became aware of the moral flaws and inconsistency with that church's teaching.

At the end of May, Family members gathered for happy hour at St. Arnold's Brewery. After meeting exclusively via Zoom for over a year, everyone enjoyed visiting and catching up with one another in person. The Dominican Family hopes to meet in person this fall and will host an invitational gathering in late August for anyone interested in learning more about the group.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Dominican Family Leadership Team is comprised of three chairs, who each serve a rotating, three-year term. We are delighted to introduce this year's chairs and look forward to their plans for the 2021-2022 year.

Past Chair, Anna Sklut, is the director of campus ministry at St. Agnes Academy. Anna's great aunt was an Adrian Dominican, her parents were Dominican educated, and Anna learned about the four pillars of Dominican spirituality as a young adult. Dominican Family challenges Anna to practice the four pillars in daily life, surrounded by supportive community and the example of the sisters and other family members.

Current Chair, Greg Schockling, joined Dominican Family having been inspired as a parent and board member by the Dominicans in the St. Agnes community. The principles taught to his children left an indelible mark on Greg and inspired his efforts to help others in a similar way. The example of St. Dominic and St. Catherine of Siena, who led with such powerful pillars of spirituality, motivated Greg to be better in his own life for his family and himself.



Future Chair, Mary Gangelhoff, was a banker in her early career. For almost thirteen years, Mary lived overseas in developing countries with her husband and two sons. During that time, Mary served as the senior editor of a community magazine and on two international school boards. After moving home to Houston, she continued with volunteer opportunities, including joining the Dominican family in 2012 as a way of serving others in the greater Houston area.

ST. PLACIDUS

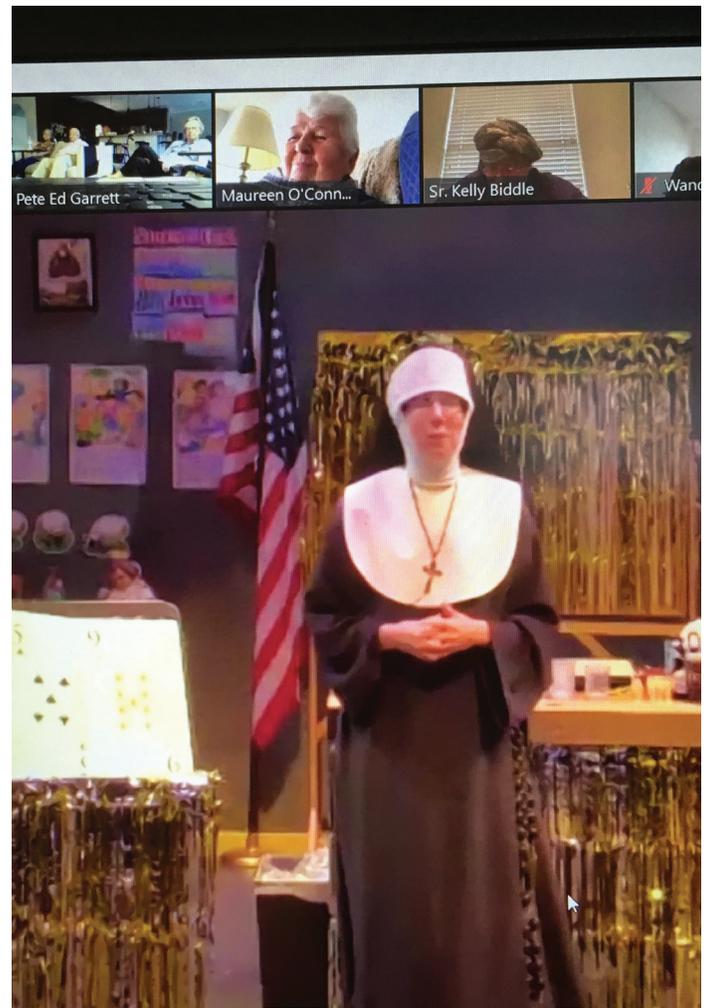
In January 2020, the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word (CCVI) graciously began welcoming our sisters in need of skilled nursing care into their nursing home, St. Placidus, on the Villa de Matel grounds in Houston. The CCVI sisters have ministered in health care for many years, and our sisters have received excellent care. What a generous gesture of love this has been!

In March, Sr. Mary Alice Carbajal, OP moved to St. Placidus. However, because she had been receiving physical therapy offsite, quarantine restrictions meant she could not return to our retirement home for a proper farewell. So, our new wellbeing coordinator, Heidi Clark, devised a plan to safely honor her with a drive-by farewell attended by sisters and staff at our Motherhouse. With Sr. Annette Dworsky, OP in the lead car, the medical transport van carrying Sr. Mary Alice paraded through the property, giving the sisters and staff time to greet her, share warm words of affection and encouragement, and happily wish her well. A large yard sign vividly proclaimed, "WE LOVE YOU MARY ALICE!" Sr. Mary Alice joins three of our sisters currently residing at St. Placidus: Mary Ann Giardina, OP, Edna Ann Hebert, OP and Gertrude Pena, OP. Pictured is Sr. Mary Alice comfortably settled into her new home.



WRITING WORKSHOP

This spring, the sisters at the Villa enjoyed a series of writing workshops taught via Zoom by Terri Schexnayder, Sr. Lucia Schexnayder's niece. Terri assured the sisters they did not need to be writers to attend but rather willing to trust their ideas and hearts to let their stories flow onto paper. Terri offered prompts based on published poetry, fiction, and nonfiction to help jumpstart the sisters' writing. During one class, Terri selected a passage from Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The group read and discussed the passage and then were invited to write about a personal experience of feeling caged. Several sisters shared their stories with the group. Terri's workshops were a wonderful gift to the sisters, providing time for stimulating and creative thinking.



LATE NITE CATECHISM

From the comfort of their homes, several of our sisters attended a performance of Stages Theatre's *Late Nite Catechism Las Vegas: Sister Rolls the Dice*. This past spring, Stages offered interactive Zoom performances of its popular *Late Nite* show. With modern day technology, "Sister," played by Denise Fennell, taught her adult catechism class in three Zoom rooms simultaneously. When she entered the stage, she went to the Dominican Sisters Zoom room first to reconnect with Sisters Carol Mayes and Maureen O'Connell who have attended her "classes" in the past. During this performance, Sister explained she was counting on her students in the class to assist in setting up a Las Vegas casino night to fundraise for much needed repairs at St. Bruno. She assured her students that gambling is not a sin if they used money budgeted for entertainment. Our sisters appreciated and enjoyed this creative opportunity to "attend" the theatre. After live performances over the years, Sister collected donations from the audience to benefit the religious communities in Houston, for which we remain grateful!



Study & Prayer



EARTH DAY

In lieu of our traditional evening prayer and labyrinth walk to commemorate Earth Day, we celebrated before Saturday Mass in our chapel. Our liturgist, Sandra Derby, played the “Canticle of the Sun,” an adaptation by Marty Haugen of St. Francis of Assisi’s composition, while members of the congregation processed in with symbols representing air, water, fire, and earth. Afterwards, Sr. Ceil Roeger, OP preached on the theme for Earth Day 2021, “Restore Our Common Home.”

Ceil reminded us of Pope Francis’s plea in his encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, that Earth “cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of goods with which God has endowed her.” While we celebrate God’s gift of creation on Earth Day, Ceil noted, “Our world is thirsting not just spiritually but physically. People are suffering because of droughts caused by climate change. People are losing their homes because of rises in the sea level. People are being displaced because of famine. So, along with our Alleluias, we need to advocate on their behalf.”

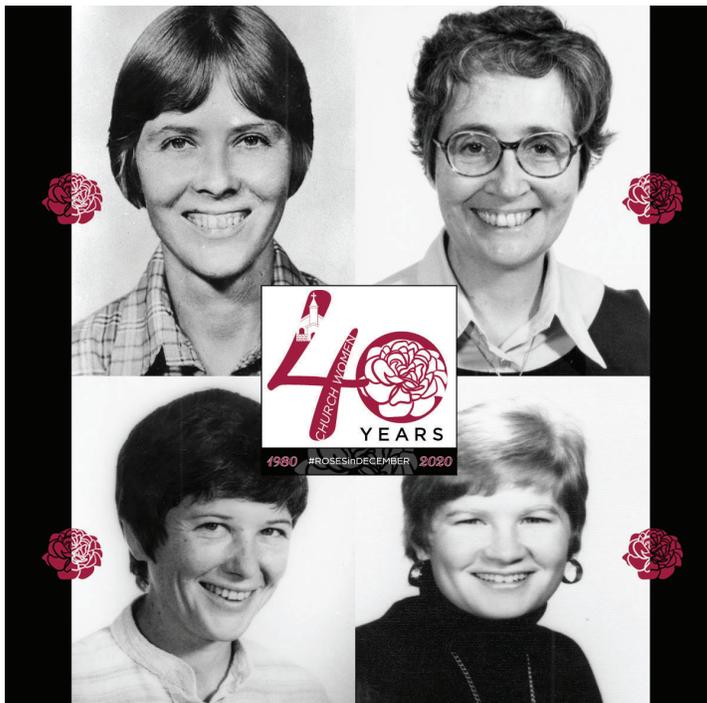




HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In recognition of National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month, we gathered on January 9th via Zoom to pray for an end to human trafficking. Kimberly Williams, Program Director of the Anti-Human Trafficking Initiative at Baylor St. Luke's Medical Center, joined us to explain the PATH Collaborative. PATH Collaborative is a partnership of medical and community-based organizations working to identify and assist trafficked individuals onto a path of healing and recovery in the Greater Houston Area.

Sisters safely gathered again for evening prayer in February to commemorate the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita, the patron saint of human trafficking survivors.



ROSES IN DECEMBER

*"El Salvador is such a beautiful country!
Where else would you find roses in December?"*
-Jean Donovan

December 2020 marked the 40th anniversary of the martyrdom of four U.S. women religious in El Salvador. On December 2, 1980, members of the U.S. trained Salvadoran military brutally murdered lay worker Jean Donovan, Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford, MM and Maura Clarke, MM, and Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel, OSU. Dedicated to the poor, these women were deemed subversives because they were accompanying refugee families who had fallen victim to the escalating violence and oppression that eventually led to civil war.

Like many women religious congregations and others around the country, we celebrated during a prayer vigil the gift of these four women and remembered all of those who dedicated their lives to working for justice in El Salvador and throughout the world.



IN Memoriam

SR. MARY THERESE WARDEN, OP

July 6, 1933 – April 28, 2021

Born in Houston, Sr. Therese (Maria Goretti) felt great pride growing up in the historic Houston Heights and attending All Saints Catholic School. Following graduation from St. Agnes Academy in 1951, she entered the Dominican Sisters of Houston. She earned a B.A. in English and Spanish at Dominican College, Houston; an M.S. in Education and Mathematics at Texas Woman’s University in Denton, TX; an M.A. in Theology at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, MO; and Certification in Accelerated Spanish from the University of Houston.

Sr. Therese served in education ministry at St. Anthony Cathedral School in Beaumont, TX and co-established St. Mary’s School in Whittier, CA. She served as principal at Corpus Christi School in Houston, and taught at St. Francis de Sales School in Riverside, CA; St. Charles School in Nederland, TX; St. Francis



de Sales School in Houston; Msgr. Kelly High School in Beaumont; O’Connell High School in Galveston, TX; and St. Pius X High School in Houston.

As part of her justice ministry prior to the Iraq War, Sr. Therese represented the congregation on a delegation of U.S. Dominicans that traveled to Iraq in 2001 to provide solace and financial aid to the poor and dispossessed. She also served the congregation through her ministry as Director of Formation, Chairperson of the General Council Steering Committee, the Planning/Implementing Goals Committee, and numerous other committees throughout the years.

Sr. Therese was gifted with an analytic mind and rich spiritual insights. She loved reading and traveling to European countries. Some of her favorite pastimes were doing crosswords and watching “Wheel of Fortune” and “Jeopardy.” Her students remember her for challenging them to: “Say what you mean and mean what you say.” She had an impact on many lives and will be greatly missed.



“
SAY WHAT YOU MEAN
AND MEAN WHAT YOU SAY.
”

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TODAY'S KINDNESS GROWS TOMORROW'S BLESSINGS

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.



Save the Date

**NOV 6TH
ANTIRACISM WORKSHOP**

ONLINE
FOR MORE INFORMATION
CALL 713-440-3714.

Mission Statement

We, the Houston Dominican Sisters, publicly commit ourselves to study and address the crucial justice issues of our times. We assume the risks inherent in preaching and teaching the Gospel. We will work to transform social structures which oppress the powerless, ministering with them in our common struggle to remain faithful to the Word of God.

Our Motherhouse grounds continue to be closed to visitors; therefore, our fall events may be moved to a virtual platform or canceled. We hope to see you when we can gather together safely.