The Good News
A Publication of the Dominican Sisters of Houston

Fall 2021
Annual Report

The Four Pillars of Dominican Life
Prayer, Study, Community, Ministry
“We must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious faith in the future.”
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dear Friends,

In January our congregation will convene for our Chapter of Life and Mission during which we will elect new leadership and set the direction for our community and our mission for the next six years. We do so “with an audacious faith in the future” of our mission and charism. While the times we currently live in remain uncertain for us all and our plans seem continually thwarted, we are committed to boldly embracing the uncertainty as we move forward.

Throughout our congregation’s history, our call to preach the Gospel has remained constant, yet the expression of our mission has been responsive to the times. We are responding to the reality of religious life now and know collaboration is even more important as we move ahead. We are collaborating with other Dominican congregations to ensure the Dominican charism in our high schools and to re-imagine communal life for our younger members. We are exploring greater collaboration with our Houston Dominican Family as they are integral to the Dominican charism now and in the future. And in remaining faithful to our long history in education and justice work, we are exploring ways to collaborate with new partners in mission to help ensure a more just and equitable education system for all our children, regardless of the zip code in which they live.

Our founders were a group of twenty bold sisters who accepted the call to spread the Dominican mission and charism by ministering in Texas. With an audacious faith in the future, a new chapter of Dominican life and mission began as these valiant women journeyed in 1882 from their established home in Ohio to unknown and rugged Galveston. Almost 140 years later, the story continues as we fully live into its hope. Our story is one of relationship and accompaniment. We understand as our foremothers did, the importance of ensuring our Dominican mission and charism today and in the next generation.

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,

[Signature]
Donna M. Pollard, O.P.
Prioress

We gratefully acknowledge all those who contributed to this issue:

Kelly Biddle, OP
Mary Brenda, OP
Barbara Ann Cernosek, OP
Heidi Clark, Sister Wellbeing
Heloise Cruzat, OP
Adrian Dover, OP
Laura Grove, Archivist
John Hensley, Dominican Family
Pilar Hernandez, Garden Leader
Wanda Jinks, OP
Lauren Lindee, OP
Carol Mayes, OP
Maureen O’Connell, OP
Miriam Oliveros, OP
Mary Jean Olsovsky, OP
Donna Pollard, OP
Mary Laura Rembold, OP
Ceil Roeger, OP

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LUNAR ECLIPSE

Early in the morning on November 19, Sr. Mary Brenda, OP woke remembering that it was the night of the 97% lunar eclipse. She grabbed her camera and ran outside to see the fullness of the eclipse. She took this photo at 3 a.m. at the lunar eclipse’s peak. In the stillness of the night, Sr. Mary “felt like just a speck on the patch of grass from where I stood staring at the night sky,” meditating on the beauty and wonder of creation and our place in the universe. As she gazed at the heavens, she reflected on Psalm 8 and how truly majestic God’s name is in all the Earth: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is humankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?”

DOMINICAN SAINTS

On August 6, we joined Dominican communities worldwide to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Dominic de Guzman, the founder of our Order. Sisters gathered, either in our chapel or via Zoom, for evening prayer during which Sr. Kelly Biddle, OP preached. Sr. Kelly noted that with his last word - Begin! - St. Dominic wanted his followers to see his death as the beginning of the order, not its end. “St. Dominic’s death was the impetus for the Dominican Order to transition into something greater than just one man – the beginning of a worldwide order of men and women preaching the gospel…St. Dominic’s parting gift to us was an eternal reminder that our Order – and God’s Mission – will never die. It will begin anew again and again and again. Every transition – every death – is a moment to begin yet again.”

On November 12, Sr. Heloise Cruzat, OP preached during evening prayer in remembrance of all the Dominican Saints. She recalled growing up in All Saints Parish in the Heights and learning from the Dominican sisters and from catechism “to believe in the communion of saints: in the Eucharist that we are one body in Christ, and in our own lives that in the communion of the faithful the merciful love of God and his saints is always attentive to our prayers.” She recalled the dying assurance of St. Dominic that he would be of even more assistance to us in his eternal life. Sr. Heloise noted that our wisdom years give us the grace and time “to claim the blessing in our lives that we may have overlooked earlier. We have grace and a call to reflect and pray, to seek deeper union, to breathe every breath with confidence that God sustains us, gives us light, love and peace, and that the saints are our ongoing intercessors. Sr. Heloise expressed gratitude for the remarkable sculptured glass window in our chapel that depicts “that heavenly procession of St. Dominic, St. Catherine, and all the saints of the Order through these eight centuries.”
LABYRINTH

After a 2020 COVID hiatus, the Dominican community resumed its practice of remembering departed loved ones with evening prayer and a labyrinth walk on October 30. Altars with mementos of the departed were placed in the Villa hallway before and after the prayer. Names of departed loved ones remained beneath our altar during the month of November. This observance was initiated in 2005, and this year honored in particular Sr. Therese Warden who died on April 28, and Sr. Edna Ann Hebert who died on July 8.

Sr. Adrian Dover, OP preached during our prayer service, reflecting on prayer and love and why we remember our departed loved ones during November. “We believe in the power of prayer. We believe that our continual entreaty to our God to bring our loved ones to peace will prepare them to experience our gracious God's love in heaven. We pray because we believe in love. We believe that true love, the love that flows from God and returns to our God, remains forever. We pray that our God heals the wounds of our loved ones and friends. We pray that all of our deceased ones may be completely open to the Presence of God.”

200TH ANNIVERSARY

This Fall, in preparation for the 200th anniversary of Dominican Women in the United States in 2022, Dominican Sisters throughout the country planted jonquil, or daffodil, bulbs. This flower draws its significance from the first US congregation of Dominican Sisters, established in Kentucky in 1822. In 1904, these Sisters experienced a devastating fire which, though not a single life was lost, decimated the Motherhouse grounds. Yet the following spring sisters observed jonquils blossoming out of the desolate, blackened fields, ringing in renewed promise. Today jonquils serve as a powerful symbol of hope and resilience for Dominican Sisters throughout the United States.

With this story and symbolism in mind, on Monday, November 15th, we gathered in the Villa chapel for a special prayer service to mark the planting of the jonquil bulbs. The soil, water, gardening tools, and bulbs were blessed as sisters recalled the history of the Houston congregation and its expansion throughout Texas and beyond. Following the service, Sisters processed outside to the Sacred Heart statue to witness the planting and final blessing of the bulbs. The bulbs were planted at the foot of the statue as the sisters gave thanks for all that has been, all that is, and all that is yet to be.

As these jonquils and all those planted by sisters across the county blossom and grow in the spring of 2022, they usher in the celebration of 200 years of Dominican Women in the United States.
On Saturday, November 6, we sponsored our ninth program addressing systemic racism and white privilege. We invited two presenters to lead us in a discussion on environmental inequity in Houston and its detrimental impact in underserved neighborhoods. Ben Hirsh is a co-founder of West Street Recovery (WSR), a grassroots disaster recovery and community organization born in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Carolyn Rivera is a long-time resident of the Settegast neighborhood in 5th Ward in Northeast Houston and a community organizer with WSR as well as the Coalition for Environmental Equity and Resilience (CEER) and the Northeast Action Collective (NAC).

A retired elementary reading teacher, Ms. Rivera, who is 78, shared her story as a resident in the Settegast neighborhood in which she raised her five children and has lived for over 43 years. When she first moved into the neighborhood, the City of Houston regularly serviced and repaired its infrastructure. However, over the years, the neighborhood’s demographics changed from mostly White residents to Black and Brown residents, and the city no longer maintains the neighborhood as in the past. The Settegast neighborhood is a small, close-knit community, and most of Ms. Rivera’s neighbors now are vulnerable people who are retired, disabled, or single parents. The pollution in the neighborhood is alarmingly high, caused by a high concentration of industries in the neighborhood, such as the Union Pacific railyard, a cement manufacturing plant, and several trucking companies.

Although active in her neighborhood for years, Ms. Rivera began community organizing during the past year. The organizations with which she volunteers provide her and other residents with education and training to advocate for themselves and their neighborhood for increased funding and service to address flooding and both air and ground pollution. She has attended numerous city council and commission court meetings, testified at the legislature in Austin, and participated in numerous demonstrations. Ms. Rivera has monitored the air quality in her neighborhood, which regularly registers at dangerously high levels, and filed complaints with the TCEQ and other agencies to no avail. She has complained of the recycling depot in the neighborhood several times, and an inspector has never visited. She and her neighbors witness and report the diesel and oil runoff from adjacent industries, again to no avail. Ms. Rivera’s house and neighborhood flooded for the first time during Harvey. The four to five feet of flood waters exacerbated the pollution issue by spreading toxin into the soil. Residents are not able to grow vegetables as they once did because of the polluted soil. Ms. Rivera became familiar with WSR after last February’s winter storm when WSR restored water to homes in her neighborhood, including her own, after their pipes burst.
COMMUNITY GARDEN

In spite of adversities last fall and winter - total consumption of garden produce by critters and the historic February freeze - the Dominican Sisters Community Garden is thriving in its 26th year! Our previous annual record was 1,438 pounds. That record was exceeded in early November with 1,493 pounds donated primarily to the Star of Hope on Reed Road.

Mr. Hirsh presented studies dating back to 1987 that show the inequitable impact of environmental issues on neighborhoods of people of color who disproportionately are exposed to toxic waste and pollution. Addressing environmental injustice includes flood prevention and mitigation, exposure to mold, and broken sewage systems. Consistent deregulation and reduced oversight since the 1980s have contributed to the inequitable impact of environmental disasters. And while the Harvey flood control bond passed with overwhelming support in Harris County in 2018, funds and projects have not been implemented equitably. While the Greens and Hall Bayou watersheds in northeast Houston had the third and fourth highest number of homes flooded of any watershed, they have the largest bond funding gaps of any watershed area in Harris County. In other words, the lowest percentage of projects funded in Harris County. Wealthier neighborhoods with fewer homes damaged by flooding have received a disproportionate amount of funding. Some neighborhoods received sewage system renovations while 5th Ward has difficulty getting existing drains cleaned out and serviced by the city. Most residents in 5th Ward have not fully recovered from Harvey, had to live in flood damaged homes while waiting for repairs, have depleted their savings, and have experienced negative mental and physical health impacts.

Both presenters urged attendees to leverage their privilege for those who do not have it and to support these organizations trying to bring equitable changes to underserved neighborhoods.
Four of our sisters were among the “Rally Nuns” who attended the opening game of the 2021 World Series on October 26th. Although the game did not end in a win for the Astros, Sisters Emily Bordages, Jane Meyer, Lauren Lindee, and Mary Brenda were thrilled to see the game and grateful to Jim McIngvale, also known as “Mattress Mack,” for donating the tickets. However, this was not the first time our sisters have been among those honored at an Astros game. On June 7, 1976, the Astros celebrated “Nun Night,” inviting more than 300 sisters from the Galveston-Houston Diocese to attend the game for free. Pictured with Astros Roger Metzger, Joaquin Andujar, Paul Siebert, and Rob Andrews are Houston Dominicans Thomas Ann LeCOUR, Mary Magdalen HANEL, and Josephine Marie Godinich. Unfortunately, despite the sisters’ fervent cheering, our Astros lost to their then rivals, the St. Louis Cardinals, 6-7.

BATS ON THE BAYOU

One rather warm August night, a group of sisters ventured out onto Buffalo Bayou and boated from Allen’s Landing to the Waugh Drive bridge to observe a large colony of Mexican Free Tail bats. The outing, offered by the Buffalo Bayou Partnership, aims to educate the public about the important role the bat colony plays in our local ecology. As evening descended, sisters enjoyed a beautiful full moon on their return voyage.
DOMINICAN FAMILY
The Dominican Family gathered at St. Theresa Catholic Church in September to witness seven new members commit to live the Dominican Charism. Members in attendance recommitted to the Dominican Charism during the Commitment Liturgy and Ceremony and enjoyed reconnecting with one another after many months of not gathering in person. After several months of delay due to the pandemic, a new formation group has begun this fall to discern if they would like to embrace the mission of the Dominican Family and become members.

At the November Family gathering, the racial justice committee led an interactive group activity and discussion to educate those who attended about the origins of our nation’s growing racial wealth and income inequality gap. Over the course of the workshop, participants engaged with twelve different federal policies, implemented throughout our nation’s history, which led to the intentional divestment of the Black community. Participants expressed disbelief, shock, and sadness at not having learned in school about these laws and their devastating impact on the Black community. The workshop was developed by Network, a justice advocacy group founded by Catholic sisters, for groups such as schools and parishes to experience.

DOMINICAN LIFE NIGHTS
To enrich communal life, Heidi Clark, our Coordinator of Sister Wellbeing, organized several experiences for the community this fall. Sisters have enjoyed a wide variety of activities from attending the opening night of Sister Act at the Hobby Center to participating in a healing drum workshop. With a monthly series called “Dominican Life Nights,” sisters enjoyed a lively singalong in August featuring opera singer Julia Laskowski, who led the sisters in singing popular songs ranging from Nancy Sinatra’s “These Boots are Made for Walking” to a beautiful rendition of “Panis Angelicus.” In September Dewayne Hill, an incredible entertainer and magician, enthralled sisters with his close-up sleight of hand magic and jaw-dropping tricks.

100TH BIRTHDAY!
Our community, along with family and friends of Sister Raphael Bordages, OP, joyously celebrated her 100th birthday on Saturday, November 20th. Not only is she distinguished by her formidable age and indomitable spirit, but Sr. Raphael is also the first Houston Dominican to reach a century in our congregation’s 139-year history!

One of thirteen children, Sr. Raphael grew up in Beaumont and attended St. Anthony Cathedral Basilica School from elementary through high school, graduating in 1939. She entered the convent in 1940 and has said, “The Dominican Sisters had a great influence on our family. Our family was very close with Sister Raphael Burke, and the community of St. Anthony’s was very tight knit. I admired the sisters and followed their example by joining.” Sr. Raphael taught in Catholic schools in Texas and California for 50 years and delighted in teaching young children. She lives at St. Dominic Villa, and she has always loved being outside in nature, knitting, and writing poetry.
On Sunday, August 8th, after a year’s postponement due to the pandemic, the Dominican Sisters of Houston celebrated the 60th jubilee of Sisters Barbara Ann Cernosek, OP, Mary Laura Rembold, OP, Mignonne Konecny, OP, Mary Jean Olsovsky, OP and Josephine Marie Godinich, OP (pictured left to right). Reverend William D. Bartniski and Reverend Dan Warden presided at the Eucharistic Liturgy, which was held in the chapel at St. Dominic Villa.

Barbara Ann Cernosek, OP was born in Galveston, where she attended St. Mary’s Cathedral Catholic School and Dominican High School. During her ministry in education, Sr. Barbara Ann taught at St. Anthony Cathedral Catholic School and Monsignor Kelly Catholic High School in Beaumont, Christ the King Catholic School, St. Francis de Sales Catholic School and St. Jerome Catholic School in Houston, St. Gregory Catholic School in Whittier, California, Central Catholic High School in Port Arthur, St. Charles Catholic School in Nederland, Dominican Academy in Austin, and O’Connell Catholic High School and Galveston Catholic (now Holy Family Catholic School) in Galveston. She also ministered at the Christus Literacy Center in Galveston and volunteered at Queen of Peace School in Houston. Sr. Barbara Ann now serves her community at St. Dominic Villa.

Josephine Marie Godinich, OP was born in Galveston, where she attended St. Mary’s Cathedral School and Dominican High School. During her education ministry, she taught at Queen of Peace Catholic School in Houston, St. Catherine Catholic School in Port Arthur, and St. John Catholic School in Rubidoux, California. She returned to Houston to teach at Queen of Peace Catholic School and later served as principal. During her time as principal, she discovered a knack for fundraising. Sr. Josephine Marie has served in the development office in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston raising funds for inner-city schools and other Catholic parishes and schools. Sr. Josephine Marie has served her community in many ways, including in the finance office. Currently, she is a distributor of the *5 Minutes of Prayer in the Home Booklets*.

Mignonne Konecny, OP was born in San Antonio, Texas. When she was young, her family moved to Houston, where she attended All Saints Catholic School and St. Agnes Academy. During her education ministry, she taught at St. Agnes Academy and St. Pius X High School in Houston, and Monsignor Kelly Catholic High School in Beaumont. Sr. Mignonne also served at St. Alphonsus Parish in San Antonio where she worked with the children’s religious education program and taught scripture to adults. While serving at St. Alphonsus, she was introduced to Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS), an organization helping people bring about major changes in their lives and neighborhoods. Over the next forty years, Sr. Mignonne worked with community organizations like COPS in Fort Worth, Austin, Houston, Dallas, El Paso and in the Rio Grande Valley. Today, she continues to minister with The Metropolitan Organization of Houston (TMO).

Mary Jean Olsovsky, OP was born in Taylor, Texas, where she attended St. Mary’s Catholic School and St. Mary’s High School, where she was encouraged by the Dominican Sisters to enter religious life. During her education ministry, she taught at Queen of Peace Catholic School in Houston, St. Joseph Catholic School in Port Arthur, St. Charles Borromeo Catholic School in Nederland, Assumption Catholic School in Houston, St. Mary’s Catholic School in Whittier, California, Sacred Heart in Austin, and St. Helen Catholic School in Georgetown, Texas. Sr. Mary Jean served as principal at Holy Rosary School in San Bernardino, California, Sacred Heart School in Austin, and St. Helen Catholic School in Georgetown. Currently, she serves as Vicaress on the leadership team for the community.

Mary Laura Rembold, OP was born in Evansville, Indiana. While growing up, her family moved to Wichita, Kansas and later to California. Sr. Mary Laura attended St. Francis Catholic High School in Riverside California for her senior year of high School. There she met the Dominican Sisters of Houston and entered the community after graduating from high school. During her education ministry, Sr. Mary Laura taught at Assumption Catholic School in Houston, Queen of Peace School in Houston, Little Flower Catholic School in Port Acres, Holy Rosary Catholic School in San Bernardino, California, and St. Francis de Sales Catholic School in Riverside, California. Currently, Sr. Mary Laura serves the community at St. Dominic Villa caring for the retired sisters.
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 successfully carry out 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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**(Gifts received from August 1, 2020 – July 31, 2021)**

- **Total Giving:** $1,535,750.00
- **Partners in Mission Annual Fund:** $514,380.00
- **Retirement Fund:** $376,500.00
- **Guatemala:** $146,400.00
- **Bequests:** $468,200.00
- **Other:** $30,270.00
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THE GOOD NEWS | 16
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.
SISTER EDNA ANN HEBERT, OP
July 16, 1931 – July 8, 2021


Sr. Edna Ann served in education ministry at Sacred Heart School, Houston; Holy Rosary School, Rosenberg, TX; and St. Mary Cathedral School, Galveston, TX. In 1965 she became Director of the newly formed Head Start Program in the Galveston-Houston Diocese. She worked in some of the poorest communities to ensure educational readiness and developmental support. Sr. Edna Ann co-founded and taught at Dominican Montessori School in Houston, which later became St. Catherine’s Montessori. She brought the Montessori curriculum to St. Mary School, Port Arthur, and St. Mary of the Purification School, Houston. She also worked at Little School House Montessori, Houston, and served as a Consultant for Montessori Pre-School at Sacred Heart School, Austin.

A leading expert in Montessori education, Sr. Edna Ann often gave workshops and in-services for individualizing classrooms. She developed a reading program used by educational institutions in the U.S. and abroad. In 1999 she established an independent community outreach Reading Center, helping children from areas throughout Houston to read at minimal or no cost to families. After spending forty-seven years at St. Catherine’s Montessori, she received Emeritus status upon her retirement in 2011.

Sr. Edna Ann had an engaging personality, a ready laugh and boundless energy. She radiated joy. A talented musician, she captivated children with rousing songs on her guitar. Her passion for teaching the Montessori Philosophy was the defining characteristic of her life. Her legacy as an educator will be remembered through the lives of those she touched.
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.

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