

The Good News SUMMER 2022
A PUBLICATION OF THE DOMINICAN SISTERS OF HOUSTON

*Dominican Sisters
of Houston*



*Special
Issue*

Celebrating Our Legacy
Embracing Our Future

INCLUDING
Congregational Report
2016-2022

CHAPTER 2016

Directional Statement



In light of our Mission Statement and what we have heard from each other, as well as from voices beyond our own, and grounded in a contemplative way of living and being, we, the Dominican Sisters of Houston, commit ourselves to FOCUS our efforts, energy, and resources for the next six years on Integral Ecology. This is the lens through which we will assess our decision-making and our actions as individuals, as a congregation, and in partnership with others.

We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach. It must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

(Pope Francis, Laudato Sí, paragraph 49)

Rationale:

- Resonates with our Mission Statement
- Is global, all inclusive, and relational
- Connects and includes all justice issues
- Calls for personal and communal contemplative action

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.

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Greetings

FROM LEADERSHIP

Dear Sisters and Friends

This special edition of the *Good News* includes a Congregational Report, which we issue every six years. We write to you as our six-year leadership term comes to an end. Much has happened in our community during this time, and as is in life, we faced unexpected challenges. This report will highlight some of those challenges but also successes and plans for a future filled with hope. We have been guided during this leadership term by the direction we as a congregation set at our 2016 Chapter of Mission and Life. At that meeting, we committed ourselves to focus efforts on integral ecology and to use integral ecology as a lens for decision making and actions. A commitment to integral ecology arose out of Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, in which he advocates for an integrated approach to caring for our common home and answering the cries of the poor and Earth. However, after setting this direction six years ago, we quickly realized using this lens would not be an easy task, and as a community, we sought and engaged in more education for greater understanding.

ATTENDING TO OUR REALITY

We also realized additional priorities facing the congregation and began attending to the realities of religious life at this moment, including diminishing membership and the implications for mission and leadership capacity in the future. Over ninety percent of women religious communities in the United States are experiencing similar demographics and challenges. As Dominicans, we began studying and discussing a way forward and adopted an integrated planning process with the help of consultants. Knowing that long-term planning takes time, we began this process four years ago to envision a future together, to decide how resources will be aligned to live mission vibrantly in the future, and to witness our legacy unfold.

In February 2020, we adopted our Focus 2020 & Beyond Planning Statement to guide us forward. We decided, as preachers of the gospel, to commit

ourselves and our resources to collaborate with others to advance social change for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. We recommitted to using integral ecology in decision making; to maintaining our responsibility to St. Agnes Academy, St. Pius X High School, and San Vicente de Paul Bethania, our Guatemala mission school; to being prudent stewards of resources; and to cultivating integral relationships with the vulnerable and marginalized, local and global Dominican Family, and present and future partners in mission.

While we are attending to advancing mission into the future, we are also attending to the congregation's needs. Most sisters are retired from individual ministry, and our campus is now primarily a retirement community. With greater intentionality, we are focusing on sister wellbeing and communal life and determining what personnel and resources are needed to care better for community members in retirement.

COVID

Much has happened in our world, communities, and families over the past two years. The pandemic changed the way we live daily life and has impacted so many physically, mentally, economically, and spiritually. We have grieved losses and witnessed the magnified suffering of the vulnerable and marginalized. And in the midst of this unprecedented time, we witnessed, yet again, horrific violence that tragically and unjustly ended George Floyd's life and many more Black lives in our country.

As we navigated life in the pandemic, we were all pressed to accept a new reality and to decide how to move forward. Early on, when stay at home orders were in place, we quickly realized the need to ensure the safety of our Motherhouse campus and took measures to do so with twenty-four-hour security. Retired sisters on campus have been most affected as they adhered to strict precautions designed to keep them safe. They have shown resilience and flexibility with each phase of the pandemic and with every

Greetings

FROM LEADERSHIP

change in health and safety protocols. As with most of the world, we increasingly relied on technology to continue to meet as a community, connect with family and friends, and continue to work. However, amid all the loss and uncertainty of the past two years, our faith in God's abiding love has given us strength and a greater confidence to move forward, heal, make ourselves and community whole, and seek a future illuminated by gratitude and hope.

LOOKING AHEAD

Led by the Dominican mission and charism, our congregation has always responded to what is needed at the time. In 1882, our founders traveled from Ohio to Galveston to answer the call to establish Catholic schools in Texas. After Vatican II, we answered the Gospel call to minister in Guatemala and to expand the expression of mission to include justice ministries.



Once again, we are responding to a new moment as we celebrate our congregation's 140th anniversary this year and the 200th anniversary of American Dominican women religious in the United States. In the past six years, we have worked to ensure the mission's future given our current reality, respond to the changes in our aging community, and use integral ecology as a guiding lens. We are moving forward thoughtfully and with care in response to the complexities of this moment. We will continue grounding all we do and all we are in the movement of God's spirit.

Donna M. Pollard, OP, *Prioress*
Mary Jean Olsovsky, OP, *Vicariess*
Antoinette Kitty Carter, OP,
Councilor

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**WE WILL CONTINUE GROUNDING ALL WE DO AND
ALL WE ARE IN THE MOVEMENT OF GOD'S SPIRIT.**
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Finances

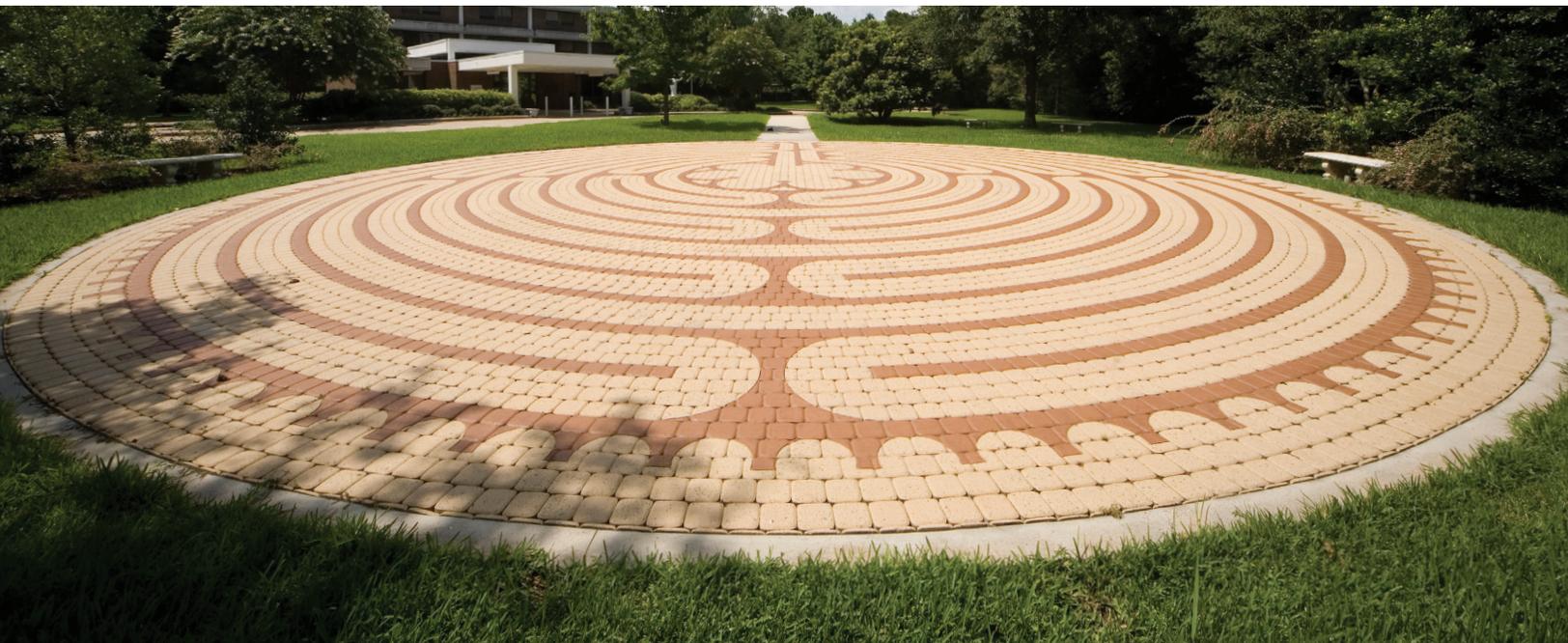


Pictured: Jose Enriquez, Director of Finance

We were blessed with positive financial results over the last six years, notwithstanding the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the global economy. Operating revenues and expenses were favorable to expectations driven primarily by high investment returns, the continued generous support from partners in mission, and conscientious spending. Our strong financial position allowed us to increase our commitment to education and justice sponsored programs and ministries. Through proper planning and consideration, we created an endowment for San Vicente de Paul Bethania, our sponsored mission school in Guatemala City. We also made contributions for the sustainable financial future of Dominican Veritas Ministries, Dominican Sisters Conference and Dominican Sisters International. All three are collaborative organizations of Dominican congregations working to safeguard the Dominican mission and charism for generations to come.

Looking ahead, we face challenges regarding the future course of our finances. Through careful planning now, however, we are ensuring sisters' care well into the future. While sisters' earnings continue to decline as most sisters have transitioned from active ministry to retirement, we are blessed that sisters' retirement is well funded. The age and condition of our properties continue to be a challenge as they require constant repairs and improvements to meet the needs of our sisters.

A high degree of risk of an economic and financial market pullback remains due to the effects of the pandemic. However, we will continue to strive to be good stewards of resources to ensure the viability of the Dominican Sisters of Houston's mission and ministries.



Mission & Ministries

While sisters are by and large retired from individual ministry, the mission continues to succeed, and will do so into the future, because we are tending to it now through planning and collaboration. Over the next few pages, we have shared some highlights from the past six years of long-time ministries, such as our justice ministry, sponsorship of St. Agnes Academy and St. Pius X High School, Guatemala mission, and community garden. However, we are also excited to share how ministries are evolving and the ways in which we are cultivating the emergence of new expressions of mission that will ensure our Dominican charism and have a lasting impact for good well into the future.

ADVANCEMENT

Our advancement program has evolved over the last six years. Traditionally, advancement efforts supported our operations, Guatemala mission, and retirement fund. However, finances are now sound, and we have the financial resources to meet operations and care for our retired sisters. We continued, however, to raise funds for our Guatemala mission school, San Vicente de Paul Bethania, to meet the cost of students' education each year and to ensure its financial future. We are grateful to have received donor support through direct mail appeals, grants, and mission appeals in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and Diocese of Austin and Beaumont. Additionally, we have been able to use annual fund donations for the past few years to financially support both San Vicente and other nonprofit organizations with whom we collaborate on justice issues.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is essential to who we are and to the success of mission, especially given our demographics and as we move mission forward into the future. We continue to collaborate with religious women's organizations, such as the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), both nationally and regionally; the Dominican Sisters Conference (DSC), a collaboration of nineteen U. S. Dominican congregations; the DSC Futuring Task Force, which is exploring ways for Dominican sisters under seventy years of age to connect nationally and explore their future in mission and community together; Dominican Sisters International (DSI), a collaboration of Dominican congregations globally; and local Houston congregations of women religious and our Dominican Family, who share the charism and commitment to justice. As mentioned, we financially supported DSC and DSI in the last year to help secure their futures. Collaboration allows us to share resources and help strengthen mission and community.



SCHOOL SPONSORSHIP & DOMINICAN VERITAS MINISTRIES

Our long history of excellence in education remains with sponsorship of St. Agnes Academy and St. Pius X High School, both of which continue to provide an exemplary education. Elected Council ensures the primary sponsorship responsibilities of both mission and governance. Council serves as the board of trustees of both schools and serves as members of their boards of directors and foundation boards. Council is responsible for new board orientation as well as board in-service.

During this past leadership term, we have taken steps to ensure the Catholic and Dominican identities and sponsorship of our schools into the future in light of current congregational and sponsorship realities. Since 2018, Prioress Donna Pollard, OP has collaborated with six Dominican congregations (Adrian, Mission San Jose, Peace, Sinsinawa, Springfield, and Sparkill) to form a pontifical public juridical person (PJP), Dominican Veritas Ministries (DVM), to serve as the canonical sponsor for our collective primary and secondary schools. DVM allows congregations to share resources and strengthen the viability of all our schools. While these Dominican schools will be joined canonically, they will remain civilly separate.

In July 2021, we received Cardinal DiNardo's votum, or supportive opinion, to move forward with the creation of DVM. After all participating Dominican congregations received the vota of their local ordinary in the fall of 2021, we submitted the PJP packet for final approval to the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome. We are currently awaiting final approval from the Vatican and are in the process of establishing the operations for DVM. We hope to activate DVM during the 2023-2024 school year. DVM's canonical member board consists of sisters from the five founding congregations: Donna Pollard, OP (Houston), Therese Leckert, OP (Peace), Mary Paul McCaughey, OP (Springfield), Mary Margaret Pachucki, OP (Adrian), and Colleen Settles, OP (Sinsinawa). DVM will be one of the first PJP models for school sponsorship in the U.S.



JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION MINISTRY

Ceil Roeger, OP continues as Promoter of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). Ceil collaborates with the North American Dominican Justice Promoters, Justice Conference of Women Religious (JCWR), and Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) Region XII Justice Committee. We have continued advocating and collaborating with community partners with a focus on alleviating the suffering caused by human trafficking, the death penalty, racial injustice, and the unjust treatment of workers, immigrants, and Earth. Covid interfered with several planned events and prayer services, but for the most part, we were able to host them via Zoom.

Of note over the past six years, we have been able to increase financial support to community partners who provide direct services to marginalized and underserved communities. For example, we awarded grants to Plant It Forward Farms for two refugee farmers to start their own urban farms; to human trafficking groups to provide food and housing for survivors, especially during the pandemic; to Living Hope Wheelchair Association, a community organization serving injured low-wage workers and immigrants; and to West Street Recovery, an organization born out of Hurricane Harvey, to rebuild flooded homes in Houston's underserved Fifth Ward. Below are some of the highlights of justice issues to which we gave particular focus over the past six years.

Human trafficking, Death Penalty and Workers' Rights We continued our advocacy, events, collaboration, and prayer to abolish the death penalty and to address workers' rights and the issue of human trafficking. In 2019, we began a new collaboration with Kimberly Williams from CHI, St. Luke's Health to increase awareness of human trafficking in Houston.

Racial Injustice While we continued our long-standing collaboration with the Center for Healing Racism, we have given more effort to the issue of systemic racism since 2017, when Sr. Ceil was invited to speak on two panels regarding racism and religion. After one discussion, we were challenged to take the conversation regarding systemic racism into our own community - our white community - and we committed to do so. Since the fall of 2017, we have offered twice yearly conversations and workshops focused on white privilege, race as a construct, the racist roots of faith and politics, the racial wealth and income gap, why Black Lives Matter, environmental racism, and most recently, reparations. During the summer of 2020, we hung a Black Lives Matter banner outside our property to preach and protest the murder of George Floyd and of so many in the Black community and other communities of color. In the fall of 2020, Dominican Family member Calista Hebert began a racial justice committee that is attended by Family members and sisters.

Immigration In 2017 the U.S. Dominican Justice Promoters issued a statement denouncing the executive order banning immigrants and restating our commitment to welcoming the refugee and immigrant. The following year, our congregation adopted a statement supporting the undocumented immigrant community and calling on Congress to pass just, compassionate, and comprehensive immigration legislation. We participated in several protests and prayer vigils, including two interfaith vigils with Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and Christian sisters and brothers, to bear witness to the separation of more than 2400 children from their families at the border and to pray for family reunification, children detained at the U.S. border, and those children who have died in U.S. custody. Dominican Family members, sisters, and friends held a round-the-clock, week-long vigil at the site of a detention center near downtown Houston. We joined immigration advocates to protest the threatened termination of the Temporary Protective Status (TPS) and DACA programs and for an "El Paso Strong" solidarity event at Houston City Hall to speak out against hate speech and violence after the horrific shooting in an El Paso Walmart, during which members of the Latino community were targeted.

Integrity of Creation During the last six years, our congregation and the Dominican Family have studied Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*. Over this past year, we have also begun exploring the Laudato Si' Action Platform (LSAP), a seven-year journey and commitment to address the seven goals of *Laudato Si'*, integral ecology, and sustainability. Sr. Ceil has joined small group conversations with other Dominican and regional congregations of women religious, and we formed a committee within the congregation. At our Chapter meeting in March 2022, we discussed moving forward with the LSAP and a possible collaboration with the Dominican Family in doing so.



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BLACK
LIVES
MATTER
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MISSION FORWARD

We embarked on a planning process four years ago to ensure the future of mission. Just as we are ensuring the Dominican mission in our schools by collaborating with other Dominican congregations to form Dominican Veritas Ministries, we have spent a great deal of time in study and discussion to discern other ways mission will be expressed for years to come. We began our study with Stephen Klineberg's *Prophetic City: Houston on the Cusp of a Changing America* to learn what is needed in Houston now and in the future for its economic viability and for its marginalized population. We realized that Houston needs an educated workforce to drive its economy in the future, to tackle flooding and environmental issues, and to close the income gap with living wages. Most jobs now, and even more in the future, require some credential beyond a high school diploma, such as a certificate of technical skills or a postsecondary degree. We studied the overwhelming need for equitable education, especially early childhood education, for children from low-income families and underserved neighborhoods because most young people in Houston, who are Black or Latino, are unsuccessful in underfunded schools with inadequate resources.

In September 2020, the congregation affirmed the focus of mission moving forward and agreed that we will be faithful to our long history and mission in education and justice by collaborating financially with others to advance systemic and equitable change in education in the Houston area. Since then, we have listened and learned from those impacted by inequitable education, particularly early childhood education and childcare system. We are exploring opportunities to collaborate with others in early childhood education to increase access to quality early childhood education, improve the childcare workforce, and help ensure every child is kindergarten ready and able to succeed in school regardless of his or her zip code. While Houston is the most diverse city in the nation, it remains one of the most segregated. With the future expression of mission, we have the opportunity to address the educational, economic, and environmental disparities in underserved neighborhoods that are the result of systemic racism.

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**WE REALIZED THAT HOUSTON NEEDS
AN EDUCATED WORKFORCE TO
DRIVE ITS ECONOMY IN THE FUTURE**
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GUATEMALA MISSION



Our mission school San Vicente de Paul Bethania continues to be a small miracle in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Guatemala City. Over the last six years, the children at San Vicente have enjoyed several new activities and programs, including a new reading and creative writing program and a soccer tournament the children love and look forward to. In 2017, Mary Brenda, OP, who ministers as the nurse at St. Agnes Academy, began taking St. Agnes students on annual mission trips to the school. Until interrupted by the pandemic in March 2020, both San Vicente and St. Agnes students loved these trips. Each year, the young women from St. Agnes carried out service projects, such as renovating the library and other areas, improving the indoor recess space, purchasing books, and teaching lessons in English and Spanish.

The school community faces many challenges in daily life, all of which have been compounded during the last two years. At the start of the pandemic, head of school Miriam Oliveros, OP closed the school, and the children learned from home. Parents and teachers have communicated through WhatsApp, Facebook, parent-teacher conferences, and a small bookstore that photocopies lessons for the children. Sr. Miriam has commended parents for doing a great job under difficult circumstances. She is pleased with the students' performance and grateful for the teachers' willingness and motivation to continue doing their best for the children and parents. School families remain grateful for the opportunity to send their children to San Vicente where there is no violence, no one goes hungry, and every child is loved and encouraged to learn.

ARCHIVES

As part of advancing the mission, we realized that we needed to give our archives much needed attention to preserve our 140-year story and legacy. Since hiring Laura Grove, our first professional archivist, in December of 2020, much work has been done to ensure the archives is in line with best practices. A cadre of policy documents and forms have been developed to properly regulate donations and loans, preservation standards and procedures, and records management practices among other things. These documents ensure that materials are properly monitored, taken care of, and collected. New archival quality boxes and folders protect our collections from harmful pollutants and a new, accurate shelf list ensures materials are easily discoverable and retrievable.

Our archives has also benefited from upgrades to the space. A new environmental monitoring system tracks and regulates temperature and relative humidity to safeguard materials from untimely deterioration. Damage to the ceiling and walls from a previous water leak have also been repaired, and new shelves have been added to fit larger artifacts, such as our collection of traditional habits. While these renovations were taking place, our archivist developed and implemented a digital archive and preservation system for digital-born collections. These efforts ensure our history is properly accounted for and preserved for generations to come.

COMMUNITY GARDEN

As with most everything, our community garden felt the effects of the pandemic. While our Motherhouse campus remained closed for much of 2020 and 2021, most of our wonderful garden volunteers were unable to lend their helping and capable hands. Cristo Rey students, who had volunteered in our garden for their service day from 2016-2019, were unable to join us as well until this past April when we welcomed their return. The pandemic also thwarted our plans to host a 25th anniversary celebration of our garden in the spring of 2020; however, Heloise Cruzat, OP, our garden liaison, and Kitty Carter, OP blessed the garden during a simple ceremony.

In June 2022, we bade farewell to garden leader, Pilar Hernandez. Our garden has been enriched by Pilar's bounty, cultivating hands, knowledge, teaching skills, love and labor ever since joining us in 2008. Under her leadership from 2013 - 2022, annual produce reached record goals! Pictured standing are gardeners Isabelle Chapman, Donna Boyd, Nancy Ozuna, Garland Kerr, and Debbie Gregg; seated are Mary Jean Olsovsky, OP, Pilar Hernandez, and Heloise Cruzat, OP.



DOMINICAN SISTERS SUMMER CAMP

In the summers of 2016 -2019, we hosted our annual summer camp, which for over twenty years we had enjoyed offering to middle school girls. In 2020, however, we came to the difficult decision that we could no longer staff and operate the camp. Each summer, sisters and volunteers offered a wide variety of activities to campers, which included an introduction to the life of St. Dominic and the Dominican charism. The fun-filled activities were taught with a deeper underlying motivation to reveal how to truly listen in quietude, the importance of teamwork, the interconnectedness between the natural environment and human experience, the responsibility to share, and many other basic principles. We remain very grateful to Thomas Ann LaCour, OP for her leadership in this ministry and to all who served and supported our summer camp.



AWARDS

Several of our sisters have been recognized for their service in the community during the past six years. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) awarded Ceil Roeger, OP the Ester L. King Bridge Builder Award for her justice work in the community. The Houston Anti-Defamation League honored Jane Meyer, OP with the Julie and Ben Rogers Ecumenism Award for her strong voice for justice and interfaith understanding as a long-serving board member of ADL's Coalition for Mutual Respect. Sr. Jane also received the Dominican Association of Secondary Schools Heritage Award for her unparalleled dedication to Dominican Catholic secondary education. The Cenacle Sisters honored Heloise Cruzat, OP for her long-standing and loyal support of

the Cenacle Retreat House. In 2017, St. Pius X High School Foundation honored Donna Pollard, OP with the Del Sarto Humanitarian Award at its annual gala. The Ancient Order of Hibernians, an Irish Catholic organization, presented Sr. Sheila Hackett, OP with its President Award for her many contributions to Catholic education and to the Irish community. St. Pius X High School awarded Kelly Biddle, OP the McMahon Teaching Chair for teaching beyond the curriculum and fostering Veritas values in students to prepare them for life beyond the walls of St. Pius X. Lastly, at an event to commemorate St. Peter the Apostle Catholic School as it closed its doors, Mary Jean Olsovsky, OP accepted an award on behalf of the congregation for service to the school. Founded by our sisters in 1942, St. Peter remained under Dominican Sister leadership and staffing for more than 40 years.



Prayer & Study

Prayer and study are integral to who we are as Dominicans and integral to our mission. Along with daily prayer, we center prayer around several events throughout the year, interrupted in the last two years when Covid restrictions were in place. As part of our mission, we commit ourselves to study the crucial justice issues of the time. We study individually and as a congregation to gain greater understanding to preach and advocate for justice in our local and global community.



LABYRINTH

Over the last six years, we have continued our annual labyrinth walks and prayer services planned by the labyrinth committee. In February of each year, we host an indoor labyrinth walk and prayer service on or near the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita, the patron saint of victims and survivors of modern-day slavery. We pray for, and hope to bring greater awareness of, the 40.3 million adults and children globally who are enslaved. Each April, we celebrate Earth Day with evening prayer and a labyrinth walk. During the prayer service, members of the congregation process in the Villa chapel with symbols representing air, water, fire, and Earth, and a sister preaches on the wonder of God's creation and the responsibility we have to care for Earth and uphold the integrity of all creation. And at the end of October each year, we remember all those who have gone before us with a Labyrinth Walk of Remembrance and Thanksgiving. All are invited to place photos and mementos of deceased loved ones in the main hallway of St. Dominic Villa and to place their names at the chapel altar for the month of November.

ANNUAL PRAYER EVENTS

Each September, we gather in prayer for several events. With students from St. Agnes and St. Pius X, we observe the United Nation's International Day of Peace with prayer in our chapel and ringing of bells for a more just and peaceful world. We also celebrate Founders' Day, the anniversary of the arrival in Galveston of the twenty Dominican Sisters from Ohio who founded the congregation. Since September 2018, we have joined in celebrating the Season of Creation, a movement of Christians of all denominations around the world united to pray and act for our common home. The Season of Creation begins September 1, the Day of Prayer for Creation, and ends October 4, the feast day of St. Francis, the patron saint of ecology in many traditions. During the month, we gather in the meditation garden at the Villa to pray the Rosary and meditate on our connectedness to all creation.

Like many women religious congregations and others around the country, each December we commemorate the lives of Jean Donovan, a Maryknoll missionary, and Sisters Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, and Dorothy Kazel who were killed in El Salvador on December 2, 1980. We also commemorate the lives of all the central American martyrs and remember those who dedicated their lives to working for justice in El Salvador and throughout the world.

Each December we also participate with Dominicans globally in the Dominican Month of Peace, during which we study and pray for Dominican sisters and brothers and the people with whom they minister. The Order chooses a particular place on which to focus each year, such as India, Ukraine, and Venezuela, to raise awareness of the injustices and hardships suffered by its people.

Also in December, when safe to gather, we hosted with the Dominican Family our annual Advent Morning

Prayer and Brunch. Over the last six years at the event, we celebrated the 800th anniversary of the Dominican Order and the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Houston Dominican Family and presented the Sr. Pauline Gannon Award to Pilar Hernandez for her service to our community garden and to Claire Warner for her ministry to our sisters in skilled nursing care.

On Ash Wednesday and every Friday in lent, we invited all to participate in the stations of the cross in our meditation garden at the Villa. This past lent, we also offered the stations in the morning in the chapel after Mass. On Good Friday, we participated with members of Houston's peace and justice community and the Dominican Family in the stations of the cross during Pax Christi Houston's Walk for Justice at city hall. Each year, those present proclaim the suffering and death of Jesus as clearly seen today in the suffering and death of the innocent, those condemned unjustly, those who side with the poor, those who struggle for justice, those who are victims of war, and those who die unnecessarily and violently.

Apart from June 2020, we held, either in person or via Zoom, our annual community retreats for sisters. Mary Jean Olsovsky, OP organized the week-long retreats with topics such as planting the seeds of gratitude, losses in life with emphasizing hope, and integral ecology. Lastly, throughout each year whenever the State of Texas schedules an execution, we gather in the Villa chapel to pray for the victims of violent crimes, their families, those sentenced to die for these crimes, their families, and those who participate in executions.





HIGHLIGHTS

Over the past six years we have studied individually and as a community to increase awareness of integral ecology and an understanding of Pope Francis' second encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. Linda Gibler, OP spoke on several occasions to us and to the Dominican Family about living in harmony with God, others, and nature, emphasizing that the environment is the relationship between nature and the society that lives in it and we are all interconnected. Sr. Linda also provided us with a practical tool to help us use integral ecology as a lens for decision making. During last summer's community retreat, led by Sharon Zayac, OP, we once again increased our understanding of integral ecology as a way to experience our world.



In March 2018, we hosted the annual Pax Christi Texas Conference at our Dominican Center for Spirituality. Before the conference began, sisters gathered with members of Pax Christi for seventeen minutes of silence in solidarity with students who were marching in Washington DC and throughout the country calling on Congress for stricter gun laws to end gun violence after the killing of seventeen students in Parkland, Florida. After the vigil, conference attendees learned strategies for waging peace from Paul K. Chappell, who spoke from his book *The Art of Waging Peace*. Paul, a West Point graduate and Iraq War veteran, spoke from personal experience how to become a person of peace and how to teach others to become people of peace by focusing on the need for respect for all and for finding peace within ourselves.



During the summer of 2019 in response to the escalating crisis at our country's southern border, members of the congregation, the Dominican Family, and friends visited El Paso for a weeklong Border Awareness Experience, an immersion experience hosted by Annunciation House, a house of hospitality for migrants and refugees. This was not a volunteer opportunity, but rather an opportunity to listen and learn, put a face on the immigrant and refugee, and experience the culture and realities of the many groups who live and work at the border.

Our group stayed at a shelter mostly for women seeking asylum who were disabled, with children, or pregnant. The shelter is a place for them to stay while figuring out next steps and contacting family in the U.S. Many women shared their stories, which were filled with violence and devastating loss. We also heard stories of undocumented migrants who had been deported after working in the U.S. for decades. Over and over, the stories told were of people in desperate situations who did not willingly choose to leave their homes but did so in the face of danger. Every evening during the stay, participants discussed and reflected on what had been learned and witnessed about the treatment of some of God's most vulnerable people, especially migrant children who in our country's care have died, become ill, or been traumatized by family separation.

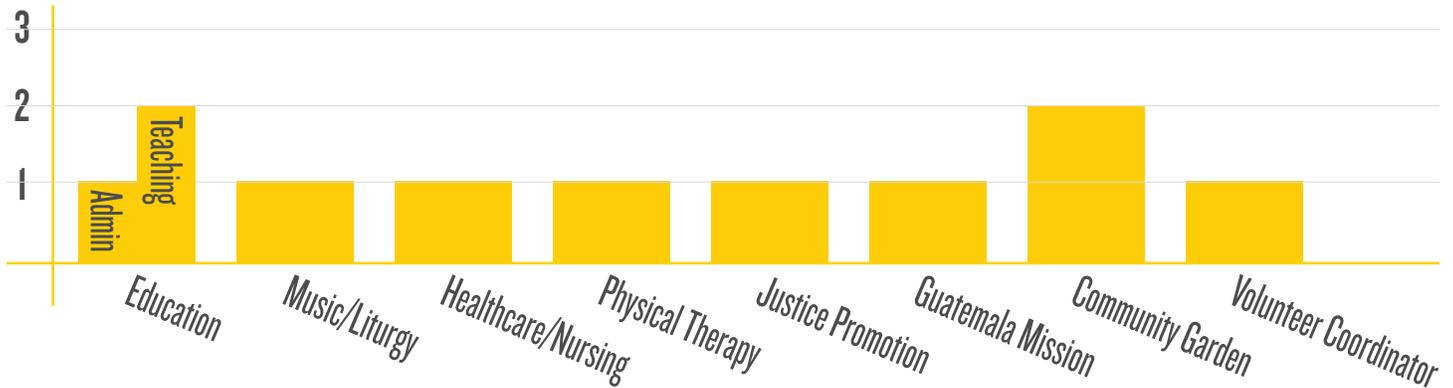
In fall 2021, we joined Dominican communities worldwide to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Dominic de Guzmán, the founder of the Order. Sisters gathered, either in the chapel or via Zoom, for evening prayer. Also, this past fall, in preparation for the 200th anniversary of the founding of American Dominican women congregations in the United States, Dominican Sisters throughout the country planted jonquil, or daffodil bulbs, a powerful symbol of hope and resilience for Dominican Sisters throughout the United States. Our sisters gathered in the Villa chapel for a special prayer service to mark the planting of the jonquil bulbs. Following the service, sisters processed outside to the Sacred Heart statue to plant the bulbs. The jonquils blossomed in spring 2022 to usher in the 200th anniversary.



Community

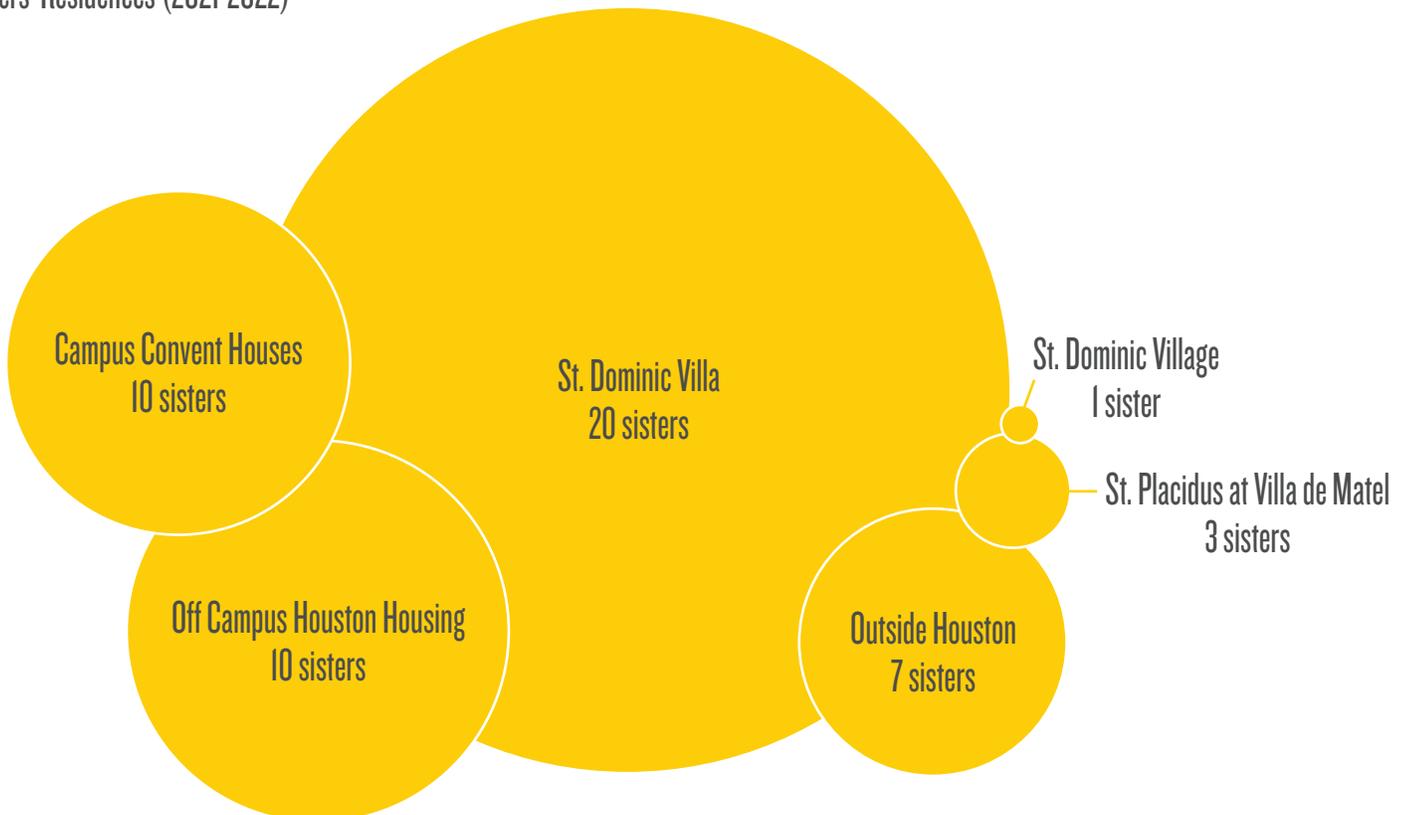
COMMUNITY STATISTICS

Sisters in Ministry (2021 – 2022)



In addition to the ministries above, we have numerous retired sisters who volunteer to minister on and off our Motherhouse campus. On campus, sisters assist with formation, liturgies, prayer services, the reception desk at the Villa, beautifying the grounds, driving sisters to appointments, making thank you calls to donors, preparing mailings, and countless other projects needing attention. Our campus truly could not operate without them.

Sisters' Residences (2021-2022)



CAMPUS LIFE AND SISTER WELLBEING

Currently, there are 51 sisters in the congregation. Over the past six years as sisters have continued to retire from individual ministry, our Motherhouse campus now houses most sisters. The number of sisters living at St. Dominic Villa, our retirement home, has nearly doubled in this time. Apart from Genesis House, which has served as a hospitality house since 2017, retired sisters also live in three other convent houses on campus.



As part of integrated planning for the future, we have begun to focus more intentionally on sister wellbeing and communal life. In the summer of 2020, sisters met via Zoom for a facilitated discussion on what they needed for improved wellbeing. From this discussion, we created the position of Coordinator of Wellbeing and Communal Life to meet with sisters individually to determine their needs, to help with life transitions, housing changes, and retirement, and to offer programs for enrichment and enjoyment. For over eight years, our exercise instructor has come to the Villa twice weekly, and via YouTube videos during Covid surges, to help sisters improve balance, strength, and flexibility, all while enjoying community together.

During congregational meetings in 2021 and 2022, we discussed communal life in the context of mission and discussed the need to “rightsize” in the next few years. Congregations of religious women are engaging in rightsizing, which involves bringing the commitments, properties, assets, ministries, and other responsibilities into proper alignment with the reality of the community today and in the near future. We continue to assess our community’s quality of life and ability to thrive in given environments and the resources and personnel needed to care well for sisters.

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 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 receive excellent care. We remain grateful for this generous act of love for our sisters in need of greater care than we can provide at the Villa.

VIETNAMESE SISTERS

Since the 1970s, we have welcomed many sisters from Vietnam to live in community with us while they learned English and attended school. Visiting Vietnamese sisters have always been a blessing and a joy. They help with the Villa chapel and liturgies and in myriad other ways. They have shared their traditions, such as the Lunar New Year celebration, cultural dances, and delicious food. Sisters and staff in turn have tutored them in English and helped them navigate life in Houston and the U.S.

During the past six years, we have said goodbye to two visiting Vietnamese sisters who first joined us in 2011 and four others who joined us in 2016. These sisters have gone on to further their studies and some have returned to their congregations in Vietnam. We became very attached to these sisters, and while we were excited for them to have new experiences, we were sad to see them leave. In the last four years, however, we have been delighted to welcome eight Lovers of the Holy Cross sisters from Vietnam, and most recently, one Dominican sister. These sisters are residing at St. Dominic Villa and in Genesis House on our campus while they attend school here in Houston.



DOMINICAN FAMILY

Fourteen years ago, Carol Mayes, OP founded the Dominican Family, non-vowed women and men who commit to live the Dominican charism and who walk alongside us. Over the past six years, the Family has continued to engage new members and evolve. Currently, there are 114 active members and 28 members who are inactive, on leave of absence, or no longer residing in the Houston area. In the past six years, the Dominican Family has welcomed five new formation groups. We mourn the loss of three Family members since the group's inception.

The Dominican Family leadership is comprised of three chairs, who serve a rotating, three-year term with one year each as a future, present, and past chair. The leadership team is also comprised of two councilors who each serve for two years, committee chairs, and three Dominican sisters.

Several committees have been established within the group. The prayer committee continues to provide daily prayer, and the hospitality committee provides food and beverages for in-person gatherings. The communication committee updates the Dominican Family website and membership records and uses digital platforms to communicate meeting information, engagement opportunities, and activities to members. The poverty committee continues to focus on study and action related to the problem of



poverty in the Houston area. Members continue to partner with organizations whose poverty alleviation focus goes beyond relief, to recovery and development of the whole person and to participate in service events with Angela House, San Francisco Nativity Academy, and KidsMeals. And to raise awareness, the human trafficking study and action committee held a prayer service and workshop, during which it presented a virtual bus tour of trafficking locations in the Houston area.

During the past six years, two new committees were formed by Family members. The integral ecology committee formed in 2018, and members undertook study to educate themselves. In February 2020, members presented a comprehensive climate change program for the Dominican Family. The racial justice committee formed in the fall of 2020 in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder. Members seek to educate themselves and the Dominican Family as to the deep racist policies and beliefs that have permeated all aspects of American society over the last four centuries. In the fall of 2021, the committee led a workshop on the origins of our nation's growing racial wealth and income inequality gap. Participants learned about and discussed twelve federal policies, implemented throughout our nation's history, which led to the intentional divestment of the Black community.

At monthly gatherings during the past six years, held via Zoom for over a year during the pandemic, members of the Dominican Family have organized presentations around prayer, study, and action. Presentations have included interfaith discussions, how to productively dialogue with those who hold different views, information on the resettlement of refugees in Houston, preaching the Gospel in public policy by advocating justice causes to our elected representatives, prayer services with liturgical dance, discussions on the clergy sex abuse crisis and the Church's response, the disproportionate effect the pandemic has had on vulnerable and marginalized populations, study on Dominican spirituality, and more.

CENACLE SISTERS

In September 2017, we welcomed seven Cenacle Sisters after the flooding from Hurricane Harvey devastated their lovely west Houston home and retreat center. We were thrilled that we had space for them to live and minister. The sisters moved to our retirement home, St. Dominic Villa, and to Genesis House. While residing on campus, we enjoyed sharing meals, liturgies, prayer, and community together. Most of the Cenacle sisters moved from campus during 2021; however, Sr. Lois Dideon, rc continues to reside at the Villa, and we are grateful for her presence.



JUBILEES

2016 60th Jubilees

Barbara Ann Collins, OP
Adrian Dover, OP
Theresa Macey, OP
Carol Mayes, OP
Rita Owens, OP

2016 25th Jubilee

Pamela van Giessen, OP

2017 60th Jubilees

Antoinette Kitty Carter, OP
Jane Meyer, OP

2018 75th Jubilee

Marie Bordages, OP

2018 60th Jubilees

Julie Greig, OP
Mary Magdalen Hanel, OP
Carletta LaCour, OP

2019 60th Jubilees

Thomas Ann LaCour, OP
Lauren Lindee, OP
Sharon Steglich, OP
Stephen Anne Zawacki, OP

2020 75th Jubilee

Mary Alice Carbajal, OP

2020 60th Jubilees

Josephine Marie Godinich, OP
Mary Laura Rembold, OP +
Mary Jean Olsovsky, OP
Barbara Ann Cernosek, OP
Mignonne Konecny, OP

2020 50th Jubilee

Miriam Oliveros, OP

2020 25th Jubilee

Mary Brenda, OP

2021 75th Jubilees

Gertrude Pena, OP

FORMATION AND VOCATION

Carol Mayes, OP has been our formation director for the past six years. She has been involved in formation for new school board members at St. Agnes and St. Pius X (with Donna Pollard, OP) new staff members, and those inquiring about the Dominican Family. She has shared the history of the Dominican order and our congregation and shared the mission, charism, and four pillars of Dominican life.

During the current leadership term, the sisters involved in vocations have been Kelly Biddle, OP, Mary Brenda, OP, Adrian Dover, OP, and Donna Pollard, OP. While we have had no new entrants or novices during the

past six years, we continue to support the Collaborative Dominican Novitiate now located in Chicago, Illinois. In September 2018, Kelly Biddle, OP made final profession. She has been a Dominican Sister of Houston for close to eleven years and made first vows almost eight years ago.



SYNOD

Pope Francis has called a Synod, which is a two-year process of listening and dialogue that opened in Rome in October 2021 and will conclude in 2023. Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on the theme, Communion, Participation, and Mission. The aim of this synodal process is to provide an opportunity for the entire People of God to discern together how

to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church in the long-term. By convoking this Synod, Pope Francis is inviting all the baptized to participate in this process. Congregations of women religious are participating with responses sent to the General Secretary for Synod of Bishops at the Vatican. At our Chapter in March, our congregation engaged in listening and discussions in preparing our contribution to the Synod.



Chapter 2022

While the original dates for our 2022 Chapter of Mission and Life and Elections were thwarted by the omicron surge this past January, we successfully held meetings at the end of March. With the guidance and expertise of our facilitator, Cathy Bertrand, SSND, the Chapter Planning Committee met for over two years to organize the meetings and ensure that all matters of importance to the congregation at this time in our history were addressed and discussed through contemplative dialogue. Committee members were Linda Gibler, OP, Laura Henderson, Carol Mayes, OP and Donna M. Pollard, OP.



At Chapter we discussed greater collaboration with the Dominican Family, our commitment to integral ecology, antiracism efforts, the future expression of mission in education, and the congregation's communal life. We affirmed the following statement to set the direction for the congregation for the next six years:

CHAPTER 2022 DIRECTIONAL STATEMENT

We, the Dominican Sisters of Houston, mindful of our deep connectedness to all creation, recommit ourselves to decision making through the lens of integral ecology as we plan for and realize the future of our mission and charism. As women preachers of the gospel, we commit ourselves and our resources for the next six years to:

- Continue to study and engage in the Laudato Si Action Platform
- Own the reality of systemic racism and work to dismantle it
- Collaborate with others to advance systemic and equitable change in education
- Move forward to provide appropriate, life-affirming options for communal life for the sake of well-being and mission
- Take intentional steps to deepen and broaden our collaboration with the Houston Dominican Family

The congregation elected the following sisters to serve on Council for the next leadership term from 2022 - 2028: Donna M. Pollard, OP, Prioress; Linda Gibler, OP, Vicarress; and Katie Gaspard, OP, Councilor. The congregation also affirmed a new extended leadership team model. In addition to canonically elected Council, three non-vowed staff members will serve on leadership for the next six years: Jose Enriquez, Director of Finance; Laura Henderson, Director of Mission Advancement; and Paula Porter, Director of Human Resources & Operations.

Necrology 2016 - 2022

*They whom we love and lose are
no longer where they were before.
They are now wherever we are.*

~ St. John Chrysostom

Rita Marie (Patricia Marie) Owens, OP ~ March 25, 1937 – January 27, 2017

Mary Frances (Lillian) Heins, OP ~ November 12, 1927 – March 20, 2017

Mary Frances (Julia) Boddeker, OP ~ May 20, 1929 – June 16, 2018

Mary Pat (Simeon) White, OP ~ March 1, 1931 – April 17, 2019

Jane (James Marie) Abell, OP ~ June 28, 1928 – April 20, 2019

Paula (Frieda Clare) Enderle, OP ~ January 1, 1928 – February 21, 2020

Lou Anne (Madeleine) Hill, OP ~ April 25, 1929 – April 18, 2020

Therese (Maria Goretti) Warden, OP ~ July 6, 1933 – April 28, 2021

Edna Ann (John Michael) Hebert, OP ~ July 16, 1931 – July 8, 2021

Mary Laura (Mary Teresa) Rembold, OP ~ October 7, 1942 – May 25, 2022

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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.

