

# The Good News

WINTER 2024  
ANNUAL REPORT

A PUBLICATION OF THE DOMINICAN SISTERS OF HOUSTON



# Greetings FROM THE PRIORESS

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.  
 – Romans 15:13

Dear Friends,

We abound in hope as our congregation continues to attend to the future of ministry and communal life with creativity. During this time of transition in religious life, we remain committed to our long history and ministry in education and justice work. However, because we are an aging community, we must explore new ways of thinking and new collaborations with other women religious and our Houston Dominican Family.

In the past two issues of the Good News, I have written about Dominican Veritas Ministries (DVM), a collaborative sponsorship model, approved by the Vatican, for the schools of five Dominican women religious congregations. On September 1, DVM officially assumed sponsorship of our two schools, St. Agnes Academy and St. Pius X High School, and the seven other participating Dominican schools. I will continue to serve our schools as a board member of DVM and am excited to have taken this step to ensure the Catholic and Dominican identities of our schools into the future.

We hope you enjoy reading in this issue about the ceremonies held at both schools to commemorate the transition of school sponsorship. We also hope you enjoy reading about some of the celebrations and projects going on at our Motherhouse campus – jubilees, retirements, and elevator renovations were all celebrated by our community with heartfelt gratitude.

Which brings me to you, dear friends. This issue includes the annual report of gifts to our community. We can never thank you enough for your generous support and for helping us carry on our mission today and tomorrow. Truly, your friendship is one of our community's greatest blessings. You remain in our prayers as we continue to hold you in our hearts with love and gratitude. May God continue to bless you, heal you, and fill you with light!

With love and in prayer,

*Donna M. Pollard, O.P.*

Donna M. Pollard, OP  
 Prioress

## WE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE ALL THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS ISSUE:

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Nikki Bermudes,<br>Communications SAA | Joyce Lubofsky, Liturgist               |
| Mary Brenda, OP                       | Florencia Parada,<br>Communications SPX |
| Heloise Cruzat, OP                    | Donna Pollard, OP                       |
| Francine Fleming,<br>Dominican Family | Paula Porter,<br>Villa Administrator    |
| Mary Gangelhoff,<br>Dominican Family  | Carleen Raymond,<br>SAA Principal       |
| Linda Gibler, OP                      | Ceil Roeger, OP                         |
| Laura Henderson, Editor               | Liz Witrago,<br>Administration          |
| Wanda Jinks, OP                       |   |
| Lauren Lindee, OP                     |   |

*Thank* YOU

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# Study & Prayer

## DOMINICAN MONTH FOR PEACE



Since 2017, the Dominican Order has been celebrating the "Dominican Month for Peace," highlighting a particular country each advent season where the Dominican Family is present to raise awareness on issues related to justice and peace of the country. This year, the Dominican International Commission for Justice and Peace selected the Amazonia Region for the Dominican Month for Peace. We celebrated the Dominican Month for Peace by praying for, learning about, and advocating for the Amazonia.

The Amazon River is the most important river in the world, with a length of over 4200 miles. The Amazon basin is the largest river basin in the world and home to the largest tropical rainforest. The basin extends to Brazil, which represents 66% of the Amazonia, followed by Peru with 13%. To a lesser extent, the Amazon basin extends into seven other countries: Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Guyana, French Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela. This vast untamed wilderness is under increasing threat from huge-scale farming and ranching, infrastructure and urban development, unsustainable logging, mining, and climate change.

During each week of advent, we immersed ourselves in what is happening in the Amazonia to raise our awareness, to pray and reflect on its reality, and to aid in its care and protection. Pope Francis has expressed his dream for the Amazonia: that we hear the cry of the land, which is overwhelming in natural beauty and overflowing with life that fills its rivers and jungles; hear the cry of the poor by fighting for the rights of the poorest, of the original peoples, of the excluded, so their voice can be heard and dignity promoted; help to preserve the cultural richness of the area and improve awareness and education; and Christian communities capable of volunteering give of themselves to become incarnate in the Amazonia.

## TURNING TOWARD THE LIGHT

The Dominican Family hosted the annual Advent Prayer and Brunch at the Motherhouse on December 2. Maria Burdick, chair of the Dominican Family, urged us to open our hearts and reorient them to the light of God as we prayed from the Islamic, Judaic, and Christian faith traditions for peace and hope for all creation, especially for Israel and Palestine. Carleen Raymond, St. Agnes Academy Principal, preached during the prayer service. Her preaching, which drew from stories of light in St Dominic's life, inspired and challenged us to bring the light of truth to the world.



Carleen began, "Today, we begin our community celebration of the season of Advent. Advent is a time of preparation. A time when we quiet our hearts in preparation for the full joy of Christ's arrival. It sounds simple: just quiet your heart. But in a time when there is so much turmoil and darkness in our world, our hearts can feel heavy, burdened, and

restless. War in Ukraine. War in the Middle East. People fleeing their homes. Innocent lives lost on all sides of these conflicts. It can be easy to let the darkness consume us as we bemoan, retreat from, and despair about what is happening in our world. But Advent reminds us that we all have a choice. We can turn towards the light."

Carleen noted that St. Dominic also lived in a time of division and darkness, but he knew his calling was to bring the light of truth to world through preaching. "St. Dominic illuminated the world with the truth of his preaching. He received the light, lived the light, and gave the light to the world through his new order. Dominicans in every age have been called to pray, study, explore, and discover better and more effective means of disseminating God's Word. As members of Dominican Family, following the example of St. Dominic and the Dominican Sisters of Houston, we too are called to bring the light of truth to the world... The Dominican Sisters, like Dominic, seek to understand the realities of peoples' lives and are moved to action based on the needs of people. Social justice and the seeking of truth has always been part of the DNA of Dominicans! When WE see signs and when WE hear stories of peoples' realities, WE must also respond with action."

"While we acknowledge the darkness of wars, the displacement of so many from their homes, or a fraught geopolitical climate, we are also offered a counterbalance: the gift of looking towards the light and the gift of preaching together as a Dominican community... We can carry the light within our hearts. We can be a sign of hope in the world. We can encourage one another to continue preaching with the actions of our lives."



# Community

## SISTER SPOTLIGHT

Mary Brenda, OP approaches life and ministry with passion and enthusiasm. Originally from LaPorte, Indiana, she earned a nursing degree in Pennsylvania. While volunteering as a medical missionary in college, working in the poorest of areas in Bogota, Colombia, the idea of religious vocation began to stir in her heart. In 1989, she joined a religious congregation on the east coast but eventually joined the Houston Dominicans in 1996.

Sister Mary has touched many lives through ministry. She has served as the Director of HIV/AIDS Outreach Ministry for Catholic Charities in the Galveston-Houston Archdiocese; administrator of St. Bakhita Dispensary in Nairobi, Kenya; development staff member at Our Lady of Grace School, Kisumu, Kenya; massage therapist; and in retreat ministry.

Currently, Sr. Mary serves as school nurse at St. Agnes Academy in Houston. She enjoys ministering to the young women at St. Agnes and attending retreats and after school events to support her students. She has also enjoyed sharing her passion for mission work with the students. While at St. Agnes, Sister Mary has

coordinated several mission trips. She has accompanied students to Eagle Pass, Texas, where they experienced first-hand the challenges the poor at the border face. She has also coordinated mission trips in Kisumu, Kenya and to our Guatemala mission school.



Sister Mary brings this same passion to her photography ministry, which has evolved over the years. Her photos of the night sky, wildlife, and all creation are awe inspiring. She is a collaborating member of the Dominican Institute for the Arts, and last fall, ahead of the COP 27 UN Climate Change Conference, the Dominican Sisters Conference asked Mary to prepare a video to capture an abundance of natural beauty. During the video, Mary states: "I walk and preach with my camera that all may taste and see the goodness of the Lord and be moved to lift

our hearts in awe, praise and thanksgiving as we learn to better care for all creation." Bringing that care and appreciation for creation a little closer to home, Sister Mary cares for a wonderful backyard kitchen garden for her local convent house where she grows a variety of delicious fresh herbs, vegetables, and fruits. Sister Mary loves being a Dominican and looks forward to many more years of serving God on her amazing journey as a Dominican sister.

## EXERCISE CLASS ANNIVERSARY

In September, we celebrated ten years of exercise classes at the Villa with our wonderful instructor, Carrie Gimmestad. Exercise participants and Carrie gathered to celebrate with an ice cream party. Congratulations Carrie and thank you for all that you do to ensure our sisters' wellbeing!



## JUBILEE CELEBRATION

On Saturday, August 9, we joyously celebrated the 60th jubilee of Sisters Anna Marie Flusche, OP, Lavergne Schwender, OP, Patricia Casey, OP, and Ann Huffstetter, OP (pictured left to right). Reverend John Rooney presided at the Eucharistic Liturgy, which was held in the chapel at St. Dominic Villa. Prioress Donna Pollard, OP thanked the jubilarians for their combined 240 years of ministry and service to God, the Church, and the Dominican community. Sr. Donna also congratulated Sr. Therese Marie Morales, in absentia, for her 75 years of Dominican life.

**Patricia (Pat) Casey, OP** (60th Diamond Jubilee) was born in Kansas City, Missouri and graduated from St. Agnes Academy in Houston in 1961. She earned a BA in English at Dominican College in Houston, and an MA in pastoral studies from Emmanuel College in Boston. Sr. Pat also received certifications in campus ministry and preaching. Sr. Pat ministered in education at St. Mary's Catholic School and St. Christopher Catholic School in Houston; St. Charles Catholic School in Nederland, Texas; St. Mary Cathedral School and O'Connell Jr. High School in Galveston; and St. Austin Catholic School in Austin. She then ministered as Assistant Director of Newman Hall in Austin; Campus Minister at the University of Houston; Director of Campus Ministry at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas; and served on the formation faculty at Assumption Seminary in San Antonio, Texas. Sr. Pat has served the community in

the treasurer's office, as Director of Formation and Vocation, and in leadership.

**Sister Anna Marie Flusche, OP** (60th Diamond Jubilee) grew up in Dallas, Texas and graduated from Ursuline Academy. She received a BA in liturgical music from Dominican College in Houston and MA from North Texas State University. She was the first person to be awarded a doctorate in organ performance from Rice University in 1995. Sr. Anna Marie ministered at St. Christopher Catholic School in Houston and St. Agnes Academy, where she chaired the music department. She served as organist at St. Michael Catholic Church, St. Christopher Catholic Church, and Hosanna Lutheran Church, all in Houston. She has written extensively about priests and religious who were organ builders, and her book, *The Life and Legend of Gerbert of Aurillac: The Organbuilder Who Became Pope Sylvester II*, was published in 2005. She has also written a screenplay, *The Preacher and the Dreamer*, a story that recounts the foundation of the Dominican Order.

**Ann Huffstetter, OP** (60th Diamond Jubilee) was born in Kearney, Nebraska and graduated from St. Pius X High School in 1963. She earned a BA in biology with a minor in chemistry and math. Later, she received an associate degree from Houston Community College to become a physical therapist assistant. Sr. Ann ministered in education at St. Pius X High School in Houston and Msgr. Kelly High School in Beaumont, Texas. She served as a media librarian for the Diocese of Galveston-Houston,

docent at the Houston Arboretum and Nature Center, and driver for her community. Sr. Ann has served as a physical therapy assistant in Anderson County, Texas in acute and home healthcare, school-based pediatric care, inpatient rehabilitation, and outpatient care. She is a cantor, sings in the Anderson County Community Chorus, and volunteers for the National Audubon Society and St. Vincent de Paul food pantry at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Palestine, Texas.

**Sister Lavergne Schwender, OP** (60th Diamond Jubilee) was born in Houston and graduated from St. Agnes Academy in 1960. She earned a BA in business administration and English from Dominican College, an MBA from the University of Texas at Austin, and a JD from the University of Houston Law Center. Sr. Lavergne ministered in education at Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral Catholic School and St. Pius X High School. She served as the Director of Newman Hall in Austin and as an attorney in the Harris County Attorney's Office for 21 years. While serving in the county attorney's office, she used her skills in law and business to help draft the first 9-1-1 legislation for Harris County and helped establish an operational

9-1-1 system in 1986. In 2005, Sr. Lavergne became the Executive Director of the Greater Harris County 9-1-1 Emergency Network and served for sixteen years. Sr. Lavergne continues to serve her community with both her business and legal experience.

**Therese Marie Morales, OP** (75th Diamond Jubilee) was born in Whittier, California and graduated from Sacred Heart of Mary Catholic High School in Los Angeles. She earned a BA in education and Spanish at Dominican College in Houston and later attended the University of California at Riverside, receiving additional certifications in both elementary and secondary education. Sr. Therese Marie ministered in education at St. Elizabeth Catholic School in Port Neches, Texas; Queen of Peace Catholic School in Houston; St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic School in Whittier; St. Anthony Catholic School in Beaumont; St. Austin Catholic School in Austin; St. Pius X High School in Houston; St. Francis de Sales Catholic High School and Notre Dame High School in Riverside; and St. Paul Catholic High School in Santa Fe Springs, CA, where she taught for 29 years.



From left to right: Sisters Anna Marie Flusche, OP, Lavergne Schwender, OP, Patricia Casey, OP, and Ann Huffstetter, OP

## VILLA ELEVATOR

In September, the elevator at our retirement home received a much-needed overhaul, which took several weeks. Sisters and staff at the Villa adapted to this major disruption with patience and grace. The food service staff did an amazing job accommodating the sisters. They brought meals to sisters using the small and very temperamental service elevator and set up a lovely makeshift dining room on the second floor. When the elevator became operational again in October, there was rejoicing all around. Many thanks and much gratitude to our Villa staff for a job well done!



## RETIREMENT CELEBRATION

In December, we celebrated the retirement of two beloved employees. Chris and Stephen Kutra are brothers who have worked at our Motherhouse for 44 and 41 years, respectively. Chris began working on our grounds when he was in high school. His brother Stephen soon followed. Stephen became our facilities manager, and he and Chris have worked together ever since. They have managed and executed innumerable projects and repairs at the Villa, administrative offices, and convent houses. Their sister Pat Kutra worked in our finance department for over forty years before retiring in 2015, and their father also worked at our Motherhouse for a time. We will miss their patient, thoughtful, and no-nonsense approach to work and any crisis thrown their way. We wish Stephen and Chris well in this new phase of their lives and are delighted to have Stephen's son August join us as our new facilities manager.

# Mission & Ministries

## DOMINICAN VERITAS MINISTRIES

In October, we celebrated with our founded high schools, St. Agnes Academy and St. Pius X High School, the transfer of their sponsorship from our congregation to Dominican Veritas Ministries (DVM), a collaborative canonical entity founded by five Dominican congregations in the US. The ceremonies, held at each school, honored the Houston Dominicans as founders and sponsors and formally recognized DVM's new sponsorship. At the ceremonies, Donna Pollard, OP preached, "Together as Dominicans, we are looking to the future of our schools with assurance that they will continue as Catholic Schools rooted in our Dominican charism, now with a new sponsorship model - Dominican Veritas Ministries."





## CRIMINALIZATION OF CHILDHOOD BEHAVIORS

In November, Brandon Mack, activist, sociologist and owner of B. Mack Strategies, LLC, gave a presentation on the criminalization of early childhood behavior in children of color, especially black children, from the time they enter the public school system. Over 25 years of research has shown that black school children are punished more severely and at higher rates for the same behaviors (or for lesser offenses) than white school children, and yet, the issue has not been addressed properly in schools.

Last spring, Brandon discussed the legacy of slavery which has allowed the devaluation of black people and resulted in the disproportionate application of the death penalty. This devaluation of black people through disproportionate punitive measures starts in school with more frequent and harsher punishments for black children that accumulate and escalate as they get older. This criminalization of childhood behaviors begins the school to prison pipeline.

Black students' behavior is disproportionately policed and punished. Nationally, black people comprise 13% of the population, and less than that in public schools. However, black students are four times more likely to be suspended than white students and three times more likely than Latinx students for the same or lesser behaviors. This disproportionality increases in southern states. In southern school districts, black children were suspended or expelled at a rate five times or higher than their representation in the student population. Black girls are more severely and disproportionately affected by school discipline policies and practices, bearing both racial and gender burdens.

Because 80% of public-school teachers are white and only 7% are black, most teachers may be more likely to misunderstand or misinterpret a black student's behavior because of their own implicit and explicit racial biases. Teachers tend to assign negative intentions to black students merely from the way they talk and move in the world. Likewise with administrators, principals, and school police officers, studies show the differences in the severity of discipline correlates to a student's race. Black students are over twice as likely to be referred to law enforcement or school related arrests than white students for the same behaviors.



The adverse impact of suspensions and expulsions is measurable. Higher suspension rates closely correlate with higher delinquency and school dropout rates which have a tremendous economic impact on the suspended student, schools, and our society. Out of school suspensions and expulsions are strongly associated with later participation in juvenile detention and the criminal justice system. The overrepresentation of blacks among students impacted by discipline policies and practices helps perpetuate the school to prison pipeline.

Brandon offered two solutions to help the disproportionate disciplining of black students. First, improve teacher training and professional development. Teachers need training on emotional and instructional support to build trust and help them better engage with black students to decrease frequency of referrals for suspension and other disciplinary measures. Secondly, implement a restorative justice program as an alternative to exclusionary policies like suspension and expulsion. Restorative justice programs decrease the likelihood of continued behavior and lessen the negative impact of disciplinary measures on students. The programs involve emotional training and community building practices to prevent and resolve student conflicts and behaviors. Students are not excluded from the classroom but rather become part of the shared solution to create a positive classroom environment with their teachers.

## SEASONS OF CREATION

Each year from September 1 to October 4, we join the global Christian family for the Season of Creation, a worldwide celebration of prayer and action to protect our common home. Prophet Amos cries out "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5: 24) and so we are called to join the river of justice and peace, to take up climate and ecological justice, and to speak out with and for communities most impacted by climate injustice and the loss of biodiversity. As followers of Christ from around the globe, we share a common call to care for creation. We are co-creatures and part of all that God has made. Our wellbeing is interwoven with the wellbeing of the Earth.



## COMMUNITY GARDEN

November 17 brought the return of a group of Cristo Rey students with their chaperone Jill to spend this year's Building the Kingdom service hours at our community garden. The group gallantly and repeatedly loaded tree mulch into wheelbarrows and then unloaded in the garden where it was evenly spread over the garden lanes. It is a morning of rather hard work, but the students do it diligently and cheerfully. We are deeply grateful as this enables our gardeners to work every Tuesday morning no matter what the weather has brought. Cristo Rey students have served in our community garden since 2016 and are much appreciated together with Mr. A. L. Mayo's annual donation of the truckload of tree mulch. Very good work on a very gorgeous morning!





AUGUST 1, 2022–JULY 31, 2023



**SR. MARY ALICE CARBAJAL, O.P.  
(JANUARY 4, 1923 – OCTOBER 12, 2023)**

Sr. Mary Alice (Mary Gilbert) was born in Fabens, Texas and entered the Dominican Sisters of Houston in 1945. She earned a BA in Spanish and English at Dominican College, Houston and completed extended studies in scripture, spirituality, and ministry at the University of California, Riverside, California.

Sr. Mary Alice served in education ministry for almost forty years, teaching at St. Anthony School, Beaumont, TX; St. Elizabeth School, Port Neches, TX; Christ the King School, Houston; St. Mary School, Orange, TX; Holy Rosary School, Houston; St. Peter the Apostle School, Houston; Holy Family School, Wharton, TX; St. Mary School, Taylor, TX; St. Austin School, Austin, TX; Holy Spirit School, San Antonio, TX; St. Francis de Sales, Riverside; and St. Mary School, Whittier, CA. She served as principal at St. Francis de Sales in Riverside and Holy Rosary School in Houston.



Sr. Mary Alice answered an appeal in 1966 from Pope John XXIII for religious communities to minister in Latin America. She was one of the mission founders at Our Lady of Guadalupe School in Guatemala City, Guatemala. Sr. Mary Alice's time in Guatemala was among her favorite in ministry. Sister also served as a bilingual receptionist at Holy Family Birth Center in Weslaco, TX, and religion coordinator at St. Francis de Sales Church in Riverside. In retirement, she served her congregation as receptionist and assisted as needed at St. Dominic Villa. Sr. Mary Alice had an impact on many lives. She will be remembered for her faithful letter writing as a prison ministry, her proficiency as a translator, and her love of socializing.

We are truly blessed to have such generous and loyal support from so many donors. Thank you for valuing the mission and ministry of the Dominican Sisters of Houston and for allowing us to carry out successfully our work for the people of God. Your gifts to our *Partners* in Mission Annual Fund are inspiring and support our sisters' work. Your loyal support of San Vicente de Paul School in Guatemala helps to better the lives of so many children. And finally, your generosity towards our retired sisters is deeply appreciated. Thank you for honoring them for their many years of service. May God bless you, heal you, and fill you with light.

*Thank you!*

**Annual Fund Donors**

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We are deeply grateful to these individuals who gave leadership gifts of \$500 or more to our *Partners* in Mission Annual Fund during the August 1, 2022 to July 31, 2023 fiscal year. We are blessed to have their faithful commitment to our mission.

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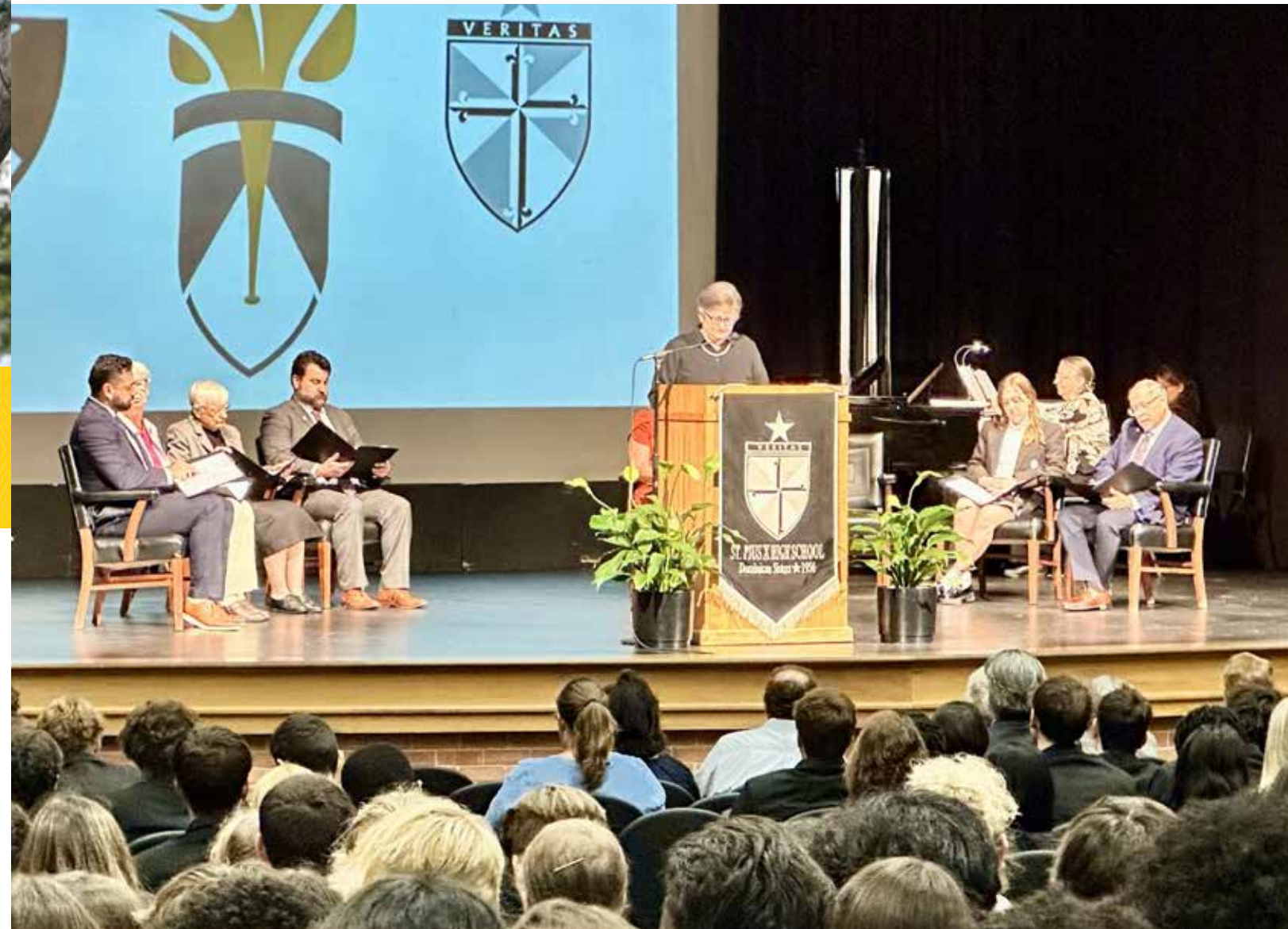


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Total Giving:	\$ 1,191,460.00
<b>Partners</b> in Mission Annual Fund:	\$ 471,250.00
Retirement Fund:	\$ 397,100.00
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The Dominican Sisters of Houston's legacy in Catholic education and service is deep 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.



FEB 24<sup>TH</sup>

Antiracism Program: The Cost of Inheritance  
(film screening and workshop)

DOMINICAN CENTER FOR SPIRITUALITY

6501 ALMEDA ROAD

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL 713-440-3714

### *On the Cover*

**THE COVER OF THIS ISSUE (ALONG WITH THE PHOTO ON PAGE 19), DEPICTS SOME OF THE EVENTS WE CELEBRATED THIS PAST FALL, INCLUDING DIAMOND JUBILEES OF SISTERS AND CEREMONIES HELD AT ST. AGNES ACADEMY AND ST. PIUS X HIGH SCHOOL TO COMMEMORATE OUR TRANSFER OF SPONSORSHIP.**

