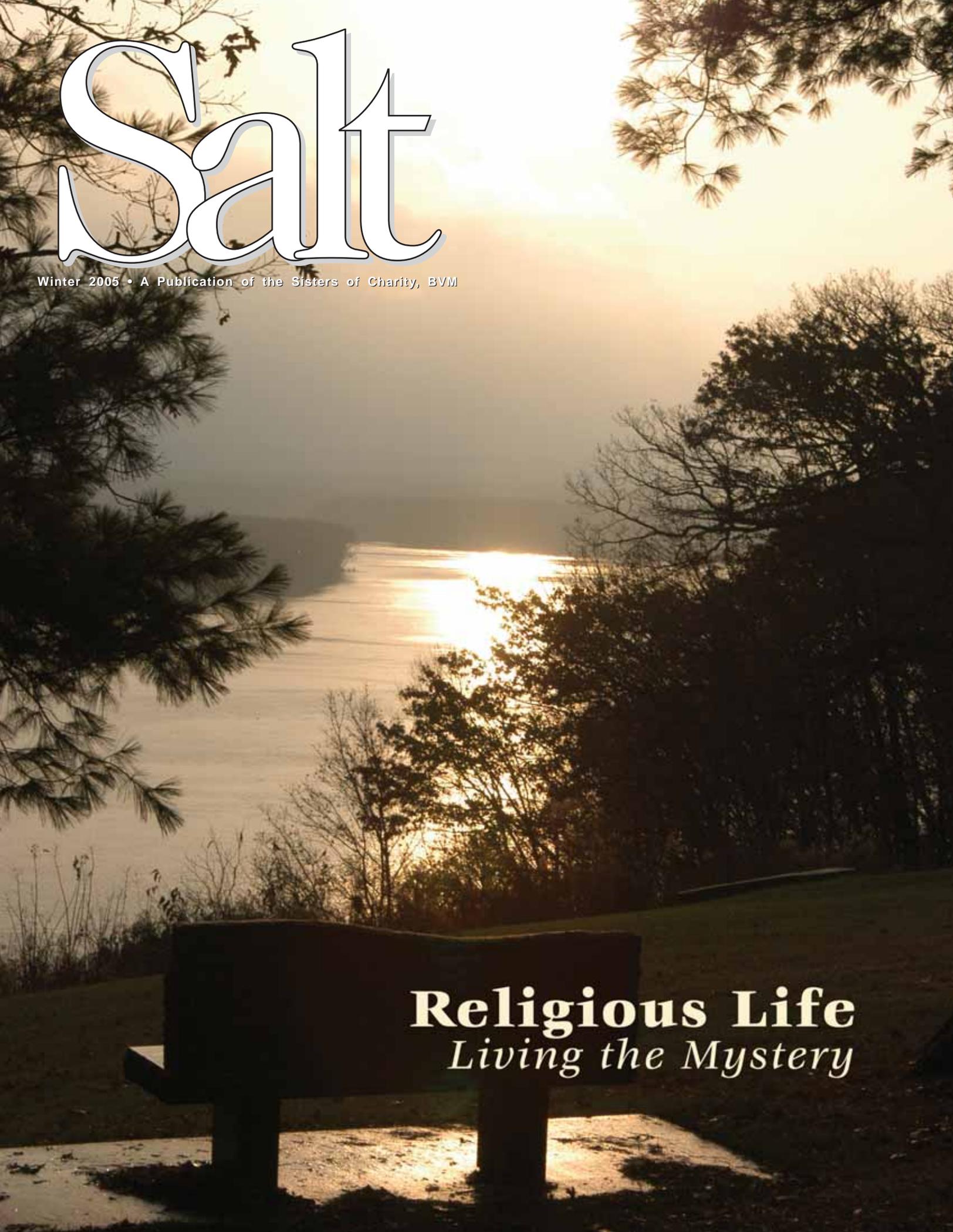


# Salt



Winter 2005 • A Publication of the Sisters of Charity, BVM

**Religious Life**  
*Living the Mystery*

**Mission Statement:** As Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we are called to participate in the mission of Jesus. Our choice of ministry is in keeping with our BVM mission: being freed and helping others enjoy freedom in God's steadfast love. *BVM Constitutions, No. 10*

**SALT** is a quarterly magazine published for friends of the Sisters of Charity, BVM.

**Editor:** Mira Mosle, BVM

**Design Editor:** Angie J. Connolly

**Communication Advisory Committee:** Mary Elizabeth Galt, BVM; Amy Golm, BVM; Jeanne Harrington, Associate; Sara McAlpin, BVM; Margaret A. McGinn, BVM; Joan Newhart, BVM; Pat Rogers, BVM

**Subscriptions:** \$7.50 per year, write: **SALT**, 1100 Carmel Drive, Dubuque, Iowa 52003-7991, ph. (563) 588-2351, or email: [ajconn@bvmcong.org](mailto:ajconn@bvmcong.org)

**2005 Calendar**

**Feb. 6** Diamond Jubilee Celebration, Mount Carmel

**Feb. 26** "Come and See," Phoenix, Ariz.

**March 12** Gannon Center Women's Conference, Loyola University, Chicago, "Women's Experience: A Global Perspective," with Patricia Schroeder

**April 10** Immaculata High School Alumnae Luncheon, Chateau Ritz, Niles

**April 15-17** "Come and See," Mt. Carmel, Dubuque

**April 24** St. Mary High School Alumnae Luncheon, Hilton Hotel, Oak Lawn

**July 9** Golden Jubilarian Celebration, Mount Carmel

**Sept. 11** Diamond and Local Golden Jubilee Celebration, Mount Carmel

**Internet Address:**  
[www.bvmcong.org](http://www.bvmcong.org)

**Email Address:**  
[mmosle@bvmcong.org](mailto:mmosle@bvmcong.org)



**Member of  
Catholic Press Association**

**On the cover:** The Mississippi River below Mount Carmel reflects the sun on a misty day.

*Printed on Recycled Paper.*

## Religious Life: Living the Mystery

- 3 Seasoning**  
*by BVMs Joellen McCarthy, Peggy Nolan and Mary Ann Zollmann*
- 4 Religious Life an Evolving God-quest;  
Vows Guide the Journey**  
*by Harriet Holles, BVM*
- 6 Constitutions Guide BVM Expression of Religious Life**  
*by Kathleen Conway, BVM*
- 8 Poverty: Sharing of Gifts, Living Stewardship**  
*by Jane Rogers, BVM*
- 9 To Save and to Savor: A Reflection on Celibacy**  
*by Paulette Skiba, BVM*
- 10 Obedience: Listening to God, Responding**  
*by Carol Frances Jegen, BVM*
- 11 What Are Women Seeking in Religious Life Today?**  
*by Theresa Gleeson, BVM and Kathleen Mullin, BVM*
- 12 Community Essential for 'Younger' Member**  
*by Lou Anglin, BVM*
- 13 International Novices Signal New Era of BVM Membership**  
*by Mira Mosle, BVM*
- 14 World Congress Strengthens Global Consciousness, Compassion**  
*by Joellen McCarthy, BVM*
- 15 Top Ten Questions Asked of a Young BVM**  
*by Amy Golm, BVM*
- 16 Religious Life in Ecuador Embraces Renewal**  
*by Luann Brown, BVM*
- 17 From the 'Heart of America,' Place Is Defining**  
*by Ana Priester, BVM*
- 18 Religious Life in Ghana: Young, Developing**  
*by Mary Ann Hoope, BVM*
- 19 SALT Briefs**

## BVMs Protest at SOA



BVMs and Associates—20 in all—were among the 16,000 persons expressing their disagreement with the U.S. policy of training military leaders from Central and South American countries. The number of protesters this year was the largest ever to gather at the West Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (formerly the School of the Americas), Fort Benning on Nov. 20-21.

Marge Clark, BVM visits with actor Martin Sheen. He was a keynote speaker and leader of the weekend's march.



# SEASONing

Dear *SALT* Readers,

Undoubtedly many of you will open this issue of *SALT* with a special anticipation.

You have followed our unfolding of religious life for years, getting to know us in classrooms prior to Vatican II where something of the distinctiveness of our life was clearly visible in our manner of dress, the names by which you knew us, our daily schedule, and customs that seemed to distance us from the world of family, job and socio-political realities so familiar to you.

Much of who we were and what we did when we were not teaching you remained a mystery. The meaning of our lives as women religious came to be defined by the separation between you and us.

Then, you—and we—experienced the radical shift that came with Vatican II and its encouragement to live our lives with and among the people of God. We wore ordinary clothes, took back our ordinary names, came into your homes and invited you into ours, and moved into a classroom defined not by the walls of a school but by the needs of our world.

The external boundaries that had separated us dissolved and along with their dissolution, the sense of meaning derived from external difference. Significantly, the sense of mystery deepened and intensified. If our identity as women religious is not found in visible and tangible externals, then where is it found?

Indeed, as you ask these questions about the meaning and identity of religious life today, so do we. We are grateful for the questions as the questions encourage us to bring to word and articulation the inspiration that underneath all of its external expressions, guides, energizes, sustains and surprises us.

The questions and our attempt to respond—both for you and for us—draw us into the deep mystery that both in and beyond what is visible and tangible, has always and will always give meaning to our lives. Our response takes the form of the rich descriptions such as the ones you will find in this issue of *SALT*.

As you spend time with us in this issue, you will engage with us as women prayerfully open to God's call, committed to being Sister to an ever-widening global and planetary community, sensitive to joy and suffering, and willing to take the risks involved

in bringing about God's dream for our world.

Yet, even in these attempts to respond to the meaning of religious life and our BVM expression of that life, we find ourselves saying, "But there is more; what we have said is not quite it." This is where poetry and symbol step in with their potential to draw us into truth that eludes explanation and definition in logical language.

A poem by David Whyte, entitled "The Old Interior Angel," speaks to what the articles in this issue of *SALT* are all about.

The author is on a hike through the Himalayan mountains when abruptly his path ends in the sight of a broken bridge, its *taut cables snapped and the bridge planks concertina-ed into a crazy jumble over the drop, four hundred feet to the craggy stream.*

Facing the *trembling bridge with a fearful mind and an emphatic shake of the head*, the mountain climber is about to turn around and go back when

*Enter the old mountain woman  
with her stooped gait,  
small feet shuffling for the precious  
gold-brown fuel for cooking food.  
Intent on the ground  
she glimpsed my feet and looking up  
Said, "Namaste"  
"I greet the God in you."  
I inclined my head and clasped my hands  
to reply, but before I could look up  
she turned her lined face  
and went straight across  
that shivering chaos  
Of wood and broken steel in one movement.  
One day the old interior angel  
limps slowly in  
with her no-nonsense compassion  
and her old secret and goes ahead.  
"Namaste"  
you say and follow.*

Beyond all description and definition, we are drawn—and we hope you will be, too—into the deepest meaning and identity of our lives: the mystery of women who have been grasped by the God of compassion and who can do nothing else but follow the lead of that love.

*Joellen McCarty, BVM*

*Peggy Nolan, BVM*

*Mary Ann Zollman, BVM*



# Religious Life an Evolving God-

by Harriet Holles, BVM

In a new poem Mary Oliver notes that as she sat one morning to think of God she saw a solitary cricket moving grains with humble effort and great energy. She concludes:

*Let us hope  
it will always be like this,  
each of us going on  
in our inexplicable ways  
building the universe.<sup>1</sup>*

It has always been like this: all of creation working together in mysterious ways for a greater good. And in the human family there has been a conscious search for meaning, often for the Ultimate Meaning, God.

Within most of the major world religions, for some women and men this God-quest was the primary and exclusive focus of their lives.

In one of those religions, Christianity, from the earliest days, a personal relationship with Jesus, the Christ, a relationship vibrant and active, has been understood as the source and support of "religious life."

A person desires to become holy and to serve others, actively and/or through prayer. This longing of a Christian to live in such a focused way for God is seen as a call. God takes hold of a person in such a strong, mysterious and yet gentle manner that one can't turn away.

Through nearly two millennia religious life has been a viable life choice for Catholic Christians. Broadly considered it has meant choosing to live a life shaped and constituted by perpetual commitment to the values of poverty, chastity, obedience, community and ministry together with other women or men who share a common vision.

Changes during the centuries—in cultures, in cosmologies, in the church—brought about different needs, varied foci, new understandings to which these seekers have responded.

Religious life has had its ups and downs; new forms have come into existence; others have disappeared. It has not been a static phenomenon!

## Evolving History

Consider a very brief sweep of religious life through Christian history. In the first centuries of Christianity virgins, both women and men, and widows, who chose not to marry again, saw their dedication as a giving of their whole life to God and not as a single focus on sexuality. Their life's work was prayer and service.

After the legalization and relaxation of Christianity in 312 many devoted Christians broke family and social ties, disposed of possessions and fled to the desert for their spiritual lives.

These "abbas" and "ammas" lived in silence and solitude: fasting, working and praying. For them the life itself meant poverty and celibacy and was not tied to specific vows.

Gradually the monastics gathered together in community and lived a common life of prayer and work guided by an abbess or abbot. Benedict (d. 550) and his sister, Scholastica, are named as the founders of monasticism in the western church.

For the first time religious profession included explicit vows, which were viewed as a deepening of one's baptismal commitment. The understandings and practices of monasticism continued to influence religious communities well into the 20th century.

For Dominic, Francis and Clare in the 13th century and Ignatius in the 16th century, the important work of preaching the gospel implied travel away from the community. Thus each member had to be an embodiment or incarnation of the religious life of the community.

Focus on the demands, responsibilities and significance of each individual vow was intensified. Poverty took primacy for the Franciscans; for the Jesuits, obedience. At one time or another each of the vows was seen as most significant.

By the time of the Council of Trent (1563) two perceptions about religious life had become common

and fixed among Catholics. The making of vows and living out their obligations was religious life. Secondly, the vowed life was superior to any other form of Christian life.

## BVM Community

Into this milieu came Mary Frances Clarke with her circle of friends from Ireland across the ocean, landing finally at Dubuque (1843) with the hope of providing Christian education for youth. Many other such God-seeking women and men gathered religious communities to do works of charity, primarily educating and nursing, during the 1800s.

The congregation, the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, known popularly as the BVMs, which formed around Mary Frances Clarke, inherited much of the then contemporary understanding and practice of the church and of religious communities. Mary Frances, however, provided a more gentle approach to some of the harsher practices.

Prior to Vatican II (1965) BVMs held the goal of their religious life to be "the glory of God and their own perfection."<sup>2</sup> Life was lived within the responsibilities of the vows: poverty, chastity and obedience, and the *Constitutions* of the congregation.

The vows were understood to affect the deepest drives of the human person, possession, sexuality and power, and functioned primarily as laws to curb or moderate these drives. By setting necessary boundaries and advocating appropriate virtues, the vows gave shape to religious life.

Poverty meant that a religious woman owned nothing independently; she gave everything she had or would have to the community. Chastity meant a religious woman did not marry which, of course, meant she did not engage in the sexuality proper to marriage. Obedience meant that a Sister in obeying the directives of the superior and the rules of the community was doing the will of God.

# quest; Vows Guide the Journey

During these years most BVMS were teachers who wore the community habit and lived together in convents, according to a common time schedule. Daily the Sisters prayed together, kept silence at certain times and gathered for recreation as a group.

Once a year, in the summer, each Sister received a letter from the provincial "sending" her to a mission where she would serve for the next year. This was understood as a significant part of the Sister's obedience.

In keeping with poverty each Sister's personal needs—food, clothing, medicine, education and other necessities—were provided; rarely did a Sister handle money. Charity, courtesy and necessity shaped the interactions of Sisters with those who were outside the community as the concerns for chastity suggested.

There was an abundance of Sisters in those days; the novitiates were bulging. Schools and hospitals flourished under the guidance and expertise of the church's religious women.

## Vatican II

Then the Mighty Spirit of Vatican II blew through our churches and our convents bringing a newness not heard or seen for 400 years. The Council proclaimed that all people are called to holiness. No longer could religious stay on the pedestal of superiority!

The Council invited acceptance of diversity and openness to other religions. The Council encouraged reading and study of the bible and living a gospel life. The Council urged attention to the signs of the times. An overarching theme was the passing of power from elites to the ordinary people of God.

The Council asked religious communities to return to the original charisma or spirit of their group. This meant a time of prayer, study, reflection and discernment resulting in new understandings and renewed ways of serving.

Today, contemporary BVMS see themselves as "...women who have been touched by God's steadfast love;" who in response live a "vowed life of faithfulness" to God, to one another in community, to God's people, especially the poor.<sup>3</sup>

*Religious life is understood as a life for wholeness and holiness, a freely chosen life which is not better than any other Christian calling but the best way for a particular woman to most fully live the discipleship of the gospels.*

## Shift in Perspective

BVMS' new *Constitutions*, completed in 1989, have a completely different style than the previous rules. Instead of regulating they evoke and inspire. (See pp. 6-7.) They embody a vision statement of BVM lived reality. Gradually the vows are being welcomed as values which guide and inspire rather than laws which regulate.

The justice and peace themes of Jesus' kingdom message call religious women into the political arena, into places of economic concern, into networks across cultures and religions. The destruction of planetary resources, the incredible poverty of so many of our people, the unspeakable violence in our treatment of life are signs of the times written large.

BVM Sisters still educate in schools and colleges but also in programs for lay ministry, English as a second language and catechesis of all kinds. They continue to heal as well, caring for bodies, psyches and spirits in hospitals, parishes, homeless shelters, infirmaries, prisons, counseling centers and retreat houses. And they pray and

facilitate prayer! Like the persistent widow of the gospel they know Who holds the power in this world.

## Broader Vision

Today religious women tend to see themselves as faith-filled and faithful God seekers whose work is building the reign of God. Religious life is understood as a life for wholeness and holiness, a freely chosen life which is not better than any other Christian calling but the best way for a particular woman to most fully live the discipleship of the gospels.

Some accidentals have changed—clothing, names, prayer styles, dwelling places—but the essentials remain, newly framed by widened and deepened gospel understandings and motivated by the enormous needs of our global society.

By living out the values of religious life—poverty or realization of our common creaturehood; consecrated celibacy or single hearted love for all; obedience or prayerful listening to the urgings of the Spirit—religious women turn upside down the world's logic regarding their needs, their love and their power. They are prophetic. They are involved. They take God seriously.

And so BVMS, at the beginning of this 21st century, continue to live with humble effort and all the energy they can muster, each one pondering God and going on in inexplicable ways to build the universe and the kingdom!

## Endnotes

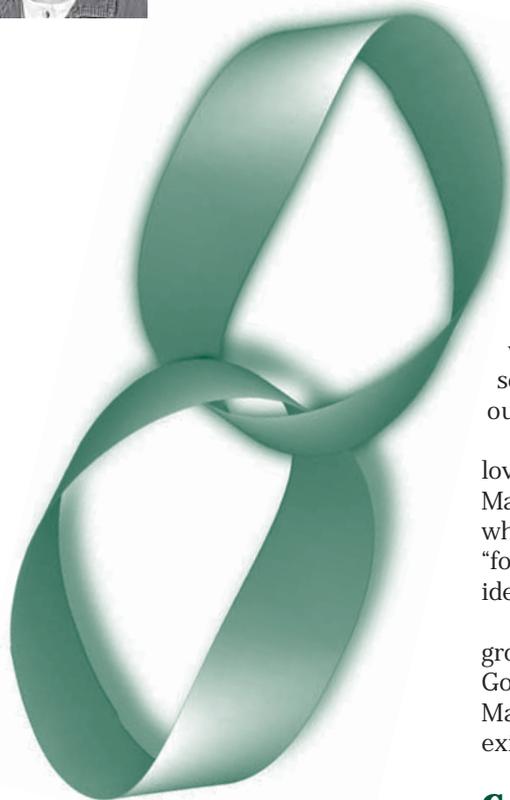
- 1 Oliver, Mary. "Song of the Builders," *Why I Wake Early*. Beacon Press, Boston, 2004.
- 2 *Constitutions of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Mount Carmel, Dubuque, Iowa, 1958, #1.
- 3 *Directory, Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Mount Carmel, Dubuque, Iowa, 1989, #1.

**About the author:** Harriet Holles, BVM (Agneda) is a resource person in spirituality. She resides in Dubuque, Iowa, and in June will return to minister in Ghana.



# Constitutions Guide BVM Expressions

by Kathleen Conway, BVM



My reasons for entering religious life in the early 60s were not terribly profound. I saw how happy my high school teachers were and how much they loved one another. Though I wouldn't have phrased it like this at the time, I wanted to love expansively and make a difference in our world as the BVMs at Our Lady of Peace in St. Paul were doing.

Today I realize that my early motivations still work. I'm a BVM because it fits me, encourages me to live a life of love, and to be Sister to all.

Vatican II encouraged religious congregations to return to the original charism of their founders and to rewrite their constitutions.

Aware that the "vision" is written in the lives of the Sisters themselves, the re-framers of our *BVM*

*Constitutions* looked closely at how BVMs lived their particular style of religious life, and wrote it down. They clarified for us our unique BVM path for freeing ourselves to "love God with our whole heart, mind and soul and love our neighbor as ourselves."

Our title describes us as Sisters of love who live lives modeled on Mary. The *Constitutions* flesh out what this means for us and help us "focus on both our daily lives and the ideals toward which we strive." (#1)

The *Constitutions* begin by grounding us in our roots: the Gospel; the church; the spirit of Mary Frances Clarke and the exigencies of our times.

## Community, Ministry, Prayer

The first three chapters on Community, Ministry and Prayer revolve around and nourish one another. My image for these first three chapters is the moebius strip (see illustration).<sup>1</sup> The "stuff" of the strip is community and the two sides, the two expressions, are ministry and prayer.

The glue that holds community together is "love which flows from the personal relationship of each Sister with the Triune God." (#4)

Our loving union with God and with one another in community supports us "spiritually, psychologically and financially." (#9) Within this congregational circle of friends, we are challenged to live a life of love and to be "Sister" to the many communities to which we belong.

Continuing with the image of the moebius strip, one side of community is prayer; the other ministry. Community life has both an inward and outward manifestation.

One quickly notices that in a moebius strip, the inner soon becomes the outer and the outer, inner. There is a constant dynamic in community of prayer flowing into ministry flowing into prayer...

"Our choice of ministry is in keeping with our BVM mission: being freed and helping others enjoy freedom in God's steadfast love. (#10) The works we do are "works of love undertaken and performed out of love" for God (#14) and our desire to sensitively respond to those in need. (#15)

Our prayer life is supported and animated by our life in community and our ministries of love and in turn supports and animates our community life and works. Our life of prayer strengthens us to "grow in Christ" and become more sensitive "to the conflicts and sufferings of our world." (#28)

## The Vows

Following the dynamic of Community, Ministry and Prayer are three chapters on the vows, the heart of our lives together. All three vows are intended to fine tune our lives in such a way that we can be greater lovers for the sake of the kingdom {sic}, uniting ourselves to the cosmic body of Christ.

Through the vow of consecrated celibacy "we freely choose to enter into the mystery of love in community." (#30) Through this love we "witness to a fullness of life in Christ which overflows into a sharing of life with others." (#32) Celibacy frees us to love all as a Sister.

As we learn more about the profound interconnectedness which unites all on earth and in the cosmos this role of "Sister" takes on a deeper meaning.

Not only are we called to love

those persons most marginalized by unjust structures and give “strong public witness against oppression” (#17) but we are also called to recognize ourselves as of earth and to love and care for all the voiceless—the air, the water, the forests.

The vow of poverty also is meant to free us to love. As our *Constitutions* state, “Religious poverty is rooted in the poverty of Christ and leads toward the ultimate goal of Christian life which is love.” (#38)

Poverty encourages us, in the context of a loving supportive community, to “detach ourselves from all that stands in the way of love and service.” (#49)

Finances, goods and property are all held in common, freeing us to hold nothing as our own, but all as gift given to enjoy and share. Like celibacy, the vow of poverty encourages us to be free from all that would prevent us from “sharing generously with others our time and talents as well as material possessions” (#44) and from “participating in the world-wide struggle of those who suffer injustice, ignorance and indignity.” (#45)

The vow of obedience also is meant as a guide to growing in love in the service of life. This vow unites us with the obedience of Jesus. (#50) We listen for God’s will “through the Church, the Scripture and Sacrament...in the signs of the times and the needs of God’s people.” (#54)

### Formation, Governance, Stewardship, Separation

The framework or structure for our lives is provided in the last four sections of the *Constitutions*. The first of these sections on formation of new members describes the formation process as one carried out

in a loving spirit of interdependence and hospitality.

The Governance section describes authority in the context of the “love and service lived by Jesus.” (#80) With an understanding of the prophetic nature of religious life, the section on Stewardship of Temporal Goods begins by reminding us of our original blessing—that all material resources are expressions of God’s love and bounty and we regard them with appreciation and gratitude. (#102)

The final section deals with separation from the congregation. We are Sisters of love and any departure of a Sister from the congregation is worked out with “understanding and supportive love.” (#108)

In the gospel of Matthew Jesus is asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” He answered. “Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mt 22)

The *BVM Constitutions* flesh out for us the unique way that we as Sisters of love, Sisters of Mary, live out this triple commandment to love God, our neighbor and ourselves.

#### Endnote

- 1 To make a moebius strip, cut a strip of paper, twist it once and attach the two ends. Image concept borrowed from Parker Palmer. For more information go to [http://mathforum.org/sum95/math\\_and/moebius/howto](http://mathforum.org/sum95/math_and/moebius/howto).

**About the author:** Kathleen Conway, BVM (Richard Marie) is a Regional Representative for the Great Lakes Region and was a member of the Constitutions Committee (1975-1989) along with BVMs Rita Benz, Mary Ellen Caldwell, Deanna Carr, Carol Frances Jegen, Joanne Lucid, Mary Frances Shafer and the late Mary Benedict Phelan.

A charitable gift annuity is a practical solution for those who want to make a gift but also need income for themselves. Quite simply, charitable gift annuities make giving possible for many.

A charitable gift annuity is an irrevocable gift that provides you or a designated recipient a fixed income. In exchange for your gift, the Sisters pay a lifetime fixed annuity based on the annuitant’s age and the date the payments are to begin. The annuity payments will never vary, and at the end of your life the remainder of the gift will be used for the ministries of the Sisters of Charity, BVM.

Why should you consider a charitable gift annuity? You are providing future support for the Sisters, while also securing a lifetime income for yourself or someone you love. And, of course, you may also qualify for valuable tax benefits. A gift annuity is a contract for your future, as well as the future of the BVMs.

If you establish an annuity with the BVMs, a contract from the Sisters and a tax and gift computation will be written. It is the recommendation of our financial advisors that we set the gift minimum at \$5,000.00 and minimum age of 70.

For a personal illustration of payments and tax deductions, please provide your date of birth and amount of your gift & send to:

**Patricia J. Judge**  
Director of Development  
Sisters of Charity, BVM  
1100 Carmel Drive  
Dubuque, IA 52003-7991  
563-588-2351 ext. 570  
[pjudge@bvmcong.org](mailto:pjudge@bvmcong.org)



# Poverty: Sharing of Gifts, Living Stewardship

by Jane Rogers, BVM

A Monet print entitled "Sunrise" hangs next to my bed. It assures me that every morning I will see the sun rise! It has a quiet, subtle beauty with its miry mist over a water scene depicting some fisher people hopefully taking in the intensity of God's presence in the NOW as they await a new day to begin.

The above imagery also reminds me of Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he said, "Jesus Christ calls us, not to a new religion, but to LIFE." For me to write anything about poverty, it is crucial to be into life in the NOW as that is how I see responding to the call of God.

This means living life to the full by focusing on all of life as I grow in love of God, neighbor and self. This is all about searching, seeking, exploring, risking and at the same time knowing that, "we are absolutely dependent, at the depths of our being, upon God as Source of Life."<sup>1</sup>

I see God's love as unconditional, unrelenting and forever. To live in a community where together people are totally committed to God's love and who strive to live "the spirit of poverty" assists me in living out my covenant relationship with God.

## Simplicity is Key

For me, simplicity is an important part of living the vow of poverty. It means openness to the beauty of the present, whatever its shape, whatever its lack. It can lead to a certain freedom of mind and spirit.

It asks me to take things I need and to leave things I don't. "Ownership is not a thing we do or have, but a set of values we live out in daily life."<sup>2</sup> I am invited to see the world around me with God's eyes and respond to what I see with a compassionate heart.

Diarmuid O'Murchu says the vows are conglomerates of values and that they all relate to the human search for meaning. This fits well, as I do not see poverty as "sacrificing material goods so much as exercis-

ing stewardship over the goods of creation according to the equality and integrity of the gospel."<sup>3</sup>

While I know Gospel values are inculturated and vary enormously from one part of the earth to another, I feel too much energy is

*I realize, in a world of limited resources and unjust distribution of wealth, how I live the vow of poverty can be a prophetic witness. I try to do this by buying generic products, recycling, avoiding multinationals, purchasing fair trade products, watching for sales, not accumulating stuff.*

given to weapons and war and results in poverty for our world.

Jesus never talked about poverty. He talked about "the poor in spirit," those who experience God's unconditional love in the ordinary. "It's what we do for Christ in the here and now that makes a difference in the then and there."<sup>4</sup>

## Prophetic Witness

I realize, in a world of limited resources and unjust distribution of wealth, how I live the vow of poverty can be a prophetic witness. I try to do this by buying generic products, recycling, avoiding multinationals, purchasing fair trade products, watching for sales, not accumulating stuff.

Another major challenge for prophetic witness is how I respond to our dear Mother Earth. I am pained to see the earth taken for granted, to be used and abused and for the times we are utterly oblivious of the gift it is.

My ministry in hospice bereave-

ment requires me to be a good listener as people share their brokenness, their utter poverty of pain in spirit. My hope is that they will do the grief work in order to live life more fully.

At the end of my day, it is the values that have touched the depth of my heart that matter. I know in my aging process I need to be more gentle to myself, and this, too, is a reminder of my poverty.

This also elicits a different quality of spirituality. It is more one of "Being." I find that a grand comfort!! I also find comfort in family, friends, faith journey reading, bridge, travels, art and music.

In conclusion, everything is gift to be shared and used for mutual benefit. I thank God for each precious person, place, thing that has been given as gift to me for a time. Knowing this in a spirit of poverty helps me to appreciate the gifts more. Gifts are given to be celebrated, and so I celebrate!

Ronald Rolheiser says, "The spiritual life is not a quick sprint to a well-marked finish line, but a marathon, an arduous lifelong journey into an ever-widening horizon."<sup>5</sup> Each day with or without the sunrise, I know I am grateful for it.

## Endnotes

- 1 Prevallet SL, Elaine M. "A Wisdom for Life," presentation given at a conference sponsored by the Loretto Earth Network, Nerinx, Kentucky, 1995.
- 2 O'Murchu, Diarmuid. *Poverty, Celibacy and Obedience*. Crossroads, Pub. Co., 1999, p. 68.
- 3 Ibid, p. 16.
- 4 Lucado, Max. *The Eye of the Storm*, on a Hallmark Card.
- 5 Rolheiser, Ronald. *The Holy Longing*. Doubleday, 1999.

**About the author:** Jane Rogers, BVM (Jananne) is a bereavement counselor with Hospice of Fort Dodge at Trinity Regional Medical Center, Fort Dodge, Iowa. She celebrated her golden jubilee in religious life this past summer.



# To Save and to Savor: A Reflection on Celibacy

by Paulette Skiba, BVM

*Every morning I am torn by the desire to save the world and the inclination to savor it.* E.B. White

The contemplative knows that there is no choice between saving and savoring the world. We will not save what we do not deeply appreciate.

At an earlier time I may have explained my own religious and celibate commitment in the language of “saving.” There is so much to be saved.<sup>1</sup>

I was attracted to the social commitment of women religious. But “saving” leaves too much unsaid. I was equally attracted to their ability to “savor” life and to enjoy the company of one another.

God invites each person to embrace a full life—a life of compassion and wonder, discipline and ecstasy, service and prayer, responsibility and freedom, sorrow and hope.

In the saving and the savoring we find that there are many ways to nurture our tender desire to care and to heal.

There are many ways to lose ourselves in the sheer awe of breath and beating heart. In this beautiful and troubled world God invites us to surrender ourselves in love each in our own way.

Celibacy lived in religious community shapes in a distinctive way how I respond to this call to embrace life fully and how I try to “save” and “savor” this precious world.

I most often think of the vow of celibacy as a commitment to community. It is grounded in my relationship with Jesus who “is what God is: infinite capacity for communion.”<sup>2</sup> As a BVM Sister my love and expression of communion is especially embodied in friendship, hospitality and contemplation.

## Friendship and Contemplation

Life in community requires the grace to be able to hold friends

dearly yet lightly. Over the decades the rhythms of ministry and life carry us from place to place. We give to each other the twofold gift of presence and freedom.

We move but never part. One needs a heart with open spaces for new friends, a heart with tenacious strings to hold secure old friends and a heart which rests in the ever present friendship of God.

*It is difficult to describe the intimacy which develops in the friendships between Sisters. Our lives become tangled together in a rich and complicated pattern of communion and love.*

It is difficult to describe the intimacy which develops in the friendships between Sisters. Our lives become tangled together in a rich and complicated pattern of communion and love. I sense something of this mystery whenever we gather.

I feel it also when I walk through our cemetery reading names and recalling faces. There exists some tie between us which only poetry or art comes close to describing.<sup>3</sup>

My students and I were returning from a visit at the local Trappist monastery one night when one noticed that when the Abbot and I spoke of our communities we used “we” even when we were talking about something that happened 150 years ago!

I have come to recognize this story as my story. I would not be who I am without these women. Nor would my understanding of God be the same. They have taught me that the secret of community life is not in perfection but in the ability to be amazed at the holiness of others.

## Hospitality and Contemplation

Celibacy within a commitment to the Gospel is embraced for the larger church and global communities. This is one reason that hospitality has always been important to religious life. It is grounded in the contemplative practice of seeing Christ in the neighbor.

Hospitality crosses the boundaries which separate and “makes brothers and sisters of us all.”<sup>4</sup> In this respect the name “Sister” does reflect the way our love as celibate women is most ordinarily expressed in our relationships with all.

“Graciousness” is a word BVMs often use when describing the texture of our hospitality. This attentive attitude is expressed in gestures as simple as remembering a name or in those small finishing touches on a table prepared for guests which silently declare to all who gather, “You are important to me.”

Our ministries, too, are shaped by this spirit of gracious hospitality which challenges the accepted divisions between friend and stranger in consistently prophetic ways.

These ministries are about “saving” but the courage and sacrifice we need to save all that needs saving comes from a deep appreciation for and savoring of this beautiful world. We find our joy and our strength in friends and in God.

### Endnotes

- 1 The use of saving here reflects the Buddhist Metta Sutta as well as the root of the Christian word “salvation” which means “healing.”
- 2 LaCunga, Catherine. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. Harper: San Francisco: CA, 1991, 202.
- 3 Louise Kames’ instillation, *Dear Mother* is such an expression.
- 4 Zaleski, Philip and Paul Kaufman. *Gifts of the Spirit: Living the Wisdom of the Great Religious Traditions*. Harper: San Francisco: CA, 1998, 93.

**About the author:** Paulette Skiba, BVM teaches Religious Studies at Clarke College, Dubuque, Iowa, and is a member of the BVM Initial Membership Committee.



# Obedience: Listening to God, Responding

by Carol Frances Jegen, BVM

A few years ago I learned that in Jesus' Jewish cultural and religious heritage, the same scripture passage refers to both prayer and obedience. The specific text is in Isaiah's third prophet-servant song. "Morning after morning [God] opens my ear that I may hear" (Is. 50:4).

This discovery made a profound impact on me. In new ways I began to realize that both prayer and obedience depend on our listening to God. It is in prayerful listening that we learn God's will for us.

This realization of the significance of prayerful listening prompted me to reflect on our BVM *Constitution* sections on Prayer and on Obedience. Both introductory statements emphasize our special union with Jesus.

*Our prayer life is sharing in the prayer life of Jesus in which we are called to an ever deeper realization of his active presence in our lives. (#22)*

*Through religious obedience we freely choose to express our union with Jesus in his obedience to his Father; thus we are united in a particular way to the Church and her mission. (#50)*

As I ponder these two introductory statements on prayer and obedience, I realize how "Jesus-centered" our BVM life is meant to be. Also I have grown in ever-greater appreciation of the introductory statement in our section on Mission and Ministry.

*As Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary we are called to participate in the mission of Jesus. Our choice of ministry is in keeping with our BVM Mission: being freed and helping others enjoy freedom in God's steadfast love. (#10)*

Being true to our BVM way of life really calls for tremendous faith in the ongoing presence of our Risen Jesus who continually gifts us with his Holy Spirit. Through the continual promptings of God's own Spirit of Love, we are ener-

gized to see and to respond to more and more situations that need the special touch of God's compassionate love.

As I reflect on my 60 years of BVM life, I see ever more clearly and gratefully how God moved me into a variety of situations calling out for compassionate understanding love.

Although the situations were quite different, the basic need was really the same. From teaching in an inner city elementary school, to high school and college teaching and administration, to involvements with farm workers and with death row prisoners, the various and sundry needs cried out for the same basic response—a genuine expression of compassionate, caring love.

Often my ministry involvements were in the day-to-day teaching a variety of adult students from all over the world. The challenges were continual and greatly varied.

Especially in Hispanic ministry, the many challenges included the language and cultural differences. But no matter where God's Spirit led me, the same basic need for discerning prayer persisted.

How beautiful to grow in the

realization that whatever we do even for the least of one of his brothers and sisters, we do to Jesus (Mt. 25:40).

Perhaps even more amazing is Jesus' promise that in doing whatever ministry to which God calls us, we truly share his own life as Sisters in God's family. "Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is brother and sister and mother to me" (Mt. 12:50).

Perhaps one of Mary Frances Clarke's wise and simple directives expresses the heart of our vow of obedience better than any extended commentary on this vow.

It is a brief and clear directive obviously coming from her lifelong witness of obedience to God's will as she prayerfully discerned what God wanted her and her Sisters to do. It is a directive that could come only from her prayerful heart.

Through the years in various ways Mary Frances Clarke continues to encourage her Sister to *do the most loving thing*. What more need be said!

**About the author:** Carol Frances Jegen, BVM is retired at Wright Hall, Chicago.

## Experience a 'Come and See' Weekend with BVM Sisters

Catholic women 18 years of age and older are invited to explore the possibilities of religious life in the BVM congregation

Phoenix, Arizona, Feb. 26, 2005 -or-  
Dubuque, Iowa, April 15-17, 2005

### The schedule will include

Time for getting to know others in the search • Learning about the BVM heritage and charism • Sharing vocation stories by BVMs • Hospitality and enjoyment • Personal quiet time • Liturgy • Questions and answers



### To register, contact

For Phoenix: Lynn Winsor, BVM by Feb. 19  
winsor@xcp.org

For Dubuque: Judy Callahan, BVM by April 8  
jcallahanbvm@comcast.net

Register online at [www.bvmcong.org/join\\_us/vowed\\_membershipframe.html](http://www.bvmcong.org/join_us/vowed_membershipframe.html)

# What Are Women Seeking in Religious Life Today?

by Theresa Gleeson, BVM and Kathleen Mullin, BVM

Research in current vocation literature indicates that what BVMs ordinarily sought in religious life years ago is still basic to the call of young women now.

Our backgrounds and societal patterns were very different, but the same Holy Spirit is at work in the hearts of today's women who are searching for meaning and commitment, and are looking at options which include religious life.

Some women shared their stories of call, risk and faith with us during the most recent "Come and See" weekend at our Mt. Carmel Motherhouse in November.

Six women from diverse backgrounds attended the weekend and shared what was stirring in their hearts. The ages of the women ranged from early 20s to mid-30s.

Asked what attracted them to religious life, each referred to an experience of God's presence in their lives modeled by their families or by other friends. They are looking for commitment to the poor, and a supportive, prayerful environment in which to come to know God in a deeper and more intimate way.

## What Attracts Young Women to Religious Life Today?

Two young Catholic women in discernment about life options in today's world explain:

"I think when young people my age look into religious life, they're searching for something that looks nothing like the world they live in... We want to be challenged and transformed. We want to be like Jesus. His life and the lives of his apostles were radical. They gave up everything... for the sake of the kingdom. We're tired of compromise... Young people want something worth giving their lives for." *Rita Witczak, 27*<sup>1</sup>

"In choosing a vocation I would look for witness in action, and a non-judgmental love for all peoples that is rooted in the Scripture's teachings. The 20-somethings I know are looking for a true sense of service and faith, manifested through action for those who



Theresa Gleeson, BVM visits at a "Come and See" experience with 26-year-old Ericka Garcia, a leader in Hispanic ministry in Addison, Ill.

present themselves in need.

"In looking for community, I would search out one that supports diversity of thought, call and prayer style. Most of all, I would hope the focus of community would be on Christ and his real presence in all those we meet in this world." *Ruth Ann Leidorf, 26*<sup>2</sup>

## How Do We Encourage Women to Consider Religious Life?

Historian and BVM Ann Harrington in her recent book *Creating Community: Mary Frances Clarke and Her Companions* includes a quote about BVM membership in the 1860s: "It becomes clear that women now came to the community after meeting the sisters through the schools they conducted, through the parish, by their reputation in the area or through family ties..."<sup>3</sup>

Today interested women learn about specific communities as they did long ago and in new ways. They go to websites on the internet, they notice ads or brochures, they initiate contacts with Sisters.

Sisters are pro-active, with the BVM Initial Membership team and committee offering ideas to all community members for ways to share our life with seekers. Like Jesus, BVMs get asked, "Where do you live?" and our answer is like his, "Come and see."

A contemporary "Come and See" experience may include invitations to dinner and prayer with a local group, or a special event where BVMs live and minister. Family members and friends of women pondering religious life may have many questions and concerns about the viable future of a religious community.

Those who support a woman who begins a life commitment as a vowed religious are risking in love and faith, too. Perhaps a "Come and See" experience would expand their awareness of the vitality of Sisters in community today.

To ponder the attraction to religious life raises these questions for me personally:

- When have I responded to Jesus' invitation to "Come and See"?
- When have I encouraged someone else to respond to Jesus' invitation?

### Endnotes:

- 1 "What young adults are looking for in religious life," *Horizon Magazine*, Spring, 1999, p. 4.
- 2 *Ibid.* p. 9.
- 3 Harrington, Ann. *Creating Community: Mary Frances Clarke and Her Companions*. Dubuque: Mount Carmel Press, 2004, p. 128.

**About the authors:** Theresa Marie Gleeson, BVM (Dorothy) and Kathleen Mullin, BVM (Robert Mary) are Initial Membership Coordinators for the BVM congregation.



# Community

## Essential for ‘Younger’ Member

by Lou Anglin, BVM

I think my first “oh, so THIS is community” came during my sophomore year at Clarke College. I’m not sure I remember the exact time of year, but it was busy, and it was time for the Quito carnival.

I was on the basketball team at Clarke and spent many an evening in the gym where I’d encounter BVM Katherine Ann Beckman who supervised the gym.

Katherine Ann loved the Working Boys Center in Quito, Ecuador and regularly held a fundraiser for the Center. Her time spent in the gym was put to good use making crafts to sell at the carnival.

Any of you who know Katherine Ann probably could have predicted that before long the entire basketball team was helping make things for the carnival, volunteering at the carnival, promising to come and buy things at the carnival. We all dutifully went—anything for Katherine Ann. It was held in the student union and the place was packed.

During one of the busiest times of the year every BVM at Clarke was there working the booths, selling raffle tickets, and having a blast. Hundreds of students had shown up to do what they could. All for Katherine Ann, the BVMs in Quito, and the families that the Working Boys Center helps.

Two years after I graduated from Clarke I entered the BVMs, drawn by the sense of community that I encountered that evening in the student union. Despite the fact that I’m still referred to as one of the “young ones,” next July 16 I will have been a BVM for 20 years.

While some of my ideas and experiences of community have grown and changed over the years, the basics have remained the same.

I choose this life because God and how God calls me to be in the world is central to my life. The women that I share life with have supported me, challenged me, helped me to grow into a healthier person.

I know why the Working Boys Center is so critical to the poor of

Quito, Ecuador. I’ve been educated about how some welfare legislation hurts women and children. I’ve been taught and I’ve been challenged to make choices based on how it will help or hurt all of God’s creation. My world is so much

*While some of my ideas and experiences of community have grown and changed over the years, the basics have remained the same. I choose this life because God and how God calls me to be in the world is central to my life. The women that I share life with have supported me, challenged me, helped me to grow into a healthier person.*

bigger than it ever was before.

People will sometimes ask me if being a “young” member is hard because I live with women who often are much older than I am. Sometimes it is, but more often I feel blessed to be surrounded by so many faithful, wise women.

Sometimes people wonder what it feels like to know that the number of younger people in community is so low. Sometimes it’s scary, but more often I see it as a challenge to open up membership to share this great gift of community we’ve been given with all kinds of people.

People will ask me if it’s hard not to be married and have a family. Sometimes it’s lonely, but more often I’m grateful for the great freedom I have to be in relationship with all kinds of people in a great variety of places.

Since that night in the student union I’ve had lots of “oh, so THIS is community” moments. They’ve been many and varied but always times that inspired hope.

It’s been at funerals where we

celebrate the life of a Sister who generously ministered for 50-plus years.

It’s reading of someone’s gratitude for our congregation’s financial help so she could continue her education.

It’s talking with my colleagues about how to best help the young women we teach.

It’s gathering with friends at the School of the Americas protest to pray for peace.

It’s times where I’m called to remember that when people are working together for good that God is at the center of it all.

So I’m grateful to Katherine Ann and the Quito carnival. While I probably could have been happily married with a family these past 20 years or so, I think that religious life has been a good fit for me.

I’ve always loved and found to be true the words of Joan Keleher Doyle, BVM from *We Did It Ourselves*:

### **I see us as**

*women of the Lord, women who laugh and dance and sing, women who weep not because we have lost something but because we have been given so much.*

*Women who struggle for justice, women faithful to prayer, women whom the Spirit continues to disturb.*

*Women who are warm-hearted with the capacity to accept and forgive all who belong to the same flawed and yet wondrous family.*

*Women who know what it means to give our lives for life. Women striving to become as human as Jesus was.*

*Women who are a sign that the Good News has come and is coming. Women who dream dreams and continue to promise.*

**About the author:** Lou Anglin, BVM teaches theology and is campus minister at Nerinx Hall High School in St. Louis. She is also a member of the BVM Initial Membership Committee.

# International Novices

## Signal New Era of BVM Membership

by Mira Mosle, BVM

The Sept. 18 reception of three women into the BVM congregation—two from Ecuador and one from Ghana—marked the most recent step in an unfolding congregational journey.

For this first time in its history, the community has embraced as members women from the Southern Hemisphere: Saskia Alquina and Alegría Chunganá from Ecuador, and Catherine Odartay from Ghana.

### Ecuador

Saskia is a Quito native who received her B.A. from the Salesian College there, and taught junior high school at the Working Boys Center for eight years.

Alegria was born in Colombia. She moved to Quito where she finished secondary school and vocational training at the Working Boys Center, then worked there for eight years.

BVMs have been ministering in Quito for 40 years, and in 1999 the four BVMs serving in Ecuador invited women who might be interested in religious life to a meeting at the Center. Representatives from other religious communities were also invited.

On-going prayer and dialogue with women interested in the BVM congregation, led to the opening of a House of Discernment in 2000, facilitated by Luann Brown, BVM. Saskia and Alegria began an official year of residency in Quito in 2003. They also were part of an inter-congregational pre-novitiate there.

Saskia says, "I identified with BVM values of justice, charity and freedom. When the Sisters first came to Ecuador, they came with love and simplicity, and they helped women achieve more dignity."

"I was attracted (to this community) by the strength of will and the energy with which the BVMs give of themselves to their work, and the diversity of ministries that BVMs



Novices (l. to r.) Alegría Chunganá, Saskia Alquina and Catherine Odartay are welcomed into the BVM congregation.

have, and the freedom to choose the place where they want to work. They love each other as they would love themselves. I feel connected to this community," said Alegria.

### Ghana

Catherine Odartay was born in Liberia, then moved to Accra, Ghana with her family when she was a young adult. She studied Human Resource Management in college, and worked for Catholic Action for Street Children in Accra.

During her year of residency she ministered at the National Catholic Charismatic Center and participated in pre-novitiate programs and theology workshops.

She came in contact with the BVM community primarily through Mary Anne Hoope, BVM (Bernarde Marie), director of the Centre for Spiritual Renewal in Kumasi.

She lived her year of residency at the Centre, where Therese Jacobs, BVM (Therese Carmelle) was also on the staff. "The freedom has allowed me to unfold at my own pace," said Catherine. "This freedom is practical. You can see the happiness and free spirit."

Each novice processed through the chapel with a colorful fabric map of the world.



### Reception

"Wherever you go, I shall go, wherever you live, I shall live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God." This powerful commitment from the Book of Ruth was the theme/message of these three women at their reception. "They have responded to the deep call of the Spirit moving in our midst with courage and creativity," said Theresa Gleeson, BVM of the Initial Membership team.

The day was, said BVM President Joellen McCarthy, in the "long tradition of receiving one another to share in our lives, of companioning each other through presence, prayer and participation in good works... knowing that openness to relationship is mutually transforming."

During this contemplative year of prayer and study, the novices are living with the Loggia community at the Mount Carmel Motherhouse.

**About the author:** Mira Mosle, BVM is SALT editor and director of communications for the BVM congregation.

# World Congress Strengthens Global Consciousness, Compassion

by Joellen McCarthy, BVM

On November 20 I found myself on a non-stop flight from Chicago to Rome where I would join more than 800 persons for the 2004 World Congress on Consecrated Life. Considerable work had taken place to prepare for such an event.

For example, months before this November meeting each of us received a 28-page working paper that gleaned the experience of religious life from around the globe.

Furthermore, a common website provided a channel for participants to share their reactions to the working paper.

In spite of the opportunity to prepare, I carried with me a certain apprehension as I approached Rome.

The stated purpose of this Congress was, *"to discern together, with global awareness, what the Spirit of God is bringing about among us, where the Spirit is leading us, and how we can respond to the challenges of our times, thus building the Reign of God for the common good."*

Implied in this goal I sensed an expectation to write the future of religious life. That task felt both burdensome and quite impossible.

Regardless of a perceived outcome, I did look forward to the process of the gathering. By joining

religious leaders from every continent, with a variety of charisms, I knew a privileged opportunity for learning awaited me.

Upon registering on Monday, I quickly sat down to find the names of the other participants with whom I would share an English-speaking discussion table.

The list revealed the following companions for the week: Irene from the Philippines, Joyce from Zambia, Breege from Ireland, Godfrey from Ghana, Jacinta from Uganda, Jerome from India, Geraldine from Canada, and Gary, Donna and myself from the United States. I couldn't wait to meet them in person.

Tuesday morning arrived and the meeting formally began. After introducing ourselves to one another at the table, we were invited to name that for which we thirsted as leaders of religious congregations. From those seated with me I heard: *"to be a presence of peace in a country torn with war," "to be a sign of life while surrounded by the AIDS pandemic," "to cultivate an inner life."*

The depth of sharing and the commonality I felt convinced me that the next five days would be truly marvelous. And so it was.

The subsequent days unfolded through a blend of prayer, keynote speakers, responders, table discussion and plenary sharing.

All of this exchange was made possible by simultaneous translation in four languages—Spanish, French, Italian and English.

## Global Networking

Having attended international meetings of religious women, I have previously experienced the enriching global reality of religious

life today. However, through this meeting I came to appreciate that the very structure of religious life provides a conduit for global consciousness that has tremendous power to shape our church and world.

Most of the religious congregations present at this meeting were international congregations. So by their membership they exist with a flow of life that truly circles the globe in a web of relationships.

For example, Jerome from India is a member of the Patrician Brothers, an Irish congregation with members serving in Europe, India, Kenya and Papua New Guinea. In his very person as a religious leader, continents and cultures talk to one another, learn and are shaped by each other. I met many "Jerome's" throughout this meeting.

## Mutual Learning

The second factor that contributes toward the vitality of religious life that I experienced in those days flows from the very structure and process of the gathering in Rome.

Thirty years ago the Sacred Congregation for Religious Life, a Vatican Office, called a Synod on Religious Life; the impetus to convene this 2004 Congress came from the leadership of the religious congregations.

The structure of the meeting consistently made visible the gifts of both women and men from every continent. This abundance of gifts was evident in the four keynote speakers, the responders to the presentations, the symbols of prayer and ritual and the exchange at our tables and plenary sharing.

Even the style of learning was mutual and circular. We learned through our lived experience as well as the analysis and reflection of professional theologians and sociologists. Furthermore, silence, listening and speaking all created the atmosphere to learn.



Joellen McCarthy, BVM is surrounded by international tablemates at the Rome Congress.



# Top Ten Questions Asked of a Young BVM

by Amy Golm, BVM

**“How can you be a nun? You’re too young.” “Where is your habit?” “How come you aren’t a teacher?”**

Although religious life has changed gradually over the past 35-40 years, assumptions about religious life and people’s expectations of religious women have not kept up with these changes.

Consider these questions frequently asked of women religious today:

1. Why don’t you live in convents anymore?
2. How do I know you’re a nun since you aren’t wearing a habit?
3. Why don’t you change your names anymore?
4. How come my children don’t have nuns as their teachers?
5. How come so few women want to be nuns anymore?
6. How can you afford to dress like that?
7. How come you drive such a nice car?
8. Will there ever be married nuns?
9. Why don’t you merge with another religious community?
10. Will you ever be ordained a priest?

The first five questions reflect how nuns were in the 1940s and 1950s in contrast to the freedoms afforded to religious women follow-

ing the Second Vatican Council. In 2004, many vowed religious women choose to live in smaller communities of two to seven Sisters who live close to their ministries in apartments or houses.

Today, we prefer to dress as other professionals and according to the needs of our ministries. I hope that a person who encounters me in ministry or in the grocery store or at an anti-war rally recognizes me as a woman religious because of the values and commitment that I live, not because of how I dress.

It is true that the number of women religious teaching in Catholic schools has declined. This reality is rooted in many causes: the number of religious women has declined, so this leaves fewer to teach and we are free to choose other ministries.

As ministries have opened for Sisters, so have opportunities for laywomen. This has limited the desire of some to enter religious life.

The questions about nice clothes and cars are really about the vows, especially the vow of poverty. I suspect the real question being asked is, “If you have taken a vow of poverty, how can you live so comfortably?”

I struggle with this one myself. It is true that my lifestyle reflects

the middle class security of those among whom I minister. I do, however, try to live simply and with stewardship for all God’s creation. (See article on p. 7.)

The final group of questions addresses the essence of our lives as women religious. Will there ever be married nuns? I hope not. Celibacy is essential to what makes us religious, especially since it is so closely related to community—and that is what distinguishes religious life from other Christian lifestyles.

Will we ever merge with another religious community? It could happen as our numbers decrease. Other congregations have had successful mergers. However, our charism as a congregation is our greatest gift. I would hate to see that gift lost.

Will nuns ever be ordained to priesthood? Again, I hope not. The call to be a vowed religious is a call to live the three vows in community according to the tradition established by our foundress. The call to priesthood is very different. They are distinct vocations.

---

**About the author:** Amy Golm, BVM is a campus minister at Clarke College, Dubuque, and a graduate student. She is a member of the BVM Initial Membership Committee and Communications Advisory Committee. Amy professed final vows as a BVM in 2003.

## Transformative Power

On the last evening of the conference, as I looked over this meeting room still filled with participants, I knew I had touched the transformative power that is created and released when a body gathers with global consciousness and compassion to learn from one another. And through this gathering the prophetic gift of religious life had been freed to build the reign of God.

Having participated in this Congress I now carry the following glimpses of God’s reign:

- As a woman belonging to an ecclesial organization, I know somewhere there is room for women to mutually share their gifts, their lives, and their experience of God.
- As a leader of a religious congregation I see the future of religious life not based upon knowing with certainty what lies ahead, but rather based upon a commitment to engage deeply in life and allow oneself to be surprised by God.
- And as a native of the world’s most dominant culture I have tasted the joy that erupts when cultures truly learn from one another.

---

**About the author:** Joellen McCarthy, BVM is president of the BVM congregation. She was one of 850 leaders of religious congregations, theologians and young religious invited to this Congress.



# Religious Life in Ecuador Embraces Renewal

by Luann Brown, BVM

Religious life in Ecuador can be viewed within the broader context of Latin America. It is a land of contrasts: rich in natural resources, yet groaning for the values of the Reign of God; steeped in culture and diversity, yet yearning for justice, equality, solidarity and peace.

Globalization is widening the cavernous gap between the rich and the poor, individualism is infiltrating the culture, and exploitation is victimizing the poor and the desperate, especially women and children.

Within this stark landscape, religious life in Ecuador is experiencing a transformation. As in the United States earlier in our history, religious communities in Ecuador had become increasingly institutionalized.

Through the initiative of "La Conferencia Latinoamericana de Religiosos" (CLAR), Ecuador and other Latin American countries are moving through a process of renewal. It is called, "El Camino de Emaús" (The Road to Emmaus).

Latin American religious communities are reflecting upon themselves in the context of

contemporary society and planning renewal based on those reflections.

Areas of focus are: option for the poor, women and the feminine, liturgical renewal, option for youth, and new *ecclesia*. These themes were selected in light of pressing issues of our time.

The Ecuadorian Religious Conference, "La Conferencia Ecuatoriana de Religiosos" (CER), as part of the broader entity of CLAR, is participating in the renewal process. Approximately 22 communities comprise CER.

Many were originally founded outside of Ecuador, but some claim Ecuadorian roots. The communities contain Sisters from Spain, Italy, the United States, and other countries as well as Ecuador.

Women and men religious in Ecuador are responsible for a wide variety of ministries which respond to the needs of the poor, a vast majority of the population of the country: schools, orphanages, clinics, soup kitchens, shelters, etc.

The communities, through the renewal process, are asking deeper questions concerning identity, charisma and spirituality in the face of grueling realities confronted daily in this society.

As Father Ignacio Madera Vargas, SDS, of CLAR insists, religious communities in Latin America must identify themselves as followers of Jesus Christ with a fascination for the Reign and its grand values of justice, truth, solidarity and peace for and with the marginalized.

In Ecuador, CER manages an inter-congregational formation program. As in the United States, Ecuador is experiencing a scarcity of vocations to religious life, though the numbers of new members are generally higher.

Young women and men religious will need to learn to collaborate between communities. The program is broad and variable and covers topics essential to living religious



Peggy Nolan, BVM meets the sister and mother of novice Alegria Chungana, BVM.

life in contemporary society: vows, prayer, bible, liturgy and Christology, as well as psychology, community relations, communication, discernment, sexuality and national reality (of Ecuador).

New members tend to be quite young (between 18-20 years old). Most women religious in Ecuador wear habits and their authority structures resemble that of U.S. religious congregations prior to the 1960s. But the spirit of these men and women is passionate, caring, dynamic and forward-looking. The renewal process has potential for marvelous outcomes.

Though we are small in number, (four vowed sisters and two novices), BVMs make up part of religious life in Ecuador. BVM novices Saskia Alquina and Alegria Chungana (see p. 13) will pioneer the discovery of what it means to be both Ecuadorian and BVM Sister.

Their culture has much to teach our community. Together, we will encounter how our presence in Ecuador will contribute to the realization of the Reign of God.

**About the author:** Luann Brown, BVM teaches special education at Nuevo Mundo in Guayaquil, Ecuador and has coordinated the House of Discernment for Ecuadorian women considering religious life as a BVM.



The parents Saskia Alquina support her choice of BVM life. Here, they celebrate the birthday of Saskia's niece.



# From the 'Heart of America,' Place Is Defining

by Ana Priester, BVM

In many ways living in Guatemala, the "Heart of America," defines our lives. We live life from a different perspective.

Influenced by Central American theologians, martyrs, Mayan spirituality and dedicated religious we have learned to see the living God in life's paradoxes: the happiness that comes from suffering; life from death; hope in the midst of oppression; the rich poor and the poor rich; the having everything we could possibly want because we have left everything.

We are defined as missionaries of the Diocese of Helena, Mont. We bear the good news that the people of the Diocese of Helena care about the people of Santo Tomás and want to help them. But we have found out that we are the recipients here. The people are constantly reminding us what is really important in life.

We came to Guatemala in the wake of the deaths of many missionaries. We have witnessed the Peace Accords only to see them ignored or mocked by the "powers

that be." We have known martyrs in our time here, people who died, not just because of their faith but because of their faithfulness to God who befriends and shows preference for the poor and oppressed. We are called by their example to a radical living of our vows.

Living among the poor in a foreign land allows us to be honest about our vow of poverty. We can't fool ourselves into thinking we are living our vow if we "need" too much for ourselves.

The poor clamor at our door daily to remind us we are holding back, we are not allowing God to provide for them through us, trusting that God will provide in our time of need.

Our consecrated celibacy is lived out by leaving all that we love: our family, our friends, our work, our country, our culture and our self. We become "strangers" in a foreign land, leaving even our "belonging." Why? To follow Jesus who loved and served the widow, the orphan, the sick.

We came to Guatemala because

of those who had to leave or were killed during the violence. We didn't even know it at the time but we were being called to continue their work, to follow Jesus in this radical way, leaving fear behind and becoming his heart ever open to those in need.

Obedience is to God who dwells in and speaks to my heart. It is expressed in obedience to the Gospel which guides us to BE Christ alive in the world today. A visiting U.S. teenager exclaimed after making a pilgrimage with our youth, "These kids act as though Jesus is a real person!"

The Gospels do come alive in Guatemala, the "Heart of America," and we are challenged by her saints and martyrs to join people who are poor in goods but rich in faith as they work to bring justice and peace to this land of oppression and violence, home of the Living God.

**About the author:** Ana Priester, BVM is parish minister and catechist at Santo Tomás La Union in Suchitepequez, Guatemala.

## Working Boys' Center/Family of Families Celebrates 40 Years of Service, Empowerment

Since 1964, children—and their families—in Quito, Ecuador who are caught in the grip of poverty have had the opportunity to turn their lives around through a multi-year program of education and family development. Almost since the beginning, BVM Miguel Conway has been a leader in this enterprise, as has BVM Cindy Sullivan.

For the Center's 40th Anniversary Celebration in November, BVM vice-presidents Peggy Nolan and Mary Ann Zollmann, Secretary Regina Qualls and Associate Jocile Walsh represented the BVM congregation and its ongoing support for this ministry.



Celebrating the anniversary (above) are BVMs (l. to r.) Regina Qualls, Cindy Sullivan, Luann Brown, Miguel Conway, Mary Ann Zollmann, Peggy Nolan and Ann Credidio.





# Religious Life in Ghana: Young, Developing

by Mary Anne Hoopes, BVM

When one inquires about religious life in Ghana, two perspectives are possible. The first is that of an expatriate woman religious, like myself, who has lived in the country for 18 years and the second is that of one who is an indigenous Ghanaian. The perspectives arise out of very different experiences of religious life.

I have experienced the post-Vatican II renewal of religious life in the United States; most religious in Ghana were not in religious life at the time of Vatican II nor were they yet born.

In addition, I have found differences in perspective among those in Ghana who have studied and lived abroad and those who have not. Nonetheless, the Ghanaian perspective is deeply shaped by the culture and values of the people.

Religious life in Ghana is relatively young. People have deep respect for religious who live their lives faithfully, yet many parents struggle when one of their children wants to become a religious.

Having children, especially if one is a woman, is seen by some as the only way to happiness and the fulfillment of one's duty to family. One Sister was asked, "If your mother had not given birth to you, would you be here?" Among those who value and respect religious life, a certain privilege is accorded religious which at times can conflict with the Gospel call to be "servant."

Religious in Ghana are deeply involved with the poor. They teach, nurse, run orphanages and minister to street children, prostitutes and those with AIDS. Much effort is given to the development of poor women. Often the income given religious is insufficient so they, too, live with many deprivations and some find it very difficult to support their congregations.

On the other hand, many religious are more affluent than many of their brothers and sisters because of shared resources (place of living, car, etc.). At times religious struggle with the living of their own vow of poverty and the needs of their families.

*Religious life in Ghana is relatively young. People have deep respect for religious who live their lives faithfully, yet many parents struggle when one of their children wants to become a religious.*

One of the strengths of religious life in Ghana is its "community-orientation." Religious give to one another a great deal of support, especially in times of need. However, as one Sister said, "At times an individual can be lost if conformity is too great."

She also noted that the "uniqueness which makes one stand out can cause problems if the giftedness of the individual is not seen in service of the group."

The attempt of many tribes, cultures, races and ages to live together in peace and harmony is a much-needed witness in a world where so many conflicts are due to ethnic and racial differences.

Religious frequently come together as major superiors, formators, co-workers in dioceses, women religious, teachers and hospital personnel.

They collaborate with the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and speak to national issues

such as education for the girl child, the right to health care, school reform and the rights of women in marriage and widowhood. Women religious are also working with laywomen in and outside the church to foster gender equality in all areas of life.

I have been deeply privileged to work with those aspiring to religious life and those who have lived religious life from one to almost 50 years.

The men and women I have met are deeply dedicated to religious life and they desire to live it ever more fully. Many desire further education and ongoing formation so as to be ever more effective in a world that is rapidly changing and experiencing both the positive and negative effects of globalization.

As one young religious put it so beautifully, "religious life is a mystery that needs to be cherished." Religious life in Ghana is a mystery that needs to be cherished and I hope further inculturated.

I believe that African religious in general and Ghanaian religious in particular need to review religious life as it has been given to them and fashion it in a way that reflects more fully the African/Ghanaian way of life.

Only then will Africa make its rightful contribution to the history and development of religious life in the third millennium.

(I am indebted to Sr. Georgina Edwine, SSL; Sr. Juliet Mensah, SJC; Sr. Emily Owusu Ansah, FST and Sr. Cecilia Boateng, SSpS for their contributions. Each is a Ghanaian woman religious).

**About the author:** Mary Anne Hoopes, BVM (Bernarde Marie) is director of the Centre for Spiritual Renewal in Kumasi, Ghana and a member of the BVM Initial Membership Committee.



**Patricia Kerz, BVM** (St. Julianna) won a first place award for her garden in the Community Landscapes regional category of Mayor Richard Daley's Landscape Awards program in Chicago. A plaque commended her "significant commitment" to her neighborhood and the quality of life in the city.



The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA) invited **Mary Gene Kinney, BVM** (Antonilla) to participate in their conference, *So Help Me God: Substance Abuse, Religion and Spirituality*. She was part of a panel on substance abuse and treatment options within the clergy. Mary Gene is addictions counselor at Education and Intervention, Inc. in River Forest, Ill.



**Mary Alicia Maas, BVM** (Alcuin), St. Paul, Minn., has been awarded the Virginia McKnight Binger Award in Human Service. This honor recognizes "unsung Minnesota heroes who have made a difference in others' lives while receiving little in return for themselves." Ten awards, which include a monetary gift, are given yearly.

For the past five years, Mary has volunteered with Amicus one day a week in a Reconnect program to assist men and women who are returning from prison to find work, housing, transportation and other needs. "It is because I am supported by my BVM congregation that I am able to give of my time," says Mary.



**Dolores Myers, BVM** (Dolore) has been awarded a Sabbatical Grant for Pastoral Leaders from the Louisville Institute, a Lilly Endowment Program for the Study of American Religion. The \$12,000 grant will enable Dee, who is pastoral associate at St. Matthias Parish in Redwood City, Calif., to spend three months upgrading her personal and spiritual capacity for future service as liturgy coordinator. She is one of 50 grant recipients; 300 persons from the U.S. and Canada applied.



During its recent alumni weekend, Clarke College recognized the service of **Marguerite (Christine) Neumann, BVM**, retired faculty member and Chemistry Dept. chair for 27 years, by naming one of the labs the Neumann Organic Chemistry Lab. Marguerite also recently celebrated her 90th birthday.



Former BVM **Marilou Denbo Eldred** has been named president of the Catholic Community Foundation in St. Paul, Minn. She will lead the nation's largest community foundation serving Catholic philanthropy. A graduate of Mundelein College in Chicago, she has been president of St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Ind., and vice-president of the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minn.



Celebrating at Sarah's Circle 25th Anniversary event are (l. to r.) Ann Ida Gannon, BVM; Anniversary co-chair, Kathy Stauber and Carolyn Farrell, BVM.

The BVM congregation and the former Mundelein College of Chicago were honored with the Silver Circle Award by the Board of Directors of Sarah's Circle at its 25th Anniversary celebration in early December.

The award recognized the "initial and continuing supporters of Sarah's Circle, represented by **Sr. Ann Ida Gannon** and **Sr. Carolyn Farrell**, director of the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership."

Sarah's Circle, located in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood, is "a drop-in center that offers a welcoming, supportive, non-intrusive safe refuge for women who are homeless, transient and of low income." It began in a small walk-up that served seven to ten women per day. Now, Sarah's helps an average of 54 women each day.

**Margaret McGinn, BVM** (Daniel Anne) served on the 25th Anniversary Planning Committee.



BVM Associate **Ann O'Hara Michalski**, Dubuque, is the recipient of the 2004 Humanitarian Service Award from the Clarke College Alumnae Association. A 1954 Clarke grad with a B.A. in sociology, she is "a church-centered mother and wife best known for her work as a community activist." She credits the BVM values as immensely influencing her community work.

Ann has helped develop many community organizations, and is an advocate and leader in the mental health field in Iowa. Ann served on the Dubuque Housing Commission and has been an elected member of the Dubuque City Council since 1995.

# Salt

Sisters of Charity, BVM  
1100 Carmel Drive  
Dubuque, Iowa 52003-7991

Change Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Dubuque, IA  
Permit No. 477

## *BVMs Honored in Wichita, Kansas*

The **BVM congregation** was inducted into the Hall of Fame at Kapaun Mount Carmel High School in Wichita, Kan., in November. The BVMs opened All Hallows School, later renamed Mount Carmel Academy, in 1887, and were educators at the merged Kapaun-Mount Carmel until the mid 1990s.

The induction citation notes, "The Sisters are remembered fondly by alumni as guiding forces in their lives, outstanding educators and models of compassion and perseverance. The BVMs have shaped the lives of countless young people for over 100 years. Their dedication to the education and formation of young women at Mount Carmel Academy continues to be seen today in the leaders of our community. They have left an indelible mark on the spirit of Kapaun Mt. Carmel."



Also inducted was former faculty member **Fleurette Blameuser, BVM**, now deceased. An artist, she created a mosaic, *Our Lady of Kansas*

(above), "an inspirational piece of incredible beauty and majesty," comprised of 138,000 tiles. She "was loved and admired by all her art students, and she was a mentor for others experiencing challenges personally, spiritually or academically. She remains an inspiration to many who have become professional artists and to all who have a love for and appreciation of art."