



Heart

Summer 2005

A Journal of the Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province



...to Heart

Thank You Note

*It flows, they say, outward,
blue ink from fountain pen.
immediate, appropriate, moving
while yet stationary.
It is a "should," they say, an "ought,"
the hand written thank you note.*

*But any gifted person knows that gratitude
first flows within, engulfs the heart,
causes one to catch a breath when
what had once been emptiness is suddenly
awash in recognition. Filled.*

*I am more now because of gift.
You have wrapped for me myself.
How else do we discover we are loved?
I had not known before this more that was disclosed
when ribbons, loosened, tightened bonds
that hold us one to another, and to an Other.*

*So with these words, I offer you not only thanks
but beckon you to wonder at yourself. You have
been abundance, given gifts and Giver all as one
because you gave yourself.*

Long before I wrote, I had taken note.

Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat had a great desire for her sisters and for all who would call themselves part of the family of the Sacred Heart. Generosity, she said, should characterize our lives – great-heartedness, a way of living with open hands, a lavish way of being with others in freedom of thought and expression, in giving of self and our personal gifts, in spreading love and joy without self-interest.

I have thought often that generosity is only half of it. Generosity inspires gratitude; gratitude, in turn, leads one to be generous. It is a cyclic process, a single movement. Both are welling up in me as I take my leave as provincial.

Gratitude for your generosity is my message in this last column I write as I prepare to hand over the office of provincial to Sister Kathleen Conan in the middle of August. Thank you to so many of you who have been generous with your praise and your constructive suggestions. You have let us know how much you enjoy these pages, how happy you are to read the news, learn about our ministries today, savor an article on spirituality or a reflection on ethics.

In a way, imagining the shape of each issue has been an exercise in keeping us honest. Saint Madeleine Sophie founded the Society of the Sacred Heart to glorify the Heart of Jesus and, unknown to many, she named four means to this end: formal education, of course, but also work with people who are poor, spiritual ministry, and collaboration with others in the work of the Church and civil society. Those weren't her exact words, of course. They are too modern. But that is how her four means are faithfully translated and, we hope, lived in the Society of the Sacred Heart today. As we prepare an issue it is important that the contents of this magazine reflect the breadth and depth of her zeal for the glory of God in all its richness. Your presence and interest have made us reflect more deeply about our many ministries and to search for words to describe them; your generosity and support have enlivened us through some difficult decisions and given us courage to continue to search for ways of making God's love known today.

In this, my last issue, it is time for a special thank you. When we first conceived of this magazine, its inspired and intrepid editor, Pamela Schaeffer, told me that I was to write a column for each issue which would be "breezy and profound." Well, that proved to be an inspiration stopper, so much so that a first deadline approached and I was wordless. As I have for years when I am flummoxed, I called my sister Patricia Hughes Baumer for help. Half an hour later a poem arrived by e-mail and thus a tradition of our collaboration was born – though I gave her more lead time for subsequent issues!

I thank Patricia for her poetry on your behalf; I thank Pam for conceiving of HEART and bringing it to birth; I thank each one of you – not because of a "should" or an "ought," but because your generosity and your affection have engulfed my heart. ✦



Kathleen Hughes RSCJ

Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ
Provincial

CONTENTS

Heartlines

4 News Notes

RSCJ publications take awards; U.S. Province prepares for changes in elder care.

5 New provincial team installed in liturgy

6 More News

Sacred Heart alumnae and alumni from thirty countries to meet in New Orleans next April. Sacred Heart communities gather in Massachusetts in June.

In Memoriam

7 Changes at the Trinità dei Monti

Nicole Winfield, 91st Street alum, wrote news of changes at the Trinità dei Monti for her employer, the Associated Press.

Features

8 Looking Back, Moving On

Outgoing provincial team reflects on six-year term.

11 Welcoming the Stranger

Children of the Heart helps new immigrants adjust to American life. For Sacred Heart Associate Mary-Burke Peterson, it is "part of a wonderful package."

15 Doing God's Work at the United Nations

Two congregations, two NGOs, share an office and double their presence.

Departments

18 Essay/Spirituality: A God Who Loves Singing and Dancing

An excerpt from an award-winning book by Mary McGann, RSCJ, is more than a good read; it's an experience in rhythm. An introduction describes ties three-decades deep between RSCJ and an African-American parish. Photos are by Irma Dillard, RSCJ, except as noted.

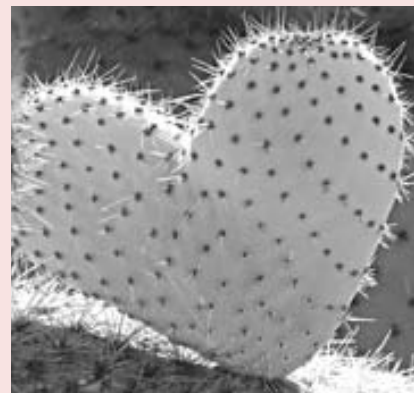
24 From the Archives

A shawl made for installation of new provincials draws on symbols from Jewish worship.

Articles and photos in this issue are by Pamela Schaeffer, editor of HEART, except where otherwise noted.

Heart

SUMMER '05 • Vol. 3, No. 1



ON THE COVER:

Photo: © Corbis

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HEART is published three times a year by the Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province. Please send address changes and requests for additional copies to Editor, HEART, at the address below or to editor@rscj.org. Article ideas, letters and unsolicited manuscripts are welcome. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for materials that are to be returned. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit submitted materials.

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Sr. McGann, Heart magazine take awards

The Catholic Press Association has awarded five of its 2005 awards for excellence in publishing to enterprises of the Religious of the Sacred Heart. The top award for books on liturgy went to Sister Mary McGann's new book *Precious Fountain*, described by judges as "a fascinating, well-written and cutting edge book about the particularity of the worship experience of a San Francisco African-American parish." A selection from Sister McGann's book appears on pages 18 to 22 of this issue.

In addition, judges in the national competition gave two awards and two honorable mentions to HEART. The publication received second place for "general excellence" among magazines

published by religious orders, and first place in the "best essay" category for a report on science and religion by Barbara Carey, RSCJ, in the Spring 2004 issue.

In addition, HEART received two honorable mentions, including one for the Spring 2004 cover in a competitive category that that included all Catholic magazines, including the national subscription publications.

In awarding HEART the general excellence award, contest judges commended the magazine for "well-written articles and information, good cover and interior design, good use of color." They described Sister Carey's essay, "Gateways to Reality," as "enlightening and engaging ... a complex subject presented in readable language."

The second honorable mention was for an article by editor Pamela Schaeffer in the Winter 2004 issue about Sister Mary Brady's ministry in the Adirondacks.

Precious Fountain tied for first place with *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly* by Andrew Carl Wisdom, O.P. Both books are published by Liturgical Press.

Changes underway in elder care for RSCJ

Readers of HEART were notified by letter in April of difficult decisions regarding care of elderly RSCJ in the United States. An elder care task force, made up of health care and financial experts and RSCJ, recommended that the U.S. Province continue using Oakwood Convent in Atherton, California, as a retirement and assisted living facility, while moving RSCJ in need of skilled nursing to facilities that are licensed to receive federal funds.

The elder care task force recommended phasing out elder care at the Kenwood Convent in Albany because of the expense of renovating the 150-year-old building to meet current health care standards. RSCJ at Kenwood will also be moved to Catholic health care facilities in Albany, thereby continuing the tradition of having retired sisters on both coasts.

At the present time, a due diligence study is underway at a facility in Atherton and negotiations with facilities in Albany are in process.



Students meet directors in El Cajon

Students were trained in working with developmentally disabled adults at Saint Madeleine Sophie Center, El Cajon, California, and had a chance to talk with the center's executive directors past and present. Pictured here, from left, top row: chaperone Christy Crandall, students Madeline Phillips, Rosalie Keane, Danielle Smith, Erin Pepin, Lauren Solari, Erin McNerney and executive director Debra Emerson. Seated: Ariana Vera and former executive directors Sisters Tita Lapeyre, Sally Rude and Maxine Kraemer; Franny Glasser and Sister Be Mardel. Kneeling: Lori Iraheta, Elizabeth Ayer and Annie Saunders. The program was one of eleven 2005 summer service projects sponsored by the Network of Sacred Heart Schools for students around the country. Projects ranged from Habitat for Humanity in Bridgeport, Connecticut, to a juvenile justice program in Chicago.

Photo by Erich Foeckler, Sr. Madeleine Sophie Center

New Team installed in liturgy at Shrine

Consulting group to be appointed

On August 14, Kathleen Conan, RSCJ, was installed as the new provincial for the U.S. Province, along with the other three members of her provincial team: Sisters Anne Byrne, Marina Hernandez and Paula Toner. Religious of the Sacred Heart, associates, co-workers and friends around the country participated by teleconference in the team transition liturgy at the Shrine of Saint Philippine Duchesne in Saint Charles, Missouri.

Sister Conan announced the names of her team members in April. Her choices were based on a province-wide consultation with RSCJ, taking into consideration current needs of the province and gifts individual RSCJ could bring to leadership.

In addition, Sister Conan will name a consulting group to assist the new team and ensure broad participation of members in the life of the province.

Both Sister Toner and Sister Hernandez have previously served on provincial teams, Sister Hernandez from 1993 to 1999 and Sister Toner from 1999 to 2005.

Sister Byrne entered the Society in 1960 following graduation from Manhattanville College, where she majored in math. She holds a master's degree in history from Manhattanville and a master's degree in administration from the University of Notre Dame. She worked as a teacher and administrator in Sacred Heart schools from 1964 to 1988, including six years as head of the upper school at Academy



Kathleen Conan



Anne Byrne



Marina Hernandez



Paula Toner

of the Sacred Heart, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and three years as head of the high school at Academy of the Sacred Heart, Grand Coteau, Louisiana. She has served on the province's Philippine Duchesne Fund committee and on the board of the school in Grand Coteau.

Most recently, Sister Byrne directed the New Life Center, Opelousas, Louisiana, which provides emergency shelter and transitional housing for homeless women, alone or with children.

Sister Hernandez entered the Society in 1965 after graduating from Barat College in Lake Forest, Illinois,

with a major in psychology. She was a member of the U.S. provincial team in St. Louis from 1993 to 1999. During the 1980s, she worked with other RSCJ in Copala, Mexico, oversaw a social service center for migrants in Indiantown, Florida, and organized church-based communities for African-American, Hispanic and Vietnamese people in San Diego. In the early 1990s, she worked as a substance abuse prevention specialist in Chicago.

Most recently, Sister Hernandez has worked with immigrants in San Diego as a housing counselor and in churches in San Diego doing HIV/AIDS prevention work.

Sister Toner entered the Society in 1965, after earning a bachelor's degree in studio art from Manhattanville College. She also holds a master's degree in school administration from the University of Massachusetts. She served as a teacher and administrator in Sacred Heart schools from 1968 until 1996, including eleven years as head of school at Duchesne Academy in Houston.

From 1996 until joining the provincial team in 1999, she was executive director of the Network of Sacred Heart Schools.

As a member of the provincial team, Sister Toner represented the province at international meetings of heads of Sacred Heart schools and served as provincial team liaison to the Sacred Heart Commission on Goals. ✦

Sacred Heart alums worldwide to meet in New Orleans

AMASC, the international organization of Sacred Heart alumnae/i will mark its fortieth anniversary at a congress in New Orleans next spring. AMASC – Association Mondiale des Anciennes et Anciens du Sacré Coeur – expects to draw five hundred alums from thirty countries to the meeting.

Olga Rome of New Orleans, president of AMASC, said the congress is “a wonderful opportunity to bond spiritually, intellectually and socially with alumnae and alumni throughout the world.” Programs will be translated simultaneously into French, Spanish and English – “the three languages of AMASC,” Rome said.

The April 23-28 congress, “Collaboration for a Transformed World,” will meet concurrently with an international conference of the heads of Sacred Heart schools. The opening Mass, at the historic St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, will be celebrated by Archbishop Alfred Hughes. He will be joined by two former archbishops of New Orleans, Francis Schulte and Philip Hannan. A reception following the Mass will be held at the cathedral’s adjacent Presbytere, which forms a part of the Louisiana State Museum.

Keynote speaker for the congress will be the Honourable Aileen Carroll, minister of international cooperation for the government of Canada and a graduate of Convent of the Sacred Heart in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The program includes an international panel of former and current provincials of the Society on the topic “RSCJ Making Their Mark Worldwide,” and a



Olga Rome, president of AMASC.

session featuring journalist and author Cokie Roberts, alumna of Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, Bethesda, Maryland, with her mother, Lindy Boggs, former U.S. ambassador to the Holy See. A farewell gala sponsored by Canadian alums will be held at the Fairmont Hotel, congress headquarters.

Other activities will include a walking tour of the secret gardens and patios of New Orleans’ French Quarter. A post-conference tour to historic Society landmarks in Grand Coteau, Louisiana, will be available.

The congress will be sponsored by Associated Alumnae/i of the Sacred Heart in the United States and hosted by the Rosary Sacred Heart Alumnae in New Orleans.

Rome said one of the most important functions of AMASC is “to share in the mission and ministry of the RSCJ.” Members have helped to fund construction of a Sacred Heart school in Uganda and contributed to tsunami relief in Sri Lanka.

AMASC congresses are held every four years in different countries. Program and registration information are available at www.amasc-sacrecoeur.org, or by calling 1-800-260-5651. The cost is \$400 before March 23, \$450 after.

Sharing the spirit of Sacred Heart

About a hundred members of religious orders whose spirituality derives from devotion to the Sacred Heart met at the Espousal Retreat Center, Waltham, Massachusetts, in June to reflect on “Listening to the Heartbeat of God Today.”

The gathering was sponsored by Sacred Heart Communities in Collaboration. Twenty-three religious orders are affiliated with the organization, which held its first conference in 1995.

Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ, was one of the speakers at this year’s conference. Listening to the heartbeat of God, she told her listeners, involves, above all, a complete giving of self, as in parent to child. Talks from the conference are available at www.sacredheartcc.org.



In Memoriam

Please see www.rscj.org for biographical information on RSCJ who have died.

May they live in the fullness of God’s love.

Muriel Heide
May 22, 2005

Barbara Williams
June 1, 2005

Helen Sweeney
June 24, 2005

Sacred Heart Alum Notes Changes at Trinità for Associated Press

Nicole Winfield, Associated Press correspondent in Rome, was reading through the Vatican's daily news releases in mid-July when something caught her eye: an item noting that the Trinità dei Monti in Rome, a church and monastery long entrusted to the Society of the Sacred Heart by agreement of the Vatican and the French government, would be staffed by a new religious order, *Fraternités de Jérusalem*. The transition would occur in 2006.

Winfield, a graduate of Convent of the Sacred Heart in New York City, "91st Street," was stunned. She had seen the Trinità's fresco of the Virgin Mary, Mater Admirabilis, during a family vacation in Rome when she and her sister were students at 91st Street. Winfield and her husband had previously lived near the famous church. "It was as if my worlds were colliding, Sacred Heart and my job," she said.

Because of her deep personal interest, Winfield felt she needed to verify with an editor her sense that the changes merited a story. Her editor agreed they did, given the prominence of the Trinità, which sits at the top of the Spanish Steps. Winfield phoned the



The Trinità dei Monti in Rome

Copley News Service, CNS Photo.

Society's General Council in Rome and spoke with secretary Agnes Hoormann, RSCJ, who directed her to postings on the U.S. Province website. They included a letter distributed by the General Council on July 2 to provincials around the world.

The letter explained that the French government, which is underwriting major renovations at the Trinità, had asked the Society for a significant reinforcement of personnel at the site. It was a demand the General Council was unable to meet, given the aging population of RSCJ in Italy and France and the Society's educational priorities worldwide.

The General Council's letter noted that *Fraternités de Jérusalem*, founded in 1975, had agreed to offer hospitality



Detail of the Mater fresco in Rome

into the future to all who wish to see the Mater fresco, painted by Pauline Perdrau, RSCJ, in 1844 and beloved by the Society's extended family, particularly alumnae/i of Sacred Heart schools. Further, the renovations at the site assure the fresco's security for generations to come.

Winfield said her Sacred Heart education had given her the confidence she needs for her fast-paced work as a reporter. A graduate of Johns Hopkins University, she has worked for AP for thirteen years. She was assigned to Rome in 2001 and from there, until the birth of her first child a little over a year ago, had been sent to a variety of overseas locations, including Israel, Afghanistan and Qatar, where she was a member of the international press corps covering the war in Iraq.

More information on Mater Admirabilis and changes at the Trinità, including directions to the fresco, is available at www.rscj.org. ❖

Looking back, moving on

Provincial team reflects on term

Sheila Hammond, RSCJ, in charge of morning prayer one day in June, asked those who would be coming to bring a special memory of the past six years, the tenure of the outgoing provincial team. Morning prayer in the provincial house chapel for members of the team and others who wished to join them was a ritual of six years running, whether two or ten were able to be present.

Sister Hammond's request pointed to a chapter closing. In just a few weeks, Kathleen Hughes, provincial, and members of her provincial team would be making way for new leadership. It was a reflective time. Final team reports to the U.S. Province and to the General Council in Rome had been modeled on the traditional Catholic prayer of confession, the Confiteor: "what we have done, and what we have failed to do."

At prayer, Sister Hammond was the first to share a memory. "I am thinking of all the things that happened when the team was away, especially the special people who died," she said, speaking softly, "and of our temptation to stop traveling – until we reminded ourselves that God's providence is not always in accord with our plans."

Sister Joan Gannon, sitting, as is her custom, on the floor, her legs coiled into the lotus position, went next. She recalled "the abundance of God's grace" – the way people in the province had "moved interiorly" as a result, had come to



Above, Sister Hughes works in her office. Below, Sisters Joan Gannon and Paula Toner, second and fourth from left, sing with other RSCJ during a liturgy.

see something from another perspective, to forgive a hurt.

Sister Hughes, thinking of RSCJ at prayer, noted "the many ways to pray – as many as there are people on the planet." She recalled being enriched, over and over, "by the wisdom expressed by RSCJ in homilies" at uncounted sacred events.

And so it went, around the small, circular room with a ceiling that soars to a point, morning light streaming through the treetops outside the windows.

Ellen Collesano, whose responsibilities had included "some of

the oldest and the newest members of the province," gave thanks for the opportunity to witness the mutual caring and support of RSCJ at Kenwood, the province's retirement center in Albany. "I learned from our elderly sisters at Kenwood how seriously they take our commitment to be in mission for life," she would say later in an interview. "They pray, study, are open to conversion, to deepening their love and understanding of one another."

Finally, Paula Toner, the one member of the outgoing team who would be joining the new team, spoke of the way communities of RSCJ had sacramentalized certain painful events, such as the bombing of the World Trade Center in 2001 and the meeting at Kenwood earlier this year, when a decision to close the convent was announced. Those involved had observed that being together at those times had "made it all right," she said.

One spirit, many gifts

"One of the things I will miss most is the true experience of team," Sister Collesano said later. "I am utterly convinced by this experience that praying together matters. We have built an awareness that God is also a member of our team."

It was a sentiment unanimously expressed by the others in interviews over the next few weeks. Although a final provincial

Outgoing provincial team, left to right: Sister Ellen Collesano, Sister Joan Gannon, Sister Paula Toner, Sister Sheila Hammond and Sister Kathleen Hughes.

team report lists many achievements of the past six years, team members preferred to talk about how they had grown as a team and of the gifts each person had brought to the table in monthly meetings lasting an entire week, sometimes with team members alone, sometimes with staff, consultants or visiting RSCJ.

They spoke of Sister Hammond's vitality, a "zaniness" that freed them all; of her pastoral skills and psychological insights, her willingness to engage conflict for the good of the whole. They described Sister Collesano's perseverance, her sense of justice, her dogged questioning to be sure all the facts were in. They noted Sister Toner's generosity, her sense of compassionate service, her hopeful optimism, capacity for detail and strong administrative skills. They praised Sister Gannon's unfailing respect for each person, her readiness to defend and advocate for others and to trust in each person's ability to work through problems with the help of God.

Building *Cor Unum*

Since Sister Hughes and her team took office in 1999, the provincial team has given its blessing to a new mission in Haiti and sent many U.S. sisters overseas, to places ranging from Africa and Iraq to Rome. The province has redesigned its web page, strengthened ties with alumnae and alumni, collaborated with the Network of Sacred Heart Schools in a "formation to mission" program for faculties and staffs and laid the groundwork for a joint fundraising effort with the Network. The team has established a communications and public relations office, a mission advancement office and approved a finance advisory committee of outside experts. Led by its justice and peace committee, the province has taken a public, corporate stance against the death penalty and participated in teleconferences on crucial world issues.

An actuarial study in 2003, reflecting falling stock prices, lengthening life spans and escalating health care costs – "the same issues every family is dealing with," noted Sister Hughes – called for strong measures to secure the province's financial viability. Belt-tightening resulted in sale of excess real estate, budget cuts across the board and, most painfully, a decision to move elderly RSCJ from the historic Kenwood Convent into more modern, cost-effective facilities in Albany, New York. Similarly, some sisters at Oakwood, the province's retirement



Sister Ellen Collesano, right, talks with Olga Rome, president of AMASC, following Rome's presentation to the provincial team in January about the AMASC congress next April. (See page 6.)

center in Atherton, California, will now receive skilled care in separate facilities. Despite its own funding shortages, the province, in a coordinated effort with Network schools, Sacred Heart associates and friends, sent more than \$175,000 to Indonesia for tsunami relief.

A province planning process, involving every member and culminating in an open assembly by teleconference in 2004, resulted in a variety of initiatives to be implemented over the next few years. The process, team members said, had strengthened the *Cor Unum* – the unity – among the members so surely that the decision to close Kenwood had brought a sense of peace to many, despite the pain. It was a powerful experience, Sister Collesano recalled.

"When Kathleen called and asked me to be on this team, one of the things she told me was that she wanted to strengthen the *Cor Unum* of this province. I said, 'I believe in that. I can work for that.' And I believe this happened, so that when the province had to make a decision about elder care, we had a real unity about the outcome despite a diversity of opinions."

Team members talked, too, about the great privilege of spending time with individual RSCJ as they traveled around the province and occasionally outside the country, collectively logging nearly a million air miles. "It's been very rewarding for me to see the progress that's been made," in terms of new offices and programs, Sister Toner said. "But there is a whole other side: being close to people in their community lives and seeing the fidelity, love and generosity of people living in their ministries. That has been one of the best parts."

continued



Above, Madeleine Ortman, director of the Network of Sacred Heart Schools, consults with Sister Toner after a meeting in January. Below, Sister Gannon.





Sister Hammond, right, visits with a guest while holding open a copy of Founding Mothers for author Cokie Roberts during an event at the national archives of the U.S. Province in December. Roberts dedicated the book to her RSCJ educators.

One of the strengths of the team, and one of its major challenges, its members said, was their diversity of backgrounds, perspectives and personalities. Sister Hammond had been co-director of chaplaincy care at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. Sister Gannon, after years in Network schools, had worked with people on the margins of society – migrants and refugees and, most recently, people with AIDS. Sister Toner, longtime teacher and administrator in Network schools, had served most recently as executive director of the Network. Sister Hughes, a specialist in liturgy, came from academia; she had been a professor and dean at Catholic Theological Union. Sister Collesano described herself as “a bridge person,” working to link students at Network schools with poverty-based ministries.

“We had at the table a real cross-section of the province,” noted Sister Hughes. “It’s a group of strong personalities, and it took time for us to know and trust one another. But when we had to struggle with an issue and come to consensus, I think our differences brought a wisdom and a strength.”

Perhaps the strongest personality is Sister Hughes herself: quick, decisive and eager to act. Her determination to build a strong team, present from the outset, reflected what she described as “some personal asceticism.” Other team members said it had been especially rewarding to find that when she was challenged she lived up to her commitment to listen and to allow her own perspective to shift.

Sister Hammond believes Sister Hughes’ gifts as provincial will become increasingly evident over time. “At the end of the day, I think people will look back at these years

and say that was an incredible provincial,” she said. “Kathleen has been a spiritual leader, a marvelous educator, and she has taken seriously the public presence of the provincial. That has been a wonderful gift for right now.”

Sister Hughes said the shift from professor to provincial had helped her discover “a whole other constellation” of untapped gifts in herself, deepening her belief that moving on, even when it means leaving a work you deeply love, can bring growth.

“Who would have dreamed when we were beginning that we would have to know about both civil and canon law, the ins and outs of development, government programs, real estate,” she said. “This team discovered early on that we didn’t have all the gifts and experience it would take to do this by ourselves. We’ve developed wonderful advisors in every area.”

Mission complete

Throughout the six years, team meetings have been punctuated by laughter, which often echoed throughout the provincial house. In recent days, some said, there have also been tears. “We have been given an enormous privilege,” Sister Hughes said, noting her own mixed emotions. “But I think most of us are pretty tired and are ready to hand over the life of the province to the generous women Sister Kathleen Conan has chosen for her provincial team.”

Two of the outgoing team members will be staying in St. Louis: Sister Toner, to become a member of the new provincial team and Sister Hammond to direct a large pastoral care department at St. Louis University Hospital. The others will move on: Sister Collesano to Miami to study Spanish and determine where best to use her master’s degree in social work; Sister Gannon to Houston, taking her love for “Tex-Mex” families to Our Lady of Guadalupe, a Network-affiliated school. Sister Hughes will head for Collegeville, Minnesota, to spend nine months “in retreat with Madeleine Sophie,” made possible by a fellowship from the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at St. John’s University. She expects her work to result in a book.

Is she pleased with what her team has done? “I had an insight during my retreat this summer,” she replied. “When Jesus completed his mission and returned to his Abba, there wasn’t any question of ‘Well, are they any better for your having been among them?’ Jesus gave a simple accounting. “I have completed the work you gave me to do.”

And so, she said, has the outgoing provincial team.

“There is no point to our belaboring accomplishments or regrets. Our work is finished. We have done our best.” ❖



Sister Gannon, left, congratulates Lisa Buscher, RSCJ, following a vow ceremony March 28, where Buscher professed her first vows in the Society of the Sacred Heart.

Welcoming the stranger

Life and work 'a package' wrapped in vision



Ask Susan Maxwell, RSCJ, what attracted her to Schools of the Sacred Heart in Chicago and she will tell you her enthusiasm derived not only from the school's unique educational plan – single-sex schools for boys and girls on a single campus – but also from the school's ethnically diverse surroundings near Lake Michigan on Chicago's north side. Eight years ago, when she became director of Sheridan Road, as the school is known, she was determined to find a way to connect the school with the neighborhoods around it.

Today a program known as Children of the Heart, under the direction of Sacred Heart Associate Mary Burke-Peterson, is a haven for immigrant and low-income parents and their preschool children, ranging in age from newborn to three. Participants come from the neighborhoods surrounding Sheridan Road, the area they call home after arriving from countries in Eastern Europe, Asia, Central America and Africa. They are the products of vastly different histories, speak different native languages and,

from some perspectives, have little in common. Some may have been forced to leave their countries as refugees or war or political change; others may have been drawn to the United States for its educational or economic opportunities.

But from another perspective, according to Peterson, participants share a lot. Many feel isolated, cut off from familiar surroundings and resources, and unsure where to turn. Regardless of their economic status, they may have limited skills in English and be uncomfortable and unfamiliar with various aspects of American culture. They often need help with navigating the daily realities of American life, its schools, libraries, hospitals, government offices and social service agencies.

For all who come, Children of the Heart, beginning its fifth year this fall, strives to be an oasis, a place where mothers new to this country can find information, friendship and support.

When Sister Maxwell arrived, though, it wasn't obvious what sort of program would benefit the neighborhood most. She gathered together a group to help her assess needs. Participants included Elise Packard from the Institute of Cultural Affairs, Barbara Becker from Uptown Headstart, and Maria Paz Salas, a faculty member at Sheridan Road. Peterson brought years of experience working with parents and children as an audiologist at Children's Memorial Hospital and a newfound love for Sacred Heart education and values.

"I remember walking into the school, standing in the hallway and being deeply aware that something was happening inside me," Peterson said, recalling her first visit to Sheridan Road. "I had a deep spiritual sense of feeling very much at home. This was where I wanted to be as much as where I knew I wanted my son to be." A few

continued

Sofia Elam, second-grader at Sacred Heart Schools, stands ready to assist Nikki Garagay.





Meg Kayama, alumna of Children of the Heart, mother of two children at Sheridan Road, and program volunteer, works on a craft project with Penelope Alegria.

years later, she would respond to an invitation to join Sacred Heart Associates and begin meeting monthly with RSCJ in the area and a group of women committed to studying the history, mission and spirituality of the Society of the Sacred Heart and making its spirituality and mission their own. “At the time, I was asking a whole lot of questions” as Children of the Heart was starting up, she recalled – “questions about spirituality, about work, about life in general.”

Learning to play

On Tuesday and Thursday mornings during the school year, the days Children of the Heart is in session, mothers and sometimes fathers climb the stairs to the second floor of a large house on the campus of Sheridan Road known today as “the 6200 House.” Some parents follow children who have skipped ahead; others carry babies or hold their more timid little ones by the hand. At the top of the stairs is a warren of rooms filled with toys and books, paraphernalia for group games and creative activities, and friendly volunteers.

After a short period of unstructured play for the children and informal conversation among parents and volunteers – who regularly include two second-graders at Sheridan Road – participants come together in a “gathering room” for songs

and games. “We always start with the welcoming song,” said Peterson. As parents and children sing it together, they make motions that correspond to the words.

“Everybody smile and wave, smile and wave, smile and wave ... where is *Maximo*,” or Isabel, or Sean, until every child present has had a chance to take his or her name card from the song leader and place it on a board. After songs come bubbles, blown out in profusion by the leader, filling the center of room, as children watch them rise and fall, some gleefully reaching for them, giggling as they disappear.

Next come snacks; then, as if on cue, mothers move into a large room where, on Thursdays, they take part in “Learning Basket” activities. One day last spring, for instance, tables held materials for creating scrapbooks, all donated by a volunteer. Sorting through photographs, the women chose those they wanted to keep, then cut and pasted them decoratively on pages they would later take home.

Peterson said “Learning Basket” activities offer mothers a chance to interact with each other as they explore ways of being involved with their children without spending much money. Most often, Peterson said, the activities are based on simple materials that might be found around the house – measuring cups and spoons for water play, garden gloves that can be turned into finger puppets, spools of yarn for making crocheted animals or balls, scraps of fabric for making clothes for animals or dolls. “Crocheting and sewing are skills many of the women grew up with,” Peterson said.

“Many of these women don’t find it easy to play with children,” she noted. “One of the fundamental focuses of these activities is to learn to play. We model it over and over as we play with the children, and sometimes we explain the benefits to the mothers directly.”

Sean O'Brien reaches for floating bubbles.





At other times, parents and children come together as adult volunteers read and talk about a simple book, asking mothers and children to examine the pictures and explain how they think people in the pictures might be feeling.

 **Empowering parents**

Two of the adult volunteers were originally parents in the program. One is Laura Vargas who brought her son Melvyn to Children of the Heart five years ago, when he was three. The other is Meg Kayama, who came when her youngest child was just one year old and an older daughter was entering kindergarten at Sheridan Road.

“At that time, I couldn’t speak English very well,” Kayama recalled. “Many Americans speak so fast. I was feeling isolated. I was afraid to talk.” Then she discovered Children of the Heart. “It’s like a family here,” she said. Similarly, Vargas, a native of Mexico, said she was thrilled when Peterson, after bumping into her several times around the neighborhood, asked her to come back to the program as a volunteer. “I feel so comfortable here,” said Vargas, who is program coordinator.

Peterson said many people, when they hear about the program, assume it is a day care operation. Then she explains that parents are included in the invitation to come and learn. “Our real purpose is to educate and empower parents, especially mothers,” she said. “We want to strengthen their parenting skills so their kids can flourish.” A side benefit, though, she said, is that once women have been through the program, they often feel more comfortable about sending their children to day care, preschools or Head Start programs when they enter work training programs or find jobs. Their children may feel more confident as well.

Mary Burke-Peterson, second from right, leans over a stool to watch as Mitzi Maloyan puts her name on a board. Also watching are Mary Craven, volunteer, with her twin children, Camille and Kyle, students at Schools of the Sacred Heart.



Jennifer Peña, left, enjoys the company of Brenda Mereida, assistant librarian at Sacred Heart Schools and volunteer at Children of the Heart, and Laura Vargas, volunteer program coordinator.

On Tuesdays, volunteers, some of them parent-professionals with children at Sheridan Road, some of them graduate students in nursing at DePaul University, give talks on nutrition, women’s health, budgeting, and a host of other issues relevant to women with children at home. Rosemary Dewey, RSCJ, who staffs the reading room at Children of the Heart and reads to children on request, gave a presentation on creating a budget, “and many of the women were stunned,” Peterson said. “They had no idea what their financial status was.” At another time, a Sheridan Road parent who is a nurse talked about post-partum depression, and one of the women in the group recognized that she had the symptoms.

“We talk about discipline, and parents learn that it’s okay to set boundaries for themselves,” Peterson said. “We help them to recognize stress and to find ways of coping. We want to help moms understand that taking care of themselves is a very important thing to do. We’d like to explore issues related to marital relationships more; explore the various levels of abuse, emotional, psychological and physical”

Kayama said, “One of the things I like best is that we never set ourselves up as people with all the answers. We are peers. On any day it is hard to tell who is the teacher and who is being taught.” Peterson added, “We’re like a big extended family; we’re all parenting each other. Sometimes I look around the room and I see parents involved with children,
continued



but not necessarily their own children.” Last fall, Peterson experimented with a “reading night” and wondered whether anyone would come. “They came in droves,” she said. “We had seventy-five people; thirty-two families.” They chose a book that is available in both Spanish and English, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, and sent every family home with a copy.

Deepening ties

Gradually, Sheridan Road’s connections with Children of the Heart have deepened. In addition to donating nearly all the books and toys, Sheridan Road parents volunteer in various capacities. Sister Maxwell donates the services of an assistant librarian, Brenda Merelda, a native of Guatemala who was trained as a physician and brings a wealth of health-related knowledge.

The program’s tie-in with the second grade curriculum is a natural, Sister Maxwell said, giving the young students an opportunity to participate in a service project without leaving the campus, and providing a connection with the second-grade social studies curriculum, which focuses on learning about other cultures.

Begun as a pilot project, Children of the Heart relies heavily on current personnel, so Peterson is working with others to create a solid structure, assuring its future beyond its present leadership. It is possible, too, she said, that the program will add additional days. An annual budget of about \$170,000 includes a substantial gift-in-kind from Sheridan Road in the use and maintenance of its space, as well as an



Mothers and children gather on a window seat to take part in a game led by Sheldon Hardy, former Sacred Heart Schools parent, and program volunteer.

operating budget of \$65,000 that comes mostly from grants, including ministry grants from the U.S. Province.

“Mary brings untiring, really untiring energy and devotion to this project,” Sister Maxwell said. “She is an inspired leader with the families and staff. She tries always to be thinking of new developments in the curriculum, and new connections with resources around the city, such as Loyola University and DePaul. She is really remarkable.”

Both Peterson, the Sacred Heart Associate, and Sister Maxwell, the RSCJ, see Children of the Heart as an extension of the Saint Madeleine Sophie’s vision for the Society of the Sacred Heart.

“I see Children of the Heart as a living incarnation of our foundress’s vision of academy and free school in dialogue with each other,” Sister Maxwell said. She referred to Madeleine Sophie’s dream of educating children from all levels of Society – those who could pay in academies, those who could not in “free schools.”

For Peterson, the program is a way to connect her deepening immersion into the spirituality of the Society with her role as an associate. “I have come to realize that this all fits together. I have a growing sense of this work being a part of the Sacred Heart mission. It’s all part of a package that’s been wonderful for me.” ❖



Getu Kebe, a native of Ethiopia, and sons Kedrus and Abbe play with an old telephone during an unstructured play period.





Doing God's work at the UN

Congregations share office

It was a rainy Thursday in Manhattan in mid-May when Cecile Meijer, RSCJ, and Evanne Hunter, IBVM, boarded a bus for the United Nations, where they would be attending, as they nearly always do on Thursdays, a briefing for representatives of NGOs. The letters stand for “non-governmental organizations” and, at the UN, refer specifically to hundreds of not-for-profit voluntary citizens’ groups that share its humanitarian goals and have established official ties.

Arriving at their destination, the two nuns passed through security and headed for the assembly room where the morning-long briefing by the UN’s Department of Information would take place. Today’s topic would be “HIV/AIDS and the Family.” Like many of the Thursday briefings, the topic relates to one of the UN’s “Millennium Development Goals,” concrete social and environmental objectives that all one hundred and ninety-one of the UN’s member nations have agreed to meet by 2015.

After the morning briefing, Sisters Meijer and Hunter joined several other women who represent religious orders at the UN for a working lunch. In the afternoon, they attended a second briefing, this one sponsored by the Human Rights Committee, to hear from victims of civil conflicts, including a woman from Rwanda, a Tutsi, who had lost friends and family members in the 1994 genocide in her country.

continued

Cecile Meijer, RSCJ, left, and Evanne Hunter, IBVM, stand in the United Nations Plaza after a long day of meetings at the UN.



Sister Hunter and Sister Ann Scholz, who represents School Sisters of Notre Dame at the UN, review upcoming events.

Sisters Meijer and Hunter have been working in concert now for nearly two years as representatives of their religious orders in an NGO office established in 2003. Though each of their congregations, the Society of the Sacred Heart and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, has been individually accepted as an NGO affiliated with the UN's Department of Public Information, the women work together as a single office under a plan conceived by international leaders of the two congregations in Rome. It is a decision both are grateful for. It doubles their presence, allows them to attend different meetings and bring back the fruit of their different experiences at the end of the day.

"It makes sense to do it together," Sister Meijer said, "not only because it's more economical, but because our two congregations are very similar in spirituality, in educational mission and in our areas of current focus – women, children, the poor, migrants and refugees, integrity of creation. One of the main benefits of the partnership is that you can do twice as much work." And, added Sister Hunter, "we can reach twice as far."

Although Sisters Hunter and Meijer had never met before their respective appointments, they have found their talents and experience mesh well. "It's been serendipitous," Sister Meijer said. At the same time, she said, they are at the beginning of a long journey. "We are defining it as we do it," Sister Hunter observed – "both the job and the partnership."

Each morning, working in a room at the 80th Street community where they live with five other RSCJ, the women look over a list of available meetings and decide which each will attend. "The possibilities are overwhelming," Sister Meijer said. "After we look at what's on the plate, we do a lot of negotiating and juggling to decide who goes to what."

Sister Meijer generally attends meetings related to social development, human rights, international law and conflicts in northern Uganda. Sister Hunter follows issues related to HIV/AIDS, eradication of poverty and financing for development. In the evening they compare notes, write reports, respond to e-mails, prepare presentations and perform a variety of other duties aimed at making the work of the UN better known to members of their congregations and their extended families – students, families, alumnae and alumni of their congregations' schools; partners in ministry; associates, family members and friends.

They encourage visitors with ties to their congregations and so far have welcomed about thirty individuals from countries on every continent. They have also received three U.S. school groups and arranged private tours. Articles on the sisters' work are available to the public in English, French and Spanish at www.rscjinternational.org.

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Before coming to the UN, Sister Hunter, a Canadian, had worked as a teacher and administrator in her order's schools, primarily Loretto Abbey in Toronto, Ontario. (Like the Society, the IBVM has schools around the world.) Then, in 2000, she was named Canadian regional superior for her religious order. She had just returned from El Salvador, where she had served as an election observer, when she was invited by leaders of her order to take the UN post.

Sister Meijer's work had been in international law. A native of Holland, she was trained and worked as a lawyer there before coming to the United States in 1985 for an in-depth look at several religious orders and ultimately becoming an RSCJ. In recent years, she had served as legal coordinator for the War Crimes Research Office at American University's law school in Washington, D.C., where she had worked on cases related to international war crimes, including genocides in the Balkans and Rwanda during the 1990s. Such different backgrounds give the sisters an edge in working with the UN's Department of

Information, where an important part of their role is to educate others about the work of the UN. They note that many people think of the UN as the General Assembly and the Security Council, without realizing how much humanitarian work the UN does through the Economic and Social Council with its programs and agencies, such as UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the UN Development Programme, and with the help of its affiliated NGOs.

Sister Hunter credits her partner with a reader understanding of the UN's complexities, while she, as a former high school teacher, instinctively translates those complexities into the jargon-free language that makes it easier for outsiders to understand.

A channel for UN involvement for NGOs is affiliation with ECOSOC, the Economic and Social Council, which offers opportunities for influencing policy-makers. At that level, Sisters Meijer and Hunter work with others to prepare such interventions, but for now, as NGOs in association with the Department of Information, they cannot officially attach their names to the work. ECOSOC status for the Society and IBVM may come later, Sister Meijer observed.

At present, their main focus is to carry out their educational role, increasing awareness of the UN and encouraging activism on the local level. All of their communication carries the hope that their congregations' members, constituents and friends will come to realize that they, too, have a role to play in making the two NGOs – the Society and the IBVM – effective. Already, the sisters see it happening. “More and more people are getting involved in the issues,” Sister Meijer said. “That’s when it gets exciting.”

Sister Hunter noted that students at Convent of the Sacred Heart (91st Street) in New York City, and a retired IBVM in Toronto are making and distributing white wristbands that signify support for the Millennium Development Goals and the Make Poverty History campaign, an international action against poverty.

Ultimately, the women stressed, their own influence will be only as strong as the involvement of the people they represent. “Sometimes people refer to us as “the NGO” and that is not right,” Sister Meijer said. “The NGOs are our congregations, and the big extended families of the Society and the IBVM are a part of this. The topics we focus on at the UN cannot be imposed from above. They have to evolve organically from the vision at the grassroots. If we want our UN office to be effective, we have to be



Sisters Hunter and Meijer, first and second from right, listen intently as victims of civil conflicts describe experiences.

actively lobbying our own governments for change.”

For Sister Meijer, working for systemic changes that result in justice – a more humane world in which everyone’s basic needs are met – is at the core of the Society’s mission. “Madeleine Sophie established schools because she wanted not only justice for women, who lacked access to education, but she also wanted to educate children of well-off families because those would be the people with access to power to bring about change,” she said. “Having at the same time free schools for those who could not pay speaks to me of her strong sense of justice for all.”

For Sister Hunter, the work of the two congregations at the UN is as basic as the Gospel of Jesus. “It’s the Sermon on the Mount in a global context,” she said. ✦

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty
- Provide universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

Each country must report this year on progress toward the goals.

For more information on requirements for meeting each of the goals, see:

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

"A great emancipator, a heart-regulator"

A God who loves singing and dancing

Anyone who has ever experienced the fervor of African-American worship is likely to be swept back to those moments by the vivid writing in the selection on the following pages, an excerpt from Sister Mary McGann's award-winning book *A Precious Fountain*. Think twice, therefore, before reading it in a public place, for you may soon find yourself swaying to the rhythm of the gospel hymns.

The parish Sister McGann writes about, the lens for her portrait of black worship, is Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Hunter's Point, San Francisco. It is a parish that has drawn RSCJ to ministry for nearly forty years.

In the late 1960s, when Redemptorist Father Don MacKinnon, a cousin of Sally Rude, RSCJ, was named pastor, he asked RSCJ in San Francisco to help build parish programs. Over the years, they have responded so generously that the Society's seal is embedded in one of the stained glass windows. Those who came included Sisters Patricia Desmond, Ellen Hoffman, Judy Roach, Marilyn McMorro, Rosemary Thompson, Mary Lou Warner, Mary Elizabeth Nothomb, and especially Helen Carroll, who worked at the parish for nearly twenty years after retiring as principal of Stuart Hall for Boys, San Francisco.

The RSCJ taught catechism and tutored adults. Sisters Joan McKenna, Helen Donohoe and Connie Welch came from Lone Mountain College in San Francisco to teach classes in Hunter's Point. A community college evolved.

Sister Irma Dillard joined the parish in 1990 and has served as coordinator for the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, facilitated retreats, led Bible study and mentored the present pastor, Father Kirk Ullery. She has helped develop the parish's annual Kwanzaa celebration.

The latest chapter in this long relationship brought Sister McGann to the parish as a doctoral student in liturgy in 1991. Today she regularly sings in the choir, commuting from her home in Berkeley. She describes her initial experience of Lourdes in the introduction to the book.

"Despite the hospitality I felt from members of the community, I knew that I stood at an intersection, a complex border-crossing," she writes. "I was attracted by the art of their communal modes of song and worship, and realized how much I could learn from them. Yet it was clear that I would be changed in the process." Changed she was! *A Precious Fountain* testifies to gifts of insight, wisdom, experience and lasting friendship that she has received from the Lourdes community.



Rose Isles, alto, is one of the lead singers in the Lourdes choir.

“Music is a gift of God,” remarked Tina Edwards breaking into a youthful smile. Tina, Tiffany Isles and I were conversing about how music at Lourdes affects one’s experience of prayer. “Music is natural,” she continued. “Hear the birds! Hum a tune! [Feel it as you’re] walking down the street! It’s the rhythm, it’s the pace, it’s always there! Music is a gift of God, a gift he gave us so that we can worship better, so that we can worship in his house.”

It seemed she’d touched the core, the heart of all that we’d been exploring that April afternoon. The song doesn’t begin with us. It’s a gift of God, to be received and returned in praise to the One from whom it comes. It’s a godly presence that makes our worship fuller, richer, more precious to the One who offers the gift. To receive this gift, explained Tina and Tiffany that afternoon, is to allow the sound, the energy, the truth, the vibrations, the message of the music to fill your body, to stir your soul, and to shake the dust off your praises; to tap into your fears, to flood you with consolation, to break down your inner barriers and enable you to surrender to God. In the rhythms of the body, [they seemed to say,] you discover the rhythms of the Spirit. “Here I am, Lord ... before I was holding back.” Tina concluded. “You release and completely surrender yourself to God.”

As Pat Goodall and I turned off Haight Street onto Clayton Avenue, Pat’s voice was full of animation. Returning from a Day of Prayer for the San Francisco School of Pastoral Leadership, at which the Lourdes choir had sung, we were discussing the importance of people worshipping God according to their own distinctive styles and sensitivities. I pulled the car near the curb across from Pat’s home so as to finish the conversation. “We at Lourdes need to make a *joyful* noise,” claimed Pat. “We need to worship God *as we know and feel God to be!* Our God is *happy, joyful*, not depressing, sad, or uptight. *God’s shoes don’t pinch!*”

The image lodged in my mind as I continued my drive home. A God whose “shoes don’t pinch,” I mused, is no doubt a God who is at home amidst our singing and dancing; a God who delights in a

creation that is rich with rhythm, movement, color and diversity – all of which is the work of God’s own hand; a God whose Wisdom is at play in the universe, delighting to be at large in “God’s playhouse.” The very *way* we worship and make music, Pat seemed to say, reveals how we know God, how God reveals Godself to us.

Conversation flowed easily among the women of the Lourdes Sodality huddled around a long table in the church hall that May morning. Margaret Fisher was seated across from me, her head nodding as various women spoke about their experience of music in the Lourdes liturgy. Margaret, a slender great-grandmother with wisdom in her eyes and dignity in her bearing, was dressed that morning in a tailored navy suit set off by the ruffled collar of a crimson blouse. A gentle woman, she waited patiently to join the flow of words and images. Then, as if too full to hold back any longer, she remarked, “Well in the *Bible* it says that we should praise God with *cymbals and drums!* Let *everything* praise God...” Her comments were swept along in the flow of conversation, but her reference to Psalm 150 was clear. She might well have continued to claim a biblical warrant for praising God with clanging cymbals, with loud crashing cymbals, with drumming and dancing! “Clap your hands all you peoples, shout to God with cries of joy!” Liz Bell returned to Margaret’s theme moments later. “The instruments – the drums, the piano [we use here at Lourdes] – help bring out the *continued*”

Irma Dillard, RSCJ, (right) and other members of the congregation clap to the rhythm of the opening song of liturgy at Our Lady of Lourdes.



Photo by Jack Smith, Catholic San Francisco

feeling of the music, the power. ... Like we're praising the Lord in a lot of ways and with a lot of voices!"

Instruments, these women seemed to say, stretch our ability to praise God. Drums, piano, crashing and clanging cymbals amplify the sound, the energy, the feeling, and the power of the music so as to awaken our bodies and enable our spirits to resonate with God's gift of song. They expand the "voices" of our praise, enabling us to express the "unsayable" – those dimensions of our praise that go beyond our words.

"Many of the songs we sing at Lourdes come from the greater Black church," remarked Father Kirk from across a small kitchen table in the parish rectory as we talked about how this community claims a musical tradition that is both Black and Catholic. "We make them our own. They enrich our Catholicity. But that's not the point for people at Lourdes. ...

"The main priority is to praise God. ... It's all about praising God. And there are many ways of praising God. Clapping, for example – we clap to praise the Lord, that's the basic reason, not to keep the choir in rhythm. To make sound before the Lord. ... The priority here is to praise God."

Father Kirk's words are borne out in conversations with others at Lourdes. No matter what the message of a song – be it thanksgiving, supplication, or testimony – the act of singing is understood to be one of praise. Indeed, singers often

use "singing" and "praising" interchangeably. "I love singing to God and praising his name," commented Judy Brown. "I love praising God. That's why I sing – for the grace of God, all the blessings he's given me – singing is just giving back. ... It's giving back to him what he's given me in my life."

At Lourdes, singing and praising are never timid or hesitant. A God who "is worthy to be praised," as song after song reiterates, deserves colorful praise, embodied praise, dancing praise, and at times, ecstatic praise.

These conversations weave a perception that at Lourdes, music-making is revelatory – revelatory of the community's experience of who God is, of what it is like to be in God's presence, of what it means to be created in God's image, and of what it is like to experience God as living Presence at the heart of the community's prayer. In the rhythms of the body one discovers the rhythms of God's Spirit – a God who loves singing and dancing.

Music as gift "of God" carries the imprint of the Giver – a Giver whose life is refracted in sound and movement, in dress and dance, in timbre and gesture. At Lourdes, to sing and praise God is to become a vessel of that life, to be moved by that life, allowing it to fill one's mind, to touch one's emotions and liberate one's body. It is to realize that "the world and time are the dance of the Lord." It is to join the "cosmic dance" which, as the great contemplative Thomas Merton once wrote, "beats in our very blood."

Below left, Father Kirk Ullery, pastor of Lourdes, preaches at Sunday liturgy. Below right, members of the congregation stand one by one, as they are inspired to join the choir in making music.



*I*t was the only time I saw Brother Banks dance. The "holy dance" that is, a dance recognized by the community as the impulse of the Holy Spirit. A dance that reaches back into the tradition of Black worship. A dance he no doubt first experienced in his youth on a Louisiana plantation, in the gatherings for praise and worship which he so beautifully described in our conversations.

It was June of '94 – a challenging time for the parish, a time of uncertainty. Just a week before the archdiocese had announced the closure of All Hallows, Lourdes' neighboring parish, and Lourdes was faced with an influx of new members into its tiny church house. What would become of this parish? Father Kirk would ask as he preached that morning. How would he and members of the



community welcome another community in grief, mourning over the loss of their beloved parish – including a large Samoan community with its own distinctive style of worship and life together?

Before the liturgy began that morning, Father Kirk sensed a heaviness in people’s hearts and requested that someone in the choir sing “Unwavering Faith” – a song that could capture the sentiments and prayer of the community, their plea for “faith to climb those mountains” which inevitably lay before them. Yet after a day of rehearsing for a gospel concert in Santa Clara, neither Ernestine Harris nor Pat Goodall felt ready for the vocal challenge.

Just then, like a miracle, Charlene Edwards arrived unexpectedly all the way from Stockton, and was pressed into service. Many times before, during her years as choir director, Charlene’s resonant contralto voice had gathered the Lourdes community into a fervent plea for “unwavering faith,” for “faith to climb that old, old rugged hill”; for “faith to ensure God will answer if we only do his will.” This morning would be no different.

It is late in the service and people are settling into their pews after receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, when Charlene moves to the microphone.

**LORD // GIVE ME // THAT
UN-WAY-ER-ING FAITH!** (Yes, Lord!)

she begins freely, in unmetred rhythm, the fullness of her voice drawing us into a communion of spirits. As each unhurried line flows out into the community, the ardor in Charlene’s voice swells ever so gently, the responses of *Yes, Lord!* and *Amen!* from around the church became more insistent. By the time she reaches the end of the song, a final soaring invocation for “unwavering faith,” many are in tears.

But then, a sudden sea change washed the church house. As the final cadence of Charlene’s song sound, with arpeggiated piano flourish and a swell of Isaiah’s cymbals, Charlene glances at Pat Goodall. Their eyes meet. A brief word is exchanged. Then a hushed word to Reed and Isaiah, who know all the songs by heart, and Reed segues into a jubilant “old, old gospel song,” recognized immediately as “I’ve Got Jesus and That’s Enough!” Isaiah is right behind, tapping into its rollicking



Above left, lead singer Rita Turner, soprano, sings at the microphone as swaying choir members provide backup.



Above right, Louise Wood, a member of the congregation, claps and joins in the singing.

duple meter with cymbals swinging and drums pulsing. Even before Charlene begins to sing, people around the church house are on their feet. Rhythmic clapping echoes off the walls. Charlene launches into a first verse, her voice spirited against Reed and Isaiah’s infectious syncopations:

**THERE’S ALWAYS SOMEBODY TALKING
ABOUT ME // REALLY I DON’T MIND!
THEY TRY THEIR BEST TO BLOCK MY
PROGRESS // MOST ALL THE TIME.
THE MEAN THINGS THEY SAY DON’T
MAKE ME FEEL SAD; I CAN’T LOSE A
FRIEND THAT I NEVER HAD.**

I’ve got Je-sus and that’s enough!

The entire church house seems to have joined Charlene on this last affirmation: “*I’ve got Jesus and that’s enough!*” *Yes!* calls someone from the first pew. *Amen!* shouts another from further back.

The song has hardly begun when Brother Banks rises to his full stature behind the choir. Cautiously, now, he begins to descend the three steps from where he was seated beside Father Kirk. Parting the choir line with a gentle nudge, he slowly walks out in front of the singers, and there, in the midst of the sanctuary, like the center of a ring shout, Brother Banks begins to sway with the gently percussive movements of an elderly dancer. Whatever has seized his soul is likewise stirring his body!

continued



To my amazement, he sways as if lost in the music. His movements are halting but never constrained. His white alb and red print stole shift from side to side with the gentle oscillation of his body, his arms, elbows bent, set in motion as if to an inner dance. “I’ve got Jesus and that’s enough!” rings another pulsing chorus. Joy, it seems, has taken hold, not only of Brother Banks but of the whole church house.

The lyrics are tripping off Charlene’s tongue as she sets up a rapid call-response:

HE’S A GREAT EMANCIPATOR!

A HEART-REGULATOR!

ALL: Jesus is! Jesus is!

**HE MAKES MY BURDENS LIGHTER, MY
PATHWAY BRIGHTER!**

ALL: Yes he will! Yes he will!

**YOU BREAK ME DOWN AND GOD PICKS
ME UP. STAYS RIGHT BY ME WHEN THE
GOING GETS TOUGH!**

I’ve got Je-sus, and that’s enough!

Brother Banks, leaning ever so slightly forward, rocks rhythmically with each rapid phrase. Shifting weight from one foot to another, as if walking in place, his shoulders undulate in rapid waves of motion that echo through his arms and torso. Then, his feet shuffling, he turns in place. It seems Brother Banks is doing what we all wish to do. He dances at the center of the gathering, dances in our name! We’ve come into a clearing with him, a place of trust and celebration. It’s not that we’ve escaped the challenge of “climbing those rugged mountains” about which Charlene just sang, nor the “unwavering faith” necessary to make that ascent – but that we’ve broken through into a place of assurance, of security that God will be there with us. Behind Brother Banks, the choir is swaying with a jubilant sense of “victory” as Charlene invites us to declare over and again, “I’ve got Je-sus, and that’s enough!” It’s a moment of grace, a moment of reassurance. The Incarnate One, who knows our struggles and offers us hope, seems to be dancing in the very rhythms of Brother Bank’s elderly body. ❖



Above, Isaiah Brown, instrumentalist at Lourdes since he was five years old, gives power to the music with his drums. Below, Sister Mary McGann, wearing a choir robe with African-American motifs for “Lourdes Day,” speaks with a member of the congregation.

*Mary E. McGann, RSCJ, who often writes about African-American worship, is Associate Professor of Liturgy and Music at the Franciscan School of Theology/Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California. The full title of her book is **A Precious Fountain: Music in the Worship of an African American Catholic Community**. (This excerpt, printed with permission of Liturgical Press, is from Chapter 13, “Rhythms of the Body, Rhythms of the Spirit – A God Who Loves Singing and Dancing.”) A companion volume, **Exploring Music as Worship and Theology** was also published by Liturgical Press. Photos on these pages are by Irma Dillard, RSCJ, except where noted.*

Join us in mission

Help us make God's love visible in the heart of the world



How?

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If you are interested in membership in the Society, please contact
Nancy Koke, RSCJ; Director of Vocation Ministry, vocations@rscj.org

ASSOCIATES

If you would like to learn about the Sacred Heart Associates program for men and women
who want to share in the mission and charism of the Society, please e-mail
Sheila Hammond, RSCJ, at shammond@rscj.org

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Please consider including the Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province,
in your estate plan or your will. For more information, e-mail
Shirley Miller, RSCJ, at smiller@rscj.org



From the Archives

Shown above is a detail from a large ceremonial shawl used by the U.S. Province in installation ceremonies for new provincials and provincial teams since 1988. The shawl was designed by Carlota Duarte, RSCJ, and made by Carol Mecagni, fiber artist from Woodville, Massachusetts. Ribbons threaded through the loosely woven fabric are cross-stitched with the names of U.S. foundations, from St. Charles, Missouri, in 1818, through Princeton, New Jersey, in 1962. The shawl was used during a ceremony on August 14, when Kathleen Conan, RSCJ, new provincial, and members of her provincial team, Sisters Anne Byrne, Marina Hernandez and Paula Toner, were installed in a leadership transition liturgy. In previous ceremonies, the shawl has been placed over the shoulders of a new provincial, suggesting the Jewish *tallit*, or prayer shawl, or held aloft over the heads of kneeling team members, symbolic of a *chuppah*, the ceremonial Jewish canopy used to create a sanctified space for making a gift of oneself to another – in this case, a gift of service to the province. Cross-stitching on the ribbons was done by Sisters Mary Loretta Busch and Emma Fernandez. ✦

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