



Heart

Summer 2006

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



...to Heart

Dear Friends,

“Home” and “homelessness” have been themes running through my mind and heart in recent months.

Just a year ago, hurricanes Katrina and Rita forced thousands of people to leave their homes. These same storms dislodged many others from familiar patterns as they opened their houses and their hearts to the evacuees. As the months have gone on, we have heard stories of people and communities rebuilding their homes and their lives. During this same year, our elder sisters at Kenwood in Albany, New York, have begun creating a new home at Teresian House, a few miles away. (See *Heart*, Spring 2006.) All through this time, many of us have been involved in the national discussion about our attitudes and choices in relation to people who wish to make their home in our country. And in this issue of *Heart* we share the experience of three of our sisters who minister daily with men and women who are without a home or who are trying to negotiate the many factors that contribute to stability and “at-home-ness” in our lives.

As people shaped by the charism of the Society of the Sacred Heart, we are called to contemplate reality and experience it with the heart of Jesus, to listen for and respond to the calls within our reality as Jesus would (Constitutions §21). I invite you to reflect with me for a moment on what God might be revealing to us or calling us to in these experiences of losing and creating home.

While we may not have been without a physical place of shelter, most of us have experienced transitions of job, home, health, relationships, which help us know something of the loss of security and stability that homelessness occasions, the loss of relationships, connectedness or belonging that root and orient our lives. In such times of dislocation and exile, the people of Israel came to know the compassion of God as Yahweh, who, stirred to the depths of his/her being by the pain of the people, responded not only with care and concern but also with action that brought them to a new home.

We also have experiences of creating a home for ourselves and for others; we know the excitement of new possibilities and the energy of creativity as we make a place our own. At the same time, it is often in such transitions that we become aware

of the life skills, initiative, courage and perseverance it takes to access new resources and make new relationships. We come to appreciate the personal touches, gestures of welcome, connections with others, routines, familiarity with customs and people that enable us to be at home in a new place. Who is the God we might come to know in this experience? Perhaps the God who is so often leading people home, preparing the way, creating with them a dwelling place and a community whose characteristics are abundance, security, fruitfulness, happiness and peace.

Some of our experiences of being “at home” are not related to place. We find ourselves at ease with another person, in a certain situation or within ourselves; at home in a group, a culture, a context in such a way that we feel rooted, able to be ourselves. We feel secure, content, with a sense of belonging, a sense of energy, lightness and joy, with a capacity to reach out that comes from feeling at home. Throughout the gospels, Jesus is the one who welcomes everyone – children, sinners, friends, outcasts – and makes them feel at home. He invites each of us to this sense of “at-home-ness” with him, inviting us to make our home in him as he has already made his home in us.

What feelings and calls arise in you as you reflect? Perhaps gratitude for the places of home in your life. Perhaps pain as you sense what homelessness and disorientation mean for someone. Perhaps courage and desire to help a person or group be more at home. Perhaps joy as you sense a new level of at-home-ness in yourself. Perhaps a longing to let God be

more at home in you. Our calls and responses will be unique to our own journey. Let us be open to the transformations they can offer.

May we find and create home for one another.



Kathleen Conan RSCJ

Kathleen Conan, RSCJ
Provincial

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Feature articles and photos are by Pamela Schaeffer, editor of Heart, except where otherwise noted.

Heart

Heart is published three times a year to highlight the mission and ministries of the Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province, for a broad circle of friends. The covers, photographs of hearts in nature, symbolic of Christ's presence at the heart of the universe, bear witness to the contemplative dimension of the Society's "wholly contemplative, wholly apostolic" mission: to discover and reveal God's love through the service of education.



Photo: Peggy Nehmen

Cover photo: water lilies growing at the Jewel Box in Forest Park, St. Louis, in September of 2005

The Society of the Sacred Heart was founded by Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat in post-revolutionary France and brought to the United States by Saint Philippine Duchesne in 1818. For more information about the mission and ministries of the U.S. Province, please visit www.rscj.org.

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Reunion: News just in

“Kensington is going home,” declared the *Detroit Free Press* in a recent report on the upcoming merger of Academy of the Sacred Heart in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and Kensington Academy. With Bridget Bearss, RSCJ, head of Sacred Heart, at the helm, the two schools will begin to reunite their programs this fall after twenty-four years apart. Originally a Sacred Heart school for boys, Kensington moved to its own campus in 1982 and became co-educational. When the merger is complete, the two schools will be based on the Sacred Heart campus. For more information, see www.ashmi.org ❖



Bridget Bearss, RSCJ

Young adults invited

Are you a young adult interested in taking time to reflect on choices for your life and the part that God plays in your decision-making? If so, you are invited to join a **day-long “Life Directions Retreat”** for women and men in their 20s and 30s. Cost is \$10;



Participants in a “Life Directions Retreat” will reflect on life’s next steps.

date is to be announced. For more information, please contact Marianne Ruggeri, RSCJ: mruggeri@rscj.org.

Young persons between 17 and 30 who would like an in-depth experience of Sacred Heart mission and ministry are invited to engage in a **nine-month spiritual journey – a pilgrimage of heart and mind** culminating in an actual pilgrimage to St. Charles, Missouri, and the Shrine of Saint Philippine Duchesne. The goal is to help young people discover the love of God in their own lives and to deepen their spirituality and faith as they explore life choices. Participants will journey with a mentor and serve with a Religious of the Sacred Heart in her ministry. For more information, please contact Kathleen McGrath, RSCJ: kmcgrath@rscj.org. ❖

Bonded in the Heart

Many RSCJ, Sacred Heart Associates and faculty members at Sacred Heart schools described a Spirituality Forum in late July as one of the highlights of the summer. The number of participants – nearly 90 – well exceeded expectations, as did the strong presence of non-RSCJ: about half of the total, divided nearly equally between associates and faculty.

The program, held at St. Mary’s College, South Bend, Indiana, featured talks and workshops by numerous RSCJ, including Patricia Garcia de Quevedo, RSCJ, former superior general of the Society of the Sacred Heart; Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ, former U.S. provincial; Nancy Kehoe, RSCJ, psychologist; Justine Lyons, RSCJ, spiritual director.

Mary Ann “Sis” Flynn, RSCJ, of the Spiritual Ministry Center in San Diego, led participants on “labyrinth walks,” inviting them to reflect as they



walked on significant moments in their lives or memories of a departed loved one, or to ask for a special intention or grace.

One of three men who participated in the forum, Paul Parker of Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart in Miami, said he had learned from the presentations “how wide and deep Sacred Heart spirituality is.” Parker, chair of Sacred Heart spirituality at Carrollton, was one of five faculty members from that school who attended. “There was an instant bonding that happened there. There were no separations. It was kind of remarkable,” he said.

Because of the success of the program, another is being planned for 2008. Some of the talks from the forum may be featured in future issues of *Heart*. ❖

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.

Mary Ann Dubrouillet
April 13, 2006

Alicia Sarre
August 1, 2006

Out of Africa

Ann Smith, RSCJ, gave the interview below while visiting St. Louis in June. She was on a home visit from the Society's Uganda/Kenya Province, where she has lived for the past twelve years.

Where do you live?

I live in Ggaba (a section of Kampala) in the hospitality house of our province. It's a wonderful house on diocesan land in a compound with two major seminaries and other religious houses. Our house can sleep thirteen or so. People come from all over the province for meetings, to take care of official business – all the government ministries are in Kampala – or to buy supplies. Sometimes we have three guests, sometimes fifteen. In Africa, all that matters is that you have a roof and open arms of welcome.

What changes have you seen since you arrived?

I am one of the newcomers to the province. Our founders came from England, Ireland and Australia – mostly Ireland. If you look at the pictures of the province today, you see wonderful changes. Now most of the faces are African. Also, Africa is the fastest growing market in the world for technology. It is amazing to me that so many Africans, even in the bush, have cell phones.

How did you end up in Africa?

I had signed up to enter the Maryknoll Missionaries after college at Barat. Then I saw a poster and realized for the first time that the Society is international. I joined the Society and finally, while I was working as campus minister at 91st Street (Convent of the



Sister Smith prepares to open boxes of used computers shipped to Africa.

Sacred Heart, New York City) I thought that if I didn't fulfill this long-held wish to work overseas, my tombstone would say, "She always wanted to go, but" I went to Africa for a summer in 1991, knowing full well it would be a dangerous journey because I wouldn't want to come back. I went for good in 1994.

What work have you done in Africa?

Wherever I've been, I have always been kind of an "odd job" person. For the past six years, I have been the provincial secretary and have taught theology and computers at the two major seminaries. I am a teacher at heart, and could not imagine just talking to computers and telephones all day. There are 350 students in the two seminaries. One is an eight-year program for delayed vocations, where the students are bricklayers, carpenters, veterinarians, teachers, and come with many different levels of education. The other seminary is a more traditional

four-year theologate. Before that, I was the bursar and even acting headmistress at our secondary school in Kalungu. I assisted at the noviceship near Jinja, where I dubbed myself "senior novice."

What are some of the things you have learned while living overseas?

When you go to a new place, you wake up sleeping parts of yourself. And if you go to live in a new culture, you become like a baby, even if you are older – I was in my 50s when I went to live in Africa. I made a decision when I first arrived that I would suspend all of my opinions and judgements and just learn all I could. One of the things I have learned firsthand is that Americans are problem solvers, and it has been fun for me to use limited space creatively – to make use of what is there, but also to be prepared to use technology as soon as it is available. My father was in merchandising, and he used to say that when a department had everything it needed, the people weren't quite as creative as when they had a little less.

What are some of the problems of living in Africa?

Whether in the cities or villages, people are buried on a scale that boggles my mind. Many who die are younger people and children. With children sickness can turn bad very quickly. Another challenge right now is the daily power cuts. But I can't paint a negative picture. It is beautiful there. The people and climate are wonderful. Even the rainy season is a joy because I know drought is bad for the people and the rain will make everything lush and green. ✦

OPPOSING THE WAR: U.S. Province takes a stand

During the run-up to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March of 2003, reactions of the Religious of the Sacred Heart in this country and around the world ranged from passionate opposition to deep concern. Some U.S. sisters, joined by Sacred Heart Associates, co-workers and friends, participated in demonstrations taking place around the country. The U.S. provincial team dispatched a letter to the White House calling on President George W. Bush as a person of faith to “cease aggression against the people of Iraq.”

“We believe that this act of aggression violates our national soul and betrays our cherished foundational values,” the letter said. “We are ashamed that our country has ignored the pleas of our world neighbors to let the U.N. inspections work, to find a diplomatic solution to this conflict, and to exercise the restraint appropriate to a great nation.”



Religious of the Sacred Heart joined thousands demonstrating against the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Now, three years later, that early groundswell of dissent has emerged as a corporate stance, adopted by the U.S. Province in May and calling for an end to U.S. military intervention in Iraq. A product of reading and research, theological reflection, discussion and prayer, it declares:

We, the Religious of the Sacred Heart, United States Province, publicly state our opposition to the ongoing war in Iraq, and we call on our government to adopt a plan for the responsible withdrawal of U.S. troops.

The statement is the second to be adopted by the province since a process for approving a corporate stance was revised in 2003. The first such statement, also approved in 2003, put the province on record against the death penalty.

The proposal for voicing public opposition to the war originated in San Francisco, where Mary McGann, RSCJ, brought it up at an area meeting and found it struck a chord. “I had long felt that if we had a moral problem with the war, we needed to speak out,” Sister McGann said. After minor differences were ironed out in San Francisco – for example, those favoring “immediate withdrawal of

U.S. troops” deferred to those who preferred “responsible withdrawal” – the proposal was sent to the provincial team. It was accompanied by supporting materials collected by Joan Hopkins, RSCJ, former chair of the province peace and justice committee, with help from others.

According to the agreed-upon process, once a corporate stance is proposed in writing, whether by an individual or a group, the provincial team must ensure that certain criteria are met. The proposed stance must pertain to an issue of major importance with national or international significance. It must be consistent with gospel values and with the social teachings of the Catholic Church. Finally, it must reflect the mission of the Society as expressed in the Constitutions and other documents.

In the extensive documentation Sister Hopkins prepared for the anti-war stance, she cited gospel passages, statements by Catholic Church leaders, and the Society’s 1982 Constitutions, which exhort RSCJ to be “inspired by the love of the Heart of Jesus and the desire of making him known, expressed in ... a thirst for working toward justice and peace in the world in response to the cry of the poor.”

When the provincial team completes its work, the proposal goes to the membership who, after a period of study, reflection and prayer, are invited to respond. For a statement

to become a corporate stance, a minimum of forty percent of the membership must make a formal response, and seventy-five percent of those must indicate support. Negative votes may not exceed ten percent of those responding.

If support for a proposal falls short of what is required, a group of RSCJ may agree to make a public “collective response,” giving the names and/or the number of RSCJ who have signed on.

In the corporate stance calling for responsible withdrawal from Iraq, 223 responded, with 212 in favor, six opposed and five abstaining.

Once a position is adopted, RSCJ are urged to get behind it by taking appropriate actions. Suggestions in the case of the Iraq war include writing to members of the U.S. Congress, backing programs to assist returning troops, and encouraging United Nations oversight of conflicts in the Middle East, including Iraq.

Similar processes have been adopted by other religious congregations and are strongly supported by LCWR, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, as a way of bringing gospel values to bear on public policy.

What difference does a corporate stance make? To Mary Pat White, RSCJ, of San Francisco, who helped prepare the statement against the war, the significance is two-dimensional.

“For me personally, I want to be part of the movement that says ‘no’ to war, and I want to feel that the Society confirms where I am,” she said.

Looking at it from the perspective of the Society’s mission, she added: “We educate others by standing up for what we believe is right.” ❖

LIVING DANGEROUSLY

Although she grew up in a military family, Anne Montgomery, RSCJ, is one of the nation’s most ardent opponents of war. That is the clearest sign that this 78-year-old nun is a woman of paradox. In an article about her on August 8 of last year, a reporter for *The New York Times* listed other signs. “In a place where everything seems broken, she has been a fixer,” Ian Urbina wrote. At a time when most other American civilians were leaving the country, she was just arriving.”

That country was, of course, Iraq. Peace-loving Sister Montgomery is most often found in the arena she most deplors: the killing fields of the world. Since the Gulf War in the late 1980s, she has been to Iraq at least twenty times as a member of a Christian Peacemaker team. She has been in other war-torn places too, more often than she can count, including Bosnia during the 1990s war and Hebron in Palestine numerous times, as recently as early spring, when she was trying to get back into Iraq. She spent much of this summer at home in East Harlem, New York, because Christian peacemakers were being denied visas, though she said she didn’t know why.

Sister Montgomery is one of about thirty full-time members of Christian Peacemakers, an anti-war organization that sends teams into troubled spots around the globe. As a member of the Iraq team, she has had vivid proof of the risks. One of the three hostages freed by a multinational military raid in Iraq in late March, James Loney, was a Christian Peacemaker, as was Tom Fox, a fourth hostage, whose plastic-wrapped body had been found on a trash pile two weeks before the rescue.



Sister Anne Montgomery joins in a demonstration to reopen Hebron University in 1998. The school has suffered repeated disruptions due to conflicts in the West Bank.

When Montgomery is in danger zones, she carries out a “ministry of presence,” doing whatever she can to help civilians get through the day. She walks with children to school, accompanies people needing medical aid, helps families of detainees find answers. Asked if her efforts were effective, she said, “Jesus is our model. He died on a Cross. We don’t expect to see results.”

Montgomery, who began her peace ministry by acting against nuclear weapons, resulting in multiple arrests, is unique among RSCJ in the United States in the extent and form of her opposition to war, though she points out that many of her sisters focus on international peace and justice in other ways. She is grateful for the new corporate stance against the Iraq war. A key principle of non-violence, she said, is that “you don’t create peace by killing people.” ❖

MISSION FRONTIER

For the Society of the Sacred Heart, one of the most challenging new frontiers is developing lay educators who are imbued with the educational vision of the Society and prepared to carry it into the future.

So it was that some ninety men and women affiliated with Sacred Heart schools gathered in overlapping weekend meetings in St. Charles, Missouri, in late June to deepen their understanding of that vision and to reflect on how to share it with colleagues and convey it to young people today.

One meeting was a retreat for experienced employees, “Roots That

Give Us Wings”; the other was a national conference for teachers, “Inside the Sacred Heart Classroom: Beginning a Great Work.” Both were sponsored by the Network of Sacred Heart Schools as part of its commitment to assist schools with ongoing mission formation for lay faculty, administrators and staff.

At the experienced employees retreat, educators were drawn back in time to explore earlier frontiers – back to the founding two centuries ago of the Society of the Sacred Heart by Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat and to the pioneer journeys of Saint Philippine Duchesne, who brought the Society to

North America in 1818.

Sharon Karam, RSCJ, talked about Philippine Duchesne and her life of prayer. Margaret Munch, RSCJ, led participants on a historical tour of the convent, school and novitiate that Philippine Duchesne established in Florissant, across the Missouri River from St. Charles, in 1819.

Suzanne Cooke, RSCJ, headmistress at Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart, Miami, noted that one of the key

Margaret Munch, RSCJ, leads a tour of the school and convent founded in Florissant, Missouri, by Saint Philippine Duchesne.





Sandra Peterson of Regis School of the Sacred Heart in Houston demonstrates a song she uses with young students to teach them about the goals of Sacred Heart education.

reasons for reflecting on the spirituality of the Society's founders was "to get us to think about our own ... to push the frontiers of our own hearts ... to explore our own spirituality in the context of theirs." Her topic was Saint Madeleine Sophie, and she urged participants to read biographies of her, to become familiar with the rich resources about her on the Web, and to read her letters and the early Constitutions of the Society, which encapsulate her vision. She counseled educators to reflect, too, on their own images of God and to recall how those images had changed over time.

A Sacred Heart educator's image of God has a profound effect on her or his role, noted Sister Karam, echoing Sister's Cooke's advice. "How you think about God has everything to do with how you communicate hope to our kids. Only in prayer and devotion can we find the words to convey hope, to counter the images our kids see and hear every day."

Sister Karam shared a story about a powerful moment in her senior English class at Duchesne Academy in Houston last year when, back in the classroom after an annual service to commemorate Holocaust victims, she had been moved to wash the feet of students, following the example of Jesus. She encouraged teachers to reflect on similar stirring moments in their own classrooms. "Sit with those images," she said. "If you sit

with them long enough, they will teach you about how you respond to God. They will help you rediscover your journey; they will reveal to you the art of your life.

"You are God's work of art," she added. "If you don't believe that in your depths, you won't be able to convey it to kids."

Panelists and other speakers talked about their own sense of mission and how it had changed and grown over time. Father Don Doll, a renowned Jesuit photographer of underprivileged people around the world, talked about the contemplative dimension of his work. As in contemplative prayer, a good photographer must watch and wait with deep awareness, he said, letting go of presuppositions of what will transpire – or of what a good photograph will be – and following his or her hunches, letting the heart speak. "It takes a heroic humility" to follow your own path – "to become the artist God created you to be" rather than to try to mimic someone else's strengths or style, he said.

Retreatants met in small groups to share their own experiences in their classrooms and schools and to propose action plans to deepen the sense of mission at their respective institutions. They heard peers talk about their personal spirituality as it relates to the Sacred Heart mission. Both groups worshiped in the Shrine of Saint

Philippine Duchesne, which is situated on the grounds of the school she founded in St. Charles, and faculty members at the academy there, John Storjohann and Kathleen Hopper, talked about experiencing Philippine in prayer and presence during crises in their lives. (See page 16 for Hopper's story.)

Teachers at the conference were invited to choose from forty workshops by Sacred Heart educators aimed at strengthening the classroom experience and integrating Sacred Heart Goals and Criteria with academics – "Giving Glory to God with Your Laptop: Using Technology in the 8th Grade Classroom" and "Supporting the Students Who Struggle with Hopelessness"; "Gender Differences in Mathematics" and "Forming Students in the Attitudes of the Heart of Jesus," for example.

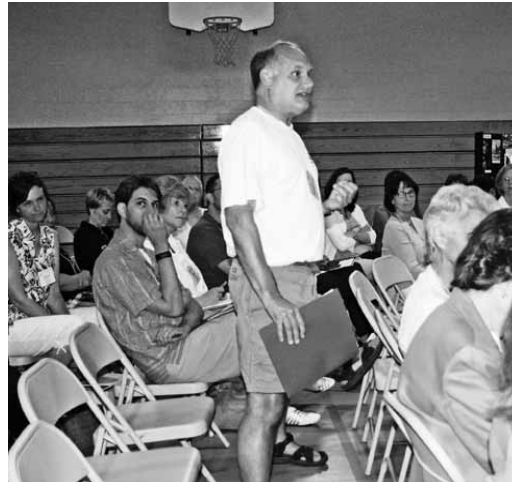
Sculptor John Lajba of Omaha, Nebraska, told teachers about his approach to the process of creating commissioned works of art – with a listening heart, much as the best teachers approach their students at the levels of both mind and heart.

Participants at both conferences gave speakers high marks. Some long familiar with the stories of the Society's founding saints said they had discovered that much is left to learn. "I thought I knew all about the lives and mission of Madeleine Sophie and Philippine Duchesne," said Cynthia Babineaux. "But I have learned

continued



Eddie Suarez of Carrollton in Miami records a speaker for a webcast.



Angela Bayo, RSCJ, confers with Barbara Blecka of Convent of the Sacred Heart, New York City. Gordon Sharafinski, head of Stuart Hall, San Francisco, comments on a presentation.

a lot I didn't know about their spirituality. I didn't know them in those terms." Babineaux is administrative assistant to Mary Burns, head of school at Academy of the Sacred Heart, Grand Coteau, and has been a member of that school's staff for twenty-seven years.

The tour of the church and convent school in Florissant was revelatory for many, particularly the view of Philippine Duchesne's sleeping quarters in a tiny closet under the stairs. This location, Sister Munch explained, allowed her to easily move into the adjacent chapel when she awakened during the night. "Every one of our students should come here before they graduate and see how it was, see where she slept," said Laura Hollier, receptionist at Grand Coteau. "I am flabbergasted."

Even teachers who are not Roman Catholic said they regard the Sacred Heart journey and mission as fundamental to their life and work. During a small group session during the retreat, Maxine Cohn, art teacher at Carrollton, recalled that Sister Cooke, headmistress, had been surprised to learn that she had quoted from Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, in a classroom discussion about love. "I told her, 'This is who I am now,'" Cohn said. "This is the most Catholic-Jewish person you are ever going to meet."

In small sessions, retreat participants brainstormed about ways to integrate the Goals and Criteria of Sacred Heart Education into their classroom work and to make them more visible throughout their schools.

Their proposals included having students create banners to illustrate each of the five goals, giving monthly student awards emphasizing the goals, holding faculty retreats focusing on the goals, and creating calendars for parents with goal-related language they can integrate into discussions about values at home.

At the conference for teachers, Sandra Peterson of Regis School of the Sacred Heart in Houston demonstrated a song she uses with young students to begin impressing the meaning of the goals at an early age. Children are taught hand gestures to accompany each of the goals – hands extended out, palms upward, to symbolize service, for instance.

Participants in the two conferences represented most of the Network's twenty-one member schools. Also represented was Princeton Academy, an all-boys school in Princeton, New Jersey, which is in the process of becoming a full member school.

James Everitt, administrator at Sacred Heart Schools, Atherton, California, said the conference had given him a better

sense of the Network's reach. "The scope of what we are about is much bigger than our individual schools," he said.

Stephanie Hamilton, a teacher at Academy of the Sacred Heart, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, said the program for teachers had reconfirmed for her the knowledge that carrying on the mission is up to lay administrators, faculty and staff at each school. "We are the ones who will do it," she said. "It is a mission of great responsibility."

Formation of all who work in the schools – deepening their sense of mission – is a high priority for Madeleine Ortman, executive director of the Network. Her next step in coming months will be to meet with the people in each school who have accepted responsibility for formation to mission of their colleagues.

"It is true that formation is everyone's responsibility at a school, but schools are beginning to commission one person, or a committee, to be sure it is happening," she said. Then, provided an application for grant funding proves successful, Ortman plans to convene a meeting next spring to begin creating guidelines and resources that will support Network schools in their efforts.

"That is my number one priority for the year," she said. ✦

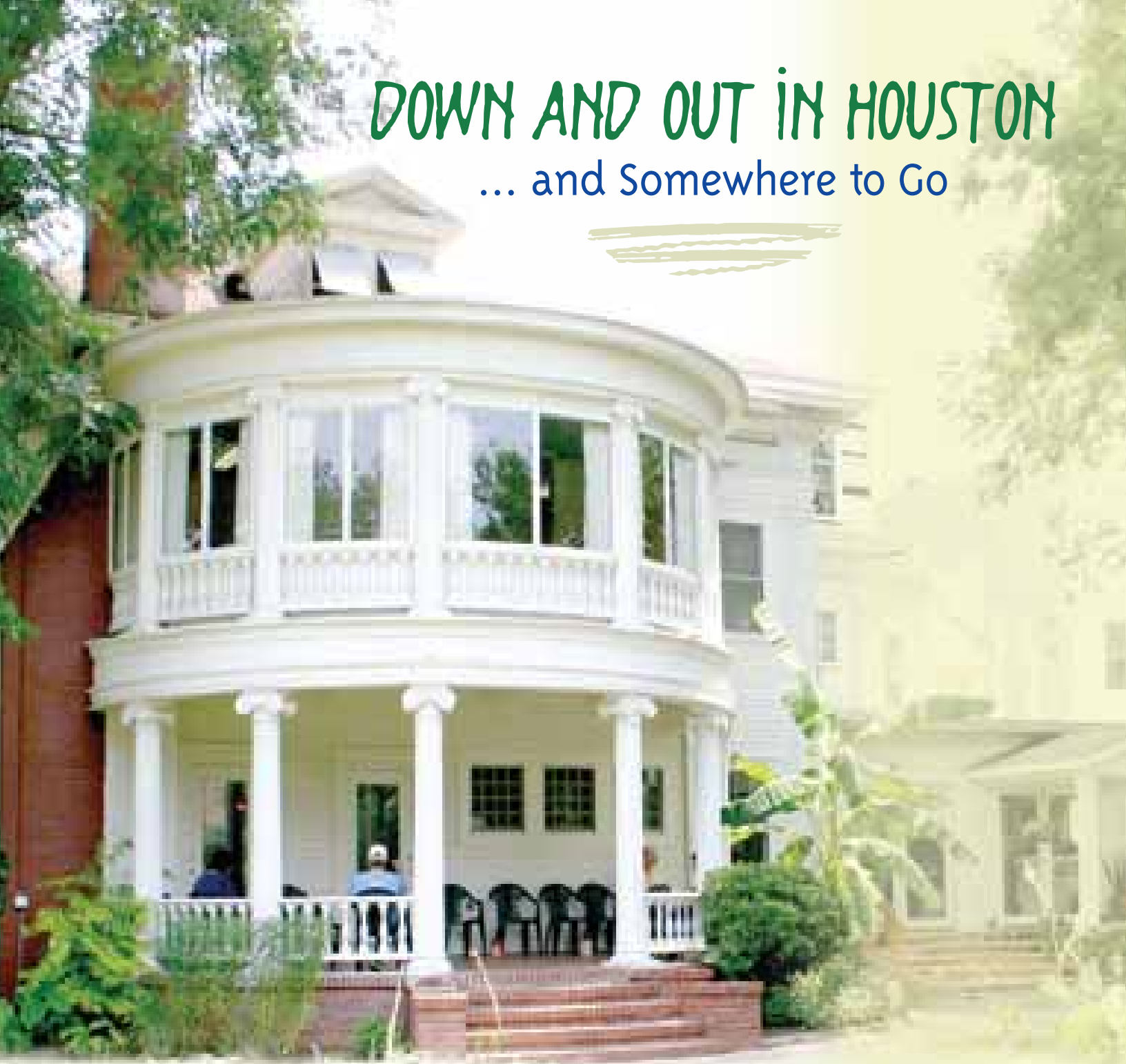
(Note: Talks by Sisters Cooke and Karam and other speakers are available as webcasts at www.sofie.org, "Resources.")



Teachers came from many Network schools. Here, Nina Maspons of Carrollton chats with Beth Morris of Stone Ridge.

DOWN AND OUT IN HOUSTON

... and Somewhere to Go



In Houston's Midtown, a cluster of well-kept homes serves, among other things, as a temptation to race-walkers and joggers, causing some to slow their pace to look. Several of the houses are spacious bungalows in the Arts-and-Crafts mode. One is a picturesque century-old neoclassical mansion surrounded by lawn and gardens that flow into a small park. In an otherwise bleak part of town, these structures hark back to an era when quality perhaps counted for more than profit.

Who would guess that this urban oasis is a complex of shelters for the homeless; that the former mansion is a psychiatric rehabilitation center, the only such program in Texas to be certified by the International Center for *continued*

This neoclassical mansion, where programs are offered for people with mental illnesses, anchors an urban oasis of homes for the homeless operated by Magnificat Houses in Houston.



Sister Thompson, here inspecting a room at Stuart House for transient men, finds herself to be more student than teacher among the poor.

Clubhouse Development according to standards designed by and for the mentally ill.

Welcome to Magnificat Houses, Inc., where Sara Kay Thompson, RSCJ, has found a home for her heart and her commitment to live out the mission of the Society of the Sacred Heart.

Sister Thompson, 43, entered the Society in 1987. Since then, she has worked at a women's prison in St. Louis and at the Academy of the Sacred Heart, Bloomfield Hills. She has earned a master's degree in art therapy at Wayne State University in Detroit and worked as an art therapist with psychiatric patients at Henry Ford Hospital. In 2002 she moved to Houston and was hired as a program coordinator at Magnificat Houses, Inc., a small non-profit organization that owns the Midtown complex. Before long, she was promoted to assistant director of the whole enterprise, reporting to Rose Mary Badami, its founder. "I've never been happier," Sister Thompson said. "It is wonderful to invite people here and see them grow."

Magnificat Houses serves a wide range of residents. Some come directly from jail or prison or

from a life of chronic homelessness. Some are mentally ill; some are just down on their luck for a time. They may stay for weeks, months or years, or be intolerant of the structured programs and leave after a day. "No two people are homeless for the same reason," Sister Thompson noted. "Everyone thinks the homeless person is the drug addict, and yes, there is that. But some are moving through a bad period and are sincerely hoping to better themselves."

There is Vincent Portillo a talented artist who has lived in an apartment owned by Magnificat Houses since 1986. He sells his paintings on the Web and paints furniture for the houses. There is Woon, a Vietnamese woman who came for temporary relief after she moved to Houston from Los Angeles and could not find a job. She is a member of the clubhouse staff. There is Jeffrey, who moved to Houston about seven years ago to help care for his ill father. His father now lives with another son and his wife, and Jeffrey said he could too, but for one thing: "I don't want to be a burden to my family."

Similarly, Billy Shepherd came to Texas to care for his late mother. In Seattle, his former home, he managed a restaurant, worked at a nursing home, volunteered with Native Americans, raised money for children with AIDS. Now he runs Loaves and Fishes, a soup kitchen operated by Magnificat Houses, using his ingenuity to turn donated ingredients into tasty meals – "paella without the shellfish," for example. The facility, closed only on Mondays, serves tens of thousands of lunches a year. Areas businesses, schools and churches send volunteers to help.

Ken is another resident who has stayed. He serves as house manager at Stuart House, a home for eighteen highly transient men, a post he earned by showing responsibility. Now he tries to get others to do the same. He makes sure the men get up in the morning, make their beds and pick up clutter. "I try to make the transition (from living alone on the streets to living with others) as easy as possible." But "easy" doesn't mean unoccupied.

"We keep our people busy," Sister Thompson



Billy Shepherd lives at Magnificat Houses and runs Loaves and Fishes, the program's daily soup kitchen downtown.

said. Residents with construction skills, however minimal, help to maintain the houses. Others cook and clean up, sew, assist with programs. After thirty days, working residents are eligible to receive a stipend in addition to their room and board. The goal is to get residents into drug rehabilitation programs if they need it and to help them into mainstream society by preparing them for jobs. Sister Thompson noted that lack of job skills is a huge factor in homelessness. She cited a recent study: Of 12,000 to 14,000 homeless men and women in Houston, eighty-eight percent say they are unprepared for employment.

At the same time, Sister Thompson said, “We are not a social service agency. We are a ministry. We feed, clothe and shelter people; we try to give them comfort, and sometimes we even bury them. We do all the corporal works of mercy here.” Founder Badami counsels tolerance over idealism. “You cannot have any expectations at all,” she said. “To be intolerant of people who have had so little security in their lives is unthinkable.”

A realistic lack of expectations applies to the state of Texas. “Texas ranks forty-ninth in mental health programming,” Sister Thompson noted.

Badami founded the organization in 1968 after working in a school for delinquent girls and being shocked to learn of their dysfunctional home lives. Badami’s own experience had been so different. As a child in Denison, Texas, during the Depression, she had watched her grandmother, who spoke only Italian, feed “railroad bums” at the family table. On the way to daily Mass her grandmother would greet each passerby, including strangers. “She would tell me, ‘I am saluting the Christ in them,’ ” Badami said. These experiences jelled into her unshakable belief in the dignity of each person.

In 1967, while studying sociology at St. Thomas University, she opened the Santa Maria Hostel for girls in Houston, hoping to break the cycle of delinquency that leads to a life behind bars. At the university library, she was introduced to the work of Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement in a New York slum. Badami struck up a correspondence with Day and, in time, came to know her personally.

Over decades, Badami has adapted her outreach to meet changing needs. In 1968, when deinstitutionalization put mentally ill people on Houston’s streets, she opened a house for recently discharged patients. She gradually expanded her efforts, acquiring the Midtown properties while



Vincent Portillo lives in an apartment owned by Magnificat Houses. He sells his art from a website and paints furniture on the grounds.

Below: Staff members and residents at Magnificat Houses pray together at daily Mass.



values were low. Today, Magnificat Houses consists of ten group homes in central Houston, inside the I-610 Loop – a total of 122 beds. Like Stuart House, each home is operated by the residents themselves, usually with house managers appointed from their ranks.

Badami opened Loaves and Fishes in 1976 beneath a downtown interstate in Houston’s skid row. Above the soup kitchen is Miryam’s Hostel, the city’s only overnight shelter for street girls. When HIV/AIDS became a major health crisis, Badami opened Morning Star Hostel, a home for up to six men and women with HIV/AIDS. One small Midtown house serves as a dispensary for prescribed medications.

There is a deeply Catholic ethos about the complex. Although attendance is not required, Mass is offered daily in one of two chapels on the grounds and on Sundays at the soup kitchen. Stations of the Cross are nailed to trees outside one of the chapels. In addition to Sister Thompson, there are seven nuns affiliated with the program. They include Mary Bernstein, RSCJ, who serves on the board,

continued

and Joan Gannon, RSCJ, who, until a recent move to Albany, New York, helped served lunch at Loaves and Fishes.

In choosing to work with homeless people, Sister Thompson keeps company with several other RSCJ, such as Sisters Ellen Collesano and Kathleen McGrath, featured on these pages; Sarah Brennan

Rose Mary Badami, once mentored by lay activist Dorothy Day, has nurtured the growth of Magnificat Houses since founding the organization nearly forty years ago.



in Chicago; Rosie Statt in San Francisco, and Leontine O’Gorman in New York City. Before joining the U.S. provincial team, Sister Anne Byrne directed the New Life Center for homeless women and children in Opelousas, Louisiana. Sister Joan Kirby formerly served in shelters in New York City. She is now affiliated with that city’s Temple of Understanding.

Sister Thompson feels “totally blessed” to be where she is as a member of the Society of the Sacred Heart, to be revealing God’s love to those who may need it most. “Madeleine Sophie is so present

to me here,” she said. “She always believed in the whole person, regardless of socio-economic background.”

Paradoxically, though, while she regards her ministry as an expression of the Society’s educational mission, she sees herself as more student than teacher, at least for now. For example, she has been forced, like some of those joggers who pass by, to slow her pace. “The poor know no time,” she said. “They don’t wear watches. They travel on buses and on foot. It may take them all day to get somewhere.”

She paused, then added: “The poor are some of the wisest people around because they have nothing to lose. They can be the teachers of us all.” ❖

Moving Ahead in Boston

Kathleen McGrath, RSCJ, who holds master’s degrees in business and theology, has been working



Sister McGrath with graduates of the Moving Ahead Program

with people who are homeless ever since she entered the Society of the Sacred Heart in 1999, though she had not previously worked in the field. Soon after entering, she was sent to New York City, where she worked in a program founded by two religious women. “Our

team would go into thirteen New York City shelters and try to build community using a faith-based empowerment model,” she said. She has also done spiritual direction with women who are homeless in San Diego and served as co-director of a church-based program in Chicago.

Today she teaches critical thinking and life skills in the Moving Ahead Program at St. Francis House (www.stfranchishouse.org) and regards education as the surest way to redirect individual lives.

Providing Services in Miami

After six years on the U.S. provincial team, Ellen Collesano, RSCJ, sought a ministry where she could put her master’s degree in social work to use. She moved to Miami, where she had lived



Sister Collesano with coworker Clifford Petit
Homme

previously, while teaching at Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart. She now works as a clinical intake specialist at Camillus House, a program for the sick and homeless founded by the Brothers of the Good Shepherd and named for St. Camillus de Lellis. Camillus House, in its forty-sixth year, provides

a variety of services, including housing, food and medical care, in several downtown locations. (www.camillushouse.org) Sister Collesano interviews applicants for a residential treatment center serving people with chemical addictions and mental health disorders. “To me, this work carries out the Society’s mission by helping people transform their lives and by enhancing the dignity of each person,” she said.

Hand in Hand with Philippine in St. Charles

By Kathleen Hopper

Those of us who live and work at the Academy of the Sacred Heart in St. Charles, Missouri, are keenly aware that we are privileged to walk on “holy ground.” Day after day, month after month, year after year, we and our students inhabit the hallways and rooms that Philippine Duchesne established early in the nineteenth century on her beloved American soil. At will, we are able to stand at the door of the room in which she died in 1852 or kneel beside her remains, encased in a sarcophagus in her shrine, and draw in her loving, selfless, prayerful spirit. The youngest are introduced to Philippine’s story and join the adults in honoring her through prayer, feast day celebrations and plays.

For all, this is an awesome opportunity and gift. However, each one of us connects to our “live-in saint” in deeply personal ways and degrees.

My own connection to Philippine can be traced back to the late 1950s when I arrived at the academy as a high school boarding student. My family lived in a small farm community about forty miles away. Good schools were in short supply in that rural area, and my parents, especially my mother, placed great importance on education. So it was decided that I would attend Sacred Heart. With a great deal of apprehension and curiosity, I walked through the front gates at the age of fourteen, hardly imagining that I was beginning a journey of total immersion in Sacred Heart. I was taught by brilliant and loving Religious of the Sacred Heart and formed by an educational philosophy that is life altering. And I am still here. They can’t get rid of me!

⇒ *Philippine’s presence*

Academy students, even in my day, quickly became familiar with the story of Blessed Rose Philippine Duchesne, who had been beatified in 1940. Few opportunities were missed to remind us of her historical significance in the Society of the Sacred Heart, in the Catholic Church, and especially in St. Charles. As I grew

in appreciation of Philippine’s historical contributions, I also experienced widespread devotion to Blessed Philippine. Each year, in anticipation of her feast day on November 17, there was a novena – nine evenings of prayer in the Philippine Duchesne shrine. The celebration, joined in by many from the surrounding community, culminated in a parade that ended at the shrine on the Sunday nearest to her feast.

I recall feeling such a sense of pride to be a student in Philippine’s school, and in time I developed a habit of turning to her in prayer. That habit was nurtured by a physical vantage point: a private room with a cozy alcove overlooking the shrine. It was my fortune to have this room during my senior year, and I looked forward to the end of each day when I could look down on the darkened shrine surrounded by the glow of street lights. I remember it as a comforting time in which I was becoming increasingly aware of Philippine’s presence in my life: a time that, although I didn’t know it then, was strengthening me for the journey to come.

After graduation I continued my studies at Maryville University, then, like the academy in St. Charles, owned and operated by the Society of the Sacred Heart. Among my cherished memories of Maryville was my American history teacher, Mother Louise Callan, the renowned biographer of Philippine Duchesne. Weakened by poor health, Mother Callan was a model of Philippine’s determination as she struggled to come to class daily, almost until the

continued

day she died – a day that came before my year in her class was over.

Because my experience of school had been one of satisfaction and success, it was an easy choice for me to settle on a teaching career. Certificate in hand, I began my classroom work in the St. Louis Public Schools. In time I married and reared two daughters, both of whom graduated from the academy. Although teaching in the public sector did not present the same challenges then as now, I found myself longing to return to Sacred Heart. Fortunately for me, a teaching position opened up in the 1970s. I was hired as a fifth-grade teacher. My experience has included teaching religion, history and language arts to seventh- and eighth-graders, serving as assistant principal and, since 1993, as principal. (Educational programs at the academy in St. Charles now end with the eighth grade.)

Late in the fall of 1987, rumors were circulating that an announcement from the Vatican about Philippine's canonization was imminent. While attending a meeting of the Network of Sacred Heart Schools with Ann Caire, RSCJ, in Tucson, Arizona, she received word from the provincial of the U.S.

Province that the canonization was indeed going to be a reality and had been scheduled for July 3, 1988. Wow! Our jubilation practically eliminated the need for a plane to return to St. Louis. The winter and spring were dominated by planning. I was invited to join a group of friends for the trip to Rome for the canonization. Our itinerary became a Philippine pilgrimage that included Grenoble, France, her birthplace, to see the church where she had been baptized and the courtyard where had played, and to walk within the walls of Ste.

Marie d'en Haut where she had gone to school and later met Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat for the first time.

Joining thousands in magnificent St. Peters on a sun-drenched Sunday and hearing Pope John Paul II proclaim that indeed our Philippine was "Sancta Rosa Philippina Duchesne" was the realization of a lifelong hope and dream for many. Even now it still amazes me that I was actually there.

⇒ *Months were a blur*

I think most of us, when we have lived enough years, have those defining moments in our lives after which nothing will ever be quite the same. For me, that moment was October 18, 1996, when, sitting alone in a doctor's office, I was told that I surely had breast cancer, the extent of which was clearly of concern. A sizable tumor had seemingly come out of nowhere, though granted, I had not been as responsible for my own health as I should have been. I had the usual excuses: too busy with work and family, including the needs of elderly, dependent parents, etc. Stunned and speechless (that's the effect the "c" word has on you), I went home and called my family and a few close friends at the academy. Within twenty-four hours, I found myself kneeling at Philippine's sarcophagus asking her to help me subdue the overwhelming surges of fear and to give me the strength to handle what was to come. Sister Margaret Caire made sure I had a special relic of Philippine to accompany me through the series of tests that followed. Five days later, it was determined my cancer was a stage three, with no signs of metastasizing at that point.

The months that followed were a blur: intensive rounds of chemotherapy, total hair loss, increasing fatigue, efforts to pretend everything was "normal," while being surrounded by the unflagging support of family, colleagues and friends. Remember the novena to Philippine I referred to earlier? Now the entire school was praying for me, and in very subtle ways I was experiencing the effect of that prayer. I felt blessed to be in the hands of a skilled and caring oncology team at St. Luke's Hospital, and, as time went on, I became determined, positive, peaceful and more submissive to whatever the outcome would be.

The goal of the comprehensive treatment plan was to shrink the tumor with chemotherapy in preparation for surgery. I was reminded repeatedly by my energetic young surgeon that the surgery would reveal the degree of lymph node involvement and determine the future. I went into surgery supported by the prayers of hundreds, Philippine's relic at my side, and awakened to news bordering on unbelievable: There was no lymph node involvement. I remember thinking, "This can't be for real. I must have died and gone to heaven."

Thank you, God. Thank you, Philippine.



Saint Philippine Duchesne

Months of chemotherapy and radiation followed. I used to think I had a lot in common with the Velveteen Rabbit – incredibly beaten up, but, I hoped, still lovable. As the end of my treatments approached, I was sitting in the oncologist’s office while he reviewed all the charts and data from the previous year. He commented that he continued to be surprised at the positive outcome and that the chemotherapy had obviously been effective.

I responded that I agreed, but offered that I was certain there was something “more” – the power of intense prayer by family and a loving school community, and the loving protection of a special saint.

His response: “I would absolutely not dispute that in any way.” I have no medical proof that my recovery was miraculous, but I really don’t need it. I know in my heart.

➤ *Beacon of hope*

One year to the day, October 18, 1997, family and friends joined me for a liturgy of celebration and gratitude. I’m sure you can guess where it was held. The presider, a dear friend, commented that I had requested every verse of many songs and the repetition of as many alleluias as possible, and that is exactly what I got.

Looking back now, almost ten years later, on that remarkable experience, what do I think I know? What have I learned?

I believe that heaven must be one incredible place filled with endless love and peace. I say that because for one year I felt as though I was walking in two worlds: drawn toward a spirit-filled, grace-filled space while struggling daily with the challenge of survival. I know I have never been happier or experienced greater peace and acceptance than during that year. The frustrations, annoyances and daily tasks that can so easily clutter the psyche became totally secondary.

What I don’t know is: Why is it so difficult to hold on to the deepened understanding of what essentially matters?

I believe passionately in the powerfully expressed idea of Janet Erskine Stuart that each one of us has a mission in life, some special work for God that only we can do, some place in life no one else can fill. I do know that during the past ten years I have had the privilege of being a beacon of hope to academy children whose mothers have experienced a cancer

diagnosis. Invariably they find their way to my office for reassurance and ongoing support. I am deeply grateful for these additional years I have been given to participate in the mission of Sacred Heart education, and when time allows, I intend to become a volunteer at St. Luke’s Hospital in the hope that I can give to others the same support and comfort that was extended to me.

I would like to conclude the sharing of my journey with Philippine with a reflection on what we have learned from her, taken from a booklet by T. Gavan Duffy, *Heart of Oak*:

What have we learned from her? The value of a steadfast purpose, the success of failure and the unimportance of our standards of success; the power of grace released by deep, divine desires and simple duty daily done; the old, unearthly, stark unwelcome fact that God is the workman, we the tools, so that He often takes the keen edge of our choice plans and uses it in His own way, not ours, producing wonderful results entirely beyond our ken – but only if the handle of the tool is smoothed and rounded to His hand by sacrifice and prayer. ✦

This article is taken from a talk given by Kathleen Hopper, principal at Academy of the Sacred Heart in St. Charles, at a retreat in late June sponsored by the Network of Sacred Heart Schools. (See page 8.)



Photo: Joan Runge

Principal Kathleen Hopper talks with a student in her office.

Heroism and Survival

By Elizabeth Walsh, RSCJ

The ravages of World War II, which ended sixty-one years ago, had a deep effect on the Society of the Sacred Heart. Memories of invasion, destruction, occupation and siege, of heroic endurance and courageous resistance, are secured in archives and house journals. They remain, too, in the minds and hearts of survivors of those terrible years. This memorandum is a tribute to these stories of undaunted courage. They are part of our heritage as Religious of the Sacred Heart.

The first sections, "Heroism Honored" and "Lifesaving Shelters," briefly sketch accounts of Religious of the Sacred Heart who saved Jewish lives. Two of these religious are remembered at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. The second section relates wartime events at two convents of the Sacred Heart, the Sophianum in Budapest and Lwów, formerly in Poland, that survived the war but were later lost to the Communist occupations.

Heroism honored

A brief biographical sketch of **Mother Berthe Naveau de Marteau** (1907-2002) includes some of the history of Jette, the convent outside of Brussels, during the war. The Germans occupied most of the area following Germany's invasion of Belgium in 1940, and the nuns were forced to move everything out of the school and pavilion. The religious and their two hundred children managed, however, to continue with classes, taking shelter in the basement during bombing raids.

On June 23, 1944, a woman brought to the school a twelve-year old Jewish child named Rachel Sadowski. A false identification card identified her as Renée Uytterhoeven. Rachel's parents, at risk of deportation, asked Mother Marteau, mistress general of the day school, if their daughter could remain at the Sacred Heart even if they did not return. To avoid implicating others in case Rachel should be discovered by the police, Mother Marteau hid the child's true identity, even from the superior of the house. The following month the parents were deported to Dachau, where they undoubtedly were killed.

Many years later, Rachel recalled what Mother Marteau had done. In 1999, the frail religious, then 92 (and known as "Sister," in accordance with changes in honorifics after the Society's special, post-Vatican II, chapter in 1967) was awarded the title of "*Juste parmi les nations*" or Righteous Among the Nations." Her name was inscribed on the wall of the Garden of the Just in Yad Vashem and a tree was planted in her name.

Mother Hildegard Gutzwiller (1897-1957), also honored at Yad Vashem, served as superior at the Sophianum in Budapest during the war. After the German occupation of Hungary in 1944, and the beginning of the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz, some Jews sought sanctuary in the Sophianum, which enjoyed the twofold diplomatic protection of the Vatican and Switzerland. One account reports that there were seventy refugees, among them thirty-seven Jews. Another tells of the Swedish Red Cross bringing eighty Jewish children to be housed. One of the survivors, Agnes Klein van Gorp, later testified, "On several nights Nazi hordes tried to enter the convent. Mother Superior Gutzwiller faced them heroically and managed to fend them off. Deputy Mother Superior Möller looked after us and protected us."

Mother Gutzwiller was named "Righteous Among the Nations" in 1995. The account of the siege of Budapest, "Le Sophianum aux Catacombes," written by Mother Gutzwiller, describes the bombardments that took place for nearly two months in late 1944 and early 1945. The community in Budapest, too, endured occupation by the Germans, followed by that of the Russians. (A more detailed rendering of Mother Gutzwiller's account follows.)

Lifesaving shelters

Mother Teresa Gonzalez de Castejón has preserved the story of Via Nomentana, the motherhouse in Rome, during this period. Soon after the beginning of the war, many friends and acquaintances of the religious began to seek refuge at the motherhouse. The RSCJ, like many communities of men and women, followed the example of Pope Pius XII, who had opened the gates of the Vatican to refugees, especially the Jews, “to save them from racist persecution.” Mother Castejón writes of one Jewish family, the Sonninos, whose members were a wife and daughter living at the motherhouse, and a husband and son housed with the Jesuits. When the German soldiers arrived at the Jesuit College to make an inspection, Mr. Sonnino had a heart attack. The Jesuits quickly clothed his body in a soutane and gathered around him in prayer. “Attention, here is a dead person,” the Jesuits told the German soldiers. They looked on but did nothing. The account goes on to describe the bombing of Rome and the destruction of parts of their buildings.

The religious were housing refugees in northern Italy too. Sister Angela Tissoni, now at Villa Peschiera, the retirement home of the Italian province, tells of two incidents in that region. In November of 1942, the nuns were evacuated to Chieri in the mountains. The house was solitary, situated on a hill, and people often came seeking shelter. Sister Tissoni is uncertain whether all were Jewish or whether some were *partigiani*, members of the Italian resistance. One day, a Jewish woman arrived and was given asylum. Soon after, the superior, Mother Borea d’Olmo, saw German troops coming up the hill. Immediately, she sent the Jewish woman to bed in the children’s dormitory, along with several of the children. The Germans said they had come to take possession of the place, but when the superior told them they had children who were ill, the soldiers withdrew, thinking it was a sanatorium.

Another incident occurred at Turin when only two religious remained in the house. They had transformed the receptionist’s office into a “living room” supplied with such essentials as food and heat. In front of the fireplace, they had extended a rope to serve as a laundry line. One day a refugee came seeking help. They placed him behind the laundry, in front of the fire, and went to get him some food. Just then, the Germans came looking for refugees. They looked all through the large house and passed by the hearth without seeing the refugee hidden there.

Siege of Budapest

Mother Hildegard Gutzwiller’s account of the siege of Budapest begins with Christmas 1944 and ends with an entry for the Sunday after the Feast of the Sacred Heart the following year, when 30,000 people joined a procession to the nearly destroyed convent for a Eucharistic celebration. The Mass took place amid the ruins where a large crucifix had been erected against the background of the Hungarian flag.

During the siege, the Sophianum was home to sisters from several other congregations, children and students from the boarding school, teachers, domestic servants, peasant refugees, Jewish refugees, as well as fifty-seven RSCJ

continued



Two Religious of the Sacred Heart are memorialized here, at the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem.

“(S)he who saves one human being is as if (s)he saves an entire world.”

Each individual awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations represents the preservation of human values in the midst of absolute moral collapse. They prove that despite the grave dangers involved, there were still those who were willing to take grave risks in order to fulfill the precept, “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” The Righteous Among the Nations are a source of hope, a role model, and an inspiration.



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Most of the areas discussed in this essay are highlighted on this map of Europe as it was in 1938.

and novices – between 230 and 250 people in all. They settled in the underground passages of the house, including the laundry, community refectory, bathrooms, furnace room and the cellar – places Mother Gutzwiller refers to as “the catacombs.” The war came closer and closer to this refuge, until, on New Year’s Day, bombing focused on the Sophianum. More than eight bombs hit the Sacred Heart houses, and one, previously evacuated, was destroyed. Six Jesuits helped move mattresses into the basement. The next day the temperature inside the building, with shattered windows and pierced walls, dove to fifteen degrees below zero. The water supply had been interrupted and on January 4, residents collected falling snow.

The week of January 12 was particularly harrowing. Overhead the drone and roar of airplanes were constant. Suddenly residents heard the crashing of stones, mortar, the clinking of glass. A large bomb had grazed the Sophianum’s façade, falling on the fifth-floor dormitory. In front of the reception area and along the length of the house, rubble and debris of every kind piled up. In the street outside, the battle raged with a hail of bullets, houses in flames. The bodies of men and horses lay in the street. The structures were hit by two incendiary bombs, but suffered only minor damage. These “days of agony,” as Mother Gutzwiller describes them, preceded the arrival of the Russians.

On January 17, the Russians arrived at the convent and groups of pilfering soldiers wandered at will through the damaged buildings. One found a First Medallion, the medal given to an outstanding student, but the commissioner managed to retrieve it in exchange for some cigarettes. The Jesuits sent Brother Alexandre Sander to be the “gatekeeper.” A tall and imposing man with a black beard, he settled in at the front entrance. His knowledge of Russian impressed the soldiers and convinced them that he must be an important

cleric. They came to venerate him, even kissing the crucifix worn on a cord around his neck.

More refugees arrived and were taken in so that every corner was filled. The convent remained without water until February 6, and for nearly five weeks, until February 15, the catacombs had no electricity.

At length, the refugees began to return to their homes or to seek shelter elsewhere, and the religious began to clear the rubble and resume their customary way of life. Throughout the siege they had celebrated Mass almost every day and said the Office whenever possible. Their prayer and confidence in God’s protection gave them strength and courage. Mother Gutzwiller attributed their survival to the goodness of God: “What dominates in our basements is courage, confidence, above all thanksgiving,” she wrote. “We are a happy people who have a history.”

Another Sacred Heart convent in Budapest, known as the Philippineum, also housed Jewish refugees and, in 1944, temporarily served as a hospital for women and children, after a children’s hospital in Budapest was bombed. The nuns helped in the hospital, as most of their students had been removed because of the bombing. In 1944, the Philippineum came under the protection of the Vatican and the Swedish Red Cross, which set up an office there. In 1948, both Sacred Heart houses in Budapest were converted into state schools and by 1950 all RSCJ who remained in Hungary were expelled.

The Sophianum became the Lenin Institute and then, in 1953, the government gave the building to the Piarists, a Catholic order of men, in exchange for a larger building on the banks of the Danube. (The Communists, fending off charges of religious persecution, were allowing some religious to teach.) Later, the Sophianum was returned to the Society, but the Piarists continue to teach there.

Occupations at Lwów

The Sacred Heart foundation in Lwów was first established in 1843 when that territory had been taken over by Austria and the city was known as Lemberg. Lwów was restored to Poland after World War I. The city was invaded again at the beginning of World War II and during that war it changed occupiers three times: Russians, Germans, Russians again. Lwów is now part of the Ukraine, near its western border.

An account of the war years in Lwów, written by Sister Ludwika Skibniewska in 1981, begins with the decision of the superior at Polska Wies to send the youngest religious to the east of Poland, hoping they might find safety there. Polska Wies was threatened by the German invasion from the west.

Sister – then Mother – Skibniewska was one of the eight religious sent to Lwów. After a harrowing train journey,

The war came closer and closer to this refuge, until, on New Year's Day, bombing focused on the Sophianum.

they arrived in the city, but they did not escape the war. The sounds of bombing and explosions drove them to the convent basement where they were able to take in others who came seeking shelter. These ranged from entire families to members of other religious orders, including five young Jesuits with their tertian master.

One evening after Benediction, hearing the sounds of an aerial attack, the superior ordered everyone to the basement. The sacristan, thinking she might just tidy up for a few more minutes, hesitated. Fortunately, another religious insisted that she obey. Hardly had they left the chapel when a shell pierced the wall of the sacristy and left it in ruins. Soon thereafter they learned the sad news of the fall of Poland.

The Bolsheviks then occupied Lwów and proclaimed themselves its liberators. The situation was tense for the religious. They were allowed to open the school, but under the directorship of a Communist who insisted that the teachings of Marx and Engels be the foundation of the academic programs. Because Russians occupied parts of the convent property, Reverend Mother Zofja Günther, the vice-vicar, arranged for the nuns to find housing in other parts of the city. Many of the sixty or so people who remained at the convent worked as nannies, cooks or hospital staff to support the community's needs.

On Ash Wednesday of 1940, the Communist director ordered Mother Günther, the chaplain, and the house dog to leave the property. The dog was sent away because his barking had annoyed the Russian occupiers by announcing their frequent nighttime house rounds. The chaplain was sent away because the prowlers wanted to occupy his living quarters. And the superior was banished because such a position was contrary to Communist ideals! Mother Skibniewska herself found work in a hospital at the other end of the city. As a servant to the ill, she often spoke to them of God and was able to contact the parish priest when a dying person needed the sacraments.

Her account describes the deportations of Polish people to Siberia in 1940. One morning in February, they learned that freight trains at the station were filled with people brought from the mountains of Beskidy and Podhala and being sent to Siberia. The nuns filled cases and sacks with food and warm clothes, hoping to give these to the prisoners, but the Russian

guards refused to allow them any nourishment or warmth despite the severe cold. In a few instances, the religious succeeded by distracting the guards. Two months later, another train filled with deportees arrived, and again they did what they could to offer help.

Sister Skibniewska mentions a third deportation, probably in 1941, this time of Jews. By June of that year, the Russians pulled out of Lwów and a German occupation began. Until it ended three years later, the nuns aided the Polish resistance in whatever way they could, procuring supplies and clothing and making hundreds of bandages. At one point they harbored a Jewish woman who was later helped by the resistance to cross the frontier.

After the Battle of Stalingrad, hundreds of wounded poured into Lwów. As additional hospitals had to be staffed, some of the religious were sent to do the cooking. With armies in retreat, some Ukrainian regiments, moved by deep hatred of the Poles, massacred entire villages and sent refugees searching for shelter. Mother Elizabeth Walchnowska, the treasurer, used her ingenuity and practical skills to house and feed many, including some who arrived with all of their possessions.

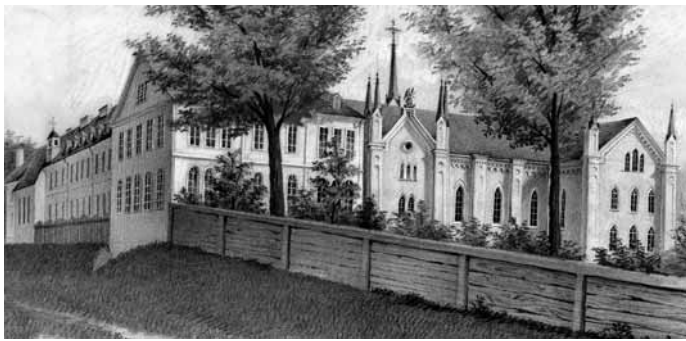
A terrible extermination of Jewish people ensued. The sisters at the German Lazarette witnessed the flames of the ghetto. Thousands of Jews were arrested, killed, or forced into every kind of labor. One such group was brought to the Sacred Heart and ordered to clean the cellars. Though the hostages were famished, the nuns were forbidden under pain of death to give them any aid. When the superior learned how weak the hostages were, she ordered the cook to prepare a large pot of potatoes. Mother Skibniewska took this to the cellars. Later she took loaves of bread cut into morsels and placed them in the hayloft or attic where the Jews were also

continued



Photo: Society of the Sacred Heart archives

The Philippineum on the outskirts of Budapest became a hospital for women and children in 1944.



The convent in Lwów changed occupiers three times during the war.

to work. She did not see them again. Presumably they were taken to the camps or killed.

One evening the nuns heard noises in the kitchen. There they found three German soldiers, now in retreat, looking for something to eat. One of the nuns prepared a warm supper of fried potatoes and omelets. The Germans were touched by this kindness. The next morning the nuns discovered three large objects in front of the house. The Russian police came to inspect them and found three disarmed mines. Evidently they had been intended for the building's destruction.

The renewed Russian occupation was the last stage in the nuns' painful experience of the war. Poles were again arrested, shot, or deported to Siberia, and their homes were given to Russian refugees. Many ordinary Russian people came with their troops seeking refuge and better living conditions. Although the nuns continued to wear the habit and to work in comparative peace at the hospital now established on their property, their peace was short-lived. When the armistice in May 1945 gave Lwów to the Soviets, the archbishop ordered the religious to leave. With heavy hearts they returned to a diminished Poland. However, two elderly nuns, one French, the other Czech, could not obtain travel permits, so the treasurer, Mother Elizabeth Walchnowska, and the infirmarian remained with them. After the property belonging to the Society was confiscated for government use, the four Religious of the Sacred Heart found lodging near the cathedral. Age and illness took their toll. In 1956, the faithful treasurer was left alone. She remained in Lwów serving as sacristan to the

“The nuns filled cases and sacks with food and warm clothes, hoping to give these to the prisoners, but the Russian guards refused to allow them any nourishment or warmth despite the severe cold.”

cathedral and secretly teaching religion to the young until her death in 1971.

Sister Skibniewska writes that Mother Walchnowska made one visit to Poland in 1956, where she was able to see Reverend Mother Günther once more. She also made a pilgrimage to Czestochowa, where she prayed, offering her life for the coming of the kingdom of Christ in all the countries of Russia.

Official histories

It is probably unnecessary to note that these personal accounts tally precisely with official accounts of the war. The siege of Budapest lasted from December 1944 until the German surrender on February 13, 1945. The Sophianum was on the east side of the Danube River, in the area known as Pest. On January 12, when Russian troops led by Marshal Malinovsky drove for the city center, the Germans were ordered to defend the city to the last man. It took six days for the Russians to take Pest. In the process 35,000 German troops were killed and 62,000 taken prisoner.

According to the *Oxford Companion to World War II*, Lwów was controlled by Soviets from 1939 to 1941 and was the scene of “brutal repressions, forcible Sovietization and the deportation of some 80,000 people, especially former Polish officials and Ukrainian nationalists.” During the occupation by Nazis, from mid-1941 until 1944, a major ghetto was established and, by November of 1943, the city's Jewish population (perhaps 150,000) had been deported or killed. Reoccupation by Soviets in July of 1944 brought yet another reign of terror, with brutal purges of Polish and Ukrainian activists. In 1946, most of the remaining Polish population was transported to the new, Communist-governed Poland. ❖



Sister Walsh, who holds a doctorate from Harvard, has taught literature at the University of San Diego since 1975. She has also lectured in English to Russian students at Moscow State University. Study and professional conferences have taken her to several European countries, where she has learned about the sufferings RSCJ endured during World War II.

She has translated many of their accounts from the French. Sister Walsh is grateful to Sisters Anne Leonard and Margaret Phelan, former and current Society archivists, for their help in locating accounts housed at the archives in Rome. Her report is not inclusive. Among omitted memoirs is Mother Marguerite Benziger's, Austria Nazified, which is available in English at the archives of the U.S. Province in St. Louis.

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If you are interested in membership in the Society, please contact
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Sacred Heart educators choose a candle to take home as a reminder of their place on the Network's **Mission Frontier**



Photo: Society of the Sacred Heart archives

The Sophianum in Budapest was nearly destroyed by bombs in World War II. Events there are among many Sacred Heart stories of **Heroism and Survival**



Ken, a house manager at Magnificat Houses, has found a home helping men who are **Down and Out in Houston**

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