

Winter 2007

MCDPs Present 18th Annual Benitia Humanitarian Award

On February 16, the Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence will honor Martha Tijerina with the 2007 Benitia Humanitarian Award. Known in San Antonio as the first lady of Spanish television, Ms. Tijerina has worked for 30 years to increase public awareness of community needs and resources through her popular television shows and her tremendous fundraising activities.

Since the 1930's the Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence (MCDP) have dedicated themselves as a congregation to apostolic works and to proclaiming the Word to all people, especially the poor and marginalized. The Community's founder, **Sister Mary Benitia Vermeersch, CDP**, for whom the award is named, said "Good is never done except at the expense of those who do it." The community, made up primarily of women of Hispanic heritage, has served the poor and neglected throughout Texas and the southwest United States for more than sixty years.

All proceeds from the Benitia Humanitarian Award Dinner benefit the Benitia Family Center on the west side of

(Continued, page two)

From Your Director . . .



"Journeys ended, Journeys begun" is the name of a rather old song by the Monks of the Weston Priory. It was also the theme of my last summer at grad school at Seattle University and the senior project/synthesis presentation I did. Those four words are very present to me once again. As many of you may know by now, I was elected to serve on the Provincial Leadership team of my community. This call to new ministry means that I must relinquish the WPC Director ministry.

It is with a saddened heart that I let go of what, for me, was a cherished and well-suited job, a journey ending. However, I feel a sense of great excitement, amazement, and energy for the journey that has now begun, as of Jan. 1st. It is a wonderful leadership team!

I am happy to serve my community and feel this call is God's invitation to newness, change, to step into the unknown, to have an opportunity to get to know more of my sisters and associates in the Divine Providence community. I will cherish all those moments and meeting of Providence people that clearly made the "journey soon to be ending" a wonderful one! I embrace the journey now begun and believe and trust that the God we name Providence leads the way.

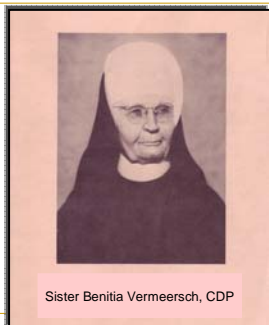
On another note, you will find lots of exciting news of interest in this issue of Collaboration. There are anniversaries to celebrate, awards to be given, new ventures initiated. Planning for Providence Event 2008 has also begun! Don't miss those dates!

Happy reading!

Sr. Barbara

(MCDPs, continued from page one)

San Antonio. The MCDPs founded this center in 1994 to empower the poor and neglected, especially Hispanics, by enabling them to reclaim their personal and family values and self-worth in light of their culture and religious beliefs.



The first Benitia Humanitarian Award was given in September 1989. The award honors a person or persons who exhibit the values Sr. Benitia modeled during her lifetime. The Congregation recognizes the honoree as a special person who is dedicated to caring for those who are in need, both spiritually and materially.

Sister Benitia, a member of the Congregation of Divine Providence of San Antonio, Texas, founded the Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence in Houston, Texas in 1930 in order to meet the material and spiritual needs of the refugees who fled from Mexico during the revolution of 1910-1936. The MCDP Congregation continues Benitia's legacy through their

ministry, charity, and work with social services in the community. The community now ministers in five states, Arizona, California, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Texas.

The uniqueness of the MCDP's is found in the spirit with which they minister. As a religious congregation of bilingual/bicultural religious women, its members have the ability to bridge cultures and become avenues of communication in a Church that is mostly Hispanic. Coming from poor *barrios* themselves, the MCDP Sisters know what it means to be marginalized; they understand firsthand the struggles of the economically poor to access services needed to advance.

MCDPs serve as role models and mentors to the local Hispanic population who struggle to advance in education, as well as in the economic ladder of society. The Sisters are able to bridge the cultural and language differences which are often an obstacle to other church leaders as they strive to meet the needs of the Hispanic population. Their ministries encompass the following: Hispanic Ministry, catechesis, youth ministry, soup kitchens, seminaries, chaplaincy at hospitals, and social services at the private and state level.

Past Recipients of the Benitia Humanitarian Award:

1. Most Rev. Patrick F. Flores
2. William Crain
3. Raul Jimenez
4. Oblates of Mary Immaculate
5. Mr. Mark Wittig
6. Maria Antonietta Berriozabal
7. Gloria Rodriguez
8. Rev. Msgr. William Tinney
9. Blanca Sanchez Vela
10. Most Rev. John E. McCarthy
11. Rev. Msgr. Balthasar Janacek
12. Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez
13. Sister Elizabeth Ann Sueltenfuss
14. Tom White & Carol White
15. The Scanlan Foundation
16. Sister Anita De Luna, MCDP
17. Mary Esther Bernal

WPC Congregational News and Ministries

Sisters of Providence, Kingston

December 2006 marked the 145th anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of Providence in Kingston. The Community offered praise and thanks to God for the many years of committed service to God's people in Canada, Guatemala and Peru. They also thank God for the valiant women who gave of their lives for the most vulnerable of society.



The Congregation's heritage is rooted in the creativity and spirituality of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, and the responsiveness of the Montreal Sisters of Providence to the call of Bishop E.J. Horan, as well as in the courage and pioneer spirit of Mother Mary Edward McKinley and the original members of the Kingston community. We trust in God's loving guidance as we continue to serve with compassion, trust in Providence and walk in hope.

Sisters of Divine Providence Elect New Leadership

At the November 2006 Chapter of Elections, the Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence, Marie de la Roche Province, elected its new Provincial Leadership Team. **Sister Mary Francis Fletcher** will be Provincial Director and **Sister Barbara McMullen** will serve as Assistant to the Provincial. Councillors are **Sisters Marilyn Bergt, Maria Fest, Lisa Paffrath, Ann Pairn, and Carol Stenger**. The team took office in January 2007 for a term of five years. They will be headquartered in the Marie de la Roche Center at Providence Heights in Allison Park, Pa.

The Marie de la Roche Province, named for the co-founder of the congregation, was formed in 2001 through the restructuring of the Kingston (Massachusetts), Pittsburgh, and St. Louis provinces, the region of Puerto Rico and a mission in Santo Domingo. There are 277 Sisters and more than 193 Associates in the province. In addition to the Marie de la Roche Province, the Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence ministers in Germany, Korea, Peru and Poland.



*The new leadership council for the Sisters of Divine Providence, Marie de La Roche Province: (front row) Sisters **Mary Francis Fletcher**, and **Barbara McMullen**, (back row, l to r) Sisters **Carol Stenger**, **Maria Fest**, **Ann Pairn**, **Lisa Paffrath** and **Marilyn Bergt**.*

Project BandAID



Through a project known as BandAID, the La Roche College Community and the Sisters of Divine Providence, Marie de la Roche Province, were able to supply St. Mary's Academy in New Orleans with new band instruments. The project was undertaken by **Sister Marilyn Bergt, CDP**, former coordinator of community service at La Roche (now on the province Leadership Team). The project made it possible to send a complete set of instruments for the St. Mary's Academy New Orleans 50-person marching band. Since many of the upper class students were evacuated from New Orleans after Katrina and have not yet returned, the school had to start anew with younger students.

Sister Greta Jupiter, president of St. Mary's Academy, was very appreciative. The project illustrated the kinds of collaborative things the staffs of the Catholic High Schools are doing to heal and move on from the personally devastating effects of Katrina so they can better serve their students.

CDPS Adopt New Community Symbols

Vowed members and Associates of the Sisters of Divine Providence received new symbols at the Chapter of Affairs in August. The profession symbol for the vowed members, which can be worn as a pin or a necklace, is a burnished silver triangle with three interlocking circles. The triangle traditionally symbolizes the mutual, dynamic inter-relatedness of the Triune God. The open interlocking circles represent the provident nature of God who invites us to co-create in love, redeems us with compassion, who calls us to bless by inclusive hospitality. Sisters wear the symbol as a reminder of their communal commitment to make God's Providence more visible in the world.



The Associate symbol is a trefoil or a type of Celtic knot that has a long history of signifying the Trinity and God's Providence. The trefoil is in royal blue, the color of the dress worn by Marie de la Roche in a formal portrait, and for the color associated with Mary the Mother of God. The earth is enclosed in an open trefoil. The trefoil symbolizes the Triune God that we call Providence. God's Providence is made visible through acts of justice and compassion, and through an inclusive hospitable presence. Associates of the Sisters of Divine Providence wear the symbol as a sign of their commitment to God's Providence in the world. (Gratitude to Henefer's Jewelers for the excellent work they did in crafting the symbol.)



CDP Sisters Reaffirm Commitment to Promote a Consistent Ethic of Life

In August 2006, more than 200 Sisters of Divine Providence from across the continental United States, Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo participated in the Chapter of Affairs for the Marie de la Roche Province. At this year's Chapter, the Sisters confirmed anew their commitment to promote a consistent ethic of life. The Sisters, reflecting God's compassionate care for the world, are called to hold all life sacred, to promote justice, to seek to advance the cause of all people, especially those in need, and to practice responsible stewardship.

The Community promotes a consistent ethic of life through its corporate sponsored ministries: Providence Connections, Inc., which operates the Providence Family Support Center, Providence Day Care South and Amelia House (a SAFE house in Clarion County); Room at the Inn in St. Louis serves the homeless, providing programming and safe day/night sites for clients and their children; La Posada Providencia in Texas works with asylum seekers, guiding them through the U. S. immigration process. Their educational ministries -- Providence Heights Alpha School, the Sacred Heart School System, La Roche College and Camp Mishannock -- instill Gospel values in young people who will be the leaders of tomorrow. The Divine Providence Retreat Ministry (Kearns Spirituality Center, Providence Villa, Transfiguration House of Prayer) offers opportunity for spiritual renewal.

In addition, Sisters and Associates work for justice daily by serving on committees such as Pennsylvanians Against the Trafficking of Humans (PATH), participating in Operation Safety Net, a local group that serves the homeless of Pittsburgh, and holding a weekly Witness for Peace event at Providence Heights. They minister in area non-profits, serving the most vulnerable among us. They volunteer as tutors, mentors, foster parents and caregivers.

In prayer and deed, the Sisters of Divine Providence commit themselves to the protection of life through the eradication of war, poverty, racism, abortion, capital punishment and euthanasia.

Sisters of Providence, Montreal



A new book has been written about the Sisters of Providence in Montreal. It is entitled, in French, *Une communauté qui fait signe*, (*A Community that Signs*) *Sisters of Our Lady of Seven Dolors, 1887-2007*.

This group of Sisters is a diocesan congregation in Montreal, whose General Superior is our Sister of Providence General Superior. The SPs operated the Montreal Institution for Deaf Girls from 1851 – 1978, throughout its various stages of development. From this school came young women who wanted to give their lives to God as Sisters. In later days, not all who entered the community were students at the school.

The author, Stéphane D. Perreault, presented the book at a launching on January 19th, at the Sisters of Providence International Centre, Montreal. Currently, the book is available only in French. It will be translated into English and Spanish at a later date.

Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Begin Associates Program



Beverly Okey and her companion Sister Mary Lois Hennel (left to right) share with others at their table during an orientation at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

Sixty-two candidate-associates participated in a one-day orientation with their sister-companions as they begin the 11-month process of becoming Providence Associates of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Ind. They chose one of three dates and locations for the November and December orientation sessions.

There was a wonderful spirit among all of those who came together, most of whom were meeting one another for the first time. The day included time for introductions, welcome and getting acquainted, followed by morning prayer with a visit and word from Saint Mother Theodore (a.k.a. **Sister Ann Casper** or **Sister Susan Paweski**).

Sister **Mary Alice Zander**, director, gave an overview of the program which included the presentation of the seven Spiritual Integration Units, which each participant received and which will become the focus of the candidate-associate and companion meetings. In the afternoon, the candidate-associates

and companions met to do some planning for their times of meeting together. At each of the orientation sessions, sisters in the area joined in the blessing of the candidate-associates and companions and celebrated a Eucharistic Liturgy. Candidate-associates and companions have already begun meeting, either in person, by phone, e-mail or in small groups.

“It is very exciting and inspiring to experience the enthusiasm among these women and men and the sisters,” said Sister Mary Alice.

Sister receives honors for alcohol treatment and education



Sister Pat Hauser traveled to Yakima, WA, from her home in Forks, WA, to be honored with the James Oldham Award by Sundown M Ranch. The award is named for the man who pioneered alcohol treatment and education in Yakima County. The plaque presented to Sister Pat reads “... for your pioneering spirit of alcoholism and chemical dependency treatment. Your knowledge and passion is a rich heritage for all of us.” Sister Pat served in ministry at the treatment center three times, as a part-time counselor loaned by Catholic Charities when Sundown opened 35 years ago, then as a full-time counselor and later as full-time chaplain about six years ago.

Ministry award for Sister of Providence

Dolores Ellwart, SP, received the ministry award from Bishop Michael Driscoll for her years of outstanding service on the Coeur d’Alene Reservation. Sister Dolores was born in DeSmet, Idaho, where she has served in ministry since 1965, when she was missioned to Mary Immaculate School. She taught all of the grades and served as superior and principal. When that school closed, she moved across the road to Sacred Heart Indian Mission, where she continues to serve as parish minister. Sister Dolores received the ministry award in October at the 2006 Fall Conference in the Diocese of Boise.



St. Finbar's honors Sister Rose Byrne

When someone knocks and asks the Sisters of Providence to serve, they answer, emcee Michael Hastings said as he presented the 2006 Harvester of Faith award to **Sister Rose Byrne** at the St. Finbar Harvest Ball in Burbank in October. In her 57 years as a Sister of Providence, she has served in teaching, including at St. Finbar School, and in parish ministry and health care. "Sister Rose has been the heart and SOUL of Providence St. Joseph Medical Center for many years," Michael says. "Anyone who has been a patient at Saint Joe's has been blessed with the presence of Sister as the face and compassionate heart of The Sisters of Providence." In addition to her work at St. Joseph's, she has been sister representative at Providence Holy Cross Medical Center and Providence St. Elizabeth's Care Center since 1998.



Sister Anita Butler, provincial treasurer, joins other guests at the St. Finbar Harvest Ball in applauding **Sister Rose Byrne**.

Sister Rose shared this year's award with Michael's mother, Mrs. Joan Hastings, who is blessed with a beautiful voice she has shared with St. Finbar's community for more than 45 years. Her many contributions include serving as a volunteer teacher for the Released Time education program and as cantor for weekday masses. Sister Rose also received a proclamation from Burbank Mayor Todd Campbell.

CDPs in San Antonio Host Weekend of Spiritual Healing



(L-R) Linda Follis, Moyer Retreat Center director, Sister Rose Kruppa, CDP and Sister Dianne Heinrich, CDP (council liaison for Moyer Retreat Center).

For many years, Moyer Retreat Center in Castroville, Texas, the former Motherhouse of the Sisters of Divine Providence, has served as a venue for spiritual growth and development. This winter it will be hosting an exciting new program called Mary's Hope to help survivors of child abuse heal from spiritual wounds caused by abuse. On February 22, 24 and 25, the Center will welcome survivors of child abuse, their companions and professionals that walk the journey of recovery with them, for a weekend of spiritual healing, provided by Mary's Hope.

Mary's Hope is designed for survivors, their companions, adoptive and foster parents, mental health professionals, victim service professionals, ministers, spiritual directors and pastoral service directors. Presented from a Judeo-Christian perspective and rooted in personal faith and healing journeys, the program deals with the spiritual healing and recovery from early childhood abuse and trauma.

The weekend's schedule consists of an information session, a workshop and a retreat, and is presented by Sherry Niermann and Reverend Diane Moore, founders of Mary's Hope.

If you know anyone who is a survivor, or who works with survivors of traumatic childhood abuse, please share this workshop information with him or her. Registration is required and forms are available at the Center or at www.moyecenter.org. Licensed personal counselors, such as psychologists and marriage and family therapists, can earn continuing education credits (CEUs) for attending Day 1 and Day 2 of the Mary's Hope program.

Sisters of Providence, Holyoke, Mass. Celebrate 30th Anniversary of Spiritual Life Center

Genesis Spiritual Life Center in Westfield, Massachusetts, observed its 30th Anniversary in 2006 and the 30th Anniversary of the Year End Retreats held there since its founding year.

Holyoke SPs **Elizabeth Oleksak** and **Ruth McGoldrick**, in keeping with their own Community's long tradition of ending each calendar year with a retreat, initially offered the Year End Retreats at Genesis for their own Providence Sisters. As time passed, they opened the retreats to all. To mark the retreat's 30th Anniversary, they invited presenters who have a special friendship with the Sisters of Providence and Genesis. This special retreat filled the retreat house to capacity and beyond.

On the retreat's closing morning, Sister Elizabeth found Sister Barbara Farrell's, SND, response to the question, "What do you most want to take home from Genesis and remember?" so moving she asked her to send it to her in writing. In that letter, Sister Barbara, a long time friend of Genesis and many Providence Sisters, shared her sentiments about Genesis and the Sisters of Providence. (Sister Barbara has conducted retreats at Genesis and is well known by many communities in the US and abroad.)



Participants at the Year End Retreat at the Genesis Spiritual Life Center.

Sister Barbara wrote: "As I attempted to respond, I found the walls 'talking' and unexpected memories crowded in. Many years ago my aunt, Peggy O'Connor, was a volunteer in this place where the Sisters of Providence operated a home for unwed mothers. She often spoke about the atmosphere that was present: a spirit of warm hospitality, gracious service and a deeply felt climate of respect..."

"I came to recognize something very special among the Sisters of Providence. They listened to the needs of their time and responded to those needs in creative ways. They continued to listen and, when attitudes changed, to let go of what was to embrace the 'new deed' to which God called them.

"The same spirit that inspired this earlier venture prompted the creation of Genesis Spiritual Life Center and today we celebrate its 30th anniversary. The people and even the walls attest to the rich tradition of (the SPs') service. The Sisters of Providence have created a space that continues to provide so many ways of helping women and men expand their awareness of the meaning of spirituality. The spirit of that earlier time continues!

"I pray in gratitude for this group of women religious who today inspire me and many others to remain open to the Spirit, to let go of what is and remain on the cutting edge of service to the people of God. They trust in the Providence of God; I trust in the goodness of God. Both congregations rejoice in the presence and power of God that is at the center of our lives and our source of hope."

Providence Event 2008 Planning Committee Meeting

The planning for Providence Event 2008 is underway! The committee members: **Ann Sullivan, SP, Elizabeth Oleksak, SP, Dawn Tomaszewski, SP, Pauline Lally, SP** and WPC Director **Barbara McMullen, CDP**, met at St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana the weekend of Jan. 5-7, 2007. Since the underlying theme of this Providence Event, *Ecological Economics*, came from the participants at the 2005 Providence Event, the direction was clear. Our communal statements called for further and deeper exploration of just what ecological economics means for Providence communities. Barbara McMullen gave an overview of the Board's thinking, presented a timeline for the event's preparations, and the planning committee took it from there!



*Providence Event 2008 Planning Committee meeting in January (from left to right): **Ann Sullivan, SP, Elizabeth Oleksak, SP, Dawn Tomaszewski, SP, and Pauline Lally, SP.***

The format of Providence Event '08 is different this year. We will have two tracks, and it will be a week-long event, **June 8-15, 2008**. Track One will begin Sunday evening and include a



Providence Event 2008 Planning Committee meets some of the local residents—the alpacas—of the White Violet Center in Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana.

Providence Earth Plunge, coordinated by the White Violet Center staff. It will include prayer, presentations, reflection time and hands-on experiences, with different speakers each day. The closing day, Thursday, is one of integration and sharing.

Track Two, *Providence People Tread Lightly on Earth*, will be **June 13-15th**, and will start Friday morning. There will be keynote presentations by Brian Swimme, Gail Worcelo, and our own Providence women.

The weekend will conclude on Sunday with Eucharist and departure at noon. Participants may opt for Track One, Track Two, or the combined week. Look for more details to come in the brochure. Mark your calendars and don't miss this exciting Event!!!!

WPC Executive Committee meets in San Antonio, TX



*Your WPC executive committee at work in San Antonio. Left to right: **Fran Moore, CDP, Elizabeth Oleksak, SP, Mary Lou Barba, MCDP and Jane Ann Slater. CDP.***

The members of the WPC Executive Committee met in San Antonio in November, 2006 for their semi-annual meeting. **Sr. Jane Ann Slater**, new Chair of the Board, hosted the group in genuine Texas-style hospitality. Vice-Chair, **Elizabeth Oleksak, SP**, from Holyoke, MA; Treasurer **Fran Moore, CDP**, from Melbourne, KY, and Secretary **Mary Lou Barba, MCDP** from San Antonio were present for the meeting.

WPC Executive Director **Barbara McMullen, CDP**, joined the group as they further explored preparations for the 2008 Providence Event begun by the Board last June. It was an exciting time of putting some "flesh" on the ideas for the Event as discussed by the Board.

The executive committee also reviewed current reports prepared by Sister Barbara, worked on current budget issues, and prepared the proposed budget to be approved at the April, 2007 Board meeting in Seattle, WA. During the two-day meeting the group was also treated to a genuine Mexican dinner at a nearby restaurant, complete with a Mariachi band!

Director's Position Available

Due to her new role on the Provincial Leadership Team of the Sisters of Divine Providence, Sister Barbara McMullen, CDP must resign as executive director of Women of Providence in Collaboration.

A search committee is being formed. Watch for more details!



Dates to Remember...

March 22-25, 2007

VFL Annual Conference
Allison Park, Pennsylvania

April 2-4, 2007

WPC Board Meeting
Seattle, Washington

Providence Event Publication

The Cosmos Within the Providence Dance, Proceedings from the 2005 Providence Event are available in the WPC office.

Additional copies may be purchased by WPC members for \$10.

The cost for non-members is \$15

Providence Event Videos

Providence Event 2005 Video Set includes five videos:

1. Opening ritual and 25th anniversary celebration,
2. Saturday morning prayer, overview of the day and presentation by **Barbara Doherty, SP**
3. Saturday afternoon presentations by **Lucy Zientek, CDP** and **Mary Christine Morkovsky, CDP**
4. Saturday dinner, Women of Providence Awards
5. Sunday morning prayers, process and engagement and closing Liturgy.

To order a set, please contact the WPC office at 314-209-9181 or bmcullen6650@aol.com.



COLLABORATION

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