



## Women of Providence Celebrate with Catholics Around the World: Mother Theodore Guerin, SP Canonized October 15

Months of intense planning reaped dividends during October as the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Ind., celebrated the canonization of their foundress, Saint Mother Theodore Guerin.

Pope Benedict XVI presided over the ceremony Oct. 15 at the Vatican. Hundreds of pilgrims from the United States and other countries accompanied about 120 Sisters of Providence who made the journey to Rome. The sisters also took a Registry of Names to Rome with more than 3,000 names of people who wanted to be part of the ceremonies *in abstentia*.

The pilgrimage was filled with things to do and places to see, but the highlights were the events surrounding the canonization. These included a vigil in the Church of the Gesu on Saturday, Oct. 14 and a Mass of Thanksgiving on Monday, Oct. 16 at St. Paul Outside the Wall Basilica.

Activities started early in October at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Saint Mother Theodore's remains were moved from beneath the floor in the Church of the Immaculate Conception to an interim shrine in the front alcove of the church until a more permanent shrine can be prepared. (Continued, page two)



### *From Your Director...*



This time of year brings the *sights, sounds and smells* of Autumn. It is a time of seeing the rainbow of colors in the trees as the leaves change and begin to fall. In my neighborhood I see children romping in piles of leaves and smoke curling from chimneys. You can see the sight of hats, gloves and scarves as they reappear from silent storage. And aren't the stars so clear at night that you can almost hear them twinkle! Autumn brings with it the honks from overhead as the geese fly south for the winter, or the crackle from a cozy fireplace. And oh how I love the sound of steady autumn rain, when I can curl up with a good book! Then there are those smells of leaves burning, pumpkin pie baking, apple cider simmering, and oh, my grandmother's apple butter...just the best in the world! Of course, it just reminds us of the breath-taking beauty provided by our Provident God, even in the season of change and letting go.

In this edition of our WPC newsletter you will find wonderful stories about brave, determined, pioneer women who weren't afraid of change; who charted new territories, responded to God's call, and whose lofty goals even took one of them to sainthood! How will you be changed in this season? Happy Autumn!

*Sr. Barbara*

(St. Mother Theodore Guerin, continued from page one)

Staff carpenters made a new coffin from walnut timber that had been stored on the grounds for more than 40 years. The former coffin was placed inside the new one, then mounted on a base adjacent to the altar in the church. The shrine was first venerated on Saint Mother Theodore's feast day, Oct. 3. Despite many sisters, staff and friends being away for canonization day, the church was filled for liturgy Oct. 15.



*The procession at the canonization of St. Mother Theodore Guerin, SP*

Plans also were developed for a local celebration Oct. 21-22 after the pilgrims to Rome had returned. Visitors on Saturday, Oct. 21, enjoyed self-guided walking tours and were able to participate in the regular Saturday liturgy. It was a different story Sunday, Oct. 22, when sisters and invited guests filled the church to celebrate the canonization and the 166<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Congregation's founding. A closed-circuit broadcast of the Eucharistic Liturgy was streamed into three venues on the grounds for additional visitors. Thousands of people have visited Saint Mother Theodore's shrine since the new coffin was placed in the church.

An intense spiritual focus was evident as the pilgrims witnessed Mother Theodore become a saint of God. **Sister Nancy Reynolds** gave a reading during the liturgy. Former General Superiors **Sister Ann Margaret O'Hara**, **Sister Diane Ris** and **Sister Nancy Nolan** placed the reliquary during the Eucharistic Liturgy. General Superior **Sister Denise Wilkinson**, vice postulator **Sister Marie Kevin Tighe**, and Phil McCord, who received a healing through Saint Mother Theodore's intercession, presented gifts to the pope.

"The work, dedication and time mean almost nothing to me at this point. It was all so worth it," said Sister Marie Kevin. "It's a feeling of great rejoicing and happiness to know that Mother Theodore has been presented to the Universal Church as a person who lived her life according to God's law and God's will and in the spirit of love for all people around her."

The Congregation shared a consistent message that Saint Mother Theodore's canonization is not just an honor for Catholics, it highlights the way she lived and the way we all are called to live.

In her homily on Oct. 3 and again on Oct. 22, Sister Denise asked those present to honor Saint Mother Theodore by trying to live saint-like lives themselves.

"... to all of us drawn by the spirit and legacy of Saint Mother Theodore Guerin, let's ponder this question together and frequently: Do we, all of us here, so love and honor Mother Theodore Guerin, Saint of God, and so love the God of Providence that we will promise one another, with all of our hearts, to do all we can to help one another become saints?" she asked.

Saint Mother Theodore's shrine continues to be open to the public daily in the Church of the Immaculate Conception.



*The Sisters of Providence choir at the canonization*

# WPC Congregational News and Ministries

## Sisters of Providence from St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Ind. Elect Leadership Team



*Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Ind., newly-elected General Council. Front row: Sisters **Marsha Speth** and **Denise Wilkinson**. Back row: Sisters **Marie McCarthy**, **Nancy Reynolds**, **Jane Marie Osterholt** and **Paula Damiano**.*

**Sister Denise Wilkinson**, who served as the Congregation's vicar (the general officer who assumes leadership in the absence of the general superior) the past five years, has been elected as the new general superior. She succeeds **Sister Ann Margaret O'Hara**, who has served as general superior for the past five years. Sister Ann Margaret chose not to seek re-election. Sister Denise was elected during the Chapter of Elections July 2006, which took place after the Chapter of Affairs was completed.

Elected to the Congregation's General Council were **Sister Marsha Speth**, vicar and first general councilor, **Sister Jane Marie Osterholdt**, second councilor, **Sister Nancy Reynolds**, third councilor, **Sister Marie McCarthy**, fourth councilor, **Sister Paula Damiano**, fifth councilor. All but Sister Jane Marie were re-elected to their second five-year term. The officers were installed during the Eucharistic Liturgy September 9. Congratulations and blessings on this new leadership team!!

## Sisters of Providence from Seattle/Spokane Celebrate 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Sisters of Providence celebrated 150 years in the west with a prayer service at St. James Church in Vancouver on Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup>. For the processional, **Sr. Lucy St. Hilaire** wore the traditional habit worn by Sisters of Providence for more than 100 years. Sister Lucy, first principal of Our Lady of Lourdes School in Vancouver, also carried books used to teach students who were educated in the numerous Providence educational institutions throughout the Northwest. She was followed in the procession by Mariette Sauve, the first lay teacher of Providence Academy grade school. Mariette carried one of the tools Mother Joseph used in her building projects, symbolizing collaboration with others that enabled the sisters' mission and ministries.



## Sisters of Providence, Seattle/Spokane Christen New Senior Housing

Sisters gathered in the High Point neighborhood of West Seattle on June 22 to join in a blessing ceremony for Providence Elizabeth House, a new 73-unit building that houses low-income seniors. Open since February 1, it takes its name from two Elizabeths: the late **Louise Gleason**, SP, whose religious name at first profession of vows was Sister Elizabeth of Jesus, and St. Elizabeth of Hungary, patroness of the religious community.



*Sister Louise Gleason, SP*

St. Elizabeth, who only lived to the age of 24, was a patron of infirm and aged women, says Sister Susanne Hartung, Washington/Montana regional director of mission and ethics for Providence Health & Services. Sister Louise, who modeled her life on St. Elizabeth, was dedicated to compassionate care for the poor. Born in 1919 and raised on a farm near Freewater, Ore., Sister Louise was a leader, a teacher, a principal, an administrator and a provincial superior. "My own simple definition of mission is to make Christ present in the world as I go about doing good," Sister Louise would say.

Robert Hellrigel, chief executive of Providence Senior and Community Services, told the crowd at the blessing ceremony that Elizabeth House is the 12th home in the Providence housing ministry, the ninth in the state of Washington and the fourth in Seattle. It is a collaboration between Providence Health & Services, the Seattle Housing Authority and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as part of the Hope VI redevelopment of the Highpoint neighborhood.

This year, as Sisters of Providence celebrate 150 years in the west, stories like that of Sister Louise Gleason offer witness that the Providence mission continues and flourishes.

## Sister of Providence from El Salvador Professes First Vows in Spokane

**Vilma Franco**, 27, a native of El Salvador, made first profession of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a Sister of Providence in a Eucharistic Liturgy on October 7. Concelebrants for the Spanish and English Mass in the chapel at Mount St. Joseph were the Most Reverend William S. Skylstad, Bishop of Spokane, and the Reverend Michael Cook, SJ. A reception in honor of Sister Vilma followed.



Sister Vilma has been living at the novitiate in Spokane since February after spending a canonical year in Chile to explore in depth the call to vowed life in the religious community. She first met the Sisters of Providence in 2000, when **Sister Fran Stacey** moved to her neighborhood.

“I observed the work that Sister Fran did with the people of my community and was moved by it,” Sister Vilma says. “I saw the spirit of Mother Gamelin and I wanted to be a part of it, too. When I read Mother Gamelin’s story and the pain she went through, I realized we had a lot in common,” says Sister Vilma, who lost her father, uncles and six brothers in El Salvador’s civil war from 1980 to 1992. “Mother Gamelin used the pain of losing her loved ones to be compassionate to the poor around her. It is a pain that I understand well.”

After the war, Sister Vilma and her sisters relocated with their mother to the department of the Usulután in the coastal zone of El Salvador, where she met Sister Fran in the community of Angela Montana. While assisting with youth ministry, Vilma expressed a desire to become a sister and was encouraged by Sister Fran to pray and explore this call. She participated in a “Come and See” experience in La Papalota and in the Sisters of Providence pre-candidate program in San Salvador.

## Sisters of Providence, Kingston, Ontario: Vigil Keepers

Kingston, Ontario calls itself the Limestone City. This small city at the northeastern corner of Lake Ontario is also the nation’s prison capital. It was described by Charles Dickens as a “very poor town” when he visited not long after the colonial authorities built Canada’s first penitentiary here. A century later Kingston is described as a place where the social divisions were “as sharp as you could cut them.” There is a great economic divide between the north and south sides of the city; these are the divides that the *Make Poverty History* campaign seeks to confront.

The Sisters of Providence keep a weekly vigil at City Hall for peace. Sometimes there may be only ten, other times the number swells to a few dozen. Since their vigils began in 1995, social assistance incomes in Ontario have declined 34 percent, a fact they keep pointing out to local government officials. Last October, they began making signs with red maple leaves that read “Make Poverty History.”

Longtime vigil-keeper, **Sr. Peggy Flanagan**, tells of serving meals to the poor at the end of every month. She told the Kingston City Council, “A lot of these meals go to families with little children. It disturbs me greatly that even people who are working cannot feed their kids and pay the rent.” Two Sisters of Providence, both in their 80s, tore dozens of white sheets in half and then sewed them end-to-end to produce a 400 meter white banner for **Make Poverty History** day. More than 300 people gathered and together they surrounded City Hall.



In the Limestone City, people made known their commitment to bridge the poverty gap and heal divides at home and elsewhere in the world. (Jamie Swift: Scarboro Mission Magazine, 2006).

## **Sisters of Providence, Holyoke, Mass.: Providential timing blesses growth of Nuestras Raíces**

At almost the precise moment this Providence Congregation was educating itself on the critical need for land trusts, given the State of Massachusetts's rapidly disappearing farmland, Nuestras Raíces was writing a visionary proposal to partner with the SPs to preserve 24 acres of SP-owned farmland. Nuestras Raíces (Our Roots) is a grass roots organization that promotes economic, human and community development through projects related to food and agriculture.

Following acceptance of the proposal, the SPs and Nuestras Raíces of Holyoke, entered into a joint application with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for an Agricultural Preservation Restriction. If accepted, the APR will result in Massachusetts purchasing the development rights to the property. That action provides for land preservation for agricultural uses only and in perpetuity.

### ***Modeling farming development***

The SP property, located on the Connecticut River, is adjacent to 4.5 acres already owned and farmed by Nuestras Raíces. The not-for-profit plans to couple the SP property with its own to help experienced and novice farmers start small, sustainable farms as well as a variety of youth, environmental, cultural and community activities. Their undertaking, aptly named Tierra de Oportunidades Project (Land of Opportunity Project), is a model for sustainable agricultural and cultural development in the United States.

### ***Protecting the earth***

According to Sister **Elizabeth Oleksak**, SP, a member of the Nuestras Raíces Board, "This exciting project puts flesh on our own SP Directional Statement calling us to care and protect the earth. This plan plants new seeds of hope for the future. As Providence unfolds in our lives we are always invited to be open to the unexpected! This request to farm our land offers us, as Sisters of Providence, the opportunity to collaborate with the Latino Community in a way we never would have thought of!"

## **Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods General Chapter**

Every five years the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods assemble in a spirit of prayer to examine and evaluate the life of their Congregation. This General Chapter is convened in two parts: a Chapter of Affairs and a Chapter of Elections. While it is in session, the Chapter is the highest governing body in the Congregation, an authority then assumed by the newly-elected officers, called the General Council.

The June 26-July 5 meeting this past summer focused on three major areas that the members of the Congregation wanted to examine with particular care. These issues were the community's commitment to doing justice and living in right relationship; how to integrate their common life and ministries as they live out their mission; and the integration and extension of the ministries of hospitality, hope and healing at the motherhouse at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

The assembly concluded with a beautiful Eucharistic Liturgy, followed by a happy celebratory dinner after which sisters returned to their places of residence and ministry across the United States and in Taiwan.



Sister **Elizabeth Oleksak** with goat, "Stephano," and, (front, left to right) William Aponte, Youth Program Director, Fermin Galarza, Experienced Farmer, and Eric Toensmeier, Farm Project Director. (Back, left to right) Angel Ortiz, Anabel Nieves, Milagros Guzman, Jocelin Medina and Leonardo Perez, members of the Youth Program.

## WPC Board Annual Meeting Held in June



The WPC Board met in June at St. Mary-of-the-Woods, IN for its annual meeting, and the new executive officers of the Board were named. **Jane Ann Slater**, CDP from Texas is the new Chair of the WPC Board. Vice-Chair is **Elizabeth Oleksak**, SP from Holyoke, Mass; **Mary Lou Barba**, MCDP, from San Antonio, is the Secretary and **Fran Moore**, CDP, from Kentucky, is the new Treasurer.

At the meeting the Board also approved the budget for the coming year, brainstormed possible ideas for Providence Event 2008, and made recommendations of names for the Core Planning Team. They also decided that there would be only one event location, with two tracks of input in a weeklong event. The

first track would be an immersion experience into Mother Earth and the eco-system; the second track would be to have Brian Swimme as a keynoter for part of the weekend's content and exploration.

Mark your calendars now!! **June 8-15, 2008!!!**

## Vocation, Formation and Leadership Conference in the Works

The VFL Planning Committee met in Allison Park, PA to discuss and plan for the annual spring VFL conference. Committee members are: Sisters **Elena Almendarez**, CDP and **Carol Stenger**, CDP from Allison Park, Penn.; **Ann Horgan**, SP, from Holyoke, Mass, and **Jan Craven**, SP, from St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Ind. They chose the theme: "A *Providence Journey into Creation*" and have secured **Ann Sullivan**, SP from the White Violet Center in Terre Haute as their speaker.

Packets of information for registration were sent in October from the WPC office. If anyone in Vocation, Formation, or the Leadership Liaison of the various congregations did not receive a packet of materials, please let the WPC office know and materials can be sent.



VFL planning committee at work! Srs. **Ann Horgan**, SP, **Elena Almendarez**, CDP, **Carol Stenger**, CDP with **Barbara McMullen**, WPC Executive Director looking on.

## Communal Actions: Let Us Know What *You* Are Doing

At the Providence Event in 2005 the members of the Women of Providence in Collaboration committed themselves to two communal actions:

1. In order to assist us in the repentance that change requires, we will adopt these two sentences as mantras to incorporate into our personal practices of prayer and contemplation: I AM A SPECIES. EARTH, I AM NOT SEPARATE FROM YOU.
2. We will further the conversations around Sallie McFague's "ecological economic" so that we can, in believing "six impossible things before breakfast," stand against the empire.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A CONGREGATION, TO ADDRESS THESE TWO ACTIONS? Email your responses for the next newsletter to WPC Executive Director Sister Barbara McMullen at [bmcullen6650@aol.com](mailto:bmcullen6650@aol.com).

## Providence Event Videos

Providence Event 2005 Video Set includes five videos:

1. Opening ritual and 25<sup>th</sup> 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 number below.



## Dates to Remember...

### November 6-8

WPC Executive Committee Meeting  
San Antonio, Texas

### 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



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