



PROVIDENCE PAGES

Winter 2022



Sister Rose-Marie Bokenfohr (right) with her faithful companion, Sister Sara Jiménez Angulo.

In 1967 when the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul were opening missions in Guatemala and Peru, Sister Rose-Marie Bokenfohr, a registered nurse, was among the first group of Sisters to volunteer for mission work. After 54 years of service in Latin America, she returned to Canada in June 2021.

story on page 3

In this issue:



Truth and Reconciliation



Jubilee 2021



160th Anniversary



Sisters of Providence
of St. Vincent de Paul

Vision Statement

A world where the vulnerable experience compassion, justice and peace.

Mission Statement

The Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul are a congregation of vowed women religious called to be channels of God's Providence.

Rooted in the mission of Jesus, we empower the vulnerable through compassionate service, advocacy and networking. Sharing our spiritual, human and financial resources, we promote justice and peace for all creation.

Please contact me with your e-mail address if you prefer to receive an electronic version of Providence Pages and discontinue receiving it by mail.

Thank you!

Michael Hammond, Communications Officer

Phone 613.544.4525 ext. 328

Email communications@providence.ca

Box 427, Kingston, Ontario K7L 4W4

www.providence.ca

Also find us on social media:

Facebook

Providence.Kingston

Twitter & YouTube

srsoprovidence

Editor

Michael Hammond

Communications

Advisory Committee

Sister Sandra Shannon
(liaison)

Sister Barbara Thiffault

Michael Hammond

Doreen Hoekstra

Veronica Stienburg

Special thanks to

proofreaders

Sister Sandra Shannon

Doreen Hoekstra

Contributors

Sr. Una Byrne

Sr. Gayle Desarmia

Sr. Jeannette Filthaut

Sr. Pauline Lally

Tina Bailey

Regina Lannon

Providence Pages is a regular publication of the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul

You Are Making a Difference in Peru

Your generosity through the Marillac Mission Fund continues to significantly and positively impact the people of Carabayllo where our Sisters and Associates live and are engaged in ministry. Your financial donations provide support in these areas: **education, health, construction projects, disaster relief, poverty relief and rural pastoral care.**

Thank you for your ongoing support of our work in Peru.

Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul

Marillac
Mission Fund
Supporting our Peruvian Missions



Missionary Returns to Canada

In 1967 when the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul were opening missions in Guatemala and Peru, Sister Rose-Marie Bokenfohr, a registered nurse, was among the first group of Sisters to volunteer for mission work. After attending language school in Puerto Rico, she spent her first two years in Guatemala. In 1969, she moved to Peru where she was engaged in mission work until her return to Canada June 2021.

In 1968, the people of El Progreso, a barrio north of Lima, wrote to the bishop asking for help to build a church and a health clinic. When Sister Rose-Marie arrived in El Progreso, her first priority was to go from house to house getting to know the people, learning about healthcare in Peru and working with the local health committee. During this time, she was even called upon to deliver babies.

When the new health clinic moved into its own building, Sister Rose-Marie became the Director. She wrote the following account of her work at the clinic in those early days of its operation:

“My aim in my work with the volunteers who offered their services in the clinic was to help them to prepare themselves as nursing assistants, mastering techniques and knowledge, learning to work together as a team in the interest of the community and, most important, learning to be responsible.”

In 1975 when Public Health took over the operation of the clinic, Sister Rose-Marie

and the volunteers continued to work there. Eventually she resigned from her position at the clinic and embarked on furthering her education and her experience in Peru.



Sister Rose-Marie Bokenfohr

The next phase of her missionary activity involved travelling to the jungle area of Peru and teaching in the villages. After this, she took a course from the new hospital for mental health in Lima, the Instituto Nacional de Salud Mental. Then for six months, her ministry in healthcare brought her each day to Independencia, a neighbouring municipality. After taking another course for further preparation in public health work, she ministered for four years overseeing a soup kitchen.

During this time, Public Health was training volunteers to work with individuals living with a mental health illness. In this new phase of her missionary activity, Sister Rose-Marie operated a clinic for mental health patients in El Progreso. With a faithful team of volunteers, she operated this clinic until it closed in December 2019. The State had by then established two mental health clinics in the area that were able to take over this work.

Throughout the years, many individuals came to Rose-Marie seeking advice and financial assistance. She, on her part, made many visits to the homes of those ill or in need. So esteemed was she for her ministry in healthcare and her dedication to those in need that in 2018 Dr. Valverde, the Director of the newly constructed Health Centre in El



54 years of service in Latin America

Progreso named the centre's auditorium in her honour. Besides these varied ministries in the field of healthcare, she was involved in a variety of other activities.

Sister Rose-Marie was on the committee overseeing the construction of the new church for Christ Light of the World Parish in El Progreso. Wearing her hard hat, she was regularly seen on-site inspecting the progress of the construction. In later years, she was on the committee for the Oscar Romero Retreat Centre in El Progreso. With the decrease in the number of Sisters at the house in El Progreso, Sister Rose-Marie assumed other responsibilities. These included:

- Guiding the students who were being financially assisted with their education through the Marillac Mission Fund
- Serving as the Sister Contact with our Peruvian Associates and working closely with their Coordinator Carmen Alomía Guía
- Acting as the tour guide par excellence for Canadian visitors



Sister Rose-Marie with the group of volunteers at the mental health clinic.

After her visit to Canada in 2019, Sister Rose-Marie decided that it was time to return to Canada. She had her return airplane ticket in March 2020. Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic intervened and changed her plans. After several cancelled flights, she returned to Canada June 6, 2021. She now resides at Providence Motherhouse and looks forward to the opportunity to visit her family in western Canada.

In looking back now, she notes that her work was always based in the local parish, even when working in the jungle. Her main base of operation was the Christ Light of the World Parish in El Progreso. The needs of the day and the possibilities available always guided her mission work.

With her quiet and gentle manner, she endeared herself to young and old alike. Hers is a remarkable life that has touched many lives and whose legacy will long be remembered in her beloved Peru.

■ *Sister Gayle Desarmia*



Sister Rose-Marie (left) with her assistant at the mental health clinic, Lucia Merino Castillo, PA.

National Day of Truth & Reconciliation

On September 30, the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, we chose to bring into our liturgical celebration elements of the culture and ritual of our indigenous brothers and sisters as a way of honouring their traditions. It was also a way of showing our sorrow and acknowledgment of the denigration of these traditions by our ancestors and members of our church.

We wanted to find healing and reconciliation. We wanted to show our desire to stand with them in their struggles for recognition of the wrongs of the past and the pain that they have suffered. Yet we know that racism and effects of colonialism exist to this day. So, as we acknowledged the traditional homelands on which our chapel stands, we



Ann Boniferro, Director of Pastoral Liturgy & Music, plays the traditional hand drum.



A star blanket with the four sacred plants and the hand drum.

asked the Great Spirit to allow us to show our indigenous sisters and brothers that we support them in their ongoing struggle for a just and respectful relationship with all the peoples of Canada.

Orange adorned the chapel ambo and walls, and many of the Sisters wore orange as a reminder of the suffering and disrespect indigenous children suffered in Residential Schools. In front of the altar, we draped a star blanket that holds deep meaning and traditions linked to indigenous culture, birth, life and death, and symbolizes peace. Placed on the blanket were the four sacred plants – tobacco, sweet grass, cedar

and sage.

Our Liturgy began with the playing of a traditional hand drum, followed by a smudging as our Penitential rite. Although we had all four sacred plants on the star blanket, we used only sage, a woman's plant, for our smudging. Sage is the plant used to prepare people for ceremonies and teachings. It has a special service of releasing what is troubling the mind and removing negative energy.

As we reflected on our need for healing and reconciliation, we prayed:

continued on page 7



Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul

It was with both gratitude and excitement, shared by everyone present, that Community Foundation for Kingston & Area board members Rob Wood (Chair) and Gayle Barr (Past Chair) met with several Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul at Providence Motherhouse to receive their change-making \$5 million gift to the community.

These funds will be used to help the Kingston community respond to some of the greatest needs among our youngest and oldest citizens.

The occasion was marked with an opening prayer using the lyrics of Jan Novotka's song *All I do Today* (2002), words selected by the Sisters to highlight their wishes for this gift and the community:

*May all I do today
Be for the healing of the whole
May all I do today
Mend our broken world
May all I do today
Bring blessing on the Earth
May all I do today
Be for the good of all*

The Sisters' challenge to the Foundation was to use these funds to stimulate transformative, sustainable, systems-level change in two identified areas of need: **to prevent**



CFKA Board members Rob Wood (left) Gayle Barr (right) with General Superior of the Sisters of Providence Sister Sandra Shannon (middle).

and mitigate the lifelong impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and to reduce the social isolation and loneliness felt by seniors – both significantly amplified by the experience of COVID-19.

Wanting to achieve immediate and maximum impact from their gift, the *Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul Community Impact Fund* is intended to be fully expended on high-impact community initiatives and programs over the next five to ten years.

“As we look to the future, the Community Foundation for Kingston & Area seemed like a wonderful vehicle through which to leave a legacy gift to continue our Mission with youth and seniors,” shared Sister Sandra Shannon, General Superior of the Sisters of Providence.



Community Impact Fund

“We are honored, humbled, and thrilled that the Sisters have entrusted us with this gift to drive meaningful change in our community,” said the Foundation’s Executive Director, Tina Bailey.

Work is well underway to address ACEs. Early results from the funding include the delivery of ‘trauma informed training’ to hundreds of people in the Kingston area. The training has been so well received, that they are working on delivering the training widely across the community. To make this possible, over 40 individuals from a wide range of organizations

– from schools to service agencies to city staff – have now been trained as facilitators to deliver this training to staff within their organizations and the community at large.

The work to address seniors’ isolation and loneliness is just getting underway (your ideas are welcome: send them to tina@cfka.org).

CFKA looks forward to sharing with you, the impacts of this gift over the coming months and years.

■ *Tina Bailey, Executive Director, Community Foundation for Kingston & Area*

...continued from page 5

Creator, we thank you for the gifts you have given to us in the many plants we use for healing. Send your Spirit into this smoke to dispel all negative stereotypes, feelings and attitudes we may have had towards people different from ourselves, in colour, culture, or religion. Cleanse us even now of the unconscious negative feelings towards others that may still be in our hearts and replace these with the energy of this sage as it brings cleansing, protection and blessing into this space.

Then the smoke of the sage was spread around the chapel for smudging.

After the Liturgy of the Word from Isaiah 58:9b-12; Psalm 33 and John 17:20-26, a recording of a drumming song, played by three women from the Four Directions Centre at Queen’s University here in Kingston, accompanied our reflection on what we had heard and experienced. We prayed the Eucharistic prayer for Reconciliation and, in the final blessings, we turned to each of the four directions. As we did so, we prayed for the dawning of a new day for all indigenous people in the Americas, north and south, as they struggle for justice and equality, and

for the healing of the earth itself and all relationships.

As we left the chapel, we heard again the drumming song. A fitting ending to a call to deep reflection and transformation.

■ *Sister Una Byrne*



Sister Una Byrne spreading the smoke of the sage around the chapel.

Jubilee Celebration of 2020 and 2021

“This is the day the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it.”

On Saturday Sept. 18th the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul came together at Providence Motherhouse to celebrate the 5 delayed Jubilarians of 2020 and the 6 Jubilarians of 2021.

Jubilee is usually a time of celebrating with family and friends the 25, 50, 60 or 70 years of service of our religious women. However, Covid-19 changed all of this for us. The 2020 Jubilarians were delayed a year in celebrating and this year’s celebration was delayed from June to September in the hopes that we would be able to gather together. No family or friends were invited into the Motherhouse, but our Eucharistic celebration was live-streamed so that family members and friends across Canada would be able to share some of this occasion with us. This year’s celebration was creatively simplified.

Eight of the 11 Jubilarians were greeted in the Sisters Dining room where photos were taken prior to a delicious dinner at noon hour. This was followed by a Eucharistic celebration at 1:30 to which our outside Sisters were also invited into the Chapel – physically distanced. We knew

some of our friends and family would be observing us via livestream, so we made a point after our renewal of vows to face the camera filming us. Because of limits on numbers, the other two religious congregations – CND and RHSJ joined us only for the main meal at noon hour and for the Eucharistic celebration. Only the outside Sisters of Providence were able to join us for the Simple Reception following the Eucharist.

We are currently in changing times, but we still desire to come together on these joyous occasions to celebrate the many years of ministry of our Sisters. This year’s total comprised 615 years of service by the 11 Jubilarians. For all this we offer our Gratefulness for these women and their service with and for the people of God in Canada, Guatemala and Peru. Our gratefulness extends to all those Sisters who mentored us and have gone before us. We are eternally grateful for all those who have supported us in our ministerial efforts throughout these 615 years. Thank you Sisters!

■ Sister Jeannette Filthaut



2020 Jubilarians from left: Sister Yvette Girard (60 years), Sister Judith Ann Murphy (60 years) and Sister Rita Gleason (60 years).

Not photographed but celebrating: Sister Nöella Séguin (2020, 70 years), and Sister Sara Jiménez Angulo (2020, 25 years).



2021 Jubilarians from left: Sister Jeannette Filthaut (60 years), Sister Susan Pye (60 years), Sister Una Byrne (60 years), Sister Catherine Casey (50 years) and Sister Gayle Desarmia (50 years).

Not photographed but celebrating: Sister Mary Bernadette Reichert (2021, 60 years).



Providence Associates Retreat 2021

In a cosmic moment in early October, 30 Providence Associates and 3 Sisters of Providence gathered via Zoom from our own homes to spend Friday evening and Saturday with Sr. Brenda Peddigrew, RSM, as retreat director once again. We were in the season of Creation, on the cusp of the feast day of Francis of Assisi and the retreat theme was *The Art of Hearing Heartbeats*.

Brenda is a Sister of Mercy from Newfoundland and a professional facilitator and spiritual teacher. She intentionally lives a contemplative integrated spirituality “on a river surrounded by trees and animals” listening to the many rhythms of each day and season. Brenda has studied and practiced for about 10 years with Dr. Robert Sardelo, a Spiritual Psychologist and founder of The School of Integral Psychology in Dallas, Texas.

The retreat began with welcoming new inquirer Carol-Lynn Manion-Wilson and an opening prayer by Providence Associates Director Barbara Baker. This was followed by a reflective viewing of a beautiful slideshow entitled *The World is in Truth a Holy Place*.

During the three sessions, Brenda introduced us to a meditation practice using our imaginations, not words, to focus inward and move from the mind to the heart. This shift of consciousness from the mind to the heart, Brenda cautioned, can present difficulties at first as our minds are constantly working – at times giving us a running commentary! Living in a world that is *not* heart focused but is mind focused has brought us to a world in deep trouble and out of balance, Brenda stressed.

The basic “Heart Presence” practice given to us this weekend brought us outward into



Brenda Peddigrew, RSM

exploring nature and inward into embracing our own heartbeat and the heartbeats of all around us - fellow humans, animals, trees, flowers, water, and rocks. This simple practice can be done anywhere, at any time and, takes from 60 – 90 seconds. It is a steadying exercise that allows

one to take a “time out”, a “pause”, to remain in the present moment. The Heart Presence practice can also open us up to a deeper way of understanding others who are different from us with a more compassionate awareness. One connects with a source of wisdom that is not intellect/ego but heart/soul.

During our time together, many stories were shared about family relationships, animal companions and nature encounters. Brenda gave us the gift of taking a time out, a “pause” in our ramped up, stress filled, mind driven society; it was sacred time, a Kairos gift. During the past 20 months of a global COVID pandemic we have lived through challenges, uncertainties, and angst. This retreat was a blessing, a sacred balm to soothe harried spirits and bring us closer to hearing the life force of creation.

The weekend closed with a joyful commitment ceremony for Dianne Hodgkins. With her mentor Sue MacDonald, her son Ian and granddaughter Summer at Dianne’s home and longtime friend Betty attending via Zoom, Barbara Baker and Sr. Gayle Desarmia received Dianne’s commitment also via Zoom. Dianne received her PA pin from her son Ian and became a Providence Associate.

Congratulations Dianne!

■ Regina Lannon, Providence Associate



Living the Charism and Mission for 160 years

We have lived the Charism and Mission for over 160 years, since our founding in Kingston, Ontario by Sisters of Providence in Montreal. On December 13, 2021, the Sisters of Providence held a small celebration that encompassed storytelling of the past, present and future in the Chapel of Mary, Mother of Compassion at Providence Motherhouse. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions the Sisters invited only a small number of special guests to participate in the Chapel celebration while others could join through the livestream.

General Superior, Sister Sandra Shannon joyfully welcomed everyone with – “What a life we have lived” – from our humble beginnings of responding to the needs of the times, to much change during our Golden years as a Congregation.

Archivist, Veronica Stienburg



Sister Sandra Shannon

spoke of our early history with many new ministry openings. She focused on the hardships and new beginnings of our pioneer Sisters, of their journey west in 1908 to open a hospital in a small remote community of Daysland, Alberta. It was so cold that the Sisters often had frozen food along with terrible prairie blizzards.

At the Congregation’s centenary in 1961, the community comprised 400 Sisters and novices. Now at the 160th we are only 51 Sisters, however our Associate membership exceeds 90

people living in various regions of Canada and Peru.

Three Sisters of Providence and one Providence Associate shared with us personal experiences they had with our Sisters that influenced their lives.

Sister Lucy Kearney explained how being wished “grace of perseverance” at her welcome into the community, enhanced her diverse ministries of teaching and pastoral work.

Sister Pat Amyot spoke of how in the early days, decisions were often made for the younger Sisters, but now these decisions are done collaboratively with discernment on the parts of Leadership and the individual.

Sister Monica Whalen echoed the importance of discernment and dialogue, which she learned even in her intercommunity novitiate experience.





Shirley Kindellan, PA

Shirley Kindellan, Providence Associate, was one of the initial members of the first group of Associates in 1985. Her Sister Prayer Partner prayed the Memorare every day for her as this was Shirley's favourite prayer. Shirley shared Associate Debbie Muise's story of her close connection with the western Sisters and how some 22 years later she became one of the initial western Associates.

At the close of the Eucharistic Celebration, Barbara Baker, Providence Associate Director, Bridget Doherty, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Director and Brian Hogan, Providence Village Board Chair, shared insights into how our Charism and Mission will be carried forward into the future.

Barbara Baker spoke of how the spirituality of the

Associates is reflective of the Sisters' spirituality and charism, of how they are moving to becoming a not-for-profit organization of liminal edge-walkers moving the planet and people to wholeness, as they reach out to the marginalized.

Bridget Doherty spoke of how on January 1st, 2022 a new path is being forged with CHSO (Catholic Health Sponsors of Ontario) to form Healthy Communities with Care for All through the Providence Centre for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

Brian Hogan, spoke of the Sisters' vision of Providence Village at Chapter 2015 and how this non-profit charitable organization, sponsored by the Catholic Health Sponsors of Ontario will partner with Providence Care, Hospice Kingston and the present Motherhouse to bring Hope, Belonging and Well Being to All.

After 160 years' we are still able to Trust in Providence, Serve with Compassion and Walk Forward in Hope.

■ *Sister Jeannette Filthaut*



Bridget Doherty, JPIC Director

PROVIDENCE CENTRE FOR JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

As the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation office of the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul comes to an end, the Providence Centre for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation begins its journey.

Bridget Doherty, formerly the Director of the JPIC office, has moved into a new role as the Director for the Providence Centre for JPIC, and is building on the work started under the guidance and support of the Sisters of Providence.

This new Centre works under the CHSO, and is guided by the Catholic social teachings and the social determinants of health, The Centre's mission is: "A world where all experience compassion, justice, and peace in solidarity with creation."

Look to the CHSO website for more information, WWW.CHCO.CA



Chapter is a Verb

In the midst of this never-ending pandemic, we held a pre-chapter retreat in October. The highlight for me was that we were able to get together. To see each other, to talk to each other, to share meals and laughter once again. After how many months? It seemed like a hundred.

However, it was a serious affair as well. This Chapter will be about transforming ourselves into a new reality in a yet unknown future. That sounds a whole lot better than being about coming to completion. As Sister Sandra reminded us, “God is always calling us to grow and change.” According to science, no energy comes to completion; it is always transformed. Yet, we must also be realistic as we await the surprise of Providence.

The Leadership Team has hired a wonderful person and canon lawyer, Sister Bonnie MacLellan, the present Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie, to be our facilitator. How good does that get! Sister Bonnie was accompanied by another Sister of St. Joseph, Sister Mary Jo Radey, who led us in a beautiful process where we reflected upon and shared in table groups our personal call, our covenantal commitment and

our communal transformation as Sisters of Providence. Sister Sandra, our own General Superior, challenged us to say “Yes” to this journey of transformation together with imagination and creativity, sensitive to the needs of the world; that the congregation’s future lay in our hands.

During this retreat we pondered the life of a butterfly which begins with the hatched and hungry caterpillar that eventually munches its way into the larva stage where it rests in its own soup for a period of time. Who would ever believe that a beautiful butterfly would emerge from that mess to make gentle flying visits here and there pollinating flowers in order to make our world so colourful and beautiful?

After working for many years like busy caterpillars ourselves, in our various ministries, are we now in the soupy stage? If so, what will emerge in order for us to continue to serve the world in a different way than before? Through this gathering and this process, I think the stage was set for the important work of Chapter ahead of us and – don’t forget, the Surprise of Providence!

■ *Sister Pauline Lally*



Sister Mary Jo Radey



Sisters of Providence sitting in groups for discussion.

