

*A publication for friends of the  
Congregation of the Humility of Mary*



## A Challenge from the Spirit

*by Sister Irene Muñoz, CHM*

**M**y life as a religious has been fascinating, life-giving and filled with growth from all the ministries I have had from the beginning to this present day. I thank God for Pope John XXIII and his marvelous gift of the Spirit in touching us all during Vatican II. The doors to new possibilities were opened and the fresh air of hope penetrated us all.

It was in the late sixties, in Muscatine, Iowa, that I began my ministry with

*God was manifested to me in so many ways by the faces and actions of the people I served...I was the one being evangelized!!!*

this hope—to share my gifts with the migrant farm workers; people of the land who traveled in search of work and survival. I was a bilingual, bicultural nurse and prayed to God to guide me in this new adventure of ministry to God's poor.

There were so many surprises I encountered with myself and others that I realized later that the hand of God was present. Over 2,000 farm workers made their way to the Midwest from areas of the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, Florida, Mexico, Arkansas and many other roads. I was graced to do this work with the people of the land who had so little but were rich in the love of God.

God was manifested to me in many ways by the faces and actions of the people I served. I encountered the

God of humility, suffering, hope and compassion. I was the one being evangelized! I was the one chosen to meet this God of mother Earth—the migrants were here to harvest the tomatoes. To this day, I bite into a tomato and think of all those hard-working families.

The migrants spent long hours in extreme heat to bring the crops to the factories and to our tables. Often they suffered poor health, inadequate housing, and discrimination as they ventured into the community. They were invisible people hidden in the shadows of America.

I was one of many who developed a health clinic for the farm workers. It was scheduled in the evenings so that availability would be good for them. The Episcopal Church was very generous in letting us use their facilities. The free clinics were staffed voluntarily by doctors and medical

*-Challenge continued page 3*



*Photos: Sr. Irene Muñoz in the late 1960s visiting workers in a tomato field in Muscatine, Iowa. Sr. Irene used her nursing skills as she ministered to the migrant field workers and their families.  
Bottom photo: Sr. Irene today.*

# Fall 2016

## Volume 14 Issue 3

The Flame is published three times a year for the Congregation of the Humility of Mary and its friends.

Our Mission: We, the members of the Congregation of the Humility of Mary, call one another to live the Gospel with simplicity and joy following the example of Mary.

Like our founders, we strive to be attentive to the call of the Spirit in the signs of our times, especially the needs of the poor and the powerless.

We commit ourselves as individuals and as a congregation to work for justice within the human family and to care for the earth itself.

*Continue to love each other as sisters and brothers. Don't neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Keep in mind those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them. And be mindful of those who are being treated badly, since you know what they are enduring.*

*Hebrews 13: 1-3*

### Congregation of the Humility of Mary

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*Celebrating CHM staff anniversaries in the backyard at Humility of Mary Center are: Sr. Greta Fitzgerald, CHM vice president; Lisa Gay, 5 years cook; Kris Brutsche, 10 years maintenance coordinator; Linda Pedersen, 5 years finance accountant; Sue Newman, 10 years housekeeping, Barb Fenton, 5 years overnight staff, Sr. Johanna Rickl, CHM president.*

Dear Friends,

Several years ago at our CHM community assembly time, I heard from five or six sisters about their ministry that year. I was struck by a common thread that seemed to go through each one's experience. They were all interacting with different persons, many on the margins of society. My interpretation of what I detected as the common aspect of the relationships was that the sister seemed to hold up a mirror to each person. Despite the different ministries, each sister's "mirror" reflected back to the person her or his own goodness and permitted the individual to see him or herself as someone valued and loved. This empowered person could then more readily find meaning in life and motivation to use personal gifts for the benefit of self and others.

Our CHM charism statement asserts that we "share the fullness of life with all we meet, especially the poor and those in need". By being "down to earth" folks, we sisters can connect with people who are burdened with cares and we can walk with them in solidarity. As pilgrims journeying together, we all find support and hope for a better tomorrow.

In Davenport, Humility of Mary Housing and Humility of Mary Shelter are two ministries that people associate with our community of sisters. It is good to be appreciated for the services offered by these CHM ministries. But I believe a more essential offering is our commitment to the God who calls us to form a loving community and inspires us to keep sharing that life-giving love even in the midst of troubling situations.

As you read this issue of "The Flame" I believe you will find these same elements in the cover story about the migrant ministry of Sister Irene Muñoz. Associate Lyle Hellyer comments about sharing in the CHM education ministry while highlighting the spiritual connections that went with it. Sister Jude Fitzpatrick demonstrated moral choices rooted in her spirituality as a basis for pragmatic support of Holy Family School. Staff anniversaries signal the partnering in ministry that is enhanced by bonds of friendship. Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat, another ministry of CHMs, offers a place and programs for self-reflection nurturing one's own spiritual development as well as one's commitment to service. I hope that your enjoyment of these stories reminds you again of why you value the Congregation of the Humility of Mary enough to support its ministries and the laypersons and sisters who work to keep holding up these life-giving "mirrors" to all those they meet. Thank you for choosing to journey with us!

*Sister Johanna Rickl  
CHM President*





*Late 1960s: Sr. Irene caring for a migrant family in Muscatine, Iowa.*

*-Challenge continued from page 1*

students from the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics—all were willing to help. Many times there were celebrations and parties after clinic hours. I ministered to these people for the next 20 years.

In the years after Muscatine I spent time as a student in pastoral education and worked in Hispanic ministry in the Diocese of Denver for a decade. I then returned to Iowa, my home state, and where the Congregation of the Humility of Mary is based. It was the year 2000 that I was employed as a pastoral minister by the Church of St. Mary of the Visitation in Ottumwa, Iowa, which is where I continue as a multi-cultural minister to this day.

So much within the country was changing rapidly as new people—immigrants from other countries—came to the United States. I was privileged and blessed to be able to minister and learn from the

wonderful people who came from the countries of Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Bosnia. On arriving in this country there were many issues they faced that had to be attended to such as how to rent, where to find schools or a hospital

and the emergency room, and many other concerns in adjusting to this new country.

It seemed to me that we were always the first ones to be contacted at the Church of St. Mary of The Visitation. The church is a safe, holy and secure place to seek advice and help. In those years there were long lines awaiting me as I arrived for work.

The immigrants found Ottumwa a good place to settle with their families. There was work and they were pleased to be able to receive a decent wage in providing for their families. It was a blessing for me again to share my gifts and receive their many multicultural gifts that allowed me to see the face of God in so many unique ways that have helped and shaped me in my journey to God.

I know the immigration issue has been a concern for many. I believe the Spirit is moving throughout our world and is calling us to reach out to our sisters and brothers who are vulnerable and suffering—especially the refugees in today's world. We are all challenged to follow what the Spirit is asking!



*Today Sr. Irene serves as a multi-cultural minister at St. Mary of the Visitation in Ottumwa, Iowa.*

## Career Highlight = Spiritual Connections

by Joyce Bieber, Development Director

For the Congregation of the Humility of Mary (CHM) and Indian Hills Community College, the events that occurred in Ottumwa, Iowa, in the late 70s/early 80s, were some of the most significant in the organizations' histories.

For Lyle Hellyer, president of Indian Hills Community College from 1973 to 2001, the sale of the Ottumwa Heights College, a private college owned and operated by the Sisters of Humility, to Indian Hills, a public community college, not only provided a career highlight but also inspired enduring friendships and spiritual connections.

Lyle remembers proceeding with caution when proposing the idea of merging the two educational institutions. That apprehension soon subsided as Lyle and Sr. Bernadine Pieper, who was serving as president of Ottumwa Heights, began meeting. "We became fast friends," he says. He credits Sr. Bernadine, Sr. St. John Ven Horst, and other CHMs for selling the concept to the doubters. There were some in the region who didn't embrace the concept of the arts and science education of Ottumwa Heights and vocational and technical programs of Indian Hills existing in the same college. The CHMs set out to change the minds of the naysayers and they had great success in garnering the needed support. "I don't think that door of opportunity would have opened without Sr. Bernadine's leadership and vision regarding how beneficial this would be to Ottumwa and southern Iowa."

According to Lyle, the arrangement combined the beautiful and functional Ottumwa Heights campus with the resources of the public community college. "I look back on it as one of



*Lyle Hellyer, with his daughter, Jan Stewart, enjoy gifting CHM Sisters with flowers on special occasions.*

my greatest accomplishments and fondest memories." The relationship forged between Lyle and the CHMs didn't stop with the merger of the colleges. "The sisters were amazing people. I made many dear friends among the CHMs," he stated. Lyle continued to visit Sr. Bernadine regularly until her death in 2000. He marvels at the impact they had on each other. One of the agreements in the sale of Ottumwa Heights includes the maintenance of Mt. Olivet Cemetery, the final resting place for many CHMs, on the Indian Hills campus. "My wife is now buried there and I, and other family members, plan to be buried there with the CHMs."

Lyle is a member of the CHM Magnificat Society and he and his daughter, Jan Stewart, are CHM Associates. He retired from Indian Hills in 2001 and lives in Arizona.

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*"Next year Indian Hills will administer the liberal arts program at the Ottumwa Heights campus. Interaction between programs will be mutually beneficial...Monetary savings will be effected...Continuation of Ottumwa Heights cultural programs in music, theater and the visual arts is assured... One strong college is preferable to the likelihood of two weak ones within the next several years...I am a graduate of Ottumwa Heights College. I was a member of the board of trustees for 11 years. I am now the chief administrative officer. So it is not without sadness that I take part in the planning of a new merged institution. I believe, though, that such is the right direction and what we call an end is a beginning."*



*-Sr. Bernadine Pieper, 1978*



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*Sister Cecelia Vandenberg (3rd from left) is quite the lady at 98 years old. Over the summer she attended a Quad City Bandits baseball game and was recognized by the announcer and applauded by the crowd! She also took a trip to Montana, her home state. While there she visited Sr. Johnelle Howanach, Sr. Lynn Mousel and Associate Melissa Clark, pictured above. Sr. Cecelia lives at the Humility of Mary Center in Davenport, Iowa, where she is active in a ministry of prayer and witness.*

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- in memory continued next page



Sister Jude Fitzpatrick was honored on October 15, 2016, by the Holy Family Catholic School—Des Moines Foundation at the annual Barn Bash for her role in helping the multicultural inner-city school survive and thrive after severe financial issues threatened it in the early 1990s. The foundation acknowledged the many hats Sister has worn through the years in service to others. The last hat indicates she's an angel among us!

## *The Greatest Joy Awaits Believers*



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Maxine O'Connell  
April 16, 1924-  
August 28, 2016

*- in memory continued from page 5*

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# Enhancing our Spirituality

by Kathleen Storms, SSND, Director, Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat

I was recently reviewing the history of Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat. Clearly, from the beginnings with the New Horizons of Faith Board of Directors to the present ministry, The Prairie's constant goal has been to support men and women of faith.

This summer we were truly blessed through retreats and programs that enhance our spirituality:

- Participants were introduced to SoulCollage®, a process of creating a deck of cards from magazine photos that depict important aspects of our spiritual journey—our companions, mentors, faith community and God image. The cards convey spiritual attitudes that guide us through discernment. A great tool for ongoing spiritual growth.

- Contemplating the Holy in Nature Through the Arts. This week-long retreat introduced retreatants to sketchbook, mandala and Zentangle, photography, acrylic painting and poetry—five ways to sharpen contemplative seeing. The end result was a keener sense of God as source of all creation and present in all that is important to us. The summer beauty at the Prairie was the perfect setting.

- Holy Family Parish Pilgrimage Journey. As a way to celebrate Pope Francis' Year of Mercy, 35 Holy Family parishioners came to The Prairie to meditatively walk the Labyrinth, to review eras of creation as God's creative energy through walking the Cosmic Walk, to sit by the pond to ponder God's gracious mercy.

- Father Bob Miller and Mark Nimo led a day of prayer and healing in late August as they reflected on A New Pentecost for a New Evangelization. Retreatants were moved by the work of the Spirit in their lives.

We are in the process of creating the Prairie-sponsored program calendar

for 2017 which will include the following spirituality topics:

- Come to the Quiet, a monthly day of reflection. This year our focus is on Abundant and Compassionate Living. Each month we will focus on the life and works of important saints. Pat Shea will lead these days of reflection.

- A week of reflection by Isa Gucciardi, founder of Sacred Stream in San Francisco, CA. Her offerings are a book reading of, "Coming to Peace"; a Friday session on Embracing the Sacred Feminine, and an overnight retreat—The Path of Service and the Nature of Suffering. These are not to be missed programs May 8, 12 and 13.

- Father Michael Joncas, theologian and well known composer of "On Eagles Wings," will do an evening presentation on music and the new rite of Liturgy in Davenport on Thursday, March 23, followed by a weekend retreat at Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat on "Vatican II, Fifty Years Later."

- A spirituality book series, new this year, will be offered every two months, based on popular writers—Karen Armstrong, Miriam Therese Winter, Joan Chittister, Richard Rohr and Elizabeth Wagner. This series is based on time honored Lectio Divina from a variety of spiritual traditions.

- A series of films with guided reflection during winter months. Included in our listing are "As it is in Heaven," "The Way," "Legend of Baggar Vance," the "Diving Bell and the Butterfly," and "Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring" These films offer food for thought on topics of renewal, redemption, healing and love.

*Our motivation to serve others and fulfill our calling comes from our hearts and commitment to spirituality.*

*-Congregation of the Humility of Mary*



**Watch for The Prairie Program Calendar to be published and mailed by early December.**

And finally, our inaugural Sabbatical for Sisters is being offered for women religious seeking spiritual renewal at this point in their lives. The sabbatical is scheduled for January 26 - February 28. We are excited to share that we have 6 participants (maximum of 8) from Australia, Canada and across the United States. A winter extended retreat at The Prairie is the perfect venue for reflection, renewal, restoration and contemplation. Contact us if you are interested in learning more about this special time.

**These are just a small smattering of programs that we continue to offer annually. We will also plan for you a special program of prayer and renewal or will host a group that just needs a space for retreat.**

As always, we are open to spiritual seekers from all faith communities. Let us together feed our souls and nurture our spirits in the tradition of the Congregation of the Humility of Mary.



**K**orey's family entered the Humility of Mary Housing, Inc. (HMHI), program in December 2015. She works full time as a lab assistant, proudly giving her family stability—with your help.

**She sends you this message:**

"I'm writing this in pure thankfulness for what this program at HMHI has done for my family. I'm a single mother of four girls who was in a horrible situation and found myself homeless. I reached out to this program in desperation, and they reached out immediately with open arms. I now have a roof over my children's heads and stability back in our lives. If it wasn't for the people who work here and all the volunteers that dedicate their time, I don't know where people like me would be; I could only imagine.

Thank you isn't enough for all that you do for my family and me!"

*Join with us as we share the fullness of life with all we meet, especially the poor and those in need.*



**Humility of Mary Shelter, Inc.**

*...because our community cares*

**H**umility of Mary Shelter, Inc., a sponsored ministry of the Congregation of the Humility of Mary, is an emergency shelter providing temporary housing and services that offer men and women experiencing homelessness the opportunity to become more stable: emotionally, mentally, and physically.

Providing in 2014-15:

- 36,665 nights of shelter
- to 693 people
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- Supporting the most vulnerable
- Helping restore productive citizens
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