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## Fire destroys historic boarding school in DeSmet, Idaho

*Thursday evening, February 3, we learned the sad news that the historic boarding school of the Coeur d'Alene Native Americans in DeSmet, Idaho, where our Providence Sisters ministered for many years, burned to the ground. The fire began about 2:30 a.m. Sister Dolores Ellwart, SP, who continues to minister in DeSmet, woke and could see the flames over the top of the mission church which is between her house and the school.*

### Mary Immaculate School

was founded by the Sisters of Providence in DeSmet, Idaho, in 1878, on the site of Sacred Heart Mission, which had been established among the Coeur d'Alene tribe by the Jesuits in 1842.

Typical for early Providence missions, the school began with a small group of sisters. The sisters who arrived on November 22, 1878, were only three: Mary Hyacinthe (Boucher), Mary Constance (Dubrule), and Mary Francis (Pinto). The convent school was blessed on December 1, and the classes began the very next day, even though only the first floor had been completed, with 30 boys and girls in attendance.

Those first sisters did not enjoy access to many comforts, but necessities were provided by the Coeur d'Alenes. The Chronicles note that "we have had to rely on

the Indians for supplies. Many a time an Indian brought a sack of flour or a portion of meat. When we asked them 'Why?' the answer was, "Our hearts told us the sisters had no more supplies." The sisters taught school, visited the sick, and helped care for the mission church.

After nearly 100 years of operation, there were few Sisters of Providence available to staff the school, so Sisters Dolores Ellwart and Imelda Flynn saw to its closing in 1974.

Sister Dolores (Sister Camilla) was born in 1929 in the tiny farm community of DeSmet, Idaho, where she still serves in ministry today.

As a child, she lived in a little house below the convent school on the hill. When she was 6 years old, she watched from a big window behind the couch as the mission burned.

Her father was foreman of a farm owned by the Sisters of Providence and her mother, a nurse, was an enrolled member of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe. Her mother's family, the Nixons, are one of five families that were adopted by the Coeur d'Alenes as full members in gratitude for helping the tribe. Sister Dolores' family members do have Native American heritage, although not from the Coeur d'Alenes.

She entered the religious community in Seattle after graduation in 1947. She wanted to become a nurse, but was assigned to teach instead. In 1965 Sister Dolores returned to DeSmet, where she taught all of the grades at Mary Immaculate School and also was superior and principal.



*Sr. Dolores Ellwart awarding Bonnie Felsman her diploma, Head Start Program, Mary Immaculate School, DeSmet, Idaho, 1966.*

When the school closed in 1974, she moved across the road to Sacred Heart Mission as parish minister. She also was chairperson of the school board for a number of years at the tribal school started by the Coeur d'Alenes.

Sister Dolores has lived in the same trailer on the reservation, 14 miles south of Coeur d'Alene, for 37 years. She teaches religion to youth and adults, prepares children for First Communion and Confirmation, and makes home visits to the elderly and the homebound in Worley, Plummer and DeSmet.

"As long as I am of help to the people, I will be a presence," Sister Dolores says. She faithfully participates in three Masses on Sundays and attends most functions, and travels to Spokane each weekend to be with other sisters. ●

## Fire in Chile ravages buildings on Sisters of Providence campus

Prayers are needed once again for the Sisters of Providence in Chile. A raging fire on the Sisters of Providence campus in Santiago on Monday, January 24, destroyed the Residencia Nuestra Senora de Dolores (home of aged women). It also destroyed the historic Sisters of Providence church and Bernarda Morin Province's museum on the campus.

More than 15 volunteer fire departments responded to the scene to fight flames that were up to 50 meters high. The 30 women who reside at the home for the aged were safely evacuated and no injuries were reported.

General Superior Kathryn Rutan, SP, reported that the novitiate collapsed and there was significant fire damage to the SP Church, which is "a national monument and a very precious patrimony of the Sisters". The province's museum houses many artifacts from Mother Bernarda, foundress of the Sisters of Providence in Chile, and other sisters.



*General Superior Kathryn Rutan, SP, reported that the novitiate collapsed and there was significant fire damage to the SP Church, which is a national monument and a very precious patrimony of the Sisters.*

*Coincidentally, this photo was taken just hours before the fire by Providence Health & Services employee Sue Painter.*



In a message to the international community, Sister Kathryn wrote: "We are very grateful to you and to all the Sisters for their prayers and support for the Sisters of Bernarda Morin Province at this time. In a message to the Bernarda Morin Provincial Leadership Team yesterday, I wrote:

*There are no words to express our deep union with you at this time of loss and sadness. The fire that has destroyed the precious patrimony of Bernarda Morin Province is a tragedy, not only for the Province, but for the entire Congregation. The losses of this fire are not able to be measured, are not replaceable, and the consequences will be felt for a long time.*

"We're grateful that no lives were lost, that no one has suffered physical injuries and that the Sisters were able to rescue the remains of Mother Bernarda from her new crypt in the Church in time. However, we understand that the Provincial Museum, with its precious artifacts, books and historical treasures, was destroyed in the fire. As of yesterday evening (Tuesday) under the watchful eyes of the firemen, the fire was smoldering and continuing to burn in some places. . .

"We count on your prayers and we trust that, even in this painful and tragic event, there is a loving Providence that brings new life out of the ashes. This faith is being expressed by the Sisters of Bernarda Morin Province even as they live through the tragedy and become aware of its consequences."

Two Sisters of Providence in initial formation from Chile, Srs. Marcia Gatica and Marisol Ávila, are staying with the sisters in Seattle as part of an international formation experience. They have been following the news closely and Sr. Marisol has provided translations of the latest developments in Chilean newspapers online. ●

## International Formation Experience

Srs. Marisol Àvila (left) and Marcia Gatica, visitors to Mother Joseph Province from Chile, chose this photo of them with the Seattle skyline as a backdrop for Caritas.



# Two sisters from Chile arrive in Mother Joseph Province

Meet the two sisters from Bernarda Morin Province in Chile who arrived in Seattle on December 30, 2010, to begin an international experience for sisters in initial formation.

## Sister Marcia Gatica, SP

**S**ister Marcia was born in the far south of Chile (the Patagonia). Her parents were both widowed when they met. Her father, now in his 80s, had seven sons. Her mother, in her early 60s, had two sons. Together, they have three children, making a total of 12, of which Sister Marcia is the youngest. Eight of her siblings live in Argentina, and the rest in Chile.

Sister Marcia met the Sisters of Providence at their mission in Coyhaique. "My experience was special, and providential, with the sisters at the mission." While trying to call a cousin who is a sister in the Servants of Mary religious community, Sister Marcia was given a wrong telephone number. "I called the Sisters of Providence by accident," she recalls. "I told the sister who answered, 'Can I talk to you then?' and she said yes." Discovering that some of the Providence sisters lived close to her home, Sister Marcia decided to walk over to see them.

"From the providential call I was able to meet and talk with the Sisters of Providence."

Sister Marcia entered the Sisters of Providence in 2002. Her ministry has been serving as a campus minister while going to school in the evening to get a psychology degree. When she returns to Chile after her international experience, she plans to go to Temuco to finish her degree and work at the sisters' school there. ●

## Sisters visiting from Haiti and Cameroon share their thoughts



**G**reat is my joy to share a little of my beautiful international experience in Spokane. A month has already gone by in a fall atmosphere where everything is changing, the leaves on the multi-colored trees, the constant cold, for me, who comes from a corner of Africa. That's how it is, a new experience where everything is new for me: the country, the climate, the culture, the language. It's a new life, a new adaptation, a new experience full of discoveries and wonders.

I am adapting fairly well and I get by well enough in English. Our community life with four sisters is going well, in an atmosphere of daily prayers, of respect, attention to the other, of listening, of dialogue and charity. I am

## Marisol Àvila, SP

**S**ister Marisol was born in Linares, Chile, and has one sister and six brothers. Her father died last year and her mother and siblings all live in Linares.

She had been in another community for 17 years, and then left. Five years later she met the Sisters of Providence while working in one of their schools, teaching history and religion.

Like Sister Marcia, Sister Marisol entered the Sisters of Providence in 2002 and they were postulants together. During their novitiate in Chile, the two met Salvadoran Sisters Margarita Hernandez and Vilma Franco, from Mother Joseph Province.

After two years as postulants and two years as novices, both Sister Marcia and Sister Marisol are now in temporary vows. When they renew vows on March 25, they will have been in the community for five years as vowed sisters. Sister Marisol's ministry has been working in a parish in Argentina for the last three years.

Sister Marcia turned 34 on December 31, the day after she arrived in the United States, and celebrated at a New Year's Eve party. Sister Marisol turned 50 on March 15, the same birthday as housemate Sister Dianne Crawford. Vocation Director Sister Joan Gallagher said a grand celebration was planned.

"My experience is now another face of Providence, both of the sisters and the realities in which they work," Sister Marisol said of her time in Mother Joseph Province so far. "From the experience, I hope to deepen my call to be Providence in an international and multicultural community." ●

lucky to have two classes of English at home twice weekly, and as ministry, I am helping Sister Liz (Gress) distribute food to the poor, which gives me a lot of joy. This is what I have been doing in Spokane. Little by little, the bird makes its nest; (Slow and steady wins the race goes the saying.) All is going well with the grace of God. Providence of God, I thank you for everything! ●

## Hortense Demia-Mbailaou, SP

**G**reetings and friendly regards to each of you in the name of our Lord Jesus-Christ!

My experience in Mother Joseph Province, so far, has been very fruitful. I am very happy to share with you what I am doing as a ministry, as well as other things, during my international experience in Spokane, Wash.

Each Wednesday, I go to work with Marita (Capili), a candidate, among the poor women. The women come for breakfast; then we wash the dishes and we prepare the dinner. Sometimes we prepare it together or we alternate. This work does me a lot of good and I "feel at ease", since I enjoy working with the poor.

There is another ministry which, every Monday, is for the benefit of women and men. They come with a list of things, and they ask for what they need. With another person from the novitiate, I help to prepare the toiletries and we distribute them. I enjoy this activity and I pray so that I can keep on carrying it out.

Each Sunday, I go to the parish with Sister Vilma (Franco) to help with the catechism classes to 5- and 6-year-olds and older children.

Each week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, I have a 2-hour English class. Each morning, Sister Josie (Ramac) helps me to read English. In this field, I realize I am making good progress and I understand this language better. On Monday afternoon I practice English by conversing, for an hour, with a student of the Gonzaga University.

On Saturday afternoon, I go outside of the residence with other sisters to take ballet exercises. For me it is a good physical activity. Please pray for me and pray for Haiti.

One of our local community's activities with the novitiate community is faith sharing every Wednesday evening. Each house takes turns facilitating. I get to know the Sisters in a deeper way with this sharing.

Visiting the Sisters at Mount St. Joseph is also another opportunity to get to know our elderly Sisters. They share some of the history of the province and it's very interesting to hear them talk about their experiences, some of their joys and challenges. They talked about how it was before and how different was their formation from ours. ●

## Mirlande Désiré, SP

