

Caritas

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Sisters of Providence announce two recipients of 2013 Mother Joseph Award



Teresa Bigelow

Teresa Bigelow, co-founder of Safe Crossings Foundation in Seattle, and Dr. Darin Neven, an emergency room physician and medical director for the Consistent Care Program at Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center, Spokane, have been chosen by the Sisters of Providence to receive the 2013 Mother Joseph Award.

The Mother Joseph Award is given annually to a person who “exemplifies the values and courage of Mother Joseph,” the first provincial superior of the Sisters of Providence in the West.

Teresa received the award at a reception May 13 in the lobby of Providence Hospice of Seattle. The award will be presented to Dr. Neven at a later date. Look for a story about him in the fall issue of *Caritas*.



Darin Neven, MD

Decades ago, attorney Teresa Bigelow was in

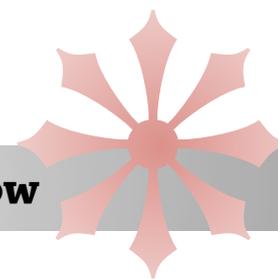
the lobby of a Seattle health-care client, waiting for a scheduled meeting, when she picked up literature that told the story of Mother Emilie Gamelin, foundress of the Sisters of Providence. Teresa was moved by the description of how the young woman in Montreal turned her sorrow over the deaths of her three young sons and her husband into works of charity that began in 1843 and blossomed. That moment in the health-care lobby is ironic because Teresa is being honored in 2013 with the religious community's

Mother Joseph Award for beginning a work of charity that stemmed from her own personal sorrow.

When Teresa's husband, attorney Bill Robertson, died of cancer in February of 1989 at just 34 years of age, she had three young children, 6-year-old Colleen, 5-year-old Ian, and six-month-old Duncan. Since Bill's diagnosis the previous June, the couple had sought a grief counselor to work with them and their children. They were able to find help because they had the means to pay for it, Teresa recalled. “I had a career, a supportive family, and enough money, but I asked myself, ‘what’s it like for someone else?’”

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“Outreach to children has always been dear to the hearts of the Sisters of Providence,” said Provincial Councillor Jo Ann Showalter, SP. “Just as the needs of children and others were always integral to the mission of Mother Joseph, we see that same deep love and compassion expressed through the untiring efforts of Teresa Bigelow and her love of children and her willingness to tackle the huge unmet need. Mother Joseph must be smiling!”



Teresa discovered that there was no free, comprehensive grief support program in King County for children facing the terminal illness and death of a loved one. “Grief is not a diagnosable illness,” she explained. “There were some programs to help, but nothing prior to the death of a parent or loved one. Help before the death is important for the child and it is a godsend for the ill parent to be reassured that ‘my children will be alright.’”

In Bill’s memory, Teresa made it her mission to change that. “I wanted to do something in memory of Bill that was significant and that would impact people’s lives. I learned from my mother that there’s nothing like helping other people to help you get through hard times.”

She set a goal of bringing grief and bereavement counseling to children facing those emotional challenges and to ensure that the service was available to all families at no cost. Teresa and Carol McMullin, a friend facing similar circumstances after the death of her husband Ken, began the McMullin–Robertson Foundation, now known as Safe Crossings Foundation. They approached Hospice of Seattle about partnering to provide children with not only grief counseling after a death, but also anticipatory counseling.

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Financial support came from a college roommate of Bill’s and from the law firm Williams Kastner, where he and Ken had worked.

Initially, Safe Crossings Foundation had a small board of three attorneys and met once a year. For the first 10 years the foundation did no fundraising, but existed on the interest and dividends earned on the initial donations. “We kind of let it chug along, but there is a huge need in the community and, as word got out, referrals increased. Families were referred through Hospice of Seattle initially, but we began getting referrals from school counselors, mental-health professionals, and people in the community who knew about the program,” Teresa said. The first fundraiser was a success, and things took off from there.

Today, the foundation is the largest contributor to the Safe Crossings Program, Providence Hospice of Seattle’s grief program for children and teens. The program has served more than 27,000 children, most of them in King County, although no one is turned away. The program has been blessed with more than \$1.8 million in donations from the foundation since 1990. There is no charge for services and families are not asked for donations. Safe Crossings Foundation has helped to fund the grief program and expansion into grief counseling in schools, day camps and Camp Erin, an overnight weekend camp for children and teens.

It was Teresa’s determination, leadership and values, like those of Mother Joseph, that led Gary Crum, director of the Providence Hospice of Seattle Foundation, to nominate her for the Mother Joseph Award.

Being compared to Mother Joseph is “very flattering,” Teresa said. “So many are deserving of recognition and never get it. It is very nice to be recognized and acknowledged. This program embodies the values of Providence and of Mother Joseph by reaching out to take care of the vulnerable and the needy.”

For 17 years, Teresa served as Safe Crossings Foundation’s president and today she is an emeritus member of its board. Her oldest daughter, Colleen Robertson, who has worked for nonprofit organizations, also is a passionate Safe Crossings Foundation board member.

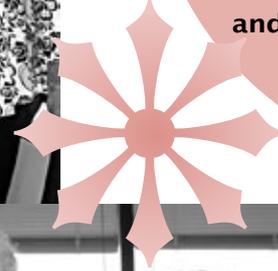
In 2008, Providence Hospice of Seattle Foundation awarded Teresa its highest honor, the Hospice Award of Distinction, for her impact on grieving children.

Service to others is something that comes naturally to Teresa. A Seattle native, her late father John had been executive director of the Washington State Hospital Association, where he was familiar with the Sisters of Providence and their health-care ministries. Her 98-year-old mother Virginia was director of volunteer services for Seattle Public Schools in addition to being a volunteer herself. Teresa has one sister and two brothers, one of whom is a former Providence administrator.

Teresa retired 12 years ago from the law firm of Bennett, Bigelow & Leedom, P.S., after a 25-year practice in health-care law, representing Providence hospitals and other health-care organizations. After retiring, she turned her attention to her remaining child at home, her aging parents, and to “strengthening and expanding Safe Crossings so that it would continue to provide services into the future. This involved



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▲ Pictured at the Seattle award presentation are (from left) Sisters Judith Desmarais, Mary Hawkins, Maureen Newman, Lucille Dean, Susanne Hartung and Anita Butler, MJ Award recipient Teresa Bigelow, and Sisters Barbara Schamber, Celia Chappell and Jo Ann Showalter.



▲ Provincial Superior Judith Desmarais (right) presents the 2013 Mother Joseph Award to Teresa Bigelow.

▶ The Bigelow family includes (from left) brother Peter, Mother Joseph Award recipient Teresa, mother Virginia and sister Ann (Bigelow) Bergman.



expanding the board of directors and hiring staff.” She remarried four years ago to Eric Larson, an internist and executive director of the Group Health Research Institute. Since 2007 she has served on the board of trustees (now the community board) of Swedish Medical Center.

Safe Crossings Program continues to be unique. Of 14 other bereavement programs in the Puget Sound area, only one deals with anticipatory grief, according to Juliana Perez, executive director of the Safe Crossings Foundation.

Its counselors, “walking the journey to dealing with death” with children from toddlers through 17 years of age, do what others do not have the expertise to do.

Does it make a difference? A friend of Safe Crossings Foundation board member Kim Isaacs tells a story about one of Kim’s three young children who received Safe Crossings services before and after the death of Kim’s husband from cancer. Her young son was overheard providing comfort and talking about the grieving process – “Grief is a normal process and you can get sad” – to a schoolmate whose father had died.

“It is an amazing thing to have a child speak to another child that way,” Juliana said.

“For me, this is an inspiration in that here’s a woman who lost her husband and was left with three young children, but went outside herself to help others,” Juliana said. “Twenty-four years later, Safe Crossings Foundation is strong, well-respected and well-managed because of what she started.” ●

2013

Jubilee Celebration

Twelve Sisters of Providence mark 50, 60 and 70 years of religious life

A dozen Sisters of Providence will celebrate 50, 60 and 70 years of religious life at 11 a.m. Saturday, August 3, at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, 7000 35th Avenue SW, Seattle. Concelebrants for the liturgy, which will be followed by a reception in Guadalupe Hall, will be Rev. John R. Walmesley and Very Rev. Michael G. Ryan.

Look for the Jubilarians' stories on the Sisters of Providence website (www.sistersofprovidence.net) after August 3.

Irene Charron, SP (Sister Ann)

Born in Duluth, Minn., Sister Irene Charron was raised in Yakima, Wash., and knew she wanted to be a Sister of Providence from her first day of school at St. Joseph Academy. She entered the religious community in 1942, after a year at Seattle University and a year teaching second grade at St. Joseph's. She made profession in 1944 and spent the next 15 years teaching, in Vancouver, Wash.; Fairbanks, Alaska; Yakima; Sun Valley, Calif.; Moxee City, Wash.; and at Maryville Academy, Des Plaines, Ill. She was librarian at Providence High School in Burbank, Calif., and then patient visitor at St. Elizabeth Hospital in Yakima, followed by 17 years as medical librarian at Providence Yakima Medical Center and then as sister representative. ●



Sister Rita left St. Vincent's as the last Sister of Providence to serve as an administrator of a Portland hospital. She moved to Olympia, Wash., where she helped at the school at St. Michael's Parish and served as discharge planner at the new St. Peter Hospital there. She returned to administration in 1977 at Mount St. Vincent, Seattle, and then served as counselor for ministry in the former Sacred Heart Province from 1985 to 1988. In 1991 she returned to St. Peter Hospital as sister representative. She eventually returned to Portland, living on the Providence Portland Medical Center campus as she did volunteer ministry and served on community boards. She left Portland to move to Seattle in fall 2011. ●

Lucille (Lucy) Villanova, SP (Sister Mary Eugenius)

Sister Lucy Villanova is an artist whose more than 50-year ministry in education and art took her from elementary school to college and from Seattle to Southern California and Anchorage, Alaska. Born in Clearing, Ill., she was educated in schools in Chicago and Des Plaines, Ill. She received a bachelor's degree in education from the College (now University) of Great Falls, Mont., and a master's degree in art from the University of Notre Dame. She entered the Sisters of Providence at Mount St. Vincent, Seattle, in 1942 and professed first vows in 1943. Her first mission was assisting with the care of children age 3 to 12 at Providence Academy in Vancouver, Wash.



Among the places where she taught are two high schools in the Archdiocese of Seattle, Blanchet and John F. Kennedy, the College of Great Falls, where she taught art to teachers, and for 16 years at Providence High School in Burbank, Calif. She also spent three years at Catholic Communications Northwest, where she previewed, purchased and rented films for church ministry in Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

Producing and sharing art has been a constant in Sister Lucy's life. One of her largest projects was a mosaic she designed for the baptistry of St. Finbar Church in Burbank, to commemorate the sisters' contribution to education in the parish from 1945 to 1984. The work, made from three panels of Byzantine glass tiles, took 700 hours to complete. ●

70 years

Rita Bergamini, SP (Sister Marie Carmen)

Sister Rita Bergamini created the first permanent archives for the former Sacred Heart Province and was keeper of the memory of the Sisters of Providence in the West for 25 years. She retired from active ministry in 1991.



She was born in Martinez, Calif., and the seeds of her vocation were planted at Providence College of Nursing in Oakland, Calif. She entered the Sisters of Providence, made first vows in 1945 and served as a nurse at St. Vincent Hospital in Portland, Ore., and St. Elizabeth Hospital in Yakima, Wash. She also served as director of St. Mary Hospital School of Nursing in Walla Walla, Wash.; director of Seattle University's Providence Hospital Clinical Unit; and as a provincial councilor and provincial secretary. ●

Rita Ferschweiler, SP (Sister Mary Laureen)

Sister Rita Ferschweiler was a major figure in health-care administration in Portland, Ore. She came to Portland's oldest hospital, St. Vincent's, as a nurse in 1956 and then became director of nursing services. After becoming its administrator in 1964 she guided construction and the move to its new 451-bed hospital and medical center. In 1971, The Oregon Journal named her one of Oregon's ten women of accomplishment.



Born in St. Louis, Ore., to Oregon pioneers, Sister Rita grew up on the family farm near Gervais in the Willamette Valley. After graduating from Mount Angel Academy, she entered the Sisters of Providence in 1943 and made her novitiate at Mount St. Vincent in Seattle. Trained as a nurse at St. Elizabeth Hospital, Yakima, Wash., she worked primarily as a medical-surgical nurse in Seattle, Fairbanks and Anchorage, Alaska, and Yakima. She holds a bachelor's degree in nursing from Seattle University and a master's degree in nursing services administration.