

The Sisters of Providence

have sponsored the low-income housing at Vincent House for the past 20 years and originally developed it in partnership with the City of Seattle, with an agreement to operate it through 2013. The facility incorporates access features for the disabled, with six units that are specifically adapted for residents using wheelchairs. The site offers convenient access to public transportation, shopping and medical centers in a building that also houses commercial space and market-rate condominiums owned by other parties.

"One of the initial works of Blessed Emilie Gamelin, foundress of the Sisters of Providence, was the care of the elderly and the infirm," noted Sister Barbara Schamber, then-team leader/provincial. "That legacy continues today with compassionate care and personal attention to the needs of the poor. Vincent House is a part of that legacy."

The sisters and others from the Providence community thanked all those who collaborated on the funding requests, including Dan Smerken, housing developer for Providence Health System, who was accompanied by his wife, Marissa Arbucci. "Dan, we would not be here today if it were not

Health System included Chuck Hawley, vice president of government affairs; Robert T. Hellrigel, chief executive of senior and community services; and Diane Groeschel, director of low-income housing. Also present were Ellen Garcia, executive director of Providence ElderPlace, Seattle; and Sister Mary Grondin, director of Vincent House, as well as staff members and residents.

The Vincent House project

had its beginning several years before it opened its doors to residents. In late 1980, Jack Greeley, then director of public affairs for the Sisters of Providence, began researching the possibility of obtaining federal funds to help the sisters in a new ministry providing housing for the poor and the elderly. The following February he presented his findings to the General Council in Montreal and the project received the council's enthusiastic endorsement and support.

In 1981 Washington State was authorized only 12 housing units of this type in the City of Seattle and only 60 for all of King County. There was a housing shortage in Seattle for the elderly poor and disabled, and the city encouraged the sisters to become involved in the project, offering its support. Pike Place Market was being rebuilt in an urban renewal

project and the city was accepting proposals for a \$19 million building program that would include 64 units for the low-income elderly. The units would be sold at below cost to a non-profit group, and the Provincial Council authorized Jack Greeley to seek to purchase and manage the units.

At that time, according to the sisters' chronicles, "no prediction could be made with regard to the future financial position of the Sisters of Providence." However, risking beyond their

securities, the sisters stepped out on faith. Sister Lucille Dean, superior at the time, signed the letter of intent to be involved in this venture and entered into negotiations with the city. According to the chronicles: "This letter indicated that the sisters were willing to commit \$1,545,000 for the project on a long-term basis – a 30-year forgivable debt basis. A key element of the condition of the 'forgiving' of the loan is that the Sisters of Providence continue to use this project for the service of the poor." The City of Seattle agreed to contribute \$900,000.

The sisters were delighted when their proposal was accepted. Sister Anita Butler, then provincial treasurer, took on the role of leading the program. Construction began at the end of 1982 and the units were the subject of a Dedication Mass and Blessing in January 1985. Sister Mary Grondin accepted the role of manager of the units. All members of the General Council from Montreal were present for the occasion. A public dedication was held the following month, with Seattle Mayor Charles Royer in attendance. The apartments were opened for occupancy on March 4, 1985.

Throughout its history, Vincent House has been fully subsidized by the religious community. No more than 30 percent of a tenant's annual income is charged for rent, and all utilities except telephone are included.

Today, 20 years after its inception,

Vincent House is in need of significant renovation, and has seen a significant increase in operating costs. The Leadership Team set a goal of ensuring the future of Vincent House as a provider of affordable housing for the elderly as well as supportive services onsite.

"We sought Dan Smerken's advice about viable alternatives, and it was his recommendation that we apply to the Department of Housing and Urban Development to accept Vincent House as a HUD project," Sister Barbara said. In 2003, Dan put in many hours preparing the HUD application, but it was not accepted due to a technicality. Undaunted, the Leadership Team asked Dan to reapply in 2004.

Dan made sure no stone was left unturned, including seeking letters of support from Washington state's delegation in the U.S. Congress. U.S. Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, along with U.S. Representative Jim McDermott, were happy to help, as was Sister Joyce Cox, BVM, delegate for religious for the Archdiocese of Seattle. In fact, letters of support were garnered from far and wide, including a host of local and state agencies and organizations that provide services and support to the low-income elderly. All expressed the vital nature of the ministry of Vincent House, as well as trust and confidence in the excellent service that Providence provides in serving unmet needs.

By the time the application for funds under Section 202, the Supportive Housing for the Elderly program, was completed, the packet was nearly 3 inches thick. Last June, Dan sent the packet to Washington, D.C. The Sisters of Providence, the Providence Associates and many others sent along their prayers for success. Word came in October that Vincent House had been accepted as a HUD project. Pre-development work began immediately and construction is hoped to begin in 2005. ●



for your dedication to this project," Sister Barbara said in presenting him with a statue of Mother Joseph for his dedication and hard work in preparing the application and shepherding it through the HUD process.

Special guests included Bill Reid, project manager for Walsh Construction; the project architect, Michael Fancher, of Michael Fancher and Associates; and Cindy Erickson, asset manager for the Seattle Office of Housing. Guests from Providence



Sr. Anna Loan Nguyen surrounded by her students in Vietnam (left) and in the classroom (below).

Sister returns to Vietnam

TO TEACH HER FAITH

by Anna Loan Nguyen, SP



6 ●

I had been away from Vietnam, my native land, for eight years when I had a great opportunity to return in 2003 to visit my family after completing my transfer into the Sisters of Providence. It was a whirlwind homecoming; just long enough for me to assess the changes since I left the country for the United States in 1997.

What I also discovered then was an opportunity for me to contribute in my own little way to the local church of Ho Chi Minh City through the good and solid formation the Sisters of Providence have given me. And so, with the blessings of the Providence community, I returned once again to Vietnam last August to teach at the intercongregational Dominican Institute of St. Thomas. I remained there through the end of December, also giving talks to both religious and lay people in various groups and institutes.

The Vietnam I experienced has a hopeful environment for progressively better relations between the church and the state. This year alone, there has been movement by the government:

- to return more confiscated properties to the church, like seminary and school buildings;
- to extend greater freedom to the church, through less control in the number of ordinations, etc.; and
- to invite religious to work in government, for example in centers for the prevention and treatment of AIDs.

This year, too, marks the celebration of the 470th anniversary of the first evangelization of the Vietnamese church. It is a church that sees its challenge to launch out into the “depths” of Vietnamese society and culture today, to proclaim and transform the country through the Good News.

The theology school where I taught for four and a half months serves about 22 different congregations, plus the five congregations of Dominican women in and around Ho Chi Minh City. The institute’s goal is to respond to the need for theological, religious, pastoral, spiritual and catechetical formation of the junior sisters.

Professors at the institute have widely differing levels of experience. Some received credentials abroad in the past and have had extensive teaching background. Others received degrees from places outside Vietnam and have returned to their home country to teach. It was my honor to be among them.

I realized that I had something to contribute because our Providence community has equipped me with a strong and enriched spirituality that I am happy to share with others. My teaching experience has shown me the

urgent need for formation of the sisters. The future of the church and religious life in Vietnam rests, to some degree, upon them.

My classes on the Spirituality of the Synoptic Gospels and Spiritual Direction were highly appreciated, especially the latter. It opened the eyes of so many and they were led to a better understanding and appreciation of spiritual direction. This is something rather new in its approach and meaning.

After attending my classes, many of my students expressed openly how much they like my style of teaching and the new ideas that I brought them. In effect, they came to a greater self-knowledge and appreciation of themselves and others. They were able to come out of their shells, and acquire greater self-confidence and self-assurance. They had become more transparent and better able to relate with their religious sisters and brothers and with those in authority in their community. They hunger and thirst to learn new things, especially discernment, as they now have more choices, especially inner freedom. They hoped that I would be able to help others understand the role and the positive contribution of the sisters to the Vietnamese church and to the society. They urged me to come back to continue my teaching.

What I learned from my students is that they are very open-minded about sharing and exchanging ideas. They respect, accept and listen to one another. They also exhibit an attitude of spontaneity and joy. I had the opportunity to meet young girls who are interested in religious life, as well as priests and parents who are supportive of the girls' desires. I distributed our vocation brochures to the different groups and have been met with encouragement.

I feel an urgent call to walk with my people in Vietnam at this important moment in the history of our church and country today. What I have done in my homeland of Vietnam is a gift. Providence, of God, I thank you for all! ●

Sr. Silvia Troncoso



Mother Joseph Province welcomes Sr. Silvia

Silvia Troncoso, SP, who has served in the Yakima Valley for the past 14 years as a missionary from Bernard Morin Province in Chile, is now a member of Mother Joseph Province. Sr. Kathryn Rutan, General Superior, and the members of the General Council approved her transfer effective Dec. 1, 2004.

Sister Silvia was born in Chile in 1931 in the Province of Concepcion in Cornel, the fourth child in a family of ten. "From early childhood, my family guided me along the road of faith," she says. "When our dear mother died, our father placed four of us girls in a boarding school, Santa Rosa High School, which was directed by Sisters of Providence. It is my belief that my vocation originated there."

She entered the community in 1948 at the age of 17. Her ministries include teaching more than 35 years in various high schools in Chile, including 15 years as director of education ministry. She served as superior of the local community for 17 years. Other ministries in Chile include parish ministry in Santiago, and pastoral ministry. She was asked by the provincial council to go to Yakima to work with the Hispanic community.

While cherishing her love for the sisters in Chile and her roots there, Sister Silvia has discerned that she is now called to become a member of this province. "I thank God for the missionary spirit with which I have been blessed," she says. "I pray that I may use my talents always to serve my brothers and sisters." ●

Sisters of Providence

Who We Are

Sisters of Providence are women of faith called to respond to the needs of society. Our living in community enables us to support and enrich our personal and communal growth, and to witness gospel values. Our life of prayer includes quiet moments and faith sharing as we journey to wholeness. We seek a deeper relationship with God, with each other, and with the earth on which we serve.

Come and See

We invite women who are interested in learning more about religious life to come for a short-term visit – a weekend, a week or a month. Meet the sisters, explore our religious community, pray with us, experience our ministries, and participate in our community life. If you are interested, please let us know.

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www.sistersofprovidence.net

Sisters of Providence thank our donors and benefactors

We deeply appreciate your kind and generous donations to the Sisters of Providence and the ministries in El Salvador, the Philippines, Haiti and the United States. We acknowledge the contributions that were received through the Development Office from **January 1, 2004, through December 31, 2004.** If you note any error in these records, we apologize and ask you to please contact us at (509) 474-2311.

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