

permanent program for sending university students to Central America as volunteers in ministry and about volunteer activities in Yakima.

One of the task force's most visible activities will be a three-day reunion of former Sisters of Providence, scheduled for April 21-23, 2006, at the former Providence Heights in Issaquah. The weekend gathering coincides with the first major celebration of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters of Providence in the West. (See list of events on page 2.)

Stories abound of the emotional turmoil experienced by women who left religious life post Vatican II and by those who remained. The reunion is an attempt to reopen the lines of communication and to explore opportunities for connection, says Sister Mary Wilson, reunion coordinator.

Sister Roberta says the inspiration for formation of the Alternative Association Task Force was discussions of sisters and associates at several tables at a provincial chapter meeting. She was one of those who strongly supported the initial idea and she became temporary chair of the group that was formed as a result.

"It seems to me a lot of people want to be part of something that is working," Sister Roberta says. Right now, the religious communities seem to be answering that need for a lot of people." The Providence Associates are an example, she adds. "They are single or married, give time to the poor and find that Mother Gamelin, Mother Joseph and other sisters are persons who inspire and motivate them." The General Chapter of 1967 encouraged development of lay associates. Today, Mother Joseph Province has more than 240 associates "and counting" and their numbers exceed 1,100 internationally.

Interested sisters and associates initially signed up for the Alternative Association Task Force to explore alternative ways that people – Catholic, non-Catholic, male, female, married, single,

widowed or divorced – might be welcomed into various types of association with the Sisters of Providence. That includes women who truly would like to be Sisters of Providence, but age or ill health prevents them from doing so. Alternative association offers a different way to fulfill their desire.

"We explored the idea of being part of our spirituality but not of our works, or part of our works but not of our meetings," explains Sister Charlotte Van Dyke, provincial councilor and task force member. "We have kept alternative association loosely defined, but the constant is that they have to be compatible with the spirit of the Providence of God, and interested in serving the needs of the poor of all varieties – the economically, spiritually, educationally disadvantaged and disenfranchised poor." Other causes individuals might embrace in keeping with the Providence charism include peace, justice and ecology. "We don't want to close off any possibilities," Sister Charlotte adds. "We are in an exploratory phase, looking at non-canonical vowed relationship between a person and God under a broad relationship with Providence – spiritual vows but with no legal relationship."

"Alternative association is a type of fellowship wherein those of us who wish to live a certain lifestyle and commitment to solidarity with the poor band together in various ways," Sister Roberta says. "The vow is to God, but specified to live in a certain way. Those following alternative association specify the way and how they are attached to the religious community."

For examples of the private vows of Lillian, Phyllis and others, go to the Sisters of Providence website at <http://www.sistersofprovidence.net> ●

She professed her private vows in a Mass at St. Joseph Residence in Seattle. She has been public about that choice, recalling that Sister Joyce Cox, BVM, of the Seattle Archdiocese, admonished: "You are to be a witness." If she keeps silent about her private vows, Marcie says, "people won't know this path is available to them."

Marcie has sponsored about a half-dozen new Providence Associates, many of whom she says may be interested in some type of private vows. She also has shared information about it with people at her home parish, St. James. ●

Mary Murtha, PA

Mary Murtha was influenced at an early age toward religious life. A number of relatives of both parents had entered religious life, as priests and as sisters. "My parents seemed to believe it was a special calling and I picked up on that from them," she says. "I attended boarding school and was taught by the Holy Names sisters -- more influence."

But when World War II began, her age group was considerably changed and impressed by the war, Mary says. She also began dating a friend in high school who entered the Marines. They were married in 1945 and raised a family of seven. Mary became involved with the Franciscan sisters

at her school, enjoying their company. When her husband returned from the war, he had changed a great deal. Soon they divorced and she began working at Loyola Retreat House, where she first met the Sisters of Providence.

"I was impressed with them very much," she recalls. "They seemed to embrace many more ways of serving God in the world than just teaching and nursing." Not long after, a Providence sister was hired by the Jesuits and the two became good friends. Through her friend, Mary became a Providence Associate in 1987.

"As time went by and the children moved on to their own lives, I began to entertain thoughts of becoming a Sister of Providence, and shared this with my spiritual director," Mary says. Together, they made a retreat and discerned the idea. Mary asked to enter the community and started a process of learning while living with the sisters at St. Joseph Residence in Seattle.

"After a time, the Provincial Council and team decided against my entering, and so I continued on with my life. I remember composing a sad poem on my way back home. Later, my spiritual director told me about the possibility of making private vows, and together



we discerned this move. It seemed to fit my deep desire to be connected to religious life."

Mary did make personal vows on her birthday in 1998, in the presence of three of her children, her good friend and spiritual director, and members of her Koinonia Community. Then came retirement and a move to Helena, Mont., where two of her daughters live.

Asked what her private vow means to her, Mary responds: "It is the culmination of a desire to consecrate myself in a deeper way to the God of my life, and seems to fill the need in my being to be closer to the community which I so love and cherish. For all those years, I somehow thought that God was calling me, and it hurt not to be able to become fully a sister, but now, from where I am, I see differently. I see that God had a plan for me all the time, and that I am fulfilling it now." ●

Phyllis Silva-Keith, PA

Phyllis Silva-Keith felt her life change when she attended the international meeting of Providence Associates in Montreal. She recalls being in the Mother Emilie Gamelin Center, in the back of the

Phyllis Silva-Keith, PA, ...



room by the original wooden tomb of the foundress. "I was reading a brochure about Mother Gamelin not being part of the first group of Sisters of Providence but taking private vows," she recalls. "It was fascinating to read what they were: a complete giving of one's self and one's life. I knew that was what I wanted to do."

"I had a strong commitment as a Providence Associate, but I could make it even stronger by doing this," Phyllis explains. "It was a call within a call. Being an associate means so much to me and has changed my life so much. I wanted to make my commitment even deeper. The word 'vow' is so important. It gave me the solidarity I was looking for."

Phyllis found the Providence family in about 1963 when she was a school bus driver in Maple Valley who was asked to take the sisters in formation at Providence Heights on an historical tour. She was not a Catholic or even a church-goer at the time, but she liked the sisters so much that she invited them to get together again, and the sisters reciprocated by inviting Phyllis to the Heights. She soon found herself on a new path, with the encouragement of her godmother, the former Sister Teresita Marie, now Helena (Toni) Riordan Strand. Phyllis was baptized in 1964, when she was

working in admitting at Providence Everett Medical Center. Sister Georgette Bayless, who was pastoral care director, invited her to help with work in the library a couple of times a week. After about 18 months as a Catholic, Phyllis had fallen away and returned to Judaism, but found herself with a lot of faith-related questions while working with the library books. She posed some of them to Sister Georgette, who responded, "Let's just talk." It was not long before she was back in the returning Catholic program.

"When I finished I was eager to put my faith to work, to learn more and to grow," Phyllis recalls. Through Sister Georgette she met Sister Shirley Smith, who suggested that she consider becoming a Providence Associate. "Then I met Sister Mary Wilson and the rest is history," Phyllis quips. "I was self-conscious, but Sister Mary said, 'Don't worry. We've all been there.' Some people have a gift to help you find your gift and I am very grateful.

"People have calls they haven't met because they don't realize the opportunity to be part of the community in different ways," Phyllis says she has come to realize. "I felt the only way was to be a sister, but that was not in the cards for me. There are so many ways to serve. There is something for everybody. Step up to the plate and go for a homer." ●

Veryl Snowhill

An adult convert to Catholicism and a former Sister of Providence, Veryl Snowhill returned to secular life in 1970. She spent the next two decades working in nursing administration in Southern California, purchasing a home, nurturing her garden and caring for her elderly mother and neighbor until their deaths. During those years, Veryl parted ways with the hierarchical church, as well. Since 1989 she has provided 24-hour, in-home care for her niece Shannon, who requires total care due to multiple sclerosis. Eventually, and with many struggles, Veryl journeyed back to her church community in 1997. Yet, Veryl wanted something else. She wanted to spend the rest of her life as a vowed lay woman; she wanted to make a private vow of chastity.

In recognition of Veryl's call to make a non-canonical vow, Sisters Roberta Rorke, Alice St. Hilaire and Katherine Smith traveled to La Mesa, Calif., for Veryl's Covenant Ceremony at her parish church. Her vow also was witnessed by her niece, her pastor Monsignor Michael

Gallagher, and Sister Carmel Lohan, RSM, parish director of religious education.

In the name of all the Sisters of Providence, Sisters Roberta, Alice and Katherine acknowledged Veryl as having been part of the Providence family for much of her life, and welcomed her in a new and special way as a companion on life's journey. They expressed joy in the way God has led Veryl and in her choice to take this step. They promised prayerful support and care. They committed themselves as Veryl's covenant companions to accompany her and to be her supportive connections with the religious community. In addition, they extended access to various community resources such as communications, prayer requests, retreat listings and use of the community library. They promised mutual support as all proclaim the mysteries of Providence and our Mother of Sorrows to the society of our time, and invited Veryl to feel at home in mutual friendship. -Katherine Smith, SP ●



SNJMs honor Providence

Sisters of Providence and Rich and Barb Umbdenstock receive awards

On October 9, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary held their 2005-06 awards ceremony. The recipients were:

- The Sisters of Providence with the Jesú-Marie Award,
- Rich Umbdenstock, president and CEO of Providence Services, and Barb Umbdenstock with the Holy Names Award, and
- Aubrey Manning, star of the humorous play "Late-Night Catechism" which raises money for the sisters' retirement, with the Marie-Rose Award.



Two of Barb and Rich Umbdenstock's four children, Alex and Lauren, attended the awards presentation.

The Holy Names sisters celebrated the Sisters of Providence for being “women of courageous faith,” “women of loving ministry,” “women of dedication – serving all people.” And they thanked the Providence sisters “for your undying friendship over 150 years; your support of and belief in our SNJM mission and charism; and for your faithful, loving commitment to Jesus and Mary.”

In the homily, the gathering was likened to the biblical wedding on a mountain, with guests who had “clothed themselves beautifully for this ‘feast!’”

“Our Sisters, Sisters of Providence, many of you joined the ‘wedding feast’ in black and white, too! Your Mother Joseph was instrumental in convincing our Mother Jean Batiste that our SNJM ministry was needed in Spokane, and our two communities came together. This was fitting since we both were founded by Bishop Bourget. Though we often refer to ourselves as cousins, we really are more like sisters, even sharing some clothes, like service to the economically disadvantaged, and special attention to women and children, as demonstrated in our partnership in the Transition ministries. You have clothed yourselves in the charism of your community after the inspiration of Mother Emilie Gamelin, with heart-crafted designs of humility, simplicity and charity.”



Awardees Margaret Botch, SP, Provincial/Team Coordinator, and Barb and Rich Umbdenstock are pictured with SNJM Provincial Ann Pizello.

Rich and Barb Umbdenstock were thanked for their tireless work in the community:

“Rich and Barb, you come together, wearing your witness to ministry as a couple, a lovely garment for a wedding feast! Together, you see with God’s eyes what might be possible in our civic and church communities. You challenge what is with a vision for what could be. Rich and Barb, when you came to brunch with Celine (Steinberger, SNJM), in 1983 at the Fort, you began a working relationship that continues to this day and forward as we look to you for the sharing of your wisdom and experience. Barb, your vision for the garments that could be worn by women in the Church and community leads to a new day of justice and complementarity. Because you present yourselves to the world as couple, we honor you as two having chosen to be one, calling all of God’s people to unity. You arrive in a seamless garment, woven as one.” ●



Sisters of Providence fill a section of pews in the chapel.



Providence award recipients -- Sisters of Providence and Barb and Rich Umbdenstock, -- gather for a group photo.

Friends

Srs. Susanne Hartung and Marta Alvear

One spoke no English and the other spoke no Spanish, but their first encounter blossomed into a 17-year friendship that has taken them on travels across continents. This year, Sisters Susanne Hartung, of Mother Joseph Province, and Marta Alvear, of Bernard Morin Province, are spending 10 months in close proximity as Sister Marta takes a sabbatical in Seattle.

The two really met by chance. Sister Marta had traveled to Providence Hospital in Seattle with the generalate in 1988 for a meeting of the general assembly. Sister Susanne was not part of that meeting, but as a member of the hospital's administration, she was helping out with logistics.

Sister Susanne would eat with the general assembly participants and would listen to the international translations. One particular voice began to speak to her. "Marta had a very definitive sense of what was right and a vision," she recalls. "She is not intimidated from



At a corporate retreat in San Diego in 1992

In Santiago, Chile, in 2000



speaking what she believes is the truth to anyone. I thought she ought to have an even greater influence on the total community." Witnessing that others sometimes discounted or disregarded the foreign woman's comments, Sister Susanne rallied. "I didn't want her to think North Americans were so closed."

One moment, they met, and in the next, the American had invited the Chilean to go get something to eat. "It was like she knew me; she listened to me," Sister Marta says today. "Now, I understand my friendship, but in the beginning, no." With time, Sister Marta says, she learned the source of the friendship. "She was open with me and shared a new culture. She looked to the future, strong and true."

Part of the week's events was a bus trip to Portland, with Sister Susanne as tour guide, and to Mother Joseph's grave in Vancouver. "We really got to know each other on that trip," she recalls. "We could not communicate; all we could do was laugh. We linked like family." Sister Marta adds, "Friendship does not need language." That week together cemented their friendship.

Through an interpreter, Sister Susanne asked Sister Marta if she would like to study the English language in Seattle. That was in November, and the following March, Sister Marta returned for three months of study at Seattle University. She roomed with the sisters at St. Joseph Residence and spent the weekends with Sister Susanne. "Lots of our communications were pictures drawn on paper," Sister Susanne explains.

Understanding each other was not always easy. "Susanne would ask if I wanted a cup of tea, and I thought it was all one word," Sister Marta explains. "She interpreted it as wanting to go out, so she would get her coat," Sister Susanne chuckles. "I invited Marta to hike, asking

if she had ever camped. We drove along the Oregon-California coast to Yosemite, and when she saw those mountains, she thought we were going to scale them. She never knew just what to expect!"

Neither has learned to fully speak the other's birth language, but Sister Susanne says she has learned to translate Sister Marta's English. The two have discovered they have much in common: They love outdoor recreation, including biking, hiking, walking, camping and swimming. They share a simple spirituality that recognizes God's Providence in everyday life. In addition, both share experience with coping with cancer. Sister Marta was diagnosed with breast cancer three years ago. Sister Susanne has a rare and incurable cancer called blood lymphoma. Both have called upon their faith and acceptance of God's design for their lives in dealing with their health issues.

But to be sure, there are differences between the two. "Marta is more reserved and more introverted, while I am more extroverted," explains Sister Susanne, who comes from a huge family that is very close, very Catholic, spiritual, politically liberal and with a strong faith tradition. Sister Marta also comes from a large, very close family, not all of whom are Catholic, with strong values and trust in God, but who "don't practice the church." Liberation theology is very important to Sister Marta, who is former provincial superior of her province, and with it the desire to be near the people. Through Sister Marta's summer visits with Sister Susanne's family and Sister Susanne's three trips to Chile, the two families have been brought together, as well. ●

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Sr. Marta Alvear (left) and Sr. Susanne Hartung (right) visited Rome in 2001 for the beatification of Blessed Emilie Gamelin. Pictured with them are (center from left) Elaine Leslie of Portland, Sr. Susanne's oldest sister; Karen Summers, director of mission for Senior and Community Services for the Providence Health System Washington region; and another of Sr. Susanne's sisters, Mary Clare O'Connor of Sacramento.