Provincial/Leadership Team Coordinator Margaret Botch, joined by Bishop William S. Skylstad, accepts Sr. Margarita's first vows.

Sister Margarita Hernandez makes first vows

Everyone turned out on a warm summer night in Spokane in August for the profession of first vows by Sister Margarita Hernandez. As Provincial/Leadership Team Coordinator Margaret Botch noted with delight, the throng included Sisters of Providence from throughout the province who had just ended their annual community meeting, friends from St. Joseph's Parish, others from Spokane and Yakima and several Jesuits. The cross bearer for the ceremony was General Councilor-elect Sister Alba Letelier of Chile, who was novice director for Sister Margarita during her canonical year.

Sister Margarita, 26, a native of El Salvador, made first profession of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience as a Sister of Providence in a Eucharistic liturgy in the Mount St. Joseph Chapel. Celebrant for the Spanish and English Mass was The Most Reverend William S. Skylstad, Bishop of Spokane, with Father Misael Enrique Rueda Meza, SJ, as concelebrant. A reception in honor of Sister Margarita followed the liturgy.

In San Salvador, when Margarita became a postulant, she was supported by her father Isaiah, her brothers and other family, Sister Margaret recalled, noting that Margarita's mother died one month into her candidate year. When a base community of the people and her family gathered again when Sister Margarita became a novice, her father, a strong Christian, said "he was giving us Margarita," Sister Margaret added. Although those friends and family from El Salvador could not join in this celebration, they were represented by a framed collage of photos that was carried down the aisle of the chapel.

"Margarita grew in faith in the Christian community that she was a part of," Sister Margaret said. "Let us remember that context tonight. Her family is here with us as are many of the martyrs from El Salvador."

"En sus mano he questo mi confianza (In your hands I have put my confidence)" was the theme Sister Margarita chose for her vow ceremony. In her remarks, she paid tribute to the Salvadoran martyr Oscar Romero, "a great man and prophet who remains alive in our lives." She also thanked Blessed Emilie Gamelin, family, friends and the Sisters of Providence "for their support and continued formation."

"See how God's power continues to work in our Church," Bishop Skylstad reminded those gathered. He also took the "opportunity to thank the Sisters of Providence for your wonderful sign and witness of trust in Provident God. The legacy you have and continue to make is wonderful, powerful and joyful."

The vow ceremony was rich with the international flavor of the religious community, with readings, songs and the homily in Spanish and English, and a liturgical dance by Sister Vilma Franco in native Salvadoran dress.

Sister Margarita topped off the festivities by embracing all three languages spoken by the Sisters of Providence congregation: "Gracias, thank you, merci beau coup!"

By taking these vows, Sister Margarita makes her formal commitment as one of the 168 sisters in Mother Joseph Province who embrace the charism and the mission of the Sisters of Providence.

"We got to know Sister Margarita as a girl, since her family lived next door to the Sisters of Providence mission in La Papalota, El Salvador," Sister Margaret recalls. "We have shared living the Gospel and reaching out to the poor for many years, so it seems right for her to make this commitment to God as part of our religious community."

Sister Margarita's home village is in the Bajo Lempa region of El Salvador, which is where the Sisters of Providence first established their mission in 1995. During the war that ravaged El Salvador from 1980 to 1992, many people did not go to the church because they were easily influenced by those in authority and were afraid, she recalls. After the war ended, things slowly began to change. Once the Sisters of Providence arrived, she began to notice a growth in her community. "I saw the reality of our people. They began getting involved with the church again and their faith began to grow."

She became involved in her community as a youth group leader, animator and catechism teacher for young children, and was aided in her own education through scholarship funds contributed by Providence Associates in Portland, Ore.

Sister Margarita is studying English as a Second Language at the Institute for Extended Learning's Adult Education Center. Her dream is to study psychology so she can help her people in El Salvador. ●

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Two sisters transfer vows

to Sisters of Providence

Sisters Gabrielle Nga Nguyen and Ana Dolores Orellana participated in Eucharistic celebrations of the canonical transfer of their perpetual vows in September in Spokane. The ceremony for Sister Gabrielle was Saturday, September 8, and the ceremony for Sister Ana Dolores was Sunday, September 9. Both celebrations were held in the chapel at Mount St. Joseph, followed by receptions.

Sister Gabrielle Nga Nguyen

Sister Ana Dolores Orellana

"After sharing our life and mission with Sisters Gabrielle and Ana Dolores for more than three years, we welcome them as sisters," says Provincial/Leadership Team Coordinator Margaret Botch, SP. "We have been mutually enriched by their presence. Their eagerness to love and serve Christ in the poor and their strong trust in Providence invite us to a deeper living of our common call."

Both sisters are living in Providence communities, Sister Gabrielle in Spokane and Sister Ana Dolores in Portland.

Sister Gabrielle was born in South Vietnam in 1962, the second oldest of 10 children. Her family escaped to the United States in 1975, settling first in Fort Chaffee, Ark. She entered the Congregation of Mary Queen in 1982 in Springfield, Mo., and professed final vows in 1991. After obtaining certification as an LPN, she served as a community health nurse at the St. Louis Vietnamese Center through Catholic Charities. Initially drawn to religious life by a wish to teach children, she was surprised to discover a passion for working with the elderly.

Sister Gabrielle met several Sisters of Providence at a workshop on transferring to another community and maintained contact with them for more than a year before deciding to take a closer look. She came to Spokane in February 2004 to live with sisters in a "Come and See" experience to explore whether a transfer of vows into the community would be right for her. That experience included visits to the sisters living in Yakima, Portland and Seattle. She began the transfer process in July 2004.

Today, Sister Gabrielle is working toward her RN degree at Spokane Community College and is on call at Mount St. Joseph.

Sister Ana Dolores, a Salvadoran citizen, has been a sister of perpetual vows in the religious community Mothers of the Orphans in Rome, Italy. She came to Spokane in August 2002, where her mother and most of her siblings have lived since becoming part of a sanctuary program at St. Ann's Church before becoming documented.

Sister Ana Dolores began the formal transfer process with a prayer service attended by family and friends in Yakima in September 2003. She studied English as a Second Language and ministered with the Hispanic community in Yakima while living with Sisters of Providence at the candidate house. She completed a "Come and See" program that included five months living with sisters in El Salvador to experience the life of prayer, community and ministry with them.

She currently is taking English as a Second Language at Portland Community College. She also is a volunteer at Providence ElderPlace and at Providence Portland Medical Center. ●

Come and See

Seven women joined the Sisters of Providence for a vocation discernment live-in weekend in Seattle in August. Participants were (back row from left) Margaret Chauvel, Portland; and Monica Aguirre, Yakima; along with pre-candidates Rosa Nguyen and Mary (Hong Nga) Nguyen, Seattle; Loraine Escarcha, Yakima; Jennifer Brogan, Newberg, Ore.; Alison Green, Portland; and Laurie Pfeiffer, Spanaway, Wash.

Helping residents of Providence Vincent House with cleanup and other maintenance chores provided an opportunity to do hands-on ministry. Resident Emil Downs was helped out by Jennifer (left) and Monica.

General Chapter
July 8-28
Montreal

Provincial Chapter
August 13-15
Spokane

(From left) General Superior Kathryn Rutan and General Council members Rollande Malo, Judith Desmarais, Yolande Gagnon, María Inelia Muñoz and Claudette Chénier say thank you for the last five years.

General Chapter

A "surprise" concert was given by the Epiphanie Choral Ensemble.

In a recap of her General Chapter homily, which she called "a prayer in progress," Sister Kathryn Rutan, General Superior, echoed the theme of the gathering: "Dare to live our charism in an evolving world." The Sisters of Providence are "alive, dynamic and relevant," Sister Kathryn declared to the sisters of Mother Joseph Province at their Provincial Chapter in Spokane in August. "The poor to us are like a magnet; we are drawn to them." When the sisters encounter the poor, she continued, "something charismatic happens; an explosion of grace." In this rapidly evolving world, "a conversion of heart and a profound change of consciousness is required of us."

"We are becoming a new reality, a new creation, a new creature. We hear an echo of this openness and availability to the new coming: Sisters of Providence are always in search for new ways to incarnate the Providence of God in our lives."

Lively dances were performed by the Quebecois group of dancers, "Les petits pas Jacadiens."

The newly elected General Leadership Team includes (from left): General Councilors Srs. Elizabeth Kaczmarczyk, Rollande Malo (Treasurer), Alba Letelier, Claudette Chénier (Secretary), María Antonieta Trimpay, and General Superior Kathryn Rutan.

The General Chapter 2007 ended with sisters affirming the following directions:

Faithful to our charism and spirituality, a legacy from Mother Emilie Tavernier-Gamelin, and in continuity with previous general chapters, we affirm:

- We are an international, multi-cultural and intergenerational congregation.
- We live in a world of communications which facilitate networking and collaboration with laity, the Providence Associates and organizations which share our objectives and values.

Women in formation were enthusiastic participant observers at the General Chapter.

In their General Chapter report, members of Our Lady of Providence Vice-Province danced, forming a "human tapestry."

On the strength of this, we commit ourselves to living the following orientations during the next five years:

1. Deepen and enrich Providence spirituality with spirituality of creation.

2. Give renewed energy to initial and ongoing formation by incorporating our international, multicultural and intergenerational realities.

3. Adjust our governance at all levels to respond to our evolving realities, while continuing to develop circular leadership.

4. Promote reconciliation by engaging in concrete actions for healing, justice, unity and peace.

5. Respond actively to the cry of the poor, especially women, children and the Earth, in light of the Earth Charter and our Constitutions. ●

Provincial Chapter

The kickoff to the Provincial Chapter was the annual Jubilee celebration. Bishop William S. Skylstad is pictured with Jubilarians Srs. Mary Fox, Margaret Botch, Anna Burris, Roberta Rorke, Maryann Bochsler, Peggy Alcorn, Elizabeth Gress and Nancy MacLean.

There was dancing at the Provincial Chapter, too, including a spirited line dance.

Editor's note:

An announcement from Sister Kathryn Rutan, General Superior, brought a somber note to the first day of the Provincial Chapter in Spokane. The body of Sister Estelle Lauzon had been discovered at Maison de la Providence on Fullum Street in Montreal.

"Sister Estelle Lauzon was 80 years old and had been a Sister of Providence for 62 years," Sister Kathryn said in a message to the congregation. "She was passionately committed to her ministry with persons in recovery and with the mentally ill. The Sisters of Providence, as Sister Estelle herself would do, forgive and are praying for the man who is responsible for her death." ●