

Caritas

A publication for the Sisters of Providence and Friends ● WINTER 2009

2009 CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

AS CHILDREN, most of us Catholic worshippers knew that Jesus was born in 1 A.D., that A.D. stood for *anno domini*, and that those Latin words meant “in the year of our Lord.” Every year we could calculate the number of years since his birth, proud to announce, for example, on December 25, 1952, that it was 1,952 years since Jesus was born!

As we concluded the second millennium ten years ago, we Sisters of Providence along with our friends counted years in a very particular way. Apart from fears of the Y2K bug threatening computers, Christmas 1999 and the beginning of year 2000 was a time of excitement and hope, as we stood at the threshold of a new world celebrated around the world and, for us, the new reality of Mother Joseph Province.

Ten years later we look back at amazing years in which we, and you with us, evolved to where we now stand. We thank God – and you – for the journey. Today we look ahead to changes: a new provincial team leading the religious community, a new public juridic person sponsoring Providence Health & Services, and many surprises to come.

At this still point in the turning world, we hear again and with new ears the “Proclamation of the Birth of Christ” from the *Roman Martyrology* for December 25th:

***“The forty-second year of the reign of Octavian Augustus;
the whole world being at peace,
Jesus Christ, eternal God and Son of the eternal Father,
desiring to sanctify the world by his most merciful coming,
being conceived by the Holy Spirit,
and nine months having passed since his conception,
was born in Bethlehem of Judea of the Virgin Mary.
Today is the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh.”***

In 2009 people need help, love, support, and compassion. In these uncertain times we, with you, mirror in our lives the desire of the eternal God to bless a world crying for bread and peace through the merciful coming of Jesus.

Thanks to God’s Providence for the birth of Jesus. Thanks to you for being a human face of Providence. Blessed Christmas 2009 A.D. and 2010 A.D., as well! ❄️

Sr. Margaret

Margaret Botch, SP
Provincial/Team Coordinator

Sr. Anita

Anita Butler, SP
Team Member

Sister Kaye

Kaye Belcher, SP
Team Member

Sr. Annette

Annette Seubert, SP
Team Member

Karen Lauby

Karen Lauby
Team Member

Sr. Charlotte

Charlotte Van Dyke, SP
Team Member

INSIDE:

Mother Joseph Award ●

New Leadership Team ●

Providence Companion



Provincial Councilor
Charlotte Van Dyke (left)
presents the crystal flame
of the Mother Joseph
Award to Ruth Palnick.

Ruth Palnick of Spokane *receives 2009 Mother Joseph Award*

Editor's Note: *The Mother Joseph Award is given to a person within the boundaries of Mother Joseph Province who exemplifies the values and courage of Mother Joseph. The Provincial and Leadership Team members present the award on behalf of all of the Sisters of Providence of Mother Joseph Province, which includes Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Montana and El Salvador.*

Ruth Palnick was nominated for this year's Mother Joseph Award by Mary Rathert, OP, program director of Women's Hearth, a drop-in center for women in Spokane. A missionary for the last two decades, Ruth has brought warmth, a listening ear and companionship to the women at the downtown drop-in center. She also helps the dying celebrate life with song, prayer and laughter as she serves as a volunteer chaplain for Hospice of Spokane.

Ruth received the Mother Joseph Award at a ceremony November 12 at Women's Hearth, where she volun-

teers weekly. Women's Hearth is one of the programs of Transitions, an intercommunity ministry that is sponsored by four congregations of women religious.

"Ruth truly exemplifies the values of Mother Joseph," Mary wrote in her letter of nomination. "Her entire life is about spreading *the flame of compassion, courage, and loving service to those in need*. And she does all this with a smile always on her face, no matter what kind of pain she may be experiencing."

Ruth, 56, a native of Salem, Ore., lives with Parkinson's disease and diabetes. She is a past president of the Parkinson Resource Center in Spokane and directs Tremble Clefs, a choir of people with Parkinson's. She also is a volunteer chaplain at Hospice of Spokane and was named Hospice Volunteer Chaplain of the Year in 2007.

Ruth has described herself as "an urban missionary." Through Missions Door, sponsors of Christian missionaries worldwide that formerly was known as Mission to the Americas, she has been sharing her gifts with others for 20 years. "We are told to carve out a ministry as God would direct us," Ruth says.

Her ministry follows in the footsteps of her parents, a Baptist pastor and a mother who traveled to Ukraine to work with orphans. As an 8 year old, Ruth met a doctor who worked with lepers in India and knew she wanted to be a missionary and a nurse. She graduated from Seattle Pacific University in 1975 with a bachelor's degree in nursing, and received a master's degree in intercultural ministry from Western Baptist Seminary in Portland in 1989.

A former nurse in Seattle and Olympia, Ruth has comforted people battling cancer there, prostitutes and others dying of AIDS in Honduras, and the dying and their grieving family members in Spokane. Along the way, she has built a base of support from eight churches and 90 couples who have been touched by who she is and what she does with her life. "My faith and trust is that God will provide, and God has been gracious; I have never lacked support," Ruth declares.

For the past five years she has been bringing her gifts to the women at Women's Hearth, spending six to 16 hours a week working with knitting and crocheting circles, "but most of all (she) brings her peaceful, compassionate presence to the women," Mary wrote.

"The knitting circle becomes the center of community, with Ruth giving each person special attention and calling forth the stories of the women. With her kindness and her listening, she helps the women move to a strong sense of self and often find courage to take giant steps toward change in their lives. When Ruth isn't working with the knitting circle, she can be found playing the piano, leading a singing group, or quietly listening and sometimes praying with an individual woman."

Ruth has collected about 30 boxes of yarn, all sorted by color and type, that have been donated. She has learned a great deal by watching women begin by hanging around the edges of the circle, not participating but just watching. Over time, trust is established and the women venture closer. "There is a kind of anger that happens when they first step into the circle; I've come to realize that it is really fear. The knitting circle really does knit people together."

One of the joys of her volunteer work at the Women's Hearth is the interaction with its staff, Ruth says. "I feel so supported and the staff is so loving." Staff members also show good humor, she adds. When a woman is struggling to learn to knit, she reminds them that she taught some of the staffers who still are not very good at it, she says with a chuckle.

Ruth recently cut back her volunteer hours to one day a week at Women's Hearth, two days a week at Hospice of Spokane, and an endless stream of speaking engagements on a variety of topics. She also is an active

member of Hillyard Baptist Church, a small congregation of 100 that does outreach and has a constantly open door. Ruth's two cats also get in on the outreach work.

Ruth, who once was a volunteer chaplain at St. Joseph Care Center in Spokane, is no stranger to Providence and had heard of the Mother Joseph Award. When Mary called to tell her she had been chosen to receive it, Ruth says, "I felt it was an incredible honor and I thought they must be running out of people."

As always, nominations for the Mother Joseph Award were kept confidential this year until Sister Charlotte Van Dyke notified Mary that her nominee had been chosen. Mary then informed Ruth that she had been nominated and selected for the honor. The letter nominating Ruth for the award was signed by half a dozen staff members at the Women's Hearth. "Many women of our community would also sign this, but we might lose the 'secret,' so only staff members have added their names," Mary noted at the bottom of the letter.

When the secret was finally out, there was no shortage of women at Women's Hearth who were eager to share their thoughts about Ruth. Here are some of their comments:

She taught me how to knit and put my colors together. She's good to be around. 🧶 Sandy W.

She donates yarn and time and needles and teaches us. She is always happy and in a good mood. 🧶 Sandi

She taught me how to knit even though it was frustrating since I am a left hander. She stuck to it and I really appreciate it. 🧶 Anaka

She taught me how to play the harpsichord. She was very patient, kind, and gentle. I've yet to see her angry. 🧶 Sue M.

She's the best friend anyone could have. She helped me out when my mother passed away and my sister got sick. Ruth helps me with my knitting and crocheting. 🧶 Gloria

She's always bright and cheery. When you are feeling low, she gives you a compliment. She makes you feel better no matter how full her plate is. She always has a smile. She brightens the room. 🧶 Peggy Sue ●

PROFILES of New Leadership

A new Provincial Council will provide leadership to Mother Joseph Province as of January 1, 2010. Learn more about the four members of that council here.

Jo Ann Showalter, SP, Provincial Councillor

(Josephine Ann Showalter)

"Environmental issues are a lifelong passion and, I feel, a call," says Sister Jo Ann Showalter, who describes herself as an "environmental advocate on local and state levels," and an "international traveler with awareness of global realities."

Sister Jo Ann Showalter grew up in the Willamette Valley of Oregon with six younger brothers and sisters. Her parents, Don and Verna Herb of Sublimity, Ore., are now deceased.

Sister Jo Ann has been a Sister of Providence since 1994. Her educational background includes a BA degree in religion and philosophy, pastoral care ministries, from Marylhurst University, Lake Oswego, Ore.; a certificate in

pastoral care and counseling, also from Marylhurst; and an MA degree in earth literacy from St. Mary of the Woods College, Terre Haute, Ind. She also spent 12 weeks in Spanish language studies in El Salvador.

Her ministry experiences have included medical radiography and sonography, and serving as a member of the Formation Team for Mother Joseph Province and of the Community Life Team for Mount St. Joseph in Spokane. She also is a regional liaison for the Providence Associates in the region in the state of Georgia.

Sister Jo Ann has been active on the Reclaiming Earth Committee, as a member and its secretary, since 2004. She also has been a member of the planning committees for the General Chapter and the Provincial Chapter, and also on

the Discernment Planning Committee/Chapter of Elections, 2008–09.

Her committee/board/volunteer experience outside the religious community is extensive, including New Beginnings Ministry, Franklin County, Ga.; the National Religious Formation Conference, as a board member and chair of Region 15; Eastern Washington spokesperson and a new board member for Earth Ministry, an interfaith organization with a focus on faith and environment; United for Sustainability, including as co-coordinator of Sustainability Forum 2006; on the Citizens Advisory Committee, Yakima County Solid Waste Division; and on the Sustainability Committee of UNANIMA NGO.

Gifts and qualities Sister Jo Ann brings to the Leadership Team include being a team player, possessing an ecological background for the future, being practical and open to the new, intercultural and international experience, and ecumenical experiences. ●

Judith Desmarais, SP, Provincial Councillor

Serving the Deaf Community is a passion for Sister Judith Desmarais. Beginning with formal ministry in the archdioceses of Seattle and then Portland, she has continued her involvement, both in the United States and in Montreal.

Born at St. Elizabeth Hospital in the Yakima Valley, Sister Judith grew up on a hop farm in Moxee, Wash., in a family with five children. She attended Holy Rosary grade school in Moxee and St. Joseph Academy in Yakima. After high school she entered the Sisters of Providence at Providence Heights, Issaquah, Wash., in 1962 and made first profession in 1965. She made perpetual profession in 1971 at Holy Rosary Church in Moxee.

In 1991, Sister Judith was elected provincial councillor for Sacred Heart Province. She held that position for

four years and became interim provincial superior during the fifth year.

In July 1997, during the General Chapter in Montreal, Quebec, Sister Judith was elected to a five-year term as a general councillor and she subsequently was re-elected for a second term in 2002. Serving on the General Council provided opportunities to live and work in an international and multicultural environment, to get to know the whole congregation and its ministries, and to meet Providence Associates in various countries. In her role, she was privileged to set up the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Center at the offices of the General Administration. As the SP board member on UNANIMA International, the NGO in which the sisters participate, she became involved in the issue of trafficking of women and children, and has continued to work on this in Seattle.

Prior to religious community service positions, Sister Judith ministered for 14 years as director of ministry with deaf people, first for the Archdiocese of Seattle and then for the Archdiocese of Portland. This call to work with deaf people came about during her years of teaching in primary grades in Vancouver, Wash., at St. Joseph School, where she became involved in the religious education program for the students at Washington State School for the Deaf. After teaching primary grades for nine years, including Our Lady of Lourdes School in Vancouver, and Holy Family School in Seattle, she attended an interpreter training program in sign language at Seattle Central Community College.

During her years of community leadership she has continued to be involved with deaf people through interpreting liturgy and attendance at various events in the United States and in Montreal. While on the General Council she was closely connected with the deaf Sisters of Our Lady of Seven Dolors.

