On the reservation at Fort Belknap, Mont., life has a language and a rhythm all its own.

It is here that Sister Nancy MacLean's journey of Providence "has taken on fuller meaning, life and joy."

In this past year, she has found new companions on the journey among the Providence Wisdom Keepers.

SACRED HEART PROVIDENCE WISDOM KEEPERS

6 formed at Fort Belknap

Providence Wisdom Keeper Prayer Warrior John Chandler blessing John Bell during confirmation ceremony. Desi Bell sits to the right of John with Jerome Bell in the background.

Providence Wisdom Keeper Susie Brown (r) is shown here in a photo taken a few years ago with Sr. Lois Murray (l) and Sr. Jane Dufault.

In November 2006, Sister Nancy MacLean was in prayer, reflecting on how to celebrate the December 8 opening of the year of celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Sisters of Providence in the West. She was determined to do something at Fort Belknap through the Native people and their lives. "They were disrupted by our presence as European people, but they have been so gracious, so welcoming to us as Sisters of Providence," she explains. "I wanted to say thank you very much for letting us come and for teaching us the Spirit ways."

It came to her that by custom, the celebration should involve the whole parish and should be tied to the regular Mass at Sacred Heart Church, followed by a feed. But she wanted to do more than feed the people; Sister Nancy wanted to honor them. "I talked with Sister Lois Murray, who called me to Belknap, and I asked her to pray with me. I thought about the people I wanted to honor, who had sat at my table and cried tears and laughter, and who had shared their spirituality as I shared mine."

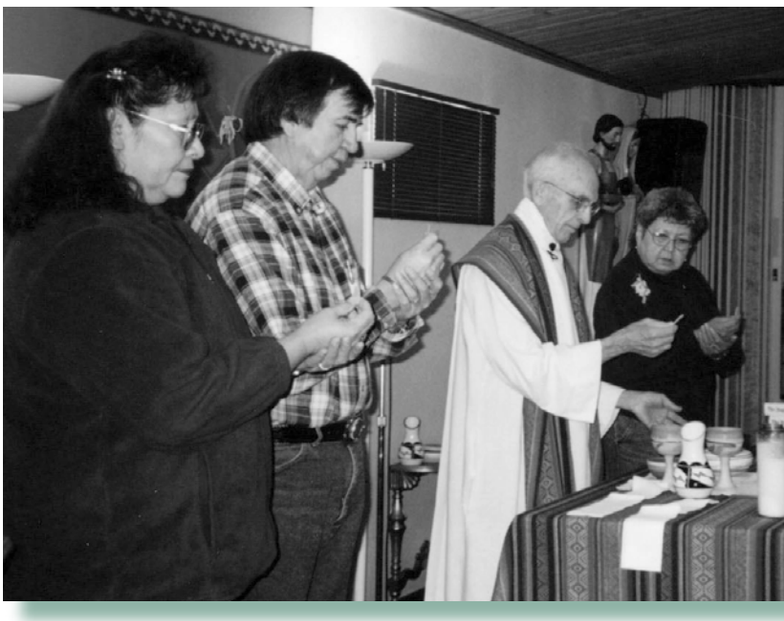
Sr. Nancy MacLean places the Mother Emilie Gamelin medallion on Susie Brown as Joe Brown stands by her side.

She shared her thoughts with Linda Azure, pastoral minister, who helped her link the spirituality of the Native ancestors and of Mother Joseph and the four sisters who arrived with her in 1856. She also spoke with Philip Bell, who said, "saying you are sorry, asking forgiveness and feeding bread is the Indian ceremonial way of making relatives."

One of the names suggested, Providence Wisdom Keepers, stuck. "To be these Wisdom Keepers, you have only to Be Who You Are, Where You Are, RESPONDING to the everyday needs of family, friends and those folks Provident God puts in your path."

The gathering for the naming ceremony was held on December 8, Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The birth of the Sacred Heart Family of Providence Wisdom Keepers was honored that day. Many of them are ministers in the faith community and help their tribal and family members on the Fort Belknap Reservation. "It is through the spirituality of our ancestors, Native American, Providence and Christian, that God's Providence is weaving this cloth of Wisdom Keepers to carry on the ministries in our everyday lives."

Beadwork by Claudia Bear of Fort Belknap Sacred Heart Church. Beatification medals of Blessed Emilie Gamelin were given to honor the Providence Wisdom Keepers.



Providence Wisdom Keepers: Linda Azure, Medric Buck, Fr. Joseph Retzel, SJ, and Faye Filesteel.

Sister Nancy had personally invited the 30 to 35 individuals who would be honored and encouraged them to bring their families. "I talked to each one and told them God told me to do it," she says. "'The Creator brought you to my mind,' I said." At the Mass, they joined in the crying, laughing and dancing when each received a special medal from Montreal on a beaded leather strip. The beatification medal of foundress Blessed Emilie Gamelin is a reminder of the spirit of Providence service to the poor, the spirit of the Mother of Sorrows, and that the Wisdom Keepers, like the Sisters of Providence, are urged by Christ's love.

While only some were recognized in the formal ceremony, all are Wisdom Keepers, Sister Nancy told those gathered. "Providence is at work within you. You are God's sacred people. This we witness!" ●

As people of Sacred Heart,
being PROVIDENCE WISDOM KEEPERS,
we hope to carry Providence God's love
for all our relatives on Mother Earth,
especially the broken in spirit, the poor and vulnerable.
We humbly ask Provident God for the continued gift
of Holy Spirit that we do this with compassion
and respect for all; bringing the vision of
Oneness and Harmony Home…