

Caritas

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Message from the Leadership Team



Various peoples have discerned God's face and heard God's voice in creation.

Discerning this presence, we respond with wonder and care.

At the same time, moreover, God specially breaks through in the experience of human love. God loves every creature, of course, but at a certain time a sacred event startled us. God said to humans in a human voice, "I love you."

God loved us first – before we could imagine such a thing. That's the Christmas surprise: God loved us first. It was as if God couldn't resist us. In our human nature God saw both our vulnerability and our splendor.

Then it seems as if God thought, "Maybe, I can do something to make myself irresistible to humans. Then they will love in return. Who can resist the beauty of a child?" So God became a baby, a boy. "And you shall name him Jesus." (Luke 1:32)

Jesus spent his life letting humans know God's love as he, himself, did. His Gospel, his good news, was that God loves everyone. His gift was love for us and an invitation to love even as he loves us.

This Christmas we Sisters of Providence want to tell, say and show our love for vulnerable and splendid people. Having been so loved by God, we feel privileged to continue what Jesus began. We feel particularly honored to love you and to know that many of you are our partners in living God's message of love. This year, many people may have a particular need to hear and see it, so thank you for joining with us in celebrating and sharing the Christmas surprise.

Of his fullness we have all had a share – love following upon love. (John 1:16)



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2008 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.

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labbergasted.” That is how Lynne Ballew of Anchorage, Alaska, describes her reaction when she learned she was the recipient of the 2008 Mother Joseph Award. “I am in complete awe of Mother Joseph and her accomplishments, and so astounded and privileged to be honored in her name,” said the founder and volunteer director of the Safe Harbor Inn, Alaska’s first and only nonprofit hotel for homeless families and people with disabilities.



Lynne Ballew, Safe Harbor Inn project director, and Emma

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Lynne was presented with the award at a reception in Anchorage on December 5. She was nominated for the honor by Al Parrish, CEO of Providence Health and Services Alaska, and others. The nominating documents describe Lynne as “a tireless advocate for social justice,” an outstanding collaborator, and one whose values, vocation, and lifestyle mirror those of Mother Joseph.

“Like Mother Joseph did, Lynne dedicates all of her time and effort toward bringing about social justice and diminishing the impact of poverty,” Al wrote. “Drawing from her own experience as a single mother who knew poverty and homelessness firsthand, Lynne brings to all of her community endeavors a sense of mission, providing sustenance to and preserving the dignity of those in need.”

The Safe Harbor Inn is a hotel—not a shelter, not a program, not a care facility, not rental housing, not an institution. It offers privacy, dignity, respect, warmth, and friendship. Its tool is relentless hospitality. On any given night its 105 rooms in two locations are home to at least 250 people. They are guests—not clients, not tenants, not cases. Lynne lives in one of Safe Harbor’s smaller rooms, using it as both her home and her office. Her nominators say the success of Safe Harbor is due to her vision, compassion, and commitment.

“Her whole life is dedicated to improving the lives of those who find themselves homeless. She walks her talk 100 percent of the time,” wrote Monica Anderson, Chief Mission Integration Officer for Providence Health and Services Alaska.

Born in San Francisco, Lynne was adopted as a baby and grew up knowing “how fragile and contingent and frightening everything could be.” But she also learned, in a Dominican Convent school, that “service is the whole point,” from nuns who were “full of kindness, love, and the excitement of learning. They taught me that whatever gifts you are lucky enough to receive have to be passed on for the benefit of others.”

After receiving her Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University, Lynne moved to Boston to teach at Boston College in 1975. Two years later, she bought her first pickup truck and introduced her 6-year-old daughter, Leesie, to her love of travel when the two drove from Boston to Alaska. “I totally fell in love with Alaska,” Lynne recalls. “It was so huge, the mountains, sky, and moose—a beautiful, captivating place.” She and Leesie moved to Anchorage the following year.

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Remembering her time volunteering at a Dorothy Day Catholic Worker House in south Boston gave her an idea. That place had been a drop-in center and free restaurant during the day, and Lynne decided to start a place like it, “a warm place to eat and be befriended, safe, and welcomed.” Bean’s Café, named by Leesie (whose nickname was “Bean”), opened in 1979 and 30 years later is still going strong in Anchorage, serving 20,000 meals a month.

After nearly 15 years in the Lower 48 developing programs and housing for homeless and low-income people, Lynne returned to Alaska for good in 1995. She began working almost at once on the lack of housing for people with special needs, especially the more than 1,000 homeless people in Anchorage. Despite the overwhelming need for it, Anchorage had “no safe, affordable, congenial longer-term place to stay while you get back on your feet.” After much planning, fundraising, and collaborating with dozens of agencies and community leaders, Safe Harbor Inn opened on November 9, 2001, as 21 rooms in an older, remodeled hotel.

The project received major ongoing support from the Rasmuson Foundation of Alaska, Safe Harbor’s largest private donor. That commitment has galvanized hundreds of other contributors, and the hotel has since expanded three times to its current 105 rooms. Its cost per bed night is less than \$10. Best of all, more than 70 percent of guests make it to permanent housing successfully.

Half of Safe Harbor’s guests are children under 18, and families with children now represent 85 percent of all guests. Another trend is the increasing number of rural Alaskans who are now moving into Anchorage because of rising costs, especially skyrocketing fuel prices. In light of the trends, it is no wonder that Safe Harbor has been full with a long waiting list ever since it opened.

“... It is never about Lynne, always about those she serves ... Lynne is there to provide for whatever needs Safe Harbor guests might have,” wrote Susan H. Bomalaski, Ph.D., LPC, executive director of Catholic Social Services, Anchorage. “When one of our Beyond Shelter participants living at Safe Harbor died unexpectedly, Lynne helped raise funds for the funeral expenses, made sure a member of the clergy was there for the family, and supported our staff member through this difficult process.”

Susan says Lynne “selflessly assists whenever she can ... Recently the CSS Refugee Assistance and Immigration Services (RAIS) program was experiencing a great deal of difficulty in providing the household furnishings necessary to resettle families newly arriving in Anchorage. I happened to mention this to Lynne at a community meeting. The next thing I knew Lynne was offering to pick up, store and deliver furniture to our families, all for a nominal fee. What an answer to prayer!”

On October 24, Lynne and many others in Anchorage celebrated the purchase of a former Ramada Inn in east Anchorage, adding another 50 rooms to the original 55. Like the original 55 rooms, the 50 new rooms also have free cable TV, private bathrooms, refrigerators and microwaves, plus extra goodies like chocolates on the pillows and rubber duckies for the bathtubs. Lynne likes to think of Safe Harbor as “the Ritz for the rest of us. The nicer it looks, the better it works.”

While there is no maximum length of stay, the average stay has been 97 days, until guests find permanent housing, usually through a rental subsidy program. When they do leave, it is with a houseful of donated furniture, help paying the security deposit, and free moving to their new places with Lynne’s beloved 21-year-old Ford pickup truck, Lefty.

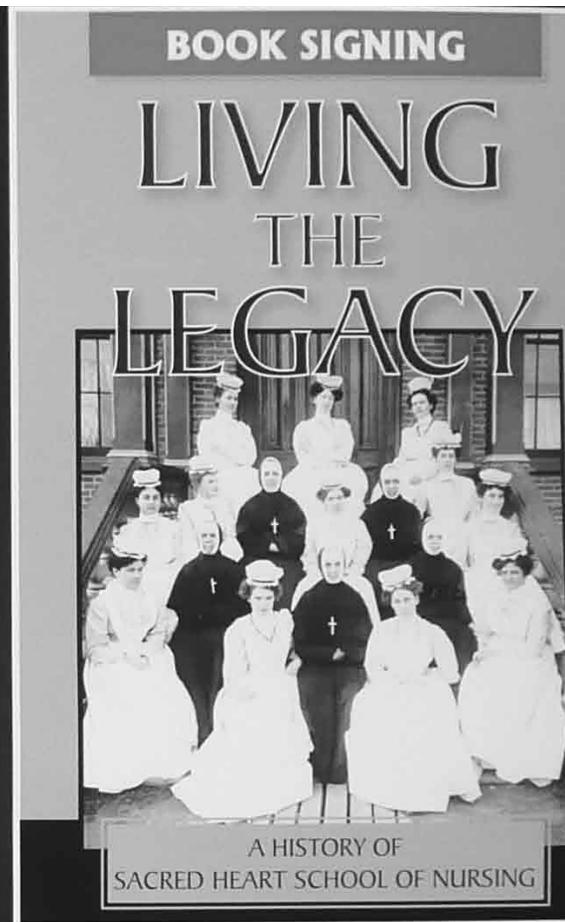
Nearly all Safe Harbor staff members are former guests, because “they have compassion, smarts, a desire to work hard and serve, and a sense of humor. Our wonderful staff is the primary reason for our success. Guests love it here because they know that we love making a jolly place for them and that we’re always rooting for them to be successful,” Lynne says.

Many of the guests and staff are beneficiaries of the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (the Trust), a state agency that supports organizations providing services to Trust beneficiaries—people with chronic mental illness and related disabilities. The Trust is Safe Harbor’s largest public donor, and Safe Harbor daily fulfills its commitment to serving Trust beneficiaries.

Lynne has a list of awards and honors too long to mention here, and they are not what she finds most important. Asked what motivates her and gives her such drive, she responds: “My favorite book when I was little was *The Little Engine That Could*. I really identify with my pickup trucks and always want to be the engine under the hood—quiet, driven, out of sight, reliable, efficient, and helping folks who need a lift get to where they need to be.” Her nominators for this year’s Mother Joseph Award had similar thoughts. “Lynne, with a Ph.D. in Greek philosophy, has committed her life to making things better for those who have nothing,” Al wrote. “When people ask about the connection, she tells them she believes homeless people and strangers are gifts from God, and should be treated with respect.”

“If Mother Joseph were alive today in Anchorage, there is no doubt she would be working in partnership with Lynne Ballew,” according to Al. “They have the same heart, the same passion, and believe in and live out of the same preferential option for the poor. Today, in the 21st century, Lynne Ballew continues to reveal God’s love for the poor and vulnerable in the tradition of the Sisters of Providence.” ●

“Living the Legacy”



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Sister Pam White (left) and Betty Harrington, PA, are pictured next to a display for “Living the Legacy: A History of Sacred Heart School of Nursing.”

New book offers history of Sacred Heart School of Nursing

When you hold a copy of “Living the Legacy: A History of Sacred Heart School of Nursing,” you know you have your hands on something special. This beautiful 256-page book is full of historical and class photographs, facts and stories about this very significant Spokane institution from its beginning in 1898 until its closure in 1973.