



Sisters of Providence gathered for the outdoor Mass celebrating the 70th anniversary of Providence Portland Medical Center are (seated from left) Sisters Suzette Bautista, Lucy St. Hilaire, Lenora Donovan, Katherine Smith and Rita Ferschweiler, and (standing from left) Sister Ana Dolores Orellana-Gamero, Provincial Superior Karin Dufault, and Sisters Margaret Pastro, Joyce Green, Mary Fox, Margaret Bischoff, Jeanette Heindl, Judi Roberts and Lang Tran.



A choir provided music for the Mass.

Providence Portland Medical Center Anniversary

4

Last two resident sisters leave Providence Portland Medical Center

It made news in Portland, Ore., in September when the last two Sisters of Providence moved out of their residence at Providence Portland Medical Center's eighth floor convent. The story in *The Oregonian* obviously struck a chord with readers. As the newspaper commented, "The story on our sisters is the 7th most read story on Oregonlive.com today. Not bad considering the top 6 are Ducks related!"

Since the hospital began in 1941, there have been Sisters of Providence living onsite. That ended this fall, when Sisters Rita Ferschweiler, age 93, and Lenora Donovan, age 78, moved to Seattle. The two received a standing ovation at an outdoor Mass on the campus on September 7 in celebration of PPMC's 70th anniversary.

Archbishop John Vlazny, celebrant for the Mass, called the medical center "holy ground." "Many people come here for healing

Sisters Lenora Donovan (left) and Rita Ferschweiler receive a blessing from Portland Archbishop John Vlazny.



– physical, certainly – but also emotional and spiritual." The archbishop said those who work in health care ministry mirror the healing work of Jesus.

Sister Rita was CEO of St. Vincent Medical Center when it moved to its current location on Barnes Road. She is a legend in Portland-area health care, including as an administrator and for her years of providing sensitive and loving pastoral care to patients and their families, and to employees.

Sister Rita was surprised to receive a special recognition at the Mass, acknowledgement that she will be added to the Walk of the Heroines at Portland State University. Her name will be added to those of other women who left their mark on the area, including Mother Joseph, foundress of the Sisters of Providence in the West. (See related story on page 5.) ●



Guests stand in the hospital's South Plaza Courtyard for the beginning of the processional.



The outdoor Mass celebrating PPMC's anniversary was packed.

Special recognition for an SP heroine

Sister Rita Ferschweiler will have her name engraved on a wall at the Walk of the Heroines on the campus of Portland State University. The recognition was initiated by Providence Health & Services - Oregon, the Provincial Superior and Council, and the Sisters of Providence in Portland. Sister Rita was surprised to be presented with a certificate notifying her of the honor at the celebration of the 70th anniversary of Providence Portland Medical Center.



Sisters Lenora Donovan (left) and Rita Ferschweiler received a standing ovation at the Mass.

Born into an Oregon pioneer family in 1918, Sister Rita discovered early on what it means to be strongly connected to a community. She grew up milking cows, picking berries and hops, and doing chores on the family farm near the tiny Willamette Valley town of Gervais, Ore.

She moved to Portland after high school, and made the decision to enter the novitiate of the Sisters of Providence in 1942. Two years later she professed her vows as a Sister of Providence. Feeling called to a ministry of compassionate care, Sister Rita (who was then known as Sister Mary Laureen) earned her nursing diploma at St. Elizabeth School of Nursing in Yakima, Wash., in 1948. She received a bachelor's degree in nursing from Seattle University in 1957, and a master's in nursing service administration from St. Louis University in 1958.

In her contributions to nursing and to health care administration, Sister Rita drew inspiration from the pioneering Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart. She modeled her leadership after that venerable Sister of Providence, who brought a health care and social service ministry from Quebec to the Pacific Northwest in 1856. Mother Joseph is recognized prominently in the Walk of the Heroines.

Sister Rita joined St. Vincent Hospital, Oregon's first hospital, in 1956 as a staff nurse and rose to director of nursing. In 1964 she was named the hospital's administrator – quite a step for someone who wanted nothing more than to care for a tiny new baby or hold the hand of a patient in pain. With that appointment, she became the Sisters of Providence's point person when the decision was made to relocate St. Vincent Hospital. Sister Rita spearheaded construction of a modern 451-bed facility and oversaw the massive 1971 move from Northwest Westover Road in Portland to the current Providence St. Vincent Medical Center site on Southwest Barnes Road.

That same year, 1971, *The Oregon Journal* newspaper named Sister Rita one of Oregon's "10 Women of Accomplishment" for her contributions to the health of the Portland community. Decades later, in an article in *The Oregonian*, civic leader and author Gerry Frank would write: "Sister Rita's faith, her love of fellow human beings and her consistent thoughtfulness have made her one of the most popular living 'saints' in our community."

Sister Rita is fondly remembered as an administrator of warm heart and good humor who kept her door open to all. She treasured the hospital's sense of family and community. She completed her work in 1972, the last Sister of Providence to serve as an administrator of a Portland hospital. However, her administrative days were far from over.

In 1977 Sister Rita was asked to assume the role of administrator of Mount St. Vincent in Seattle, a care center for older adults. There, she was able to share her deep love for and appreciation of the elderly. She enrolled in the Continuing Religious Education Development Opportunities program (CREDO) at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Wash. Through this program, she gained a renewal in scripture and theology and an even deeper spirituality.

Sister Rita joined the Provincial Council/Board of Directors as the councilor for ministry in the Sisters of Providence's Sacred Heart Province in 1985. As her administrative responsibilities increased, she was named to many boards and held membership in several nursing and administrative organizations. Regardless of the position she held or the accolades she received, her love for the elderly and her genuine call to serve the poor and vulnerable remained the foundation of her ministry.

Sister Rita eventually returned to Portland, living on the Providence Portland Medical Center campus, and continuing her volunteer ministry with patients, serving on boards, making phone calls for a busy blood clinic, bringing the Eucharist to patients and reading books for visually impaired people.

To this day she finds nature a source of refreshment. She often visits the family farm in St. Paul, Ore., picking fruits and berries for her fellow Sisters of Providence.

The sense of community that nourished Sister Rita's early life continues to nurture her devotion to serving others. "I am grateful," she has said, "for the gift of faith, which has been the sustaining element over the years, and thankful for a loving, supporting immediate family and for a close extended family. I am thankful to a religious community that supported, challenged, and provided growth opportunities, both spiritually and professionally, and I am thankful for friends. If I had it to do over again, I'd do the same thing." ●

Spotlight *on vocations*

The fall began with joyful celebrations marking the spiritual journeys of four Sisters of Providence – one to the novitiate, two for first vows and one to renewal of vows. Sister Marita Capili entered the novitiate in Spokane. Sisters Hong Nga Nguyen and Rosa Nguyen professed first vows in Seattle. Sister Vilma Franco renewed her vows in Spokane.

Novitiate entrance • • • • •

Marita Capili entered the novitiate in a simple ceremony on September 11 in the chapel at Mount St. Joseph, Spokane. Marita was born in the Philippines and spent her teen years in Guam, where she attended high school and college, earning an associate's degree in hotel management. She worked for Hyatt International Hotels at locations around the world, including Seattle, before becoming a candidate for the Sisters of Providence in August 2009. ●



Provincial Superior Karin Dufault (right) presents a copy of the Sisters of Providence Constitutions to Marita Capili.



Sister Karin joins Sisters Rosa Sen Nguyen (left) and Hong Nga Nguyen as they profess first vows.

• • • • • *First vows*

Sisters Hong Nga Nguyen and Rosa Sen Nguyen professed first vows in a ceremony on September 25 at St. Joseph Residence, Seattle. Both are from Vietnam and met the Sisters of Providence through correspondence and then discernment. Together, they came to the United States in November 2006 for a six-month "Come and See" experience. They were accepted as candidates at the Provincial Chapter in August 2008. Both Hong Nga and Rosa entered the novitiate in 2009. ●

Vow renewal • • • • •

Sister Vilma Franco renewed her vows on October 2 in the chapel at Mount St. Joseph, Spokane. She arrived in Spokane from Angela Montano, El Salvador, in the winter of 2006. ●



Sister Karin receives Sister Vilma Franco's request to renew her temporary vows.

To learn more about the steps to becoming a Sister of Providence, go to the Sisters of Providence website's vocation section.