Caritas

Winter 2020-2021

A publication for the Sisters of Providence and Friends

It has been a year like no other. Now is the time for hope.

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A Christmas message from the Leadership Team

Barbara Schamber, SP
Jacqueline Fernandes, SP
Karen Hawkins, SP
Margarita Hernandez, SP
Elinor Alexander
David Neisius

"Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." Romans 12:12

Though there are many verses that speak to what we are going through in the world today, this is one that we have returned to as day after day we have faced extraordinary challenges through much of 2020. A global pandemic, economic crisis, contentious politics, racial justice movements, wildfires and storms have shaken our world.

Yet as we know from history and our Christian faith, the fractures caused by these momentous occurrences also open space for compassion, justice and meaningful change. We discover God among us in times of tribulation, where suffering calls forth a response of love and compassion. We are presented with opportunities to more deeply examine and change how we respond to injustices, so we can move toward peace. All of this is cause for hope!

The Sisters of Providence and all the dedicated laity who continue to collaborate with us in responding and adapting to the times in our ministries and day-to-day lives are the human face and hands of Providence. We especially wish to acknowledge our sisters in retirement at St. Joseph Residence in Seattle and Emilie Court in Spokane who have been in lockdown since March. They continue to contribute as they can, despite the challenges.

We are so grateful to our Provident God and Blessed Emilie Gamelin for protecting our congregation from deaths due to COVID. Many of our friends and benefactors have not been as fortunate and have suffered the loss of a loved one during these months. We offer you our compassionate sympathy and assurance of prayers.

It has been a heavy and trying year in so many ways. Have faith that Providence is present, even in the darkest hours. May hope, patience and prayer be guiding lights for all during this blessed Christmas season and into the new year. The Lord comes again to us as we sing: Glory to God in the highest and peace to all people on Earth.

Lovingly in Providence,

Barbara Schamber, SP
provincial leader

Elinor Alexander
provincial secretary

David Neisius
provincial treasurer

Jacqueline Fernandes, SP
provincial councilor

Karen Hawkins, SP
provincial councilor

Margarita Hernandez, SP
provincial councilor

Reflections on a year like no other

By Clare Lentz, SP

This year, 2020, has been a year like no other. Our Provident God is leading us into new terrain. God is in charge of the world! The changes we need now can only come about by deep, deep, contemplative listening and then acting. In this way we will accomplish what God wants.

We must let our Gracious God take possession of our eyes, ears, minds and hearts so we can move with Spirit and follow Her whisperings. God's Spirit is pushing us to cooperate in God's work. We are evolving in God's tempo as God's partners toward an unknown future that Providence so desires.

The global pandemic – COVID 19 – is requiring us to live in deep grief, with so many deaths, the economic collapse and wealth disparity. We are much like the mute spirit who was brought to Jesus to be healed. The disciples were clueless about how to respond. Jesus told them that this will only come out through faith and prayer. "Nothing will be impossible for you."

A huge blessing is that our lives have greatly slowed down. I treasure the personal prayer time we have. We are living more reflective lives, growing in contemplative listening, dialoguing with our sisters and discerning action. Jesus prayed to his Father "that they may be One…they may all be One, in us as you, Father, are in me, and I in you." This seems to be Jesus' deepest desire.

The global pandemic is shifting the trajectory of human history. It is prompting us to deepen our communion with each other and with other religious congregations and groups. The tasks of our evolving world are the common concern of all of humanity. We are invited to co-partner with God's Self in this flourishing of all people and, indeed, with Creation itself.

One gift of this time is the renewed and extended connections within Mother Joseph Province and with sisters in other provinces. I appreciate the experiences we have shared online using technologies like Zoom. Now we share in first and final vows, funerals, as well as marking congregational events with prayer and ritual through virtual celebrations. Some newer members have made videos of their activities – dancing, singing and voicing their views. This has been a wonderful way to get to know them.

One immense evil we must address is the systemic racism and inequities that impact the lives of Black, Latinx and other people of color. The awareness of our sin confronts us daily. Sisters are doing what we can to change this centuries long prejudice – participating in protests and studying the situations to learn, repent and change our hearts and actions to be more aligned with our Christian values.

As we move forward into a complex future with many unknowns, we do so with eyes, ears and hearts wide open. Our foundation of trust in our Provident God is solid. We are growing toward a divine vision with the assurance that God is always with us!

Earth Committee moves toward ecological conversion

Care of the Earth is nothing new to the Sisters of Providence. It is part of the Constitutions and Rules of the congregation – number 28, to be precise: "… Recognizing that we humans are a part of the whole created universe, we accept the challenge to promote an integral ecology. (Pope Francis) As we foster the human, social and environmental connectedness of God's creation, we become more authentic signs of God's loving Providence."

During this year of significant international milestones in caring for creation – the fifth anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical, "Laudato Si," the fifth anniversary of the Paris Agreement to combat climate change, and the 50th anniversary of Earth Day – it has simultaneously been a time of significant suffering due to health, justice, economic and environmental inequities.

In response to the increased and changing needs of our times, the Sisters of Providence have refocused their Earth ministry. A new Earth Committee will build on the work of the prior Reclaiming Earth Committee to support an updated **mission statement: to foster action for the healing of our common home by deepening our understanding of Constitution #28 and facilitating the response to Laudato Si and integral ecology by the Sisters of Providence, Associates, Companions and friends.**

Recognizing that we humans are a part of the whole created universe, we accept the challenge to promote an integral ecology.

Nature's Abba Prayer

Chants of praise are sung in tongues of birds and beasts, hallowing the creator whose isness they proclaim in the skies and on Mother Earth,

Fish and fowl and all four-legged ones await their daily sustenance and with eagerness nourish themselves with what Providence provides.

Trees and plants sink deep their roots and extend their branches to quench their thirst and receive nutrients their being needs to sustain life.

May humanity learn to join in like engagement of table fellowship, sharing bread and food, shelter and medical care so all people can gratefully receive their basic needs.

May the two-legged ones ask forgiveness for destroying the balance of all this livelihood. May they learn to live their existence with one another and not against.

Let all humankind be led from their paths of violence and destruction to proclaim Justice-making for all and come to celebrate our common home.

May all peoples be inspired to respect the diversity among us and work for God's KINDOM coming among all creation. May they join nature's praises that all may be one enjoying the simple gifts of life. Amen. So it is, and so be it.

-Annette Seubert, SP 10/18/20

Our Earth today cries out for us to respond to the care of our common home.

The committee is made up of sisters with deep roots in Earth advocacy: Sisters Annette Seubert, Charlene Hudon, Margaret Botch, Marilyn Charette, Mary Kaye Nealen, Sue Orlowski, and Karen Hawkins. As a committee, they will be identifying specific steps for personal and provincial movement toward "Laudato Si's" Goals for Ecological Conversion, below.

1. **Response to the cry of the Earth:** work toward carbon neutrality through greater use of clean renewable energy and reduced fossil fuel use; support efforts to protect and promote biodiversity and guarantee water access for all.
2. **Response to the cry of the poor:** defend human life from conception to death and all forms of life on Earth, while giving special attention to vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities, migrants and children at risk of trafficking and slavery.
3. **Ecological economics:** support sustainable production, fair trade, ethical consumption and investments, investments in renewable energy, divestment from fossil fuels and limiting any economic activity harmful to the planet or people.
4. **Adoption of simple lifestyles:** reduce use of energy and resources, avoid single-use plastics, adopt a more plant-based diet, reduce meat consumption and increase use of public transportation over polluting alternatives.
5. **Ecological education:** redesign curricula around integral ecology, create ecological awareness and action, promote ecological vocation with young people and teachers.
6. **Ecological spirituality:** recover a religious vision of God's creation, promote creation-centered liturgical celebrations, develop ecological catechesis and prayers and encourage more time in nature.
7. Emphasis on **community involvement and participatory action** around creation care at all levels of society by promoting advocacy and grassroots campaigns.

"As a member of MJP Earth Committee I am eager for us as a province to delve more deeply into our constitution #28 and to understand integral ecology at a deeper level," says Sister Annette Seubert. "Our Earth today cries out for us to respond to the care of our common home. Creation cries out in devastating fires, high winds and tropical storms; our suffering people cry out in illness and deaths from COVID 19 and racial inequality surfacing black lives matter protests, violence and white supremacist activities; our consciences cry out for justice and transformative soul-making. I believe God is inviting us to change our minds and our hearts, and to invest our energies into responding to the most urgent need of our world today; climate change and its impact on the whole of our Earth community."

Integral ecology defined: everything is connected

Pope Francis' encyclical, "Laudato Si," chapter 4, describes integral ecology as the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, political, social, cultural, and ethical issues.

Because everything is connected, we must take a holistic approach to what is both an environmental and human crisis: "…genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others." (LS n 70)

Our current patterns of connecting people to each other do not make it possible for everyone to live well. Integral ecology requires "an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature." (LS n 139)

Photo by Ashwin Vaswani on Unsplash

"If everything is related, then the health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life. Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment. In this sense, social ecology is necessarily institutional, and gradually extends to the whole of society, from the primary social group, the family, to the wider local, national and international communities." (LS n 142)

Sister Teresa Huong Thi Nguyen processes into her first vows ceremony COVID style – with masks, closed pews, limited attendance and livestreaming for distant family and friends.

Teresa Huong Thi Nguyen professes final vows as a Sister of Providence

During this particularly challenging year, celebrating the perpetual vows of Sister Teresa Huong Thi Nguyen was a bright spot.

Sister Huong professed her final vows of chastity, poverty and obedience as a Sister of Providence in a liturgy on Sunday, Oct. 11, at Vietnamese Martyrs Catholic Church, Tukwila, Wash.

Due to pandemic health and safety requirements, Sister Huong's vows ceremony was a bit of a break from tradition. The church was limited to 25 percent capacity, which restricted the number of friends, parishioners and sisters to approximately 200, with masks and social distancing in effect. Caution tape blocked off alternate pews, attendees were seated six feet apart, and a cleaning crew appeared as soon as Mass dismissed. The customary final vows reception will be rescheduled as health and safety requirements allow.

Though Sister Huong's family was unable to travel from Vietnam for the ceremony, they were able to watch via livestream video. Several times during the ceremony, the family was addressed, keeping them engaged from afar. Sisters of Providence in lockdown and long-distance were able to enjoy the event online and be present in spirit, as well.

All four members of the Provincial Council of Sisters of Providence, Mother Joseph Province were able to attend – Provincial Leader Barbara Schamber and Councilors Jacqueline Fernandes, Margarita Hernandez and Karen Hawkins – as were more than 25 other sisters. Congregational Leader Karin Dufault, SP, traveled from Montreal and spent 14 days in quarantine so she could take part in the event. Father Gioakim Dao Xuan Thanh presided, with six concelebrants.

Sister Huong (right) recites her vows to Sister Karin Dufault, congregational leader. The liturgy was presented in English and Vietnamese.

Sister Huong's many personal gifts and talents were apparent at the ceremony. The altar was decorated with a handmade needlework quilt and flowers arranged by the creative sister, who also sewed her own dress for the occasion. The ceremony culminated with a beautiful song written and sung in Vietnamese by Sister Huong for her parents. The lyrics describe her gratitude for their love and support, and reassuring words about her call to become a bride of Christ:

"Jesus is my married man. He is the best of the best… Mom, Dad, please do not worry for me because with Jesus I am at peace, and I am His beloved, and I will try to live this love for the rest of my life."

Sister Huong entered the Sisters of Providence religious community as a candidate in April 2010. She had been called to religious life as a young woman and initially joined the congregation of the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Thanh Hoa in North Vietnam after graduating from high school. When her family members experienced difficult times, she left the religious community to help support them as a seamstress and florist.

However, God's call persisted, and Huong was drawn to the Sisters of Providence. She spent two years communicating with various Sisters of Providence. Eventually two sisters visiting Vietnam paid a visit to Huong and her parents, and she was invited for a "Come & See" experience in Seattle.

As a Sisters of Providence candidate and novice, Huong spent time in Spokane, Wash., studying theology at Gonzaga University and taking courses at Spokane Community College. She also volunteered at the Women's Hearth and St. Ann's Child Center.

Sister Huong returned to Seattle in June 2013 where she finished her associate degree at Seattle Central College and earned a bachelor's in business administration at Seattle University. She completed a master's in transformation leadership at Seattle University in June 2020 – celebrated "the Covid way" with a virtual online graduation ceremony.

Sister Huong begins her new ministry this month as a residence service coordinator with Providence Peter Claver House and Providence Gamelin House, affordable supportive housing programs in south Seattle.

"I cannot explain enough how Provident God is in my life, particularly my religious life, but one thing I know: God will always be with me in every step of my life," said Sister Huong. "I often remind myself of the words St. Teresa of Calcutta said, "I can't do a great thing, but I can do a small thing with great love." So, I choose this way as I trust in my God because, "with God, nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). I offer my life to God through the Sisters of Providence responding, "Yes, here I am, send me!" to serve people who are marginalized and vulnerable in our society.

The altar was decorated with a handmade quilt and floral arrangements created by Sister Huong.

(Above) Funds were also used to purchase laptop computers for Providence scholarship students like Maria, Josselin and Otoniel who have continued working toward their degrees despite COVID, tropical storms and other challenges.

(Right) The sisters prepared and distributed food packages to Providence scholarship students and their families.

Thank you from El Salvador!

This summer our sisters in the El Salvador mission made an urgent request for funds to help individuals and families devastated by the coronavirus and tropical storms in the Chalatenango mountain region and islands of the Usulutan region. What resulted was extraordinary.

In the midst of a pandemic and so many other challenges, you opened you hearts and answered our call for donations, exceeding the goal of $21,300 to raise more than $36,000!

The Sisters of Providence and the Salvadoran people we serve are so grateful for your outpouring of generosity. Here are some of the beneficiaries of your gifts.

Donations to the El Salvador mission last summer helped rebuild houses like this one so they could withstand storms and provide safe shelter for families.

Sisters of Providence
MOTHER JOSEPH PROVINCE

Please consider a year-end gift to put food on the table for our neighbors in need

Dearest friends,

At this time when everything feels uncertain, it is more important than ever to pause and recall our blessings. When we reflect with gratitude on the gifts from our Provident God, we can begin to shift the spirit of our journey through uncertainty, recognize our abundances and see opportunities to help others.

Statue of Blessed Emilie Gamelin offering bread.

As we have responded to many increased needs during the past few months, the Sisters of Providence have been particularly struck by the increased demand for the most basic of needs: food. With the COVID-related economic downturn, many food pantries have closed or are unable to feed all who are hungry. The need for food assistance has risen significantly in the U.S. during the pandemic. Children are at especially high risk without public school meal support and other community resources.

Feeding the hungry is a work of mercy and an ongoing ministry of the Sisters of Providence, beginning with Blessed Emilie Gamelin. Even before she founded the congregation, Emilie Tavernier would open her dining room for food and fellowship with her neighbors who did not have enough to eat. She called it The Table of the King.

Many of our sisters serve in hunger relief ministries – preparing meals for people living on the streets, hosting food drives and assisting with food distribution. We see people who have been suffering from long-term food scarcity and people never expecting to be left hungry by a pandemic trying to put food on the table for their families.

Sharing food with another is an act of love. In the spirit of Blessed Emilie Gamelin, we invite you to consider a financial donation to nourish your neighbors in need. Monetary donations give hunger relief organizations the flexibility to fill the gaps when food donations are unable to keep up with demand or to expand distribution efforts to serve more people.

If you can help, please donate online at sistersofprovidence.net/support-us or mail a check to Sisters of Providence, Development Office, 1801 Lind Ave SW, M1-C, Renton, WA 98057. All donations (unless otherwise specified) made between now and January 31, 2021, will be designated for hunger relief through the Emilie Gamelin Mission Fund. If this is a hardship, please join us in praying with compassion for all who are suffering during these uncertain times and with gratitude for those gifts we have received.

Blessings in Providence,

Barbara Schamber, SP
Provincial Leader, Mother Joseph Province

If you have a question about donating, please contact Jayne at 425-525-3019 or jayne.holmes@providence.org.

Around the Province

Sister Sue the "baby whisperer"

Over her years in ministry, **Sister Sue Orlowski** has had titles like coordinator, instructor and facilitator, but now she is known as NICU Nanny and baby whisperer. For the past four years (minus a few months due to pandemic restrictions), Sister Sue has been a volunteer at the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center and Children's Hospital in Spokane, Wash.

Though it may sound blissful to rock babies, Sister Sue pointed out that most of the time, the babies she rocks are the ones who are fussy or crying because they are in pain, fasting for blood work or surgery, or withdrawing from drugs taken by their mothers during pregnancy.

"My job as a nanny is to comfort those babies who don't understand why they feel as they do or why they can't get something to eat," said Sister Sue. "But this is a challenge I love. I get to rock the babies who need me, and in return I am cuddled by them."

Sister Jeanette takes on new health ministry

Sister Jeanette Heindl has begun a new ministry as health assistant for the Sisters of Providence. She will be supporting the sisters' health and wellness needs, helping them understand diagnoses, sort out insurance and get to doctor appointments.

One of her biggest challenges is learning to navigate around an unfamiliar city and a closed bridge, having recently relocated from Portland to West Seattle. Sister Jeanette previously ministered as a patient care coordinator at Housecall Providers in Portland, as well as being an in-home care provider.

Two sister centenarians in 2020

The Sisters of Providence celebrated two 100th birthdays this year: **Sister Cecilia Paganessi** on July 9 at Emilie Court in Spokane, Wash., and **Sister Irene Charron** on Oct. 4 at St. Joseph Residence in West Seattle.

The centenarians enjoyed cake and gifts from their communities. The Provincial Council of Mother Joseph Province paid a visit to each in their retirement homes – after ensuring the health and safety of all by taking a COVID test before each visit. Sister Karin Dufault, congregational leader from Montreal, in town for another event, was a special guest at Sister Irene's birthday festivities.

Sister Cecilia Paganessi (seated, center)

Sister Irene Charron

Rest in Peace

May our sisters, who have fulfilled their baptismal commitments in lives of religious consecration, find everlasting peace and joy in your presence, O Lord.

Felina Afinidad, SP

Sister Lina

Sister Felina (Lina) Afinidad, age 90, a Sister of Providence for 56 years, died July 9, 2020, at St. Joseph Residence, Seattle, Wash.

Lina Afinidad was born in Iloilo, Philippines on May 3, 1930, to Nicasio Afinidad and Marta Aranador, the seventh of nine children. Sister Lina became a postulant of the Sisters of Providence in 1962, made first profession in 1965 and final vows in 1970.

In 1954 Sister Lina received a Bachelor of Science degree in pharmacy at Central Philippine University, Iloilo, Philippines. In 1967 she graduated from St. Peter Hospital School of Nursing, Olympia, Wash., as a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). In 1974 she went to St. Patrick Hospital School of Nursing in Missoula, Mont., to finish her RN course.

Sister Lina began her health care ministries as an LPN in 1967 at St. Clare Hospital in Fort Benton, Mont. In 1969 she transferred to Columbus Hospital, Great Falls, Mont. In 1974, she moved to St. Patrick Hospital in Missoula, Mont. She also ministered at the St. Joseph Care Center, Spokane, Wash. In 1989, Sister Lina was one of the five foundresses of the Providence Philippine Foundation. She was a missionary in the Philippines for 19 years.

In July 2008, Sister Lina returned to Spokane to retire. She moved to St. Joseph Residence in Seattle in 2012, where she always greeted others with her lovely smile and her heart-warming personality.

Clarella Lois Mae Fink, SP

Sister Clarella

Sister Clarella Lois Mae Fink, age 92, a Sister of Providence for 74 years, died Aug. 10, 2020, at St. Joseph Residence, Seattle.

Clarella Fink was born in Minneapolis, Minn. on Sept. 28, 1927, to Andrew Roy Fink and Clara Theresa (Klimek) Fink. She was the oldest of 10 children. Sister Clarella became a postulant of the Sisters of Providence in 1945, made first profession in 1947 and final vows in 1950.

In 1945 Sister Clarella graduated from Sacred Heart Academy, Missoula, Mont. In 1958 she received a bachelor's in elementary education at the College of Great Falls, Great Falls, Mont. In 1968 she earned a master's in education at Gonzaga University, Spokane, Wash., and in 1985 a diploma in accounting from Kinman Business University, Spokane.

Sister Clarella ministered as a teacher from 1948 to 1984. She taught first through fourth grades at several primary schools in Washington, Idaho and Montana. She also lived and worked with Native Americans in DeSmet.

In 1989, Sister Clarella was called to be a missionary in the Philippines. She was one of the first five Sisters of Providence to minister in the Philippines, their first superior and treasurer for nine years. In 2002 when she returned to Spokane, Sister Clarella volunteered on several community boards. In 2012, she moved to St. Joseph Residence in Seattle where she prayed with and comforted those who were dying.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Sisters of Providence Retirement Fund, 1801 Lind Avenue SW, M1-C; Renton, WA 98057. To sign the memory books for Sister Lina or Sister Clarella, please visit the website for Bonney-Watson Funeral Home at bonneywatson.com.

Please Remember in Prayer

Albina Heindl, mother of Jeanette Heindle, SP, died April 3 in Portland, Ore.

Ed Thomas, brother of Sister Peter Claver, SP, died July 16.

Christina Calakason, niece of Fe Sumalde, SP, died Sept. 20 in the Philippines.

Leocadia S. Calakason, sister of Fe Sumalde, SP, died Sept. 23 in the Philippines.

Colleen Mooney, sister of Barbara Savage, PA, died Oct. 3 in Spokane, Wash.

Tacoma Dominican **Sister Ann O'Sullivan, OP,** died Oct. 29 in Seattle.

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Anita Wilkins, *Director of Communications and Development*

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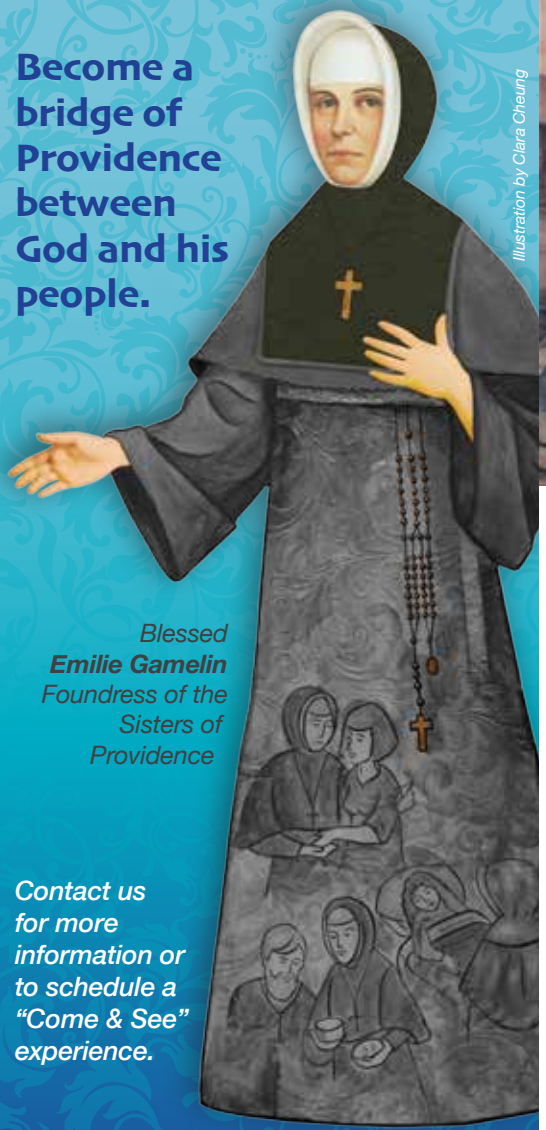

Illustration by Clara Cheung

Blessed ***Emilie Gamelin*** *Foundress of the Sisters of Providence*

Contact us for more information or to schedule a "Come & See" experience.

vocations@providence.org
206-979-0577

sistersofprovidence.net

Historical Corner

History of the sisters' devotion to Our Mother of Sorrows

The devotion to Our Mother of Sorrows is one of the defining traditions of the Sisters of Providence, born of the grief experienced by Emilie Gamelin upon the death of her husband and three young sons. After her tragic losses, Emilie Gamelin received the image of Our Mother of Sorrows from her spiritual advisor and in it found relief from her bereavement. "...every day I invoked her in an act of special devotion. I asked her for courage ... my heart was pierced with a painful sword and I found solace only by meditating on her sorrows," Mother Gamelin wrote in 1850.

Emilie resisted the temptation of self-pity; she chose instead to join her sorrows with those of Jesus. She was nourished by her devotion to Our Mother of Sorrows to find the strength to work toward alleviating all sorts of human misery. This is where the charism of the Sisters of Providence takes its source: in "the manifestation of the mysteries of the Providence of God and Our Mother of Sorrows in compassionate love and creative prophetic solidarity with the poor."

The Sisters of Providence traditional habit included reminders of Our Mother of Sorrows through an image on the pectoral cross and the Seven Dolor beads worn at their sides, representing Mary's seven dolors – a Latin word that means sorrows. The Sisters of Providence honor Our Mother of Sorrows on September 15, her feast day. This is also a special day for the sisters to gather and renew their vows.

Learn more about the history of the Sisters of Providence in the West at Providence Archives Seattle, providence.org/archives.

Photos courtesy Providence Archives Seattle