

Vision

THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF NEW YORK

VOL. 25, ISSUE 3 *Now in Our Third Century of Living Lives of Love* SUMMER 2021

Guatemala Mission — 1971 – 2021



From the President

Dear Friends,

This issue of VISION highlights our fifty years of presence in Guatemala. Seventeen sisters were missioned there over the years, some for two or three years, others for a longer time.

Sister Immaculata Burke, one of three sisters missioned to Guatemala in 1971, spent forty-three years in ministry to the people. She devoted much of her life to elevating health care in the Novillero region. She often worked during the days of war and cataclysms of natural disasters on little food or sleep. A testament to her impact is that many babies born there were named in her honor.

Whether for a long period or a shorter one, each sister who ministered among the people brought love, compassion, and healing into their lives. In turn, they were touched by the gentle and faithful spirit of the Guatemalan people and their culture.

One does not travel to Guatemala and return unchanged. Perhaps reading this issue will encourage you to one day travel and live for a while among the Guatemalan people.



Blessings,

Sr. Donna Dodge, SC

Cover Photos (Clockwise from top left)

1. In 1971, Sr. Marie Immaculata Burke, a nurse, was among the first three Sisters of Charity sent to staff the Spokane mission's service to the Maya-Quiché people in Sololá, Guatemala. She opened clinics for women and children and trained health promoters until her death in 2014.
2. Sr. Marie Tolle looks on as Dr. José Miguel Vasquez Yaxon provides counsel to expectant mothers at Clinica Mariana in Nueva Santa Catarina, Ixtahuacan.
3. Sr. Rosenda Magdalena Castañeda Gonzalez, the first Sister of Charity from Guatemala, made final vows on July 11, 2017. Sr. Jane Iannucelli, then President, assisted by Sr. Sheila Brosnan, accepted the vows with joy. Sr. Nora Cunningham, Director of Formation, watched proudly; Monseñor Álvaro Ramazzini Imeri presided. Photo by Nelson Estrada.
4. The staff at the Barbara Ford Peacebuilding Center ministers to women, men, young girls and boys in health, education, human rights and agriculture. Applying the principles of systemic change, BFP Center participants learn to replicate the skills they gain to enhance their lives. Sr. Virginia Searing, founder of the Center, sits in the center, the second row from the bottom.
5. Sr. Barbara Ford, killed in Guatemala on May 5, 2001, was a nurse, health promoter, and human rights advocate for the Mayan people.

Many thanks to Nelson Estrada, Director of Communications at the Barbara Ford Peacebuilding Center, for providing several photos for this issue.

VISION enables the Sisters of Charity of New York to make a cohesive statement about how we reveal God's love in our lives and the many and varied ways in which we respond to the signs of the times.



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Clockwise from top left: Expectant mothers wait to be weighed at Clínica Mariana, Nueva Santa Catarina Ixtahuacan; medical assistant checks patient's blood pressure at Centro de Promoción de Salud Rural, El Novillero, the first clinic operated by the sisters; Dr. José serves as Director and chief physician at the four clinics run by the sisters in collaboration with the Diocese of Spokane; staff at Clínica Santa Elizabeth Ann Seton in Nahualá works together to care for patients.

Health Care in the Highlands

By Sheila Brosnan, SC

When the Sisters of Charity arrived in Guatemala in 1971, the anticipated life span of women was 41 years, and of men, 45 years. The programs that were put in place 50 years ago have radically changed the perspective of health among the indigenous people in the Altiplano region of Guatemala. Clinics established in each of four municipalities proved to be a significant step in providing medical and educational services in the remote areas. Currently, the life span is predicted to be in the low seventies for both men and women.

The establishment of prenatal care, “under-five clinics,” vaccination programs, and monitoring for signs of malnutrition, parasites, or tuberculosis, enabled the Sisters of Charity nurses, Sisters Immaculata Burke, Barbara Ford and Sheila Brosnan, to welcome graduate medical students from the University of San Carlos who were willing to practice rural medicine for a few months.

A stellar program for health promoters proved to be key in establishing trust among the people in remote villages. Promoters were trained local men and women who spoke limited Spanish but could identify the signs and symptoms of the most common medical problems and offer practical advice.

Over the years, the most significant change agent in the highlands has been Doctor José Miguel Vasquez Yaxon. His medical expertise and administrative skill, along with his natural command of the Indian language and his gentle manner,

enabled him to successfully work in rural health care. After many years, Dr. José continues to practice with commitment and innovation; the clinic in Nahualá is equipped with a modern lab and technician.

Currently, disease entities that are more prevalent in United States culture seem to be emerging in the Guatemalan culture. Diabetes, stress-related issues and manifestations of heart disease are occurring with greater frequency, possibly due to changes in diet and activity.

Guatemala has procured minimal supplies of Covid vaccines and most of the rural areas are considered “red zones.” In one of the most remote villages, Santa Catarina Ixtahuacan, the people have had little or no incidence of Covid. They accomplished this by prohibiting entrance to or egress from the village.

During Covid, health promoters have been unable to function, and people cannot gather in church or in the town plaza. Public Health officials provide strict regulations about the care of the deceased and involved family members. Because Public Health monitors Covid reporting, it is difficult to determine the death rate in the Altiplano village.

After 50 years, we are proud and happy to report that despite many challenges, the medical clinics in Nahualá, Santa Lucia, and the New and Old Santa Catarina Ixtahuacan are still providing consistent quality care. *Ad multos annos!*

Heart of a Missionary — Sisters Missioned in Guatemala

Since 1971, seventeen Sisters of Charity from the U.S. have served in Guatemala in the fields of health care, religious education, pastoral care, formation, and integrated human and spiritual development. While never directly missioned to Guatemala, two additional Sisters of Charity greatly

influenced the establishment of the missions in the Central American region.

In the coming issues, *Vision* will feature these dedicated and courageous women who lived the mission of Charity in Guatemala, a mission that continues to this day.

Sister Marie Immaculata Burke, El Novillero, Sololá, 1971–2014

By Maryellen Blumlein, SC



Born in Ireland, Brigid Burke went to England to receive her nurse's training as a young woman. She later went to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and served in The Bahamas, where she met the Congregation and became a Sister of Charity in 1953. She served in St. Vincent's Hospital in Manhattan, but soon the missions again called to her. She studied Spanish for a year and then responded to the call to serve the Guatemalan people in Novillero, Sololá.

Sr. Immaculata was responsible for four clinics that served the needs of mothers and their children. She worked tirelessly to implement health initiatives to improve their nutrition and general health.

In her forty-three years in Novillero, Sr. Immaculata saw

the devastating effects of a brutal civil war and the massive destruction of an earthquake in 1976. Her dedication and devotion to the Guatemalan people was returned tenfold. She was beloved by the many for whom she cared and those with whom she worked. With great affection, she was known as “Madre (Mother) Immaculata,” a name that suited her well.

Dr. José Miguel Vasquez followed Sr. Immaculata as director of the four medical clinics operated by the Sisters of Charity in collaboration with the Diocese of Spokane, Wash. He began his years of service with the sisters as a medical school graduate who volunteered to gain practical experience in the Novillero clinic in 1985. Dr. José cherishes the memories of serving alongside his mentor. Asked to share one memory, he shared three. He remembers Sr. Immaculata often saying, “Charity that doesn't cost anything is NOT charity,” “We must always be generous,” and when asked how much she was owed, she replied, “One Our Father.” Dr. José added, “Before becoming a sister and until her death, Sr. Immaculata demonstrated that her surrender was complete. She even asked that her body be deposited in the local cemetery, buried with the poor.”

Upon her death in March 2014, she was mourned by thousands. Many took turns carrying her coffin to her final resting place, a distance of almost two miles.

In her time in Guatemala, Sr. Immaculata provided medical care, spiritual enrichment, and friendship to many people. She truly brought the charism of Charity to life.

Sister Doris Pagano, El Novillero, 1971–1982; San Marcos, 1985–1996

By Ellen Rose O'Connell, SC



Sister Doris Pagano was one of the first missionaries who went to Guatemala in 1971. While learning to speak Spanish was difficult for her, she persisted in mastering the language.

A life-long teacher, she spent 22 years in Guatemala—11 each in El Novillero and San Marcos.

In 1976, the first of a series of earthquakes devastated Guatemala. Sr. Doris responded to the pastoral needs of the people; her ministry became the care of the people who had lost the little they possessed. She developed leadership skills among those she taught. She continued to build community among the people and the sisters in mission in Guatemala, especially Sisters Immaculata Burke and Connie Kelly.

Sr. Doris was a pioneer in the Guatemala mission and enthusiastically contributed to its steady growth over the years. She especially longed for native vocations in Guatemala. In this regard, she saw the mission of the Sisters of Charity connected to the growth of the local Church in Guatemala.

Sister Eileen Judge, Santa Cruz, El Quiché, 1998–2011

By Lisa Shay, Associate

Sister Eileen Judge, a nurse practitioner, went to Guatemala in the early 1990s at the invitation of Sr. Bobbie Ford. She made several visits but had no intention of missioning there as there was no need for her specialty—geriatrics—and she was not fluent in Spanish. But our God is a God of surprises! In 1997, Sr. Santiago, an Incarnate Word sister, opened a nursing home in Quiché, El Hogar de Ancianos Sor Herminia, and needed a nurse. Although the home was not near where the Sisters of Charity lived, a friend, Sr. Janet Druffel, SSND, lived within walking distance and had extra space. Reflecting on the circumstances, Sr. Eileen says, “That was a call I could not ignore.”

Sr. Eileen lived with Sr. Janet from 1998–2008, working full-time as the only nurse at El Hogar, then moved to the newly opened Sisters of Charity House of Formation. From 2008

to 2011, she continued to work part-time at El Hogar while she finished a nursing manual and concurrently served as the Director of Associates in Guatemala. She made an enduring

impression on the staff and residents at El Hogar; when she and Associate Lisa Shay visited in the summer of 2019, they discovered her picture hanging on the wall in the dining room.



Sister Virginia Searing, Lemoa & Santa Cruz, El Quiché, 1995–Present

By Lisa Shay, Associate

As with many Sisters of Charity, Sr. Virginia Searing (“Sr. Ginny”) first came to Guatemala in 1993 at the invitation of Sr. Bobbie Ford. Sr. Ginny fell in love with the people, who radiated peace despite crushing poverty, and with the beauty of the mountains, rivers and lakes. Her visit inspired her to accompany the people and understand their tremendous suffering from the genocide. Some of her most sacred moments were accompanying people through the process of exhuming loved ones from mass graves, celebrating their lives, and giving them a dignified ritual and burial.

After several visits, Sr. Ginny committed to the mission in Guatemala in 1995. She and Sr. Bobbie Ford, along with Dr. Roberto Cabrera, developed a program of Integral Human Development that combined Christian spirituality with rituals from the Mayan culture. While the program might appear to be a break from her previous 30 years in education, she sees it as a natural evolution from living in an intentional community that had done its own healing work. Integral Human Development continues to be a major program of the Barbara Ford Peacebuilding Center, which Sr. Ginny has directed since its inception in 2009. “My life,” she says, “continues to be transformed as I walk humbly with these resilient Mayan women and men as we carry on the charism of Charity.”



Sister Maria Iglesias, Chajbal, El Quiché 2007–2011

By Ellen Rose O’Connell, SC

In 2007 Sr. Maria Iglesias was asked by Leadership to assume responsibility for vocations recruitment both stateside and in Guatemala. This was a difficult challenge because of the cultural differences among Hispanic cultures and North American cultures.

As a native Spanish speaker and daughter of Cuban and Puerto Rican parents, Sr. Maria understood Hispanic as well as North American cultures. She had also previously studied at the Mexican Cultural Center and served in Las Hermanas, an organization of Hispanic religious sisters in the states.

Sr. Maria began her vocation work in Novillero, sharing community with Sr. Gloria De Arteaga, newly appointed Aspirant Assistant. Both worked in pastoral ministry, knowing that a call to vocation as a Sister of Charity arises out of a call to service for others, especially those in great need. In time they moved with the aspirants to El Quiché.

In reflecting on the move, Sr. Maria said, “We believed religious vocation in Guatemala needed to be situated in the candidates’ culture in order to develop a greater spiritual dedication to Christ and God’s people.”

As the growth of the Sisters of Charity in Guatemala continues, Sr. Maria’s contributions remain one of its sturdy building blocks.

Left to right: Sisters Maria Iglesias, Eileen Judge, Gloria De Arteaga, Mary Meyler and Virginia Searing before a display honoring Sr. Barbara among those who died serving the people of Quiché.

Sister Mary Meyler, Lemoa & Santa Cruz, El Quiché, 1997–2013

Sister Mary Meyler was a dedicated teacher in both elementary and secondary schools who brought her skills and creativity to the Guatemalan people in Lemoa, Santa Cruz and Quiché for thirteen years. Her years of service occurred when Guatemala was recovering from a bitter civil war. Former soldiers and their family members were dealing with trauma, violence, loss and multiple forms of addiction.

In 1996, Sr. Mary was invited by Sr. Barbara Ford to join the Caritas Heath Team to start a program for Rehabilitation of Alcohol and Drug Addiction. With the help of Caritas and the Sisters of Charity, she guided the construction of Casa Nueva Vida, a rehabilitation center for attention to the sickness of alcohol and drug addiction. Sr. Mary designed a new model of addiction treatment and education, a great need at the time. She designed a two-program approach—one for men and another for women—to address alcohol and drug

addiction, as well as its effects on a country suffering extreme poverty and violence (especially towards women). Job development and training was also incorporated into the program, which received local and international acclaim.

In 2007, Sr. Mary joined Sr. Virginia Searing in co-founding the Barbara Ford Peacebuilding Center, where healing and recovery programs continue to this day.

Sr. Mary was beloved by the people she served. Cancer took her life in 2013 but her legacy lives on!



By Ellen Rose O'Connell, SC

Sister Anne Denise Brennan, Santa Cruz, El Quiché, 2009–2011, 2012–2014

By Lisa Shay, Associate

Sister Anne Denise Brennan traveled to Guatemala several times before being missioned there in 2009. She was the novice director for the Sisters of Charity in New York and traveled to Guatemala to advise the sisters in Quiché about setting up a House of Formation at the Barbara Ford Center. Sr. Gloria de Arteaga had served in Guatemala for a few years as the postulant and vocation director and, by 2009, there was a need for a new novice director.

Sr. Anne Denise served as novice director in Guatemala from October 2009 through the end of 2010, living in the newly constructed House of Formation with Sr. Gloria. She returned to Guatemala in 2012 to be the Charism Integration Director and Director of Associates. She set up workshops and programs in both Quiché and Novillero to introduce laypersons to the charism of Charity. As a result of her work, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's life resonated with the people in Guatemala. As Sr. Anne Denise said, "It is a story that sells itself!" She is remembered fondly for her kind and gentle manner and remains in contact with many of the associates in Guatemala.

Right: Sr. Anne Denise (right) with Sr. Gloria de Arteaga on the grounds of the Barbara Ford Center.



Sister Nora Cunningham, Chajbal, El Quiché 2011–Present

By Maryellen Blumlein, SC



Sr. Nora with Postulants Maria Pablo Andres Santos (left) and Manuela Tax Alvarez

After completing eight years as Regional Coordinator in 2011, Sr. Nora assumed the role of Director of Postulants and Novices in Quiché, Guatemala. Her ability to speak Spanish and her broad experience in formation ministry made her the perfect choice to work with the women discerning religious life.

Sr. Nora's love of and interest in people is a gift to those with whom she works and ministers. Casa

de Formación is a short walk from the Barbara Ford Peacebuilding Center, so there is mutual support and frequent collaboration.

To date, Sr. Nora has spent ten years in Guatemala. She enjoys her varied responsibilities and will continue with her many tasks for as long as needed. She finds the Guatemalan people kind, generous and caring. They are eager to learn and readily share their knowledge with their American friends.

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Vocations in Guatemala

By Nora Cunningham, SC



The call: Eve, to be the mother of all the living (Gn. 3,20); Abraham, to be the father of a host of nations (Gn. 17,5); Moses, to be the liberator of God's People (Ex. 3,10); Deborah, to be prophetess and judge (Jgs. 4,4); Samuel, to be judge and prophet of the Lord (1Sam. 3,20); David, to be shepherd king of Israel (2Sam. 5,3); Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, to be prophets of Hope.

The call of Jesus to the apostles and disciples has continued to our modern day martyrs and saints; and the call continues now in the heart of each one of us.

Vocation in the past, many thought, was only for the priesthood or consecrated life. As you can see from the Scriptures, however, the Spirit of God is boundless, moving, calling all to the fullness of life.

In Guatemala the Latin American Bishops in the Congress for Vocations (2011) summoned us to create a culture of vocations. Youth should know they have a call to a way of life as a married or single person or a priest or religious. It is the responsibility of the People of God to awaken, help, cultivate, form, and accompany them in their discernment process, respectful of all vocations as a means of transforming society into a "civilization of love."

In 2005 six young Guatemalan women sent letters to Sisters of Charity President Sr. Dorothy Metz asking for a sister to accompany them in their vocational discernment. This occurrence

initiated a series of events that led to the establishment of a Sisters of Charity Formation House in Guatemala. The prayers for vocations of Srs. Immaculata Burke and Marie Tolle were answered.

In response to their requests the Congregation asked Sr. Gloria De Arteaga to go to Guatemala for this ministry in 2006. There would be a number of other sisters who became part of the Formation experience: the Councilors, Sisters Eileen Judge, Anne Denise Brennan, Maria Iglesias, Virginia Searing, Mary Meyler, Cecilia Harriendorf, Nora Cunningham and many visitors.

By January 4, 2008, four of these women became postulants and moved into the new House on April 19, 2008.

Formation is a time of discernment for a woman and for the Congregation to test one's ability to live a life of prayer and ministry in the context of community life.

The challenge of religious community life is perhaps a testimony to the world of the possibility of people of different ages, cultures, language, personalities, etc., living together, working towards the ideals of peace and harmony.

The doors of the Formation House open to welcome new members and close in blessing for those who come and then take their leave. All are enriched in the shared experience of the different gifts.

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Above: Sisters Nora Cunningham (standing), Gloria De Arteaga (sitting) and (left to right) Sisters Manuela Tax Alvarez, Margarita Choc Caál, Rosa Tzul Say, and Maria Pablo Andres Santos; in the background is the "Casa de Formación."



Sister Rosenda Castañeda Gonzalez
By Lisa Shay, Associate

The first professed Sister of Charity from Guatemala, Sr. Rosenda Castañeda Gonzalez entered the Congregation through the House of Formation in Quiché. She knew from an early age that she was called to live a consecrated life. Through prayerful discernment, she realized that becoming a Sister of Charity was how God was calling her to fulfill her vocation.

Sr. Rosenda maintains a busy schedule, fulfilling two distinct ministries. First, the Congregation asked her to accompany young women who are discerning becoming a Sister of Charity. She serves on the nationwide bishop's conference commission for vocations. Since COVID-19, this

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Above: Sr. Rosenda (right) dispenses medication at the clinic on the grounds of the cathedral in Santa Cruz de Quiché.



The Guatemalan Mission — 1971 – 2021

By Mary Mc Cormick, SC

Above left: Sr. Marie Immaculata Burke provided care to children and mothers for 43 years; Sr. Marie Tolle (*above right*) among her many catechism students

New York Sisters of Charity have always cherished Elizabeth Seton's understanding of her desire to be known as a "citizen of the world."

In 1856 and then in 1889 the community missioned sisters beyond the U.S. borders, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and to Nassau, The Bahamas.

But it was Vatican Council II that opened U.S. religious communities to new possibilities of collaboration with and connection to the experiences of the Church in Latin America.

The Mission Commission established by the SC General Assembly in 1969 explored possibilities for service in various countries south of the U.S. border.

Guatemala was chosen as a place where the needs were great and Church

authorities were willing to receive Sisters of Charity as missionaries in the state of Sololá in the northwest of the country. From 1971 to the present, our sisters have served in the fields of health, catechetics, social work and formation. Nurse midwives delivered babies and catechists trained local church leaders to preach and teach. Mayan people were accompanied back from long exile in Mexico. The widows of Sololá were given the opportunity to sell their weavings in markets which provided a just recompense. Potable water projects brought clean water to villages where people lacked drinkable water and proper waste disposal.

A House of Formation for women discerning a call to religious life as Sisters of Charity was opened. There is an active

Associate Program with members in Sololá and Quiché. And the Barbara Ford Peacebuilding Center, opened in 2009 in Chajbal, outside of Santa Cruz, is a multiservice initiative which provides integrated human and spiritual development, especially to rural poor women and girls traumatized by physical, psychological and emotional abuse.

The first three Sisters, Immaculata Burke, Marie Tolle, and Doris Pagano, arrived in Novillero, Sololá, in April 1971. A convent formerly occupied by the Congregation of Daughters of Mary, Health of the Sick became their home and continues to be a residence for the community to this day.

Three clinics had been started by the Daughters of Mary: in Novillero, behind the convent, in Nahualá, and in Santa

Sisters Margaret Dowling & Teresita Regina Austin — Founders from Afar

It may seem odd that two sisters who spent the least amount of time living in Guatemala and other Latin American missions became the founding energy for the Sisters of Charity in Latin America.

Sr. Teresita Regina Austin never lived permanently in Guatemala; however, as an appointed leader of the Mission Commission, she laid the foundation for future SC missions in Guatemala and Chile. The Mission Commission was created following the 1969 Chapter of the Sisters of

Charity. With Sr. Margaret Dowling's vision for direct service to those living in poverty and Pope John the XXIII's call for religious in particular to go to third world countries to spread the Gospel, the Mission Commission began its work of identifying suitable places where New York Sisters of Charity could serve.

Sr. Teresita and the Mission Commission became the "go to people" to accomplish this goal. She identified possible

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Catarina Ixtuhacan. Sr. Immaculata continued providing services in these clinics and was later joined by Sisters Sheila Brosnan and Barbara Ford. Dr. José Miguel Vasquez has been medical director for the four clinics and is an associate of the Sisters of Charity. Sr. Eileen Judge arrived in Guatemala in 1998 and served as a nurse practitioner in a home for the elderly in Lemoa, Quiché. Currently, Sr. Rosenda Castañeda operates a small clinic in the cathedral parish of Santa Cruz.

Pastoral work was the special ministry of Sisters Marie Tolle, Doris Pagano, Constance Kelly, Katherine Byrnes and Elizabeth Judge. Over the years they did outreach in Novillero, Quiché and San Marcos.

After an absence of several years, Sr. Barbara Ford returned to Guatemala in 1989 and moved to Quiché. She was joined by Sr. Virginia Searing in 1995. Both worked at Caritas, a health agency in Santa Cruz. Sr. Mary Meyler joined them in 1996 and became the founder and director of an alcohol prevention and rehabilitation center in Santa Cruz. Women fearful of admitting to the disease were touched by Sr. Mary's gentle acceptance and genuine love for them and sought from her the help they needed.

In 2005, the SC Council opened a House of Formation in Quiché. Sisters Mary Meyler and Virginia Searing accompanied the first six inquirers until Sr. Gloria De Arteaga became Aspirant Director in August 2006.

Sr. Eileen Judge, in Guatemala since 1998, moved to the newly opened formation house to start an Associate Program. In 2007 the program began when Laura Morales Chic, a long-time coworker with Sisters Barbara Ford and Virginia Searing, became the first associate. She and Sr. Eileen attended the Federation Associate Weekend Charism retreat in Emmitsburg and were enthusiastic about bringing the program to Guatemala. Laura made her commitment in 2010 and partnered with Sr. Eileen in recruiting and orienting others.



Sr. Anne Denise Brennan served as Associate Director from 2012 to 2014. Under her direction, the program grew in both Sololá and Quiché. Currently there are 35 associates in both states.

As a result of a request made by the Guatemalan associates at Assembly 2019, a new committee was formed consisting of both U.S. and Guatemalan associates and sisters. The group named themselves "One Community" and have been meeting regularly, via video conference with simultaneous translation. Their goal is to get to know one another's cultures, dreams, and sense of the SC mission.

Sr. Cecilia Harriendorf, who had been Campus Minister at the College of Mount Saint Vincent, brought nursing students and alums to Guatemala to experience health measures outside the United States. Sr. Ceil moved to Guatemala, dividing her time from 2013 to 2016 between Novillero and Quiché. She continued to provide mission experiences of short duration for nursing students and alums, as well as several groups of sisters and SC associates.

Part Two

Guatemala's history in the 50 years of Sisters of Charity presence has been dominated by the twin catastrophes of climate change and the violence brought on by the 36-year-old war that ended only in 1996.

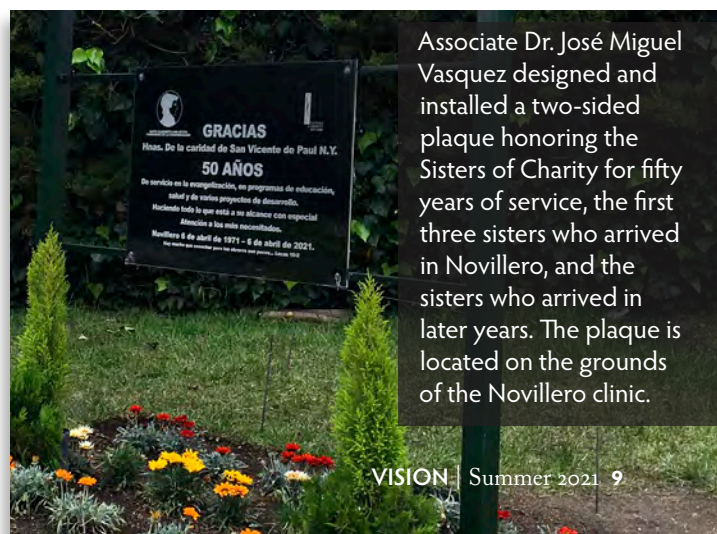
Serious adverse climatic conditions, largely man-made, have resulted

First row: Srs. Margaret Dowling, then-president, who missioned the first three sisters to Guatemala in 1971 and served there herself, 1979–1981, and the three pioneers, Sisters Doris Pagano, Marie Immaculata Burke and Marie Tolle; **second row:** Srs. Jean Iannone, Elizabeth Vermaelen, Virginia Searing, Elizabeth Judge, Rosemarie Walsh, Mary Donagher, Barbara Ford, Mary Mc Cormick, Sheila Brosnan and Regina Murphy. The photo was taken during a Leadership Team visit.

in the destruction of forests, pollution of rivers, aftereffects of strip mining, and the unregulated emission of carbon dioxide by trucks, cars and buses, among other causes. In addition, an earthquake in 1979 and devastating hurricanes in 1998 and 2019 caused the deaths of many, destroyed whole villages, and left survivors with few resources to rebuild.

Years of violence beginning in the 1960s resulted in what has been rightly called genocide: the deaths of 200,000 Mayan men, women, and children by state-sponsored forces. The Peace Accords ended the war, but post-conflict trauma remains the stuff of nightmares for countless survivors.

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Associate Dr. José Miguel Vasquez designed and installed a two-sided plaque honoring the Sisters of Charity for fifty years of service, the first three sisters who arrived in Novillero, and the sisters who arrived in later years. The plaque is located on the grounds of the Novillero clinic.

Congregation Works Toward Self-Education & Consciousness Raising for Justice

Regina Bechtle, SC



A December 8, 2020 letter from SC leadership invited the Congregation to “self-education and consciousness raising for justice” in response to Assembly 2019’s “Charity Rising” call. Racial injustice and the “call of this time for racial harmony” have emerged as a key focus, so sisters, associates and companions have found creative ways to listen, learn and share, with the goal of personal and social transformation. A few examples:

Sisters Vivienne Joyce, Florence Speth and Associate Bill Hurley participated in the “Just Faith” program offered through St. Francis Xavier Parish in Manhattan. A group met weekly via video conference to discuss readings including *White Fragility* (Robin DiAngelo) and YouTube® videos. Sr. Vivienne noted, “Recognition of biases surfaced as well as disinformation.”

Many participants attended a liturgy celebrated in St. Charles Borromeo parish in Harlem where they were welcomed and enriched by the celebration. The series ended with a commitment by each person to address racism in some way.

In February 2021, responding to a suggestion by leadership, Sr. Mary Ellen O’Boyle organized a group on racism via video conference. Since then, twelve Sisters of Charity have met every other week for an hour to share reflections on articles, videos and personal experiences. Privilege and white supremacy became the main focus and, as Sr. Mary Ellen stated, group members “feel we are slowly awakening to what this means for each of us. It is a process and pervades our daily encounters with others—especially with people of color.” Many members realized how their early years were “very limiting” with regard to understanding and appreciating other cultures, and how education “failed to offer us the truth about oppression of non-white groups.”

While the group acknowledged that it is often a challenge to share their growing awareness with family or friends, Sr. Mary Ellen commented, “Being part of a small, safe group

where all speak freely has been a supportive and enriching experience.” Recommended article: *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, Peggy McIntosh, <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2003-06587-018>

More creative responses will be shared in future issues.

Often, it is our young people who shine light on injustice and point the way for older generations. Jaclyn Dencker (grandniece of Sr. Margaret Egan) is a recent high school graduate from Mount Saint Mary Academy, Watchung, N.J. We are honored to share her powerful reflection on racism.

Loving One Another

May we pray for the end of racism; May you help us work toward loving one another, Caring for one another, and treating others with respect.

No matter the color of our skin.

May we pray for the end of racism; May you grant us the courage to see, To speak, And to act on the inequality our brothers and sisters may face.

May we pray for the end of racism; May you show us how to bring peace and love into our lives, to stand side by side with our brothers and sisters, And defend the oppressed.

May we pray for end of racism;
The end of prejudice,
The end of inequality,
The end of discrimination,
May we be brought out of darkness, and into the light together.

Amen.

Tree Blessing at Mount Saint Vincent Affirms Commitment to *Laudato Si'* By Owen Smith, Associate

Sisters, associates, companions and colleagues gathered on June 3, 2021 to bless a newly planted Yoshino Cherry Tree at Mount Saint Vincent. From Administration Hill on the campus, the tree will, for years to come, peer over the Hudson River and the Palisades in celebration of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' second encyclical.

On May 24, the Church celebrated the sixth anniversary of the encyclical and the conclusion of the *Laudato Si'* Anniversary Year. *Laudato Si'*'s overarching message — all is connected — is alive in the work of the Sisters of Charity of New York. Long before the encyclical's publication expanded awareness of Integral Ecology, the Congregation experienced the interconnectedness of climate change, trafficking, hunger, homelessness and poverty through their ministries.

Pope Francis is inviting the entire Church on this journey towards an integral ecology and ecological conversion. The *Laudato Si'* Action Platform, announced by the Vatican at the end of *Laudato Si'* Week and Anniversary Year, outlines the

commitment to this journey. Pope Francis hopes this journey will attract the 20–25% of the population needed for transformative change so that future generations will have a life-sustaining and flourishing Earth on which to live. The Sisters of Charity of New York have accepted this invitation and will develop a multi-year plan towards an integral ecology and ecological conversion.

For years, the Sisters have expressed their commitment through education, legislative advocacy, investments and lifestyle adaptations. The Congregation has faithfully stewarded the property they hold, preserving it for generations to come.

Continued, see page 14, bottom



Above: Sr. Carol De Angelo, Director of the Office of PJIC, was one of four sisters who blessed the tree as Sr. Claire Reagan (right) led the prayer service. **Top:** Sisters, associates, colleagues and CMSV staff and students joined in the blessing on the rainy June day.



(From left to right) Srs. Mary Ann Garisto, Carol De Angelo, Claire Reagan and Margaret Dennehy initiated the effort to plant the tree and prepared the prayer service.



Guatemala Mission — 1971–2021

Cont'd from page 9

Both catastrophes have had an impact on the way the Sisters of Charity have responded to the enormous demands made on them.

In addition to the work being done in the clinics and the spiritual aid provided by Sisters in the parishes in Sololá and San Marcos, other initiatives came into fruition in the state of Quiché.

In 1996 Sisters Barbara Ford and Virginia Searing, working with Caritas, joined the recently added mental health team of the integrated health program. They developed programs using Mayan healing practices and western psychology

the atrocities occurred and ministered to the people left behind. They accompanied the families of those buried in mass graves and exhumed the remains, which were then given a dignified Mayan burial.

Sisters Barbara and Virginia continued the work of reclamation into the new century. On May 5, 2001, in Guatemala City, Sr. Barbara was killed in a carjacking that had turned deadly. Although there was much speculation about the motive for the murder, intensive investigation ruled out a political one. As the 20th anniversary of her death was celebrated in May, Sr. Barbara continues to be revered by many for the work she did for over 20 years with the poorest of the Mayan community.

The twentieth anniversary of Sr. Barbara Ford's death on May 5, 2021, brought the communities in Guatemala and the U.S. together for a Mass of Remembrance via live-stream; Monseñor Julio Cabrera Ovalle presided.

to allow survivors of the violence to begin the healing process. They began to visit places where

The Barbara Ford Peacebuilding Center, opened in 2009 in Quiché by the Sisters of Charity, continues to focus on integrated mental and spiritual health. Its well-prepared and enthusiastic teams offer opportunities for youth training and employment, understanding of human rights, including the rights of children, and agricultural projects, including a model farm. The Center partners with other organizations to bring the best of what is available to the rural poor, especially to women and girls who suffer from the effects of physical, mental and sexual abuse. (*See Vision, Summer 2018, pages 8-9 and 12 to read about the about programs offered at the Barbara Ford Peacebuilding Center.*)

Guatemala, land of eternal spring, continues to be a place of special bonding between the Sisters of Charity and its people. May we long continue our relationship of love and service with each other.

Sister Nora Cunningham

Cont'd from page 6

Asked to reflect on her work, Sr. Nora said, "In September I will be celebrating 60 years as a Sister of Charity. As I look back I see my life as an adventure, post Vatican II, full of surprises, changes, sorrows and joys. I started out in the streets of Manhattan and the Bronx, journeyed to the mountains of the Catskills and back; and the biggest surprise of all—I am now living in Guatemala.

"During my ministry I have lived with inspiring sisters, worked with dedicated associates and met wonderful people and, alongside my special family, have enduring friendships. At the center of my life is a passionate God of love and the mission of Jesus to reveal that love—in a classroom, a parish, a novitiate house, a boardroom or a mission outside the USA. I have been so blessed; now it's all joyful gratitude."

Sisters Margaret Dowling & Teresita Regina Austin

Cont'd from page 8

sites and found the monetary support both within and beyond the Congregation to make missions in Guatemala and Chile a reality. She traveled to these far-away missions, encouraging sisters to commit their time and talent to minister with the Guatemalan people.

As the President of the Sisters of Charity, Sr. Margaret Dowling challenged the Community as a whole to reorganize its ministries around areas of need beyond the borders of New York City and the U.S. mainland.

Sr. Margaret Dowling continued to support the development of these foreign missions throughout her time as President (1971–1979). It was during this time that missions were established in Chile, Peru and Guatemala. Following her time in office, she joined the sisters in El Novillero and Sololá. Returning stateside, she continued to support the missions by publishing a monthly journal called "Focus on Central America" which informed readers about political, social and economic trends. At its height of popularity, 900 subscribers received the journal.

Through the hard work of Sisters Teresita and Margaret, the Guatemalan missions became the interest, love and support of all Sisters and Associates of Charity, whether or not they stepped out of U.S. territory.

Ellen Rose O'Connell, SC



In the spirit of *Laudato Si'*, we may want to consider ways to reduce our carbon footprint and take better care of our common home. The Congregation is putting into practice *Laudato Si'*'s call to integral ecology and ecological conversion. Since 1995, a significant focus of the Sisters of Charity of New York has been "to reverence creation in a spirit of interconnectedness with all that is, living responsibly."

Our carbon footprint refers to the amount of greenhouse gases that go into the production of our everyday consumption and activities. To avoid an unsustainable rise in global temperatures, our average carbon footprint should drop from the estimated annual U.S. average of 16 tons to an amount closer to two tons by 2050.

What follows are a few practical and easy ways to promote a healthier

and more balanced relationship with our environment.

- » Use a reusable bottle instead of disposable plastic ones. The energy required to produce products we consider "green," such as a stainless-steel thermos, may be initially high, but its durability makes it a better choice than disposable plastic. In terms of energy, the thermos can replace 100 plastic bottles and last a lifetime. As a result, it will be far less likely to end up in the landfill.
- » Be mindful of packaging with food deliveries, takeout orders, and take-home items after dining out. Food containers are often made with single-use materials like polypropylene that cannot be recycled. Plastic containers often wind up in landfills, soil, or water systems, including the ocean. While a percentage of aluminum containers are made with recycled materials, making aluminum involves heavy water use and releases emissions, including greenhouse gases and sulfur dioxide. When ordering takeout for home delivery, request to leave out the plastic utensils, napkins and single-use condiments. Remember—takeout requires a lot of packaging.

» Paper towels can be wasteful, not to mention expensive. Cut down on the use of wasteful paper towels with reusable Swedish dishcloths. Typically made with 70% biodegradable cellulose and 30% cotton, one Swedish dishcloth can replace 17 rolls of paper towels. The dishcloths may be used for absorbing spills, cleaning countertops, scrubbing dishware and cups, and cleaning windows. They air-dry faster than sponges and can be cleaned in the washing machine or dishwasher. After multiple uses, the towels can safely go in the compost.

Watch this space for more suggestions on how to lower your carbon footprint. Have your own suggestion? Drop us a line at extcomm@scny.org

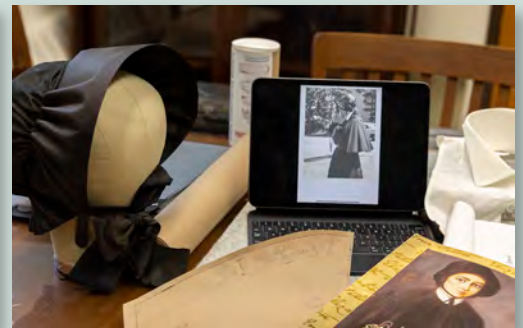
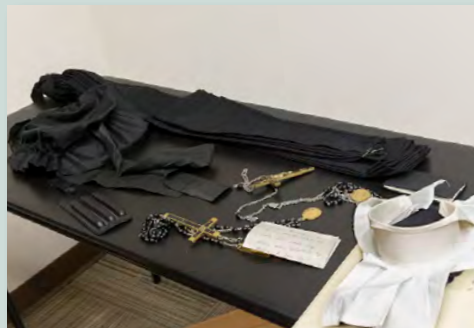


Sr. Mary Ann Garisto, who holds a master's degree in biology, taught biology and environmental science on the high school and college levels. She was the

Congregation's first Director of Ecological Concerns and the founding Director of Sisters Hill Farm; she currently serves as Director Emerita of the farm.

Professor Researches Traditional Sisters of Charity Habit

Professor Darrin Pufall Purdy, Director of Theater and Costume Design at Boise State University, received a grant from the University to derive patterns from authentic habits to create a resource for designers. During his research visit in May, he traced patterns from the dress, cape, apron, sleeves and cap preserved in the SC Archives.



Sr. Elizabeth Vermaelen, a former SC President, explained details about fabric, tailoring, and the "death tuck," a six-inch tuck sewn above the hem of the skirt pulled down to cover the feet before burial. Professor Pufall Purdy will donate to the Congregation copies of the paper and digital patterns created as well as a replica of the habit sewn from the pattern. *Mindy Gordon*



Elizabeth Ann Seton with her Child

Before Elizabeth Seton's canonization ceremony in Rome on September 14, 1975, artist Joseph Dawley accepted a commission to paint four portraits of her, including an official portrait as Mother Seton. The other three paintings depict Elizabeth Ann Seton as a young woman before her conversion to Catholicism.

Mr. Dawley created Elizabeth's facial characteristics from her wedding miniature, the only known portrait drawn during her lifetime. Measuring 3.5 by 2.5 feet, the painting was displayed in the President's Reception Room at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in Founder's Hall. The artwork is now in the foyer of Elizabeth Boyle Hall, the location of the Congregation's archives.

Mindy Gordon, Archivist

Vocations in Guatemala

Cont'd from page 7

In the Formation process today there is one aspirant, a postulant, a novice and two temporary professed sisters. Two Guatemalan Sisters have made perpetual profession: Rosenda Castañeda Gonzalez and Rosa Tzul Say.

We ask all of you to remember your call to be part of creating a vocation culture wherever you are and to pray for vocations and for all those in their formation process.

The prayer of the Latin American Congress for vocations in 2011 is our continued prayer today:

Enlighten us to offer our youth appropriate training that prepares them to give sense to the life of men and women today, that allows them to be good Samaritans for the wounded of life, and prophets of justice for so many victims of corruption and violence.

Help us to be joyful witnesses and committed to a life of service, radically surrendered to God and neighbors, in the married, single, priestly, consecrated (contemplative or missionary) life—both within and outside of our borders.... Amen.

Sister Rosenda

Cont'd from page 7

ministry has moved to a virtual format. She spends many evening hours in video conference meetings with the other committee members and telephone discussions accompanying women discerning their religious vocations.

Sr. Rosenda's second ministry is the administration of health clinics. She established one at the cathedral of Santa Cruz del Quiché, which she staffs as an auxiliary nurse six days a week.

She also oversees another clinic in Ixcán that she set up two years ago. Ixcán is on the Mexican border, 11 hours away by car, so a local nurse staffs it. Four to five times a year Sr. Rosenda drives to Ixcán to restock medical supplies. In addition, she is in the process of opening a third clinic in Nebaj. When asked how she finds her energy, she responded, "I am passionate about meeting the needs of the people. I love helping people."

Laudato Si' Tree Blessing

Cont'd from page 11

In collaboration with organizations such as Religious Organizations Along the River (ROAR), the Sisters have worked to save the Hudson River from the effects of pollution, encouraged recycling to the campus community and educated themselves on their personal carbon footprints.

Sr. Margaret O'Brien, SC Councilor, stated, "This tree blessing proclaims our gratitude for this magnificent campus and marks a larger commitment to the Earth. We Sisters of Charity are determined to be part of restoring and sustaining this planet, our common home, as Pope Francis calls it."

The Yoshino Cherry Tree, distinguished by its glossy bark,

oriental branching pattern and dark green leaves, is incredibly resilient. First brought from Japan to the United States in 1902, the tree can grow in various climates and, each spring, produces beautiful pink flowers.

As the newly planted tree grows, providing fruit for birds and beauty for the Mount Saint Vincent community, it will serve as a marker of the Congregation's progress and a monument to the commitment to live *Laudato Si'*.

The Sisters of Charity pray that the tree looks over a healing world dedicated to preserving "our common home" and a community deepening its relationship with God and all of Creation.

With Love and Appreciation We Remember...

Visit our website at www.scny.org/news for complete biographies

Sister Elizabeth Judge, SC (*Sister Marietta Elizabeth*)

Entered: 1952 + Date of Death: April 3, 2021 + Age: 86



Sister Elizabeth Judge's 48 years of active ministry were devoted to education, pastoral ministry and advocacy. She taught elementary grades in schools in Brooklyn, Queens and Rockville Centre. She also taught Spanish in Cathedral High School in Manhattan, and St. Gabriel High School and Iona College in New Rochelle. She served in the advocacy programs of the Little Sisters of the Assumption in Manhattan and H.O.P.E. Community Services in New Rochelle. Farther afield, Sr. Elizabeth served as a teacher in The Bahamas and as a Pastoral Minister in El Novillero and El Quiché in Guatemala. On May 21, 2021, a section of garden outside Ely Hall was dedicated to Sister Elizabeth, a longtime resident and avid gardener.

Sister Katherine King, SC (*Sister James Miriam*)

Entered: 1958 + Date of Death: April 6, 2021 + Age: 83



Sister Katherine King devoted her 34 years of ministry to childcare. After receiving Certification for Baby Nursing from New York State and Certification as a Montessori Teacher from the State of New Jersey, she spent a short time at St. Joseph Hall in Brooklyn before serving six years as a childcare worker at the Foundling. She then moved to St. Agatha Home in Nanuet where she devoted the next 38 years to caring for children. In her later assignments at Nanuet, she served as a Crisis Mediator. After retiring to Seton Village in Nanuet, she volunteered her services in the office of the Resident Director and generously ran errands for other residents.

Sister Margaret Sweeney, SC (*Sister Mary Jeremiah*)

Entered: 1946 + Date of Death: April 11, 2021 + Age: 99



Sister Margaret Sweeney spent her first few years of ministry in elementary education. However, most of her ministry was connected with St. Vincent Hospital in various administrative offices, and in retirement she volunteered at the Medical Center. Some of the achievements of her administration were developing a master plan for modernization and the initiation of several community-responsive programs for the Hospital. She guided the Medical Center through times of significant needs and responses to health care demands in New York City. She also served in the administration at the College of Mount Saint Vincent.

Sister Veronica Liegey, SC (*Sister Maria Veronica*)

Entered: 1957 + Date of Death: April 24, 2021 + Age: 88



Sister Veronica Liegey's years in ministry were wide-ranging on several levels. She began teaching elementary grades in several parish schools in Manhattan. She then taught High School English, and for ten years AP English, in New Rochelle and in Cardinal Spellman High School in the Bronx. After retiring from teaching she devoted her next nineteen years to parish ministry in the East Bronx. She began a program for seniors, both home-bound and able, in Our Lady of the Assumption Parish. This ministry expanded the knowledge of the senior members of her parish through the many travel opportunities within and outside the country that she offered them.

Congratulation CMSV 2020-2021 Seton Service & Leadership Graduates

The Sisters of Charity are happy and proud to see the 2021 graduates of the Seton Service and Leadership Program complete their undergraduate studies at the College of Mount Saint Vincent. Abundant blessings as they endeavor to fulfill their call to service. We also congratulate the 2020 graduates, who celebrated a belated graduation on June 24. Sincere gratitude to Sr. Mary Lou McGrath and Matthew Shields, Director for Mission and Ministry at CMSV, for the guidance and support they provided to the students.

2021

Emily Batac
Hadisa Chowdhury
Matthew DiNorcia
Olivia Hilliard
Xena Llamas
Sayde McDermott
Erich Naumann
Jennifer Puac
Olivia Schmutz
Kathleen Stack

2020

Jenna McDonnell
Danielle Quaranto
Steven Hansen
Tara Maloney
Juliette Borghesan
Megan Costello
Sophia Herrera
Meghan Hoban
Genesis Torres



Sisters of Charity Center
6301 Riverdale Avenue
Bronx, NY 10471-1093
718.549.9200 • www.scny.org



Celebrating Fifty Years of Mission in Guatemala



Above: The people of Guatemala joined in the celebration of the Congregation's 200th anniversary in 2017; **(below)** a program at the Barbara Ford Peacebuilding Center teaches computer skills.



Above: A young mother learns sewing skills at the Barbara Ford Center while her baby tries his best to provide accurate measurements; **(below)** Sr. Ginny Searing and others in attendance cheer on Sr. Donna Dodge at the blessing of the new administration building at the Barbara Ford Center in 2019.

