God does great things for us!

Dieu fait pour nous de grandes choses!
May 2022

The Lord does great things for us, and we are filled with JOY!

Psalm 123

These words ring in my mind and my heart encouraging me/us to be AWARE of all that God has and continues to do in our lives as individuals and as a Congregation. Amid our daily crosses, Sr. Suellen being taken hostage, the world experiencing war, and the lived reality of climate change we move forward as women of HOPE who are more aware of our connectedness to each other and to people around the globe.

As of today, there is no word on Suellen, and Sr. Pauline & Sr. Pascaline are safe in Burkina Faso. We beg your continued prayers and humbly thank the hundreds who have reached out to us.

The theme of our 2022 Congregational Chapter is – “God does great things for us”! A statement that has been a lived reality for the Marianites since our beginning in 1841. Our beginnings in France were marked by the vision of our founder, Blessed Basil Moreau, with a sincere desire to create a congregation that would tie priests, brothers, and sisters together as a Family. Together with our first Superior General, Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors, they formed young men and women and quickly sent them across the world to evangelize. Today the Marianites are the smallest of the four Congregations known as the Family of Holy Cross but our presence in the world makes a difference!

The 15 Marianites in France remain a viable presence in Le Mans, opening our doors to all who wish to experience the beginnings of Holy Cross. The little woods where Moreau wrote the Constitution still offers visitors a place of silence away from the noise of the world. The Solitude is the spiritual HOME BASE for Holy Cross men and women across the world.

Two Marianites are in Canada, and they continue to offer a presence in Lac-Mégantic and allow the legacy of our sisters who nursed so many people to health be a memory that will not be forgotten for years to come.

In New Jersey, we have eight sisters who embrace the gift of daily prayer for the needs of the people of God while encouraging young people to know, love and serve! Smiles, kind words and encouraging presence are the ways in which they reach out to many. They are regularly in dialogue with our one sister in Ireland who is in parish ministry.

In Louisiana we continue to share our gifts in education, health care and social ministry. We focus our efforts on being a viable presence in an ever-changing world. 59 Marianites continue to spread the good news of GOD WITH US as we reach out in a variety of ministries to address the needs of today!

Our three sisters in Burkina Faso are examples of women of faith who heard a call to service and responded with determination and good will. Today we hold these women in our hearts and ask that God lead us to know what the future holds. My/our consistent prayer in the last month is, “God’s will be done!”

As we move forward in Hope knowing that Blessed Moreau and Mother Mary intercede for each of us, we invite you to pray with us in GRATITUDE for all that has been, IS and will be!
Companions On The Journey

By Sr. Joan Marie Comeaux

Have you heard the good news? The Marianites of Holy Cross have purchased a property and an existing building in Covington on the Northshore. The property, originally named “Village in the Oaks” is located at 75520 LA-1081. It will be the future home of a Marianite community. The property sits in a peaceful setting surrounded by a plethora of trees—mostly oaks and pine trees—and approximately three acres of grass and woods encompassing a pond. Renovations are underway for the proposed twenty-four apartments, a chapel, a kitchen, offices, as well as other necessary amenities. This move is the outcome of a request by some sisters who wish to share a more community-centered life with the freedom to make decisions about areas of their communal lifestyle.

Purchasing property for a house is exciting, but making it home requires that we imbue the physical property with the heart and dreams of those who will live there. Our founder, Blessed Basil Moreau, emphasized the value of unity of persons and purpose. In a world marked by individuality and division, we wish to strive for closer unity among ourselves as well as with the larger community by sharing our time, talent, and treasure while respecting each other’s individuality. We hope that this new community will be a place of welcome to others who wish to join us with open minds and hearts in an invitation for all to pray, play, and work in partnership in our efforts to build up the Kingdom of God. Our Constitution states, “An authentic community life is an essential part of our apostolic mission as Marianites of Holy Cross… we endeavor to express the spiritual reality of the Trinitarian unity…” (MSC Constitution #9)

A desire also arises out of our dreams to care for our common planet for the future of our earth by reducing our carbon footprint. We will, whenever possible, make a personal and communal commitment to incorporate sustainability practices for the goods we possess for the common good. In the future, we hope to incorporate projects that exemplify the care of “Our Common Home” along with the local community of faith in the area, i.e., water and energy resourcefulness, the dedication of property for a community garden, and the planting of fruit trees and solar projects to better our environment now and in the future. Hopefully, we can ensure the dedication of our resources toward the mission of being a compassionate presence through our interactions with others in prayer, work, and celebrations of life.

We do not know when we will have “Open House” but we will extend the invitation when appropriate. In the meantime, please pray for all who are working to make this a reality. To paraphrase an old Beatles song... “You may say that [we] are dreamers, but [we are] not the only ones.” Come and join us as we strive to live as one.

Sr. Joan Comeaux, MSC serves on the Holy Cross International Justice Office Committee and looks forward to her move to “the Oaks”.

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May I Introduce Myself…

By Sister Mary Andrée Rousseau

I am a Marianite of Sainte Croix and a native of France. I currently live in Le Mans, in the Sarthe where our Congregation was born. I entered the Marianites in 1964. In my ministry, I have always been on mission in the service of the diocesan Church. I initially worked with teenagers from 11 to 14 years old, in a chaplaincy for young people who are in public schools. I was in ministry with a priest of Holy Cross and a group of lay people. I really enjoyed this mission because of the collaboration: priest, nun, laity. This ministry was in connection with other chaplaincies of the diocese and it seems to me that it was well in the spirit of what Father Moreau had wanted when founding Sainte Croix.

After some time I also worked with the diocesan team of the Catechesis of Sarthe. Here again I found many joys, openings and riches in this mission which included the entire diocese and in collaboration with diocesan priests and lay people.

Five years ago, after a period of special formation, the bishop sent me to a small town in the Sarthe 40 kilometers from Le Mans to entrust me with the responsibility of a parish where there was no longer a priest. It was a great adventure! There were a lot of new responsibilities to take on. In this new mission I discovered the realities of the Rural World, the poverty of the local Church, the dechristianization, but also the goodwill of lay people and the desire of some families to be certain that the Church continues to live locally! What impressed me the most was the accompaniment of the families to prepare for burials! It was there that I experienced encounters in truth, in depth. I shared the grief of the families; I listened; I tried to bring my compassion and the faith of the Church to the grieving family. This mission has helped me to grow spiritually and humanly, to feel in communion with people who are often far from the Church!

But after nine years it was time for me to retire. I came back to Le Mans and now I serve as a volunteer. This has helped me to regain the energy to invest in a Catholic school located in a disadvantaged area of the city that welcomes children especially from North Africa, Turkey, and the Middle East. I do tutoring, I help them learn to read, to count... it’s exciting and the contact with six and seven year-olds helps me feel “young” again! In my parish I am a member of the burial accompaniment team and I am also in contact with a “secular” community of disabled people. Every Thursday we share a time of prayer. I continue my Mission in the Congregation and in the Church with joy and hope!

I was scheduled to come to Louisiana for our General Chapter, but my superiors invited me to come before the Chapter began to meet Marianites from the United States. I just spent a week in Opelousas and I really enjoyed my time there. Even if we are not bilingual, each one of us is of goodwill and we manage to share in depth! Long live the Marianites of Holy Cross!
My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...

Luke 1: 46-56

The Blessed Mother is no longer just an obedient and willing girl, a tabernacle for God’s Son, or silent member of the nativity. Her Magnificat has become a focal point for living in the reality of waiting for true justice to come. Mary helps us understand the magnificence of how our lives, our choices, our very faith calls us to action on behalf of others, filled with HOPE.

Recently two of our Marianite Sisters were honored for the many ways in which they magnify the Lord in their service to the broader community. Sr. Ann Lacour received the SPES UNICA AWARD from the University of Holy Cross, New Orleans, Louisiana. This is the university’s highest award presented for her unflinching support of the university and her faithful call as a Marianite in varied ministries over the years.

In Hamilton, New Jeresy, Trenton Catholic Preparatory Academy, Inc. recognized their long-time teacher and Campus Minister, Sr. Barbara Schreier. Often working with at-risk students, Sr. Barbara molds her charges in their social ministry awareness and outreach.

Congratulations, Sisters, on these honors. We applaud your witness and work. “Like Mary, our patroness, we Marianites are women of the Church leading others to Christ and discovering Christ in them...we must be willing to assume leadership roles in those areas where we can best respond to today’s needs.” (MSC Constitution #5)
Is “God Inside You, And Inside Everybody Else”?

By Sr. Maura O’Donovan, CHF

Recently Governor John Bel Edwards of Louisiana said it simply: based on “math” and “fairness,” and because it did not meet the standards of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, he vetoed the congressional map proposed by the Louisiana Legislature. It was clear to him that since African-Americans comprise about 30% of the population of Louisiana, they should be entitled to two of the six electoral districts, apportioned by the U.S. Congress to Louisiana. The federal government stipulates that the electoral districts must have nearly equal populations, and there must be no discrimination based on race or ethnicity, in the redrawing of the boundaries. Governor Edwards was commenting after the Louisiana Legislature had overruled his veto.

Who belongs in this country? It seems not everybody. Why this fear on the part of some for giving anything, beyond minimal or nominal political power to African-Americans, or other non-whites? Why are there widespread efforts in many states to suppress black/brown votes? Moral theologian, Father Bryan Massingale opines that this resistance is based on fear of loss of power and privilege by some of the now majority U.S. white population.

Recently, Fr. Massingale, in a workshop offered at Xavier University, presented an analysis of what is happening across the United States. Scientifically based population trends indicate that within the next twenty years or so, the U.S. will experience a major “browning” of its population. White nationalism is growing exponentially. This pathology is corrupting the very marrow of our U.S. Society. It is not so much the outrageously vicious acts of racism which are sometimes carried out by a small minority, but it is the more subtle pervasive racism, which has become the very framework of our lives, and of which mostly we are unaware, or if aware we are ambivalent about it. Many of us choose to be passive bystanders. We will not engage in any openly racist activities, but we will do little else.

Fr. Massingale gave several practical examples of how our imaginations can be manipulated into believing that the black/brown body is “dangerous,” “bad,” “violent,” “stupid,” and numerous other negatives. Among his examples were two images with which New Orleanians are familiar. It was two captioned images from the 2005 media, when most of the city was drowning in toxic floodwaters. In each image people were wading through the floods with goods they managed to procure from flooded shops, to try to get the necessities of life. The whites were captioned as carrying well-needed “supplies.” With blacks it was “looting.” It is this prejudiced, jaundiced culture, into which many of us may have been socialized as white people in the U.S. Fr. Massingale feels that although the Civil Rights Movement has done a lot to improve things, more is needed. We need more than fair and just laws. We need a spiritual/religious renewal to uproot our racist culture. He believes we are in a fight for the very soul of the U.S. nation. He calls it a “soul sickness.” St. Pope John Paul II in 1999 identified and named this racism as one of our major U.S. problems. Who paid attention to the pope’s
critique of us then? Very few I suspect. Fr. Massingale takes up that cause now. I hope we can open our minds and hearts to this conversion. It is an uphill climb, says black poet Amanda Gorman.

Many in the U.S. population are people of faith conviction. How can we continue to call ourselves people of faith, and continue to view others, our sisters and brothers, through prejudiced, jaundiced lenses? How can we be indifferent or lacking in empathy for the thousands of brown-skinned children cruelly separated from their parents at our Southern border? Or for those migrants rotting away in detention centers in remote centers around the U.S.? Or for those young black boys like Travon Martin shot and killed on suspicion, as he left home to purchase a snack, and his killer was never convicted for his murder? This racist culture, in which all of us are embedded is clearly at variance with the gospel of Jesus, and the values of our Catholic faith. Martin Luther King once said, “The great majority of white Americans are suspended between ….opposing attitudes. They are uneasy with injustice but unwilling yet to pay a significant price to eradicate it.” Many of us lack the courage to take the road less traveled, to do the right thing. Alice Walker in The Color Purple writes “God inside you, and inside everybody else.” This is our Christian belief. How can we, therefore, refuse to speak for, and defend the dignity and respect each deserves?

Fr. Massingale proposes that our Catholic faith tradition has the spiritual tools to heal us, to uproot our racist sins, mostly of omission, in the gospel call to conversion of heart, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation meaningfully celebrated, if we have only the courage, and the will to be healed. Fr. Massingale references Albert Einstein who said that no problem can be solved with the same level of consciousness which caused the problem. So, we need a new way of being human. He also referenced St. Thomas Aquinas who said that there can be no real virtue without courage (fortitude). Josef Pieper, in developing Aquinas’s theory, said that we must not be kept by fear from doing the right thing. Let us by God’s grace do the right thing. Let us pressure our public representatives to allow a fair allocation of the political arena in the new electoral boundaries.

Sr. Maura is a member of the American Province of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Faith.

Legacy (noun) ... Something handed down from an ancestor or predecessor – or from the past.

As our numbers grow smaller and as we grow older as a Congregation, what legacy will we leave? We have served the people of God for one hundred eighty years as teachers, nurses, doctors, missionaries, spiritual directors, advocates for justice, etc., etc., etc.

For the past three years, members of the Marianite Legacy Committee, composed of Sisters Judith Gomila, Marjorie Hebert, Mary Kay Kinberger, Beth Mouch, Sue Pablovich, Regina White and members of our Leadership Team, Sisters Ann Lacour, Stephanie Brignac and Renee Daigle have met to plan for a preferred future.

Legacy is fundamental to what it is to be human. Research shows that without a sense of creating a legacy, adults lose meaning in their lives. Exploring the idea of legacy offers a glimpse, not only into human relationships, but also the human spirit. Legacy connects our past, our present, and our future.

Susan V. Bosak, founder of the Legacy Project, a research and social innovation group, has stated that “the power of legacy enables us to live fully in the present. You understand that you are a part of a larger community, a community that must remember its history in order to build its future. Legacy is very much about life and living.”
FRIENDSHIPS BETWEEN WOMEN
Are we really back-biting shrews????
By Sr. Clarita Bourque, MSC

On May 31 we celebrate the Visitation … that special day when Mary visited her elderly cousin, Elizabeth. In the image below, the two women appear to be so very happy, and with good reason. Both are pregnant, expecting their first child.

Though they lived a distance apart, Mary was told by the angel Gabriel that Elizabeth was pregnant. (I often think that angels who deliver messages to us earthlings must have to attend “messenger school”. In every case, the formula is the same. They announce their presence, tell the listener not to be afraid, deliver the message and then, as a sign, inform them of an event about to happen.)

The meeting between these two women can also be regarded as a symbol of women’s friendship. In the past, too often women were portrayed as back-biting shrews, their relationships toxic and competitive. This is unfortunate and untrue.

The truth is that women, throughout history, have forged lasting relationships with other women. Author Alice Hoffman in her book, Local Girls, says it beautifully. “Jill and I have known each other our whole lives. We met before we were born and we’ll probably still know each other after we die. At least, that’s the way we’re planning it.”

Gloria Steinem addresses the issue of cultural differences: “The odd thing about these deep and personal connections of women is that they often ignore barriers of age, economics and race— all the barriers that, in male or mixed society, had seemed so difficult to cross.” In our time, I believe that women have grown closer because of injustices to us such as human trafficking, the “glass ceiling”, and sexual harassment.

I’m sure our female readers can relate many stories of their lasting friendships with other women. Some of these friendships will last for many years but others may be cut short by distance or death.

In Cat’s Eye, one of Margaret Atwood’s characters speaks to a friend who has passed away: “This is what I miss, Cardelia: not something that’s gone, but something that will never happen… two old women giggling over their tea.”

So, before it’s too late, phone, text or write to a dear friend and plan a date and time to meet. If a pregnant Mary could visit with Elizabeth who lived a good distance away, so can we!

A little Lagniappe: During her meeting with Elizabeth, Mary utters a beautiful prayer, the Canticle of Mary. During the political upheaval in Nicaragua and El Salvador during the 1980’s, anyone caught with that prayer on their person was arrested! Why? Because of these verses: “He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.” (Luke 1: v 51-53)

Why did Mary utter these words? One commentator speculates that on her way to Elizabeth’s home, Mary saw atrocities such as people hanging on crosses, the poor begging, others being mistreated by Roman soldiers. May we be as brave as Mary and speak forth when we witness injustice in any form.
We continue to pray for Sr. Suellen Tennyson, MSC, the prayer composed by Very Rev. Charles Benoit, OSB, VF:

Loving and faithful God, source of all that is good, you gave Blessed Basil Moreau a burning zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and inspired him to undertake great works, even at the cost of great suffering and personal sacrifice.

We ask that through his intercession Sr. Suellen Tennyson may be kept safe and quickly released by her captors, and that she may have the strength to continue confessing boldly the Cross of Christ as our only hope!

Standing with Mary at the foot of the Cross, we ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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The year was 1870. Archbishop Napoleon J. Perche, Archbishop of New Orleans, had as one of his main concerns Catholic education for children. He preached and wrote tirelessly on this subject and greatly influenced Father M. Harnais, pastor in Franklin, Louisiana. Father Harnais made known his desire to establish a Catholic school for girls to the Archbishop, had his plans approved, and bought the property and building on Main Street. He wrote to the Provincial Superior of the Marianites of Holy Cross, Mother Mary Eutychuis, requesting her to “come and see”. In the summer of 1871 two sisters came, were favorably impressed, and upon their return urged the Superior to accept the mission. On October 31, 1871, the Mother Provincial brought four sisters to minister in Franklin. The school received the blessing of the Church on November 4, 1871.

The institution was placed under the guidance of St. John the Evangelist and was called The Academy of St. John. It was the fifth permanent foundation of the Marianite Sisters.

Fast forward to the late 1940’s and 1950’s. Betty Jane, Cora, and Natalie were students who graduated in 1954 when St. John’s was still an ‘all-girls’ school – elementary through secondary. It doesn’t take much to get them talking about the “good old days”. Each has her own fond memories of their kind, gracious principal, Sr. Rita Achee, the influential Sr. Francis de Sales, and other younger, energetic sisters who taught them: Sisters Damien, Teresita, and Bernardine. Cora, a 1947 transplant from New Orleans, delights in remembering that their choir, under the direction of Sr. Bernardine, won a state championship…but she adds quickly, “I don’t recall what we actually won!.” Sitting in the old school, Natalie’s distraction was staring out the window, and watching with interest the new school being constructed. There was a room off the principal’s office with a large picture of Fr. Moreau and a kneeler. Students were frequently in and out “ she says. Betty Jane has multiple happy memories too, but her underlying thoughts were about the Marianite Sisters and perhaps hearing God’s call for her to become a woman religious. As far back as the 1870’s, Franklin can boast of a long list of religious vocations that were nurtured on Bayou Teche. Fast forward to the new millennium.

Sr. Mary Ann Peltier (aka Betty Jane), Cora McCain Bouton and Natalie Winchester Guidry are back at St. John’s celebrating the 150th anniversary of their Alma Mater. The day began with Mass in the Church with Fr. Joel Faulk, Pastor of Assumption Church.

The on-going connection today for these 1954 graduates is the Marianite Associate relationship. Both Natalie and Cora speak of the importance of their morning prayer in preparing them to meet the new day – whatever it might hold. They pray and relate to the Blessed Mother under several titles: Our Lady of Prompt Succor, Mary, Mother of Sorrows, and varied apparitions of Mary honored at particular times of the year.

Speaking of The Marianite Natalie says, “I appreciate the quarterly magazine and stories, particularly about the sisters and how they are serving the Church in these uncertain times.” Cora agrees but she adds, “The
On the Grow newsletter has practical ideas to help us grow spiritually and be women of HOPE. I’ve learned more about Blessed Fr. Moreau, the Founder.” Sr. Mary Anne who is the Coordinator of the MSC Associates in Opelousas and Franklin, is happy to hear that.

Many of the Franklin Associates are also Catholic Daughters. Together they have a generous and compassionate outreach to the needy. “At Easter they brought goodies to the children in the Battered Women’s Shelter; this past winter, they gifted cuddly blankets to the sisters in Prompt Succor Nursing Home. Associate Charlene Blanchard was one person who monogrammed the names.

I inquired about this, the Anniversary celebration, “What do you want to remember about today?” Natalie said her mom had been a lay teacher at St. John’s, Mary Grace Shannon Winchester. At the luncheon, a number of people came up to say what a marvelous teacher she was. “One person told me,” says Natalie, “that because of my mother, she aspired to be teacher. Even at my age that comment touched me.”

Returning to the school building filled Cora with memories of her earliest years. Because her mother died when she was only two years old, Cora was raised up by her great aunt, her maternal grandmother’s sister. When her uncle retired from sugar cane processing the family moved back to Franklin. Cora gets a little misty eyed, “Thanks to Ms. Theriot, the cafeteria manager who told my story to the Marianites, the sisters generously took me into their Catholic school for something like $1.00.”

Betty Jane, Cora, and Nathalie, molded and shaped by their education at St. John’s with its rich history, are still connected today as women of prayer and compassion, sixty plus years later!

EDITOR’S NOTE:

Since Chapter in our Congregation only happens every five years, we really have to give it “our all”.

Our editors are prepared to “dive in”.

Let’s hope they don’t drown!

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PENTECOST PEOPLE

Pentecost is June 5, 2022

When the risen Jesus visited the disciples before he returned to his Father in heaven, he promised to send the Holy Spirit to be with the Church always. Like those first disciples before the coming of God’s fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:3-4), we wait in faith, and we pray. Come Holy Spirit…

Come, Holy Spirit, Fire of love and make us Pentecost People. May your gifts be mirrored in our daily choices:

– WISDOM and RIGHT JUDGMENT guide our decisions and temper our impulses.
– KNOWLEDGE and UNDERSTANDING increase our capacity for empathy and compassion.
– REVERENCE and AWE fill us with gratitude and respect for all of creation.
– Give us the COURAGE to witness boldly to our faith in our creeds and our deeds.

Spirit of Fire and Light, transform our hearts so that we may turn from violence to peace, hatred to understanding, and revenge to mercy. Pentecost People through, with, and in Jesus Christ, we pray, Come Holy Spirit.

adapted from William H. Sadlier