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Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception • *"A Caring, Praying Presence"* • West Peoria, Illinois

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Reflection: Sister Diane Marie VandeVoorde



The article on Archives in this issue of the newsletter is rich in the recording of the stability and the transition, the memories of people and significant events, and the unexpected changes that have always accompanied and shared the history of this community.

Without consulting Webster to define the word "archives," I have decided that the archives

story featured in this newsletter might be defined as a pretty stable and solid record of who have been, and are today, guided by the models and examples of St. Francis of Assisi and Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

We, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception, have always lived and traveled together. And as we travel, usually piling into the same car together, the conversation begins with, "Let's say a prayer for safe travel." The prayer is always the same, "Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy

protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother; to thee do I come; before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen." This ancient prayer from the 12th-15th century is named the "Memorare," in Latin, meaning "remember." It invokes the Blessed Mother Mary's intercession. The prayer was made popular by a French priest, Fr. Claude Bernard, who spread the prayer after being cured from his illness.

As Mary knew all about traveling safely, it is the perfect prayer for travelers. She had plenty of experience on the way to Bethlehem, on the journey to Egypt, and every year to the temple in Jerusalem. She was well acquainted with the risks and dangers of going to places unknown, crowded with unknown people and unacquainted circumstances.

Mary, as a guardian and protector, has wisdom and experience of how to watch over and protect her loved ones. No wonder the sisters call upon the person whose role was and is that of a loving mother and intercessor. Holy Mother Mary, pray for us.

Meditation



This prayer is from our community prayer book. It is for those in need, written by St. Peter Canisius, a 16th century Jesuit priest and scholar:

"O God, the Refuge for the poor, the strength of those who toil, and the Comforter of all who sorrow, we commend to Your mercy the unfortunate and needy in whatever land they may be. You alone know the number and extent of their sufferings and trials. Look down, Father of mercies, at those unhappy families suffering from war and slaughter, from hunger and disease, and other severe trials. Spare them, O Lord, for it is truly a time for mercy. Amen."



Our Jubilarian

Celebrating Sister Alice Marie Rogers 70 years of religious life

At the age of 21, Sister Alice Marie Rogers entered the Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception in 1953 and professed first vows in 1956, thus marking her 70th year in religious life this year. She professed perpetual vows in 1961. Prior to entering religious life, Sister Alice had just finished nursing training to become an R.N. at St. Anthony's Hospital in Rock Island. She was enjoying living with her loving parents, her two younger brothers, and two younger sisters. She was taught by the Heading Avenue sisters at Alleman High School in Rock Island and was attracted to their joy and friendships. When God called her, she answered.



Since becoming a Sister of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception, Sister Alice has had several ministries, including nursing at St. Joseph's Home in Peoria, teaching young children in the primary grades, visiting people in their homes, taking them to appointments and shopping, and helping them as needed. While she greatly enjoyed all her ministries, her favorite was working with and teaching young children.

Sister Alice enjoys her time with her Franciscan sisters, being with them on mission, living and serving together with them at Lutheran Hillside Village participating in morning and evening office, Rosary, Mass, and Communion Service. She also spends time with sisters reading reflections and praying together. On warm days, Sister Alice can be found, at least three times a day, walking outside and admiring the flowers and trees.

Praying with her sisters and her relationships with them have sustained her in religious life over these past seventy years. Her favorite part of being a sister is being close to Jesus through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

Sister Alice's guidance for those on their faith journey is, "lean heavily on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the surprising things that happen each day."

Preserving our History: The Archives for the Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception

In this year of 2026, the United States will celebrate its 250th birthday from its founding in 1776. About thirty-three years after the founding of the U.S., the first women's religious community was founded by St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Since then, thousands of women's religious communities have been founded, and these communities serve as leaders in healthcare and education.

The Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception is proud to be part of that group with its founding 135 years ago in 1891. The history of our community is not just our community. It is also part of the history of Peoria, the Catholic Diocese of Peoria, religious history, and women's history. About thirty-five years ago, to preserve our history, we started and currently maintain an archives, as have many religious communities. In 2022, the Women's Religious Archives Collaborative (WRAC) was founded to establish a heritage center to be a permanent home for the archives of over seventy-five congregations, open to the public for research, programming, and presentations in person and on-line. The mission of WRAC is to preserve the legacy of women religious in the United States. We are proud to be part of this group and look forward to the opening of the 30,000 square foot heritage center in Cleveland, Ohio, scheduled to open in the spring of 2027.



*Sister Mary Virginia
Butkovich, our first
archivist*



Preserving our History

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*Sister Mary Lenore Highland,
our current archivist*

community. As these two sisters learned on their trip, the purpose of an archives is to get to the roots of the community: the who, what, when, where, and why of the Community's origins and for on-going development. The archives provides a base for the community preserving its origins and its purpose. It is the foundation or the groundwork on which the structure is built.

Since 2019, Sister Mary Lenore has been the archivist for our community. Prior to that time, she was in education and nursing home care. As Sister Lenore states, "I came in with no training as an archivist and was given the direction of Patricia Carroll, who had been the archivist for a community in Chicago. Since we joined WRAC in 2022, I have had two women in the leadership of WRAC who have provided me with assistance and guidance for our archives." Sister Lenore describes the role of the archivist today as "to carry on the research element of what happened, when, and where. People seeking information on religious life, information to help determine their own life path, or those interested in the structure of religious life have contacted me as the archivist. Some people have also contacted me to determine if a relative had been a member of our community, or even some wanting to connect with a sister they had as a teacher in grade school. Connecting people to our sisters and our history is a joy of my ministry as archivist."

Sister Mary Lenore transferred to our community from another religious order about fifteen years ago. When asked what she learned about our community and our 135-year history, she stated, "The thing that has always astounded me is the great tenacity with which our Foundress started the community. Mother Pacifica was asked to work with

the orphaned children in Metamora and then almost at the same time she opened the nursing home here in Peoria, and shortly after that, the one in Springfield. It was as if the sisters would do, and were given God's grace to do, whatever was asked of them. They also became involved early on in schools which was not the original request of the Bishop. The work with the women in the St. Mark's Home for Working Girls is yet another example of this willingness to serve. During these 135 years, this community has stepped up when asked, and trusted God for the skill, talent, and resources to do whatever was asked of us."

The Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception were also leaders in the development of the Peoria-Aledo plan, a program of religious education components developed by our sisters, and part of our archives. This plan was developed by sisters teaching in the primary, intermediate, and upper levels of schools. The topics were explained and then questions were developed about the topic which students studied and answered. This program was used to help study the Baltimore Catechism. Sister Lenore views "the greatest treasures of the archives are the stories of the people and places we have served. The information of the individual schools, homes, and sisters who helped to make the memories of people something which is positive and life-changing is a treasure, and I am privileged to preserve these materials for future generations of religious, scholars, and seekers."

Sister Lenore, with the support of our leadership team, will send our archives to WRAC sometime in 2026. These materials will include information on our history, our ministries and missions, and our deceased sisters. Items pertaining to living sisters will remain in Peoria until the sisters are called home to God. A folder for each sister will contain items revealing the sister's participation in the call to spread God's compassionate presence to people she has served. It will have the history of where each sister served, pictures of her through the years, and some other interesting items about her. Sister Lenore expressed her desire to visit the WRAC facilities when they open in 2027.



*Sister Mary Louise
Hynd, our archivist who
died in 2023*



Sr. Holly Marie Schultz and Sr. Diane VandeVoorde at Stations of the Cross

*Sisters celebrating
Easter*



Sr. Mary Lenore Highland, Sr. Linda Burkitt, Sr. Rose Madonna Gibbons, and Sr. Betty Jean Haverback



Sr. Marion Lemon, Sr. Jacqueline Schroeder, and Sr. Paula Vasquez



Sr. Holly Marie Schultz, Sr. Barbara Ladd, Sr. Janice Keenan, and Sr. Kathleen Ann Mourisse

