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F S M

MAGAZINE

Franciscan Sisters of Mary

Blazing the Way



Pioneers of Progress



Founded in 1872, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary is a religious congregation of women within the Roman Catholic Church. Committed to standing with the poor and marginalized, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary sponsor the ministries Almost Home, SSM Health Care, and Woman’s Place, and collaborate with four other religious congregations of women in The Sarah Community.

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Message from Rose Dowling, FSM, President Franciscan Sisters of Mary



Pioneers!

The stories you will read in this issue of *FSM Magazine* tell of our sisters who in one way or another were considered pioneers.

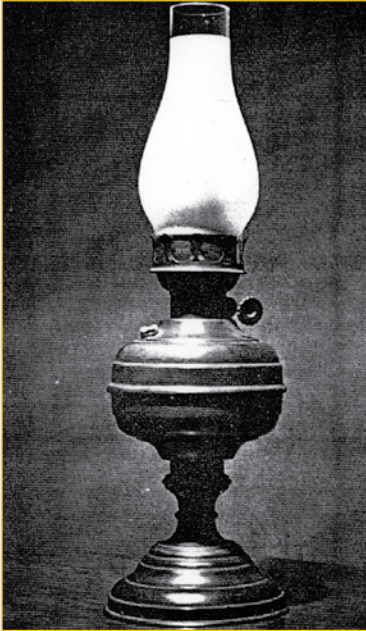
When I see the word *pioneer*, I usually think of those who did extraordinary things. And sometimes this is true. But more often than not, these pioneers are just listening deeply to the God inside of them and then responding to that desire, that urging, that “something” that just draws them in a certain direction. Their actions don’t seem extraordinary to them; those actions just appear to be the next step they need to take in their life.

That kind of listening and responding we are all capable of. Whether we are called and respond step by step until our next step is on the moon or we are called and respond to the next step that is front of you and me today . . . we are all pioneers. We are all breaking new ground or preparing the way for something or someone or leading the way for our children or grandchildren or someone(s) somewhere in the world. The beauty is we don’t see ourselves as pioneers, but rather as faithful listeners and responders to the God who brings all of creation to take the next step in our search to deepen our relationship with God and one another.

So I wish you happy “next step,” Pioneer! And I hope that the stories of our sisters will inspire you to look at the story of your own life as a pioneer.

Rose M. Dowling, FSM

Journey toward a Dream



Pioneers.

They began with a dream, and that dream was the lamp lighting their way through the wilderness.

The dream fed them when food was scarce, encouraged them when hope seemed foolish and the way impossible, called them forward when all argued that to go on was madness.

For some it was a dream of religious or political freedom. For others it was a life of dignity. The dangers and the probability of back-breaking work or heartrending poverty didn't deter them. Without hesitation they left behind all that was familiar and comfortable for a world unknown. For them, the dream was everything.

When Mother Mary Odilia Berger and her companions arrived on the St. Louis riverfront in November 1872 with five dollars and a mission—to care for the sick among the poorest of the poor—they too had a dream. Not to mention an incredible faith and a heaping measure of courage. Over the years they struggled to achieve that vision, building hospitals and offering compassionate, quality medical care to those who needed it, most especially “Our Dear Lord’s”—those patients unable to afford that care.

The founders of many religious orders were just such dreamers, such visionaries. They dared to dream of a society where the children of sharecroppers would be as well educated as the children of the elite. Where desperately poor migrant women could bring their children into the world in a clean, safe, and compassionate place—whether or not they could pay for it. Where the poor and marginalized would be treated with the dignity and courtesy that is the right of every child of God.

In this issue we explore the stories of several pioneer visionaries among our own Franciscan Sisters of Mary. The sisters featured by no means represent the only pioneers of this congregation. Nor can these stories do justice to all they've accomplished.

But as we stand on the brink of yet a new frontier, our hearts need to pause, to remember and cherish what these brave pioneer sisters achieved—and to let their stories inspire us to continue courageously, trusting God to light our way into the future. ✨



Rose Mary Dowling, FSM: *Guiding Others to Hear the God Within*

Who guides the leaders? Especially when times have changed and old assumptions and techniques no longer work?

And how did Sr. Rose Mary Dowling, who hates to fly, end up spending thirteen years in South Africa helping leaders find the inner center from which they need to lead?

A Shift in Approach

Vatican II sparked a new approach to spirituality, calling Christians to open themselves and to build their own relationship with God rather than simply sit in the spectator seats.

Changes for religious were even more profound. “We were moving from a hierarchical to a more participative model of being with one another in community,” Sr. Rose said.

To help religious groups move to more shared leadership, Inter-Community Consultants, a St. Louis group made up of sisters from different congregations, began to teach leadership from a fresh perspective—encouraging a team approach.

“We were teaching people how to be together and make decisions together, how to identify together what they need to do and how they want to be with one another as they do it,” Sr. Rose said. “It was teaching people organizational and relational skills to be able to make decisions together. But it also went much deeper—it was teaching people to move from an outside reference of authority only to an inner authority reference point, to trust the God within.”

A Triple Base of Authority

Traditional authority is based on the authority of office. If you were an elected official, God would work through you by virtue of your position.

But after Vatican II, the understanding of authority became more inclusive.

“There’s also the authority every individual has because authority comes from God authoring life,” Sr. Rose said. “God authors life in every person. So you have your own inner authority where God is working with you—and it is up to you to listen and to ask for the help you need to get the message.

“And then you bring it to the community—so there’s the authority of the group.



“We were trying to teach religious—and anyone else who wanted to learn—how you bring those three loci of authority together and have them interact for the common good.

“Many women religious have moved from a solely external authority to an inner authority—not an egocentric authority but a true, genuine listening to the God within who says, *This is what you need to do* or *This is what you need to say* or *This is what you need to be addressing*. If you really are prayerful about it and you’re willing to be influenced by what other people are saying, then you can trust what comes out of the process and move on it. That’s why *how* you are together is just as important as *what* you’re being called to do.”



Called to Go International

Inter-Community Consultants worked with leadership teams, mostly from religious congregations, teaching them the skills for participative leadership. In 1986 they decided to expand their ministry to other countries. Sr. Rose agreed with the decision provided she would not have to go . . . remember, she hates to fly!

Then came the phone call from South Africa—the prioress general of the King William’s Town Dominicans asked ICC to come help with team development. ICC agreed to send two consultants in August 1987.

But as the time drew near, one consultant found herself unable to go. It became clear that Sr. Rose was the only one available. “So I

said, ‘Okay, I’ll go,’ and then I went home and looked at a map to see where South Africa was because I didn’t have a clue.”

Thirteen Years in South Africa

After the first team, ICC was called back to train five more teams. It snowballed from there. Sr. Rose lived in South Africa till 1999, facilitating teams and training facilitators.

The challenges in South Africa were different than in the United States. “The indigenous South Africans understand community; their very survival depends on it. The concept of the individual is meaningful only in the context of community,” Rose explained. “Survival in Africa depends on the community, and the worst thing that can happen to you is to be ostracized from the com-



munity. Their whole social structure is based on community—historically, to survive in the bush you have to be able to fit in and stay in alignment with the community. But the concept of the *individual* is less well developed. Thinking on your own may be seen as destructive of the community.

“With the training, over time, the African women began to understand that they had a source of personal authority within them and to trust it, to trust that they had a voice.”



Achieving a balance—being willing to share one’s own insights and yet be truly open to hearing others’—is the essence of shared leadership.



Exploring New Horizons in Women’s Spirituality

For years Sr. Rose had dreamed of helping women explore and develop their spirituality. In November 2000, she and several women gathered to discuss the nature of women’s spirituality. From that first meeting grew Woman’sSpace, which offers a woman “the opportunity to deepen her spirituality . . . to explore, to embrace and to enliven her relationship with herself, with the Divine, and with others.”

“We wanted women to be able to come together in circles and talk about how *they* experience God and their spiritual life, how God interacts with them and how they interact with God, which is different from men—it’s not better or worse; it’s just different,” Sr. Rose said. “Trusting the voice of God within you moving you to do something—it’s a way of knowing that isn’t scientific but it is another way of knowing.”

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Pioneer of the Inner Life

From guiding women religious leaders to a more inclusive style of leadership to exploring the interdependent, intuitive basis of women’s spirituality to helping her sisters listen for God’s whisperings as they embark on yet another journey of exploring God’s great plan, Sr. Rose encourages women to trust and develop the deep knowledge—the voice of God—within themselves. ☀



Mary Antona Ebo, FSM: Pioneer for Civil Rights

When the news hit about “Bloody Sunday,” the brutal attack on peaceful demonstrators by Alabama state troopers and police on March 7, 1965, near Selma, Sr. Antona Ebo was at work as director of Medical Records at St. Mary’s Infirmiry.

On Wednesday, March 10, 1965, she boarded a rickety airplane headed for Selma with Sr. Eugene Marie Smith, four other white sisters, and several clergymen to protest the vicious attack. They intended to join Rev. Martin Luther King’s second attempt to cross Selma’s Edmund-Pettus Bridge.

Once there, the only African-American sister in the crowd, she’d hoped to keep a low profile. Instead, Sr. Antona found herself thrust to the front of the march. Facing a bank of microphones, she spoke simply and from her heart: “I am here because I am a Negro, a nun, a Catholic, and because I want to bear witness.”

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It took immense courage—although she will be the first to tell you she didn’t feel very

courageous just then. If arrested, she knew her habit wouldn’t win her any special treatment. Selma’s mayor even suspected she was only disguised as a nun.

All her life she has been a pioneer. She was the first African-American to graduate from her high school, Holy Trinity in Bloomington, Illinois. Determined to pursue a nursing career, she applied to numerous nursing schools, only to be rejected because of her race. Finally she heard of St. Mary’s Infirmiry School of Nursing for Negroes in St. Louis. In 1946 she became one of the first three African-American women to join the Sisters of St. Mary (now the Franciscan Sisters of Mary). In 1967 she became the first African-American woman executive director of a hospital—St. Clare’s



Sr. Antona receives the Martin Luther King Award from the St. Louis Archdiocesan Commission on Human Rights, 1994.



(© CORBIS/Bettmann) Donated by Corbis-Bettmann

Hospital in Baraboo, Wisconsin. For two years she served as executive director of the Wisconsin Conference of Catholic Hospitals. In 1968 she helped found the National Black Sisters' Conference and later served as its president.

In 1989 the National Black Sisters' Conference conferred on her the Harriet Tubman Award, honoring her as "called to be a Moses to the people."

She has continued to speak out, standing up for the dignity of African-Americans, of women, of all God's creatures. And others have listened. For many, she is the face of the Civil Rights Movement.

The St. Charles Lwanga Center honored her with its Trail Blazer Award for "Being a Noble Pioneer of the Church and Community." She has received an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Loyola University-Chicago (1995), the College of New Rochelle in New York (2008), and Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis (2009). She served on the Human Rights Commission of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, and you'll find a seminar room at the Archbishop May Pastoral Center in St. Louis named in her honor. She was prominently featured in the "Voices of Civil Rights" exhibit at the Library of Congress in 2005 and in the 2006 PBS documentary *Sisters of Selma: Bearing Witness for Change*.



Sr. Antona Ebo (second from right) with Civil Rights figure Rosa Parks (third from right) during the papal visit of John Paul II to St. Louis in January 1999.

Bearing Witness for Change. In 2006 she received the Heschel-King Award from St. Louis Jews United for Justice. Even now, in her 80s, from coast to coast she is asked to speak about her experiences with the Civil Rights Movement.

And she does, challenging her listeners to live out the truth—as St. Francis did—that all God's creatures are equal in the eyes—and in the heart—of God. ☀

Mary Jo Kahl, FSM: *Inner City Pioneer*

When we imagine the wilderness frontier the early settlers faced, we think of forests, jungles, deserts, windswept plains, snowy mountain passes. Pioneers braved starvation in a barren land. Scorching heat and sun. Bitter cold. Driving winds, rain, blizzards. Attacks by hostile bands.

But today's wilderness may be no farther than a few blocks away. Our cities can pose dangers that rival anything our pioneer ancestors faced.

For some of the poorest of our urban poor, these hardships are everyday life.

A Ministry of Presence

Milwaukee's housing projects are Sr. Mary Jo Kahl's frontier.

As a nurse case manager for S.E.T. (Service, Empowerment, Transformation) Ministry, Sr. Mary Jo works in Milwaukee's public housing, keeping her clients—the poor, the elderly, the mentally ill—connected with services so they can live independently. Knowing the system and helping them negotiate it is her ministry.

But hers is also a ministry of presence. She chooses to live, not in a comfortable if simple convent, but in a housing project like the one where she works.

She spent the first three days of one year in a Red Cross shelter with her neighbors when, after days of bitter cold with no heat, the pipes in their building burst, flooding the basement with two feet of icy water. No heat, no gas, no water. The emergency rescue team declared the building unfit for human habitation. Sr. Mary Jo went to the shelter with her neighbors.



A Ministry of Hospitality

When the director of migrant and refugee services for Catholic Charities asked her to help the Mahamud-Kusows, a Somali Bantu family of nine who had lived in Kenyan refugee camps for a decade, find a home in Milwaukee, she took on the challenge. Parishes worked together to rehab a confiscated drug house, then donated household items and enough money to cover the deposit and first month's rent.

But, as Sr. Mary Jo said, "The story is bigger than the house; the house is a symbol of the relationship we have formed with the family." She mentored them, helping to

orient them to the culture and to become self-sufficient, but also to maintain their cultural identity.



In 2004 she helped set up a community farming project funded by the Heifer Project—five acres outside Milwaukee as well as two acres in central Milwaukee. African, African-American, Hmong and Hispanic women cultivate the garden in Milwaukee; Somali Bantu women farm the larger area in Sussex, with each family having a quarter of an acre. A friend of her nephew contributed three weeders and a rototiller, which lightened the workload and increased productivity.

“It is amazing how the gardens have transformed the appearance of the neighborhood along with providing the families with nutritious fresh vegetables,” she wrote. “We do our own composting, harvesting of worms and worm castings for providing a nutrient-rich growing environment. We do raised bed planting with our ‘rich’ compost, never letting a chemical herbicide or pesticide alter the quality of our natural sustainable grown produce. We had enough vegetables for the families and community, so we proudly sold our organically grown vegetables after church services” (from a letter, April 6, 2008).



While she remains close to the Mahamud-Kusow family, she has mentored 43 other Somali Bantu refugee families as well, welcoming them truly as her brothers and sisters.

A Ministry of Compassion

On April 8, 2005, Sr. Mary Jo arrived home after work. All the well-lit street parking near her apartment was full, so she parked a block away.

Two men thrust open the door, forcibly carjacking her car. They sped off.

At 4:30 a.m. the police called—they’d arrested her attackers.

The flashbacks, the terror, the sleepless nights she suffered led to a bleeding ulcer. At first, she just wanted to put it behind her. “I was thinking about not pressing charges, but the more I got to thinking about that, I realized that’s not responsible on my part,” she said. “He had injured me and really had injured society as a whole.”¹

1 As quoted in “Angel in Disguise: Franciscan Helps Carjacker Turn from Life of Crime,” by Mary-angela Layman Román, *Catholic Herald* (July 6, 2006), p. 14.

The Milwaukee court system had a name for the kind of justice she envisioned: Restorative justice.

She researched it. First, her attacker needed to admit his guilt. Sr. Mary Jo explained to him the terrible impact on her. He also heard how his actions affected the community. She worked up a contract for her attacker that included a pledge of nonviolence, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, attaining his high school equivalency diploma, and job training.



She pleaded his case at his trial, seeking leniency. He received a sentence of a single year rather than ten—if he fulfilled the contract. She worked with him for more than a year.

Officials warned her that restorative justice with such a violent offender was uncharted territory. But she didn't give up on him.

“God is calling me to work with my offender to know that he is forgiven, is good, and at the core of his being he wants to change his life around,” Sr. Mary Jo said.

Her compassion and faith in the goodness of others has opened the door to a new frontier—one where justice is tempered with mercy and where even hardened criminals receive the chance to rise above their past to a new future.

On March 20, 2009, Sr. Mary Jo was honored for her humanitarian spirit as one of the fifteen “Women Putting Their Stamp on Metro Milwaukee” celebrated by the United States Postal Service as part of Women's History Month.

Several of the FSM community were able to join her for the special luncheon ceremony: from Wisconsin, Sr. Rebecca Wright of Waukesha;



Sr. Bridgid McNamara of Baraboo; and Srs. Mary Ellen Lewis and Priscilla Weber of Madison; as well as Srs. Mary Teresa Noth and Thelma Marie Mitchell of St. Louis.

The special commemorative stamp issued in her honor celebrates her truly Franciscan spirit of presence, hospitality, and compassion. ☀

Ramona Meurer, FSM: *Pioneer for Peace*

In late July 2008, Sr. Ramona Meurer was scheduled to fly to Denver to receive the 2008 Peacemaker Award at the Franciscan Federation meetings.

But then Hurricane Dolly blasted into her region of southeastern Texas. Floods and damaging winds left thousands without power, shelter—or transportation out of the area.

Sr. Ramona rode out the storm with her neighbors in Harlingen, then rolled up her sleeves and plunged into the Red Cross rescue work that is both her gift and her love.

“During the hurricane I was with them,” Sr. Ramona said. “I worked with them. I lived with them in the shelters and in others’ homes. I was without power too.”



Peacemaker and Pioneer

The Peacemaker Banquet at the Franciscan Federation meetings honors someone “whose life and actions model for others a person who has moved out of their comfort level toward a deeper sense of Franciscan Evangelical Life and inspires others to do the same.”



For decades Sr. Ramona has done just that. “She has a gift—she’s not afraid to go anyplace, to do anything,” said her sister, Jeanne Meurer, FSM. “She has boundless energy.”

In 1971 she headed to the impoverished Rio Grande Valley of southeastern Texas, with Srs. Mary Eloise Haberstock and Mary Unterreiner, to serve at Su Clinica Familiar. She did home visits with clinic patients and served as chief nutritionist for the clinics in Harlingen and Raymondville.

She mentored two young women from southern Texas who themselves became registered dietitians qualified to take her place. And for five years she served as the first full-time registered dietitian at the new Brownsville Hospital.

She spent nearly a decade in Kenya, founding a mission and serving as a community outreach organizer, nutritionist, and health teacher. She helped build homes and schools.



“I’ve always worked with the poor,” Sr. Ramona said. “I’m energized by seeing how they’re energized.”

Back in Texas once more, she serves as a volunteer with both the national Red Cross and the local Red Cross. She goes wherever she’s needed, picking up at a moment’s notice when disasters strike. She finds shelter, food, and bedding for others. She helps them fill out the forms. “She always goes the extra mile,” Sr. Jeanne said.

During the 9/11 tragedy, she served for three weeks at ground zero, then was asked to serve another five weeks—which was almost unprecedented. She worked mostly with the families of the firefighters.

She was there to help after Katrina. She’s worked with the victims of wildfires in the Northwest and California. She served people in the floods in northwestern Texas and in Iowa.

“Out of nothing she can make something for people,” Sr. Jeanne said. “She always helps the poorest of the poor. She helps get houses rehabbed and built, helps immigrants with resettlement.”



Marching to a Different Drummer

Missing the awards banquet in Denver didn’t seem to cause Sr. Ramona much concern. She finally received her Peacemaker Award on October 5 at the fall gathering of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary at St. Mary of the Angels in St. Louis.



“I probably march to a different drummer,” she said. “But you have to do what brings you peace.”

Sr. Ramona’s work with the poor and marginalized shows a deep respect for them as her sisters and brothers. “It’s a balance, like walking on a trampoline,” she said. “You want to be compassionate—you’re with them all the way. But you don’t give them *things*—they don’t need that. You give them teaching tools.

“Everyone needs that continued movement forward.”

Her vision for peace stands firmly on her respect for others, on honoring the individuality and the value of every human person, no matter how poor and insignificant he or she might seem.

“There will never be peace until everyone in the world can stand tall amongst their own people, stand as an individual and bring the peace they have within to one another,” she said.

“Francis and Clare did that—they helped make the people around them stand tall in their spirituality, in their life, and in their death.” ☀

Angela Murdaugh, FSM: *Sage Femme, Pioneer of Midwifery*



Sage Femme means both “wise woman”—and “midwife.” On October 19, 2008, the Midwives Alliance of North American (MANA) bestowed on Sr. Angela Murdaugh their highest honor—the Sage Femme Award, honoring not only her experience and wisdom but her deep compassion as well.

Geraldine Simkins, president of MANA, said, “Sister Angela Murdaugh is known, admired, and loved by midwives, mothers, and birth activists across the nation for her loving care of mothers and babies who are among the most underserved in this nation—our immigrant and undocumented women in the southwestern United States.”

For more than three decades Sr. Angela has blazed new trails. Certainly in midwifery, where she mentored, encouraged, and empowered countless midwives and strove to get nurse midwives recognized as legitimate medical practitioners. But she also believed that the hundreds of migrant workers in the Rio Grande Valley—the poorest of the poor—deserve quality medical care.

“We did an enormously wonderful job of improving infant outcomes,” Sr. Angela said. “We had half as many preterm babies and low-weight babies as our county, as our state, or as the United States.” By making sure mothers had good pre- and postnatal care, enough to eat, and a clean, safe, caring place to deliver their babies, she made a true difference in the lives of an entire community.



A Vision for Childbirth as Natural

For Sr. Angela, birth is a beautiful, natural event, not a clinical procedure. And she credits her decision to become a certified nurse midwife in part to Sr. Mary Charitas Iffrig, who introduced her to natural childbirth.

“With the Erna Wright method of natural childbirth, the parents sang through transition—that point from about seven centimeters to complete that is the hardest, most difficult part of labor. This mother and her husband sang ‘O What a Beautiful Morning’ through transition! It was so lovely! The mother was wide awake and everything was delightful—we stood next to each other just swooning over this wonderful experience!” It fueled her passion and vision for what childbirth could be.

Sr. Angela earned her master's in midwifery from Columbia University. In 1971, she headed to Su Clinica Familiar in Raymondville, Texas, where she established the first free-standing birth center in Texas to provide poor mothers with good care during pregnancy and delivery. For more than eight years she helped mothers and babies through prenatal visits, labor and delivery, and postpartum visits.



When she left in October 1980 for an internship in Washington, D.C., she gained a new perspective on natural childbirth. “It was a great time to be living there,” Sr. Angela said. “The women who came to those Thursday night clinics were very sophisticated. They were breastfeeding their babies; they were going to have natural childbirth; they wanted midwives; they wanted to stay home and have their babies—they didn’t want any part of a system that pressed them down! You can imagine what that did to my thinking, how it helped me develop who I was.”

Coming Home to Texas

Just before leaving Raymondville, Sr. Angela had been featured in the film on nurse midwifery *Daughters of Time*—and at the film’s premiere, she wept through her entire segment. “My heart longed for Texas! Why did I ever leave? I loved those women so much and I wanted to go back.”

She missed the strong sense of family that was part of the culture—of women who nurtured other women through pregnancy and delivery. “It was nothing—*nothing* for me to have two sets of grandmothers at a birth. And sisters! Seven, eight sisters, aunts—just lots of women, with their energy and power and goodness. It was just incredible! They loved having babies. They loved being mothers. You never had any sense that these children were anything but loved and taken care of. For them, that was simply how life was supposed to be.”



For One Brief Shining Moment

Return she did. She, with three other sisters, founded Holy Family Birth Center in Weslaco, one of the poorest areas of the impoverished region about ten miles from the Mexican border. And she built it her way. “I wanted to live and work in the same place, to live in a simple way like my people so that the way I lived would spiritually, emotionally, and physically feed my work and my work



would spiritually, emotionally, and physically feed the way I lived.”

She decided Holy Family would not seek government funding, giving her the freedom to place crucifixes in the rooms and to make decisions that best fit the center and its deeply religious clients.

It was a great decision. “For one brief, shining moment there was a Camelot—an oasis of what midwifery *should* be,” Sr. Angela says. “A moment when professors sent their best, most forward stu-

dents from all over the United States there. I always got the cream of the crop.” Methods were “high touch, low tech.” “It was just such a fabulous place.”

While she retired from Holy Family in 2007, she still hears from many of those students. Many treasure their time at Holy Family as a golden era. One wrote, “I can still hear you saying, ‘Don’t ever feel bad if a former client cannot remember your name because then *she* delivered her baby. If she can’t remember you, you did a really good job. You empowered her to be who she should be.’”

“It was such a privilege to have mentored so many people.”



A Legendary Figure

Sr. Angela’s energy, vision, and compassion have touched the lives of thousands, from the poor she treated with dignity to the students and midwives she mentored and challenged. She helped establish policies and licensing requirements for birth centers. Her advocacy gained respect and acceptance for the midwifery profession, and her striving to ensure that all people have access to quality medical care reflected her deep compassion and commitment to social justice.

She served as president of the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) and received numerous awards, including the Texas Nurse of the Year Award (1978), ACNM’s Hattie Hemschemeyer Award (1990), and the Social Justice Award (1998). She was inducted into the Texas Women’s Hall of Fame in September 2002, and she received the honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Villanova University in May 2005.

Today her ministry of compassion continues as she reaches out to those in prison, showing them the same dignity and compassion that Jesus had for the poor and broken. ✨



Leo Rita Volk, FSM: *Pioneer of Cytogenetics*



Her colleagues in the scientific world called her “Sister Mary Chromosome”—and with good reason.

Her work in cytogenetics—the study of genetic variations at the chromosomal level—has been heralded as ground-breaking. In an era when few women and fewer sisters delved into scientific research, Sr. Mary Leo Rita Volk, supervisor of the clinical laboratories at St. Mary’s Hospital in St. Louis and professor of Medical Technology at Saint Louis University, was a pioneer, developing techniques for mapping and analyzing chromosomes so outstanding that they set the standard for the Human Genome Project (1990–2003) and other cytogenetic research.

But exciting as she found charting chromosomes and their abnormalities, she never lost sight of her real purpose—to benefit others. Many diseases—sickle cell anemia, muscular dystrophy, Down syndrome, spina bifida—have their origins in genetic abnormalities, and genetic counseling can alert people to potential problems. Such research has also helped doctors identify those at risk for developing some forms of cancer and leukemia and other diseases. In the 1970s she even explored the effects of LSD and marijuana on heredity-bearing chromosomes, looking for patterns of breakage in users.

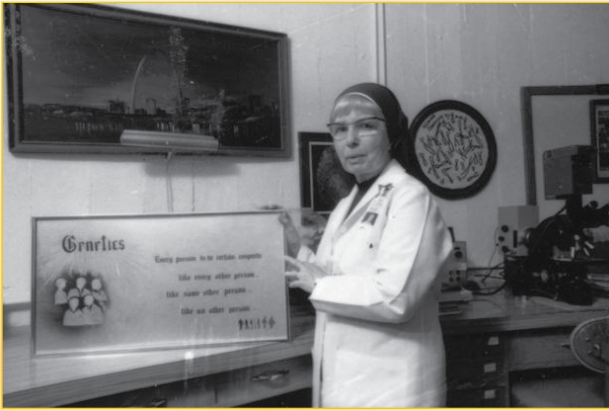
She did extensive research on treating cancer. In a explanation of cancer developed at St. Mary’s, she described cancer at the cellular level: “Instead of a normal, orderly cell development of 46 chromosomes, some mechanism—be it environmental or a virus or whatever—triggers



a wild, unorganized growth of cells in the body which often contain damaged or broken chromosomes and numbers from less than the normal 46 to more than hundreds of chromosomes in one single cell.” She would test a number of cancer therapies on malignant cells from a specific cancer patient to predict the most effective treatment for that person.



Her brilliant intellect, precise techniques, and humble commitment to her work won her the respect of col-



leagues in the scientific world and beyond. She has belonged to many prestigious medical and religious groups—the American Society of Human Genetics, the Association of Cytogenetic Technologists, the Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research Center, Sigma Xi (the Scientific Research Society of North America), and the Institute for Theological Encounter with

Science and Technology (ITEST). Her impressive list of publications and presentations goes on for pages.

But Sr. Leo Rita’s pioneering research was integrally bound to her deep faith and spirituality. “It is the greatest meditation—to look into a microscope and see the actual chromosomes we are made of. To think that God made this from all eternity and we are just now discovering it. He is just now slowly revealing it to us.”¹



1 From “One of God’s Mysteries Glimpsed through a Microscope” in *What in the World Are We Doing?* 1:1 (April 1974), p. 2.

And Artist



Sr. Leo Rita retired from the laboratory in 1991. But her steady hands, precision, and close attention to detail have borne fruit in a new career: painting.

“I have always loved art—the beauty of nature, the gracefulness of trees, the fragility of flowers, and the many colors of sunsets,” she said. She

works primarily in pastels, and her favorite subjects are St. Francis of Assisi, the St. Louis Arch, and flowers.

“For me art is meditation and sometimes therapy, and I thank God for the gifts I have been given,” she said. “A prayer goes with each painting. In the Office of the Hours, there is an intercession, ‘May the arts and sciences advance your glory, and the happiness of all peoples,’ and this science and art are what my life has been all about.” ☀



On the Edge of a New Frontier

Nearly fifty years ago Senator John F. Kennedy spoke these words as he accepted his party's nomination for president:

Today our concern must be with the future. For the world is changing. The old era is ending. The old ways will not do. . . .

I stand tonight facing west on what was once the last frontier. From the lands that stretch three thousand miles behind me, the pioneers of old gave up their safety, their comfort and sometimes their own lives to build a new world here in the West. . . .

We stand today on the edge of a New Frontier . . . a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils, a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats.



The frontier John Kennedy described was different from the one we face today, but we too face a future of challenges that demand “new invention, innovation, imagination, decision.” All of us are asked “to be pioneers on that New Frontier.”

What is our frontier? Rebuilding an economy destroyed by greed and carelessness. An environmental crisis that threatens all natural life as we know it. The widening chasm between the rich and those who go to bed starving every night. The challenge of recognizing every creature—human or not—as our brother or sister and respecting others’ needs as well as our own—as St. Francis did.

Our new frontier demands nothing less of us than a genuine change of heart.

Or, as John Kennedy put it, “This is the choice our nation must make . . . between the public interest and private comfort—between national greatness and national decline—between the fresh air of progress and the stale, dank atmosphere of ‘normalcy’—between determined dedication and creeping mediocrity.”

Many of our FSM and members of other religious congregations have been pioneers, trekking the wilderness—wherever they found it—to try to make the world a better place. They stand ready to carry the torch once more, prophetic women and men leading from the edge. Let us together engage the challenges before us, courageously, creatively, and joyously, recognizing and honoring in all God’s creatures their Creator’s presence and deep love.

*We must shine
with hope, stained glass windows that shape
light into icons, glow like lanterns
borne before a procession. Who can bear hope
back into the world but us . . . ¹*



And so we continue courageously, with insight and imagination, to explore the new frontiers that await us. ☀



¹ Marge Piercy, as quoted by Linda Tan, OSF, in *Changing the Face of the Mountain: Daily Reflections on Visioning for the Future*, a publication of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Annemarie Sanders, IHM, ed. (Silver Spring, Maryland, 2006), reflection on June 19.

Sisters in the Spotlight

Mary Antona Ebo, FSM, recounted



her journey to Selma in March, 1965, when she introduced the documentary *Sisters of Selma: Bearing Witness for Change* in honor

of Martin Luther King Day on January 19, 2009, at the Touhill Performing Arts Center on the campus of the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

She spoke of her participation in the march once more on Presidents Day at St. Augustine Catholic School in Washington, D.C., where she introduced the documentary and cautioned her listeners not to become complacent about the progress achieved so far.

In recognition of Black History Month, the alumnae of St. Mary's Infirmary School of Nursing were honored at the University of Missouri-St. Louis's full-day conference "African-American Nursing History: Health Disparities within a Historical Context." In 1933 the Sisters of St. Mary (now the Franciscan Sisters of Mary) opened St. Mary's Infirmary School of Nursing to give African-American women the opportunity to enter the nursing profession.

Sr. Antona, who attended the school, spoke briefly of the school's unique contribution to health care. Several alumnae, including **Thelma Marie Mitchell,**



FSM (class of 1950), prepared a display for the conference showcasing photos from the school during its operation. With the advent of

integration, the school closed with the class of 1958.

On May 8, 2009, Sr. Antona received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis. ☀

Mary Jo Kahl, FSM, was one of fifteen



women honored March 20, 2009, at the United States Postal Service's *Women Putting Their Stamp on Metro Milwaukee* in commemora-

tion of Women's History Month. As a nurse case manager for S.E.T. (Service, Empowerment, Transformation) Ministry, Sr. Mary Jo demonstrates deep compassion and concern for the poor in Milwaukee. The award recognizes her humanitarianism. ☀

Angela Murdaugh, FSM, received the *Sage Femme Award*

at the annual conference of the Midwives Alliance of North America on October 19, 2008. The award honors a “wise woman”



of midwifery, one who “exemplifies the compassion and perseverance of midwives and who can serve as a mentor for younger midwives as well as an admirable example for more seasoned midwives.” Sr. Angela was particularly honored for her care of mothers and babies among the immigrant and undocumented women of the southwestern United States. ✨

Mary Teresa Noth, FSM, who served

as dean of the Saint Louis University School of Nursing from 1966 to 1982, was honored at the nursing school’s 80th anniversary celebration. Teri



Murray, Ph.D., current dean of the nursing school, praised Sr. Mary Teresa for her “transformative leadership in nurs-

ing education,” noting that under her leadership the nursing school pioneered the first accelerated baccalaureate nursing program in the nation. ✨

Jane Rombach, FSM, was featured in

the December 2008 issue of *Glennon Magazine* and in the January 9, 2009, issue of the *St. Louis Review*. The article honors her many years of faithful ser-



vice at Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital, most recently with the hospital’s hemophilia patients. Sr. Jane celebrated her diamond jubilee in October 2008 (60 years as a Franciscan Sister of Mary). ✨

Mary Jean Ryan, FSM, who has led SSM

Health Care for more than twenty years, was named one of the “most influential St. Louisans” by the *St. Louis Business Journal* in the February 20–26, 2009 issue. ✨



Transitions

Sr. Cecilia Rose Boucher

August 29, 1928 – March 11, 2009

Cecilia Rose Boucher was born in Alton, Illinois, on August 29, 1928, the fourth of ten children (six girls, four boys) born to Joseph and Josepha (Wardein) Boucher. The family moved seven times before she was 17, mostly in the country, and Cecilia Rose and her brothers and sisters all helped with the farm chores.

Cecilia Rose entered the congregation on August 3, 1949. She received the name Sr. Mary Clarence, and she professed her final vows on February 11, 1955. She assumed her baptismal name, Cecilia Rose, following Vatican II.

Sr. Cecilia Rose cared for the sisters' laundry and linens, both at St. Mary of the Angels Convent in St. Louis and at St. Mary's Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin. She also served as sacristan until her health began to fail.

She helped out in the Activities Department. She made and repaired rosaries and worked latch-hook rugs. During her years in Baraboo, Wisconsin, she visited patients at Jefferson Meadows Care Center, providing a caring presence and a compassionate ear.

For the past thirty years her physical difficulties—pulmonary disease that restricted her breathing, arthritis, and loss of vision—limited her range of motion but not her spiritual growth. As her physical constraints grew more severe, she turned to prayer, helping many through her powerful ministry of intercession.



On March 11, 2009, Sr. Cecilia Rose drew in her first sweet breath of eternal life in the arms of her beloved Spouse. With her Lord she will celebrate her diamond jubilee, her almost sixty years of faithful service in his name.

**“I am the way, the truth, and the life”
(John 14:6).**

Sister Mary Eloise Haberstock

February 1, 1912 – March 12, 2009

On February 1, 1912, Laurinda Maria Haberstock was born to Louis and Elizabeth (Thee) Haberstock of Hermann, Missouri, one of seven children. The family moved to St. Louis, where Laurinda attended St. Alphonsus (Rock) High School and later worked for Brown Shoe Company.

She joined the Sisters of St. Mary (who in 1987 reunited with the Franciscan Sisters of Maryville, Missouri, to become the Franciscan Sisters of Mary) on December 1, 1931. She was given the name Sr. Mary Eloise, and she professed final vows on June 29, 1937.

Sr. Mary Eloise earned her B.S. (1948) and M.S. (1952) degrees in Medical Technology from Saint Louis University and served as medical technology supervisor at hospitals in Jefferson City, Blue Island (Illinois), St. Louis, Kansas City, and Madison (Wisconsin). While in St. Louis, she taught serology and blood banking techniques.

In Madison, she helped set up a clinic in Endeavor, Wisconsin, to serve migrant workers. She recruited physicians to supervise and teach medical students from the University of Wisconsin, who then worked on a team with registered nurses, students and nutritionists. Back in St. Louis, she staffed a mobile unit providing prenatal care. She then left to serve at Su Clinica Familiar in Texas, providing care for migrant Mexican-Americans. She always cherished a special love for her work on the mobile unit and with migrant workers.

After retiring, she volunteered in the surgical hospitality suite at St. Mary's in St. Louis, offering presence, hospitality, and compassion to those anxiously awaiting news of loved ones. She also volunteered at election polling places.

For more than twenty years she painted in oils, offering her creations in the AnitaJo Gallery at St. Mary of the Angels Convent—“A prayer goes with each painting,” she would say. She also worked in ceramics and created greeting cards.



On Thursday, March 12, 2009, at the age of 97, Sr. Mary Eloise felt her beloved Lord's encircling arms welcome her to the joys of heaven.

**“I have run the race . . . a merited crown awaits me”
(2 Timothy 4:7–8).**

Sr. Mary Melania Myers

December 3, 1914 – March 20, 2009

Carolina Marie Myers (Charlene to her family) was born on December 3, 1914, on a farm just south of Maryville, Missouri, the fifth of eleven children (five girls, six boys) born to Edward and Anna (Hengeler) Myers. As a child she enjoyed the outdoors, working on the farm, tending the garden, milking the cows, playing in the woods, fishing (although she said she would have enjoyed that more if she could catch a fish!).

The story of the Little Flower, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, inspired her decision to become a sister; she entered the Sisters of St. Francis of Maryville, Missouri, on February 24, 1932, at 17. She was given the name Sr. Mary Melania, and she professed her final vows on October 4, 1937.

Her ministry took her to St. Francis Hospital and Mount Alverno Convent in Maryville, Missouri; St. Joseph of the Pines in Southern Pines, North Carolina; St. Mary's Hospital in Nebraska City, Nebraska; and St. Mary's Ringling Convent in Baraboo, Wisconsin. She served as housekeeper and sacristan, and she worked with the laundry and sewing. She found her work as sacristan—caring for the chapel—especially fulfilling, as it allowed her to serve her Lord as both Martha and Mary.

The lovely quilt blocks she stitched and assembled, her crocheting, knitting, and sewing all made life more beautiful for those around her. At St. Mary of the Angels Convent, she delighted in the homely simple tasks—baking cookies, shucking corn, peeling apples. She loved the fall and springtime colors. In the true image of The Little Flower of Jesus, she strove to “do the ordinary with extraordinary love.” Her lovely smile and her peaceful spirit reflected her joy in serving God and others as a Franciscan Sister of Mary.



At 94, having faithfully served her Lord as a sister for seventy-seven years, Sr. Mary Melania was called home to heaven on March 20, 2009.

“How can I repay the Lord for all God’s goodness to me?” (Psalm 116:12).

Sr. Mary Rosaleen Dorlac

September 25, 1911 – April 17, 2009

Mary Elizabeth Leona Dorlac—Leona to her family—was born in St. Louis on September 25, 1911, one of four children born to William and Wilhelmina (Stute) Dorlac. The family moved first to Festus, then to De Soto, where Leona attended St. Rose of Lima School and De Soto High School. She then worked as administrative secretary for International Shoe Company.

While visiting her sister Marie at St. Mary’s Hospital in St. Louis, Leona met Sr. Mary Joan Lueckenhoff. Leona joined the Sisters of St. Mary on May 25, 1930; she was given the name Sr. Mary Rosaleen. She professed final vows on February 15, 1936, and graduated from nursing school in 1937. She earned both her B.S. (1946) and her M.S. (1956) in nursing education from Saint Louis University.

Sr. Mary Rosaleen served as obstetrics supervisor at St. Joseph’s Hospital in St. Charles; St. Eugene’s Hospital in Dillon, South Carolina; Desloge Hospital in St. Louis; and St. Mary’s Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin, where she was also assistant administrator and then administrator. She worked at St. Mary’s Hospital in St. Louis, and for more than fifteen years she served as finance secretary for the congregation’s leadership team. She retired in 1986, living at St. Mary’s Ringling Convent in Baraboo, Wisconsin, until she returned to St. Mary of the Angels Convent in 1998.

Those she served, both in her nursing ministry and her other ministries, benefited deeply from her close attention to even the smallest detail. She helped integrate African-Americans into the hospitals, nursing schools, and the congregation. During World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars she served on the home front, helping new mothers through labor and delivery despite short staffing, space, and supplies—she felt they all deserved purple hearts as well. She loved nature and delighted in identifying the birds on the convent grounds.

A woman of great trust, she surrendered herself into the welcoming arms of her loving God in the early morning of Friday, April 17, 2009.

“All that is in me, bless God’s holy Name!” (Psalm 103:1).



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In 1877, Mother Mary Odilia Berger met with a banker to seek \$16,000 to buy the mansion on Papin Street that would become St. Mary's Infirmary.

Concerned, the banker said gently, "This is a large sum of money to lend to sisters, Reverend Mother. Because the bank would eventually like to be paid, I have to ask: Is there someone who will help you assume this responsibility?"

"Of course," Mother Odilia said with a smile. "St. Joseph will be our security. He has never let us down."

The banker, startled yet touched by her faith, paused a moment, then answered, "With such good backing for your financial stability, Reverend Mother, I would be foolish to refuse you!"



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ST. LOUIS, MO
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Identity and Mission **Identity and Mission of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary**

*As Franciscan Sisters of Mary,
we live the Gospel as sister to all.*

*We give our life by being present, hospitable and
compassionate, choosing to stand with
our sisters and brothers
who are poor and on the margins of society.*