

Visions

March 2023

www.olvm.org

Helping Hands

Lay staffers are valuable resource
in furthering the OLVM Mission





Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters is a community of women religious founded in 1922 by Father John Joseph Sigstein. The Victory Noll Motherhouse is located in Huntington, Indiana.

Victory Noll Sisters:

- Proclaim the Word of God
- Stand in solidarity with those living in poverty and oppression
- Foster justice
- Promote the development of leaders

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ON THE COVER

Sherry Thurston, pastoral care companion for OLVM, works with the Victory Noll Sisters to take care of their needs.

Photo by Paul Siegfried

On a day back in 2008, I drove up the hill to Victory Noll, not knowing what to expect.

I was going to interview for the position of communications coordinator with Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters. Working at the local newspaper for more than two decades, I took pride in knowing what was happening in my community, but honestly, I knew very little about the Victory Noll Sisters.

PERSPECTIVES ALONG THE JOURNEY

On the surface, we couldn't have been more dissimilar; I was a non-Catholic sportswriter, and the extent of my exposure to Catholicism was going to mass with my wife on Christmas and Easter and attending Notre Dame football games. While I was born in a Catholic hospital where nuns were my first caregivers, I had no clue about the lives of women religious.

At my interview, the Victory Noll Sisters I met made an impression on me. They must have seen something in me as well, because they quickly offered me the job of telling their story.

Fifteen years later, we're still working with each other.

I had a lot to learn about the lives of the Sisters and developing the ability to communicate in their voice. But I quickly came to understand the OLVM mission and charism. It became my charism, and I walk the same path as these remarkable women.

In this issue you can read about how my co-workers and I work alongside the Sisters, developing our own individual ministries, and taking pride that our time, treasure and talents contribute to the ongoing OLVM mission. ❖

— Paul Siegfried

CONGREGATION LEADER

Sr. Jenny Howard, SP

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Understanding the meaning of ministry

When most of us hear the word, “ministry,” we think of it in terms of a formal religious life, such as that of a pastor, or here at Victory Noll, the work of the lives of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters.

The many ministries of the Sisters have a basis in their Mission Statement, which is to proclaim the Word of God, stand in solidarity with those living in poverty and oppression, foster justice, and promote the development of leaders.



**Sr. Jenny
Howard, SP
Congregation
Leader**

But we also need to expand the idea of what “ministry” means, and how it applies to all of us, not just those who are professed religious. The root of the word “ministry” means “to serve.” If we put that in context, the work of every person can be considered a ministry. The Scriptures confirm this idea in 1 Peter 4:10, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”

Ministry is about giving of ourselves and our time, talents and resources to bless and help others.

Not limited to a formally religious context, ministry can be as simple as being a good person. Whether it is a small gesture or a life’s work, it all adds up to a person’s own ministry, serving as faithful stewards of God’s grace.

Our ministries develop out of our words and deeds. We do this when we lend comfort to a friend, sometimes even just by listening. When we rake a neighbor’s leaves, donate clothes to Goodwill, or even take time to wish someone a happy birthday, we are practicing our ministry. In the workplace, ministries show when co-workers collaborate on solving a problem or reaching a goal. Each individual within a business, a factory, or a restaurant contributes their individual abilities to the overall effort.

We certainly believe that each person has been given gifts from God to use for the good of others. Someone might have a scientific mind, or be a whiz in the kitchen. Another could be good working with their hands, or maybe have a particularly empathetic spirit. All work has value, and by using those gifts as a life’s mission toward a greater good, each of us has our own individual ministry.

As you will read in this issue of *Visions*, each lay member of the OLVM staff brings a specific talent. Their individual ministries help support the ministries of the Sisters, which contribute to the overall mission of OLVM.

OLVM Sisters serve in a variety of ministries throughout their religious lives. From their founding a century ago, they have gone to places where there are people in need. Some have served in multiple states in many different conditions. When they are no longer physically able to be in a mission field, they are still charged with a ministry, that of prayer and presence. They continue to use those gifts they have to serve others.

Each of us has been placed on this Earth, and as we travel our life’s path, we often find ourselves walking alongside others. Some walk confidently and briskly with a sense of purpose and direction. Others on the path might walk slowly or with difficulty, perhaps even lost along the way.

Do we continue to stride along at our own comfortable pace, or do we stop, offer assistance, or a hand up off the ground to those people in need? Do we walk with them for a while at their slower pace to make sure they get going in their intended direction?

Ministry is the way in which we are able to be present with others ... the way we respond. Because we all share the path, we have a responsibility to give of ourselves so that all can make their journey. ❖

Website redesigned to reflect new OLV M realities

The redesigned OLV M website is now online. The new site, remade by OLV M Communications Coordinator Paul Siegfried, reflects the new realities of the Sisters and the community heading into the future. The website address is the same at: www.olvm.org.

The site features a section on OLV M's social mission which details the Sisters' work on social justice issues. Victory Noll's partnerships and collaborations are also highlighted, including organizations

receiving legacy gifts, and a page with information for organizations wishing to apply for Victory Noll Empowerment Grants. Information on the Sisters' active ministries also is added to the new site.

OLV M history remains a part of the site, including a database of deceased Sisters with their memorial letters and gravestone location in the OLV M Cemetery. Items from the OLV M Archives are accessible, including all issues of *The Missionary Catechist*, which was published by the Sisters from 1924-64. ❖

Sr. Francisca volunteering with Matthew 25



Sr. Francisca Olvera's new ministry is volunteering in Fort Wayne, Ind., with "Matthew 25 Health and Care," a Gospel-inspired health-care center that provides high quality medical, dental, vision and mental health services at no charge to low-income, uninsured adults in Northeast Indiana and Northwest Ohio.

Inspired by the Bible verse for which they are named, they offer hope to the most vulnerable in the local community, treating everyone with compassion and dignity.

Sr. Francisca ministers as a certified Medical Interpreter for patients, and also phones patients to remind them of their upcoming appointments. She is also in the process of developing an adult literacy program. ❖

Death to New Life

Sr. Rose Ann Kaiser

September 23, 2022
Saint Anne Communities
at Victory Noll

Morgan Nederhiser

Brother of Sr. Terri Nederhiser
December, 2022
Spicer, Minnesota

Toni Rios (Conception Rios)

Former OLV M Member
January 23, 2023
Amarillo, Texas

Sr. Elizabeth (Betty) Anderson

November 21, 2022
Saint Anne Communities
at Victory Noll

Patricia Nederhiser

Sister-in-law of
Sr. Terri Nederhiser
December, 2022
Spicer, Minnesota

Steve Hay

OLV M Associate
February 6, 2023
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Virgil Rosonke

Brother of Sr. Rose Zita Rosonke
December 22, 2022
Manning, Iowa

Adan Castillo, who handles OLVM maintenance, clears out trimmed brush from the OLVM Cemetery.



Partners in the ongoing journey

Experienced Victory Noll co-workers embrace OLVM mission

For the first half of their century-old existence, the Victory Noll Sisters took care of themselves.

They cooked and cleaned. They managed their finances. They even had their own printing press to produce publications.

But as they aged and their numbers started dropping from its peak, the Sisters decided they would need some outside help. They brought in nurses, food service personnel, housekeepers and maintenance staff to take care of four buildings and 150 acres of land on the Victory Noll campus. Lay staff were hired to handle finances, human resources, communications and archives. At one point, there were more than

80 people on the staff providing service for nearly 300 Sisters.

Today, there are now fewer than 30 Sisters. The land and buildings have been sold. With the downsizing, the number of lay staff has also been reduced to just seven people. But those few are still providing critical service to an OLVM community that remains focused on its mission. And with a collective experience of nearly 120 years at Victory Noll, the small staff brings a wealth of institutional knowledge to help keep that mission in strong focus.

The OLVM Sisters still have a campus presence in the St. Joseph Building, where the main floor is used for offices and the top floor for the local living community

of Sisters.

The most significant time of transition in the congregation's history came in 2022 when the traditional leadership structure came to an end. With no members able to assume leadership duties, OLVM looked to another community of women religious, and Sr. Jenny Howard from the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary of the Woods was named as the new congregation leader.

While she got up to speed on the Victory Noll charism and mission by spending time with OLVM Sisters, Sr. Jenny admits she had to rely heavily on the lay staff to keep the daily routines rolling.

“The members of the OLVM staff are a gifted and steady



Above, pastoral companion Sherry Thurston talks with an OLVN Sister at Saint Anne Communities at Victory Noll. Below, Communications Coordinator Paul Siegfried (left) and Archivist Jeff Hoffman look over photos to be used in an upcoming publication.



presence serving the mission of the Victory Noll Community,” says Sr. Jenny. “Over the years leadership teams come and go. In this particular transition their presence, knowledge, and expertise is especially significant.”

Keith Lawson serves as the chief financial officer and Jo Yahne as the staff accountant and purchaser. Diane Gearhart serves as administrative assistant. Paul Siegfried is the communications coordinator and Jeff Hoffman maintains the OLVN archives. Sherry Thurston works in the Saint Anne Communities building as a pastoral companion to the Sisters, helping them with their personal needs. Adan Castillo is semi-retired after working 36 years in the maintenance department, but still works a couple days a week to take care of needs around Victory Noll.

Over the years, the Sisters have provided opportunities for staff to have a better understanding of the fundamentals of religious life, including the defining of charism — or gift — that each person carries with them, whether they be a Sister or a staff member. This “mission integration” has contributed to the way both the staff and congregation interact.

“When they started talking about Catholic Social Teaching, that made a lot of sense to me and how it forged a foundation for the Sisters as to how they view things,” says Lawson. “It kind of helped me to understand where they come from.”

Sister Clarita Trujillo was at Victory Noll when the Sisters did all the work. She spent time away from Huntington in mission centers, and served on the Leadership Team. Now she is one of a few Sisters living independently on campus, living on the third floor of the St. Joseph Building, one floor above the staff offices. It’s not the typical employer-employee relationship, because the workplace also serves as the Sisters’ home.

“It all seems to integrate well. Just talking to anyone on the staff is like talking to another Sister. There really aren’t any barriers. It’s a very comfortable feeling,” she says. “The staff bought into the mission of the congregation,” she says. “It’s amazing how knowledgeable they are, and how they recognized the values that we have and promote, and they seem to live out the mission statement in their staff roles.”

Making sure everything works

Adan Castillo has experienced more of Victory Noll than any of the current staff, starting in 1986. Even though his task load has been considerably narrowed with his part-time status, although there is always a steady amount of work.

“There’s not as much to do, but enough to keep me busy for one or two days,” he says. “Back when I started we had a lot of Sisters living here and all this property to take care of. We had a full staff doing maintenance, and we were busy all the time. We had a lot of projects going on.”

Adan never thought he would make working for the Victory Noll Sisters his life’s occupation. Back when he was first hired at the age of 24, the Sisters had him sign a one-year contract. The end of the first year came and went. Nothing was mentioned about the end of his contract. He just kept working and receiving paychecks. He’s not sure whatever happened to the contract, figuring it might still be in a file cabinet somewhere.

“It does feel like a family working here,” he says. “People come and go, but you’re around the Sisters all the time, so you get to know them pretty well, and you feel a part of their lives.”

Managing Victory Noll resources

Keith Lawson came to Victory Noll in 2012. He focuses on the larger financial issues of

the congregation as a whole. He prepares reports for OLV M leadership and occasionally presents an overall financial snapshot to the entire community at regular gatherings. He also works with the OLV M Board of Directors and the Trustees, along with the Victory Noll Empowerment Grants committee, providing information on the current financial situation and projections for the future. In addition, he puts together tax returns for the Sisters and some other required functions such as keeping registrations current on OLV M cars.

As the Sisters decided on how they will use their resources in support of various organizations, Keith does a large amount of research into the finances and mission of the entities to make sure gifts and grants from the Sisters

match with the OLV M mission.

“A lot of times I talk with people at these organizations, and I really get a direct sense of what they are providing to people, and how the contributions from the Sisters is helping in those efforts,” says Keith. “You get to see what a difference these organizations are making in lives of people.”

As Victory Noll accountant since 1996, Jo Yahne has also seen plenty of changes.

She manages invoices and bills for the community, dealing with vendors and handling all the purchasing. She reconciles bank accounts and creates budgets for each of the individual Sisters and for each of the mission centers. She also handles



The OLV M Finance Department is managed by Chief Financial Officer Keith Lawson (right) and Staff Accountant Jo Yahne.



Administrative assistant Diane Gearhart (right) collaborates on a regular basis with Congregation Leader Sr. Jenny Howard, SP, to maintain schedules and manage a number of organizational duties.

budgeting for the different departments.

Jo has gotten used to times of transition over 27 years.

“New leadership would come in and have new ways of doing things. Different staff and department heads came in and did things in their particular ways,” she says. “The difference now is that we’re down to just a few staff and just a few Sisters who are living here, it’s all gotten a lot smaller and the focus has narrowed. In a lot of ways, it’s simplified things because there’s just not as much happening.”

Telling the OLVN story

After 20 years working as a sportswriter for the local Huntington newspaper, the last thing Paul Siegfried thought he would be doing was writing for a group of Catholic Sisters. But 15 years after joining OLVN as Communications Coordinator, he’s settled into his second career.

“The biggest challenge was to learn to write and communicate in the voice of the Sisters,” he says. “I’m not Catholic and obviously not a Sister, but working daily with the Sisters, hearing their stories and the passion for the work they do, I came to understand their mission and charism. I hope that I’ve been able to communicate that through our various public platforms that present the OLVN story.”

Paul produces the “Visions” newsletter multiple times a year. He designed and maintains the OLVN website at www.olvn.org, and oversees the Sisters’ social media presence. He also produces in-house communication materials.

One of the favorite sayings of OLVN founder Father John Sigstein was “meet modern needs with modern means.” Paul says the Victory Noll Sisters have taken that to heart and have tried to stay ahead of the curve as technology has changed. That came into play during COVID shutdowns, when the Sisters turned to Zoom for meetings and livestreaming for special ceremonies and funerals. They have continued to use those tools.

“We all learned how to use Zoom together,” he says. “There were some hurdles trying to manage Sisters joining in from a dozen different locations, but we made it work, and now it still serves as a regular part of their communications.”

Keeping it all on schedule

Diane Gearhart joined OLVN in 2013 as administrative assistant. Primarily working with the leadership, she maintains schedules and manages many daily, weekly, monthly and yearly duties. She is a main link between the leadership and the rest of the community, sending out communiques, booking rooms on and off campus, lining up air flights, and setting up Zoom conferences, among many other tasks. She prepares materials and mailings for community gatherings, and makes many arrangements for Sister funerals.

Because of that close contact, Diane understands her place in keeping the daily wheel moving. She gets fulfillment knowing she has a role in contributing to the objectives the OLVN congregation.

“It’s been great to get to know all the Sisters and work with them and help them with their individual ministries and overall mission,” she says. “It’s so different than working in a corporate structure. Here you see this is not only where they work, but it’s where they live. So you see them as a family, and you know that you are a part of it in some ways.”

Preserving Victory Noll’s history

Jeff Hoffman, who originally attended seminary with thoughts of becoming a priest, came to OLVN in 2008. His main focus was the cataloguing of OLVN historical

New Congregation Leader Sr. Jenny Howard recognizes the Victory Noll staff for their work during the Transfer of Leadership ceremony in August 2022.



artifacts and getting them onto a computer database. That included wading through thousands of photos, documents and letters, deciding what was important to the history of the community, and getting them digitized, including “The Missionary Catechist,” the OLVN newsletter published from 1924-64.

More recently, as the Sisters have downsized their footprint, Jeff has been working to find places to distribute other items, such as furniture, books and religious artifacts. Some have been donated to the Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese. Others were donated to the Huntington County Historical Museum or to area parishes.

Eventually, much of the history will be joined with archival material from other Catholic communities locally, nationally and internationally.

“The Victory Noll story is a small, but unique, part of Catholic history worldwide,” says Jeff. “But if we don’t tell the story, no one else is going to, and then all of that is lost. I see my job as

that of a facilitator to help bring it where it can be preserved for the future. Learning their stories gives me a better understanding of the Victory Noll story,” says Jeff. “Because each one of those Sisters is just one branch of the Victory Noll tree, and each one has their own unique history to tell, and that contributes to the larger picture.”

Providing comfort to those in need

Sherry Thurston might be the newest member of the Victory Noll staff, joining in 2020, but she brought 22 years of experience as a certified nursing assistant.

As pastoral companion working at Saint Anne Communities at Victory Noll, she tends to the needs of the Sisters, which she admits is a broad term. For the Sisters in full or part-time care, she goes to appointments with them, takes them shopping and arranges activities for them. But she also is there for their emotional and spiritual needs.

“It’s peaceful and calm,” says Sherry. “I have the time to spend one-on-one with them. Sometimes it’s as simple as sitting and talking with them, or even just listening to them.”

She helps them with letters to friends and families, and arranges for them to receive communion when they can’t attend Mass. And she is there when Sisters face end-of-life issues. She often has to contact family members to let them know a Sister is declining. But Sherry says watching how Sisters face their own mortality has had an effect on her.

“It has changed how I viewed death. I used to think it was the end, and it’s not. The journey is just beginning,” she says.

The many challenges and emotions associated with the occupation often leads to a lot of turnover in care personnel. But Sherry has embraced the work.

I’ve always had a heart for this,” she says. “When it comes to the Sisters, it’s rewarding. I’m not a religious Sister, but I would almost say it’s God calling to put me there.” ❖

And God planted a Garden!

Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden... Out of the ground the Lord God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food.

Genesis 2:8-9

By Sr. Beaty Haines
OLVM Social Justice Coordinator

This image of God as a Gardener is delightful as are the parables and teachings of Jesus that speak of soil, planting seeds, bearing fruit and so much more. Pope Francis in the opening lines of his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, *On Care of Our Common Home*, quotes St. Francis praising God "... who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs."



During one of our community meetings, when we were in the process of making decisions regarding our land and buildings, one of our Sisters commented: we never owned Victory Noll or the land on which the buildings stand. This is so true. The Miami People lived here first. Later Bishop Noll passed this land on to us and we have lived on it and cared for it for over 90 years.

We cherish this land as a sacrament of God's love for us and will tend it following this Victory Noll Land Ethic (2008):

We Victory Noll Sisters, imbued with the love of God and of all God has created, revere the land and all it contains. We are grateful to those who have lived on this precious and sacred ground and cared for it before us; the Miami People, the farmers, and our own Victory Noll pioneer women.



Sister Clarita Trujillo (top) tends to the Peace Garden at Victory Noll. Left, Sister Rose Zita Rosonke cares for Father Fahey's Garden next to the Archbishop Noll Memorial Chapel.

One of the ways we continue to care for this land "on the hill," is through gardening. From the time when we first came to live here, we planted, tilled and harvested fruits and vegetables.

Farmers and gardeners are very aware of the

St. Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.

Laudato Si', #12

change of seasons and the cycles of life. "There is a time for everything under the sun," a time for planting, a time for growing, a time for pruning, a time for harvesting and a time for the land to lie fallow. One year in February, I asked our Chaplain, Fr. Thomas Fahey, whether this time of year was hard for him, since I knew how he loved flower gardening. He said, "Not at all. I'm studying the catalogs thinking about what I'll plant when Spring comes." He had a wonderful expectation of what was to come. Maybe that's the reason he seemed to always have such a ready smile!

One retreat director observed that Victory Noll Sisters are very "earthy." Maybe that's because many of us came to Victory Noll from farming communities in various parts of the United States, where their families often grew their own food.

Those of us who still do some gardening are very aware of those who have handed on these small plots of land to us to continue growing both vegetables and flowers, nourishment for both the body and spirit. We enjoy the fruits of our "exterior" gardens and recall Jesus' challenge to us to continue to bear the fruit of our "interior" gardens, co-creators with our Gardener God. This means to be "good soil" receptive to receive the Word into our hearts and to proclaim it with our lives. ❖



Longtime Victory Noll Chaplain, Father Thomas Fahey (above), was well-known for the beautiful gardens he planted and tended to on the Victory Noll campus. Fr. Fahey died in 2019 at the age of 99. OLVM Sisters have taken up the task of maintaining several flower beds at Victory Noll.



For many years, the Victory Noll Sisters maintained an orchard on the grounds, which provided the community with apples, pears and cherries. The Sisters did all the harvesting and filled hundreds of crates of fruit.

New world comes into view

Women in crisis find a place to regain their lives

Erin Ness, MSW
Executive Director
St. Joseph Missions

St. Joseph Missions is righting a long-standing injustice here in Fort Wayne, Indiana. For years, agencies who served the homeless would get together in the fall and discuss what they would do with women who were experiencing homelessness because they couldn't have women sleeping on the streets in the winter. Each year, plans were made to try to put a "Band-Aid" on the problem for the winter. However, there was always this constant problem; we had a lot of women with nowhere to go in our community.

In 2013, a local volunteer service organization "Catholics on a Mission" began feeding the homeless weekly. After religiously feeding those in need, this group began to start asking questions. Was there more they could do? This group began doing



Photo provided

A guest at St. Joseph Missions gets work done at one of the available computers. The emergency homeless shelter provides resources for women in need.

some research and found there was no emergency shelter in town for single women. There was an emergency shelter for men, an emergency shelter for families and an emergency shelter if you were experiencing domestic violence, but if you didn't fit into any of those categories, there was nowhere for them to go.

A group of individuals from Catholics on a Mission felt compelled to do more and vowed to fill the gap for single women who were experiencing homelessness in Fort Wayne. They formed a board and received non-profit status with the goal of opening the first emergency shelter for women in Fort Wayne. After a lot



The mission of St. Joseph Missions is to provide emergency shelter and resources for single homeless women, regardless of their faith, in an environment that respects their dignity as human persons, affords them the opportunity to live individually and collectively with others in a safe environment of self-government, and empowers them to network with local businesses and social services for employment and self-sufficiency.

of work, St. Joseph Missions opened its doors to its first guest on June 8, 2021.

St. Joseph Missions serves 18 women on any given day and the average length of stay is up to 45 days. Women come to us from a variety of different places and for different reasons. They have been sleeping on the streets, in their cars, storage units, abandoned buildings, after their money has run out and they can no longer pay for a motel room, or because they can no longer couch surf. Women come to us from local hospitals and social service agencies in town.

Homelessness is a symptom of something else. It might be mental health issues that are either not diagnosed or treated. Perhaps family problems have caused a woman to no longer be able to stay where she has been living. She might have untreated addictions or had a major life event that created a downward spiral, resulting in the loss of her job, transportation, housing, etc.

On average, we receive 90 phone calls a month from women needing shelter. In 2022, we served 157 women and provided more than 5,700 bed nights. Women come to us often without personal identification. They don't have an I.D, social security card or birth certificate. Women are essentially "starting at ground level." Our guests work with our on-site case manager, who helps meet them where they are. They create a plan for next steps and connect them to local service providers.

Success looks different for each guest we serve. We define success as not having a woman exit back to the streets. We want her to be better equipped than when she first walked through our doors. We know that 45 days goes quickly and if someone is "starting at ground level," they won't be able to move into their own place. We work with partner agencies who offer transitional shelter to give them more time to get on their feet.

Here are just a couple stories of women who were brave enough to acknowledge the need for help and put into action steps to better their lives (Names have been changed to protect identities):

"Janelle" lost everything when a long-term, abusive relationship ended abruptly. Her ex-partner took everything. Thankfully, St. Joseph Missions was here for her in her time of need.



Photo provided

Above, "Kay" was able to move into her own housing after spending time and getting help at St. Joseph Missions. Below, a guest at St. Joseph gets assistance from a case worker.





Photo provided

Guests at St. Joseph Missions share in duties such as cleaning and cooking for those who are staying at the facility. As many as 18 women live in the emergency shelter at any given time, with the average stay being 45 days.

Not only has she gotten clean, but she has also been able to maintain her sobriety. She has been able to hold on to her job at Midwest Eye Consultants, which has enabled her to pay down her debt and build her savings account. “Janelle” also cleared the path for a fellow guest to be considered for a job where she works.

“Tonia” came to us as a 63-year-old who had lived most of her life with her parents. After her mother died, her father kicked her out. “Tonia” lived off her retirement and went through it before becoming homeless. When she came to St. Joseph Missions, she didn’t have an I.D., birth certificate, medication or a bank account. Since she arrived, she has connected with a bank, gotten her I.D., and has been working with Brightpoint and Fort Wayne Housing Authority for housing.

“Mary” had been chronically homeless for years before coming to St. Joseph Missions. She had a history of domestic violence and drug and alcohol use.

In collaboration with Brightpoint and The Carriage House, “Mary” was able to secure a housing voucher and moved into her own apartment, something she never had for herself before.

Since opening our doors, the phones continue to ring off the hook from women needing shelter. Although we have done important work, we know there is so much more that can be accomplished. Due to the sheer volume of women needing shelter, we are beginning to ask ourselves what that work looks like, and where is God calling us to go. Each step that has been taken has been led by God and we are open and excited to see what God has for the future of St. Joseph Missions. ❖

St. Joseph Missions website:
www.stjosephmissions.org

NOTE: *St. Joseph Missions is one of the agencies receiving support from the Victory Noll Empowerment Grants.*

Students and instructors from The Learning Center / House of Connections sit in front of the renovated parish rectory now used as an adult center.

Photo provided



Providing adults a bit of TLC

By Angelica Saucedo
Executive Director
The Learning Center/House of Connections

In 1983, lay members of St. Luke Parish in River Forest, Illinois, and Sisters of the Sinsinawa Dominican Congregation established the House of Connections in the former convent of Blessed Sacrament Parish in Chicago. It served as a resource in the North Lawndale and Little Village communities for adult education, social services, and legal assistance. For 16 years, Connections served the community in

these multiple ways, with adult education growing in significance as the chief need for the people in the area.

In 1999, the Board of Directors of Connections engaged in a strategic planning process. This process resulted in clarifying the main focus of the House of Connections — adult literacy education. Supportive services and the involvement of the community were retained as essential elements of our educational goals. The purpose of Connections was defined in future terms as “educating adults for effective personal lives, productive employment, and positive contribution to the community.” A name change reflected the center’s clarified focus and history: The Learning Center / House of Connections (affectionately known as TLC).

During the planning process of 1999, the value of volunteer tutors was noted and a plan for significantly increasing tutor numbers at The Learning Center was created. The Center received its first Secretary of State Adult Volunteer Literacy Grant in 2000. Ever since, enrollment has more than doubled; student retention has improved; and reading, math, and English comprehension scores have risen. Volunteer tutors have made the difference. We are fortunate to attract and retain high quality tutors.



The Learning Center, primarily serving the North Lawndale and Little Village communities of Chicago, supports adults in their pursuit of an educational path to more confident and effective living.



Photos provided

Above, The Learning Center in Chicago provides classes for adults in a variety of areas. Top right, adult education provides new avenues to effective and confident living. Right, advocating for adult education resources is part of the mission of The Learning Center.

In June 2005, with the merger of Blessed Sacrament and St. Agatha’s Parish, TLC joined the Youth Center and the Food Pantry/Social Services Program in retaining essential services in the community. The Learning Center moved into and renovated the former parish rectory. We are proud to provide a respectful, beautiful, peaceful, and professional atmosphere for adult learning.

Adapting to the pandemic, TLC ceased in-person classes in March of 2020. We worked with Malcolm X College to provide online classes and with our partners to provide computers and hotspots for our students. Cautiously, in the fall of 2021, TLC reopened its doors with a hybrid of in-person and online classes and tutoring.

Throughout the years, TLC’s holistic approach to service has included:

- Adult Basic Education classes
- High School Equivalency classes
- English as a Second Language classes

- Spanish Literacy classes
- Computer Literacy classes
- Mental health clinicians
- Nutrition classes
- Healthy meals and fresh produce deliveries
- A music program
- Coat drives
- Book drives
- Free bus passes
- Student testing fees paid by The Learning Center
- Field trips to museums, theaters, and cultural sites

Over the past three years, TLC has been the beneficiary of grants totaling over \$70,000 from OLV’s John Joseph Sigstein Foundation and the Victory Noll Empowerment Grants. These grant monies have made it possible to provide many of the services available to our students.

My name is Maria Villa. I am a mother, wife, and a Spanish Literacy student at The Learning Center/House of Connections. I found out about The Learning Center in 2018 at the Little Village Education Collaborative's 4th Annual Education Summit.

I met the Program Coordinator and she put me in contact with the Spanish Literacy Instructor, Mrs. Luz Arteaga. It is when I spoke to Mrs. Luz that I told her that I only knew the Spanish alphabet. I did not know how to read and write in my native language. She convinced me to join her Spanish Literacy classes. I knew I needed them. My husband questioned why I was going to school and said it was a waste of time. But I ignored him and decided I needed to do this for myself.

I made a promise to myself to learn as much as I could, to make my education a priority, and to attend class every day.

Today, I can read and write at a third-grade level in my native language. For many, it may not seem like a big deal but for me, it has changed my life. I have come a long way and I am extremely proud of my accomplishments. Every day I join class with a hunger to learn. I am the first student to arrive and the last student to leave.

Things that were impossible, but so easy for others, I am now able to do. I can fill out a medical form or read certain things on my own without needing to rely on my family. I can write a text

message to my oldest son. I can read the grocery store specials. I can write down a phone message for my husband. I can read my youngest son's report card.

The pandemic was a challenge for me, as it was for many others. I had to put my education on

hold to assist my younger son with his remote classes. But I quickly realized that I was going to fall behind. So, I decided to devote any extra time I had to work on my studies. The Learning Center provided me with a Chromebook, a hotspot, and books to study at home. As soon as my son was done with his classes, I would connect with my teacher on WhatsApp and work with her for 20-30 minutes. Besides learning to read and write in my native language, I was also learning to use the computer. I

improved my typing skills, I have an email address, I can compose and reply to emails, and I can complete assignments on Google Docs.

Last year, The Learning Center nominated me for a Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition Personal Achievement Award and I won. My husband and sons were there to watch me accept the award. It was one of the proudest moments in my life.

I could have easily given up but I was determined to keep on studying. I pushed through all barriers to make myself a priority and set aside all fear and self-doubt. I am so grateful to have found The Learning Center/House of Connections. They helped change my life. ¡*Muchisimas Gracias!*

Maria's story



On the advent of our 40th anniversary, The Learning Center / House of Connections continues to espouse these values:

- Adults can learn.
- Adults have a right to quality education.
- Education is liberating.
- Education is empowering.
- Inclusive education creates a path to justice and peace.

The Learning Center / House of Connections website: www.tlcchicago.org

A video celebrating TLC's 40th anniversary is available at tlcchicago.org/40thanniversaryvideo ❖

NOTE: *The Learning Center / House of Connections is one of the agencies receiving support from the Victory Noll Empowerment Grants.*



OLVM Archives

A tent set up on the Victory Noll grounds for the 1971 “Collegial Assembly” served as home for some OLVM Sisters when there was not enough room in campus housing for the 350 members who came to Huntington for the event.

When they all gathered together

By Jeff Hoffman
OLVM Archivist

Religious communities meet regularly to take care of business matters, elect new officers, and set the course for the coming years. Usually, members elect delegates to represent them at big meetings or Chapter proceedings.

At the 1968 General Chapter of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters, delegates discussed the possibility of making the following Chapter an assembly of the entire congregation at Victory Noll Motherhouse in Huntington. There was some concern about

finding enough space on the campus to house more than 350 Sisters who might attend.

They decided to put this proposal up for a vote of the congregation, allowing all Sisters to decide if they wanted to come to Victory Noll for the General Chapter in the summer of 1971. The delegates began to refer to the 1971 General Chapter as a “Collegial Assembly,” and the idea became more attractive. When the vote was put before the entire membership, it resulted in 81 percent in favor.

In a story in “The Missionary Catechist” newsletter at the

time, Sr. Elizabeth Ann Clifford described overwhelming approval as “clearly the work of the Holy Spirit.” Although some Sisters had reservations about how the event could be accomplished, by the time of the Assembly only 15 Sisters were unable to attend the two-week session in August of 1971.

Some Victory Noll Sisters in Tucson, Arizona, stayed behind to keep open the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Clinic, which served those in need in that community.

While working on the details of the Assembly, the Sisters were surprised to learn that OLVM founder Father John Joseph Sigstein had proposed such a gathering of all the Catechists back in the summer of 1938. His purpose then was to renew community spirit. However, due to the Great

EDITOR’S NOTE: Following the completion of OLVM’s year-long Centennial Celebration, Victory Noll Archivist Jeff Hoffman will continue his historical look at significant events and individuals from the congregation’s first 100 years.

Depression and financial constraints, he was not able to make it happen. Transportation costs made the attempt unfeasible. However, just the idea of a “Collegial Assembly” in their history was enough to give the Sisters encouragement for the 1971 gathering.

There were only accommodations for 250 Sisters at Victory Noll, meaning alternative quarters would be needed for approximately 100 Sisters. Some of the Sisters took the opportunity to make it an adventure, setting up a makeshift tent on the grounds for their two-week stay. They dubbed it “Resurrection City,” which recalled the 1968 Poor People’s Campaign when thousands of protesters using the same moniker spent 42 days living in tents on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

Other Sisters, in the spirit of Vatican II, relied on an ecumenical effort for their accommodations.

In a venture coordinated by Church Women United, the people of the city of Huntington opened their homes to the Victory Noll Sisters. Much of the coordination of “Operation Hospitality” fell to Roberta Meitzler, a young mother with small children, who took care of all the arrangements. According to Sr. Elizabeth Ann Clifford, Mrs. Meitzler found 51 Catholic and non-Catholic homes for the overflow attendees.

Many of the host families were so affected by the Sisters staying with them they sent letters to Victory Noll thanking them for the opportunity.

The Sisters regarded the 1971 “Collegial Assembly” not only as an event involving elections and decisions, but also as part of the ongoing process of growth and renewal in community and ministry. ❖

OLVM Archives

Sisters gathered in the Archbishop Noll Memorial Chapel (top) for the 1971 “Collegial Assembly.” Right, several Sisters stayed in the homes of locals in Huntington because there was not enough room to house all the Sisters at Victory Noll.



Getting Sisters back to their homes on the ‘Roadrunner Special’

There was a notable migration out of Indiana on the morning of August 30, 1971, following conclusion of the two-week “Collegial Assembly.” On that day, a Continental Trailways bus took aboard 33 Victory Noll Sisters to deliver them from Huntington back to their mission centers.

Destinations for the travelers included San Antonio and other points in Texas, then west to New Mexico, Arizona and, eventually, California. The journey took up to 40 hours for some.

The Sisters missioned in the Southwest were familiar with the roadrunner, the speedy little bird of the desert area. They had unofficially adopted the roadrunner as their mascot. Maybe in hopes of making their lengthy trip go a little quicker, they dubbed their bus “The Roadrunner Special.” ❖





OUR LADY OF VICTORY
MISSIONARY SISTERS
1900 W. PARK DRIVE
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Visions FROM THE VICTORY NOLL ARCHIVES



Flowers, fruits and vegetables aren't the only things that have been raised by the OLVM Sisters on the Victory Noll grounds over the years. In the early years of their existence, the Sisters kept chickens that provided eggs for the congregation, and they kept bee hives on the campus that produced honey and helped to pollinate the flowers and fruit trees on the grounds. Prior to World War II, the Sisters also kept a number of cows on the open land on the north of the property. The buildings that were used as the chicken coop and for the bees still stand on the grounds at Victory Noll, north of the main buildings. They were eventually converted for use as general storage. ❖