

NEWSLETTER OF OUR LADY OF VICTORY MISSIONARY SISTERS

Visions

July 2020

www.olvm.org



Our Past,
Present
and Future



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

Victory Noll, the motherhouse of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters, has been a landmark in Huntington, Indiana, since it was built in 1925.

Photo by Paul Siegfried

The start of a new year. The start of a new decade. The start of new life and new ways of thinking. It is ironic that the year 2020 should give us a new way of seeing our lives. So much of what we have lived and experienced is being challenged by a series of events. We have a divided country with an upcoming election that may decide what path we will follow in the future. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way all of us live, and forced everyone in the world to reassess priorities, including family, friends, economic security, and the meaning of community. In June, a nationwide movement arose calling for an end to systemic racism.

PERSPECTIVES ALONG THE JOURNEY

And we are only through half the year.

In the midst of the upheaval, Victory Noll Sisters are working to answer the questions concerning the path they will follow as a congregation. Chapter 2020 was held in an abbreviated fashion, but major steps were taken. In the coming months and years, the OLVM Community will continue to cross the bridges to their new reality, drawing on their past to define who they are now and who they will be in the future. ❖

MAILING ADDRESS NOTICE

The official mailing address for Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters no longer includes post office box #109, and any correspondence using that PO Box will be returned to the sender. All future correspondence, including to individual Sisters, must include the street address:

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OLVM LEADERSHIP TEAM

Sister Mary Jo Nelson,
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Leadership Team Liaison: Sr. Ginger Downey



Making the move to our ‘new home’

EDITOR’S NOTE: These are the remarks of President Sr. Mary Jo Nelson as she opened the 21st OLVM General Chapter on March 26, 2020

By Mary Jo Nelson, OLVM President

The scripture passage sounds like our story. ...by an act of faith we are saying YES to God’s call to travel to an unknown place that will become our home.

...and because we believe in the promise of God to do what he said, new life is possible.

There is a saying that says “Home is where the heart is.” Home is where we have planted our hearts, where we belong, where we grow, where we feel rooted, who we are connected to, and where we find wings to fly. It is the path with heart. Whether our initial experience of home — was located in one place, stable, on the move, dysfunctional, happy, or sad, part of the adult journey is to leave home.

Henri Nouwen also wrote that leaving home whether it was a good or bad home, is one of the greatest spiritual challenges of our life. Most likely, there are times in each of our lives where our hearts longed for a deeper home in God. That longing also meant we needed to leave a place, a ministry, a person, a way of thinking and acting, or a reality that did not fit us anymore. We needed to find a new way to grow and become our best selves.

In a very real sense, women religious in this country are being called at some level to leave the “home of religious life that we have known.” For some this is frightening, for others it is exhilarating! For some leaving what we have known is painful, and for others the leaving is an arrival at what has lived within them for a very long time. Whatever it is for each one of us, leaving is not an option — we will choose it or it will choose us.

As a community we are being called to leave what we have known, for what we do not yet know. There are no road maps and like Abraham, we have traveled in stages. This journey to a new home may not be a place as much as it is a new way of being with God, others, and planet earth.

Over the last four years, we have engaged our real-

ity, and are on the edge of becoming a different kind of community as we become smaller with a different structure, and new ways of living religious life.

We are experiencing many layers of leaving home. First, we are living in a world-wide pandemic with the COVID-19 virus. No one will escape this dangerous time without being changed. What might we discover that is no longer important? What will we leave behind? Who will we become during this time?

None of us could have dreamed that the coronavirus would happen at the same time we are saying goodbye to aspects of our Congregational life. And, more personally, each Sister has her own journey of leaving home — many of us are the Elders of the Congregation and your journey is closer to the end than the beginning. This time is precious and calls for one kind of focus and energy.

A handful of us are active, and have many active years ahead of them. They will be part of the emerging new in religious life, and will be creators of this emergence with Sisters from many congregations. And, there is another handful of Sisters who are not elders and they are not young — they are bridge Sisters. Each of these groups have a different life energy that is very different from each other. Part of our new land is to give space and hospitality for each of these three energies and ways of living into this “new home.”

As we begin our chapter, I offer this prayer from Jan Richardson:

For those who have far to travel

*If you could see the journey whole,
you might never undertake it,
might never dare the first step
that propels you from the place
you have known toward the place
you know not.*

*Call it one of the mercies of the road:
that we see it only by stages
as it opens before us,
as it come into our keeping step by single step
be faithful to the next step;
rely on more than the map.
Offer the gift most needed —
the gift that only you can give. ❖*

Chapter like no other

Quick rise of pandemic prompts last-minute changes

By Paul Siegfried
OLVM Communications Coordinator

The role of each Sister in the governance of congregations is especially important, and every four years congregations hold a “Chapter.”

A Chapter is the highest governing body of any congregation and is made up of delegates from the Sisters. The major functions of the Chapter are to elect leadership and to set the direction for the next four years. For the Victory Noll Sisters, Chapter is the culminating gathering of four years of week-long meetings or assembles three times each year, where together they make decisions and do the necessary on-going planning.



Chapter 2020 for Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters held even greater importance. As an aging congregation, this year’s gathering was expected to be a time where the Sisters could plan and set the direction for a new way of being a community.

Preparations for each Chapter take time. The planning for Chapter 2020 had been on-going for much of the past four years. Facilitators, consultants, even musicians were selected to come to Victory Noll to make this Chapter a special celebration. Planning of the daily schedule, liturgies and all parts of the Chapter were meticulously constructed to meet both the needs of the Sisters and emphasize the importance of this particular Chapter. Social gatherings and a retreat were planned, and even details such as decorations and food were discussed as the week-long Chapter approached.



All photos by Paul Siegfried

Sister Mary Jo Nelson makes remarks to open 2020 Chapter, which was abbreviated due to COVID-19. Below, Srs. Beaty Haines, Rose Ann Kaiser, Helen Rodriguez-Marin and Lucille Martinez take part in a table discussion.



But then the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world quickly. In the blink of an eye, much of the planning had to be scrapped. The OLVM Leadership Team decided to hold a modified Chapter in which only the major issues would be addressed and decisions made.

In a matter of days, the new plans were made. Sisters living away from Victory Noll were asked to stay home. Outside facilitators also would not be coming to Huntington. Even Sisters living in the Saint Anne Care facility across the street from the main campus would eventually not be able to take part in person because of the health risk. The conversations that were planned to facilitate the decisions had to be rethought because video conferencing was replacing face-to-face conversations.

Much of the beautiful prayer and liturgies, along with the social gatherings had to be eliminated from the proceedings.

But Chapter 2020 did go on.

Adjustments had to be made so the Sisters could address the most crucial issues. What was to be a weeklong event was shortened to less than two days. For Sisters who could not physically be in the room, the videoconferencing platform Zoom was used. Ten Sisters took part through Zoom, and with just a few technical hurdles, the system worked well.

In 2016, the theme for Chapter was “Crossing the Threshold.” For 2020, the theme was “Building the Bridge, Crossing to New Life,” signifying the next part

of the Sisters’ journey. Chapter 2020 had been envisioned as a transitioning Chapter where plans could be discussed with regards to a new form of governance and guidelines could be given on how to move forward together.

The main item on the agenda was the vote to extend the current Leadership’s term by two years to complete the “Plan of Life.” With their numbers dwindling, there are no longer enough Sisters to elect a team within the OLVM Congregation. The proposal to extend the term of the current three-person Leadership Team two years needed to be voted on and passed. Because the OLVM Congregation is a Pontifical Congregation and not a congregation under the jurisdiction of the local Bishop, the proposal also needs the approval of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) at the Vatican.

On Thursday, March 26, 2020, OLVM President Sr. Mary Jo Nelson formally opened Chapter with her remarks. The community then discussed the governance proposal to extend the Leadership Team term, and a vote to affirm the proposal of extension was taken. The decision was immediately sent to CICLSAL. In a bit of a surprise, CICLSAL responded within a day giving their approval of the extension.

The other main item for consideration concerned the fate of the buildings on the Victory Noll campus. The Sacred Heart Building is



Meeting by Zoom

Like much of the country during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Victory Noll Sisters have embraced Zoom teleconferencing as a main way of staying in touch and holding meetings when traditional face-to-face gathering has been impossible.

For the 2020 Chapter, Sisters linked up from 11 locations away from the Huntington, Ind., motherhouse. OLVM Communications Coordinator Paul Siegfried assisted those who had difficulty with the technology, but all were able to take part in the proceedings, and even had some time to socialize, even at a distant and by video.

The technical task reminded all of the prophetic words of founder Fr. John Joseph Sigstein from the 1920s, to “meet modern needs with modern means.”

You have to wonder what Fr. Sigstein would have thought of Zoom teleconferencing.

being used very little following the closure of the Victory Noll Center and with just a few Sisters living there. Fewer than a dozen offices are used by Sisters and lay staff in the OLV Building. Even the St. Joseph Building, where the majority of the Sisters live, is only about 50 percent occupied. The costs of keeping all these buildings open, heated or cooled, cleaned and maintained is substantial, considering their low occupancy.

Over the past two years, a variety of options were considered. Outside organizations were contacted and consulted, including the city of Huntington, looking for any group capable of purchasing the buildings and using them in a manner consistent with the values of the Sisters.

In the end, no organization could be found to take over the buildings.

After lots of information sharing



Leadership Team members Srs. Ginger Downey, Mary Jo Nelson and Lucille Martinez prepare for a Chapter session. Below, Sr. Betty Anderson (center) gives a reading during Chapter proceedings.

and assembly consultations, the Leadership Team recommended to the delegates to deconstruct the Our Lady of Victory and Sacred Heart buildings. The process will be one sensitive to environmental considerations, and every effort will be made to preserve artifacts and recycle as much as possible. The hope is to return the land to its natural state, consistent with the ecological land-use values of the Victory Noll Sisters. The Chapter affirmed the Leadership Team’s decision.

The decision to take down their home of nearly a century, a place of architectural and cultural beauty for the overall Huntington community, was understandably emotional. But after many conversations over the past year, there was clear consensus deconstruction was the best option.

Before closing the Chapter, Sr. Mary Jo Nelson made the announcement of an “extraordinary” Chapter in 2022, then laid out a proposed planning guide for the next two years. Continuing to use the theme of “Building the Bridge, Crossing to New Life,” the plan centers on creating a life plan based on the core of OLV life,



and emphasizing the continued work in the areas of Canonical governance, corporate governance, health care and a legacy plan for mission.

Chapter 2020 ended with a certain sense of relief, resolution and hope that the OLV community is taking steps on the journey to secure their future, both in immediate future and for the longer term. ❖



OLVM Finance Director Keith Lawson gives the Chapter Financial Report during the 2020 Chapter.

Foundation grants help during pandemic

By Keith Lawson
OLVM Finance Director

John Joseph Sigstein Foundation began operation in 2014, but its roots trace back much further. In 1975, OLVM Sisters started a program they called Resource Sharing. Sisters identified there were quality organizations providing needed services to underprivileged. These organizations operated in the areas where Sisters missioned and Sisters had direct, first-hand knowledge of the impact these organizations fostered in a community.

OLVM Sisters administered and provided grants through Resource Sharing until 2014 when John Joseph Sigstein Foundation was founded to continue this funding, but with a primarily a lay board of directors. JJSF was established to promote and sustain the mission of God according to the charism of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters in solidarity with all persons, especially those living in poverty and/or oppression.

The accomplishments of JJSF as a grant making foundation are measured through the work that is enabled by the organizations it funds. The shutdown from this year's COVID-19 crisis created unemployment, with the marginalized portion of the population that JJSF serves bearing the brunt of those job losses.

Grant recipients report each May on the spending of the grant funds they have received. This year's reports highlight the important role these organizations fill, especially during a time of crisis. Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants reported that most of their Stage Two recipients had lost their jobs as hotel, restaurant, or transportation workers. ICDI has used JJSF funds to assist these individuals with

rent and living expenses.

Arise Chicago, an organization supporting worker rights stated, "We began receiving and continue to receive 160 calls, texts, and emails per week from workers whose lives are threatened. Initial contacts were about workers losing work and not receiving any kind of government support. More recently, worker contacts have shifted, primarily coming from workers who are working and feel unsafe from insufficient access to hand washing, to working close together, to having coworkers even die from COVID-19. Workers are very scared. With no access to unemployment or federal government stimulus funds, undocumented workers face the impossible choice of working in unsafe conditions, risking their own and their family's physical health; or staying home without pay, protecting their health but risking financial crisis. The expenses we have used since mid-March primarily went toward creating training materials, educational resources and videos, plus a 12-page FAQ document and template letters and petitions for workers seeking support and information to improve health and safety to protect their lives."

This July marks the start of another grant cycle for JJSF and culminates in the disbursement of funding in November. JJSF seeks grant applications from organizations that are working to create positive systemic change. The organization must be based and operating in the United States. Grant requests are limited to \$25,000 per year. Grant applications may only be submitted once per year and are due July 1st. Additional information about the grant and grant applications are available on the OLVM website at www.olvm.org/jjsfoundation. ❖



OLVM Sisters renew vows

The OLV Feast Day on May 24 normally would feature Victory Noll Sisters celebrating Jubilees. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the Archbishop Noll Memorial Chapel was unavailable, so Sisters gathered outside for a program for renewal of their vows. The day was sunny and warm, and Sisters took precautions either by maintaining a social distance or wearing a mask. ❖



Laudato Si'

Care for our Common Home

By Sr. Beatrice Haines
OLVM Social Justice Coordinator

During Lent this year Victory Noll Sisters and Associates were challenged to read or re-read Pope Francis' Encyclical, "Care for Our Common Home," *Laudato Si'*. We want to increase our awareness of the ways each of us can contribute to the care of God's creation and the healing of our Earth. Along with reading and reflecting on the Pope's message, we were challenged to fast from those things that harm the environment even after Lent was over.

We are grateful that our efforts are part of a much greater climate movement in the Church and World and are excited to be partnering with an organization called the Catholic Climate Covenant. The goal of the Catholic Climate Covenant, in collaboration with 18 National Catholic Partners, is "to live the Gospel by caring for creation, to avert the climate crisis especially as it impacts the poor and vulnerable, and to revitalize the Church with younger and future generations." This organization shares our commitment to care for the Earth as well as our commitment to "be in solidarity with those who live

in situations of poverty and oppression." (*Victory Noll Sisters Mission Statement*)

Care for Creation and concern for how the climate crisis affects the poor and vulnerable, are underlying themes of *Laudato Si'*. An equally important theme is the call to reverence God's Creation, stating: "the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise." Though somewhat hampered by being sheltered in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, we joined the Catholic Climate Covenant and the Earth Day Network in commemorating the 50th anniversary of Earth Day on April 22 as well as the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si'*. We recalled with gratitude the many ways Victory Noll Sisters and Associates cared for God's creation the past 50 years and more, especially at Victory Noll. We also prayed and reflected together about the need for continued climate action and culminated the evening by signing the "Climate Action Pledge."

Several years ago, as part of our planning for the future, we realized that one of the most precious assets or resources with which we have been gifted is the land on which our motherhouse is located. We seriously considered how our land might be preserved for future generations to enjoy.

With this in mind, we sold approximately 100 acres of woods and fields to Acres Land Trust. This was an assurance that these acres would be kept in their natural state “in perpetuity.”

“In both urban and rural settings, it is helpful to set aside some places which can be preserved and protected from constant changes brought by human intervention.”

#151, Laudato Si’

“The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone.”

#95, Laudato Si’

We also articulated a Land Ethic to guide our future planning and decisions:

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 Indians, the farmers and our own Victory Noll pioneer women.

We know that from the smallest particle to the most complex of creatures all creation is a gift that God has entrusted to us to protect and nourish.

We are in grateful awe of the magnificence, the complexity and the beauty of all creation. We know that the entire and ever-growing universe is interrelated, and what we do affects all creation. The privilege of being integral to this interconnected universe means that we have a serious responsibility to treat all creation with the utmost respect and care. We cherish this land and will tend it as a sacrament of God’s love for us.

Acknowledging the present ecological crisis, Pope Francis expressed the hope that this encyclical “can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face.” (#15, *Laudato Si’*)

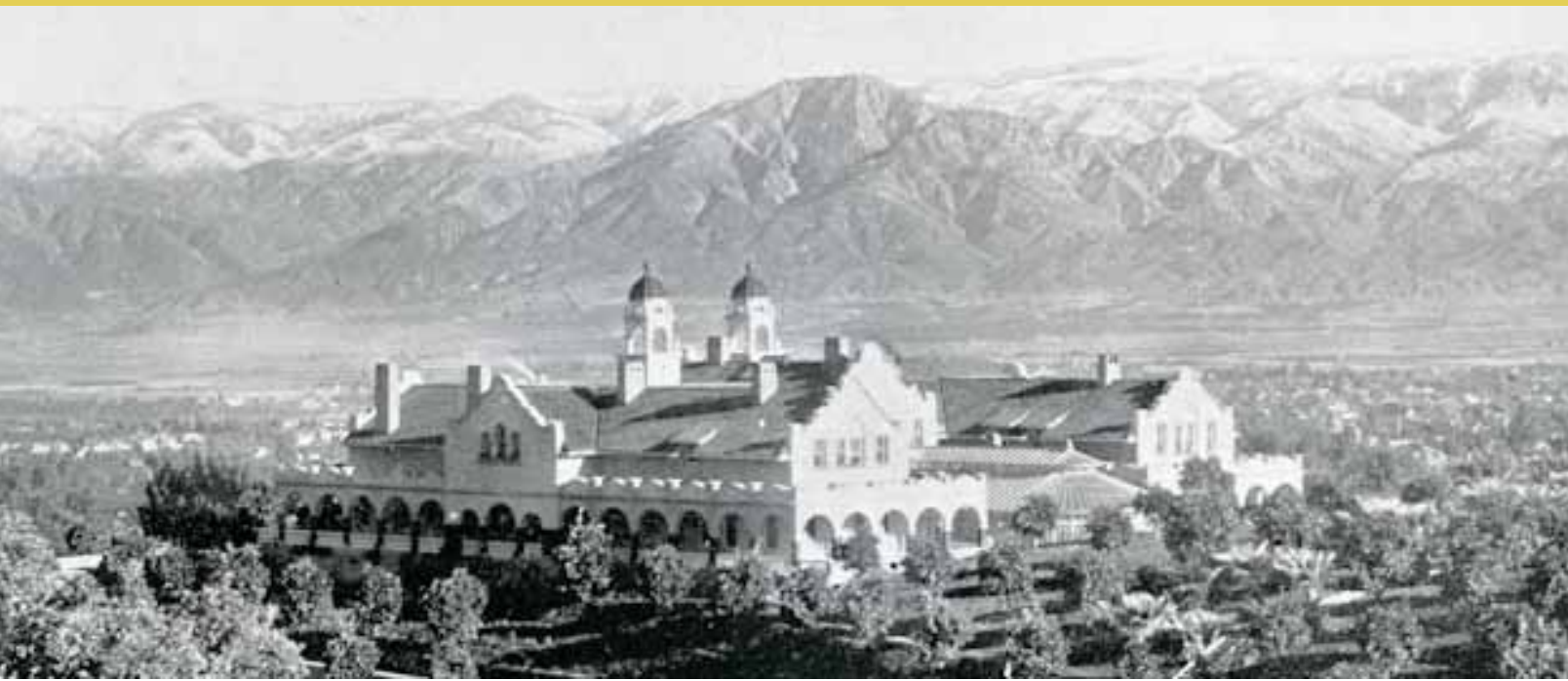
He also invites us, faithful to the Scripture, “to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.” (#12, *Laudato Si’*)

May we continue to reflect on this challenging encyclical and it’s call to us. And may we continue to enjoy and praise God for the Wonderful Gift of Creation. Laudato Si’! Praise God! ❖



Top photo by Paul Siegfried. Bottom photo by Jason Kissel.

Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters sold 100 acres of wooded lands and fields to Acres Land Trust in 2017 to preserve the area in its natural state, eventually to be include natural trails for the public. Shown, from left, are OLVM President Mary Jo Nelson, Steve Hammer from Acres Land Trust, OLVM Sr. Ginger Downey, and Jason Kissel from Acres Land Trust.



Victory Noll Archives

The Burrage Mansion stands in the shadow of the San Bernardino Mountains on a 27-acre estate in Redlands, Calif. The Victory Noll Sisters lived in the mansion, then called “Queen of the Missions” from 1940 until 1974 as part of the OLVM presence in the San Bernardino area.

Center of activity

Sisters reached out to thousands in San Bernardino area

By Jeff Hoffman
OLVM Archivist

After residing at the Queen of Missions in Redlands for three years, Bishop John F. Noll, as editor of Our Sunday Visitor, in the fall of 1940 made an offer of \$13,000 for the Burrage Mansion and the 27.5 acres that surrounded it, which was accepted

by the owners.

As a Christmas present that year, Bishop Noll transferred ownership of the Burrage Mansion from Our Sunday Visitor to the Society of Missionary Catechists after making necessary repairs which included a new roof and furnace.

With the purchase, the Catechists had a central house in which

they could call their own. They finally made the necessary repairs to their new home. They no longer had to wonder where they were going to hold their summer retreats. Through the years they would sometimes have over ninety Catechists arrive for the annual retreat.

The Catechists enjoyed coming to the Queen of the Missions during the summer, not only for the annual retreat, but also for recreational activities. It was the only center that had a swimming pool, but it also had volleyball and tennis courts, and there were also many pairs of roller skates for those who wanted to use them.

***EDITOR'S NOTE:** As Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters approach their 100th anniversary in 2022, we will be taking a look back at the history of the community in a series of articles, researched and written by OLVM archivist Jeff Hoffman. This article is the second looking at the OLVM's first foray into California, specifically in the Redlands and San Bernardino areas where the impact of the Victory Noll Sisters is still felt to this day.*



There was much happening at the Redlands property. Above, left, a Victory Noll Sister prays at the grotto. Top, right, Sr. Olivia Olivera on the tractor taking care of the orange grove at Queen of the Missions. She arrived there in 1940 and served as gardener and mechanic until shortly before her death in 1962. Bottom, right, Sr. Mary Doran stands in the pool area, which doubled as a chapel when the water was drained from the pool.

With all of the acreage, there were plenty of opportunities for walks through the outdoor stations and a trip to the grotto on the grounds. There were also orange and lemon trees that produced fresh fruit for the Sisters. This produce was also sold to the general public. Other fruit grown on the property included figs, avocados, plums, strawberry guavas, apricots, grapes and olives. In the winter, Christmas trees were also sold.

Just before taking ownership of the Burrage Mansion, the Catechists helped staff a well-baby clinic at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in San Bernardino. It provided vaccinations for whooping cough, diphtheria, and small pox for

babies and school age children. In its early days it was staffed by four volunteer doctors and had a nurse who was paid by the city.

From their base at the Queen of the Missions the Catechists fanned out to more than 30 different centers and taught a total of 3,744 students. They supervised 15 Sodalties of Our Lady, 11 Girl Scout troops, and nine Junior Holy Name groups. Other responsibilities included home visits, census taking, teaching liturgical ministers, instructing and supervising CCD teachers.

By the 1960s many of the parishes they administered to were being cared for with a lay staff. Many of the Sisters were

also pursuing college classes and remaining on campus. The Queen of the Missions was no longer needed for summer retreats. By the 1970s the number of Sisters living in the mansion was in the single digits. Along with the declining numbers within the Congregation, a decision was made to sell.

Although OLVN Sisters might have left the Burrage Mansion, they continued ministering to the needs of the San Bernardino Diocese in various capacities until very recently.

Upcoming issues of VISIONS will focus on those continued efforts in the San Bernardino area. ❖



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Visions FROM THE VICTORY NOLL ARCHIVES



The need for infant health care in the Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in San Bernardino, Calif., led Father Jose Nunez to open a care facility in October of 1941 to serve the largely Mexican immigrant population of the parish. The clinic was supervised by the Missionary Catechists of Our Lady of Victory, including Catechist Mary Eileen Masterson (pictured). Doctors and nurses offered their services. Hundreds of babies received vaccinations, and mothers were given instruction on well-baby care. ❖