

Bylines

Ursulines of the Eastern Province SPRING 2011

CARRYING ON: WORLD WAR II AND THE URSULINES IN ROME

Martha Counihan, OSU

During World War II, like many other Roman institutions and convents, the Ursuline community at the Generalate in Rome provided sanctuary to hunted Jews and political dissidents. I spent a fall sabbatical from my ministry as Archivist and Special Collections Librarian at the College of New Rochelle in research on this topic.

My interest had begun when I read the typescript of the English Ursuline, Mother Magdalen Bellasis, who was the prioress of the community in Rome from 1935-1945. The general government was in exile in the U.S.; few letters could be sent, and fewer arrived. The nuns were cut off from one another. An inveterate diarist, Mother Magdalen's diary of the war years in Rome whetted my interest and curiosity.

In 2007, I had attended a presentation by Mrs. Jetta Hendlin Gordon, who, as an 18-year-old Croatian Jewish girl, had sought and found shelter with her young sister in the Generalate during the months when the Nazis took over the city of Rome in autumn 1943. Jetta's dramatic story of desperation was a story that needed to be told.

Bylines has covered the account in 2002 of the Award of the Righteous from the State of Israel given to one Ursuline, Mother Marie Xavier Marteau, who befriended and helped an Italian Jewish family to hide in the Generalate. At the time of the award, Mother Colette Lignon stated that the award rightly included the entire community who participated in concealing a number of "guests" who knocked at their gate seeking refuge.

In March 2010, I spent time in the English Province Archives outside London, reading the later diaries of Mother Magdalen who had been born in 1891, an Anglican in India. She converted to Catholicism as a young woman, was a suffragette, then worked in British Intelligence during WWI (for which she received the prestigious award of Member of the British Empire), and entered the Ursulines at the age of 28.



Mother Magdalen Bellasis, OSU

Photo courtesy English Province Archives, Ilford

Magdalen was a gifted person. Soon after profession in 1922, she was sent to Oxford where she received both a BA and an MA. She served as a school headmistress and then novice mistress in England before going to Rome for tertianship in 1934. A year later she was appointed prioress of the generalate community. Her diary during the war years documents the daily challenges of the war: bombing, demands from the police for possible requisition of the huge building, robbers breaking into the farm land and stealing crops and animals, the phone being tapped, and many requests for refuge. Then the vagaries of weather, no water for days, no fuel, rationing of bread, less and less food for 50 people, rumors of

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As I See It . . .

Mary Sullivan, OSU



The road in was unremarkable. An oft-traveled path opened out on a simple house, chapel, and gathering spaces of the Ursuline sisters of Botswana. Just a stone's throw from the parish church, the otherwise dry desert area was resplendent with extraordinary flora, reflective of the beauty of the people and the place.

Only a few days after our wonderful 475th celebration at Beckwith Pointe, I was in South Africa and Botswana for a meeting of Ursuline provincials from around the world. The theme was "Ursulines in the Service of Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace." Prior to the meeting, each of the provincials had a two-week immersion experience in one of seven different countries of Africa. I chose Botswana, a place that had been for many years home for some of our Eastern Province sisters.

Ursuline presence in Botswana began after Vatican II. The Province of South Africa wanted to extend its presence into other African countries. At the time Botswana was one of the poorest of countries and had just gained political independence. In 1970 the South African province opened a community in Serowe, with two sisters from the Eastern Province, Sisters Gregory Horgan and Patricia Knight. The foundation was a new impetus in the Institute and sisters were recruited from many provinces around the world. More sisters from the East responded: Anne Marie Kelleher, Christina Pratt, Ann Alicia Smith, Theresa Falls, and Fran Lyle. The scope of this column does not permit a description of the depth and breadth of the influence of these sisters. To this day their presence and initiatives in education have made a lasting contribution, still remembered by the people who continue to benefit from what they began.

Soon after our arrival in Serowe we felt very much at home in our Ursuline

community and among the people. We shared wonderful meals and conversations, visited homes, schools, persons with AIDS, church communities and programs that immersed us in the multifaceted life of the Ursuline community. The beautiful flora that blossomed everywhere, the animals that populated homes, yards, and roadsides, and wiggled under one's feet, spoke of the people's loving connection to creation. Though the Ursulines are fewer now, the mission continues through Sisters Zora from Slovenia and Liz and Frances from Australia, and their lay collaborators. Their compassion and active involvement in the issues affecting the lives of the people are admirable.

As I reflected on the time in Botswana, I was struck by some of the similarities between this experience and our process of reconfiguration of four provinces into one. The latter immersion will take much longer and calls for a sustained openness to new cultures with a willingness to look at life from another perspective for the sake of our mission. The big events that will signal more change for us are the election of our Inaugural Team which will take place in St. Louis, July 9-14, and the beginning date of the one United States Province on October 21, 2011.

Most of us in the present Eastern Province will

continue to live, work and have our connections here as we strengthen the broader connections with places like Botswana and the rest of the U.S. Through these efforts to come together and to move forward, we continue to hear the invitation of Angela to recognize the importance of union and concord, to pursue it, embrace it and hold onto it with all our strength. (Last Counsel)



Photos: Margaret Johnson, OSU

We met Ursulines of different congregations serving in Africa: Standing: Pamela (Kenya), Mkhensani (South Africa), Christine (Senegal) Seated: Rosella (Burkina Faso), Edilburga (Tanzania), Esperance (Congo), Anna (Mozambique)

During our visit in Botswana we were invited to a dinner with this bush family.



CARRYING ON *Continued from p. 1*

raids by the fascists, and, later, the Germans, and blackouts.

In her diary she mentions the arrival of Jetta Hendlin and her sister and other “guests.” One gets the impression that Magdalen could “carry on” calmly as war and worry surrounded her and her companions.

The Generalate property was under the protection of the Vatican, but when the Germans replaced the fascists in September 1943 (and the manhunt for Jews began in earnest), some convents and seminaries were raided by the Nazis. Although the Villino on the property was briefly occupied by Nazis, the large convent fortunately was never raided. Rome was liberated in June of 1944, and the diary describes the rationing and privations that continued—and the relief that liberation brought.

After the war, Magdalen returned to England and was named Provincial. In 1949, she visited the Eastern Province, accompanying some Guyanese Sisters. From 1952 to 1966, she was back in Rome where she served in Ursuline general government and as first Dean of the new Pontifical Institute for women, Regina Mundi.

Her post-war diaries pick up in 1966 when she finally returned to England to live in Westgate; she died there in 1980. How she welcomed all the changes of Vatican II—liturgy and office in the vernacular, changes in religious and community life, even her first colorful habit!

In the Generalate Archives in Rome I read correspondence, reports, and the daily Chronicle of the community, as well as the personal file of each Ursuline, choir or lay sister, who was a member of the Generalate Community during the war years. Of great interest to me was the fact that the community was composed of Ursulines whose nations were enemies of one another—Italians and Austrians, representing Axis countries, and many others from the Allies: France, England, Poland, USA, Netherlands, and Belgium.

Together, the nuns did the work of Christ in communion with so many who saw a desperate need and responded. The diaries and Chronicles, and Mrs. Gordon’s reminiscences tell an inspiring story of courage and survival.

CELEBRATION OF 475th ANNIVERSARY

Bridget Puzon, OSU

A year of celebration for Ursulines who trace their origins to St. Angela Merici began on November 25, 2009. Ursulines around the world held a special Vespers service on that day, so that within a 24-hour period, as the sun was setting in each place, the evening prayer of the Church was said in many languages. The 475th anniversary of the Founding of the Company of St. Ursula in the city of Brescia, Italy, had opened.

Around the Province Center, banners for the anniversary hung from the lampposts; they featured laurel leaves as the logo for the year, recalling the anagram Ursula Laurus, the tree featured on the worldwide Ursuline shield.

October 4, 2010, brought together Ursulines, alumnae and friends for a celebration brunch at Beckwith Pointe overlooking Long Island Sound. The ritual that opened the event highlighted in song and prayer the international nature of the Ursulines.

The guests proceeded to the dining area, beautifully decorated around the laurel theme. Speakers addressed the meaning of the anniversary both historically and in current experience. Dr. Mary Erina Driscoll, alumna of The Ursuline School and currently a professor at New York University, in her keynote address, brought insight and affection to her analysis of the Ursuline impact on students and countless others to whom they have ministered. She emphasized characteristics of transformation, of belief in women’s capabilities and imagination in “ministries that encompass the needs of individuals across the life cycle, promoting social justice in a multitude of forms.”



*Archbishop Timothy Dolan,
Celebrant,
475th Anniversary Mass*

The warmth of the interaction among those joining in this celebration expressed a joyful community among friends of the Ursulines. Take-home favors of small desk calendars with pictures of Ursuline activities and places convey the message of



*Laurel banners at the
Province Center*

Photo: Maria Rosa Deiso, OSU

PHOTO: John Vecchiola Photography

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Highlights of Activities at SERVIAM GARDENS- SERVIAM TOWERS

Construction of Serviam Towers, Phase Two of a 243-unit senior housing complex on the grounds of Bedford Park Convent in the Bronx, was completed in the summer of 2010.

Each Tower houses 80 single bedroom apartments, many overlooking a roof-top garden which in spring will provide a gracious space for gathering and for exercising one's green thumb.

Some 3,400 applicants entered the lottery for 160 available apartments in Serviam Towers. Those selected in the lottery spent the fall inspecting apartments, signing leases and moving in.

The photo gallery offers a glimpse of some of the activities in which tenants participated in the fall and winter months. For additional information and snapshots of Serviam residents, go to: www.fordham-bedford.org.



Photo: Caitlin Grath

Sr. Alice Marie Giordano and Sr. Patricia Russell presented a PowerPoint on the "475th Anniversary of the Founding of the Ursulines" to tenants in early January.



Photo: Melissa Spahr

Tenants enjoying a December Holiday Party.

Left: Let it snow! Shot taken from interior of campus on February 21 when 4 inches were added to the 56 which had fallen since December 27.



475TH CELEBRATION *Continued from p. 3*

accomplishment and ongoing dedication.

On November 20, 2010, a Mass of Thanksgiving in Holy Family Chapel at the College of New Rochelle formally expressed the founding achievement. The celebrant was New York's Archbishop Timothy Dolan. He brought good cheer and outgoing engagement with the people gathered in the chapel and later at a reception in Maura Hall. The reception rounded out the year memorializing the Founding of the Ursulines. The wide circle of friends of the Ursulines enjoyed the opportunity to rejoice in 475 years of service.



**WATCH YOUR MAIL
IN APRIL FOR
THE
"MAY BOUQUET" ...
A FUN WAY TO
CONTRIBUTE
TO URSULINES IN
RETIREMENT!**

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THE UPPER ROOM

Bridget Puzon, O.S.U.

“Those things that concern the good of the church” are, according to the *Constitution on the Church* of the Second Vatican Council, the concern of lay people as well as of religious and priests. In the aftermath of the clerical abuse revelations in 2002, a group of dedicated men and women joined together under the leadership of Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly, to express their concern and make sense of their role as laypeople in that time of crisis.

After open discussions, those who continued to look for a way to respond as committed Catholics sought to be effective and informed about larger issues and a broad vision of the American Catholic Church today. Since that initial gathering in 2002, the group created a program of presentations and discussions held approximately three or four times a year and featuring a speaker whose specialization is an aspect of the contemporary church.

Such is the formal outcome of their concern, for which they took the name The Upper Room. Informal actions and conversations enable participants to reach beyond those gatherings to other contacts in a focused and informed way.

Notable speakers have included such experts as theologian Paul Lakeland, on the role of the laity in the church; Peter Steinfelds, co-director of the Center on Religion and Culture at Fordham University and author of *The Church Adrift*; Elizabeth Johnson, theologian and author most recently of *The Quest for God*; E.J. Dionne on the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ pastoral, “Faithful Citizenship”; and theologian Reverend Joseph

Komonchak, whose work on the history of Vatican II made him an appropriate choice to open the 2011 series “Celebrating the Upcoming 50th Anniversary of Vatican Council II.”

In place of a membership organization, The Upper Room consists of those who sign on to be part of a mailing list that by 2010 included 180 names. They meet in early evening in the spacious social hall at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in New Rochelle, with an attendance of between 75 and 120 people.

The Upper Room continues, led by Sr. Alice Gallin and a committee of men and women who plan the events since the death of Sr. Dorothy Ann Kelly in 2009. Meetings in spring 2011 will be held on Thursday, March 31, at 7:30 p.m., with John Carr speaking on “The Church in the Modern World: Challenges and Responses,” and on Thursday, May 5, with John Borelli, on “The Council’s Promotion of Ecumenical and Interfaith Dialogue and Activities.” All are welcome!

News and Notes

Sr. Beth Dowd received “The Unsung Hero Award” at New Rochelle City Hall on November 16, 2010. It was given in memory of Josh Sumner, from New Rochelle, who did a great deal for the youth of New Rochelle. One of the *Songcatchers* parents made the presentation, along with a high school volunteer in the After School Music Program, who serves on the Youth Council board and made the recommendation. The plaque reads, “For making a vital contribution improving the quality of life of our City’s youth without seeking praise, recognition or reward.”

In November 2010, **Sisters Teresa Byrne, Terry Eppridge, Carole Marie Keaney, Marie-Celine Miranda and Dee Yanshak** spent a week in New Orleans, participating in NunsBuild, sponsored by the St. Bernard Project. With donations for building materials and

volunteers for the labor, the Project has rebuilt more than 350 homes left uninhabitable by the flooding after Hurricane Katrina.

The photos and information at www.stbernardproject.org tell why some of the sisters are already planning to go again in November 2011. Come right along down!

Ursuline sisters Teresa Byrne, Marie-Celine Miranda, Phyllis Kemper, a Cleveland Ursuline, Terry Eppridge, Carole Marie Keaney, Dee Yanshak, and Regina Marie Frommuller of New Orleans, all decked out for work.



OBITUARIES



Sr. Joan Marie Clarke died at Andrus on Hudson on September 15, 2010, six months after her 100th birthday. She had made her first profession of vows in 1931. An alumna of the Academy of Mount St. Ursula, she graduated from Fordham University. Sr. Joan Marie taught at St. Philip Neri School and

St. Jerome's School; at her alma mater, the Academy of Mount St. Ursula; at the Ursuline Academy in Springfield, MA, where she also served as superior, and also at Ursuline Academy in Bethesda, MD. After retirement, she was archivist for her community of Bedford Park; she was a dependable resource for community and Bronx history. She also visited the sick and tutored, and she was a faithful correspondent with family and former students.

On August 11, 2010, **Sr. Marie Paul Denesha, Pauline**, died peacefully at Andrus on Hudson. Born on February 8, 1918, she was one of three Denesha sisters who became Ursulines: Marie Thérèse predeceased her, and she is survived by Christine who lives at Andrus. On January 25, 1938, Marie Paul made her vows as an Ursuline.



A graduate of St. Joseph's Academy in Malone, NY, she held bachelor's and master's degrees; she also was certified as a Montessori teacher. For forty years she taught in Ursuline schools in Bethesda, Wilmington, New Rochelle, the Bronx, and Malone. She was part of community service activities in the Malone area such as the Homebound Pastoral Team. Her calligraphy in house blessings, memorial cards, and a banner in Notre Dame Chapel is cherished by friends and parishioners.

Sr. Mary Patrick Levis, born Anna, died peacefully at Andrus on October 17, 2010, at the age of 89. She graduated from Cathedral High School in New York and the Assisium Institute. She was a graduate of the College of New Rochelle and Fordham University. Sr. Patrick made her first profession of vows in 1945. An



elementary school teacher, she served in Bronx parish schools. She also taught at the Academy of Mount St. Ursula. Her keen business sense served well in assisting in the treasurer's office of the Bedford Park community. Sr. Patrick is remembered for her kindness and her correspondence.

Sr. Joan Mc Iver, formerly known as Mother Emmanuel, died on February 15, 2011, at Andrus at the age of 84. She made her final vows in 1951.



Sr. Joan was a theologian by profession, teaching at the College of New Rochelle, beginning in 1958 to 1969; later she taught there in 1972-73, and 1976-79.

She also taught briefly at Seton Hall University. She began her teaching career at The Ursuline School in New Rochelle, 1950-51 and 1953-55, and in 1951-53 at St. Jerome's School in the Bronx. Over the years she was director of the Ursuline House of Studies in New Rochelle and later in Washington, DC. She was superior of the St. Teresa's community in New Rochelle 1978-84.

She graduated from The College of New Rochelle in 1951, earned a Magister in Sacris Scientis degree at Regina Mundi in Rome in the 1950s, and a master's from St. Mary's Notre Dame. She held a doctorate from Fordham University.



Sr. Elizabeth O'Brien, formerly known as Mother St. John, died on February 8, 2011, at Andrus; she was 97 years old. She held leadership positions in her long career, notably as President of the College of New Rochelle from 1961 to 1963. She was an alumna of The Ursuline School (1930) and of the College

of New Rochelle (1934). After she made her vows in the Ursulines in 1941, she taught at both schools. In the Order she held positions of responsibility as novice mistress, mistress of juniors, superior of the St. Teresa's community, held office as part of the provincial leadership team, co-director of education at the generalate in Rome, and superior of the community at the retreat center in Frontenac, Minn. Later she engaged in spiritual direction and directing retreats.



Sr. Philip Touhey, born Grace Catherine, died unexpectedly in Wilmington, Delaware on February 8, 2011, three weeks before her 89th birthday. An alumna of the Ursuline Academy in Wilmington, she graduated from the College of New Rochelle and earned a master's degree at The Catholic University of

America. She entered the Ursulines in 1938, was professed in 1941, and taught at Ursuline Academy and other schools of the province. For 12 years she served in Caracas and Maracaibo, Venezuela, returning in 1970, when she began a career in library work. Besides staffing libraries at Ursuline Academy, she also served at St. Anthony of Padua School and at the William C. Lewis School. Philip was archivist for her Ursuline community until the time of her death.

Sr. Jean Baptiste Nicholson died on March 23, 2011 at the age of 75. She entered the Ursulines in 1954 and made her first vows in 1957.

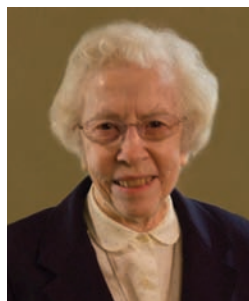
She served as Principal of The Ursuline School from 1974 to 2005 when she was named President. In 2009 she was given the title President Emerita. Better known as JB, Jean Baptiste was an innovative leader, continuing the Ursuline tradition: enriching the school with increased and diverse enrollment, strengthening the academic, art, and athletic programs, improving facilities, and enhancing faculty development. During those years, one of her great pleasures was teaching Greek and Latin at 7:30 a.m. for students electing to study those languages.

Before coming to The Ursuline School, Jean Baptiste taught at the Ursuline Academy in Bethesda and St. Joseph's Academy in Malone, where she also was Principal. A graduate of Mount St. Ursula, she held a B.A. in classics from the College of New Rochelle, and an M.A. in Greek and Latin from The Catholic University of America.

Sr. Mary Thomas Maloney, born Mary June, died peacefully at Andrus on Hudson on March 24, 2011. She was 92 years old. One of 13 children, she had two sisters, Priscilla and Veronica, who also were Ursulines and predeceased her. All three were



Photo courtesy Joanne Saffian



known for their joyful spirit. She is survived by one brother, Henry.

Sr. Mary Thomas entered the Ursulines in 1937 and made her first vows in 1940. She earned a bachelor's degree in English from Fordham in 1943, and in 1961 a B.S. in elementary education, also from Fordham. She taught in a variety of schools in the province, beginning with St. Philip Neri School and later at St. Jerome's and St. Angela's, all in the Bronx. In 1974 she returned to Malone, where she had graduated from St. Joseph's Academy, and served at various schools and parishes there as teacher or pastoral assistant. In her retirement she lived in Wilmington, DE, from 2000, until moving to Andrus in 2007.

News and Notes *continued*

In a forthcoming memoir, *Wind in the Buffalo Grass*, **Sr. Marian Bohem, O.S.U.** recounts transforming experiences in Indonesia over 25 years as she learned the customs and language and adapted to the cultures of the people, particularly in service to Christians, in a predominantly Muslim country. Photographs illustrate the people and places she encountered in her mission-driven experiences. The title of the book is taken from a North American Ojibwe proverb. Publication date in 2011. If you would like to be notified about availability, e-mail the Development Office DEVOFC@aol.com.

Sr. Maryellen Keefe presented a paper at the Texas A & M Maritime Education Summit In Galveston, TX, March 13-15. The topic was "Roping in the Reluctant Reader: Strategies for Tethering Maritime Undergraduates to Safe Ports within the Humanities Curriculum."

Sojourners' Place, founded and directed by **Sr. Jeanne Cashman**, celebrated its 20th Anniversary with the Light up the Night Awards Dinner on March 10, 2011. For more information visit: www.sojournersplace.org

After five years of service as superior of the Ursuline Community at Andrus on Hudson, **Sr. Kathleen Mary Donohue** completed her term. Kathleen Mary brought years of experience as director at the former Marian Residence as well as her personal upbeat spirit and devoted care for the infirm. The province is grateful for her service to our sisters. She is now taking a period of renewal.

On March 3rd, at The Adult Learning Center's 14th Annual Angela Awards Dinner at Beckwith Point in New Rochelle, **Sr. Eileen Fane**, Director, presented the awards. The honorees were: **Sr. Alice Gallin, OSU**; Richard Pisano, M.D. and Kathy Pisano, R.N.; Luis Quiros, M.P.A., M.S.W. and Martha Quiros, C.P.A.

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IN the upcoming publication of her latest book, **SOLO VOICES: A Novel of Forgiveness**, **Sister Irene Mahoney** narrates the stories of three women within a complex family.

"I have tried," Irene writes, "to capture their tangled relationships and their search for understanding. But even more **Solo Voices** explores the struggle to free oneself from a God of law and constraint to find the God of compassion and forgiveness."

Please join us for a reception and book signing for SOLO VOICES in the College of New Rochelle Castle Parlors on Sunday, May 15, 12:00-3:00.

"Irene Mahoney has once again created a gallery of unforgettable women. Their clearly heard solo voices rise, fall and rise again in a serenade to the surprises of love and loss and rediscovery—and so they sing not only of their own lives, but about yours too, and mine." Donald Spoto, Author



PROVINCE MISSION STATEMENT

We, Ursulines of the Eastern Province of the United States, are women religious in an international community, united by the vision and spirit of our foundress, St. Angela Merici.

Impelled by deep personal love for Jesus Christ, Angela sought in a life of prayer and action to bring people from all segments of society to a deeper love of God and one another.

We follow Angela in the service of this twofold love. While we continue to proclaim the Gospel in our traditional work of education, we welcome the call of the Spirit to new ministries.

In response to the needs of our times, we commit ourselves, in both our life and our work, to solidarity with the poor; to the pursuit of justice for all, especially women; and to collaboration with the laity.

As a community that values both tradition and progress, we move into the future with courage and with trust in God.

Visit the Ursuline Web Site: www.osueast.org