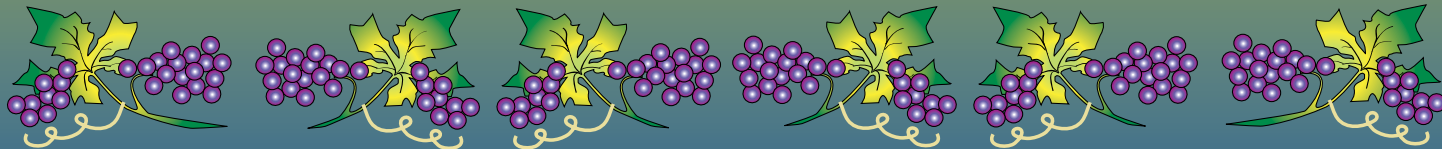


# CONSECRATA

A newsletter for member communities, friends and supporters of the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious



VOL. 6 NO. 1 SUMMER 2013

## AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

**A reflection on the care of the dying by a Dominican Sister of Hawthorne**

**By Sr. Catherine Marie, OP**

St. Catherine of Siena was once granted a vision of seeing the soul of a dying woman for whom she had been caring. She exclaimed to a friend: "If you could behold the beauty of one soul adorned with grace, you would gladly suffer death a thousand times for the sake of one such soul."

The Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne who care for those suffering from incurable cancer attest to this ultimate value of each person, presumably without the advantage of such a vision, seeing with the eyes of faith.

To be at the bedside of the sick is a privileged place to be. Mother Mary Alphonsa, foundress of the Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne, believed it is to be like Mary at the foot of the Cross, beholding her Son. In being present to the sick we behold their humanity and we behold Christ in them.

In addition, as we care for those who are sick, particularly those at the moment of death, there often is a sense of helplessness, of being able to offer very little. However, when we approach the dying, aware of our littleness, it is not a time to focus on our incapacity but to realize this creates an opportunity to become a vehicle for the largess of

God's grace. A sister's presence at the bedside as one leaves the twilight of this world for the full light of eternity involves her in a unique mystery. A religious sister, being nourished daily by her prayer life and the Eucharist, imbued with the charism of seeing Christ in those who suffer and seeing their innate value, do not just bring their skill and compassion, necessary as they are, but they in fact bring the love of Christ Himself.

Though caring for the sick and dying may seem sobering or severe, there is also much joy in the ministry. This should not be so surprising, for it is our Lady of Sorrows on Good Friday who becomes the one to whom we ring out the joyful Regina Caeli on Easter Sunday. We too rejoice in hope that the soul we have spent a little time with on earth has crossed the boundary to eternal life.





## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON

**Sister Regina Marie Gorman, O.C.D.**

I want to begin by thanking you, dear friends, for journeying with us. When clergy, laity and religious collaborate together, the message of Christ pulsates with compelling beauty and life-giving conviction. Your support has been strong and clear and for this we are forever grateful. In turn, we too promise you, our Bishops, priests and laity, our support and service, so that the Body of Christ may be brought to full stature.

This issue provides for you a window into one way our member communities are privileged to minister: caring for the sick, the frail and the elderly, which in this day and age is a timely topic. From the most superficial reading of the Gospels, it is evident that this work is near and dear to the Heart of our Savior and therefore urgent and critical to each one of us.

In this edition of *Consecrata*, you will view the vital apostolate of health care through Dominican, Franciscan and Carmelite eyes, as well as through the eyes of the Little Sisters of the Poor and the Religious of Mercy.



Many perspectives, but one focus: Jesus Christ suffering in the person of our brothers and sisters. You will read how the Sisters are grateful to be called to serve in the healing ministry of Jesus Christ, healing both body and soul.

In the midst of current challenges, let us continue to move forward together, convinced of the mandate of Christ. Again, I thank you for your unfailing support.

Gratefully in Christ,

Sister Regina Marie Gorman, O.C.D.  
Chairperson of CMSWR



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## “WHAT DO I CALL YOU? SISTER DOCTOR?”

**The experience of a Woman Religious in Medicine**

by Sister Mary Gretchen Hoffman, R.S.M., M.D.

When I walk the halls of the hospital, I can still sense the stares of the visitors. The hospital staff is used to seeing me there now, but a woman religious wearing a white coat is something that people in the South do not see every day. Patients, visitors, doctors, and nurses alike are drawn to a religious. I have had many experiences where they look right past the white coat to my religious habit and are stunned when I tell them I am their doctor. Patients in the clinic ask to be my patients, “because she’s religious.”



Each day I see how great is the suffering of Christ in those who are sick and those who are lonely, and at the end of the day I carry that suffering to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and place it before Him. I ask Him for the grace to know how to treat my patients medically, but more importantly to bring them closer to Him and to ease their sorrow. My praying of the Psalms each morning prepares my heart for those I meet. As I pray the Psalms again in the evening, I realize that I

have encountered those sentiments in my patients that day.

Suffering brings with it great humility, and humility disposes us to be aware of God. Being a religious sister and a physician has allowed me to enter into some of the deepest and most humble moments of my patients’ lives as they face chronic illness or approach death. I have prayed with patients who have defied my prejudices, like the former alcoholic covered in tattoos and dying of liver disease. After a prayer he allowed us to treat him and asked if I would be there on the day of his procedure.

Women religious have been an integral part of healthcare for centuries, and the need for a religious presence is as essential as it has ever been. Formed by the vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, she can bring to her patients and colleagues a unique witness to Jesus Christ. Joined intimately with her Spouse in prayer, she can bring the suffering of those she serves to the Mass and unite it with His suffering. She is not just another doctor or nurse, not just another social servant, but rather a witness to hope for those who are ill and a connection to their God.



“Through prayer and contemplation we are united ever more intimately with God, and through God’s grace even the most difficult tasks in His service become easy and pleasing for us.” (Mother M. Theresia)



## AT THE SERVICE OF THE FAMILY FOR LIFE

By Sister Madonna-Joseph Seltzer, O.C.D.

The healthcare apostolate of the Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles is the founding apostolate of the Congregation. Foundress, Mother Maria Luisa Josefa of the Most Blessed Sacrament, a candidate for sainthood, taught her spiritual daughters to “see the patient’s room as another chapel, the bed as another altar and the one being cared for as another Christ.”

Today, this charism is shared in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in a continuum of care for the elderly which includes short and long term independent living, assisted living and skilled nursing facilities.

We believe that all who participate in the healthcare ministry through administration of the sacraments, pastoral care, medical/nursing care or cultural support, are vessels of God’s mercy and love. The pastoral care ministry of companioning the sick and weak on their spiritual journey affirms that they are not alone. Spiritual companionship relieves a sense of isolation, loneliness and helplessness, whereby we bring our seniors into a family which is centered on the light of Christ’s presence.

Person-centered care in a Catholic environment creates a community which offers residents a rich sacramental life.



Residents have the opportunity to attend daily Mass, pray the Rosary, receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick as well as participate in Bible studies and other devotions. Ultimately, they are being prepared for their final journey to Heaven.

When elders come to the facilities, they are welcomed along with their families into an environment that respects their dignity and gives them an opportunity to live as full a life as possible. Inter-generational activities are offered with children from the child care center on the property. The children adopt a grandparent and share their lives with the seniors. A “Senior University” is also offered to help residents experience new avenues of learning and enjoyment. The university welcomes outside speakers and offers workshops in heirloom scrapbooks, arts, crafts and gardening.

Another dimension of the healthcare apostolate is the opportunity for an internship in gerontology for those considering a career in ministering to the elderly. In addition to the knowledge gained in gerontology, it is also a time to participate in the new evangelization by sharing the ethical directives of the Catholic Church and witnessing to the dignity of human life.

In the year 2012 after much prayer, planning, and collaboration the Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles opened their first assisted living cottage. This is the first step in creating a Neighborhood of Care which will eventually include nine cottages, each of which will house 20-26 seniors in a home-like environment. Each cottage will have its own dining room, kitchen, living room and den. In addition to these present levels of care, the Carmelite Sisters are currently in the process of developing a Memory Care Unit and planning for a future wellness center for seniors. This will complete all levels of care so that those who are served can enjoy the fullness of life, thus fulfilling the scripture, “I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly”.

## THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR

Making Christ Present to the Elderly Poor

For centuries the Church has counted on consecrated persons, many of them women, to assure a dedicated and prophetic presence in the world of health care. In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI wrote about the Church’s vocation to practice love through works of charity, including the care of the sick. “As a community, the Church must practice love. Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community” (“*Deus Caritas Est*”, 20). Who better to organize this love than the legions of women religious who have served in hospitals, homes for the elderly and other institutions down through the centuries? Witnessing how Catholic health care is faced with increasing challenges in our secular society, the Church needs consecrated persons in the field of health not only to continue Christ’s mission of healing and mercy but to evangelize in this area with the light of the Gospel of Life. Blessed John Paul II once said that health care ministries staffed by religious or otherwise associated with the Church must be places where suffering, pain and death are understood in their human and specifically Christian meaning. This is the aim of the 29 homes across the United States of the Little Sisters of the Poor, and the homes for the needy elderly around the world. Hospitality to the needy elderly is at the heart of the

charism of the Little Sisters of the Poor. The care of the elderly is so central that it is sealed by a vow of its own, that of hospitality, in addition to the three vows traditionally made by consecrated persons. This fourth vow of hospitality brings to perfection one’s gift of self to the Lord and gives it a very concrete expression in the activities of daily life. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said that members of religious congregations working in health care have a fundamental role to play in going beyond the clinical approach so common today “to allow the glory of the risen crucified Christ to appear in the diversified panorama of health.” May this be a goal for all those involved in Catholic health care ministry!



**God’s mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can restore life to dry bones (cf. Ez 37:1-14). ... Let us be renewed by God’s mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish.**

*Pope Francis: — Easter Urbi et Orbi message on March 31, 2013*



## DILLINGEN SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS

### Continuing the charism of service

When the Dillingen Franciscan Sisters arrived in the United States, their charism of service to all of God's people was always first and foremost in their work. From Canada to Minnesota; from the Dakotas to Kansas; and several states in between, the Dillingen Sisters gave freely of themselves and their gifts. As they celebrate 100 years in the United States, the North American Province continues their service to the homeless, ill, elderly and children.

St. Gerard's Community of Care, Hankinson, ND was established in 1953 as St. Gerard's Hospital. Now it is a 37-bed, skilled care facility. There are 12 units for independent living where residents are provided with meals and housekeeping. Assistant Administrator, Sister Mary Louise Jundt, shared that some residents opt for the skilled nursing benefits when they can no longer live independently. 1997 saw the opening of a daycare, primarily for children of employees. In 2011, Kinder College opened on the campus, featuring a pre-school curriculum. The Dillingen Franciscans have always been committed to respecting life from conception to natural death. "We are here to serve and it is meaningful that St. Gerard's Community of Care provides loving services to babies and to the elderly", shared Sister Mary Louise.

St. Anne's Guest Home, Grand Forks, ND had its roots in Fargo, ND where the Sisters began taking care of the poor and homeless in 1945. In 1952 the Bishop called them to Grand Forks. Sisters Rebecca Metzger and Sister Elaine Roggenbuck have served in this ministry, caring for the



lives of many homeless during their combined 82 years of service. The sisters shared that they are one big family at St. Anne's Guest Home. Many of the people are alienated from their own families and may have mental or physical impairments. With loving care, they can often return to a more functional lifestyle.

Oakes Community Hospital, Oakes, ND was operated by the Dillingen Franciscan Sisters for 48 years, and now is under the management of Catholic Health Initiatives. Sister Dianna Hell, OSF is one of the Sisters working at the facility. She serves as the Director of the Spiritual Services Department; Mission Leader, a member of the Ethics committee and is responsible to the Board of Directors. Daily she visits each of the patients, providing them with loving care in the name of the Lord.



## SISTERS CELEBRATE 150TH ANNIVERSARY AND BEATIFICATION OF THEIR FOUNDRESS

When Mother Maria Theresia Bonzel founded the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration in 1863, she desired to serve both orphans and the sick in her hometown of Olpe, Germany. Her Sisters undertook home nursing care in



those early years, and many served as nurses in the Franco-Prussian War. After Mother Maria Theresia sent Sisters across the Atlantic to escape the religious persecution brought about by the Kulturkampf, this healthcare apostolate expanded to hospitals throughout the United States. She was always solicitous that the apostolates of the Community flow from the Congregation's primary charism of Perpetual Adoration, recognizing that work would be fruitless without a life of prayer. A loving Mother to both her Sisters and those they served, she advised one Sister, "Take care, dear Sister, to attend to the bodily and spiritual needs of the sick and encourage your good Sisters to offer joyfully the sacrifices asked of them." Her compassion for the sick was drawn from personal experience, as she suffered from poor health throughout her life. Mother

Maria Theresia died in 1905, and over the years the healthcare ministry of the Congregation grew to include hospitals, clinics, and homes for the elderly. In the spirit of their foundress, the Sisters continue the healing ministry she began 150 years ago. The foundress herself continues this ministry in a spiritual capacity from the halls of heaven.

On March 27, 2013, Pope Francis approved the decree of a miracle attributed to her intercession. This miracle involved the healing of a young boy from Colorado Springs, Colorado in 1999. Her Sisters now anticipate the beatification of their foundress this November and continue to seek her heavenly intercession as they continue to serve the Church through Franciscan Alliance, their healthcare system, as well as in the apostolates of education and other ecclesial ministries.

### The Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR)

is a collaborative body of major superiors from over 100 religious orders in the United States. The CMSWR cooperates closely with the United States Conference of Catholic bishops and individual bishops and nurture "a renewed appreciation of the deeper theological reasons for this special form of consecration," that is religious life. During the year, CMSWR sponsors several events and workshops that provide a realistically viable and mutually helpful forum for participation, education and dialogue on the shared patrimony of the Church's teaching on matters central to the mystery and reality of religious life as integral to the life and holiness of the Church (LG n. 44; VC 53). The CMSWR promotes a unity among major superiors, articulates the theology of religious life as a vocation nurturing the Church's life and holiness, assists in the revitalization of institutes of religious life and their participation within each particular church, and offers educational opportunities helpful to religious institutes such as formation and regional workshops for the member communities.

Our member communities serve in many apostolic works throughout the United States. In all, the Sisters from CMSWR associate and full membership communities live and/or serve in 129 dioceses in the United States. Sisters from these communities live and/or serve in at least 54 dioceses outside the United States.



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*If you are inspired to support any of our member Communities in their apostolic and educational needs, please contact us at the National Office or contact the individual Communities through our website:*

*[http://www.cmswr.org/member\\_communities/membercommunities.html](http://www.cmswr.org/member_communities/membercommunities.html).*

*May God reward you for your prayers and support of religious life.*

*Please know of our daily prayers for you.*

## SAVE THE DATES:

**2013 National Assembly:** October 10-13, 2013  
at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows.