

125 years: Sisters celebrate a history of service

The party was 125 years in the making.

On June 3, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia brought an end to our celebration of the 125th anniversary of our arrival in Kansas.

We did so by inviting the community into the Motherhouse and onto our grounds for an ice cream social, tours, children's games and other festivities.

In addition to nearly all of the 160 Sisters of St. Joseph who "came home" for the event, there were another couple hundred friends, family and community supporters on hand as well to join in the celebration.

The afternoon began with a short formal program, with Sister Beth Stover serving as emcee. In addition to serving as vice president of our order, Sister Beth is also a member of the committee that planned and presented the 125th anniversary celebration.

Speakers during the half-hour program included state Sen. Mark Taddiken, who read a proclamation from Gov. Mark Parkinson honoring the Sisters (*reproduced at right*).

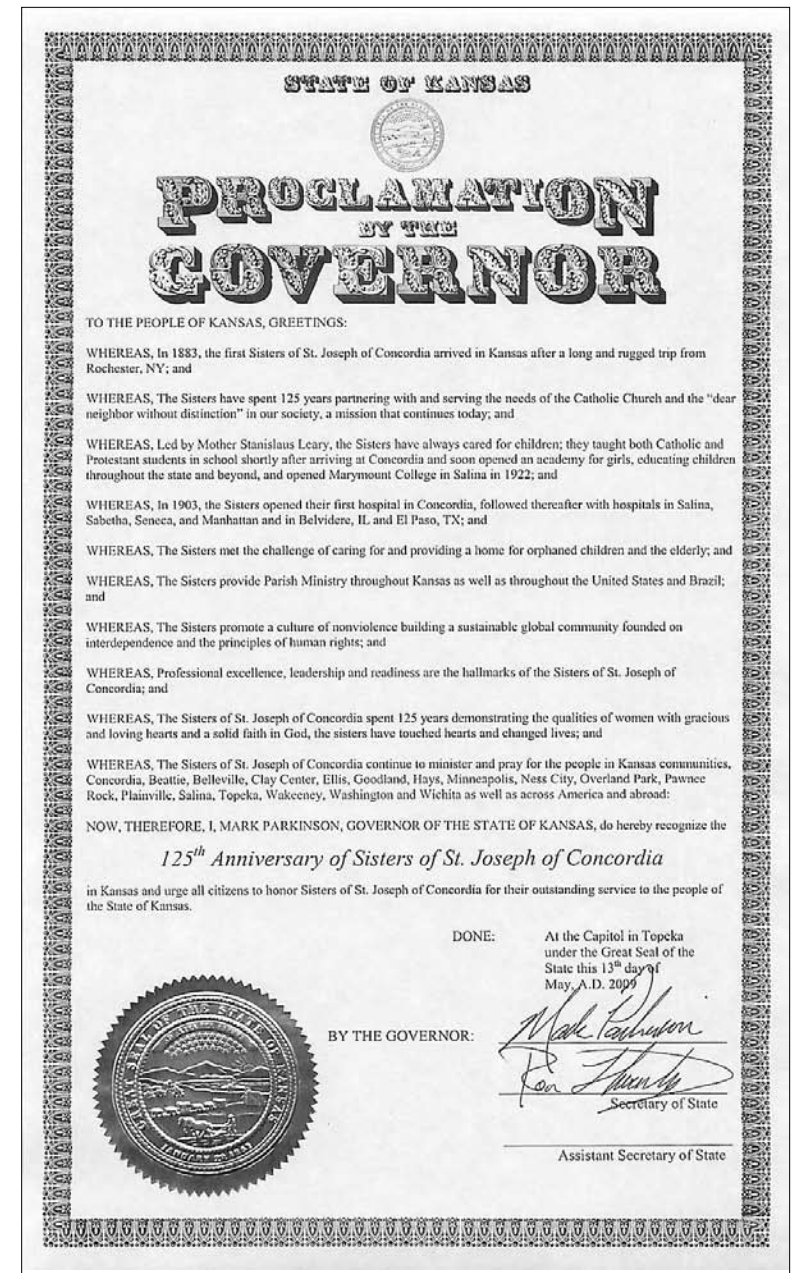


Sister Mary Fran Simons and Concordia Mayor Greg Hattan renew their acquaintance at the Motherhouse June 3. Sister Mary Fran, who now lives and works in Chandler, Ariz., was Dr. Hattan's high school Latin teacher.

The Sisters of St. Joseph arrived in Kansas in 1883, with the intent of going on to Arizona Territory. The reported dangers of Indian uprisings dissuaded those first Sisters from that destination, and they stayed in Newton, Kan., for a year.

In 1884, the small band moved to Concordia where they established a convent and academy.

Having outgrown that building, now home to Manna House of Prayer at Fifth and Olive streets in Concordia, in 1902 the Sisters began construction on the five-story red brick building that is our home today. That building was completed in 1903, with the Sacred Heart Chapel added in 1907; it has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1973.



LEFT: Sister Bev Carlin demonstrates the best bowling technique as Sister Lucille Herman, left, looks on.

RIGHT: Sister Jeanette Wasinger, second from right, is welcomed home by other members of the congregation. Sister Jeanette lives and works in Orange, Calif.



Cape Cod retirees explore spirituality during seven-week stay in New Mexico

By CHRIS AND FRANK NOONAN
South Chatham, Mass.

In the book, "Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life," the authors use the term "voluntary displacement" to mean being willing: to step out of your familiar world and put yourself into a strange place, to leave home and leave behind a sense that you are special, to put yourself in a place where you can listen to God more clearly. (The authors warn that this can be risky because God may ask you to do something which is difficult.)

In the summer of 2008, we had just retired and were looking for an opportunity for voluntary displacement, an opportunity to step away from our home and community on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. We did a Google search on some key words: New Mexico, Christian, Volunteer. One of the items that came up was CSJ Concordia, Kan., and within that, St. Mary's Spirituality Center in Silver City, N.M. We have connections with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston and wondered if God was calling us to St. Mary's. Emails followed with Sister Christine Doman, the CSJ Kansas volunteer coordinator, which led to an application process and dialogue to learn more.

The power of growth is in relationship. We came to New Mexico, to St. Mary's Spirituality Center, in February 2009 looking for relationships that may spur some growth. Sisters Rita Plante and Rosemary Farrell did not disappoint. They are the face of St. Mary's. They made us feel at home in their home and by sharing their many relationships they made us feel at home in Silver City.

We came to St. Mary's with a desire to spend seven weeks. We came with some expectations on our service and, remembering the words from the book "Compassion," one of these expectations was to be ready to welcome God in both surprises and mundane tasks.

Opportunities for service work included helping at St. Mary's Spirituality and Retreat Center or helping at El Refugio where Rosie works as a social worker specializing in therapy for children who have experienced domestic violence. El Refugio is a women's shelter but more broadly it's an organization positioned to prevent domestic violence.

Frank worked with the domestic violence



Volunteers IN ACTION

offender's treatment program counseling the men there, while Chris helped with paper work in the counseling section for women and children and worked on the design for an outdoor garden. Our work schedule allowed us to arrive around 9 am and leave by 3:30, Monday to Friday. It was a schedule that didn't overwhelm but allowed us to be really connected to El Refugio and to the people in Silver City who El Refugio serves. Service there satisfied our spiritual appetite.

Southwestern New Mexico abounds in natural beauty and weekends gave us opportunities to explore and experience some of that beauty. Both Rita and Rosie shared places and areas they loved and, with their encouragement, we made weekend trips to Gila National Forest and Gila Cliff Dwellings, Cat Walk, Grand Canyon and closer to home, Burro Mountains, Black Range and the historic towns and silver and copper mining sites. Chris enjoyed walks into downtown Silver City to get a sense of peoples' lives, with stops at the public library, art galleries and good coffee shops. Frank explored the area near St. Mary's and became enthralled with cactus of all kinds. And the weather was great!

We are back home in Chatham, Mass., grateful for our time at St. Mary's. We are looking to bring some of the experience back to Cape Cod. Chris has begun volunteering at a local food pantry. Frank has begun some volunteer prison ministry.

The experience at St. Mary's has been rewarding and we have decided to apply again for another seven-week stint in the fall (beginning Oct. 1), hoping to build on and deepen our experience.

To learn more about ways to volunteer with the Sisters of St. Joseph, email Sister Christine Doman, cdoman56@aol.com

Noted peace activists lead Manna's annual Theological Institute

teshuva — a Hebrew word meaning *repentance, or a return to God or a godly way of life*

For Jim and Shelley Douglass, *teshuva* means turning to nonviolence.

That will be the focus of a weeklong Theological Institute the last week in July at Manna House of Prayer.

During "Teshuva: Turning to Nonviolence," the Douglasses — nationally recognized activists, Christian theologians and authors of more than a half dozen books — will talk about their own lives and work, the Gospel's mandate to turn away from violence and how violent acts have affected our culture in the last 40 years.

Jim Douglass' most recent book is "JFK and the Unspeakable," which discusses the assassination of President John F. Kennedy as a conspiracy ordered by unknown parties and carried out by the CIA with help from the Mafia and elements in the FBI.

That will be the topic of one lecture during the Institute. Others include the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.,

the life of Mahatma Gandhi, "Jesus' Way of Nonviolence" and current efforts to turn to nonviolence nationwide.

During the week, participants will consider the Scriptures, share stories of faith and learn some practical skills for fostering nonviolent change.



Jim and Shelley Douglass, at their home in Birmingham, Ala.

To take part

WHAT: 2009 Theological Institute

WHEN: July 27-Aug. 1

WHERE: Manna House of Prayer, Concordia

WHY: To deepen our roots in the Christian tradition and explore its implications for living the Gospel in today's world

COST: \$425 for registration and room & board (Attendance for one or more days is also available at \$40 per day plus \$8.50 for the noon meal.)

DEADLINE TO REGISTER: July 15

FOR INFORMATION: 785-243-4428 or www.mannahouse.org

SPONSORED BY: Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia

In 1975 the Douglasses founded Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action to protest the planned Trident missile nuclear submarine base on the Kitsap Peninsula in Washington state.

They later moved to Birmingham, Ala., to establish Mary's House, for homeless or indigent people in need of long-term health care.

A tag-team ministry in the tiny towns of very rural Kansas

EDITOR'S NOTE: For seven years, Father Jim Hoover and Sister Marilyn Wall served parishioners in four churches in the farm country of North Central Kansas. Beginning July 1, he has been reassigned to three parishes in Central Kansas. Together Father Jim and Sister Marilyn are now serving the parishes of Wilson, Dorrance and Hollyrood. This profile, researched and written before the new assignment was announced, looks at how their partnership developed and why they believe it fits the critical need for rural parish ministries.

Washington County, Kansas, may be the epitome of rural Mid America. Its 900 square miles butt up against an equally rural Nebraska county, and it is populated by 125,000 hogs, nearly 76,000 head of cattle, slightly more than 5,800 people, more veterinarians than medical doctors, and one Catholic priest and one Sister of St. Joseph.

Father Jim Hoover and Sister Marilyn Wall have served what they call "the Catholic community of Washington County" as a team for seven years. There are four active parishes — in the county seat of Washington, as well as the towns of Hanover, Greenleaf and Morrowville — but Sister Marilyn says the 500 Catholic families scattered across the county are a practical lot; they attend whichever of the churches is most convenient at any given moment. There may be someone who catches the 5 p.m. Stations of the Cross at Sacred Heart Church in Greenleaf or the Saturday afternoon Mass at Hanover's St. John the Baptist Church, but is a member of Washing-

ton's St. Augustine Church.

"They know we'll be there, wherever they are," Sister Marilyn explains.

That, in fact, could be the motto of their shared ministry.

This is actually their second stint working together to serve the people of a group of rural parishes.

Father Jim is a native of Junction City, Kan., who was ordained in 1960. He was headed toward becoming a canon lawyer when he discovered his love of ministering one-on-one with people in need. His sister Dorothy, meanwhile, had entered the Sisters of St. Joseph — the order Marilyn Wall entered the same year Father Jim was ordained.

It would be more than 20 years before they met.

Marilyn, a native of Aurora, Ill., spent her first two decades as a sister getting an education — including master's degrees in both botany (Kansas State University) and social



Father Jim Hoover and Sister Marilyn Wall talk during a lunch at the Pony Express Cafe on Highway 36. One secret to their collaboration in serving Washington County for the past seven years, they say, is that they stay in almost constant contact.

work (St. Louis University) — and teaching at the high school and college levels. Then, in the early 1980s, she returned to Concordia to focus on counseling and directing retreats at the sisters' Manna House of Prayer.

It was during those years she met Father Jim Hoover. It was also during those years she began to feel called to a different type of ministry.

“

This is where we truly touch people. At weddings, hospitals and funerals... we become part of their lives, and they become part of ours.

”

Her good friend Sister Jean Befort was working in a rural parish ministry, Marilyn explains, "and I saw what she did, and I was touched by it — I wanted to be out working among the people."

In 1987, Father Jim was being assigned to a parish in Beloit, Kan. "And before I took that assignment, I went to (Marilyn) at Manna to ask her to lead me in a directed retreat," he

recalls. "We discovered we had more in common than we had any idea."

They also discovered a shared vision of working with people in small parishes, and being available for human needs as they arise. They found they shared a core belief in the compassion of Catholicism, and the deep human desire to find and feel faith.

Over time, they also developed a vision of working together, to join their separate strengths into one ministry.



Their chance to put that vision into practice came in 1994 when Bishop George Fitzsimons decided to give the partner-

ship a try, in Oberlin, Kan., and two neighboring western Kansas parishes. Father Jim was assigned as the priest while Sister Marilyn served as what was then called a pastoral administrator.

The titles belie their actual responsibilities.

As Father Jim explains in his typically no-nonsense



Sister Marilyn Wall leads a 5 p.m. service for a dozen parishioners at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in the tiny town of Greenleaf.

manner, "I do the holy 'sacramental' stuff; we share everything else."

After eight years in western Kansas — and eight years of learning how to make their partnership work to best serve the people in three scattered parishes — they were appointed to Washington County and took on the even greater challenge of four parishes, a Catholic grade school and 500 families strewn across 900 square miles.

Two priests had served the parishes there, but the continuing nationwide shortage of ordained Catholic priests made replacing them impossible. So Father Jim and Sister Marilyn took on the task.

Father Jim, now 75, still does "the sacramental stuff," including five Masses from Saturday afternoon through Sunday morning.

He starts at his home base at St. John the Baptist in Hanover with a Mass at 5 p.m. Saturday. Then he drives roughly 17 miles — and, depending on the changeable Kansas weather, it can be a very rough 17 miles — to the tiny town of Greenleaf for a 6:30 p.m. Mass at Sacred Heart Church.

Sunday morning starts with a 7:45 Mass at St. Peter & Paul Catholic Church north of Morrowville, some 28 miles from his home. Then it's back 13 or so miles to Washington for a 9 a.m. Mass at St. Augustine

before heading another 15 miles east and north to Hanover again for the 10:30 Mass.

"And that's if there are no funeral preparations, baptisms, anniversaries or weddings," Sister Marilyn notes, "and no stopping to talk."

The nature of their ministry — and Father Jim's nature — is that he will almost always stop to talk.

For 66-year-old Sister Marilyn, there is sometimes less routine but the same drive to be there, wherever she can reach out to people who may need her.

On a recent spring Friday, she begins her day by driving to Hanover, to help Father Jim give communion to parishioners in a nursing home, and to two more who are homebound.

Then it is back to Washington and the small hospital there, to be of whatever service she can be for a young mother and father grappling to accept God's will.

The Mexican family has three young children and the mother was pregnant with another daughter. But they had learned the tragic news that the baby had died in the womb, and they arrived at Washington County

Hospital where the doctor began inducing labor at 8 a.m.

Marilyn is there, to talk about faith and God and funeral arrangements. She'd found a prayer for blessing a baby and is having it translated into Spanish, and she has with her an inexpensive Christmas ornament of an angel holding an infant.

The baby's name was to be Azul

“

I do the holy 'sacramental' stuff; we share everything else. ... I punt, she catches — even if we haven't talked about it.

”

Celeste — Spanish for Blue Heaven.

By late morning, when it becomes clear that the labor is going to take much longer than hoped for, she leaves to drive a little more than halfway to Hanover to meet Father Jim for dinner.

A key to their shared work, they both say, is keeping in almost constant contact. They talk at least once a day — and more often three

or four times a day — to fill each other in on the lives of their parishioners.

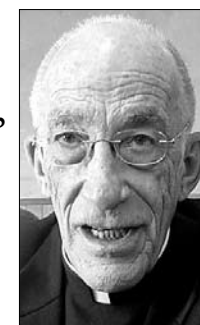
"Sometimes we can be like parents of teenagers," Sister Marilyn says with a laugh. "People will go to him, and if they don't like what he says, then they come to me to see if I say something different."

But that doesn't work with this team, Father Jim notes. "I punt, she catches — even if we haven't talked about it."

After dinner — during which they check in with a handful of parishioners who stop by their table at the Pony Express Café — Sister Marilyn returns to the hospital to check in with the nursing staff. There is no progress to report, but she spends a few minutes talking with

the young couple and their translator and assures them she will be immediately there whenever they need her.

Then it's over to St. Augustine's to pick up books for a service later and to check in on the crew preparing a Lenten fish fry at the church. She trades quips with the members of the



See "MINISTRY," page 15.

Twenty-somethings share with assembled Sisters

Continued from page 3.

the church is teaching. I have thought about religious life, but right now I see myself as more active.

LAURIE: My family and my community have always been the core of my faith. I have thought about it, I'm open to it. But I think I'm where I'm supposed to be, and I'm growing. And I like boys.

CRYSTAL: I don't think I have what it would take. I admire the discipline, boundless faith and hope that women like you have. But so many young people I know, we just don't have the training to understand, or to lead that life. We are superficial when it comes to religion.

"Connectedness" & isolation in today's world

BRIDGET: I'm sitting here with a cell phone in my pocket. But texting is a hollow kind of communication — when they write "LOL," are they really laughing out loud? There's no true emotion. There may be communication, but it leads to aloneness; you don't have to see someone face to face.

CRYSTAL: There are 8-year-olds with cell



Kelly Conwell prays with the Sisters during the commissioning ceremony that is a part of the June assembly.

phones. If you don't build those (interaction) skills early on, you don't know how to communicate. You don't even know why you feel alone.

JODI: I don't have a cell phone with me. Technology is a tool, just like anything else. People can go to extremes; we need to find balance.

KELLY: I'll be in the same room with my little sister (a high school senior) and she'll text me. She's not paying attention to the conversation, or the people in the room. I don't know the correct way to fix that, unless it's your parents teaching you manners.

President outlines strengths, challenges

Continued from page 2.

"Circles of Community Life," to which every sister must belong. The circles allow each sister a greater voice in order-wide decisions while also demanding more accountability and personal responsibility.

▶ A growing focus on spiritual renewal, with a specific emphasis on annual retreats for Sisters of St. Joseph from around the world that delve into the origins of the order and its original calling, or charism. The monthlong "Bearers of the Tradition" this summer has attracted sisters from seven countries and eight American states to Manna House of Prayer. (See related story, page 1.)

▶ Growing outreach to the broader communities where sisters live and work. As one example, Sister Marcia cites a series of civic forums in Concordia, where she and other sisters have worked to help residents identify local problems and seek realistic solutions.

In addition to the positive elements, Sister Marcia also included a shorter list of "challenges" facing the Sisters of St. Joseph. That list included:

▶ A new Leadership Council, which took charge just a year ago with a new governance structure.

▶ The global economic crisis, which has

forced the order — like every other organization and institution — to be increasingly cautious about finances.

▶ The need to stay focused on missions and serving people in need while maintaining our own sense of "community" and life in communion with each other.

▶ Fewer young women expressing an interest in religious life as vowed sisters grow older.

Sister Marcia also included two "concerns" specifically addressed to the Apostolic Visitation.

The first raised the question of why such a visitation is needed, when the order is faithful to the Church, the sisters' vows, the order's Vatican-approved constitution and the mission of serving those in need.

The second, though, was Sister Marcia's "personal concern" that Mother Millea and all of those involved in the visitation process would understand and appreciate the historical development of the order in the rural Midwest and its fidelity to the Church through its 125 years of history.

"As leader of this community," I am constantly struck by the wholeness and holiness of the members of our (order)," Sister Marcia wrote. "Our 1694 constitution calls us the 'Congregation of the Great Love.' That is what we have committed ourselves to and what we pray daily to be."

Visitation will continue with surveys, on-site visits

CONTINUED from page 2.

gregations of women in the United States, with about 59,000 vowed sisters. (Communities of cloistered, contemplative nuns and monasteries are not part of the study.)

This summer Mother Millea is also recruiting members of religious orders to help with the on-site visits, which will be Phase III and will likely begin in early 2010.

In a letter dated May 19 and sent to orders' leaders, she asked each to give her up to three names of sisters or members of other religious orders to serve on the team.

Mother Millea's letter noted that those who take part in the work "will be acting in the name of the Apostolic See" and for this reason "they must be willing to make a public profession of faith and take an oath of fidelity to the Apostolic See."

Although there is no deadline for completing the visitation and submitting a report to Cardinal Rodé, Mother Millea hopes to complete the task by 2011.

That final report has been described as "comprehensive and confidential," with information included on each of the congregations assessed. One unanswered question, however, is how the information in the report might be used or if there could be action by the Vatican based on it.

The entire apostolic visitation has caused considerable uncertainty and alarm among many American sisters who see it as unnecessary, potentially divisive and intrusive.

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious, which represents about 95 percent of the American orders, was surprised when the apostolic visitation was announced. But, in a statement in February, its board said, "We hope that the results of the apostolic visitation will demonstrate the vitality and depth of the life and service of women religious in the United States."

Then, in late May, the Catholic church's top women religious organization issued a strong supportive statement for American women's religious orders under investigation by the Vatican. The International Union of Superiors General's executive board praised U.S. women religious for living out the mandates of the Second Vatican Council.

"We affirm unequivocally our support for our sisters in the United States," the statement read.

— Compiled from Catholic media news reports

Sister Mary Savoie, standing, and Sister Margaret Nacke previewed an early version of "Interrupted Lives: Catholic Sisters Under European Communism" at the Motherhouse in April. The finished documentary is scheduled to be aired in September.



Documentary took three years to make

CONTINUED from page 4.

mentary "Jesus Decoded." "So that's where my work started."

A team from NewGroup, including Sister Judy and photographer Lynn King, and Sisters Mary and Margaret traveled together to Eastern Europe, mostly for introductions and to get a better sense of the story.

But once she began meeting the Sisters who had survived, Sister Judy realized this was more than just a scouting trip.

"These were women who were fragile, many of whom were mature women at the end of World War II," she said. "They were elderly, and many were in frail health. We knew this couldn't wait."

During that first trip, they interviewed and videotaped 42 Sister Survivors. They would eventually return for more interviews and taping.

"They recalled their personal experiences of... spending years of labor on collective farms and in state-run factories, foregoing the wearing of their habits and veils, losing the right of free assembly and ... banishment from monasteries and convents. Some shared stories of imprisonment, beatings and isolation. Others recalled vows whispered in confessionals, attics or basements out of fear of discovery by the police..."

For Sister Judy, who grew up in a Polish-American parish, the stories they told from the mid 1960s on were particularly moving.

"I was a young Sister teaching high school and coaching cheerleaders, experiencing a new and exciting post-Vatican II time in the Church," she said, "and their entire culture of religious life and ministry had been

destroyed, leaving only tiny remnants of debris floating around. It was sobering."

It was also a massive creative challenge. "The scope of this project was daunting," Sister Judy concedes. "Tell the stories of the Communist experience over 40 years as it unfolded in five Eastern European countries, each with its own culture, history, ethnic populations and languages. And do it in 53 minutes!"

That is expected to be the finished length of the documentary when the final cut is completed.

A couple of hurdles have yet to be crossed, but the expectation is that the film will be offered by ABC television to its affiliates beginning Sept. 13.

Local ABC affiliates then can choose to air it, but have no obligation to do so. (*See related story at the bottom of page 6.*)

But that won't be the end of the story — or of the work being done by Sisters Mary and Margaret, who are the executive producers of the documentary.

The DVD of "Interrupted Lives" will be available for sale through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Sisters Mary and Margaret are organizing special showings and discussions to continue to educate people about this period of history.

One such is a colloquium scheduled for Sept 4 and 5 in Atchison.

Information about "Sister Survivors," including "Faces of Faith" — a traveling exhibit of photographs — is available on the Sisters of St. Joseph web site:

csjkansas.org/index.php/faith-works1/

Ministry brings pair close to the people of rural parishes

CONTINUED from page 13.

Knights of Columbus working in the kitchen, and praises the baked beans they'll serve later.

Before she leaves, she is surprised by a parishioner who hands her a \$500 check, "for your family," the Sisters of St. Joseph.

After walking across the yard to her home in the rectory, Sister Marilyn checks her voice mail — still no news from the hospital — and spends a few minutes putting together the list of fish dinners to be home-delivered early in the evening.

She's surprised by a visit from three sisters from Concordia. They had been to Greenleaf to deliver a baby blanket — crocheted and donated by Marilyn, coincidentally — that was purchased a week earlier at a fundraiser at the sisters' Motherhouse in Concordia and to thank another couple who had made a donation to the Catholic order.

Then it is back to the hospital; still no progress, but she checks with the increasingly weary parents to ensure their children were picked up after school.

There's one more road trip, south to Greenleaf this time, to pray with the dozen or so who show up for a 5 p.m. Stations of the Cross and communion. It's a larger crowd than she expected on a Friday afternoon in this simply decorated brick church, and she's pleased at the turnout. "They love this church," she says of Sacred Heart and its people.

Back at St. Augustine's, Sister Marilyn joins the crowd for the fish fry and greets everyone; these are the people who have made her a part of their lives.

Father Jim is there, too.



Sister Marilyn Wall's office was in her home in the rectory of St. Augustine's Church in Washington.

They ask about recent illnesses and family members.

In their seven years in Washington County, the two of them have been to countless basketball games, Scouting events, high school plays and grade school concerts. "We are part of the community," she explains, "and people here notice that."

After dinner, Sister Marilyn returns to the hospital. The mother's ordeal is finally over, and Marilyn brings a blessing of the child. The baby's father reads the prayer Sister Marilyn had translated into Spanish.

"This is where we truly touch people," Sister Marilyn says. "At weddings, hospitals and funerals — that's where we become part of their lives, and they become part of ours."

This part of this day, and this part of these lives, is immeasurably painful.

But the prayers, the thoughtfulness, the being there are all appreciated; you see it in the father's tired eyes.

"I love these people," Sister Marilyn says, clearly speaking beyond this family to all the families scattered across this rural Kansas landscape. "And I love this place. We are one here. This is the kind of place Father Jim and I were meant to be."

All the news that didn't fit

Snapshots of events at the Motherhouse and Manna House of Prayer



FAR LEFT: Bob Kearns, left, and Greg Gallagher work on the sign that now graces the driveway of the Motherhouse.

LEFT: Jim Helton gently chisels away a bit of wood to fit a glass "shield" on one of the stained-glass windows.

BELOW: The Motherhouse was a striking backdrop for the Kansas Sampler Festival the first weekend in May.

RIGHT: Sisters tour the Meridian Way Wind Project south of Concordia in May.



CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

NONPROFIT
US POSTAGE PAID
CONCORDIA, KS 66901
PERMIT #47

SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH
P.O. BOX 279
CONCORDIA KS 66901

