

## **CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS OF HOLY FAITH MINISTRY IN LOUISIANA**

**OCTOBER 14, 2017**

God has blessed the Sisters of the Holy Faith with fifty years of unbroken service in the Archdiocese of New Orleans since 1967. Over these fifty years forty Sisters of the Holy Faith have ministered here in education, pastoral and social advocacy ministries. In these ministries the sisters worked side by side with many devoted co-workers, who have blessed us in so many ways, and enhanced the ministries in which we have been together engaged. We are happy that so many were able to rejoin us to celebrate those years of partnership and collaboration.

On October 14, 2017 ten sisters, namely Sisters Angela Hallahan, Anna Bolger, Dolores Madden, Joan Hogan, Maura O'Donovan, Miriam Harney, Nancy Hale, Pauline O'Reilly, Teresa Rooney and Vickey Haran together with their fellow religious, associates, co-workers, friends and fellow parishioners and seven priest friends, Msgrs Doug Doussan, Lanaux Rareshide, Fathers Marlon Mangubat, Lance Campo, Charles Caluda, Gary Copping and John Marse celebrated a Eucharist of Thanksgiving at Our Lady of Prompt Succor Church, in Chalmette, Louisiana. Msgr Rareshide who had been the associate pastor at St. Robert's in 1967 when the sisters arrived, preached the homily. The Eucharistic celebration was followed with a time of fellowship in the school cafeteria, where all were treated to local caterer, Eric Triche's delicacies, many of which he fried on location while we were celebrating the liturgy. They were delicious. It was a time of joy and revisiting with friends, most of whom had lost their homes, and other properties and possessions in an area ravaged twelve years earlier by Hurricane Katrina.

While the Sisters of the Holy Faith had never ministered at Our Lady of Prompt Succor parish, it was chosen for our celebration because it is geographically close to the location of the former St. Robert Bellarmine, and St. Louise De Marillac parishes, two of the first parishes in which the sisters ministered in the earlier years of our ministry here. Some of the former parishioners, of these two parishes now closed, are registered members at Our Lady of Prompt Succor. We were very fortunate that the pastor, Father Marlon Mangubat, together with parish secretary, Angele Chaplain and parish business manager, Marie Montalbano, and the choir under the direction of Lisa DeHarde and accompanied by Maria Trosclair, as well as the parishioners of Our Lady of Prompt Succor were so hospitable and welcoming to us, and provided us with all the support we needed to celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup>. Deacon Tommy Lotz, a past sports coach at St. Robert's, and brother of associate, Judy Lotz, assisted the concelebrating priests. The church and cafeteria at Our Lady of Prompt Succor were warm and welcoming spaces, and well suited to a celebration. We were also blessed with some warm and sunny weather in the midst of what has been a very active hurricane season, from which our neighboring states and Puerto Rico continue to struggle to recover.

At our celebration we were blessed to have with us two of the founding members of the Louisiana mission, Sisters Vickey Haran and Anna Bolger who traveled from Ireland for the occasion. Vickey, on behalf of the two of them led us down memory lane to the beginnings, their wild experience of landing in a NYPD squad car as she and Anna got lost at Kennedy Airport, and of course without a cent in their pockets. In those days the superior carried the community purse, and that was usually a pittance. The story had a happy ending as the police got the two lost travelers united with Laurentina who was frantically waiting for them in another airport terminal. Then there was the story of the thunderstorm as their 'plane approached New Orleans, and followed by the incident where their 'plane could not land due to the presence of a dog on the runway.

They recalled their first experience of the New Orleans August heat and humidity, as well as their first experience of a party, New Orleans style, for which they dressed themselves in their best clothes. When they arrived at the party they found heaps of freshly-cooked seafood piled high on tables covered with newspaper! When you live here, this way of doing things makes very good sense, but for raw recruits it was a culture shock. There were a number of hilarious stories about language challenges. All were speaking English, but not of the same variety.

When our celebration at Our Lady of Prompt Succor concluded the sisters, accompanied by associate, Mary Coulson went on a pilgrimage to the sites of three of the early locations of their ministry which regrettably no longer function as Catholic parishes. The first stop was at an empty lot surrounded by chain-linked fencing. Vickey and Anna were particularly shocked by what they saw. Formerly this vacant lot had been the location of St. Robert Bellarmine Church, school and convent in Arabi. Here we paused to recall, remember and send out blessings to all who lived, learned, worshipped, played and ministered there, and in a symbolical gesture we left some flowers as a farewell to that part of our Holy Faith story. Onwards the pilgrims proceeded to the site of nearby St. Louise De Marillac parish. The former church and school build remain standing, and have been sold by the Archdiocese and put to an alternate use. The house on Aycock Street, in the Lr. Ninth Ward in which the sisters used live, is demolished, as are the neighboring houses. Mary Coulson helped to pull back the grass at the side-walk to uncover the remaining faintly-etched number on the curb, opposite the now vacant lot. Some of the sisters remembered that there was a pump-house at the end of the yard. That confirmed that we were at the right place. Again we engaged in our thanksgiving, blessing and farewell ritual and left some flowers as a symbol of closure. A neighboring family watched us. It was news to them that ever anyone had lived across their street, or that houses had formerly stood there. Is there a lesson to be learned from this about the passage of time and how quickly memories are lost? It took us a little longer to get to the former Epiphany on Duels Street where some of the church buildings remain, but the whole property has been sold. The remaining buildings are now derelict and boarded up. The school buildings are all demolished. It was a requirement of the Federal Emergency Management Agency after Katrina. At the Epiphany site we especially remembered Peggy Conway who died at the former convent. Herbert Roimenenq, one of the neighbors came out to greet us. The derelict buildings are a daily reminder to the Roimenenqs and other local residents of a life that has passed. Unfortunately, it seems the group which bought all the Epiphany properties has no money to develop them. The news at the time of sale by the archdiocese was that the Delta Sorority, the purchasers, had plenty of money, and hopes were high for redevelopment of the area. It now looks quite bleak for any renewal at this time. Those who have rebuilt their homes live, like many in New Orleans, in a sea of urban decay.

In planning for our event we felt that Margaret Aylward would wish us, in true Vincentian spirit, to mark the occasion by some social outreach, especially to try to help a family have a better life together. To that end we have collaborated with SBP, a local New Orleans non-profit agency which coordinates volunteers to help low-income families rebuild or repair their storm-impacted homes. Two other agencies, the Dominican Sisters of Hope of Newburg, New York and the Tucker family of Los Angeles have with us raised funds to mold remediate and refurbish the Anderson family home in Chalmette, Louisiana. To date our Holy Faith Anniversary project has raised over \$4,000 US dollars for this cause. We are most grateful to each person who has made a donation. We are happy to say that the demolition work has commenced on the Anderson home. SBP is hopeful that this family will be back in their newly repaired home by the spring of 2018.

Although SBP has enough funds to get going on repairing the Anderson home, the family has further needs. They are being housed at another location during the repair work, and have to have most of their furnishings and equipment replaced in their renovated home. Since SBP does most of their work by using voluntary labor, and under the leadership of Americorps workers who receive a small cost-of-living stipend, we are putting out a plea for volunteers from among our sisters, associates and friends to spend some time here working on this house. Please contact [mauraodonovan74@gmail.com](mailto:mauraodonovan74@gmail.com) for further information.

On the eve of our celebration the ten of us, sisters, were guests of the D’Arcys, an Irish family who live at Vendome Place in the Broadmoor area of New Orleans. Karen and Adrian are both Irish born, but their children, Grainne and Conor were born in New Orleans. The D’Arcys’ hospitality gave us an opportunity to gather together to socialize, enjoy and have dinner together, and was much appreciated by us.

We prepared a souvenir booklet for our celebration. We were blessed by the kind help of Lauren Hall who formatted the book for us as well as finding an efficient and reliable printer. Our congregational leader, Sister Rosaleen Cunniffe wrote a letter for insertion in the book, for which we are very grateful, and Sister Alice Aylward, or archivist was very helpful in providing us materials from the Glasnevin Archives. Our celebration was sponsored by our Holy Faith U.S. region for which the organizing committee, Sisters Nancy Hale, Maura O’Donovan, Pauline O’Reilly, Teresa Rooney and associate, Judy Lotz are very grateful.

Making contact with past students, former co-workers, friends, parishioners about our celebration was challenging. The areas of our Holy Faith, New Orleans ministerial footprint were particularly vulnerable in Katrina. New Orleans has experienced a huge demographic shake up, and most records, photos and contact information were lost in Katrina. We are now hearing that some were disappointed that they did not know in time to attend. Many sent us greetings, and we have tried to be in contact with each of them. All were remembered as we prayed and partied together. We are very grateful.