



The View From The Bluff

November 2017

SISTERS OF CHARITY OF OUR LADY OF MERCY

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Moments In Ministry Middlesex New Jersey Our Lady of Mt. Virgin School 1955-1984

March 1955, Mother Mary Bernard Campbell received a letter from Bishop George W. Ahr of Trenton, NJ. The Bishop proposed that the Hightstown Mission be turned over to the Victory Noll Sisters whose only mission was catechetical instruction, and, that the OLMs, whose mission included teaching in parochial schools, transfer to Our Lady of Mt. Virgin, Middlesex, NJ, to staff the parish school. Mother Mary Bernard and Council accepted the proposal provided it would not require more than four sisters. The OLMs assigned to the new mission were Sr. Roberta Bridgeman, Sr. M. Rita Dixon, Sr. Rosemary Boyd, Sr. M. Ernest Ferro, and, Sr. Christine Marie Herring. On August 29, 1955, Reverend Emanuel Gauci informed Mother Mary Bernard that the sisters had arrived safely. He also invited her to attend the dedication of the parish school on September 4, 1955. The OLMs remained in OLMV, Middlesex, until 1984.



Unknown Student, Sister Roberta Bridgeman, OLM Principal, 1955- 1961
Fr. Gauci, Pastor.



Top Left: Sr. Rita Dixon, 1955, getting ready to move from Legare St. to NJ.

Center: Sr. Roberta Bridgeman trying on some snow boots for the trip North.

Bottom: Sisters Rosemary Boyd, Christine Marie Herring, M. Ernest Ferro, M. Rita Dixon and Roberta Bridgeman, 1955.

Top Right: Sisters on steps of Convent.

Middle Right: Our Lady of Mt. Virgin School

Bottom Right: Our Lady of Mt. Virgin Convent

Sister Rosemary Boyd Remembers:

In early September, 1955, five of us Sisters arrived in Middlesex, NJ at Our Lady of Mt. Virgin parish. The pastor, Fr. Emanuel Gauci, and associate pastor, Fr. Delzell, greeting us warmly. The Victory Noll Sisters, whom we were replacing, and many parishoners were there also to welcome us.

I vaguely remember also that a table full of groceries was provided by the parishioners to fill our pantry shelves. School opened soon after our arrival. There were to be only four grades the first year. The new school building, however, was not quite ready on opening day. Blackboards had not yet arrived, so we taped paper to the walls for the first week or so. The tiled floor in the hallway was uneven in places and had to be replaced. This was done without too much of a problem for the teachers and students.

Every year a grade was added. In June of 1960 our first eighth grade class of students graduated—a total of 50 children.

During the first five years the teachers in the school were Sisters Christine Marie, Mary Earnest, Carmelita, Rosemary, Lawrence, Roberta, Mrs. Witkowski and Ms. Donnelly. Miss Donnelly, an Irish lady, died of cancer. She was a wonderful English teacher. Classes in grades 6-8 were departmentalized by Sr. Rosemary, Sr. Lawrence, and Miss Donnelly.

Seton Hall University—Classes at Seton Hall were attended on Saturdays during the school year and for nine weeks during the summer. Most of us, before starting at Seton Hall, already had 60 credits toward our degree from our OLM Junior College classes given at the Motherhouse.

CCD—During the school year we taught CCD classes on Sundays after Mass and on Wednesdays after school to middle grade students from the local public Junior High School. The Dondiego couple from the parish ran the CCD program for many years.

Religious Life Schedule- 5:45-6:30 Morning Prayer and meditation. 6:30 Daily Mass in our convent chapel. Often Fr. Gauci would have a requiem Mass to say. Sr. Roberta would play the organ and Sr. Christine Marie and I would sing the Latin hymns required for this liturgy. Every 4th Sunday we had Eucharistic adoration from 1:30-4:00 followed by benediction. Spiritual reading was required during supper and again after supper in the community room Monday-Friday. Recreation was after the readings. Night prayers followed recreation and grand silence began at 9 PM. Lights out by 10 PM or sooner, I think.

For me the years in Middlesex 1955-1960 were very happy ones. Sister Roberta was a wonderful Superior and Principal to live and work with. Also Srs. Christine Marie, Mary Earnest, Lawrence, Carmelita, and for one year Sr. Rita, were and remain always in my heart as lovely friends who blessed my life.

Around 1960 Father Gauci moved to Arizona because of health problems. He was sorely missed.

In 1970-71 I was sent to Middlesex to teach school while finishing up my Master's Degree work at Seton Hall. I enjoyed living and working with Sister Mary Joseph, Principal, Sister St. Anne, Superior, Sister Veronica Janas and Sister Pat Blaney. During this year the lovely new church was built.



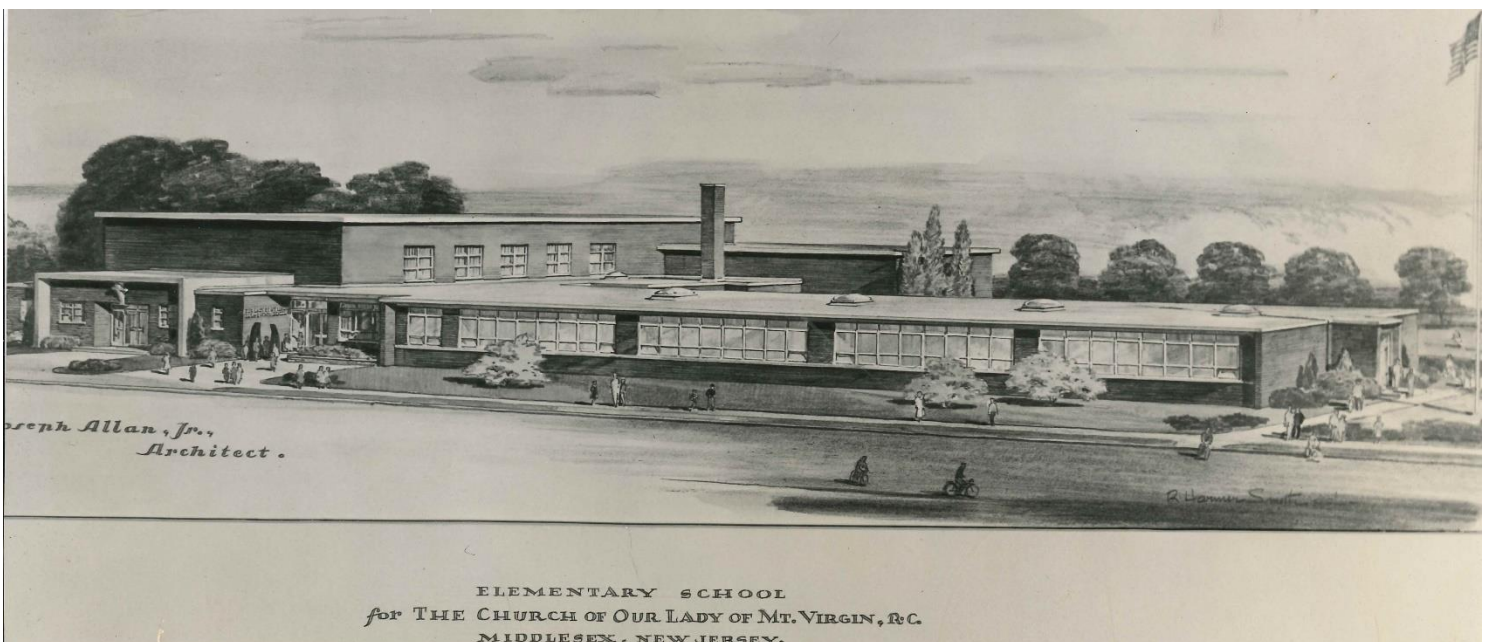
OLMs arrive in Middlesex, NJ

1955

Sisters Ernest Ferro, Rita Dixon, Roberta Bridgeman, Rosemary Boyd, Christine Marie Herring.



Convent Chapel





1956 Sister Rosemary Boyd



1961 Sisters Mary Thomas Neal, Magdalen Dwyer, Alice Joseph Brady, Bridget Sullivan



1968 Sisters Stella Maris Craven, Mary Bernard Campbell, Jean Marie O'Shea, Victoria Mennella with school staff.



1962 Sister Mary Lawrence Cass

Sister Bridget Sullivan remembers:

SNOW! Since snow is a rarity in South Carolina my first real experience with snow was amazing. We southerners sat on the back porch and watched it fall. Then some of the 7th and 8th graders came to visit and we were introduced to snow angels-remember we were in full habit! What a wonderful experience, wet habit and all. Thank God Sr. Roberta was the Superior and understood our fascination and let us enjoy it all for awhile!

1971



Sisters Mary Paul and St. Anne

Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Teachers

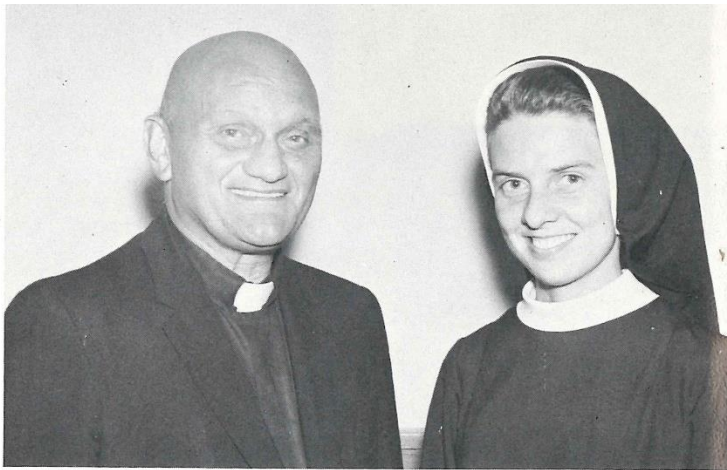


Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy staff
our parish school

Sisters Mary Joseph, Veronica, Mary Paul and Mary Rose

Sister Mary Joseph Ritter Remembers:

In 1962 I went to New Jersey as a substitute teacher for three months. It was my first experience of being out of Charleston and I remember being amazed at the large numbers of Priests and Sisters serving in the area. A class of 74 fourth graders became my challenge as most of them were from Italian or Polish ancestry and daily I mispronounced their names! In 1970 I was sent as Principal to Our Lady of Mt. Virgin and began studies at Seton Hall University. Both of these adventures were blessings!



Father Fibner with Sister Mary Joseph,
School Principal

The people in Middlesex, in particular the parents of the school children, were very supportive and always showed their appreciation for the Sisters. The PTO members constantly raised funds to provide for improved educational opportunities for their children. It was great to be involved in a school where teachers and parents worked together and I enjoyed the mission.

Sister St. Anne taught me the fine art of savoring a cup of tea, especially after the evening trips to Seton Hall. Mrs. Housman, who cooked for us, was a treasure! She offered not only good food but always a listening ear and wise guidance. "Snow Days" were fun but driving in the snow – or being snow-bound for a week – presented a different kind of challenge!

Many OLMs visited us during the years and we had memorable trips touring New York City, usually ending with a stop at Fitzpatrick's Store for habits! One of our finest outings was a visit to Weston Priory in Vermont. Once we found a place to stay, it became even more enjoyable!

I am grateful the Community responded to the call to "go north"!



1972 Sisters from Gibbstown and Charleston came to visit.
Sisters Ann Marie Strange, Martha Woodruff, Mary Joseph Ritter
Ellen Marie Mackie, Michael Marie Aun, Donna Lareau
Pat Blaney, Mary Paul Hogan, Veronica Janas, St. Anne Whalen

1972
Sisters Stella Maris Craven, Margaretta Molony, Mary Cyril
Murray, Veronica Janas, Marie Cecilia Ferro.



Sisters Left to Right:

Immaculata Codere

Mary David deBose

Victoria Menella

Mary Thomas Neal

Mary Bernard Campbell

de Lourdes Eassy

Carmelita Boyd

Stella Maris Craven

Sr. Carmelita Boyd Remembers:

I have fond memories of being stationed in Middlesex, NJ. I taught seventy children in the First Grade. I quickly enlisted the bright children in each row to help me. Sr. Roberts was our Principal and Superior. She was

a delight to live and work with. Every Saturday and through the summer we would go to classes at Seton Hall to get our degree. On Saturdays we would prepare the meal by using the leftovers from the week to make a pot luck casserole. This was an "order from headquarters". Some fun! Father Gauci was a loving Pastor and his assistant was a riot when he would dress up and scare the children on Halloween. Great memories of Middlesex.

Sister Stella Maris Craven Remembers:

I taught 8th grade at Our Lady of Mount Virgin for three years, from 1964 to 1967 and returned in 1968 as Principal. I found the people in Middlesex friendly and generous. They were constantly bringing us vegetables from their gardens and delicious bakery cakes and pastries. One lady would come at intervals to fill our freezer with wonderful meats. There was a statue of St. Joseph in the kitchen. We kept flowers in a vase in front of the statue and were told that legend had it that we would receive gifts the color of the flowers. We had more fun trying to guess what we would receive and found the legend to be true. Before returning after retreat in Charleston, some of the mothers would fill the refrigerator and make the beds. This was a great welcome after beginning our trip at 4:00 a.m. with six Sisters in an unairconditioned car in the August heat. In addition to teaching we attended college classes at the Seton Hall campus in Newark on Wednesday evenings and Saturdays and taught CCD classes on Sundays. After being assigned to Middlesex I continued to return in the summer to take classes at Seton Hall South Orange campus to complete my BS degree and begin my Masters which I completed at the Citadel.

Sister Ann Billard Remembers:

As I recall memories of the mission Our Lady of Mt. Virgin, Middlesex, NJ, the first verse of the song *In the Name of Love* by Sr. Jennifer Corlett, OSU and Rev. Mark Hobson surfaces.

Do you remember the call?

When did you hear your name out loud?

Can you remember the word that you heard when the story began in you?

Listen, remember, catch glimpses of springtime

and roots sinking deep in the heart of our God

and you were carried. Green and stretching to life in the name of love.

It was here in my home parish in 1955, when I first met the OLM sisters who came from Charleston, SC that the story of my OLM vocation began. It was a snowy school holiday when I first met these sisters. My brothers and the neighborhood children were all planning to go have a snowball fight with the nuns from the south. They asked me if I would like to go. I was curious and excited, as I had not yet met these sisters, as I was not attending OLMV School. School opened with grades 1-4 and I was in grade five. It was a fun experience. These nuns laughed, and seemed to know how to have fun. That stuck. I remember well these OLM Sisters from the first year: Sr. M Roberta, Sr. Mary Ernest, Sr. Rosemary and Sr. Christine Marie.

Over the next few years, I continued to “hang out” at the convent with neighborhood girls. On Saturday afternoons, we helped the nuns clean the chapel. As a high school student, I taught CCD on Sundays alongside these sisters who seemed so young and who came across as happy in their vocation. Glimpses of springtime include Sr. Bridget teaching me how to do lesson plans for my Sunday school classes, Sr. Alice Joseph, Sr. Mary Thomas, Sr. Carmelita, Sr. Vincent, Sr. Lawrence encouraging me. I recall Sr. Mary Cyril meeting me in New York to buy the “nun” clothes I would need when I entered. All these OLMs I recall supporting and nurturing my call to the OLMs. I remember a high school teacher asking me, “Why did you choose the OLM community?” I answered, “They come across as happy women. They’re joyful. They know how to have fun.” The roots sunk deep and I have been carried since.



Sisters Nancy Purdue, Mary Thomas Neal, Jean Marie O'Shea, Marie Cecilia Ferro

Sister Mary Thomas Neal Remembers:

The words that come to mind about the Middlesex experience are **CULTURE SHOCK**. The shock came from many things—so many highways with overpasses and under passages, so much traffic moving almost bumper to bumper, on the side streets only young saplings and few large trees lining the way. In the classroom sixty five third graders.

However, Father Gauci and parental enthusiasm were supportive. Their energy and organizational skills were impressive, exemplified by Mrs. Cella, the cafeteria manager. In addition, the fun parts were the Women's Club annual visit to Radio City Christmas Spectacular preceded by the great restaurant at the Newark Airport (recognized as very good at the time). For me it was an outstanding day.

The diocesan Fall meeting set the spirit for the year. The hall was decorated with masses of flowers, bright Fall colors. Officers decked out in lovely colored Fall suits, and the excitement of the crowd. The "Jersey Girls" were an inspiration to me. These are only a few things that brightened my experience of Middlesex. There was satisfaction in preparing lesson plans, completing the dreaded ten or so bulletin boards each month, preparing lesson as best I could in spite of the odds, especially inability in classroom discipline. This was tempered by some cultural frills—Fall Festival foods, pizza frites (Italian fried dough), Italian sausage with peppers and onions, lots of tasty treats.

Mount Virgin School was always a happy place in my estimation with success teaching and learning. Years went by and I returned as Principal for six years that was united in an atmosphere of joyful purpose, learning together to grow in Faith, knowledge, and love of God, others and self. Recently a young father visited me to thank Sister Jean Marie, Cecilia and me for the atmosphere we provided. It was with regret and sadness that the OLMs withdrew from OLMV School in 1984.



1984 Former OLM teachers and principals return for the farewell events.

L-R: Sr. Nancy Purdue, Sr. Marie Cecilia Ferro, Sr. Stella Maris Craven, Sr. Mary Rose White, Sr. Mary Thomas Neal, Sr. Jean Marie O'Shea, Sr. Anne Francis Campbell (General Superior), Sr. deLourdes Eassy, Sr. Agatha Sloan, Sr. Ann Billard, Sr. Mary Joseph Ritter.

***note the school closed permanently in 2011.**



School says farewell to Sister Mary Bernard Campbell 1968



1979 - OLMs return to Middlesex for the 150th Jubilee of the founding of the OLM Community



BLESSING AND TOAST

150 Jubilee in Middlesex

Victor Hoagland, C.P.

God, our Father,
With kindness and love
you bless your people
and give them their food
in due season

Bless your Sisters of Charity
of Our Lady of Mercy
in this season of their
celebration.

Strengthen them with your gifts
that they may reflect
your love and mercy to all.
You bless every table.
Bless this table of
our celebration.

May we share in the blessings you
extend today to your Sisters.

Amen.

A religious Community is like a river --
beginning as a small stream,
gathering force and direction as
it goes forth on its way
flowing out into the endless sea.

Like a fruitful river this good Community
of Sisters
began as a tiny stream in the warm soil of
South Carolina.
For 150 years, in good times and bad,
it has brought silent, humble enrichment
into countless human lives

From the South it has flowed North,
to bring its own unique gifts to this state
of New Jersey and the Diocese
of Trenton.

May it go on its course -- and grow strong--
May it always be directed toward the
infinite seas of God's will,
peace and rest.

OLM Principals



Sr. Roberta Bridgeman 1955-1961

Sr. Magdalen Dwyer 1961-1964

Sr. Mary Bernard Campbell 1964-1968

Sr. Stella Maris Craven 1968-1969

Sr. Mary Cyril Murray 1969-1970

Sr. Mary Joseph Ritter 1970-1975

Sr. Mary Rose White 1975-1976

Sr. Mary Thomas Neal 1976-1984



The Culture of Encounter

Pope Francis establishes a World Day of the Poor

Pope Francis officially declared the first World Day of the Poor to be celebrated on November 19, 2017, the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time. In a message to the world entitled "Let us love, not with words but with deed," Francis invites the church and all people of good will to reach out, encounter and touch "all those who stretch out their hands and plead for our help and solidarity" (#6). Such an encounter is sorely needed in light of the current global refugee and immigrant crisis. Francis suggests that on "this Sunday, if there are poor people where we live who seek protection and assistance, let us draw close to them: it will be a favorable moment to encounter the God we seek" (#7). Francis' message for the World Day of the Poor ends with this profound and insightful observation: "The poor are not a problem: they are a resource from which to draw as we strive to accept and practice in our lives the essence of the Gospel" (#9). How will you make time and space to encounter the poor, not just on this day but every day?

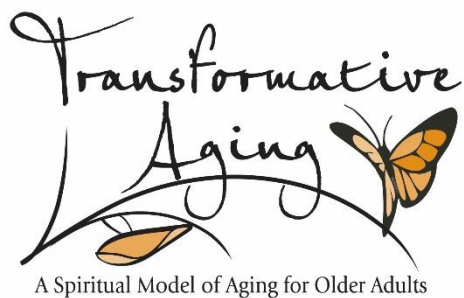
Source: Biagio Mazza for Celebration Publications



The annual conference was held Oct. 3-6 at Niagara Falls, Ontario Canada.



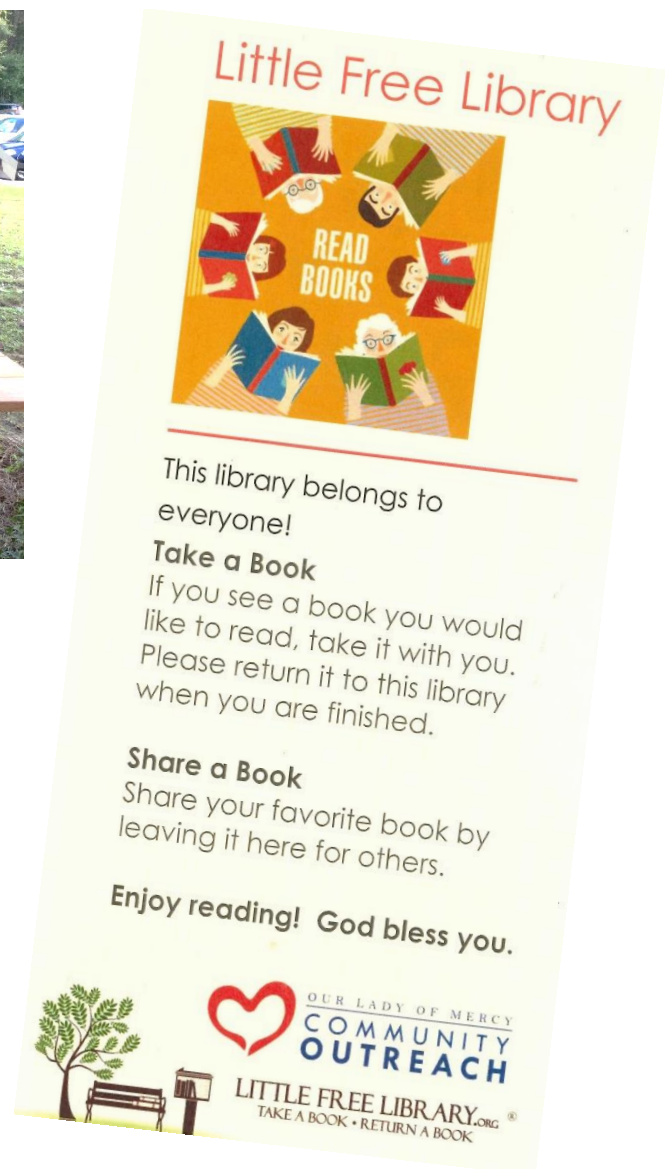
L-R Tanya Mullin, CSM Communicator; Donna Sartor, SC-NJ Communicator; Diane Curtis, SC-Nazareth Communicator; Sister Carol Wentworth, SC-OLM Communicator; Claire Meyerhoff, DC-St. Louise Communicator; Sister Grace Hartzog, SC Federation Ex. Director; Jane Strittmatter, SC-Seton Hill Communicator; Spalding Hurst, SC-Nazareth Communicator; Sister Joanne O'Regan, CSM Communicator; Belinda Davis, DC-St. Louise Communicator. On Screen: Katie Zeller, DC-St. Louise Communicator; Kristen Blacksher, SC-Federaton. The SCL and SC-Cincinnati Communicators were also present at the conference.



Transformative Aging Program goes to Sisters of Mercy Convent in Oklahoma City, OK October 1-6 for a retreat presented by Sister Ann Billard, OLM (4th from the left). The Sisters of Mercy gave her a grand send off at the conclusion of the retreat.



As people of faith, we are called to transformation. Transformative Aging provides the older adult with tools to foster one's spiritual growth while promoting a positive approach to one's aging process. Spiritual growth occurs via self-transcendence. Transformative Aging enhances this process providing a way for the older adult to become a Transcendent Elder— one who has said "yes" to the call of aging by living in the promise of the resurrection while surrendering to the losses of aging. Source: Transformative Aging Program Brochure



Our Lady of Mercy Community Outreach, a sponsored ministry of the OLMs, has opened a "Free Little Library" on the Johns Island campus. Feel free to donate or take a book to read!

Saturday, November 4, 7am-noon

OLM
COMMUNITY
YARD SALE

A Prayer Meditation for All Saints Day

by Safiyah Fosua

We give you thanks, O God, for all the saints who ever worshiped you
Whether in brush arbors or cathedrals,
Weathered wooden churches or crumbling cement meeting houses



ALL SAINTS' DAY

Where your name was lifted and adored.
We give you thanks, O God, for hands lifted in praise:
Manicured hands and hands stained with grease or soil,
Strong hands and those gnarled with age
Holy hands
Used as wave offerings across the land.
We thank you, God, for hardworking saints;
Whether hard-hatted or steel-booted,
Head ragged or aproned,
Blue-collared or three-piece-suited
They left their mark on the earth for you, for us, for our
children to come.
Thank you, God, for the tremendous sacrifices made by
those who have gone before us.
Bless the memories of your saints, God.
May we learn how to walk wisely from their examples of
faith, dedication, worship, and love.



The world's an inn, and death the journey's end.

-John Dryden

The call of death is a call of love. Death can be sweet if we answer it in the affirmative, if we accept it as one of the great eternal forms of life and transformation.

-Hermann Hesse

Death is not extinguishing the light; it is putting out the lamp because dawn has come.

-Rabindranath Tagore

Death is the supreme festival on the road to freedom.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Is death the last sleep? No--it is the last and final awakening.

-Sir Walter Scott

For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come!

-William Shakespeare



A day of prayer and reflection was presented at May Forest by Cenacle Sisters Susan Arcaro and Barbara Young. 35 Partners in Charity, future Partners in Charity, and OLM Sisters attended.



December 9 at 9:30-Advent Program presented by Sister Susan Schorsten, HM in John England Hall. All Partners in Charity, future Partners in Charity and OLM Sisters are invited.



This is the *Day*
that the Lord has made,
let us *Rejoice*
and be glad in it.
Psalm 118:24

