

Servants of Mary
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Fall 2016



Servite Sisters Today

A Newsletter for Our Families and Friends

Telling the Story, Keeping the Vision Alive

“Women of Compassion,” which is a permanent exhibit of the story and the vision of the Ladysmith Servite Sisters, opened Sunday, June 19, with a blessing of the exhibit and a reception.

The occasion was attended by about 150 people including Servite Sisters, former Servites, members of the Rusk County community, Sisters from other communities – one from as far away as Switzerland – and Bishop James P. Powers, bishop of the diocese of Superior.

The exhibit traces the 104 year history, mission, and legacy of the

Ladysmith Servites from 1912 when six Sisters of St. Joseph left their community in LaGrange, Illinois, and came to Ladysmith, at the invitation of the Servite friars, to staff the new parish school. It is housed in what was the chapel of the Sisters’ former motherhouse – now the Indianhead Community Action Agency auditorium. ICAA purchased the motherhouse in 2010 for its administrative offices.



School Sisters of Notre Dame Joyelle Proot (left) and Gen Cassani, designers of the Women of Compassion exhibit, stand before a panel highlighting the global outreach of the Servite Sisters’ Mary Alphonse Bradley fund.

First panel of the “Women of Compassion” exhibit in the Indianhead Community Action Agency auditorium, 1000 College Avenue West, Ladysmith.

Women in the church, we look to Mary, the power of womanhood.

THE LADYSMITH SERVITE STORY BEGINS 1912 - 1937

1233 In the fall of 1912, six young women left the Sisters of St. Joseph Community in La Grange, Illinois, to teach in a new school at St. Mary's parish in Ladysmith, Wisconsin. The move to Ladysmith came at the invitation of the Servite friars who served St. Mary's parish from 1910 to 1953. Thus began over a century of bold undertakings to follow the call sometimes with little more than their own faith and courage to serve God's people. Deeper roots are found in remote beginnings traced to the Servite Order in Florence, Italy 1233.

1912 THE LADYSMITH SERVITE STORY BEGINS 1912 - 1937. In the fall of 1912, six young women left the Sisters of St. Joseph Community in La Grange, Illinois, to teach in a new school at St. Mary's parish in Ladysmith, Wisconsin. The move to Ladysmith came at the invitation of the Servite friars who served St. Mary's parish from 1910 to 1953. Thus began over a century of bold undertakings to follow the call sometimes with little more than their own faith and courage to serve God's people. Deeper roots are found in remote beginnings traced to the Servite Order in Florence, Italy 1233.

1914 The St. Mary's Elementary School opened on October 10, 1912, with 95 students in grades 1-8 and five teaching sisters. The Sisters' initial response to ministry was service in Christian education and care of the sick. Two years later, the parish opened St. Mary's High school, also staffed by the Sisters.

1916 The exhibit consists mainly of wall-mounted panels featuring photographs, artwork, historical facts and stories, and is enhanced with banners. It was designed by School Sisters of Notre Dame Gen Casanni and Joyelle Proot. They said of the exhibit, “It’s a presentation, and it’s a ministry of the Servants of Mary going into the future.”

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President's Message

Cherishing the Past While Embracing the Future

When my mother died she left me a box of papers. Recently I opened that box and discovered that she had kept every letter I had written home after I entered the convent. Reading them now with older eyes has brought me to reflection and new insights.

Those first letters showed excitement and energy as I learned about religious life. They told of creativity as I began to teach. They told of strength and understanding as the church and the world changed. And they showed my compassion as I followed the call to chaplaincy. The letters share the stories and the struggle of those years. Change was constant and it was exciting at first, but with time it became a burden.

As I read these testaments to a life, I began to understand more deeply a saying I have framed on my wall. "At each stage of learning we must give up something, even if it is a way of life that we have always known." In the early years I expected only small changes. Maybe a change in the grade I taught. Or where I taught.

But who would expect that there were new careers? Or that Vatican II would bring about changes in the understanding of church? Or the way that we became involved in the liturgy? Over a span of fifty years so many things have changed. And each time I gave up something as we moved to a new way, a new understanding.

Servants of Mary have come to a new place, as well. In June we dedicated an exhibit that shares the story

of our history. From the foundation in 1912, Servite Sisters have listened to the needs of the church. When children needed an education, there were schools. When the sick needed care, there were hospitals. When the church changed, there was adult education. Servites have continued to listen to God's call. The changes that are reflected in the exhibit did not come easily. Decisions made together have called for deep listening, for honest dialogue, and for humble prayer. At each point God's call was to move ahead, and we left behind a way of life that we had grown to love.



The letters from 1961 show how I have aged. The exhibit in what was once our Chapel shows how the Servants of Mary have changed. Together, we cherish the past as we look back, but open our hearts and hands to the present and the future. We no longer staff Catholic schools, but we tutor or work in the library. We no longer staff hospitals, but we visit the sick, hold their hands, and say a prayer. Some of us are no longer able to minister outside the home, but we hold your requests in our hearts as we pray.

At each stage of life we are asked to give up something. As we move on and look back, we can see the graces and gifts that helped us to grow in wisdom and grace.

In the words of Pope Francis, I pray that we may continue "to look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion, and to embrace the future with hope."

Mary Alice Willems, OSM

Mary Alice Willems, OSM
Leadership Team Member

Editor's Note:

For this issue we invited Sister Mary Alice Willems, a member of the Leadership Team, to pen the President's Message.

Sister Cecilia Honored for Service

Sister Cecilia Fandel received the Jayne Thomas Grassroots Volunteer Recognition Award at a ceremony in Ladysmith on June 3, 2016, in recognition of her work in the Crossroads Literacy program. Indianhead Community Action Agency, the Ladysmith-based organization that sponsors the program and conferred the award, called Sister Cecilia “a compassionate and dedicated public servant who helps adults achieve enhanced literacy.”

ICAA Board Chairman Eldon Skogen, who presented the award, praised Sister Cecilia for her volunteer work in literacy and other programs, calling her “an individual who has shown commitment to the community.”

In accepting the award, Sister said that her first experience in volunteer work was in second grade, when her teacher Sister Mary Flora asked her to help other students with their reading and math.

For the past five years Sister has tutored adults in reading and language arts skills in the literacy program. Some of her students are seeking a GED and need better composition and comprehension skills, others have never learned to read, and still others are immigrant workers for whom English is a second language. Sister has also tutored inmates in the county jail.

Earlier this year, Sister Cecilia also received the Distinguished Graduate Award from Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic School in Ladysmith. Besides graduating from OLS, she also taught there and served as principal.

(At Right) Sister Cecilia receives the Distinguished Graduate Award from Principal Tami Stewart (left).



(Above) Sister Cecilia receives award for volunteer service from Indianhead Community Action Agency.



Servite Sisters Challenged to Plan for Future

Twenty-eight Servite Sisters, including two by Skype, gathered for a General Chapter April 4–7, 2016, at Siena Retreat Center in Racine, Wisconsin. The theme of this year's Chapter, "Like a living stream let mercy flow," reflected the Year of Mercy declared by Pope Francis.

Fr. Ricardo Martín of Sacred Heart Parish in Racine presided at the opening liturgy on the feast of the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Sisters Bonnie Alho and Kateri Guske coordinated the prayer and environment for the Chapter. On entering the Chapter room, each Sister received a mandala pin, symbolizing harmony, wholeness, and healing. The Sisters were encouraged to wear the pins during the Chapter to remind them of their support for each other.

Servants of Mary president Sister Theresa Sandok presented the Leadership Team report. She spoke

about the need for future planning, citing a scriptural passage: "When you were young, you would fasten your belt and go wherever you liked. But when you get old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten your belt and lead you where you don't want to go" (John 21:18). "If we do not plan for ourselves," she said, "someone else will do it for us." Demographic projections indicate that there will soon come a time when the community will no longer have Sisters able to carry out leadership, management, and pastoral functions for the group.

With their current reality in mind, Chapter members adopted the following call and commitment: "We hear God calling us to be Gospel-centered, compassionate women, inspired by Mary's *fiat*, letting go of what makes us comfortable and fearlessly open to what will evolve. In order to fulfill this call, we commit ourselves to prayer, deep listening, communication,

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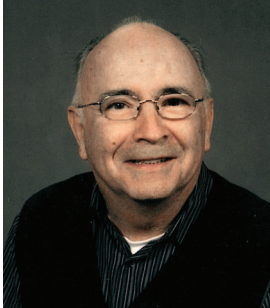


Sister Theresa Completes Service on Bishops' Advisory Group

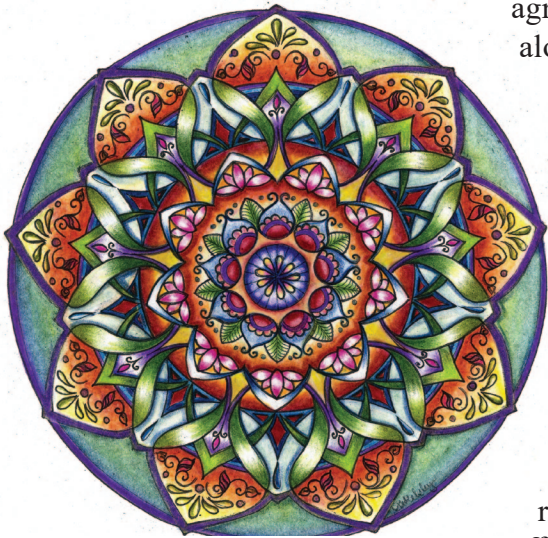
collaboration, and responding to the challenges of our times.”

The Sisters then entered into a process of prayerful discernment to select a Leadership Team for the next four years. Sisters Sean Fox, Theresa Sandok, and Mary Alice Willems were selected once again to lead the congregation.

The heavy mood of the topics on the agenda was lightened by Chapter facilitator Br. Sean McLaughlin,



SDS, (*pictured here*), who opened the selection process with a rollicking rendition of “The Best of Times Is Now,” a favorite tune of the McLaughlin sisters.



Servite Sisters at the 2016 General Chapter received a mandala pin (*pictured here*), symbolizing harmony, wholeness, and healing.

Servants of Mary president Sister Theresa Sandok recently completed a four-year term on the National Advisory Council (NAC) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The NAC is composed of some fifty Catholic men and women – mostly laity, but also a number of sisters, priests, and bishops – from around the nation. In light of its diverse membership, the NAC is sometimes called “the Church in miniature.” Sister Theresa served as a representative of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, an association of about 1,350 leaders of congregations of sisters in the United States.



The work of the NAC is to advise the bishops on proposals scheduled to come before them at their biannual general assemblies. Through a process called “profile voting,” NAC members indicate whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with a proposal, or abstain, along with rationale for their position. The majority of these proposals are submitted by bishops’ committees, and the NAC is asked to react to them. Others are initiated by NAC when there is an issue NAC members would like the bishops to consider.

In a letter to Sister Theresa at the conclusion of her term, USCCB president Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz wrote:

“On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and its member bishops and staff, I want to thank you for your four years of service on our National Advisory Council (NAC). The National Advisory Council has, for many years, been an important resource to the bishops of the United States. Since its inception, it has offered valuable insight, opinion, and advice to the bishops on so many significant matters which we have addressed.”

Jubilee

Two Sisters - 145 Years of Service



Sister Mary Catherine Izral

Sister Mary Catherine Izral celebrated 75 years of religious life this year. Sister was born in Chicago, Illinois, on April 30, 1919. She was the middle child in a family of six girls and one boy. The family moved to Catawba, Wisconsin, when she was in first grade. After completing high school she moved back to Chicago where she worked in the hosiery department at Sears and took evening classes at Loyola University College.

She entered the convent as a postulant in 1939 at age 20 and professed first vows in 1941. She earned a bachelor's degree from the College of St. Catherine, Saint Paul, Minnesota, and a master's from the University of Minnesota.

She taught in Catholic elementary schools in Wisconsin, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Illinois for 35 years, and then taught religious education and did sacristy work for

about 10 years at St. Agnes Parish in Saint Paul. Her one brother is a priest.

Since 2007, Sister Mary Catherine has resided at Regina Senior Living in Hastings, Minnesota. She celebrated her jubilee on August 15 at Regina with other residents, Servite Sisters, and Secular Servites.

As a jubilee gift, an anonymous donor left a set of art supplies in Sister Mary Catherine's room, and she has become an avid fan of adult coloring. Some of her artwork (pictured above) graces the hallway near her room.



Sister Loretta Lonsdorf

Sister Loretta Lonsdorf marks 70 years of religious life this year. She was born in Athens, Wisconsin, on June 2, 1926, the self-proclaimed "spoiled middle child" of five children, four girls and one boy.

After graduating from Athens high school, she entered the convent on September 6, 1944. She became a novice in 1945 receiving the name Sister Mary Marcella, and later returned to her baptismal name.

She professed first vows in 1946. She earned a bachelor's degree from St. Norbert College, DePere, Wisconsin, and a master's in Theology and Pastoral Ministry from the University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas.

Sister served as a teacher and principal for 42 years in Catholic elementary schools in Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. She ministered as parish visitor and director

of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) at St. Anthony Catholic Church, Brooksville, Florida. She is now retired and lives at Ashton Gardens, Sun City Center, Florida.

(Left) Sister Loretta Lonsdorf

Finding Joy in Helping Children in Romania

By Sister Barbara Thomalla, OSM

“You could go to Romania and work with Global Volunteers!” I heard those words on a Sunday after the homily at Mass. No human person said those words. I think they came from God.

My friends Barb and John Winters told me a few days earlier about their plans to go to Romania with Global Volunteers. Later that Sunday I asked myself, “Do I really want to go to Romania?” I heard my heart say, “Yes!” That was September 6, 2015. By November 6 we were on a plane to Bucharest for two weeks of working and touring in Romania.

We traveled five hours by bus from Bucharest to Barlad. Romania was the last country in Europe to overthrow Communism in 1989, and Barlad is in the poorest section of the country.

In Barlad we helped make a difference in the lives of eight children with neurological disabilities such as fetal alcohol syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism, and dwarfism. The children ranged in age from eight months to ten years. Two of the children were able to walk and talk but were delayed in cognitive skills; the others were profoundly limited in motor and cognitive skills. All were very small for their age. We sang to them, moved their muscles, helped them sit or roll, and offered them various toys to let them know they were important and maybe elicit a smile.

The children currently live in a placement center, which is basically an orphanage. They periodically come to the Municipal Hospital’s Elena Beldiman Pediatric Unit for up to 21 days for re-evaluation by the medical staff and for stimulation by Global Volunteers. The Global Volunteers’ program employs a local woman to work with the children as a caregiver and to guide the volunteers.



Global Volunteers’ country managers coordinate with the placement center and the director of the hospital’s pediatric unit to choose children who are likely to make progress through love and stimulation. The current managers have worked with some of the children for twelve years. They told us that children who were initially very withdrawn and delayed made progress thanks to the work of the volunteers.

The volunteers painted and decorated the walls of a hospital room with colorful toys and animals. The hospital’s play room, which the volunteers decorated and supplied with toys, was very colorful and inviting. The rest of the rooms were stark white, with four simple beds.

Global Volunteers is an international volunteer organization founded thirty years ago by Burnham “Bud” Philbrook, who was taught by Servite Sisters at St. Rose of Lima School in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The organization began its Romanian partnership in 2004, focusing on projects for at-risk and disabled children.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve with Global Volunteers and to learn firsthand about the country of Romania.

At left, Sister Barbara holds an orphan in the pediatric unit of the Barlad Municipal Hospital in Romania.

Sister Barbara Thomalla is public health nurse with Saint Paul-Ramsey County Public Health.

Sister Mary Eugenia Tremblay, osm

1921–2016

In Memoriam



Chicago, and a master's in English and English literature from Marquette University in Milwaukee.

Her teaching career spanned 42 years. She taught at all levels, from kindergarten to university, in Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, and New Jersey. She was an English instructor at Mount Senario College in Ladysmith and at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point.

She authored two books of poetry and a historical novel on the life of Servite Saint Peregrine Laziosi called “Pilgrim Aflame” (1958), later reissued as “Healing Saint” (2000). She enjoyed painting and other artistic activities.

In 1983 Sister Mary Eugenia and her sister, Sister Mary Celestine, moved to Sherman, Illinois, to work with the elderly at The Villas Retirement Community. Nine years later they retired to Addolorata Villa in Wheeling, Illinois, where they volunteered in the activities department. In 2005 they moved to Felician Village in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, to be closer to their elderly brother, Fr. Eugene. They returned to the Villa in 2008.

Sister Eugenia died in her 77th year of religious profession. She was preceded in death by her parents and all her siblings.

A funeral Mass was celebrated at Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Ladysmith on May 13, with burial in the convent cemetery.

Sister Mary Eugenia Tremblay, 95, died on May 5, 2016, at Addolorata Villa, Wheeling, Illinois. She was born in Chippewa County, Colburn Township, Wisconsin, on August 16, 1921, to Alexander and Magdalen (Russell) Tremblay, the youngest of seven children.

When she was four years old, her family moved to Ladysmith, where she attended St. Mary's Elementary School and High School and was taught by Servite Sisters.

She entered the Servants of Mary on Aug. 30, 1937. She made her first profession of vows on Aug. 16, 1939, and her final profession on Aug. 15, 1945. She earned a teaching certificate from Rusk County Normal School, a bachelor's from DePaul University in

Tremblay Family, 1962. Seated: Alexander Tremblay with daughters, from left, Sister Mary Celestine, OSM; Luella; and Sister Mary Eugenia, OSM. Standing: from left, sons Father Russell, OMI; Cecil; John; and USAF Chaplain Father Eugene, OMI.



Sister Mary Pat Hill, OSM

1947–2016

In Memoriam



Sister received a bachelor's degree with a major in education and a minor in social studies from Mount Senario College in Ladysmith, Wisconsin. She received a master's in applied theology from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. She also attended a summer program at the Maryknoll School of Theology in Maryknoll, New York.

She taught in Catholic elementary schools in Minnesota, New Jersey, and Wisconsin for thirteen years. She worked at Groundwork for a Just World in Detroit, Michigan, and at Bread for the World in Washington, DC. From 1997 until her death she ran a website called Hill Connections, a ministry linking contemplation with social justice, and faith with action.

An avid social justice activist, Sister served on several national and Servite justice and peace boards and committees and volunteered with a number of social justice and legislative organizations. She could often be found marching or boycotting for social justice causes and issues. She also participated in immersion experiences in Mexico and Nicaragua.

Sister Mary Pat Hill, 69, died on August 14, 2016, at Hillview Health Care Center in La Crosse, Wisconsin, following a long battle with cancer.

She was born in La Crosse on May 15, 1947, to Merle and Ann Marie (Daly) Hill, the oldest of six children, and grew up in La Crosse.

She joined the Servants of Mary in 1961 as a high school freshman. She made her first profession of vows in 1967 and her final profession in 1974.

Sister Mary Pat died in her 49th year of religious profession. She was preceded in death by her mother, brother Thomas, sister Catherine Yeager, and stepmother Jayne (Nault) Hill. She is survived by her father, brother James, sisters Elizabeth Hennig and Margaret Soller, and her Servite Community.

A memorial service was held on Aug. 17 at Blaschke & Schneider Funeral Home in La Crosse. A funeral Mass was celebrated on Aug. 19 at Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Ladysmith, with burial in the convent cemetery.



Compassion Retreat Draws Servites Together

Ladysmith Servite Sisters Mary De Lourdes Plourde, Rosemary Fandel, and Mary Dominica Effertz attended a retreat on “Boundless Compassion” presented by Omaha Servite Sister Joyce Rupp (second left), June 19–23, 2016. Over 50 people from all walks of life participated in the retreat, which was sponsored by Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality, a ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Sister Joyce is an award-winning author and popular speaker. She describes herself as a spiritual midwife, one who assists others in birthing an ever fuller and deeper faith life.



The Servite Sisters' Leadership Team

The Leadership Team (from left) Sisters Sean Fox, Mary Alice Willems, and Theresa Sandok, are pictured with Bishop James Powers following the celebration of their Installation Mass on June 19, 2016. They will serve a four-year term. Each has been on the Leadership Team previously. Sister Theresa has served as president for 16 years. Sister Mary Alice has also served for 16 years, and Sister Sean has been on the Team 8 years.



Sisters' Garden in Ladysmith

Sister De Lourdes is pictured in the garden on September 16. “Just look at the spectacular colors of the flowers in our garden!” she said. “They are so pretty, and you can see them from a distance. We planted these flowers because the deer dislike the taste of them. We are still producing and eating cukes, potatoes, tomatoes, and onions. Beans are finished.” Sister De Lourdes, 85, and her gardening companion, Sister Rosemary, 80, announced that this will be their last vegetable garden – but they won’t stop planting flowers.

“Women of Compassion” Exhibit

Continued from cover

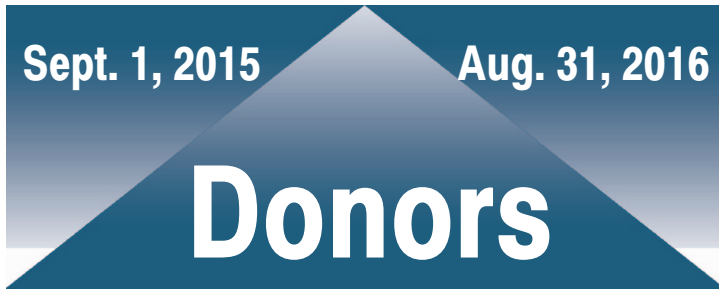
Sister Theresa Sandok, president of the Ladysmith Servites, said of the project, “this exhibit has been over two years in the making, and we are very pleased with it.”

The exhibit is open to the public Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m., except when the auditorium is in use. Visitors are encouraged to call ahead at (715) 532-4222.



Marie Therese Woods, pictured at left at age four, was adopted as an infant by the Servite Sisters in 1923. Seven years later the Sisters adopted three little orphan girls, the Vogel sisters, two of whom later professed vows as Servants of Mary: Sisters Mary Angelica and Mary Ambrose. This photo of Marie Therese appears in the “Women of Compassion” exhibit.

**We are deeply grateful to you, our donors,
and hold you in our prayers.**



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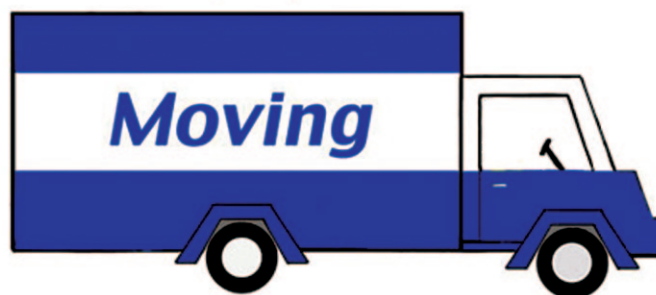
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Servite Sisters Today
is an official publication of the
Ladysmith Servite Sisters (Servants of Mary)
published annually and distributed
to family and friends.

Editor: Sandra DeGidio, OSM
Design & Production: Countryside Marketing, Inc.
Circulation Manager: Mary Heintz

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Sister Virginia (*Finally*) Retires

Sister Virginia Schwartz, age 85, retired August 15 from her longtime ministry as parish director at St. Ann's Parish in Cable, Wisconsin. The parish community held a retirement party for her on August 7 at Lakewoods Resort in Cable, beginning with Mass.

In a letter to Sister on the occasion of her

retirement, Bishop of Superior James Powers wrote: "It was twenty-one years ago that you were appointed as Parish Director of St. Ann Parish [by Bishop Raphael Fliss]."

"Your amazing leadership, friendly disposition and infectious smile will be missed, Sr. Virginia, but know that the Diocese, the parishioners, and all those you've ministered to feel blessed to have had you in their life. Please know how grateful I am, as well as my predecessors, to have had you as a leader in the Diocese."

Twenty-one years ago the ministry of parish director was a relatively new concept, and Sister Virginia was one of the first parish directors in the Diocese of Superior. As parish director, she provided administrative, liturgical, pastoral,

educational, and spiritual services to the parish and was responsible for the maintenance of parish property.

Here is how she described a day in the life of a parish director in a note to a friend: "It has been a full day. Wore about ten different hats as a parish director. Made potato salad early this AM for a funeral dinner, then had the memorial service and went to the cemetery and buried the remains, then met with two young people for instructions, then did the weekly parish bulletin, and now just found out I have no hot water and NO janitor to find out the problem. Will go downstairs when I turn off this machine and see what is happening in the fuse boxes. This house is desperately in need of rewiring, so if you never hear from me again I put my hand in the wrong place."

Though retired, Sister Virginia is not one to rest on her laurels. She helps out as a volunteer at the St. Vincent De Paul food pantry, and she plans to continue her annual trips to Central America with the Lions Club to distribute eye glasses to the needy.

Prior to going to Cable, Sister worked with the Glenmary Home Missioners, ministering in priestless parishes in rural Alabama, Tennessee, and West Virginia. She also served on the Leadership Team of the Servants of Mary, including two terms as president, worked in the Office of Religious Education in the Diocese of Superior, and taught in Catholic elementary schools staffed by Servite Sisters.