

NEWSLETTER OF OUR LADY OF VICTORY MISSIONARY SISTERS

# Visions

JANUARY 2017

[www.olvm.org](http://www.olvm.org)



## Changing Landscape

Partnerships give OLVM Sisters a new view of their future



Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters is a community of women religious founded in 1922 by Father John Joseph Sigstein. The Victory Noll Motherhouse is located in Huntington, Indiana.

Victory Noll Sisters:

- Proclaim the Word of God
- Stand in solidarity with those living in poverty and oppression
- Foster justice
- Promote the development of leaders

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The word that most defined a very busy 2016 at Victory Noll was "change." You will read about all that has been happening in this issue of Visions. There are some very visible changes happening, with the construction of a new addition to the Holy Family Building and the partnership formed with Saint Anne Communities to provide health care for our Sisters and for others. There is also

## PERSPECTIVES ALONG THE JOURNEY

information on the collaboration with Acres Land Trust to preserve Victory Noll's natural land for future generations. The 20th General Chapter last March also addressed many other changes concerning the future of the OLVM Congregation. A new Leadership Team was elected, and a Shared Vision was articulated for the next four years and beyond that addresses stewardship and transformation issues that we Sisters are facing. Through all these busy days, know that the Victory Noll Sisters appreciate your ongoing love and support, and that we continue to hold you close to our hearts and keep you in our prayers. ❖

### OLVM LEADERSHIP TEAM

*Sister Mary Jo Nelson*

*Sister Lucille Martiny*      *Sister Ginger Downey*

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**Leadership Team Liaison:** Sr. Ginger Downey

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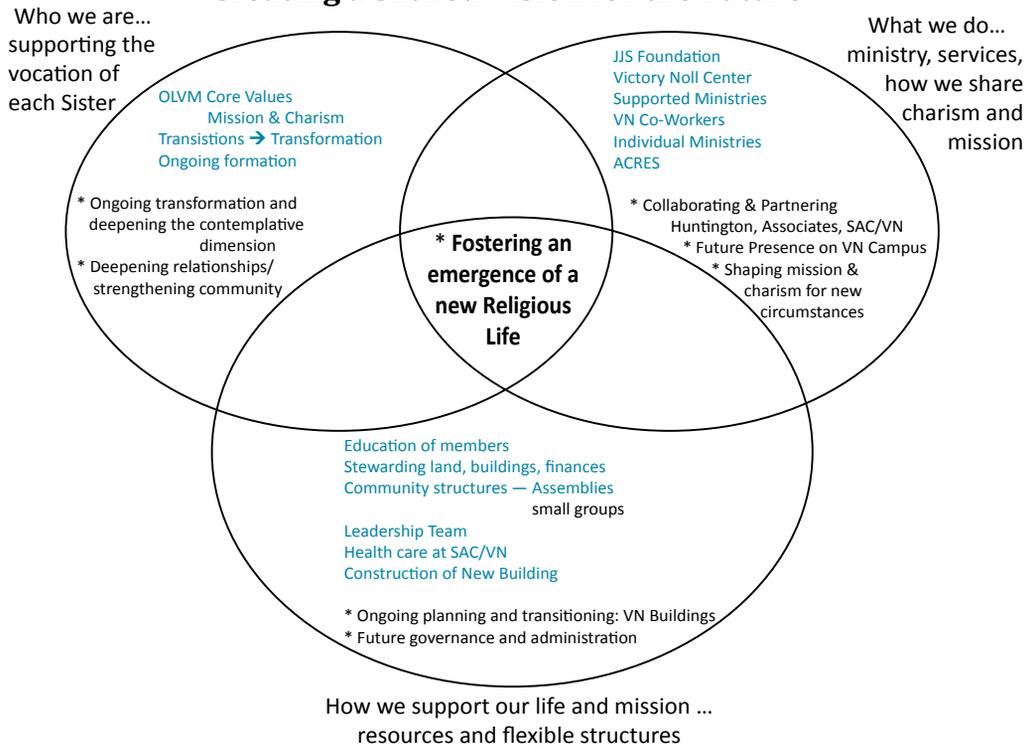
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## Creating a Shared Vision for the Future



## Challenge: Bring Chapter Vision to light

The last four years, in particular, have brought changes for the Congregation many of which have been highlighted in this issue of Visions, from the transformation process, to the selling of Holy Family building and putting some of land into the Acres Land Trust. These were some of the externals, but there were also internal changes, one being the move from a four person Leadership Team to a three person Leadership Team. This change was not done lightly or without thought and conversation. It also had to be a Chapter decision.

In light of the Chapter decision, a new Leadership Team was elected in March at our 20th General Chapter. The new configuration has called for new ways of looking at the responsibilities for each team member and also a different way of working together. After meeting with key co-workers to understand their roles and responsibilities and to give each an opportunity to share insights, the Leadership Team then discerned which areas would best fit with their own gifts, skills and experience. A collaborative model of leadership was developed and presented to the Community and the co-workers in September.

As the Leadership Team continues to partner and collaborate with co-workers, they also partner and collaborate with other groups that have a similar mission. Each member of the Leadership Team has a



Photo provided

**The new OLVM Leadership Team includes, from left, Sr. Ginger Downey, General Secretary; Sr. Lucille Martinez, Vice President; and Sr. Mary Jo Nelson, President.**

connection to an outside partner. Sr. Mary Jo Nelson is a member of the Saint Anne Communities board, Sr. Lucille Martinez is working with the John Joseph Sigstein Foundation, and Sr. Ginger Downey is on the board of the Victory Noll Center.

The main objective for this Leadership Team is to take the Vision from Chapter and to facilitate the work of that Vision over the next four years. The top diagram illustrates this process. ❖

# Change brings opportunities

## How we respond is the key to facing uncertain times

By Sister Beatrice Haines  
Mission Integration Coordinator

**A** great deal has happened within the Victory Noll Congregation in the past four years. It was about five years ago, we faced the fact that we were actually in crisis. Half of our sisters were over 86 years of age, sisters were dying and we were not getting new members. Only a handful of sisters were in active ministry beyond the congregation. How were we to respond to this situation? Like Mary, our deepest desire was to continue to do and be whatever God was asking of us in living fully and faithfully the mission entrusted to us as Victory Noll Sisters. It was a call to live the missionary value of adaptability in proclaiming God's love and faithfulness in a whole new way!

A crisis can be described as a time when a difficult or important decision must be made related to the future. What road, what direction, would we as a congregation choose? Aware that our situation was critical, we reached out for help in navigating this very challenging "Journey at the Crossroads." The leadership team contacted Dr. Ted Dunn, an experienced facilitator and consultant to religious congregations facing critical issues such as ours, to see if he was available and willing to work with us. They described our situation to him and he agreed to work with us for the next 4 years on the condition, that we were willing to choose "communal transformation" in the midst of the major changes we were experiencing, changes largely beyond our control.

In a time of great change, there is naturally a great deal of ambiguity and confusion with no clear direction. It can be a scary and unsettling time, shaking the very sense of who we are and what we need to be about and it can be a time of great opportunity. One way to deal with crisis of this kind is to bury our head in the sand, pretend that it is not happening and protect ourselves from the risk of making a decision. Another way is to face the reality or truth of the situation and make choices that can lead not only to external change, but a much deeper, profound change or transformation. Change happens. How we



Photo provided

**As part of the opening ritual of the 20th General Chapter in March, each OLVM Sister enters through the circle to symbolize crossing the threshold.**

respond to change, is a choice.

We have all been faced with decisions or choices that offered the possibility of a transformative experience wherein our entire life was uprooted and transformed. It might have been a choice to change our profession or to marry or to become a sister. The result of such choices is a shift in the understanding of our identity and purpose, a change in our life's direction and vision for the future. We became learners again, trying on new skills to aid us in our newly chosen direction. These are the dynamic elements of the "Journey of Transformation," which describe in many ways the journey we have been on for the past four plus years as a congregation, a journey we share with many congregations in the U.S.

As a congregation we have chosen to undertake the ongoing challenge of transformation. We have committed our resources, time and energy to this process or journey. I am happy to share with you some of the fruits of our experience these past four years. It began with our total membership agreeing to come together in an assembly three times a year. The result of our commitment was that we got to know

and understand one another better and to grow in our ability to listen respectfully, especially at times when we disagreed or were in conflict. This involved the effort to be honest and direct in our conversations. Growth in the quality of our relationships assisted us with the challenge of coming to some major decisions and to do so together in prayerful discernment.

The decisions facing us were related to the health care of our sisters, our land and buildings. The first decision was whether to continue to provide health care for our Sisters at Victory Noll. We asked ourselves whether doing so made sense as we continue to grow smaller in number? We did decide in favor of continuing to have health care at Victory Noll which led to the decision to hire Hoffman Associates to assist us in renovating our health care center, Holy Family Building. As the process of conversation and decision-making continued, we realized that it would not be right to put money into renovating Holy Family building just for ourselves.

This led to the decision to seek a partner with whom we could collaborate in providing health care for our sisters into the future and at the same time serve those beyond our membership. We found this partner in Saint Anne Communities in Fort Wayne, IN. An important aspect of the overall plan was to put an addition on the front of Holy Family Building where we had provided health care for our sisters for many years.

As plans continued to evolve, we decided to actually sell the building with the addition to Saint Anne Communities, now known as Saint Anne Communities at Victory Noll. This is an adventure that will offer new possibilities for us and for the greater Huntington area as



Photos provided

**Dr. Ted Dunn (above, center), talks with Sisters in the Holy Family Building. Dunn served as facilitator for General Chapter proceedings in March. Below, Sr. Jeanette Halbach takes part in table discussion during Chapter.**



we open our home to others who are in need of health care.

At a Mass with our Bishop Kevin Rhoades on June 7, we marked the transfer of ownership of our health care building and the land on which it is located in a prayerful celebration of something new coming to birth. Bishop Rhoades commented in his homily that he believed Bishop John Francis Noll, who donated the land on which Victory Noll was built, is pleased with this collaboration with Saint Anne Communities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

A second decision was related to our approximately 100 acres of woods and fields, a large portion of the Victory Noll Campus. We began with establishing a “Land

Ethic” which included principles to guide our stewardship of this land. Several of those principles related directly to our decision to sell these 100 plus acres to ACRES Land Trust.

1. We will insure that VN land will remain a place of peace and beauty for all who come to enjoy and be nourished by this space.
2. We will strive to maintain some acres as a wildlife preserve.
3. We will be hospitable to those who visit VN and will share this land especially with those who live in poverty and are oppressed.

The journey I have described involves a willingness to “let go” and be open to something new. “I am doing something new. Do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19) This “letting go” is not easy and takes a great deal of trust in God and one another. It is in fact a faith journey into the paschal mystery, the heart of communal transformation. For Victory Noll Sisters it means proclaiming God’s love and faithfulness in a whole new way! ❖



Artwork provided

The final artist rendering of the new Saint Anne Communities building at Victory Noll.

# Future is coming into focus

## Partnerships help OLVM Sisters plan to preserve their legacy

By Paul Siegfried  
 OLVM Communications Coordinator

**W**hen the cornerstone is laid for the new health-care facility on the Victory Noll campus, it will reflect a partnership and collaboration that has opened up a new view of the future for Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters.

Since the 1920s when Bishop Noll sold land to bring them to Huntington, the OLVM Sisters have taken care of themselves. But in recent years, as the OLVM community has aged, their needs — especially in the area of health care — has begun to exceed their ability to meet the needs of their Sisters. After much discernment, prayer and conversation, the result is a partnering with the diocesan-owned Saint Anne Communities, who have purchased the build-



ing and will operate and administer it under the melded name of “Saint Anne Communities at Victory Noll.”

The two-story, 40-bed facility will ensure that OLVM Sisters receive excellent health care that Saint Anne has been providing for the Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese for 50 years.

While OLVM is a pontifical congregation and not directly affiliated with the diocese, there has been a strong connection between the two, dating back to the time when then-Bishop Noll collaborated with OLVM founder, Father John Joseph Sigstein, to provide the community with a permanent home in Huntington. With the sale of a portion of that land back to the diocese and Saint Anne’s, the partnership has come full circle.

“Bishop Kevin Rhoades very much



Photo by Sr. Ginger Downey

**The Bell Tower is moved to its new location in front of the new entrance to the Saint Anne Communities building.**

wanted to make it a partnership and very much wanted to make it work. That was a huge thing from our perspective, that he saw as a good thing for Saint Anne and a good thing for us,” says Sister Ginger Downey, OLVM general secretary who was part of the leadership team that worked out the sale. “As we go forward, it will become more and more jurisdiction of Saint Anne’s, but we will always have a Sister on the board of Saint Anne as long as we have a Sister able and willing, so we will always have a presence there to represent our Sisters’ interests.”

The Holy Family Building on the Victory Noll campus opened in 1960 to serve the health care needs of the Sisters. In recent years, however, the building has shown its age, with the Sisters growing uncomfortable with the small, cold, industrial rooms. Discussion began about what could be done with the building, with ideas ranging from renovation of the Holy Family Building to demolition and rebuilding.

In October 2014, the Sisters gathered a group of organizations and individuals from the Huntington and Fort Wayne area to meet during the Sisters’ Assembly to gain more input on how OLVM might develop a partnership that would be mutually beneficial. The group including city officials as well as the mayor and Huntington County Foundation, and health-care providers including Saint Anne. Hoffman Planning, Design & Construction of Appleton, WI, was also part of the meeting. Hoffman has specialized in working with religious communities.

At that time, OLVM had gone through a period where a third of their population had passed away over a span of 18 months. Even in an aging community, that kind of loss had an impact, and added more questions to what kind of facility they would build. Hoffman came in and helped in the process. The Sisters also tapped Jerry Carley of CSJ Initiatives, a branch of the Congregation of St. Joseph that serves as consultants to religious communities, specializing in senior care and property management.

In 2015, leadership presented two

proposals to the Sisters. One proposed OLVM continue to own the building but bring in a company to run the health-care system. The second was to sell the building to Saint Anne.

Downey said it didn’t take long to realize which one would work best. The match with Saint Anne just felt right.

“I’ll never forget sitting in the Leadership Team office with Jerry Carley, and he said ‘What I’m really hearing is, you want to sell the health care, and not just manage it.’ It just became crystal-clear that it made more sense to sell to St. Anne and do a partnership with them as a legacy piece,” she says. “Health care is a huge undertaking, and we had never done anything of that magnitude. We had Sisters who had been nurses or who had been in health care, but no longer had the personnel who could oversee it. Health care is getting more complex, so it didn’t make sense for us to try and continue managing it.”

David Deffenbaugh, chief operating officer for Saint Anne, says the project was very much a collaboration.

“I saw that when discerning the Victory Noll and Saint Anne unification, seeing the partnership through the Sisters’ hearts, which was to preserve their legacy. With both teams keeping this aspiration in mind, we could move forward and create our vision,” he says. “Our core, which is our faith, inspires both of us. In the future, I see Saint Anne and the Sisters working together on key missions to help the community.”

**Continued on Page 8**



Photos by Sr. Ginger Downey

**Construction began in June 2016 on the new building at Victory Noll. Below left, concrete is poured for the new elevator shaft. Above, the elevator portion nears completion. Below, the new interior courtyard begins to take shape.**





Photos by Paul Siegfried (above), Sr. Ginger Downey (right)

**An overview shows the footprint of the new building waiting for resident modules to arrive.**

**Continued from Page 7**

Things moved quickly after the decision was made to partner with Saint Anne. Hoffman worked on the plans of a new assisted living facility that would be tied into the existing Holy Family Building, and the 11 acres surrounding it would be sold to Saint Anne to own and manage. With red brick and clay-tile roof, the Spanish Mission look of the new facility will tie in with the original design of campus buildings. Construction began in June, 2016, with a scheduled completion date in the spring of 2017.

Dave Dickinson, construction superintendent for Hoffman, says it was important to have a solid working relationship with the Sisters.

“We are able to bring our expertise in play to enable women who have given their lives to ministry a good retirement environment,” he says. “Anytime that our mission statement and a client’s mission statement lines up helps to create an ideal relationship. Sisters have given their lives to improve other’s lives; We can improve a portion of their lives and give them another tool in their mission work.”

The Sisters have also entered into a partnership with Acres Land Trust to sell the acreage of woods and other undeveloped land to preserve it in its natural state for the future. Along with the sale to Saint Anne, the amount of original acreage to be under Victory Noll management drops from 150 to 43, including the cemetery where the Sisters, Archbishop Noll and Father Sigstein are buried.

Beyond that, the partnerships have removed a veil of uncertainty that had obscured the vision of the future of the OLVN Sisters.

“We know now that our Sisters will be taken care of. It’s a weight that has been lifted,” says Downey. “We have a huge part of our planning put in a place that allows us the freedom to look at the planning for the congregation and how we move into the future. It allows us to focus on the task of historical completion and furthering our charism into a legacy piece that we can’t imagine. It allows us to dream and vision a future that we will live into.” ❖



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**[saintannecommunities.org](http://saintannecommunities.org)**

# Critical time in history for all women religious

By Sister Mary Jo Nelson  
OLVM President

**T**ransformation and the call to transformation is not only for Victory Noll Sisters. It is the reality of religious life in the United States, in the Church, in our country, and in the world. Transformation is more than change and transition. It emerges from a deepening consciousness that allows us to see what is real, and engage our reality, not denying the massive change and challenges facing us as the earth community. It calls us to embrace vulnerability, and not deny the grief of losses and suffering, and to live fully in the present as a way toward the future. And, it calls us to do the work of hope and possibility, to have an open mind, an open heart, and an open will as we grow into new ways of seeing, new ways of thinking, and new ways of being together.

We as a congregation are not outside what is happening in all of life. Religious life in the United States as we have known it is coming to a historical completion. At our Chapter in March, we grasped the seriousness of our reality and asked: what can we be and do together to foster the emergence of a new religious life? We made a commitment to contribute to the future of religious life by:

1. Engaging in the transformation process within religious life and deepening the contemplative dimension of our lives
2. Deepening our relationships and strengthening our communal life
3. Shaping our mission and charism in, and for today's world
4. Collaborating and partnering with others for the sake of passing on the Victory Noll charism and mission
5. Continuing our planning and transitioning of our Victory Noll property
6. Reviewing our governance structures for a new community reality



Photo provided

**Below, Sr. Alma Bill offers input during Chapter events in March at Victory Noll. OLVM Sisters and Sisters worldwide are facing historic challenges as women religious.**



A key question for Victory Noll Sisters and all women religious in the United States is how do we live this life without the ministries and works that made us known and loved? What is the meaning of religious life without being the workforce of the Church? What we do know is that the life of being a Victory Noll Sister has deep meaning to the very end — we never retire from the life — the life of prayer and contemplation, our shared life as Sisters, or our life rooted in the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Our life is different now, but it is not without meaning and purpose. How we live this life to the very end will be a gift for the future form of this life, for the Church, and for the World. This I believe! ❖

# Nature's beauty at Victory Noll will be preserved

By Sister Ginger Downey  
OLVM General Secretary

*“Nature cannot be regarded as something separated from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are a part of Nature.”*

**T**his quote from *Laudato Si* (139) has much meaning as the Sisters began to realize that part of their legacy is the beautiful land that they have called home for more than 90 years. They have become as much a part of the landscape as the towering oaks or the magnificent maples.

Many of our Sisters have walked or maybe even forged trails through the woods, spending time in quiet reflection and prayer. It truly is a sacred place for many — not only for the Sisters and their families and friends, but for all those who walk the campus or enjoy the beauty and serenity of the woods. Many who come comment on the peacefulness of the land. One said, “As soon as I drive onto the property, I feel the peace and presence of God.” Another who was here to work on the construction of the new addition, asked “What is this place? I knew when I drove on to the property it was sacred.”

Long conversations around legacy and planning had been going on for several years. As the Congregation began to take a closer look at their legacy and what they needed to do to prepare for the future, they realized they needed a plan for the land. Conversations and dialogues, along with some wild ideas, started to get the ball rolling.

Within a few months, those discussions brought the community to a place where they could look at the whole picture. The first step was affirming their Land Ethic, which they used as a tool to make decisions regarding the property.

One of the principles states, “We know that from the smallest particle to the most complex of creatures, all creation is a gift that God has entrusted to us to pro-



Photo provided

**The natural areas at Victory Noll have long been sacred places for the Sisters and others who have walked their trails. Those areas will be preserved with a sale to Acres Land Trust.**

tect and nourish. We cherish this land as a sacrament of God's love...

This principle guided their decision to consider putting the majority of the woods and prairie into conservation. There had been a few acres in the Department of Agriculture's conservation and wildlife habit program, CRP, for a few years. The CRP was used as a way to move from farming the land to the idea of selling the land to Acres Land Trust. In working with Acres, it became very clear that our Land Ethic and Acres' mission statements were very much in line. So the sale of the land, which we hope will be completed by the end of 2016, seemed like the direction we should take.

As part of the sale, the Sisters were able to recommend the name for the property. The name was decided to be “Victory Noll Acres,” combining the two entities in the name.

Joining with Acres guarantees that future generations will continue to be able to enjoy the beauty of the land and experience God in the majestic maples and the towering oaks. ❖



# Center moves to independent status

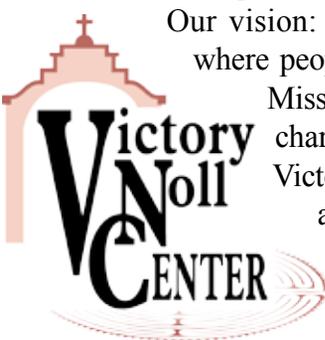
By Sue Wilhelm  
Victory Noll Center Director

In the last couple years, Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters and Victory Noll Center have been intentionally moving toward making the Center a sponsored, yet independent not-for-profit ministry. Toward this end a Board of Directors was formed in the charism of the Sisters. Vision and Mission statements were discerned that would articulate with greater clarity the Center's focus, The detailed work of filing articles of incorporation, and putting in place the policies and financial pieces that would assist in serving the Mission were completed.

Our vision: Victory Noll Center is a place where people are formed in and for God's Mission. Our mission is to extend the charism and legacy of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters by inviting all people to discover and develop their capacity for God's Mission. These statements ring true to what every Victory Noll Sister has been about as a Missionary-forming leaders, forming people in the faith and forming human persons to respond to the needs that are before them, in other words, God's Mission.

Offering Hospitality, promoting personal formation, providing educational opportunities and creating collaborative partnerships are means to assist people in being formed in the Gospel to live lives of justice.

Please visit our website and learn more about us! [www.victorynollcenter.org](http://www.victorynollcenter.org) You are always welcome at the Center! ❖



## Blessed are the Peacemakers: A Call to Christ's Way of Nonviolence

Friday, July 28, 7 to 10 p.m. and  
Saturday, July 29, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters and Victory Noll Center along with Pace e Bene are happy to announce a collaborative effort for our first annual Nonviolence Conference. Speakers Ken Butigan, John Dear, and Kit Evans-Ford from Pace e Bene Nonviolence Services, along with local and regional peacemakers, will be joining us for intentional conversation around building a culture of nonviolence. We hope you can join us for this transforming experience.

Early registrations through July 1.  
Cost: \$95 After July 1, \$110

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## Visions FROM THE VICTORY NOLL ARCHIVES



**J**ust as now, there was construction taking place on the Victory Noll campus in the summer of 1959, with the building of the Archbishop Noll Memorial Chapel. In this photo, the concrete for the louvered walls had been poured, and the form for the curved front wall was in place. In the center of the photo, the tunnel is visible connecting the rest of campus to the Holy Family Building, now part of Saint Anne Communities. ❖