

Visions

October 2022

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Life's evolution

Victory Noll Sisters embrace changes in time of transition





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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ON THE COVER

OLVM Sister Guadalupe Aguilar-Huanca leads the procession of Victory Noll Sisters to open the Centennial Celebration Aug. 6 in Archbishop Noll Memorial Chapel.

Photo by Paul Siegfried

Pardon us if we take a moment to catch our collective breath.

All of this has all been many months or years in planning, and for so long it seemed like it would never get here. And once it did, it blew through like a hurricane.

PERSPECTIVES ALONG THE JOURNEY

August 2022 proved to be the confluence of multiple major events for the Victory Noll Sisters and all of us who work closely with them on a daily basis. The first week of the month featured the end of a year-long celebration of the community's 100th anniversary that included a special memorial service and a livestreamed gala event with a Mass and dinner for Sisters and more than 100 supporters. In between was the Jubilee for Sisters celebrating their 25th anniversaries.

At the end of the month the Transfer of Leadership service and reception took place, as Victory Noll welcomed a new congregation leader in Sr. Jenny Howard from the Sisters of Providence.

The logistics and detailed planning for all the events involved everyone. That alone would wear out anyone.

But there was also the emotional toll. The Centennial Celebration came with a wave of nostalgia and remembrance. The monumental change in governance was a reminder of the realities of an aging community, and the knowledge the journey continues.

Of course, there were many tears shed, some in sadness for what is past, but most in joy and gratitude for what lies ahead. All the work and planning means the evolving future of the OLVM mission remains active and vibrant.

— Paul Siegfried, Communications Coordinator ❖

CONGREGATIONAL LEADER

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Outgoing OLVM President Sr. Mary Jo Nelson (right) leads a blessing for new Congregation Leader Sr. Jenny Howard, SP, during the Transition of Leadership service Aug. 28 at Victory Noll.

A promise of loving support

Sisters of Providence provide new era of OLVM leadership

Following years of discernment and planning for the future of their community governance, Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters formally transferred leadership on Sunday, August 28, with Sister Jenny Howard of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods stepping into the role as OLVM Congregation Leader.

A special service was held in the Archbishop Noll Memorial Chapel at Victory Noll to celebrate the new leadership and offer blessings for the future.

In her remarks during Sunday's service, outgoing OLVM president Sr. Mary Jo Nelson reminded those gathered that this transfer of leadership does not



Sr. Dawn Tomaszewski (left), Superior General of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, greets OLVM Sr. Rose Ann Kaiser after Sr. Rose Ann and the other Victory Noll Sisters crossed a symbolic bridge to the next stage of the OLVM journey. Sr. Rose Ann passed away on September 23.



Sr. Dawn Tomaszewski, SP, offers the support of the Sisters of Providence to the OLVN Sisters. Below, the OLVN Sisters return the blessing to Sr. Jenny Howard, SP, as the new Congregation Leader.

represent an ending, but the start of a new chapter in the 100-year history of the Victory Noll Sisters.

“This is not a completion of our community or the ending of our charisma and mission,” she said. “It is not fulfillment — a sense that we have done everything and can now bask in the goodness of our life. Rather, it is a call to live in the evolution of all life — to live in the deep change and a new consciousness of our universe, of our earth, of the world community, of our country, of our Church, and of the bigger picture and reality of religious life. Our journey is a little seed of what is happening everywhere.”

The Sisters of Providence in Terre Haute selected 70-year-old Sr. Jenny to be the new OLVN Congregation Leader in April. She has been meeting with the Victory Noll Sisters and staff over

the past few months in preparation for her new role. In addition, she will serve as President of the new OLVN Corporate Board, which is also part of the new governance structure.

“I’m really humbled by the opportunity,” said Sr. Jenny, who has been a Sister of Providence for 39 years. “I really admire the courage of the Victory Noll community. They have not denied the sense of loss that they feel, but they’ve also been so good about establishing ways in which the legacy can continue into the future. It’s a great gift to be able to be part of that journey with them. It’s a great model for the future of religious life.”

Sr. Mary Jo was confident that Sr. Jenny would be a good steward as the OLVN community enters its second century.

“Sr. Jenny comes with lots of leadership experience and pastoral



experience. I think she is a perfect fit for this transition time in our community,” she said.

The Victory Noll Sisters, who celebrated their 100th anniversary earlier in August, have faced their reality in recent years that no Sisters would be willing or able to serve in leadership. Most of the 31 Sisters are over the age of 80 and there have been no new members in the past 25 years. They started the process of finding a commissary congregation — another community to provide them with a congregation leader.

In 2020, OLVN Sisters began conversations with three communities about their willingness to become a commissary congregation. OLVN voted to suspend their current governance structure in 2021 and petition officials in Rome for a commissary. In January 2022, OLVN Sisters recommended the Sisters of Providence to provide the new congregation leader. Sr. Jenny was named to the position in April.

Sr. Dawn Tomaszewski, Superior General of the Sisters of Providence, said her congregation promises to provide the loving support the OLVN community needs at this time and into the future.

“In order to assure this will happen, our community has called forth Sr. Jenny Howard to walk with you as your congregation leader,” said Sr. Dawn. “We, Sisters of Providence, know Jenny as a faithful daughter of Providence, someone whose own life experiences, like your own, have called her to let go in order to let something new come. Thank you, Victory Noll Sisters, for inviting us into your lives. We accept this



New Congregation Leader Sr. Jenny Howard (left), offer a blessing to the new OLVN Corporate Board members during the Transfer of Leadership service. Below, outgoing OLVN President Sr. Mary Jo Nelson embraces Sr. Jenny following the service.

invitation with great hope for the future of religious life.”

Sr. Jenny, a native of Indianapolis, graduated from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College with a Bachelor’s Degree in Biology and earned a Master’s Degree in Biology from Ball State University. She also has a Master’s Degree in Guidance Counseling in secondary schools from Northeastern Illinois University.

In her time as a Sister of Providence, she has ministered on the Congregation’s Leadership Team and as Vocations Director. She has also ministered as a teacher at North Central High School in Indianapolis, as well as Providence-St. Mel School in Chicago and Cathedral High School in Indianapolis. Sr. Jenny also ministered



on the Congregation’s Leadership Team from 1996 to 2001 and from 2011-21. With a strong passion for justice, Sr. Jenny also serves in part-time ministry at Providence Housing Corporation in West Terre Haute.



OLVM has been addressing their current reality and making plans for the future dating back to 2016. They partnered with Saint Anne Communities to build a new health care and residence facility to care for retiring Sisters and lay residents. Natural lands on the Victory Noll campus were sold to ACRES Land Trust to preserve them in accordance with the Victory Noll Land Ethic. Most recently, the remaining campus buildings were sold to Huntington County to be used by Community Corrections in a restorative program for low-level drug offenders and to support their healing and wellness.

“The Victory Noll Sisters are filled with great gratitude for the hard work of change, transition, and transformation,” said Sr. Mary Jo. “We are also being given a new opportunity to share our lives in a new way with the Sisters of Providence, to offer learnings and wisdom to the whole of religious life — to many others who will follow us in some way. And our mission and charism continues in our numerous partnerships throughout the United States.” ❖

Sr. Dawn Tomaszewski (above, right), Superior General of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, introduces Sr. Jenny Howard, SP, as the new OLVM Congregation Leader. Below, Outgoing OLVM Leadership gathers for a photo with Sisters of Providence, their associates and friends during a reception following the Transfer of Leadership service Aug. 28 at Victory Noll.



‘Finding our way together’

Throughout her religious life as a Sister of Providence, Sr. Jenny Howard has served in several different ministries, and considered many others. Serving as leader of a congregation not her own never really entered the picture.

But Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters came calling. The needs of their aging community meant finding a leader for their congregation from another community. The Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in Terre Haute, Indiana, were ultimately selected by OLVM to provide the new leader.



Sr. Jenny Howard, SP

In January, Sr. Dawn Tomaszewski, Superior General of the Sisters of Providence, asked for applicants for the position. Sr. Jenny was recovering from a pair of surgeries, but as her health improved, and after discernment and

conversation with friends, she put her name in for consideration.

In April, Sr. Jenny was named as the new OLVM Congregation Leader. She went right to work preparing for the role.

“I immediately started reading the history of the Sisters. I had known (outgoing OLVM president) Sr. Mary Jo (Nelson) since 2000 when we served on the same group. And I’ve gotten to know some of the Victory Noll Sisters from being in (LCWR) Region 7, so I knew some of the background,” says Sr. Jenny.

She also made the first of many trips from Terre Haute to Huntington, where she was embraced by the Victory Noll Sisters. She attended a number of events and meetings as she learned about the spirit of the community.

Two years of planning by OLVM Leadership helped guide the way.

“I feel like they have set their expectations themselves. They’ve created their Direction Statement from 2022 to 2027. Of course, they have their Mission Statement which they live out daily,” says Sr. Jenny. “How I see part of my role is to help facilitate the carrying forward what they have determined



New OLVM Congregation Leader Sr. Jenny Howard, SP (left), honors outgoing Leadership Team members (from left) Sr. Ginger Downey, Sr. Lucille Martinez and Sr. Mary Jo Nelson during the Transfer of Leadership service August 28.

to be their direction into their future, as well as companioning with them and getting to know them personally.”

Following the Transfer of Leadership ceremony August 28, Sr. Jenny went right to work. She took part in the initial meeting of the OLVM Corporate Board, where she is the new president, and met with the OLVM staff to get caught up on daily operations. Then she headed back out onto the road to visit with the OLVM Sisters in ministry away from Victory Noll.

Sr. Jenny planned to appoint two advisors, along with continuing to tap into the knowledge and experience of the previous Leadership Team.

“It’s a big learning curve, and everyone has been so patient and helpful,” she says. “Actually, I feel very peaceful, and full of gratitude. I feel that this is really a graced moment.”

Sr. Jenny looks forward where this new ministry leads, and also where she can help guide the OLVM community.

“It’s very humbling for me to be on this part of the journey with the OLVM community,” she says. “They are so courageous, and it fits their founding spirit as missionary Sisters. We’re really finding our way together.” ❖



Second century begins

Special service marks the anniversary of OLVN community



A year honoring a century of presence and service culminated with Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters holding its Centennial Celebration August 6 in the Archbishop Noll Memorial Chapel at Victory Noll. The Sisters welcomed family, friends, co-workers, Victory Noll Associates, volunteers, former members and other supporters for the special Mass commemorating when OLVN Founder Father John Joseph Sigstein sent the first two congregation members on their initial mission in 1922.

The service was presided by Most Reverend Gerald Barnes, Bishop Emeritus of San Bernardino, Calif., who received his early Catholic education from Victory Noll Sisters as a youth in Los Angeles. In his homily, Bishop Barnes reflected on his close relationship with OLVN Sisters throughout his life and religious career, and the far-reaching impact of the Sisters in



Most Reverend Gerald Barnes, Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of San Bernardino, was the celebrant for the OLVM Centennial Celebration in Archbishop Noll Memorial Chapel at Victory Noll.

the areas where they have been missioned. Additional priests taking part were Reverend Phil DeVolder, Reverend Tim Gray, Reverend Kurt Klismet, and Monsignor Michael Foltz. Special music was provided by Jaime Cortez, Kari Magwire-Cortez, and Rick Elliot.

In addition to the Mass, the Sisters hosted their guests to a dinner at Saint Anne's Communities at Victory Noll. A new film documenting the history and future of the OLVM was available for viewing, and tours were given of the former OLVM Administration Building, which the Sisters recently sold to Huntington County and is now known as the O'Donnell Center serving as home to Huntington County Community Corrections.

Faced with an aging population and diminishing numbers, OLVM is in a time of transition. Along with the sale of buildings to the county, the health care facility is now owned and managed by the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend as Saint Anne Communities, and the remain-





Above left, Bishop Barnes delivers his homily during the Centennial Celebration. Above right, special music for the event was provided by Rick Elliott, Kari Magwire-Cortez and Jaime Cortez.

ing open land has been sold to Acres Land Trust. Governance of the community is also undergoing change, with no Sisters in position to fill leadership roles. On August 28, leadership transferred to a new Congregation Leader, Sr. Jenny Howard of the Sisters of Providence.

As a young priest in Chicago, Father Sigstein made a trip to the American Southwest, where he saw the poor, immigrant population being underserved by the Church. He vowed to do what he could to not only provide Catholic education, but to give voice to those who had been marginalized by society. Father Sigstein founded the Society of Missionary Catechists of Our Blessed Lady of Victory in Chicago in 1922, sending his original two catechists, Marie Benes and Julia Doyle, on their initial mission to Watrous, New Mexico. They arrived in Santa Fe on August 5, 1922, the date now used as the start of the community.

The congregation came to Huntington in 1925 with the help of Bishop John Francis Noll, who had founded the weekly “Our Sunday Visitor” in the city. Bishop Noll provided land and built the Victory Noll motherhouse, with financial assistance from retired Chicago policeman Peter O’Donnell and his wife, Julia. The Society later changed its name to Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters, and Victory Noll has been their home for nearly a century. From Victory Noll, Sisters have been missioned in 36 states where they have held to their mission to proclaim the Word of God, foster justice, stand in solidarity with those living in poverty and oppression, and to promote the development of leaders. ❖



Above, outgoing OLVN President Sr. Mary Jo Nelson welcomes guests to the special Mass. Below, Victory Noll Sisters Guadalupe Flores-Ocaña, Adela Amoroso-Medrano and Teresa Aparicio-Cervantes join in singing during the celebration.



Sisters make a visit to their past

During the OLV M Centennial Celebration, the Victory Noll Sisters got the chance to walk through their former motherhouse.

The OLV Building, which opened in 1925 and was used for administration and housing for the Sisters, was one of the buildings OLV M sold to Huntington County earlier in the year. The county now uses the building for its Community Corrections program and Emergency Management operations.

The county opened the building for tours as part of the Centennial Celebration on August 6. Several Sisters and guests walked through the building to visit former offices and the historic OLV Chapel for the first time since the buildings were sold. ❖



Sister Jeanette Halbach, above, looks around the office she occupied in the OLV Building when she served as OLV M President. The building now is owned by Huntington County and is home to Community Corrections and Emergency Management.



In the photo left, OLV M Sister Mary Louise Rowney chats with Leslie Rentschler, director of Huntington County Community Corrections, which moved its operations into the former OLV Building on the Victory Noll campus. Right, Victory Noll Sisters Leora Linnenkugel, Jeanette Halbach, Alma Bill and Connie Lewandowski visit the historic chapel in the OLV Building.



Jubilarians 2022



May Jubilarians were, front row — Sr. Dennis Kerr (left) and Sr. Alma Bill. Back row — Sr. Mary Louise Rowney (left) and Sr. Beatrice Haines.

Sister Alma Bill, a native of Arcadia, Wisconsin, celebrated 75 years as a Victory Noll Sister. She entered OLVN on October 30, 1947. Her ministry work has taken her to California, Florida, Indiana, Missouri and Arizona. She has served primarily in religious education, authoring catechetical texts, and in congregation leadership.

Sister Dennis Kerr, a native of Detroit, Michigan, celebrated 75 years as a Victory Noll Sister. She entered OLVN on October 30, 1947. Her ministry work has taken her to Utah, Nevada, Wyoming, Michigan, New Jersey, California and Colorado. She has served primarily in religious education and social services.

Sister Mary Louise Rowney, a native of Kokomo, Indiana, celebrated 70 years as a Victory Noll Sister. She entered OLVN on September 7, 1952. Her ministry work has taken her to Iowa, California, Massachusetts, Colorado, Indiana and Illinois. She has served primarily in religious education, catechist formation, and in congregation leadership.

Sister Beatrice Haines, a native of Goshen, Indiana, celebrated 60 years as a Victory Noll Sister. She entered OLVN on September 5, 1962. Her ministry work has taken her to New Jersey, California, Illinois, Texas, New Mexico and Indiana. She has served primarily in religious education and in congregation leadership, and was co-founder of Julia Center in Chicago.



August Jubilarians were Sr. Leora Linnenkugel (left) and Sr. Guadalupe Flores-Ocaña.

Sister Leora Linnenkugel, a native of Toledo, Ohio, celebrated 25 years as a Victory Noll Sister. She entered OLVN on August 10, 1997. Her ministry work has taken her to California, Indiana and Illinois. She has served primarily in religious education, immigration outreach, and in congregation leadership.

Sister Guadalupe Flores-Ocaña, a native of Colquiri La-Paz, Bolivia, celebrated 25 years as a Victory Noll Sister. She entered OLVN on September 22, 1997. Her ministry work has taken her to California, Texas and South Carolina. She has served primarily in religious education, youth ministry, and Hispanic faith formation. ❖

MEMORIAL SERVICE

Remembering those who have gone before

On the evening of August 4, the Victory Noll Sisters gathered in the Archbishop Noll Memorial Chapel for a memorial service to remember the Sisters who had died since the founding of the community in 1922.

The program included music, readings and a reflection from Sr. Rita Musante, co-chair of the OLVM Centennial Committee.

During the service, a virtual tour of the OLVM Cemetery was shown, a video presenting a photo of each deceased Victory Noll Sister and a picture of her headstone. ❖



Above, Victory Noll Sisters watch a virtual tour of the OLVM Cemetery. Below, readings and music were part of the Memorial Service.



OLVM video, book debut at Centennial

Two media projects were produced to coincide with OLVM's Centennial Celebration held on August 6, 2020.

The half-hour video, "To the Poorest First: The Journey of the Victory Noll Sisters" debuted following the official celebration. Each guest also received a copy of the Centennial Memorial Book.

The idea for the video dated back to 2019 in the early days of centennial planning. The OLVM Leadership Team saw another congregation's video and thought it would be a good way to tell the story of the Victory Noll Sisters.

They contacted Sr. Judy Zielinski, OSF, and NewGroup Media in South Bend, the producers of the other video, and contracted them to make the OLVM video.

COVID shutdowns slowed

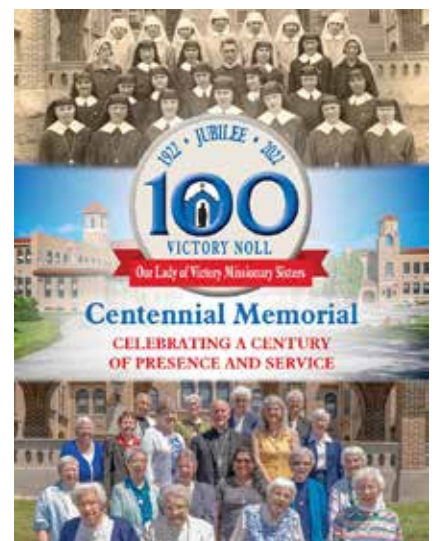
production, but interviews were conducted and video shot at Victory Noll and in Colorado, New Mexico and California.

Older video clips and still photos were provided by OLVM Archivist Jeff Hoffman and Paul Siegfried in the Communications Office. Music was recorded by Jamie Cortez and Kari Magwire-Cortez.

The 128-page Memorial Book was produced in-house by the Communications Office and printed by Our Sunday Visitor in Huntington.

The book includes photos of every Sister in OLVM's 100-year history, with historical photos, tributes, and reflections.

Both the video and the memorial book are available for viewing or download on the OLVM website. ❖



In 1938, the Society of Missionary Catechists held its First General Chapter and elected the first General Officers. Front — Superior General Catherine Olberding and Vicar General Clare Leutenegger. Back — Councillors Caroline Meister, Helen Srill and Josephine Penning.

Victory Noll Archives



Major change nothing new

Governance structure radically altered in 1938

By Jeff Hoffman
OLVM Archivist

The Victory Noll Sisters went through a major change in leadership structure in 2022, but it wasn't the first time the community had to work through a shift in governance.

Before Founder Father John Joseph Sigstein accepted Msgr. John F. Noll's offer to build the motherhouse for the Society of Missionary Catechists at Huntington in 1923, he set one

provision — that there would be no interference on the internal affairs of the institute.

Fr. Sigstein knew a religious community of women needed to be autonomous, and he began steps to eventually step back from his role as superior. He had set up the Missionary Catechists as a Diocesan institute. In the eyes of Rome it was just a "pious association of women with no canonical status as a religious organization."

In 1928 he reached out to

a friend who provided him a connection with a Holy Cross priest who guided him through the process. Fr. George Sauvage, CSC, helped in putting together material that led the Sacred Congregation to recognize the Society of Missionary Catechists as a Diocesan Congregation in December, 1930. This was just the first step to attaining canonical status and receiving approval from Rome.

Fr. Sigstein and Fr. Sauvage, CSC, worked on this for another eight years before the process was completed. Delays were caused by Fr. Sigstein's health, Fr. Sauvage being based in Europe, the Great Depression, and the Society's financial

***EDITOR'S NOTE:** Following the completion of OLVM's year-long Centennial Celebration, Victory Noll Archivist Jeff Hoffman will continue his historical look at significant events and individuals from the congregation's first 100 years.*

health. Bishop John F. Noll was instrumental in overcoming these obstacles to obtain the alignment of the Society's Constitution with Canon Law.

In 1938, permission was granted for Bishop Noll to select a Superior General and appoint other officers in consultation with the Superior General. However, Bishop Noll felt that he did not know the personnel well enough, so he chose to hold an election. The First General Chapter was called to order on August 25, 1938, with Bishop Noll presiding.

Bishop Noll read the names of the 39 Catechists who were eligible for the office of Superior General. After three rounds of voting, no one received a majority. On the fourth round only the names of the largest number of votes were on the ballot. Catechists Catherine Olberding and Clara Leutenegger were on the fourth round ballot, and were not able to vote. Like the previous rounds this one did not produce an immediate winner when the result was a tie. The candidate who had professed first was the one who received the office. Catechist Catherine Olberding became the congregation's first Superior General. Catechist Clara Leutenegger was later elected as First Assistant. Catechists Helen Srill, Caroline Meister and Josephine Penning were elected as the Second, Third and Fourth Assistants.

With this change Fr. Sigstein took a step back and let the Catechists take a larger role in their future decisions. Bishop Noll continued to provide assistance as they worked to obtain canonical status and approval of their Constitution, which would not occur until



In the early years of its existence, the Society of Missionary Catechists were led by Founder Father John Joseph Sigstein (front, second from left) and benefactor Bishop John F. Noll (third from left). That changed in 1938 as Sigstein and Noll stepped aside and the Catechists assumed leadership of the community.

December 30, 1965.

Bishop Noll's assistance provided the Catechists being able to take permanent vows 1940. In 1946, as the 25th anniversary of the congregation was approaching, Bishop Noll notified Bishops where the Catechists were stationed the community would be changing its name to Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters. This name change also resulted in the switch of individuals from being called "Catechist" to being addressed as "Sister." It became official on January 1, 1947.

At that same time there was a back and forth going on with the approval of the congregation's Constitution. In 1938 they were granted temporary approval, which allowed for these changes. In 1947 Bishop Noll recommended they send the latest copy of the Constitution to Rome. Fr. Sauvage received it and needed more letters

and paperwork. After some more back and forth, Mother Cecilia Schmitt and her Council made a formal petition for the Decree of Praise in March 1956. It was granted on June 16 of that year. The Constitutions were approved *ad septennium*; meaning they would be used experimentally for seven years. Finally, on December 30, 1965, approval was received from the Holy See.

Changes continued with the governing structure in following years. Superior General and Council were replaced with President, Vice-President and Area Coordinators in 1968. In 1984 the new Leadership Team format dropped Area Coordinators and added a General Secretary and General Treasurer. That governance continued until the appointment of a Commissary Congregation and Congregation Leader in 2022. ❖



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Visions FROM THE VICTORY NOLL ARCHIVES



In 2000, there were five living OLVM presidents, representing leadership dating back to 1962. They guided Victory Noll through major changes in the lives of women religious. Sr. Florentine Lohr (front, seated) led OLVM from 1962-71. Also serving terms as Leadership Team president were (from left) Sr. Mary Louise Rowney (1984-92), Sr. Jeanette Halbach (1977-84 and 2000-08), Sr. Gertrude Sullivan (1971-77) and Sr. Lucy Regalado (1992-2000). ❖