

# Visions

February 2020

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



ARISE CHICAGO  
**Giving a voice  
to workers**



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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Members of Arise Chicago stand with workers during a rally.

Photo provided

**T**he start of a new year. The start of a new decade. These are the times when we look back at where we've been, and also look forward to where we want to go.

It is a time of reflection and discernment, not only for ourselves, but for our families, our friends, our community, our country, and our world.

## PERSPECTIVES ALONG THE JOURNEY

The Victory Noll Sisters have witnessed the daily struggles of marginalized people. They have stood with them, prayed with them, and advocated for them. That work continues in many ways. In this issue of Visions, OLVM-supported organizations are featured for their social justice action and advocating for the rights of workers so they can pursue their own hopes and ambitions.

As the new decade begins, the Sisters themselves are at a crossroads. During their Chapter 2020 gathering this year, there will be many questions to answer as they cross the bridge to their own future and face some difficult decisions. OLVM President Sr. Mary Jo Nelson writes about some of the issues the Sisters will be discussing in her article in this issue. ❖

## MAILING ADDRESS NOTICE

The official mailing address for Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters no longer includes post office box #109, and any correspondence using that PO Box will be returned to the sender. All future correspondence, including to individual Sisters, must include the street address:

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*Sister Lucille Martinez, Sister Ginger Downey*

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

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# Chapter to set path for the future

By Mary Jo Nelson, OLVM President

**E**very four years we, Victory Noll Sisters, have a “Chapter.” It is the highest decision-making body of any congregation when it is in session. These special gatherings are times when a congregation looks back through the last four years to remember and celebrate all the work the community has done. As we remember, we also distill our learnings and emerging matters of greater importance for the future.

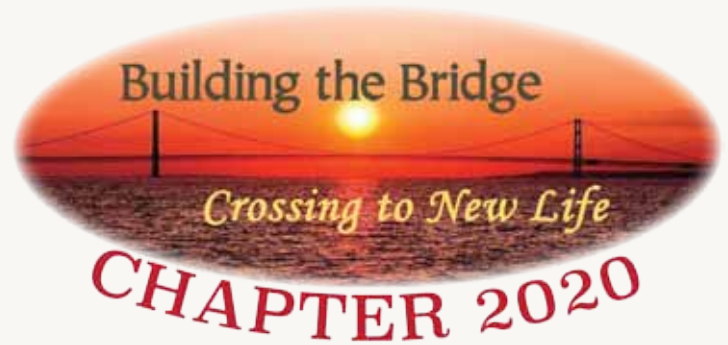
Over time, chapters have evolved. In earlier times, we often worked with proposals that were developed by a group of Sisters to offer some needed change in an area of our life and mission. All Sisters would then give input to the proposal before the proposal was presented to the Chapter body.

As time went on the content for a Chapter changed as congregations faced unknown and uncertain futures, and faced questions that did not have an easy answer or even an answer! In addition, we now see that chapters are not just an event; rather, they are a process. There is pre-chapter time of reviewing our life together — what are we seeing? What needs our attention — not just in us, but also in the world and church? What is God calling us to be and to do because of our efforts to see deeply? During the chapter, a community enters into contemplative dialogue to discern their next best steps for their life, for their engagement in the world and church. After the chapter, the leadership team facilitates and empowers the work of the community to act on the direction statement from the chapter.

In addition to addressing matters of greater importance, congregations elect their leadership team for the next term. Since we, Victory Noll Sisters, are engaged in serious planning for our future, we have petitioned the Office for Religious Life in Rome to extend the term of our current leadership team for two additional years. So, instead of an election, we will vote to extend the term of the current leadership team.

We will have our Chapter March 25-29, 2020, at Victory Noll. And, we invite you to join us in prayer:

- as we remember and celebrate our blessings
- distill our learnings of the last four years
- engage in our matters of greater important
- re-commit ourselves to living our life as women religious in a liminal time — in a time that is unknown and uncertain, but is also a time of entering more deeply into the love and mystery of God. ❖



# Continuing to speak out

## OLVM Sisters remain focused on social justice issues

By Sr. Beatrice Haines

OLVM Social Justice Promoter

In the summer of 1991, five of us Sisters drove a van from Victory Noll to the Nevada desert for retreat. On arriving, we met several more of our sisters who had come from locations in the West.

This was an experience of prayer, learning more about the dangers of nuclear testing and the possible use of nuclear weapons, a profound threat to human life on an unimaginable scale. The retreat was organized by the Eighth Day Center for Justice in Chicago and included an afternoon protest at the test site.

One of the officials guarding the site, chided us: “There’s a shortage of Sisters in Catholic Schools. That’s where you should be!”

Well, Victory Noll Sisters have never taught in Catholic Schools and we believed we were right where we should be. We were called, then and now, to proclaim the Gospel through our various ministries, prayer, study and action on behalf of human rights, justice and peace.

Fr. Sigstein challenged us to “do the work Jesus did.”

Our Constitutions state, “Jesus, anointed by the Spirit, was sent by God ‘to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free.’”

From our beginnings as a congregation, we have been guided by this



**Victory Noll Sisters (above) march in Nevada in 1991 against nuclear weapons and testing. Right, OLVM Social Justice Promoter Beatrice Haines speaks during a gathering supporting diversity in Huntington, Ind., in 2018.**

challenge, adapting how we did it, to the needs and realities of the time.

Beginning in the early 1980s, we began taking corporate stances in relation to various critical social issues.

- 1) In 1982 we agreed “to covenant together, through prayer and action, to oppose publicly the nuclear arms race.” Today we have developed this commitment further by working for the elimination of all weapons of



mass destruction — nuclear, biological and chemical, addressing the root causes of violence and supporting the resolution of conflict through diplomatic and peaceful negotiation.

- 2) In 1986 we took a stand in opposition to the state's execution of any human being through the imposition of the death penalty. We are grateful to see support for the death penalty dwindling in the U.S., however, we cannot rest until no state, nor our federal government continues to carry out executions in our name.
- 3) In 1992 we chose a corporate focus on justice for women in Church and society. This involved the empowerment of women and promotion of women's rights.
- 4) In 1995 we established the "Cherish the Earth Committee" which evolved into an ongoing and growing commitment to Ecological Sustainability. This commitment has become even more critical today as we face the crisis of climate change which threatens all life forms on planet earth.
- 5) In 2008 we took a prophetic stance in support of our brother and sister immigrants in Church and society.

These "corporate stances," commitments as a congregation, continue to guide us today. Though our median age increases and the numbers of members decreases, our passion for peace and justice increases. Every Wednesday evening we gather at Victory Noll for an hour of contemplative "Prayer for the World," focusing each week on a different issue. We sign petitions and write our representatives to support or oppose legislation. Sisters who are able join demonstrations for



**OLVM Sisters continue to stand in solidarity with others in support of many social justice issues. They often are joined with Victory Noll Associates or other partners at events.**

peace, justice for immigrants, and action to address the climate crisis.

On the corporate level we commit our material resources through the John Joseph Sigstein Foundation and congregation donations. This foundation was established to extend God's mission through service in solidarity with God's people, especially those marginalized by society. Another way we continue our social justice stances beyond individual Sisters' commitments is through socially responsible investing of our funds.

As social justice promoter for the congregation, I am energized by efforts to network and collaborate with other organizations working on justice issues and to facilitate and coordinate justice related experiences for and by the Sisters.

For example, I recently prepared postcards to be sent by Sisters at Victory Noll to our Indiana senators urging them to support legislation before Congress to stop the withdrawal of the U.S. from the Paris Climate Agreement.

I believe the following statement from the Vatican II document, "On the Church in the Modern World Today" expresses well, the underlying motivation for our prayer, witness and action on behalf of social justice:

"The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts." ❖



Photo provided

Arise Chicago members march for justice for worker rights, immigrant rights, and human rights.

## Faith • Labor • Action

Arise Chicago addresses root causes of poverty by advocating for workers

By Shelly Ruzicka  
Communications Director  
Arise Chicago

**A**rise Chicago addresses systemic worker exploitation and poverty experienced by low-wage immigrant families across Chicagoland. Arise trains workers in their rights, organizes them to lead workplace justice campaigns, develops their leadership, and mobilizes workers to win pro-worker legislation. As an interfaith organization, Arise also engages clergy and religious allies at all stages of our work. From partner congregations hosting workshops to clergy attending worker delegations, the moral voice of workers' struggles is interwoven

into the Arise model of building economic justice.

Our goal is to create family-supporting, respectful workplaces so that all have a seat at the table of God's abundance. Arise Chicago's work is directly in line with Catholic Social Teaching, in particular the teaching that "The thing that must shape the whole economy is respect for workers rights; this must be our guiding principle." This indeed is the guiding principle at Arise.

Arise Chicago was founded in 1991 by Msgr. Jack Egan and other faith leaders to address root causes of poverty. In 2002, Arise opened a worker center to specifically educate, support, and build community



Drawing from sacred scriptures, Arise Chicago upholds the belief that every person is created in the image of God and therefore deserving of dignity and respect, including in the workplace. Arise Chicago was founded in 1991 by a diverse group of religious leaders who created a model to combat some of poverty's root causes (workers being paid improperly, workers receiving less than a living wage, etc.) by bringing the moral voice to both non-union and union workplace struggles.

among low-wage immigrants, primarily Latinx and Polish workers.

To date, Arise has supported workers to recover more than \$8,700,000 in owed wages and compensation! This includes recovering wages when workers are paid under minimum wage or not paid for all hours worked, compensation for injuries or sexual harassment, etc.

After workers learn their rights and take actions in their own workplaces, they are invited to lead policy campaigns to prevent abuse and make systemic improvements for workers across the city, county, and state.

Arise is located in Cook County — the second largest county in the U.S. and home to over 350,000 low-wage workers, most of whom are women and people of color. These workers lose over \$1 million per day to wage theft, or approximately \$1 of every \$5 they earn, due to unscrupulous employers.

All workers, regardless of immigration status, are covered by U.S. laws. However, locally, immigrants are 150% more likely than U.S.-born workers to experience



Photos provided

**Portillo's restaurant workers contacted Arise Chicago about a threatened unjust mass firing. Arise organized with over 220 workers from 22 locations to walk off the job and deliver a demand letter to company headquarters signed by 781 workers to management. Their action saved over 700 jobs, won a written apology from management, and reinstatement with back pay for at least two dozen workers.**

wage theft.

Recently, immigrant families have faced the increased workplace threat of “silent raids” through the crisis of “No Match” letters. These are letters saying that a worker’s name and social security number do not align in the SSA database. A majority of these “no matches” are simple clerical errors.

However, the federal administration escalated its anti-immigrant agenda by politicizing the Social Security Administration and sending out 875,000



Photos provided

**Arise member Hortencia speaks at the Arise press conference reminding workers to “Check Your Check” when the Chicago and Cook County minimum wage increased.**

“No Match” letters — causing mass chaos with employers and crisis for working families. Mis-

understanding the letters as related to work authorization, many employers improperly fired workers.

Arise responded to these “silent raids” by launching a rapid response “No Match” education and organizing campaign, emerging as a local and national leader. After being contacted by hundreds of workers, Arise: created a 40-page Toolkit; produced trilingual educational videos; informed 40,000 Illinois businesses; held a symposium and national press conference with labor and elected leaders; and trained workers to organize beyond the crisis to improve conditions.

One of several examples of how Arise turned this crisis into an opportunity for workers to improve their jobs happened in the Chicago suburb of Bedford Park.

Workers at a food processing factory were threatened with being fired because of “No Match” letters. The workers reached out to Arise, were trained on their rights under “No Match” and collectively demanded to keep their jobs. And they won! Feeling their power, they decided to keep organizing to improve working conditions.

With support from Arise, they decided they best way to have family-sustaining jobs was through unionization. But leading up to their election, the employer hired a union buster. He threatened the workers — falsely scaring workers to think they would be deported if they supported the union. In a landmark decision, the National Labor Relations Board found that the union buster intentionally misled workers and illegally used



Photo provided

**Arise Chicago staff celebrate with member Rosalba and her daughter after she received the first payment of owed wages from her employer.**

false immigration-related threats. This set a precedent that immigration-related intimidation violates federal law. With Arise support, and overcoming the threats, the workers organized and won their union election!

Dalia, a worker from the Bedford Park plant, said after receiving “No Match” letters, “We were shocked because many of us had worked there for many years without any problems. We looked for information on what to do, and we found Arise Chicago. With their support, we signed a collective letter to our employer to save our jobs. And we won! This inspired us to take additional steps to improve our workplace and we are now forming a union! To other workers, I want to say: protect yourself at work, learn your rights, and organize! Si se puede!”

Throughout history, the faith community has played a leading voice on issues of social justice. At Arise Chicago, we proudly claim that role. We proudly practice the belief that we are all created in the image of God, and therefore deserving of dignity and respect — whether at home or at work. We invite you to honor the dignity of workers through your prayers and actions. We invite you to reflect on how each of us, through our work, contribute to the common good of humanity. We invite you to Arise with us. ❖

Arise Chicago website:  
arisechicago.org

**NOTE:** Arise Chicago is one of the agencies receiving grants from OLVN’s John Joseph Sigstein Foundation.

# SUPPORTING OUR MISSION

## IN GRATITUDE TO OUR BENEFACTORS

Contributions from September 1, 2018 to August 31, 2019

*Through your generous contributions, you support Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters in their mission to proclaim the Word of God, to stand in solidarity with those living in poverty and oppression, to foster justice and to promote the development of leaders. The Victory Noll Sisters thank you and continue to keep all of you in our prayers.*

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**El Centro member Juana joins with others during a rally in Denver for immigrant rights in 2019.**

# Stepping out of the shadows

## El Centro efforts advance the welfare of ‘invisible’ workforce

**By Sarah Shikes**  
Executive Director  
Centro Humanitario

**C**entro Humanitario Para Los Trabajadores (El Centro), the name itself (Humanitarian Center for Workers) lifts up all workers as human beings who deserve dignity and fair wages.

The organization was founded in Denver, Colorado, in 2002 by a community concerned about the welfare of an important yet often “invisible” workforce. The mission is to promote the rights and well-being of day laborers and domestic workers in Colorado through education, economic opportunity, job and leadership skill development, united action and advocacy. Its vision is that ALL workers are agents of change; they belong, thrive and contribute to their families, communities and for the global social change movement.



Centro Humanitario Para Los Trabajadores (El Centro) is Denver’s only day laborer center promoting work, dignity and community. The mission is to promote the rights and well-being of day laborers and domestic workers in Colorado through education, job skills, leadership development, united action and advocacy.

The invisible workers that El Centro engages in its programs are primarily immigrant workers from Mexico and other Latin American countries, with low proficiency in English, who struggle to support their families working unpredictable and low-paying jobs. They struggle to make ends meet working physically demanding and often dangerous jobs in construction, landscaping moving, cleaning, cooking and childcare. Those challenges make it difficult for them to access work opportunities, find transportation, access health care, or secure housing, which can result in homelessness.

This niche workforce relies on temporary jobs and the informal “gig economy,” where they work for multiple employers often without a contract or set expectations. They do not receive adequate training or benefits such as health insurance or paid time off. Workers find that race, socioeconomic, and political status lead to unfair treatment and exploitation including non-payment, underpayment and unsafe work conditions.

## Outreach, Engagement and Leadership Development

Each year El Centro’s programs bring more than 300 workers out of isolation as they organize to promote economic advancement, connect directly with employers and unite for social change.

Day laborers — those who seek work on street corners throughout the city — participate in know-your-rights training, find access to resources to combat workplace exploitation, and engage in the Employment Program where they may connect directly with employers.

Domestic workers attend workshops and forums as they build skills together and become leaders in developing opportunities for economic advancement and campaigns that promote the rights of domestic workers locally and nationally.



Photo provided

**Members engage in building a vision for themselves and the future of El Centro in Denver.**



Photo provided

**El Centro members gather for an assembly in Denver, celebrating the efforts done in support of worker rights.**

El Centro's guiding principles are to ensure the workers who make up the membership are active in decision making regarding day-to-day operations. They create equitable systems for employment distribution and pricing, offering input guides the priorities and long-term vision for El Centro and as leaders representing the organization in the community, locally and nationally.

## Employment Program

Economic opportunity is fundamental to El Centro's programming. The primary goal is for workers to increase their ability to support themselves and their families through a fair wage and dignified work.

El Centro's Worker Center provides an alternative for day laborers who seek work on street corners.

Workers and staff collaborate to recruit and retain employers who are willing to pay a minimum of \$15 per hour for at least 4 hours and commit to a standard expectation for the treatment of each worker.

Workers with experience in a specific trade are encouraged to take a primary role in promoting themselves to employers willing to pay competitive market rate wages for skilled labor (i.e., house cleaning, catering, child care, painting, carpentry, plumbing and drywall).

El Centro worker members have created an agreed-upon employer intake and job delegation system to educate employers regarding their responsibilities and sets expecta-



Photo provided

**Worker Members unite at El Centro and staff and worker leaders represent El Centro at the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition Annual Convening.**

tions for the fair treatment of each worker.

## Juana's Story

My name is Juana Armijo. I am an immigrant woman, worker member of El Centro Humanitario, and domestic worker.

My life has not been easy since I came to this country. I lost a child many years ago and I care for my husband who is homebound and ill.

Two years ago, I found Centro Humanitario and this has been good for me. I love the sharing of our life together with other members and immigrants, the support we receive from the staff and all the things I have learned like knowing my rights, how to protect myself at work, how to take care of my health and how to work on my personal development and growth.

El Centro has also provided me

opportunities to serve others. I support the day laborers by offering free haircuts to them and help at El Centro however I am able. I cook meals, and show up at important rallies. It is also through El Centro that I spoke in public for the first time. I now have participated again and again, representing El Centro as a leader in the community.

El Centro is a place where I see myself growing every day and helping others in the community to find what I have found here. Gracias! ❖

Centro Humanitario Para Los Trabajadores website:

[centrohumanitario.org](http://centrohumanitario.org)

**NOTE:** *Centro Humanitario Para Los Trabajadores is one of the agencies receiving grants from OLV's John Joseph Sigstein Foundation.*



## OLVM Sisters reach milestone

Victory Noll Sisters Valeria Foltz and Mary Joan Ginsterblum each were honored with a special Mass as they reached 100 years of age. Sr. Valeria, born November 12, 1919, entered OLVM in 1941, while Sr. Mary Joan, born December 28, 1919, entered the congregation in 1939. Each Sister had a nephew priest celebrate Mass, and several family members were able to attend the events. ❖



In the photo top left, Sr. Valeria Foltz (center) celebrates with Fr. Maicaal Lobo (left), Sr. Valeria's nephew Msgr. Mike Foltz and Steve Rennels. Above, members of Sr. Valeria's family with her in a special Mass at Victory Noll.



Sr. Mary Joan Ginsterblum (center) celebrated her 100th birthday with nephews Tom Farris and Fr. Bill Farris, OFM.



Sr. Mary Joan Ginsterblum receives communion from her nephew, Fr. Bill Farris, OFM, during a special Mass at Victory Noll celebrating her 100th birthday.

# Going to California

Longtime area presence began with Redlands mission

By Jeff Hoffman  
OLVM Archivist

**O**n September 7, 1932, Catechist Mary McConville and Catechist Esther Furst arrived to their new home on Lugonia Avenue in Redlands, California. This would be the opening date for the “Queen of the Missions,” which would become their base of operations in Southern California for over the next 40 years. Within in the next month they would be joined by nine more Catechists.

The Catechists’ first year in Redlands was not without its excitement. In an account preserved in the Victory Noll Archives, Catechist Sophia Renkey says that on their first Halloween in Redlands, a cross was burned in the park across from their house. A few



**Victory Noll Sisters are seen in front of Burrage Mansion in Redlands, Calif., called “Queen of the Missions.” The Sisters arrived in Southern California in 1932, and the building would remain their area base of operations for many years.**

days later they received a phone call where the voice on the other end said, “You are nothing but a group of lying hypocrites.”

The Catechists would go on to administer to centers in Redlands, Yucaipa, Mentone, Crafton, Bryn Mawr, and three centers within the boundaries of San Bernardino. Within five years there would be another additional 13 sites added to their number. The spacious Cheney home on Lugonia Avenue was large enough for it to provide room for semi-annual retreats for other Catechists from other California locations. The garage out back was utilized as a dormitory for the growing number of Catechists.

Catechist Mary McConville and

Catechist Sophia Renkey set out to find a more suitable location in Redlands or San Bernardino that could accommodate the growing needs of the Catechists. No one wished to open their home to such a large number of people. Finally, a non-Catholic, Mrs. Ada Stillman opened her home for retreats for the next three summers. The following year the Sterling home was utilized for a retreat in March and a retreat later in the summer.

While renting the Sterling home on West Crescent the Catechists went for a walk and seemed to be guided to an abandoned building they called the Old Monastery. They eventually made contact with someone who assured the

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** *As Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters approach their 100th anniversary in 2022, we will be taking a look back at the history of the community in a series of articles, researched and written by OLVM archivist Jeff Hoffman. This article is the first looking at the OLVM’s first foray into California, specifically in the Redlands and San Bernardino areas where the impact of the Victory Noll Sisters is still felt to this day.*

Catechists that if they could make the Burrage home livable, they were welcome to occupy it.

On December 8, 1936, Catechist Mary McConville and Catechist Catherine Ganse planted a medal of the Immaculate Conception in one spot and another of St. Therese in another. Catechist McConville promised the Little Flower that they would name the chapel in honor of St. Therese of the Child of Jesus and of the Holy Face, if they would be granted permission to occupy the Burrage mansion. Permission was granted. On May 24, 1937, on the Feast of Our Blessed Lady of Victory, the Catechists moved into the Burrage Mansion, which became the new location of the “Queen of the Missions.”

This was a house that had not been occupied for 20 years. Time and vandals had taken their toll on the building. The electrical fixtures and much of the plumbing were vandalized. Water had to be piped to the top of the steps leading into the house, and from there it made its way into the house via a bucket brigade. Neither of the two furnaces worked and the 13 fireplaces were used for warmth in the winter. Candles had to be used for light on the second floor. The owners were glad to have occupants in the house in order to stem the decay of this grand structure.

In order to make it habitable, 24 women of the Mexican Women’s Club of St. Mary’s parish in Redlands spent every day for two weeks cleaning and scrubbing to assist the Catechists. The Catechists’ story at Redlands will continue in the next issue of VISIONS. ❖



**Above, Catechists stationed in Southern California gather at the Burrage mansion in the summer of 1939 for their annual retreat. They formed the letter “M” in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary.**



**At left is the house on Lugonia Street in Redlands where Catechist Mary McConville and Catechist Esther Furst called home when they arrived in 1932. During the next year, 10 Catechists would instruct 1,500 students in 22 centers.**



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# Visions

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FROM THE VICTORY NOLL ARCHIVES



**P**art of the OLVM mission is to stand in solidarity with those who have been marginalized. Sister Justine Kiefer (center, holding sign) was one of the Victory Noll Sisters who participated in a 1980s rally in support of farm workers who were seeking better working situations. ❖