

NEWSLETTER OF OUR LADY OF VICTORY MISSIONARY SISTERS

# Visions

March 2019

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



## THE BORDER

Aiding those who are  
seeking a better life

**PLUS: Raising up vulnerable children**





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

The 196-foot tall sculpture at the border in Juarez, Mexico, honors mixed-race peoples and re-creates both the Christian cross and an Aztec religious symbol called the Nahui Ollin.

**A**s a congregation, we have been walking alongside immigrants since our earliest days and it is no wonder why some of our Sisters would choose to go and walk with the asylum seekers at the southern border of the United States. Three sisters, Sr. Clarita Trujillo, Sr. Lucille Martinez and Sr. Francisca Olvera, reflect on their experiences of being on the border. In reading their reflections, many of the reasons these refugees are undertaking the journey from their homelands is the same

## PERSPECTIVES ALONG THE JOURNEY

as the family of two of our Sisters — Sr. Rafaela and Sr. Otilla Mendoza — in the 1920s, as they escaped the violence and persecution in their home country of Mexico. (*You can read the Mendoza family's story on our website at [www.olvm.org](http://www.olvm.org)*) This is an issue very close to the hearts and ministry of many of our Sisters. The history article speaks about how the Victory Noll Sisters provided for the immigrants during the Great Depression of the 1930s in Gary and Indiana Harbor, Indiana. Once again, we feature two grant recipients of the John J. Sigstein Foundation — Hannah's House and Talitha Koum. Both of these recipients work with children to give them a good foundation in order to grow into healthy adults. ❖

## OLVM LEADERSHIP TEAM

*Sister Mary Jo Nelson,*  
*Sister Lucille Martinez,* *Sister Ginger Downey*

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# Special day is call to action

## Our Lady of Guadalupe reminds us we can speak to power

*December 12 is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and is held dearly by the Victory Noll Sisters. On that day, Sr. Ginger Downey, OLVN General Secretary, offered this reflection.*

**T**he feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is one of the important feast days for the Victory Noll Sisters and has been since the earliest days of our congregation. There are several reasons for this. First, from our very beginning we have continually worked within the Hispanic community, mainly with the Mexican and Mexican-American population, where Our Lady of Guadalupe is very important culturally as well as religiously. As we became a viable part of the community we also incorporated the devotion to Our Blessed Mother under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe.



Sr. Ginger Downey,  
OLVN General  
Secretary

Secondly, many of our early Sisters and some of our Sisters living today grew up with devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. It was a part of the faith tradition of their families and continued to strengthen their own faith throughout their lives. The devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe by these Sisters has helped to strengthen the devotion within our entire congregation.

When we look at our readings from today's liturgical celebration, we see a parallel to the traditional message of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In the first reading taken from the prophet Zechariah, we hear the words, "I am coming to dwell among you . . . many nations shall join you." This is speaking about the Messiah, but as we learn from the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe that it is also the same message she gave to Juan Diego. She came to be with the people and her famous quote, "build my church" has continued to spur discussion among scholars. Did she mean a church in a building, or more realistically, to "build my church" as a community of faith that would follow her guidance to living in the way of her son. The second part of that quote from Zechariah, "Many nations shall join you," has also proven to be true. The devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe has spread across the Americas over the centuries since her appearance in 1631.

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Fr. Mike Lobo, priest chaplain at Victory Noll, told the story of how the United States was placed under the protection of the Immaculate Conception by the first bishop in the United States, Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore. Pope John Paul II declared Our

Lady of Guadalupe the Patroness of all the Americas in 1999, elevating the Liturgical Celebration to a Feast in all countries of North America, Central America and South America. Many nations have joined in the veneration and devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe throughout the Americas, and it continues to grow.

Not only did she ask Juan Diego to build a church, we also know that she told Juan not to be afraid just as the angel said to her, "do not be afraid you have found favor with God." It took a few more encounters for Juan to have the courage to take the message from the "Lovely Lady" — the name that Juan used for her — to the bishop. At first, the bishop did not believe Juan, rebuffing his story. It was only through Our Lady of Guadalupe's assurance that she would be with him as he spoke to power for her, on behalf of the native people of Mexico, that he was able to go once more to the bishop. She gave Juan the sign in the roses she arranged on the bishop's tilma. The real sign that moved the bishop to belief was her image on his tilma.

Today we still hold the assurance that Mary, under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, will still be with us when we do speak to power, especially when we speak for those who have little standing in the world. In a small, but significant way, it is what Sr. Lucille Martinez, Sr. Clarita Trujillo and Sr. Francisca Olvera are doing at the southern border of the United States. They are speaking to the powerful through their actions that all who have crossed our borders deserve humane treatment. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to follow the gospel and welcome the stranger, the immigrant, the widow and orphan, especially when they are fleeing violence, persecution and oppression along with living in poverty and lacking human dignity in their own countries of origin. I am sure the celebration of the Our Lady of Guadalupe at the border will be special celebrations of gratitude and intercession for continued safety, asylum and welcome.

As we gather today to celebrate this feast of our Blessed Mother, under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we remember that she called not the powerful but a poor native man to speak to the powerful. She still invites many to speak to those in the seats of power, both civilly and ecclesiastically. We speak on behalf of those whose voice is not heard and raise awareness of the injustices that are still prevalent in many places in the world. In doing so, each of us follow the way of the Gospel preached and lived by her son. Que Viva La Guadalupe, Que Viva La Guadalupe, Que Viva La Guadalupe. ❖

# Welcome to the stranger

Sisters volunteer to help immigrants arriving in the U.S.



Photo provided

Among the women religious assisting immigrants crossing the border were (from left) Sr. Pauline Troncale, CVI, of Houston, Texas; Sr. Clarita Trujillo and Sr. Lucille Martinez, both of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters in Huntington, Indiana; and Sr. Judy Kramen, OSB, of St. Joseph, Minnesota.

*Last fall, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) put out a call for volunteers to work at various respite centers along the Southwestern border to assist immigrant individuals and families entering the country. Two Victory Noll Sisters, Sr. Lucille Martinez and Sr. Clarita Trujillo, volunteered to serve at Annunciation House in El Paso, Texas, for a month-long commitment. Sr. Francisca Olvera volunteered for a shorter time in the San Diego area. (See Page 6)*

*At El Paso, Srs. Lucille and Clarita helped to process more than 1,500 people crossing the border in their month-long volunteering effort.*

*Sr. Lucille emailed regular updates back to the Victory Noll motherhouse in Huntington, Indiana. This is a compilation of her missives.*

## FRIDAY, NOV. 16

Left Albuquerque early in the morning and got into El Paso around noon.

We called our contact to find out where we were staying. We got directions to El Convento. I think it's the old retirement place of the Loretto Sisters.

Our contact, Mary Hull, had already assigned us to the 2 p.m. – 10 p.m. shift at the Soluna Hotel. We went over to the hotel to get oriented by Dan, a Jesuit seminarian. We stayed on until 9 p.m.

I was inducted to do the intake since they were short of help. It is one of those situations where you learn by doing. After a short orientation, I was on my way to receiving the immigrants, getting them settled and doing whatever needs to be done. That night Clarita was responsible for taking them to get clothes from our "treasure chest" and giving out medication.

## SATURDAY, NOV. 17

Another 2 to 10 p.m. shift. Both of us continued doing intake. All of the folks come with documents prepared by immigration. It has an ID number, and gives the name of the contact who will be receiving them here in the United States. We take that info down and they move on to the next step. Another group of volunteers assigns them a room and begins to make contact with their sponsor.

Every evening there is a group of folks who come with prepared food to serve. They take care of everything, setting up, serving, and cleaning. I understand in the other shift the volunteers end up doing a lot of this work.

## SUNDAY, NOV. 18

We went to Mass at a nearby parish and then we went out to eat lunch.

From there we went to work because it was already close to 2



p.m. Just as we arrived, a busload of folks were being dropped off by immigration.

The guard said there were 45 people. All these men, women, and lots of children getting off the bus. Many of the children come with colds, sore throat, vomiting, etc.

We immediately begin our work of intake. We had not yet finished that group when the ICE officer comes to say they have another bus with 14 persons. We continue with our routine. The people want clean clothes so they are taken to the clothes closet, provided with medication, if needed.

Most of the people are from Honduras, Guatemala, and a few from El Salvador. Many Dads with one or two children. Lots of Moms with their child, no man. I think the men are already here in the states. Many are going to South or North Carolina, Alabama, California, Virginia, Washington. It looks like most of them will go by bus, which means a good 3-to-4 day trip.

Before they depart, a care package is provided with food for the journey. Imagine a mom on a bus for 4 days with a 2-or-4 year old child. Volunteers also take them to the bus or plane. This gives you an idea of the situation. I assume this will be what we do every day.

Keep the prayers coming. The people are so grateful for the little that we can do for them.

## MONDAY, NOV. 19

Today when we arrived at Soluna Hotel, we found out we had been assigned to the Budget Motel next door. It is the same routine as what we were doing except the work place is more crowded since the rooms are smaller. We did the



Photo provided

**Protesters at the Tornillo Detention Center in El Paso, Texas, ask for the center to be closed. Nearly 3,000 teen immigrants were being held at the government-run facility. It closed in January.**

intake and called the sponsors. It was very cold and we were afraid we might all end up with a cold. One of the sisters did end up with a bad cold.

## TUESDAY, NOV. 20

A new group of Notre Dame sisters arrived this afternoon. Have not met them yet since they were already in bed when we came in this evening.

We had lots of volunteers this evening. We received 50 this evening. I don't know if I mentioned that there are seven locations under Annunciation House. I assume those locations are also receiving refugees each according to the number of rooms available. This evening there was another change in how we do the work. They

moved the office from Budget to Soluna Hotel. All the paperwork and calls are now made from Soluna. This is good because as I mentioned the other place was very cold, no heat and had to keep the door open. We had a wonderful evening meal of rice, potatoes and pasta.

I have been most impressed with the people's gratitude for the little that we can provide for them. This is much different environment from the detention place. It seems the routine was eating cold burritos for all meals, sleeping on the floor, and not knowing what was the next step. One young lady said they slept for three days not knowing whether it was day or night. For us Americans who are compulsively clean, there was no bath or

## The view from California

*OLVM Sister Francisca Olvera lives in the San Diego area, and she volunteered to assist migrants entering the United States at Tijuana. Here she reflects on her experience.*

I am not sure how long my service to this ministry will be. I am thinking that is going to depend on the situation. If more immigrants are allowed to cross they will need the shelter to wait and to contact their friends or relatives to go to their destinations in this country. My other connection with this ministry is the Casa Cornelia Law Center, where I work. They collaborated to have the shelter and the lawyers went and help. They invited me to go with them. So in this ministry I represent my OLVM Congregation and Casa Cornelia.



**Sr. Francisca Olvera**

In San Diego we do not have many Sisters helping. The main group that does most of the planning is a Jewish organization, and other organizations pitch in, like Catholic Charities.

I volunteered to help during the morning hours because I'm not very good driving at night. I help at the kitchen during breakfast. I am available to accompany families to the airport and the Greyhound bus. They need guidance to make sure they get the right tickets and pass security, and we help them to get to the gate and wait with them getting their plane or bus. The kitchen serves three meals and provides travel snacks bags. We advise them to get a coat or jackets since it is winter wherever they are going in the States.

Since I have been serving at Casa Cornelia I keep a motto, or a kind of mantra, to help me to make sense of my ministry to the immigrants. This is a global human tragedy. Whatever I contribute, I always say to myself, this is my grain of sand in this vast desert of this human tragedy. Sometimes I feel that I did not do enough for this or that family, and I pray that whatever I missed God will take care of them and also me. I think that life goes on, and as our paths cross, we ought to be there for one another and continue our journey together. I pray for the gift of being fully present to each person I meet and give to them the best of myself. I learned that "compassion is an empowered state where we want what is best for the other person." These are words that the Dalai Lama said to Douglas Abrams in an interview. As I continue my service to the immigrants I hope these words will keep me going to be fully present to them. ❖

showers the whole time they were detained – which could be days for some and weeks for others. I noticed last night that most of the women had on the ankle bracelets provided by ICE, to be kept on until their first hearing. Many of the women mentioned how tight it is and uncomfortable.

### WEDNESDAY, NOV. 21

We received 50 new refugees today. Had great news — one of the ladies from El Salvador gave birth to her new daughter and came back to the respite center yesterday. The baby is healthy and brought much joy to all of us. Now arrangements are being made to send them off to their destination to Seattle, Wash. Originally, the brother was thinking of sending her by bus but we are trying to make other arrangements because of her current situation. Imagine having to travel by bus with a new born after giving birth.

OLVM Sister Lupe Flores arrived today with an Incarnate Word Sister. They will stay the weekend and help out. They were assigned the morning shift on Thursday.

### THURSDAY, NOV. 22 THANKSGIVING DAY

A good day to reflect on gratitude, demonstrated and expressed by the refugees that come to the respite center. It's a good meditation to think about my own life and how it is so easy to take so many things for granted. The generosity of the folks who show up everyday to give of their time is overwhelming, not to mention the folks who bring the food to feed all of us. The interesting aspect is, at least at our place, the groups are not church groups as such but neighbors and



friends who organize themselves and have decided to do this on a regular basis. Last night the group was a Jewish family who brought the food. Yesterday afternoon we heard that the cleaning ladies who work for the hotel provided a thanksgiving dinner at noon. Conversing with the refugees is most interesting. As we observe them some of the volunteers ask ourselves why are they willing to put up with all the struggles they encounter to get to the U.S. and it all comes down to, they want a better life for their children. The love, compassion and generosity exemplified by those who are giving of themselves to serve others is the America these folks have heard about and want to be part of.

No refugees today. Immigration officers are on vacation.

## FRIDAY, NOV. 23

The day after Thanksgiving we had plenty of leftover turkey and pumpkin pie. We received 60 persons today. We had about 10 young women from Cuba. The other day we also had a family with young children from Russia. Lots of the folks have left for their destination. Dan, the seminarian, commented he had not seen as many leaving by plane as he did this week. Sr. Clarita has been busy buying wool caps, gloves and chapstick for the people with money given her by a friend. The folks are happy to keep themselves warm as they travel by bus for several days. The lady who had the baby was off today by plane to Seattle.

More religious sisters arrived today, so we have a full house here at Loretto. Today is one week since our arrival. It seems we have been here much longer.



Photo provided

**A baby girl was born to one of the immigrants from El Salvador during her time being processed after entering the United States.**

## SATURDAY, NOV. 24

OLVM Sister Teresa Aparicio came over today from Albuquerque. She will be staying until Tuesday. Another busy day, received 57 refugees. Lots of kids with colds, cough and fever.

## SUNDAY, NOV. 25

We received 75 persons. Two of the families came with measles, so they have been quarantined for a few days. The afternoon was somewhat chaotic, with not enough volunteers for the number of people to attend. We were kept busy all night making calls and attending to the various needs of the folks. Most of them today were from Honduras and Guatemala.

## MONDAY, NOV. 26

We had 75 arrivals today. Interesting occurrence when we received 10 young women from Cuba again today. We all wonder what this means and who is sponsoring them. One of them was sharing how difficult life has become under the new administration. They are very different from our humble people from Guatemala and Honduras. Sr. Teresa Aparicio left today.

## TUESDAY, NOV. 27

Our friends from the Benedictine Monastery in Kansas left today and there are new arrivals – Sisters of Charity. We had 70 arrivals today. Many continue to be sent to their destinations by plane. I went to the airport for the first time to help some of the folks know the details about flying. I feel for them and admire their courage. Picture yourself in a foreign country not knowing the language and trying to figure out what to do. I woke up this morning wondering if they had found their way at the airport. Donations of clothes and food for the journey continue to arrive. I have never been fond of rummage, now I find myself working with it every day. One of the ladies wanted to give me a \$5 donation for the church so we could pray for her. I said no need for a donation but we will pray for you.

## WEDNESDAY, NOV. 28

60 arrivals today. Among them was another group of young women from Cuba. We also had about 6 pregnant women in their seventh or eighth month of pregnancy. We found out the airlines do not allow them to fly unless they have a doctor's permission, so that means a long bus ride for them.

# SISTERS IN MISSION



Photo provided

**Protesters calling for the closing of the Tornillo Detention Center are filmed at the facility near the United States-Mexico border in El Paso, Texas. The facility housed nearly 3,000 immigrant teens.**

## THURSDAY, NOV. 29

70 new arrivals. Another group of young women from Cuba.

We have a few of the refugees willing to help. We asked a few of the women to help with making order of the piles of clothes. They did a wonderful job. Some of the men take the initiative to clean up the mess after the folks are fed. I don't recall if I told you the meals are held outside in a tent with some gas warmers, especially in the evening. Both Clarita and I have been trying to recover from a cold.

On several occasions, I have asked if they are part of the caravan. What caravan? They tell us it never existed, they have come with small groups of friends or family members. In our conversation I asked how they managed to come this far and one of the men replied the child is their ticket. Apparently, they are releasing parents with children, so most of the men and women have one or more children accompanying them. In some cases, some of the family members have been detained. It's always a heartache for them because they don't know what has happened to that family member.

## FRIDAY, NOV. 30

Busy day, we had 70 new refugees. It was cold and windy and it even rained somewhat this morning.

Folks continue to come and go. It takes great effort to keep it all straight. Quite a number continue to fly, most take Greyhound. Someone said President Trump was upset about the money Greyhound is making and wanted to do something about it. It is making lots of money with all these folks taking the bus. Some of them come with mistakes made by the immigration folks. Some have had the wrong photo, going to the wrong place, and several this week had the address of Annunciation House as the sponsor. What this means is that the paperwork has to go back to Immigration for corrections and that delays the departure. Sometimes it takes 2 or 3 days to get the correct paperwork returned. There have been several going to different parts of Indiana, including one to Fort Wayne.

## TUESDAY, DEC. 4

Back to work, I'm feeling much better. Both Clarita and I are still

working on getting rid of our cold. We had 50 refugees, lots of sad stories as we listen to the ladies share with us why they have left their country. Two of the sisters from St. Louis left today, another one from their community arrived. Our coordinator, Dan, who is a Jesuit seminarian left today to resume his studies in Louisiana. He has been working in the project for 6 weeks. I think he was really looking forward to his departure.

## WEDNESDAY, DEC. 5

What a hectic afternoon. We must have had 80 folks come in two shifts, we did not have enough volunteers. It was a long night as we kept working until the end. We got home around 10:30 p.m. ready to fall into bed. Our colds persist. More Sisters arrived today. We had another group of 13 young women from Cuba.

## THURSDAY, DEC. 6

Another busy afternoon and evening. We had a few more volunteers but they don't speak Spanish so I had to do most of the intakes. Those who don't feel comfortable in their limited



Spanish are very helpful in taking the folks to the bus station and airport. We had 70 folks come in mostly from Guatemala and Honduras. Don't recall if I mentioned one of the women went to the airport to depart but was not allowed to fly. Since she was very pregnant, she was taken to the hospital where she delivered her baby. I understand she plans to fly out today.

More Sisters arrived last night. I met them this morning at breakfast, they are from Iowa and I think one is from South Dakota. It seems most of them stay for 2 weeks.

## **FRIDAY, DEC. 7**

A very busy night with very little volunteer help. We had 65 folks who arrived right before supper. We asked that they go over to supper and then come back for the intake and room assignments. We had a difficult time trying to find enough accommodations. We are running out of rooms because we still had people from previous days who have not left. Ruben Garcia came over yesterday to showcase the process. He mentioned that Immigration wanted to send him 400 people but he only had room for 320. That means the other people are left at bus stations to fend for themselves. As the situation continues I question how long this can go on and am convinced there must be some other solution. Yesterday I read that the military presence at the border has cost the government \$92 million. Where are our priorities, our values, our sense of what we can expect from our elected persons? Someone mentioned this morning

that 90 percent of these folks will most probably be deported after they have gone thru this process. Doesn't make sense to me.

## **SATURDAY, DEC. 8**

Thank you all for your continued prayers.

## **SUNDAY, DEC. 9**

More Sisters arrived, some left. Clarita and I seem to be the steady anchor as we see volunteers moving in and out. We had an exceptionally busy afternoon. Lots of people, around 80, and a very small group of volunteers. This night we stayed on until around 11 p.m.

## **MONDAY, DEC. 10**

We received 45 folks, most of them from Honduras. We heard more horror stories of how they are treated in the detention centers. One lady said as soon as she entered our door she knew this was a peaceful place. I happened to step out to go buy some shaving blades for the men, so I missed out on what occurred while I was gone. Apparently a man came over and asked if there was a church they could go to. The Sisters said no but we can pray right here. Some prayer took place and apparently the group that gathered all were crying and crying. It was a very healing time for all. In the evening, one of the ladies was again sharing how the prayer had relieved her of all this pressure she felt in her heart. Before we knew it both this lady and some others were helping out in serving food and helping to take people to their rooms. Some of them are so accommodating and always willing to help us out.

## **TUESDAY, DEC. 11**

We received 45 refugees today, mostly from Honduras. It was an easier night since we had more help today. Lots of arrivals have left or are on their way tomorrow. They come so unprepared for winter. When I keep reminding them they are going into cold country, they just laugh.

## **WEDNESDAY, DEC. 12**

We had 60 people today. We got official word that we will be moving from the hotel location we are in now to another hotel location.

## **THURSDAY, DEC. 13**

We had 60 folks today, mostly from Honduras and Guatemala. The kids continue to arrive with colds, fever, and upset stomach, as well as some of the parents. We continue to do the same work. We had a very sad case of domestic abuse of one of the women, I hope she is granted permission to stay in US.

## **FRIDAY, DEC. 14**

Today we started working at a new hotel, further distance from the previous one. It's an old hotel that had not been used for several years. Apparently they have been trying to clean it up and do many repairs. We received 60 today.

## **SATURDAY, DEC. 15**

We continue to organize ourselves in the new place. We received 60 today. More Sisters came in some from Scranton, Pennsylvania and Holy Spirit from Chicago. We now have a full house here at Loretto convent. This morning some of us attended the demonstration at Tornillo. A relatively small group gathered,

with much media coverage and some political people, including Beto O'Rourke. You may have heard about the young 7-year old from Guatemala that died here last week. This will be used to gain some leverage and political pressure. We were not allowed to enter Tornillo but a man from

New York who has stationed himself outside the wall informed us they do not have water inside the detention. The water is brought in and they use generators. There is a great push to have this place closed. I think it's our new Guantanamo, holding teens and refusing to release them.

### SUNDAY, DEC. 16

Today begins the celebration of Las Posadas.

A good reminder that we continue to refuse hospitality to the WORD incarnate.

This is my last communication from El Paso. I will see you all soon. ❖

## Reflections on the border experience

*Following their time in El Paso, Texas, volunteering to aid immigrants entering the United States, OLVM Sisters Lucille Martinez and Clarita Trujillo reflect on the experience.*

The time I spent in El Paso working with the immigrants was during the Advent season, a season of waiting, expectation and preparation to receive the Incarnate One. In many ways the immigrants we assisted found themselves in the Advent spirit as they waited, hoped and prepared themselves to be received in their new home. The children expressed much joy and excitement about flying for the first time; getting to eat Kentucky Fried chicken for the first time and having the opportunity to enjoy the snow as they departed to all parts of the country.



Sr. Lucille Martinez

Like Mary and Joseph these immigrant families now find themselves thrust into the role of refugees, fleeing danger and crossing a border to provide a safe and better life for their children. They enter a foreign land uninvited, relying upon the kindness of strangers of a different nation, different culture to keep them alive.

The blessing of this experience was what I witnessed in the immigrant families who came through our door. They were overwhelmingly grateful for the kindness of strangers – the many religious women who were present to them, the numerous men, women and children from the El Paso area who came on a daily basis to provide food, clothing and friendship. We were truly blessed by their presence, their gratitude and the kindness they extended to all who encountered them. ❖

This experience, like many others I have had with Central American people was a good one, that hopefully will guide me in my interaction with others. Most people were from Honduras, Guatemala and a few from El Salvador. What I most value in the interaction with them is their values of simplicity, friendliness, deep faith and their trust in people which does not seem to be tarnished by mistreatment.



Sr. Clarita Trujillo

They can recount how badly their stay at ICE's accommodations was, how they were insulted, poorly fed, without bitterness. What stands out to them is that some of the guards were kind, compassionate and helpful. They thank God for being with us, feeling welcomed, at peace and safe and show an unfailing trust that God will guide them to their new place. They look forward to a better life full of hope that will be better for themselves and their families.

The ones that stay longer than a day begin to offer help in cleaning, sorting clothes, guiding people to their rooms, picking up after meals and doing any other task. I will treasure this experience and am grateful that I was open to go to El Paso. I interrupted my peaceful life, my carving classes, my painting, planned gatherings with family and friends and am glad for it now. All is well when we accept unexpected invitations and by the grace of God live it and can recall the experience with a thankful heart. ❖



# Hope is here

Hannah's House opens doors for vulnerable women

By John A. Meiser  
Executive Director  
Hannah's House of Michiana

**T**wenty-five years ago, Hannah's House of Michiana began when four organizations came together to help meet the needs of pregnant women facing homelessness in Michiana. Bethel College, Saint Joseph's Hospital, The Catholic Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend and Women's Care Center were among the early visionaries that believed that they could be the hands and feet of Jesus in Michiana by helping mothers and babies in our community. Fast forward to 2019, and Hannah's House of Michiana continues to love, care and support these vulnerable women in their time of need and beyond.

How do we accomplish this monumental challenge of helping someone transform their life and future? We do this by having defined programming that has been created with love, structure and intentionality from the first time our guest steps foot into our door. Each resident has their own strengths, weaknesses and personalities; thus our program is individualized person-by-person with common structural components embedded



Photo provided

**A Hannah's House baby is all smiles. Hannah's House of Michiana welcomes homeless pregnant women and provides them with not only housing, but love, care, and support throughout and after their pregnancies.**



Hannah's House is a Catholic-Christian agency offering a continuum of shelter, staff support and programming for the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of pregnant and parenting single/homeless young women.

throughout the curriculum. We believe in trackable outcomes and measurements of success. We

measure these steps with defined goals and trackable/measurable outcomes overseen by our Director of Programming and 24-hour Residential Care Staff. The only requirement to stay in our program is that a resident is taking steps forward while also respecting themselves and other members of the program.

Once a mother has her baby, she is invited to stay in our residential, transitional housing for up to one year to continue to grow in mind, body and soul. At this stage, we partner this new mother with a dedicated group of folks who have chosen to support her in this next phase of her life. We call this Bridge



of Hope, and it truly is a gift to witness the church being the church.

Since beginning as Executive Director in early November, I have learned how important Hannah's House is to the community in which it serves. I recently held and gazed upon a resident's 5-week old baby and couldn't help but wonder, "Am I holding the next Mother Teresa? Rosa Parks? Condoleezza Rice?" It was in this moment that I realized that Hannah's House isn't just about meeting the needs of the women in our care right now, but more importantly, it provides life, love and hope for a better future in the years to come.

Over the past 25 years, hundreds of women have chosen to change the direction of their lives by making decisions that are God-honoring and what is in the best interest of their children. It hasn't always been easy; but it has always been simple. Our organization is about helping women change their identity, while also promoting and teaching good Christian values.

Hannah's House is more than great programming and meeting the needs of the women in our program. These women become part of our family, and we are committed to a lifetime relationship through fun alumni events, family support groups and ongoing learning opportunities during the year. In doing this, we have helped our residents make changes that will have generational impact on their families. We celebrate those stories of life-changing success and pray for the thousands of lives that will be changed over the next 25 years and beyond.

We are proud of what we offer our residents at Hannah's House's and our mission states, "At Hannah's House, a maternity home, we respect life, share love and inspire hope by modeling Christian values for pregnant and parenting women facing homelessness and poverty." We believe and know that each of our residents has something to offer this world, and God has called us to help them uncover their purpose... together. ❖



Photos provided

**A local Girl Scout troop (top, left) donates items to Hannah's House. The original home (above), the Leep House in Mishawaka, will house 20 women throughout the year. Below, a reunion of Hannah's House babies whose mothers have been able to transition to their own housing.**



Hannah's House website:  
[www.hannahshousemichiana.org](http://www.hannahshousemichiana.org)

On Facebook:  
[www.facebook.com/maternityhomewithaheart/](https://www.facebook.com/maternityhomewithaheart/)

**NOTE:** *Hannah's House of Michiana is one of the agencies receiving grants from OLV's John Joseph Sigstein Foundation.*



# Jubilees 2019

Three members of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters are celebrating Jubilees in 2019.

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**Sister Millicent  
Peaslee**

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**Sister Millicent Peaslee**, a native of Gary, Indiana, celebrates 80 years as a Victory Noll Sister. She entered OLVN on October 28, 1939. Her ministry work has taken her to Michigan, Indiana, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Texas and Colorado. She has served as a catechist, a pastoral assistant, and in the office of diocesan religious education. She has been coordinator of the House of Prayer and the Spiritual Renewal Center.

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**Sister Alodia  
Carney**

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**Sister Alodia Carney** has been a Victory Noll Sister for 70 years, entering OLVN on October 27, 1949. She is a native of Detroit, but grew up in Fillmore, Iowa. She has served in Texas, Michigan, California, Iowa, Indiana, and Colorado. Sr. Alodia has worked as catechist, a pastor, and an RCIA coordinator.

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**Sister Margarita  
Moreno**

**Sister Margarita Moreno** is celebrating her 60th year as a woman religious. A native of Parita, Panama, Sr. Margarita originally entered religious life in her native country. She eventually was called by Archbishop Gregorio McGrath to become director of catechesis for the Archdiocese, the first woman to hold a senior position within the Catholic Church. She organized many major events, such as the nationwide-televised Catholic Mass and the visit of Pope John Paul II to Panama in 1983. Sr. Margarita joined OLVN in 1998, and served the majority of her time in the Diocese of San Bernardino. She has worked as a catechist, a spiritual director, in adult formation, and in prison ministry. ❖



Men, women, and children line up outside the house of the Society of Missionary Catechists in Indiana Harbor to receive food and other necessities during the Great Depression.

# Aiding the immigrants

Catechists provided food, spiritual support to those in need

**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. In this article, he tells the story of how some of the earliest members of the congregation aided immigrants coming to the United States who arrived in Indiana to work in the newly-built steel mills along Lake Michigan.

By Jeff Hoffman  
OLVM Archivist

Father John Joseph Sigstein was sought after as a confessor and spiritual director. Because he was looking to start up a community of women catechists to work in the missions in the western and southern United States, he was observant of young women who would seek guidance for their vocation, and for those who felt a call to religious life. Two of the earliest ones to answer this call were Julia Doyle and Marie Benes. He instructed them in the religious life with the assistance from the School Sisters of Notre Dame at Longwood Academy in Chicago. Besides spiritual life and music classes, they received instruction in Spanish, which they would eventually use as catechists in the Southwestern missions.



## OLVM HISTORY

Catechists Doyle and Benes arrived in Watrous, New Mexico, in August of 1922, now officially under the name of Fr. Sigstein's Society of Missionary Catechists (later to become Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters). Additional catechists remained at Longwood Academy to continue receiving training from the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Because of Chicago's close proximity to the Diocese of Fort Wayne, Fr. Sigstein was able to get permission from Bishop Alerding to send catechists to Gary and Indiana Harbor to administer to the newly-arriving Mexican-Americans from southern Texas who were coming to work in the steel mills that were opening on the southern shores of Lake Michigan in Indiana.

At the Gary-Alerding Settlement House in Gary, catechists would put into practice the training they received in teaching catechism and religious instruction to the children of the new arrivals, while being observed by Fr. Sigstein. The catechists also taught classes in cooking, sewing, and English to the parents of their students. These new arrivals were fleeing war in Mexico in the early decades of the 20th century. They first settled north of the border, before moving farther north for better-paying jobs.

Fr. Sigstein's goal was for the catechists to serve the poorest of the poor. In Gary and Indiana Harbor, these recent arrivals left everything behind to seek a new life here. The Missionary Catechists sought to integrate these immigrants into the American way of life. The catechists also



**Congregation trucks (above) would drive into Chicago, where bakers provided bread and pastries to the poor Indiana communities. Right, catechists gave religious instruction at the Settlement House in Gary.**



sought to minister to their physical needs with home visitations that included taking care of the sick and convalescents in their homes. During the Great Depression many immigrants were the first to be laid off. In Indiana Harbor the convent of the catechists became the social service agency in which many sought assistance. Requests for food, clothing, fuel, furniture, and prayers came to their door.

Arrangements were made with local doctors to treat the poor that the catechists would bring them, and transportation to the hospital would be provided for those who needed it. The catechists worked

with some bakeries in Chicago and would distribute an average of more than 2,500 loaves of bread and several barrels of cakes and pastries each week.

The catechists were providing aid to these recent arrivals that they could not obtain anywhere else. This was at a time of stricter immigration enforcement and an economic downturn with widespread layoffs. Many of the recent arrivals spoke little or no English and the catechists were able to fill their needs. The catechists were the main material and spiritual support for many during these trying times. ❖



Photo provided

**A therapist at Talitha Koum Institute reads to one of the children. The mental health therapeutic nursery aids trauma-affected children.**

# Raising up the children

Texas ministry seeks to unlock those affected by trauma

**By Susan Cowley**  
Co-Founder and Executive Director  
Talitha Koum Institute  
Waco, Texas

**T**alitha koum,” said Jesus in his native Aramaic. “My child, rise up.” And with that he wooed Jairus’ 12-year-old daughter from death to life. (I love that his next move was, “Get her something to eat.”)

Talitha Koum Institute is one church’s mission to raise up children from deep poverty, helping them form neural pathways in the brain that will work at school and in the world regardless of the toxic stress that exists at home. Consistent nurture from birth to five, alongside the evidence-based HighScope® cognitive curriculum, layered each day with 3 ½ hours of sensorimotor input to the brain — well, it’s a lot of effort. And every child is worth it.



In a context of loving relationship, and using research-based therapeutic intervention, Talitha Koum partners with parents to raise children who are intellectually capable, emotionally resilient and prepared to be contributing members of the community.



*Jaylon (not his real name) was 9 weeks old when we received him into our infant room last year at Talitha Koum. His mother whispered in a terrified tone, “I think he’s blind.” And certainly we were concerned as well.*

*If you held, Jaylon, he stared with no affect past your face. Blank. Never looked into his mother’s eyes. He appeared dazed and listless. He slept all day, not even coming out to eat. No cries were heard.*



Photo provided

**Jaylon, at nine weeks old when he entered Talitha Koum.**

Since 1993, when I travel around the U.S., even in foreign countries, shop keepers notice my credit card. They used to say in sad, hushed tones, “Oh, Waco, Texas. Were you there when the children burned?” Now they say, “Waco! Do you know Chip and Joanna?!”

I have met the Gaineses and they have had a profound “Magnolia effect” on Waco. The silos are six blocks from Talitha Koum Institute, a mental health therapeutic nursery for trauma-affected children. These infants to five year olds may not have been hit by a car, but they have been broad-sided by a life filled with chaos, violence, neglect, abuse, and the toxic stress of deep poverty. Same goes for their parents and grandparents and generations before.

But the shopkeepers’ question of the 90s still haunts me, because children in Waco and all around our country are still on fire. Their brains are being snipped by the flames of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) that come hit after hit before any resilience can be built.

Your own brain was built on experiences and the more sequential and repetitive the experiences day-by-day, the better. In homes where there is almost nothing, there is an excess of toxic stress. That toxicity is the constant. Routines are never set. Plans can’t be made. The higher your stress, the shorter is your brain’s ability to reason, focus, and make a plan.

So violent and unpredictable is the child’s first few years of life that the stress hormone, cortisol, shoots into the brain unrelentingly — literally breaking down the brain’s architecture as it tries to form neural pathways. The child’s stress response system becomes hyper-reactive, sending her into fight, flight, or freeze over and over. By Pre-K, these children land on the “school-to-prison pipeline,” suspended repeatedly due to violent behaviors that are out of bounds, but, not out of reason for a trauma-affected child.

*Jaylon came home from the hospital to a pop-up camper with seven siblings, his mom, and no bathroom. Mom was frantically awaiting public housing to open a four-bedroom apartment, but that wait can be long.*

*By the time Jaylon arrived at Talitha Koum at nine weeks, his stress response system was on so much overload, he had completely shut down. He would do without food to avoid being engaged or awake. He had instinctively chosen “freeze” mode.*

*Months later, our first glimmer of change came on a day when mom was bringing Jaylon down the hall. Jaylon heard the voice of his teacher, Bruce, and began squealing with delight.*

*The before and after photos are telling. After three months of therapeutic care, Jaylon began to feel safe. He became responsive and engaged with the joy of discovery.*



Photo provided

**Jaylon, after three months of therapy.**

When I say this ministry sprang from a church, don’t picture a steeple. We were four women without a dime in an ecumenical church of six. If this tiny church could launch such a life-changing intervention, we believe

## MINISTRIES



Photo provided



**Talitha Koum offers a number of programs for children up to five years old whose development has been affected by trauma. The children receive more than three hours daily of sensory activities that strengthen their brains for later learning. Children who are food scarce often create “meals,” asserting a sense of power over circumstances.**

there are numerous parishes and churches that could do the same.

On the horizon for Talitha Koum is a way to help others begin, but with all the knowledge we have gained across 16 years, which includes “how to” on our all-day Nurture Center program as well as programs for parents and mentors (who take a child from Kindergarten to College or Career).

We are preparing a tool kit and an apprenticeship program. If you have an interest, I’d like to hear from you. We won’t care what others name their early childhood mental health programs. We are not building an empire. But we believe God would like to have an empire of Christians getting out of their “boats” and securing for “the least of these” their brightest hope. ❖

Talitha Koum Institute website:  
[www.talithakoum.org](http://www.talithakoum.org)

Contact information:  
1311 Clay Ave, Waco, TX 76706  
(254) 753 - 1144  
[SCowley@talithakoum.org](mailto:SCowley@talithakoum.org)

**NOTE:** *Talitha Koum Institute is one of the agencies receiving grants from OLVm’s John Joseph Sigstein Foundation.*



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

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# Visions

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FROM THE VICTORY NOLL ARCHIVES



**W**hile much recent attention has focused on the immigrants coming to this country, a main mission of the OLVM Sisters has been to serve those who have been marginalized by society or underserved by the Church, wherever they may be. In this photo, Sister Mary Eva Geiskopf walks to school with a group of barefoot students in rural Appalachian Kentucky in 1953. The area has been, and still is, among the poorest in the United States, and Victory Noll Sisters were there to provide social services and religious training to the population. ❖