

# Lurana's Star

FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF ATONEMENT  
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2014

SUMMER

No. 3



*Sisters' Jubilee, June 21, 2014*



Sister Eilish  
Sweeney

Dear Friend,

Like so many Religious Congregations throughout our country and around the world, we the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement, gather annually as a community, with family and friends to celebrate our Sisters' Jubilee. This year we rejoice in being able to celebrate the life and dedication of six of our Sisters.

Sister Bridget McGovern from Co. Fermanagh, Ireland is our only Diamond Jubilarian. Sister Bridget has dedicated 75 years of her life to God, to our congregation and to our church. What a marvelous achievement.

Our four Golden Jubilarians, Sister Nancy Conboy, our present Minister General comes to us from Canajoharie, New York. Sister Mary Sarah Dolan from Auburn, New York is a registered nurse and until recently was Co-Coordinator of our Lurana Health Care Residence here at Graymoor. Sister Paul Teresa Hennessee who is also a registered nurse and ministers in New York City comes to us from Washington, DC. Sister Marianne Rohrer from Atwater, California is presently serving as a Parish Minister in Vancouver, Canada. Sister Mary Patricia Galvin, our Silver Jubilarian, is a member of our administration, and a native of Jamaica Plain, Boston, MA.



Five of our Jubilarians recently met at Graymoor. Left to right are Sisters Paul Teresa Hennessee, Mary Sarah Dolan, Bridget McGovern, Mary Patricia Galvin, and Nancy Conboy.

Our Jubilarians gathered on Saturday, June 21, 2014, at Our Lady of the Atonement Chapel, Graymoor with family, friends, Friars and Sisters for the Celebration of Liturgy. Later, all gathered at our Friars' dining room for a festive dinner and celebration.

In preparation for the publication of this edition of Lurana's Star, I asked each of our Jubilarians: As you reflect on the past seventy-five, fifty and twenty-five years as a Franciscan Sister of the Atonement, what do you consider to be the most life giving and rewarding throughout these years as a Religious

in today's world?

The following is a brief depiction of their lives and ministries as Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement. I hope that you enjoy all that they have to share with us.

A blessed and peaceful summer to you and your family. Know you are in our thoughts and prayers.

Gratefully,

*Sister M. Eilish Sweeney*



Left to right are Sisters Mary Patricia Galvin, and Marianne Rohrer, at a meeting recently in California.



# 2014 Jubilee Celebration



## Sister Bridget McGovern



*Sister Bridget McGovern*

On Saturday, June 21, 2014, Sister Bridget McGovern our one and only Diamond Jubilarian for the year 2014 gathered with community, family and friends to celebrate her life and ministries as a Franciscan Sister of the Atonement. Seventy-five years of dedication to God, to the church and to her community is indeed something to be celebrated.

Sister Bridget McGovern was born on January 31, 1922 in Co. Fermanagh, Ireland. She was born into a large family of eleven children, four boys and seven girls; she was number seven.

Sister Bridget was blessed to have a great life with many wonderful experiences. Several years ago when asked to share with us some moments in her life, this is what she had to say: "I entered our convent in Rossinver shortly after the war began on September 30, 1939. It is said that I was the 'wild one' during my formative years. I do not choose to remember those times though they did accomplish wonders.

I was professed on June 25, 1944 and my first mission was in Wales as our mission in London had been bombed. While in Dublin prior to my departure for Wales, I had the honor of having tea with the Papal Nuncio in Dublin. He later invited me and Sister Mary Eugene Meehan to join him for a delightful walk around the gardens. My life seemed to be filled with a lot of ups and downs and it was at that time that I called on Jesus and Mary to guide me, especially Mary.

In September, 1950 I came to the United States and was missioned in South Plainfield, NJ. What a beautiful change from the war torn Europe. South Plainfield was so nice, quiet and peaceful. My greatest joy was teaching the children who were well behaved most of the time. It was here in America that I shook hands with the Dali Lama and Rocky Marciano (the boxer).

Another of my missions was the Washington Retreat House. I established many personal relationships and met a lot of people. I was deeply impressed by the groups who came on retreat. They showed me the beauty that can be found in human beings, my brothers and sisters in Christ as I witnessed their sincere kindness, friendship, and joy which bonded them together.

My days at St. Christopher's Inn had a profound impact on me. In the beginning I found it very difficult to cope with the stress of the men who came there. Their brokenness, problems, addictions, discouragement and hopelessness were hard to relate to at times. It was overwhelming, but, once again, calling upon Jesus and Mary, I found the strength to minister to them in my own small way. It was my hope that while I shared with them the love of God I was able to be of some help while listening and praying with and for them.

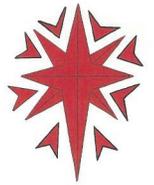
Jesus was always in my life. He came to me through his people, but especially through the Eucharist.

Now, in my retirement years, after seventy-five years in religious life, in season and out of season, in good times and bad, Jesus is number one in my life. I was greatly rewarded by being a part of our Mother Lurana Adult Social Day Center. Being an active member of this delightful group of people I shared my gifts of singing, love for poetry and story telling. I loved to sing my favorite songs which brought smiles to many.

I am also a great lover of nature as I find it a tremendous healer. I also love children. They are beautiful at every stage. They are like a gift from God, whose lives are still unwrapping. They are very accepting. They enliven me. The poor and those in need whom I have met in places that I have ministered have a special place in my heart. They, as well as my family, friends and community are in my daily prayers."



# 2014 Jubilarian



## *Sister Nancy Conboy*



*Sister Nancy Conboy*

A young man used to sit by the side of the road begging for money. One day, off in the distance, he noticed a beautiful carriage on the horizon. He thought, "Perhaps this is my lucky day, the day when I will receive everything I have ever hoped for and longed for."

As the carriage approached, the beggar hailed it to stop and put his hands out hoping to gain a valuable treasure, something that would make him rich for the rest of his life. To his surprise, however, the person inside, who was a Bishop, held out his hand asking for something. Reluctantly, the beggar reached into his traveling bag and pulled out the smallest kernel of corn he had; he gave it to the Bishop who thanked him and rode off.

That night, when the young man laid down to rest, he reached into his bag, and to his amazement, saw that the kernel of corn he had given away had been returned to him in the form of gold. His only regret then, was that he had not given more.

As a member of our Leadership Team I have had wonderful opportunities to experience the ministry of our Sisters in so many places. Unlike the young man in the story above, these Sisters have given so much to God and to the people whose lives they have touched through their presence.

God is not in the whirlwind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, Scripture teaches us. God is in the gentle breeze, in the very atmosphere around us, in the little things that shape our lives, in the common events of each day. God is in the ordinary moments of our lives, God is where we are. I discovered this truth as I ministered with children and families in St. Cecilia's Parish in Spanish Harlem, New York City, and also in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. My life has been blessed through these experiences and I will forever be grateful!

However, the most rewarding moments in my life as a Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement are the times during the past eight years when I am privileged to see the passion of many of our Sisters as they share our charism with others. The joy that is part of our Franciscan/Atonement life is such a blessing to people throughout the world and I will share a few examples with you:

A pilgrim in Assisi is grateful for our Franciscan hospitality; a Buddhist family in Japan learns about Christianity through the example of our Sisters; a woman and her children fleeing domestic violence in Canada are able to begin a new life after staying at Lurana Shelter; our Sisters at our retreat houses in Washington, DC and Graymoor provide a welcoming space where people have an opportunity to experience the presence of God; a teenager who is out of school in a poor area of the Philippines learns English from one of our Sisters; a young woman in Brazil has steady employment after attending a vocational program sponsored by our Sisters; a senior Sister who is 95 years young and lives in our health care residence, continues to minister to people in the area who telephone her or visit her, asking for prayers.

These Sisters inspire me by their joy and enthusiasm for prayer, community and mission. The gift of their lives is a blessing to me as I celebrate my Golden Jubilee! They remind me that our charism is alive and well in the 21st century and our world needs women who are passionate about the religious life!



# 2014 Jubilarian



## *Sister Mary Sarah Dolan*



*Sister Mary Sarah Dolan*

Growing up in the 1950s in a small town in New York State, our faith defined our family, formed a social and educational network, and provided a vision for my future. I decided I would enter religious life as a sophomore in high school and chose the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement because they were part of the neighborhood, involved in the daily lives of my family and my friends.

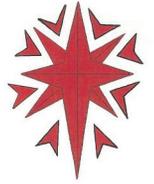
We moved to Scotia in 1959 just two houses from the convent. Sister Colette and the other sisters came down one morning to welcome us to our new home and from that first house call, helped me forge a lifelong, life enriching relationship. Sister Maura, the teacher of the Irish jig, was also skilled in volunteer recruitment. All through high school, I worked with her on religious education projects, preparation for big feast days and every other project she devised. During those early years, the sisters couldn't go out alone so Sister Maura would call up during the summer and my mother would say, "Mary, your boss is on the phone."

My ministry in its many forms has been the life giving element of my life. My family was instrumental in encouraging me to not only want to do good, but have the skills to actually accomplish something. As a result I completed a nursing degree before beginning to work with the elderly, the poor and other disenfranchised people. My experiences have enriched my life and offered opportunities to work with many different religious and lay people, and in many different ways to serve the People of God.

Reflecting on 50 years, I have many memories, all of them unique but working together to enrich my life.

- Coming full circle- - I started working with the elders of my community as they moved into the final stage of life and I have returned to this work today.
- In the beginning I worked in East Harlem with mothers trying to provide for their families amid poverty and prejudice. These strong and proud women were grateful for any help and they in turn shared with others.
- Networking with East Harlem Interfaith - nine religious communities working together to maximize services and eliminate competition for the good of our families. This was a time of great change in society and we worked and prayed together to support the people and ourselves.
- The beginning of the AIDS epidemic. I moved into HIV research at a time when it was a terminal disease especially the young men who had been at the fringes of society most of their lives. It wasn't long before we began to see children born with the disease and the orphans and grandmothers and great grandmothers raising the children. They did this with little financial support and in an atmosphere of great prejudice.
- Because the origins of the disease were unknown, and AIDS was so virulent, family life became even more difficult.
- I was also privileged to work in a sexual assault and violence intervention program where I met with survivors of sexual assault in the emergency department and supported them through a horrific time of their lives. I was also able to facilitate training of other advocates who would carry on the work in the different hospitals in NYC.
- During my last years on the mission in New York City, I returned to home care supporting elders in their home, with little or no social support, having little or no family available to help them. The various staff of several agencies worked together to help support the elders and provide as high a quality of life as possible. This was truly a foreshadowing of my continued work with the elderly at Graymoor.

What is the continuing thread of these last fifty years? For me it has been the community of God with the people I served. Many of them were alienated from themselves, their family community and their God. I tried to help them see themselves as persons of worth reconnecting them to family and/or society, part of the bigger community. My journey has taken many paths in different cities, among many people but central to it has been the vision of service with the guidance of the Creator and sometimes some straight talking from my family. The past 50 years have certainly been a gift.



# *2014 Jubilarian*

*Sister Paul Teresa Hennesse*



*Sister Paul Teresa Hennesse*

Reflecting on 50 years brings to mind many experiences life-giving and rewarding, sorrowful and joyful and so the task today is not an easy one. It is, for me, easier to speak about, than to write about my life.

50 years is indeed hard to believe! I see my life as one continuum in which I received much from others and, I pray, was able to give back much of what God has allowed me to learn and experience.

As an older vocation to Religious Life, (“delayed vocation”, as we say today), I had worked seven years as a Registered Nurse before joining the Sisters. These years profoundly shaped my life both personally and professionally and guided my life as a religious. God’s goodness to me has indeed been great.

I grew up in a family of diverse cultures and backgrounds and continued my professional career living, working and traveling in this same environment of mixed cultures and experiences. My early life helped me respond to becoming a missionary vowed religious rather than becoming a member of a diocesan congregation. I knew my life as a “gypsy” might possibly continue!

The most life-giving experiences as a Franciscan Sister of the Atonement have been those in which I was able to meet and live within various cultures such as Brazil, Canada, Africa and a number of our Congregational missions throughout the United States. I had always, as a registered nurse and counselor, worked with the poor and disadvantaged and with those persons who were seeking to discover what God was asking them to be and do in their own lives. Now, as a Spiritual Director, I continue this same path and try to help people see their own goodness, worth and dignity.

My most rewarding experiences have been when I helped someone awaken to how much God loved them and what God was asking them to do with the talents and gifts and abilities God had given them! For the gift of participating, as a Franciscan Sister of the Atonement, in this part of peoples’ lives I will forever be grateful! Giving back continues to be both life-giving and rewarding for me.

Along with composer and singer, Andrae Crouch: “For all the good God has done for me.....To God be the Glory!”



# 2014 Jubilarian

*Sister Marianne Rohrer*



*Sister Marianne Rohrer*

Sister Marianne Rohrer whom you recently read about in our Spring 2014 edition of *Lurana's Star* is among our four Golden Jubilarian. In reflecting on her fifty years as a Franciscan Sister of the Atonement, Sister Marianne writes the following: "It does not seem possible for me to be celebrating 50 years as a member of the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement. And yet the dates, September 1964 (entrance) and September 2014 speak the reality. Celebrating this occasion is not to give tribute to what I have accomplished throughout these years, but rather to recognize the hand of God in my life. Hearing the words "I have loved you with an everlasting love, I have called you and you are mine," has journeyed with me through hard times as well as the more life giving times.

In reflecting back these 50 years, I am grateful for all the Spiritual Teachers that I have met on the way. Men, women, the young and the elderly, those with money in the bank and those without a penny in the pocket, all have taught me some very valuable lessons. From the east coast of the States to the west coast of Canada, stopping off in Utah for 17 years, I believe God planted these teachers to show me the way. I was asked to do various ministries from teaching early childhood, organizing a basketball league for the inner city kids in the rough part of Boston, being a Pastoral Associate in Parishes, coordinating the Religious Education program and visiting those unable to come to the Parish services.

And what did I learn? In the early years, I was so afraid to make a mistake, afraid to share my thoughts, afraid to teach children their CCD lessons, afraid even to read aloud, lest I mispronounce a word. All this began to change when I met the young four year old children in our nursery program in Boston and was asked to teach them. The children wanted to learn, to be read to, to spend time with me. It was here that I took a book and read as well as I could, skipping over the "hard words" I couldn't pronounce and replacing them with others. That did not matter to them. I slowly learned that the children wanted to be with me and wanted me to "be" in their presence. Thanks to the children, I enjoy reading aloud especially at Liturgy.

Later while in Utah, my Spiritual Teachers were women wanting to become more involved in the Catholic Church. Many had been baptized Catholic at birth, married into a Mormon family and later realized that at heart they were still Catholic. Meeting with one woman in particular, and listening to her story was a very humbling experience. I was astonished in the level of trust as she entrusted her story to my safe keeping. At first it was important to tell her that God did not abandon her and was present with open arms to welcome her back to the Catholic Church. When I first heard myself say these words and noted her reaction, I realized that through her and the other women, God was revealing Himself to me also. I heard my own heart speaking and it was beautiful.

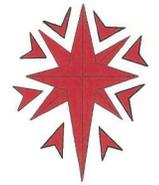
Another teacher was found living in one of the poorest streets in Western Canada, Cordova Street. There the poor, hungry, destitute, lonely men and women would gather for food, drugs, sex or to talk with a friend. While living in the area, it took me awhile to divest myself of expectations of what to say, what to do, what to give. Soon I realized that what was really needed was to simply be present on a regular basis and let the people know that I cared. Words of gratitude, "thank you" were spoken as a bowl of hot homemade soup and two sandwiches were passed to each person. I was just asked to "be present" and that stance alone was one of the greatest gifts I believe that I have received these past 50 years.

I am grateful for these Spiritual Teachers and the gifts they have given to me. I hope to continue listening; being present and realizing God's gifts in those I meet each day."



# 2014 Jubilarian

## Sister Mary Patricia Galvin



Sister Mary Patricia Galvin

*Make a difference* ~ On August 31, 1986 when I arrived at Graymoor to enter the community my mother gave me a card. The quote on the front of the card read: “You are unique. You’re not just anybody, and your friends know it, and you know it. You are yourself, and the way you express your individuality is what makes you special. You have a distinct way of going about things that says you believe in yourself ... Everything you are is very important ... and you’re admired because you’re you.” (Gail Cunningham) Inside she simply penned ~ “Mary Pat ~ My prayers are with you as you start your journey. Love always ~ Mom.” She gently said to me ~ “You can make a difference!”

Reflecting on what has been most life-giving and rewarding over the years of this journey always brings me back to that thought ~ *make a difference* ~ wherever I may be called to be of service. It does not have to be a big deal or a well-known quest; it is in simplicity that hearts can be moved and lives can be changed. For me, it has been and probably will always be in the ‘little things’ that one can *make a difference*.

Perhaps it has been in the eyes of a child in third grade religious education class in Burlington, Vermont when he realizes what true reconciliation can mean when preparing for his first confession ... *making a difference!* Or in the smile of an inner-city Boston child learning to roller skate for the first time holding the hand of someone willing to fall with her ... *making a difference!* In Adams, New York the woman whose husband just died at home of emphysema who calls upon you to just be present in her time of need ... *making a difference!* Being caregiver to the children of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada who experienced abuse at home and needed to live in a residential treatment center for their own safety ~ holding them from harm when they tantrum out of anger and frustration ... *making a difference!*

Shifting gears from ministry ‘out there’ to internal community ministry was a definite transition: called to assist in the administrative realm had its daily challenges. How does one *make a difference* in an office? My first decision when appointed to a five year term as Treasurer General for the congregation was clear ~ be present and available to the Sisters at all times, never let paperwork supersede their personal needs! After those five years as Treasurer, being elected to the role of a Council Member of the Leadership Team held its own sense of diversity and challenge. Over these recent thirteen years as Council Member I have gone from literally wearing a ‘hard hat’ as Director of the Graymoor Building Project to more recently wearing a slightly different ‘hard hat’ of Motherhouse Coordinator. How does one really *make a difference* when residing at Graymoor for eighteen years? The answer is actually quite simple: always keep the greater good and the bigger picture in your mind’s eye. Everything we do must be for the sake of the mission ~ the centrality of the gospel!

Striving to *make a difference* in the lives of those around us is instinctual when you know your source of strength and when firmly grounded in Romans 8:28 ~ “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.” And only then can one really in fact say ~ “For all that has been thanks ~ to all that will be yes” (Dag Hammarskjöld).