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Providence Moments

CONGREGATION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE | MELBOURNE, KY



Pictured: Jubilarians (standing, from left) Sister Margaret Stallmeyer, Sister Alice Gerdeman, Sister Stephanie Killeen, Sister John Margaret Walsh, Sister Francis Margaret Maag; (sitting, from left) Sister Mary Bezold, Sister Judy McMahon, and Sister Viola "Micki" Martin.

“YOU WELCOMED ME”

Sisters and Associates reach out to help refugees feel at home.
(Story on pages 8-10.)

INSIDE— Stories of our jubilarians, a reflection on Providence, news of our new leadership team, and more!



New Provincial Leadership Team Elected in June

Sister Barbara Rohe will continue to serve as Provincial Superior. and Sister Margaret Stallmeyer will continue to serve as Councilor and Treasurer. The rest of the leadership team members are Sister Mary Agnes Cashman, Councilor; Sister Lynn Stenken, Councilor, Vicar; and Sister Leslie Keener, Councilor, Secretary.

Please join us in praying for the leaders of our community for the next five years.



Reminder: Help us stay faithful to our Laudato Si commitment by sharing this newsletter with a friend and recycling it when finished. We also offer a digital version, which you can receive by sending a note to Maria Lauer at secodo@cdpkentucky.org. Thank you for sharing in caring for our common home!

Providence Moments

is the newsletter of the Sisters of Divine Providence in Melbourne, Kentucky. "As Sisters of Divine Providence we have a mission to be living witnesses to the Providence of God. God's love becomes real in us as we go out to be Providence to others through the works of mercy."

— Constitutions of the Congregation of Divine Providence

Providence Moments is published three times a year. To subscribe, please contact Maria at secodo@cdpkentucky.org.

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The Inspiration of Providence

We Sisters of Divine Providence have as our mission to be living witnesses to the Providence of God. This isn't just a personal call; everything we do in ministry, as individuals or groups of Sisters, is a way we live our mission. We all are included in every action and prayer.

The call to a specific ministry is hard to deny when God places it in the hearts of a discerning community. A verse of Scripture gains new strength: "The Most High has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor" (Luke 4:18) and informs decisions. "Consider the lilies of the field..." (Matthew 6:28) leads us to deeply appreciate and protect the wonders of nature.

A passage from our CDP Constitutions sparks questioning: "Constantly attentive to the real situations of the world, we try to discover the particular calls of Providence." What real situations right now need prayer, reflection, and action to bring the extravagant love of God to oppressed peoples? When inspiration comes in various forms at every international and U.S. Chapter held to clarify our mission, it must be Providence. The challenge to bring about a world that recognizes all people as God's children deserving respect and care, and the recognition of the earth itself as a sacred gift, has been one of our communal ministries for fifty years. Each Sister accepts and acts on this call.

One of the 'real situations' that has called us to prayer and action is the work with persons who are refugees. Sisters Mary Lucy, Chantal, and Camille, the first CDPs, came to Kentucky as immigrants and refugees. Over the years, Sisters have taught children whose families immigrated to find safety and employment. We welcomed immigrant women from France and then from Asia, Africa, South America, and island nations to Jeanne d'Arc Residence in New York. We taught children whose grandparents were forced immigrants from Africa, provided language lessons to refugees from Vietnam, and now through El Centro de la Divina Providencia, we support people coming from around the world by teaching them English. Sisters assist mothers welcoming new babies, provide pastoral and spiritual care to immigrants in parishes, and introduce refugee families to the wonders and mysteries of life in the United States. We work together with members of the CDP Associate Community and through various agencies.

Providence regularly gives us opportunities to listen to the struggles that lead people to risk fleeing their homeland. We come to know the yearnings and deep goodness of these Sisters and brothers, and we get to hug the children. This grace demands that we share what we know with others and challenge attitudes of fear and discrimination in society and economic and political systems. Scripture reminds us, "The foreigner who lives among you must be treated like one of your own. Love them as you love yourself, for you too were foreigners" (Leviticus 19:34). Sometimes this is forgotten.

The God of Providence gives us joy, and we are blessed with the expectation of the reward promised in Matthew 25:35 to those who love those in need in our world.

—Sister Alice Gerdeman, CDP

“I Entrust Myself to your Providence”



**Sister Mary
Bezold**



Sister Mary Bezold knew she would be a Sister in the second grade when she attended St. Joseph's two-room school in Camp Springs. The CDPs there inspired her to join religious life and become a teacher. She taught elementary school for eight years before transitioning to Montessori education, which she loves because it allows students to learn at their own pace. She also enjoyed teaching other teachers, becoming a Credentialed Trainer for Kentucky.

Over 22 years, she established Montessori and environmental programs, earning a “Campus of the Year” award for the butterfly garden, walking trails, tracking boxes, vegetable gardens, and outdoor classroom at St. Camillus Academy. She says she finds inspiration in the Sisters, who always persevere through health issues and other difficulties. “I admire every one of them,” she says.



**Sister Stephanie
Killeen**



Sister Stephanie Killeen, born in County Clare, Ireland, studied at Thomas More College and Western Kentucky University. She has always found a spiritual home in the beauty of nature. For 45 years, she dedicated herself to teaching, with a career spanning six dioceses across Minnesota, Rhode Island, Maryland, and Kentucky. She taught grades one through eight and initiated various programs.

When she retired from classroom teaching, she continued to serve at St. Anne Convent, Moye Center, Holy Family, and the Health Care Center. She says she hopes she has been faithful to the spirit of Providence and her own Celtic spirituality.



Jubilarians Celebrate Milestones

Sister Alice Gerdeman describes her life as a blessing, enriched by a faith-filled upbringing and a supportive family. Early in her religious life, she found her calling in teaching, eventually becoming a principal. Always interested in the Church's teachings on social justice, she helped found the Province's Office of Peace and Justice. Her work took her to New Jersey for an internship, where she expanded her skills and worldview. Returning to Kentucky, she became more publicly active, representing the province in various peace and justice initiatives. Sister Alice coordinated the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center for 22 years, teaching at local universities and hosting a radio program. Her journey included interactions with diverse groups and significant contributions to justice efforts. She has served the Congregation as Provincial, and continues to inspire with her untiring work in peace and justice issues.

Sister Margaret Stallmeyer resonates with two scripture quotes: Romans 11:34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor" and Psalm 136 "God's loving kindness is never ending." Entering the community in 1962 at age 16, she naively thought she knew her life's path. Born into a loving, faith-filled family, she was influenced by the Sisters of Divine Providence throughout her education. Her early years in the community during Vatican II were supported by wise mentors. Sister Margaret spent nearly 20 years in secondary education and two years at Our Lady of the Way Hospital in administration roles. In 1987, she studied canon law and later directed a tribunal in the Diocese of Lexington. As Provincial treasurer, she developed financial skills that served her well in her tenure as president of Thomas More College. She currently serves as Director and Judge for the Diocese of Covington's marriage tribunal.

Sister Alice
Gerdeman



Sister Margaret
Stallmeyer



“I Entrust Myself to your Providence”

Sister Francis Margaret Maag says that she had been given a gift of certitude about her vocation. After considering her life's path, she told her mother that she would join the CDPs and her mother said, "I always thought you would." She feels that her years of varied ministries have been challenging and inspiring, but that her work always fit her "like a good pair of shoes."

She served in ten parishes located in six different (arch) dioceses in the states of Kentucky, Maryland, Tennessee, West Virginia and Ohio. She has always tried to understand God's will and to do her best to fulfill it, no matter where it led her. She ministers now at Speers Court where she lives, helping neighbors with practical matters (furniture, apartment repairs) and spiritual matters (a kind word or a listening ear). "God has a mission for everyone," she says.

Sister John Margaret Walsh grew up on a small farm in County Clare, Ireland, with her six sisters and one brother. Her parents instilled in her a deep appreciation for God and nature, and the importance of seeing God in everyone and everything. She first encountered the Sisters of Divine Providence when a Sister visited her grade school in 1950. Inspired, she joined the congregation at St. Anne a few months later and has never regretted this decision.

Throughout her life, Sister John Margaret has been influenced by the Sisters she served with, who encouraged her to be a true and faithful Sister of Divine Providence. She has dedicated fifty years to the teaching ministry, always driven by the Congregation's mission to serve the poor. A significant moment of reliance on Providence came when her passport arrived just in time for her to attend her mother's funeral in 2004. She hopes to be remembered as loyal, honest, helpful, and friendly to all.



**Sister Francis
Margaret Maag**



**Sister John
Margaret Walsh**



IAE TUAE
MITTO

Sister Judith McMahon was raised in a large, loving Irish family. She attended St. Mary's grade school and La Salette Academy, where she excelled in sports, glee club, and drama. After high school, she felt called to religious life and entered the Sisters of Divine Providence in 1952, influenced by her experiences with the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and encouragement from her parish priest.

Sister Judith began her teaching career at Christ the King School in Lexington. She taught at several elementary and high schools. In 1988, she was elected General Councilor and served ten years, traveling internationally and expanding her horizons. Her ministry continued at Jeanne d'Arc Residence in New York City, serving women from around the world. She is deeply grateful for her vocation and the blessings of Providence in her life.

Sister Viola Martin, born on February 23, 1931, as Viola Elizabeth Martin, was affectionately known as Micki during her childhood due to her love for Mickey Mouse. After considering missionary work in her youth, she eventually felt called to religious life. She entered St. Anne Convent and later pursued a career in education and ministry.

Sister Viola taught elementary and high school, revitalized religious education programs in the Diocese of Covington, and became a certified Guided Imagery and Music therapist. She later served as Director of the CYO Office in Dayton, Ohio, and as director of youth retreats at Marydale Retreat House. Passionate about contemplative prayer, she founded a contemplative outreach chapter and taught centering prayer. Sister Viola's life has been dedicated to spiritual growth, education, and fostering community through her faith.

**Sister Judith
McMahon**



**Sister Viola
"Micki" Martin**





Sisters Alice Gerdeman and Mary Jennings share a happy moment with a refugee family and CDP Associate Donna Esposito.

“I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me”

Refugee Families Find a Warm Providence Welcome

The Sisters of Divine Providence have been actively involved in refugee ministry, providing practical support and compassion to those fleeing conflict and hardship. Sister Alice Gerdeman and CDP Associates Ginny Kane and Robin Kelly share their stories of blessing and bewilderment.

A Commitment to Service

Sister Alice Gerdeman's journey into social justice began with her family's kind and inclusive nature. “My grandma immigrated from Germany, and we had immigrant and migrant workers on our farm. My family was kind,” she recalls. This early exposure laid the foundation for her future ministry. In 1998, she participated in a study tour to Mexico, Nicaragua, and

Cuba, which included analyzing U.S. policies and the Church's teachings on immigration. “This experience galvanized my efforts toward immigration reform,” she says.

Similarly, Associate Ginny Kane's history of volunteerism and commitment to service paved the way for her involvement in refugee ministry. “In high school, I volunteered during summer breaks to go to Appalachia. We painted buildings and did whatever we could to help,” she shares. She says growing up during the Civil Rights Movement provided deep roots to her commitment to justice.

Associate Robin Kelly says, “I have always done volunteer work of some kind. But knowing how much



these families need us is shocking. They are completely at our mercy. They need so many basics — blankets, pots and pans. The first family I worked with were sleeping on the floor and sharing one cup. Helping them with simple things like learning to ride a bus or providing basic necessities is incredibly gratifying,” she says.

Stepping Out in Faith

All these women share a common trait: a willingness to step out in faith and embrace new challenges. Ginny Kane recalls how she was recruited into the refugee ministry. “Sister Alice Gerdeman called me one day saying they were looking for Associates interested in working with refugees,” she explains. At the time, the Kentucky Refugee Ministry (KRM) was just starting and faced organizational challenges. Despite the uncertainty, Ginny embraced the mission, relying on her adventurous spirit.

Robin's involvement began with a similar call to action. “After getting an invitation from Sister Alice, I signed up with KRM and continued volunteering even after the sponsorship ended,” she says. Balancing her volunteer work with personal responsibilities requires setting boundaries — “You’d just be running nonstop otherwise,” she says — but Robin remains committed to helping

refugee families from conflict-stricken areas such as Somalia and Afghanistan.

Overcoming Challenges

Working with refugees comes with its own set of challenges, particularly in communication and understanding cultural differences. Communication can be a real hurdle, Sister Alice says. “Not being able to communicate to better understand the real needs of the refugee and immigrant people is a significant challenge,” she admits.

Ginny also highlights the importance of patience and observational skills, honed during her teaching career. “Understanding cultural differences and providing the right support is crucial,” she notes. Both women emphasize the need for adaptability and the importance of learning from experienced volunteers.

Memorable Experiences

The work of the CDPs with refugees is filled with memorable and touching moments. Sister Alice recalls sitting on the couch in an Afghan refugee family's home, with a three-year-old girl cuddled near her, eyeing the candy in her purse. She also attended a style show where



children modeled clothes their mother had resized using a sewing machine gifted by the Sisters.

Ginny vividly remembers an Afghan family's arrival at the airport. "A small boy was pushing his smaller sister in a collapsible stroller while his mother, carrying a baby, struggled along. You could tell she was completely exhausted. The father had already run ahead to get the little bit of luggage they had. None of us really knew what to do at first," she says.

"We had done some research about the food in their original country, and we bought what we needed for dinner. We took them to their new home and made dinner for them, all the while having to use the interpreter or sign language to communicate. It was chaotic but filled with a welcoming energy," she recalls.

The Importance of Support

For all these women, the support of experienced volunteers and the broader community is crucial. Ginny emphasizes the importance of sharing experiences and learning from others to manage the emotional burden. "It's important to have support from experienced volunteers. Every situation is different, and there's no handbook for this," she says.

"You have to be observant, to try to understand what they might need even when you can't communicate in words. We try to listen and learn about these families and get to know them as people. That's when we are best able to help," she says.

Robin notes the dire need some of these families experience. "They left home with little more than the clothes on their backs," she says, "and they never complain. They're so grateful for every little thing they get." The volunteers rely on the support of others to help them purchase basic household supplies for the families. "We reach out to people for donations and they respond with whatever they can," she says.

"I so admire the families, especially the women, for their courage and strength as they face struggles every day," says Sister Alice. They meet an outdated immigration system and sometimes outright hostility from people who have negative ideas about immigrants. "Those negative ideas simply aren't true for 99% of immigrant families," Sister Alice says, "and we rarely talk about the blessings immigrant families bring."

The Impact of Refugee Ministry

Refugees are often fleeing violence we don't really understand. Those who make it this far are the lucky ones, but their journey is far from over. They still have to learn a new language and culture, find jobs and schools, and navigate a whole new world.

The Sisters and Associates who engage in refugee ministry make a significant and practical difference in the lives of these new neighbors. The dedication and compassion of these volunteers exemplify the spirit of the Congregation of Divine Providence, providing critical support and a welcoming embrace to refugees. Their stories highlight the power of faith, the importance of community support, and the profound difference small acts of kindness can have in the lives of displaced individuals.

Called to Eternal Life

**“Eternal rest
grant to them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light
shine upon them.”**



SISTER MARTHA ELLEN CHEEVERS

Sister Martha Ellen Cheevers (also known as Mary Bonita), born on April 18, 1927, in Dayton, Kentucky, peacefully entered eternal life on March 6, 2024, at Holy Family Home at the age of ninety-six.

A devoted member of the Congregation of Divine Providence for seventy-one years, Sister Martha Ellen's life was marked by unwavering faith, service, and a deep commitment to education and spiritual guidance.

The youngest of eight children of Francis and Mary Josepha Cheevers, Martha Ellen was deeply influenced by her close proximity to the Sisters of Divine Providence in Dayton, Kentucky. She was drawn to their joyful and friendly presence, which fostered her desire to join religious life.

After high school, she spent six years working before responding to that call.

Martha Ellen entered St. Anne Convent on September 8, 1950. She professed her first vows on August 29, 1952, and final vows on August 29, 1957. She earned her A.B. degree from Villa Madonna College (now Thomas More University) and her M.Ed. from Xavier University.

She served as both teacher and principal at many Kentucky schools, including St. Aloysius in Covington, St. Patrick in Mt. Sterling, St. Gregory in Barbourville, and St. Francis de Sales in Newport. Sister Martha Ellen's leadership extended to administrative positions and community service, including her role as administrator at Jeanne d'Arc Home in New York City. Later she served as provincial secretary and media clerk in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

Sister Martha Ellen Cheevers will be remembered for her loving presence, her commitment to the Providence of God, and her lifelong dedication to serving others with compassion and joy. Her legacy continues through the lives she touched and the faith she shared so generously.



Linda Rawe (Development Board Chair), Sister Emerita McGann, Sister Barbara Rohe, and Amy Arlinghaus (Development Board Co-Chair) at Beyond the Oaks.

Beyond the Oaks: A Resounding Success!

The Sisters celebrated another successful Beyond the Oaks spring social event on June 1 at The Syndicate in Newport. Thanks to the coordination of members of the Development Board, the evening went smoothly with lots of good conversation and fun, a delicious meal and desserts, and various raffle items which were bid on by those who attended and those who did not via the internet. The Country Store sold out and patrons left with homemade candies, cookies, and baked goods. Proceeds from the event will assist the Sisters of Divine Providence in our efforts with major updating of the retirement home and health care center for the Sisters at Holy Family Home. Next year's Beyond the Oaks will be held once again at The Syndicate on May 17, 2025. 

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---A Walk Down Memory Lane---

