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Providence Moments

CONGREGATION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE | MELBOURNE, KY



Pictured: Some of our Associates gathered on January 16, 2026, to celebrate the kickoff of their fiftieth anniversary year.

MARKING A MILESTONE— The Associates of the Congregation of Divine Providence share their thoughts on fifty years of ministry (Story on pages 3–4.)

INSIDE— A look back on a monumental peace and justice movement that stopped a nuclear power plant, memories of the first CDPs in America, a Scriptural reflection on milestones, and more.

Milestones: Providence Along the Way

Milestones matter because they help us see where we have been and recognize how God has been at work, often in ways we could not name at the time. In Scripture, God's people repeatedly pause to mark moments of passage—not to glorify themselves, but to remember the faithfulness of God.

When the Israelites crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, the Lord instructed Joshua to set up twelve stones as a memorial. "When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' then you shall tell them" (Joshua 4:6-7). The stones were not the miracle; God was. But the stones helped the people remember that they did not arrive by their own strength. The river stopped because the Lord made a way.

Milestones function much the same in our own lives. A jubilee, an anniversary, a new beginning, or even a quiet turning point becomes a kind of spiritual marker. Looking back, we begin to see patterns of grace—how doors opened unexpectedly, how strength appeared when we were certain we had none, how companions were sent at just the right moment. As the psalmist reminds us, "The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad indeed" (Psalm 126:3).

Yet Scripture also teaches that milestones are not endings. Paul writes, "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal" (Philippians 3:13-14). Remembering God's faithfulness in the past gives us courage for the future. Providence is not confined to what has already happened; it is active and unfolding, calling us forward.

As we mark milestones—personal, communal, or mission-centered—we are invited into the same posture. To pause. To give thanks. To ask: Where was God present here? And then, renewed by that recognition, to continue the journey.

These moments of Providence remind us that God is faithful across time: in beginnings and endings, in clarity and uncertainty. Each milestone becomes a testimony, quietly proclaiming, "Thus far the Lord has helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12)—and God is not finished yet.

— KATHLEEN M. CARROLL

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 secodo@cdpkentucky.org.

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Fifty Years of Trust

How CDP Associates Live the Call of Providence

For fifty years, the CDP Associates have quietly and faithfully lived out the charism of Providence alongside the Sisters of Divine Providence. Rooted in the virtues of abandonment, charity, simplicity, and poverty, Associates carry the mission of Providence into parishes, workplaces, families, and communities across the world. As the Associate community marks its fiftieth anniversary, their stories reveal a shared spirituality lived in deeply personal and practical ways.

For Anne Etzel, the journey began with a simple invitation in a parish bulletin at Our Lady Star of the Sea in the mid-2000s. Responding to a notice from Sister Barbara Rohe, Anne entered formation and became an Associate in 2007. What ultimately convinced her, she says, was not a program or structure, but a prayer. Reading the Prayer of Abandonment in a *Providence Moments* publication stirred her heart. Though written centuries ago, the prayer felt uncannily relevant to the modern world and to her own spiritual longing. That prayer became a doorway into a deeper relationship with God. “Being an Associate has deepened my relationship with God in unbelievable ways,” Anne reflects.

Through friendships with Sisters and fellow Associates, she has come to experience God’s love more intimately and consistently. Living the charism has shaped her sense of self and vocation, blessing her volunteer service and returning to her “over and over again” the assurance of God’s faithful care. As she looks ahead, Anne describes the Associate call as a source of peace—an anchor as she moves closer to “seeing the face of our Providential God.”



As part of the Associates’ Anniversary observance, a new logo was commissioned, celebrating their theme “Burst into flames again.”

Across the Atlantic in Ireland, Pauline Maher’s path into the Associate community was shaped by both relationship and need. Her initial draw, she recalls simply, was Sister Leslie Keener and God Space—a place of shared prayer, reflection, and presence. That ministry became especially vital to her during the COVID-19 pandemic and at the time of her mother’s passing. “I felt held by the community,” Pauline shares, describing how regular participation sustained her through grief and uncertainty.

For Pauline, being a CDP Associate is less about having arrived at perfect trust and more about staying open to the slow work of grace. The Associate path helps her remain hopeful that she can increasingly rely on God’s Providence rather than material security, freeing her to give more generously of herself. Her understanding of mission has also deepened: Mission is not a single action or project, she notes, but something lived daily in small and large ways through how we treat others.



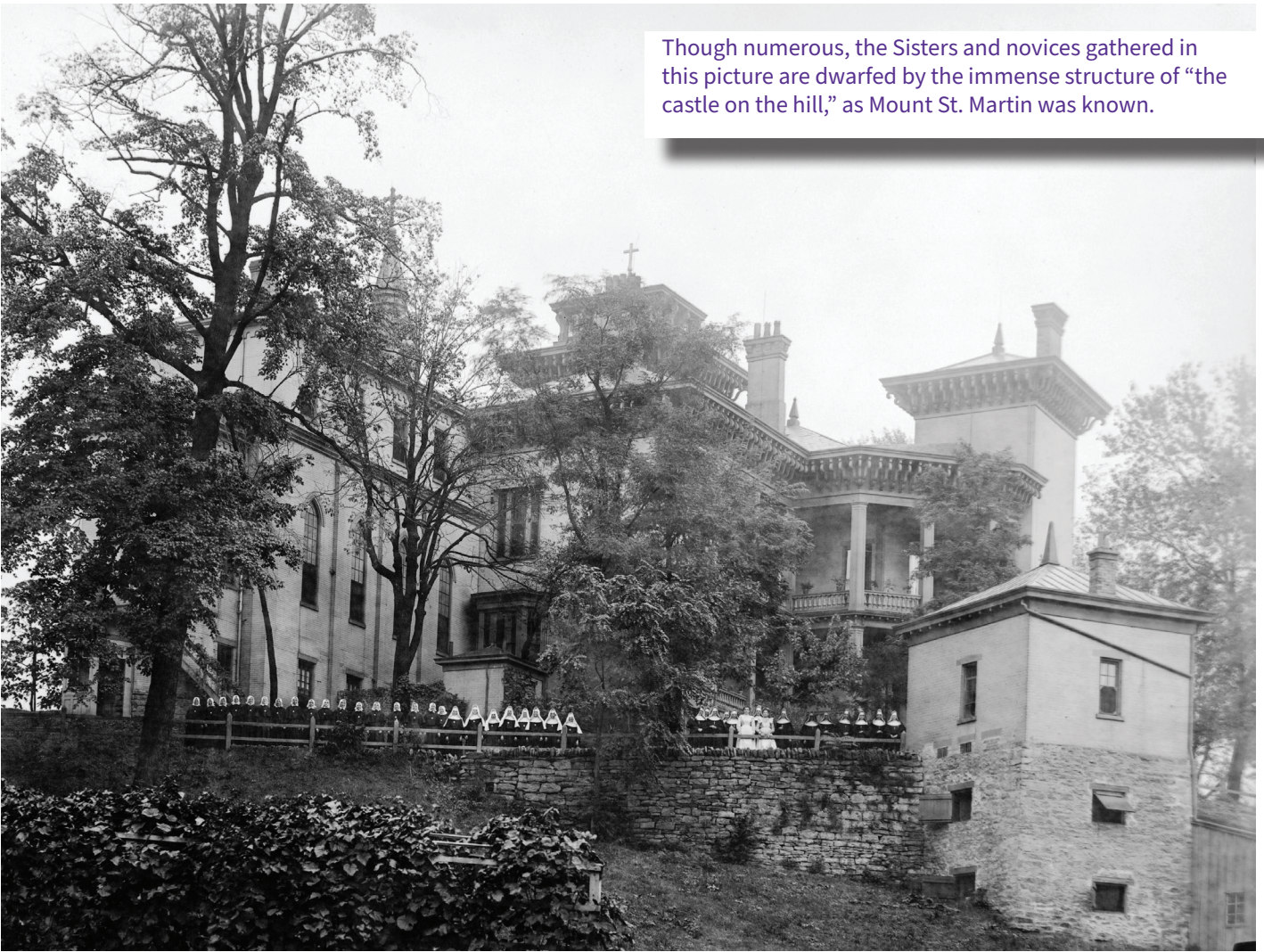
Looking toward the future, Pauline hopes the Associate community will continue to grow in mutual support as members strive to live the four virtues together. Robin Kelly's connection to the Sisters of Divine Providence began in childhood. Taught by CDPs in grade school, she encountered their way of life early on, sensing "something special" in these women who shaped her Catholic faith formation. Yet it was not until three years ago that she formally chose to become an Associate. What drew her was the coherence of the virtues as a lived spirituality—abandonment, charity, simplicity, and poverty embodied in everyday Gospel living.

Through her personal friendship with Sister Leslie and through shared ministry, particularly work with refugees, Robin found her faith enriched and her commitment deepened. Serving alongside the Sisters

made the Gospel tangible and compelling, reinforcing her desire to live simply and faithfully in response to God's call.

For Robin, the Associate vocation is not an abstract ideal but a way of embodying the Gospel "in a simplistic way," shaped by relationship and service. Together, these voices reflect the heart of the CDP Associate community over the past fifty years. There is no single path into association, no uniform expression of mission. Instead, there is a shared willingness to trust God's Providence, to walk with others in times of joy and sorrow, and to live the virtues in concrete, often quiet ways. As the CDP Associates celebrate this milestone, their witness affirms that Providence is not only a belief, but a way of life—one that continues to unfold through community, compassion, and faithful trust in God's guiding care. 🌱

Though numerous, the Sisters and novices gathered in this picture are dwarfed by the immense structure of “the castle on the hill,” as Mount St. Martin was known.



Homesick, Seasick, and Hopeful

The Sisters' Early Years in America

Sister Barbara Rohe

The early history of the United States province of the Sisters of Divine Providence is a story of courage, perseverance and overcoming numerous trials and difficulties. It does not herald a smooth and easy beginning. Our first three Sisters left the Motherhouse in France in 1889 and eventually settled in Newport, Kentucky in an abandoned mansion, later named Mount St. Martin, after the founder, John Martin Moyer. They sailed for ten days aboard a French liner

in a small cabin shared with a woman and her baby. Homesick, seasick, and probably sleepless, they couldn't take food for days. Finally the captain taking pity on them moved them to an empty first-class cabin where they could rest and recuperate.

They arrived in New York harbor on August 19 and stayed there with Franciscan Sisters until they found their way by train to Covington and stayed with the



Franciscan Sisters of the Poor who operated St. Elizabeth Hospital until their future convent home was livable. Difficulties with language, travel, reliance on the goodness and generosity of others, and the lack of household items and conveniences was an everyday struggle. Sister Agnes Margaret Humbert, CDP, compiled “A History of the Sisters of Divine Providence of Kentucky, 1889-1989” for the 100th anniversary and much of that early history she took from letters and annals written by these first Sisters. It is no surprise that those European Sisters found life here so very different; but what stands out is their courage, perseverance, and reliance on God’s gracious Providence, which serves as inspiration for us now all these years later. The following are a few examples from the written or oral history.

“Expenses attending the new Institute were great. The Sisters were impressed by the generosity of the

American people, even the poor. One day a woman gave them eight cents on the street, and another gave twenty cents on the streetcar. They often walked to Covington and Cincinnati to get better bargains at the markets there.” Stories handed down over the years about the early days at Mount St. Martin tell of the cold winters, lack of reliable heat, and the regular walk along the railroad tracks nearby to pick up coal which bounced out of the coal cars passing through.

The mansion in Newport, the “castle on the hill” built for Mary Keturah, the daughter of Col. James Taylor upon her marriage to Thomas Laurens Jones, was huge with many rooms, but not built for occupants of twenty or thirty Sisters. For instance, domestic arrangements at the new Convent were trying, especially for laundry purposes. The two cisterns which supplied the house with water were near the kitchen door. Linen was boiled on the stove in the

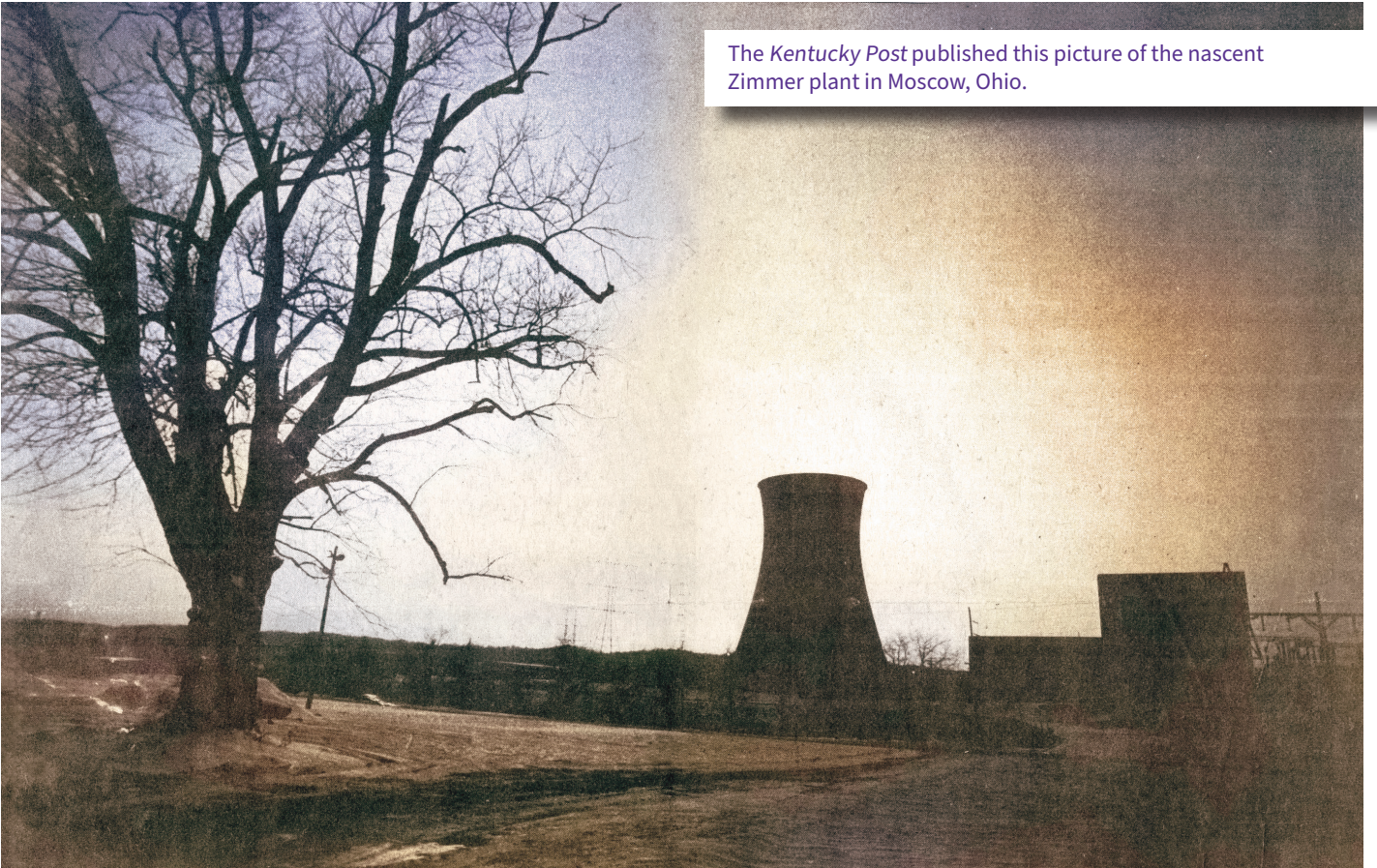


dining room/kitchen area, then soaped and rubbed on the tables after meals. The drying process was carried out in the dining room overnight, and the ironing was also done in the same room. No dryers in those days for sheets and heavy serge habits!

Requests for the services of the Sisters began early upon their arrival and more Sisters were sent from Europe. They began classes in 1890 right there at Mount St. Martin, called St. Martin Academy, an elementary and secondary school. In the same year the first parochial school at St. Joseph Parish, Camp Springs, Kentucky, was begun. For the first seven months there the four Sisters slept in one small room with beds so close together they could not all rise at the same time. In the next few years, other Sisters were sent to St. Boniface Parish in Ludlow, Kentucky; St. Anne's Parish, West Covington; St. Aloysius Parish; and St. Stephen Parish in Ohio to begin schools. There were also requests for Sisters to assist in care at St. Vincent de Paul Infant Asylum in Providence, Rhode Island, and to do domestic work at St. Mary Seminary, Baltimore, Maryland. There are numerous

stories about their early mission work of lost trunks in transit which held all their individual clothing and possessions; Sisters left at the train station waiting for a ride to the new mission; traveling by horse drawn buggy; and living in close quarters with little provisions. They also dealt with trying pastors, difficult students, little resources for classroom teaching in English, and homesickness for the familiar European customs and foods they were used to.

We owe a debt of gratitude to these pioneering women, who braved inconveniences, cold and hot muggy Kentucky weather, as they practiced the fundamental virtues of the Congregation: "abandonment to Providence in meeting their growing needs with meager resources; simplicity in contrast to the solemn festivities at the Motherhouse; poverty in food, gifts, and half-furnished living quarters; and charity in bearing the common suffering of a group whose capabilities were stretched beyond measure to honor increasing requests for their services." 🌿



The *Kentucky Post* published this picture of the nascent Zimmer plant in Moscow, Ohio.

A Quiet Witness

When Ordinary People Stood Up to a Dangerous Proposal

A reunion took place on a quiet Saturday afternoon at a Unitarian church in Cincinnati. About thirty people—many now retired, some leaning on canes—sat in a circle and told stories they had not shared together in years. They spoke of hearings and headlines, prayer vigils and photocopied briefs, of long nights shaped as much by discernment as by determination.

It was more than a reunion. It was a milestone.

They had gathered to remember their role in stopping the Zimmer Nuclear Power Plant, once planned along the Ohio River in Clermont County. In an era when nuclear power was widely promoted as inevitable, Zimmer became something else entirely: a rare

example of a community acting from conscience—and prevailing.

For Sister Alice Gerdeman, who emerged as one of the movement's most visible leaders, the issue developed quietly. She attended a public meeting simply to listen. Cincinnati Gas & Electric (CG&E) was presenting information about the proposed plant, and residents were invited to ask questions.

"The questions were there," she later recalled. "But the answers weren't."

That moment of unease—when people sensed a gap between assurances and accountability—became

the beginning of something larger. Teachers, parents, scientists, and faith communities on both sides of the river began to organize, not out of ideology, but out of responsibility. As Sister Alice would later say publicly, their purpose was not obstruction. It was to bring moral clarity to the issue, to ensure the energy produced at the plant was safe, affordable, and respectful of human life.

Catholic social teaching shaped that response, even when it was not named explicitly. Concerns about cost were tied to justice for ratepayers. Questions of safety were inseparable from the Church's insistence on the dignity of the human person and the protection of the vulnerable. Decisions made behind closed doors, with consequences borne by entire communities, demanded scrutiny.

As opposition deepened, whistleblowers came forward with troubling information about construction practices and oversight. Claims that the plant was nearly complete did not match what insiders described. In 1983, the Coalition for Affordable, Safe Energy formally challenged federal regulators, arguing that management failures and unresolved hardware problems made any rush toward completion morally irresponsible.

National events gave those concerns sharper focus. The 1979 Three Mile Island accident made clear that nuclear failure was not theoretical. When systems failed, communities—not corporations—absorbed the risk.

Obstacles for the plant's opening snowballed. Nuclear Regulatory Commission hearings drew large crowds. Prayer accompanied testimony. At one packed hearing in 1983, Sister Alice stood before regulators and utility executives alike and prayed aloud—not for victory, but for wisdom, courage, and accountability. She called for thorough inspection of every critical system and warned against placing paperwork ahead of public safety.

This was not protest as spectacle. It was witness.

Those in the movement also learned to speak in the public square. Before federal rules changed, citizen groups were entitled to limited broadcast airtime to respond to paid advertising. When CG&E promoted



This image of Sister Alice Gerdeman in front of St. Anne Convent appeared in the *Kentucky Post*'s coverage of the proposed nuclear power plant.

Zimmer as safe and essential, opponents secured brief public service announcements. They aired at off-hours, but they mattered. They reminded viewers that the conversation was not settled—and that conscience had a place in public life.

Local newspapers chronicled the growing controversy: regulatory fines, shifting explanations, ballooning costs. Financial analysts began to take notice. Credit rating agencies downgraded CG&E as confidence eroded. For a project built on long-term trust, this was a decisive moment.

Another milestone came quietly, in a hallway at CG&E headquarters. After a tense meeting, Sister Alice says, "I overheard them remark that construction at the Zimmer site didn't look right—that they weren't as busy or organized as they should be. That told me they knew things weren't going well."

It was an unguarded admission, but a revealing one. Sister Alice knew that doubt had entered the institution itself.

Now a leading voice on peace and justice issues in the greater Cincinnati area, one of Sister Alice's first forays into the arena was with the Zimmer controversy.



Political leaders, initially cautious because of job-loss concerns, began asking harder questions. Hearings were held in Cincinnati. What had begun in small towns like Mentor, Kentucky, and Moscow, Ohio, became a regional moral reckoning.

Then came the milestone no one quite expected.

In the mid-1980s, CG&E announced it would abandon plans to operate Zimmer as a nuclear plant. The decision arrived suddenly. Some activists learned of it from reporters' phone calls. The partially completed facility would later be converted into a coal-fired power plant.

Looking back, participants describe the moment less as triumph than release.

"It just came to an end," Sister Alice recalled. "All of a sudden."

The opposition groups' reunion marked another turning point—not of struggle, but of meaning. Those gathered were realistic about how difficult such a movement would be to replicate now.

Yet the lesson endures. Zimmer was not stopped by a single protest or a single voice. It was halted by faithful persistence: questions asked patiently, truths repeated steadily, conscience exercised in community.

In Catholic tradition, milestones are not only dates or achievements. They are moments of conversion—times when people choose responsibility over convenience, and the common good over private assurance.

The legacy of Sister Alice's movement lies not only in what was eventually built on the riverbank, but in what was refused—and in the quiet conviction that faith, when lived publicly and humbly, can still shape history. 🌱

Called to Eternal Life

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

SISTER ROSE MARY RIZZO



Sister Rose Mary Rizzo (Charles Elizabeth), CDP, a Sister of Divine Providence for 78 years, died December 27, 2025, at Holy Family Home. Born in Covington, Kentucky, she entered the congregation as a young teenager and devoted most of her life to elementary education, teaching in Kentucky, Ohio, Maryland, West Virginia, and Arizona. Over four decades, she shaped generations of students with quiet dedication and warmth.

In 1987, Sister Rose began a decade of pastoral ministry at Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission in Kayenta, Arizona, serving primarily Navajo parishioners. Returning to Melbourne, Kentucky, she later coordinated transportation for Sisters and remained active in community service well into retirement.

Known for her kindness, love of gardening, and practical helpfulness, she embodied a simple, joyful spirituality. She once wrote that she hoped to be remembered as someone who could simply say “Jesus” and let love overflow to others.

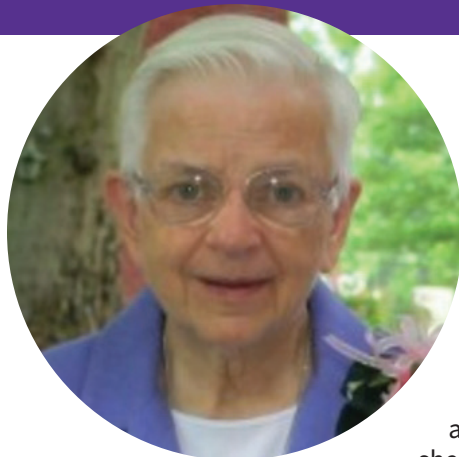
SISTER MARY THERESA BOWMAN



Sister Mary Theresa Bowman, CDP, died December 14, 2025, after 68 years of religious life. A native of Covington, Kentucky, she felt called to religious life from early childhood and entered the Sisters of Divine Providence as a teenager. Initially trained as an educator, she taught elementary school for over fifteen years before being called into leadership and formation ministry.

From 1986 to 1996, Sister Mary Theresa served as Provincial Superior of the American Province, guiding the congregation through significant milestones, including the opening of the Ghana mission. She later served as director of a retreat center in Sunyani, Ghana, and ministered in pastoral roles in rural Kentucky and New York City. Deeply grounded in Providence spirituality, she was known as a thoughtful mentor who challenged others to simplicity, discernment, and trust in God. Her life reflected a quiet intensity of prayer, compassion, and faithful leadership.

SISTER MARY JO HUMMELDORF



Sister Mary Jo Hummeldorf (Loretta Ann), CDP, died November 6, 2025, after 73 years as a Sister of Divine Providence. Born in Covington, Kentucky, she experienced early hardship with the loss of her mother, a formative experience that shaped her resilience and trust in God.

Trained in mathematics and science, Sister Mary Jo began as a high school teacher, where she excelled despite claiming she

never enjoyed teaching. Her ministries later expanded into administration, healthcare leadership, provincial governance, and pastoral counseling. She also served as director of the Moye Spiritual Life Center, dedicating a decade to its growth and beautification.

In later years, she became an environmental advocate for the congregation, overseeing recycling efforts and restoring wetlands in Melbourne, Kentucky. Known for her quiet competence, reflective faith, and wholehearted service, she lived by a simple conviction: “Here I am, Lord. I come to do your will.”

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