



The *Flame*

Congregation of the Humility of Mary

Fall 2009

Pioneers of Healing

The history of the Congregation of the Humility of Mary (CHM) and its mission of caring for the poor and sick is one of pioneer spirit and strength. It was that strength that led to the building of St. Joseph's Hospital in Ottumwa, Iowa.

In 1864, at odds with the government of Napoleon III, 11 Sisters of the Humility of Mary, with three orphans in their care, and cofounder, Father John Joseph Begel, traveled by ship from France to New York. From there they traveled to New Bedford, Pennsylvania, where a farm had been given to them by the bishop of Cleveland. After a period of struggle and near despair, the sisters learned English and gradually began teaching, caring for orphans, and nursing in homes and hospitals.

In 1870 three sisters traveled west to the newly formed Diocese of St. Joseph, Missouri, to teach the rural poor. Several young women joined the sisters and in 1874 it was decided that the Western group would separate from the Humility foundation in the Cleveland diocese. Sister Mary of the Angels, one of the original 11 from France, became the superior of the new community with its motherhouse at Liberty, Missouri.

Due to lack of spiritual opportunity and economic support, the sisters set out to find a more suitable location. In July



St. Joseph Convent (L) and Tally Hospital, North Court Street. The first motherhouse and hospital of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary in Ottumwa, Iowa 1878-1890.

1877, seven sisters and five novices arrived in Wapello County, Iowa, in the city of Ottumwa, a month after the establishment of the Morrell packing house. At that time the population of Ottumwa numbered approximately 6,500.

In Ottumwa, Mrs. Mary Tally, a wealthy woman from New York City who had befriended the Humility Sisters in Missouri, purchased a two-story brick home with a 7.5 acreage located on North Court Street. This would be the sisters' first motherhouse in Ottumwa. Seventeen days after the purchase, on May 11, 1878, the sisters became incorporated under the State of Iowa with the stated purpose:

To afford greater opportunity...in the establishment and management of hospitals, schools, asylums and other institutions for the relief, education and care of the poor and needy, the distressed, the orphans, and ignorant.

The sisters took possession in July, just a year after their arrival in Ottumwa. In addition to teaching, Mother Mary of the Angels decided to utilize the vacant parts of the building for other kinds of social works—care of orphans and of the sick.



The Flame

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The Flame is published three times a year for the Congregation of the Humility of Mary and their friends.

Our Mission: We, the members of the Congregation of the Humility of Mary call one another to live the Gospel with simplicity and joy following the example of Mary.

Like our founders, we strive to be attentive to the call of the Spirit in the signs of our times, especially the needs of the poor and the powerless.

We commit ourselves as individuals and as a congregation to work for justice within the human family and to care for the earth itself.

Congregation of the Humility of Mary

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Officials of Wapello County were notified in May 1878 that three incurable mental patients from their county were being returned from an asylum in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, due to overcrowded conditions. The sisters' assistance was solicited. The convent became a "temporary hospital" and the patients were housed on the third floor—a finished attic with dormer windows.



St. Joseph Convent and Academy—Fourth Street, Ottumwa, Iowa. Later to become the second CHM hospital—St. Joseph Hospital.

The initial step which led to the founding of the first hospital in Ottumwa was the agreement of the sisters to care for these mental patients. Learning of this, city officials sent a committee urging Mother Mary to build a hospital on their grounds and promised that the city would donate half the cost. Mrs. Tally donated \$5,000 to begin the hospital at once. For this and later gifts the hospital bore her name. The Tally Hospital was completed in 1879 on a site north of the convent building. The patients were mainly travelers, railroad workers, strangers in the city, and the homeless poor. Most locals who were sick were nursed in their own homes.

When the Court Hill motherhouse became too small for the growing congregation, the sisters began negotiations for the purchase of the Visitation Convent and Academy on Fourth Street. The Tally Hospital was closed when the sisters took possession of that property in 1890.

The *Ottumwa Courier* contained the following in its December 19, 1890 issue:

The Sisters of Humility have been with us for twelve years. During that time how many homes in the hour of their affliction have felt the benign effects of their presence. Race and creed are not considered when duty calls. Contagious diseases have no terror when duty calls them. They only seek to alleviate suffering under what form so ever it may be, absolutely without money or price....

The Visitation Convent's name was changed to St. Joseph Convent and Academy and was opened in September 1890 for the education of girls and young ladies. Growth of the congregation and their school over the next two decades necessitated the building of a larger convent and academy, later to be called Ottumwa Heights. In 1912 they moved in.

The sisters never ceased in their charity for the sick and the poor. During the years after the closing of the Tally Hospital,



The second location for the sisters' St. Joseph Hospital on North Ash Street in Ottumwa, Iowa, today known as Ottumwa Regional Health Center.

Providing Direct Service & Empowering Others

What a long and rich history the Sisters of the Humility of Mary have in health care. In this edition of *The Flame* we focus on our former sponsored health care institution, St. Joseph Hospital in Ottumwa. This focus is called for by the “signs of the times” in that the St. Joseph Hospital building will be closed by Ottumwa Regional Hospital which purchased the facility in 1987. Prior to that step, we have been engaged in an effort to distribute the furnishings of the chapel, which we continued to own according to the sale documents.

This occasion prompted me to look at the guiding documents of the congregation and to examine how the ministry of health care was described in them historically. The original Rules and Regulations of the Sisters of the Holy Humility of Mary were approved by the Bishop of the Diocese of Nancy in France on August 29, 1858. They state:

...they [the sisters] have resolved in return for His love to devote themselves to Him and His members,—in these aforesaid [poorest] localities which are for them preferable...—their hearts, their minds, their work, their time, and their life.... In short, the care of Churches, schools, and workrooms, asylums, and the care of the sick...the sisters shall exercise their charity, ...to dressing their wounds, making their beds, preparing remedies. [Note: at this time care of the sick took place in homes.]

In the 1948 Constitutions, we find, “The particular purpose of the Congregation is the salvation of souls through the instruction of children and youth and the care of the sick in hospitals.” Under the work of the Congregation, “Care of the Sick” is listed first. In addition, we find these details:

...where particularly delicate care is to be given, the sisters shall make use of lay help of members of the patient’s family; in extraordinary cases the Superior may designate some mature sisters of proved piety who are willing to practice such works of charity.... The sister shall not forget to perform spiritual works of mercy in regard to her patients and shall endeavor to dispose them well toward God and to get religious helps for them as soon as their illness seems somewhat serious. If no priest is present at the hour of death, the sister shall recite the prayers of the dying...

We leap forward to our current documents. Following Vatican II, religious congregations underwent a period of “experimentation” to respond to the Council’s document “Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life.” It directed us to examine the original purposes our founders had in establishing the community, to reflect on the Gospel call to imitate Jesus, and to listen to the “signs of the times.” Following this period of “experimentation,” we were to revise our documents accordingly.

After years of prayerful exploration using these guidelines, and “testing” of changes in all aspects of our lives, we drafted new constitutions and related documents. These, too, underwent revisions involving all members of the community. Our final Constitution entitled “Search and Service” was approved by Vatican authorities on December 8, 1990, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

At the beginning of the “Mission” section we read, “...the sisters share a mission of the church: to give witness to the message of the beatitudes according to the congregation’s spirit and tradition.” But just as Vatican II “opened the windows” of the Catholic Church to new possibilities, we see the same “freshness” reflected in the statement of our ministry focus: “...the sisters’ commitment to education, health, social issues and pastoral concerns continues to include diverse and changing works to accommodate the needs of the people, the signs of the times, and the mission of the local and universal church.” Each year this is implemented during the “missioning ceremony” at the CHM Annual Assembly, “...the president sends each sister to a ministry which responds to the call of the Spirit in the signs of our times.”

These brief references testify to the congregation’s history as one of dynamic evolution in our ministry of health care. In addition to the health-related activities in which our sisters and associates are involved today, this mission continues specifically through the graduates of the St. Joseph School of Nursing and Marycrest College. Through all of these means, we strive to live out our role—common to all of our ministries—of providing direct services and empowering others. ✦



-Sister Mary Rehmann,
CHM President

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the sisters continued to visit and nurse the sick in their own homes. It was a custom among the Catholics to call for the sisters when serious illness occurred in their family. This practice had begun when the pioneer sisters first came to Ottumwa in 1877.

When the sisters left the Fourth Street Convent in 1912, the idea of using the building for a hospital occurred to many of Ottumwa's leading citizens. Dr. D.C. Brockman said, "Ottumwa is greatly in need of another hospital...the present institution is always crowded. The convent building is nicely adapted for a hospital, has a good location, and no doubt, can be remodeled into an excellent institution." The following year Dr. Brockman led a fundraising committee to secure \$10,000 to help cover the expenses of remodeling. After a thorough transformation the sisters' second hospital in Ottumwa, St. Joseph Hospital, formally opened on February 23, 1914. Since some space had to be reserved for sisters and nurses, the new institution had only thirty-five beds. St. Joseph School of Nursing also had its beginnings that year.



in 1950 Sr. Eleanor Neuroth (R) was a part of the OB nursing staff. She served at St. Joseph Hospital from 1945-1973.

By 1924 the hospital facilities on Fourth Street had become inadequate and a more favorable site was sought for the construction of a new St. Joseph Hospital. The old home and estate of Dr. Benjamin W. Searle on North Ash Street was purchased by the St. Joseph Hospital Association. The following year a modern, fire proof, four-story building was erected with a capacity of 100 beds. In 1926 the sisters moved to their new building.

Thirty-one years later expansion was imperative. In 1957 community leaders came forward to devote their services and guidance to fundraising and construction of a new wing. Ready for occupancy in 1960, the hospital benefited from a new entrance, additional office space, and new physical therapy, X-ray, and surgical departments.

From 1914–1987 more than 70 Sisters of Humility worked in hospital ministries at St. Joseph Hospital, contributing over 950 years of service. Some steadfastly remained in service after St. Joseph merged into the city hospital system in 1987, and became Ottumwa Regional Health Center. The last two Sisters of Humility working there have just recently retired. ✦



September marked the first birthday of Humility of Mary Shelter, Inc.(HMSI) Celebrating a year of providing shelter for homeless in the Quad Cities are HMSI staff members: front row from left: Lisa Devlin, Ashley Velez, Melanie Jones, Christine Gresch and Sandy Walters. 2nd row: Sr. Nancy Schwieters, CHM, Kathleen Collins, Cindi Gramenz, Staci Hammill, Sr. Mary Ann Vogel, CHM, Julie Williams and Dorothy Spiess. Back row: Peggy Quilty, Kelly Tompson-Reyes, Cathy Jordan, Tim Wolfe, Allen Taylor, Jason Bilbrey, Tracy Peterson and Kate King.

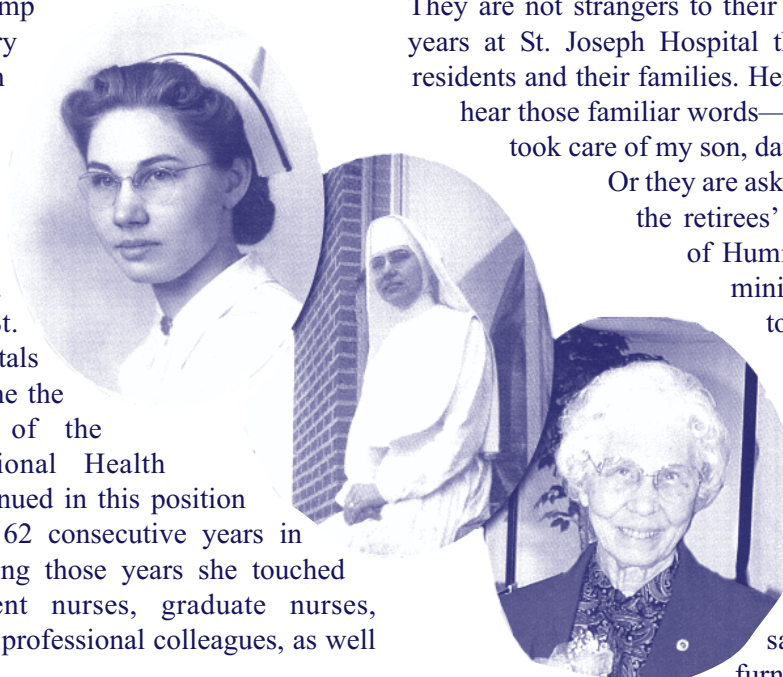


Two new residents are now settled in at the Humility of Mary Center. Sister Marita Bartholome(L) moved from Great Falls, Montana, and Sr. Ursula Keough (R) came from Des Moines, Iowa. They received a warm welcome which included an ice cream sundae party.

Last Two Standing in Ottumwa Health Care

by Sr. Marie Vittetoe, CHM

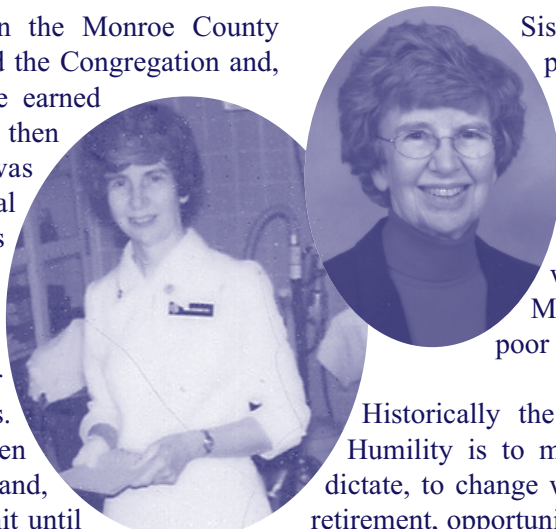
Rarely do you hear of people spending the majority of their lives in one location, but that is just what Sister Suzanne Wickenkamp did. She started her ministry of nursing at St. Joseph Hospital in 1939 as a student nurse. She continued her career as a nurse, director of the school of nursing, and then as chief executive officer. After the merger of St. Joseph and Ottumwa Hospitals in 1987 Sr. Suzanne became the pastoral care manager of the renamed Ottumwa Regional Health Center (ORHC). She continued in this position until 2008 for a total of 62 consecutive years in health care ministry! During those years she touched innumerable lives—student nurses, graduate nurses, patients and their relatives, professional colleagues, as well as the public at large.



Above: Sr. Suzanne Wickenkamp—graduated from St. Joseph School of Nursing in 1942 and became a CHM sister.

Sister Kayleen Heffron graduated from the St. Joseph School of Nursing in 1952 and was employed as a nurse in the Monroe County Hospital for five years. She entered the Congregation and, after completing her novitiate, she earned her bachelor's degree in nursing at then St. Ambrose College. She was assigned to the St. Joseph Hospital surgical suite. But most of the years between 1964-87 were spent in the emergency room. There she greeted and cared for many anxious or critical patients by calming their fears and solving many problems. After the ORHC merger Sr. Kayleen worked in the skilled nursing unit and, lastly, in the acute rehabilitation unit until retiring in 2008 for a total of 44 years of service in Ottumwa! She continues to devote herself to visiting former patients and spending time with those grieving the loss of their loved ones at wakes and funerals.

Below: Sr. Kayleen Heffron in the emergency room and today.



For many years Sr. Suzanne and Sr. Kayleen, along with Srs. Miriam Clare, Eleanor, Amata (all now at Bishop Drumm retirement community) and Srs. St. Jude and Christine (both now deceased), resided in Marian Hall, the former dormitory for the St. Joseph School of Nursing.

Srs. Suzanne and Kayleen, the last two residents, have now moved to the Pennsylvania Place retirement community. They are not strangers to their new community; for many years at St. Joseph Hospital they nursed many of these residents and their families. Here it is common for them to hear those familiar words—"Oh, I remember when you took care of my son, daughter, mother, father, etc. "

Or they are asked to pray with or for one of the retirees' intentions. Thus as Sisters of Humility they now continue the ministry of caring and listening to residents and employees of Pennsylvania Place.

As with the closure of any home or business, completing the total removal of St. Joseph Hospital artifacts has been a daunting and sad experience. The chapel furnishings were perhaps the most difficult to see dispersed to many venues. Everything will be gone within a few months...some artifacts to the

Sisters of Humility in other locations, the pews to a Missouri church, the Stations and other items to St. Louis, the black altar marble to the new St. Patrick's Church in Iowa City, the windows to Des Moines, the chandeliers to an antique store, etc. Sister Irene Munoz was helpful in distributing much of Marian Hall bedroom furniture to the poor and needy in the Ottumwa community.

Historically the lived experience of the Sisters of Humility is to move on and, when circumstances so dictate, to change with the times. Thus it is that even in retirement, opportunities exist for fruitful ministries.

In 1923 the *Ottumwa Courier* quoted Mother Mary Liguori, then General Superior of the Sisters of Humility of Mary, in preparation for the building of St. Joseph Hospital:

We hope to build a hospital that will be a credit as well as a source of pride to Ottumwa. Our lives are short and uncertain, but the life of the community is permanent, we must build for the community, and not for ourselves. †

Forever Grateful



Jack and Mae Marie Heinje on their 50th wedding anniversary on October 5, 2008.

Mae Marie Kunzman Heinje has enjoyed a lifetime career in nursing. Much of her success she attributes to the superior education and training she received at St. Joseph's School of Nursing in Ottumwa, Iowa.

Mae Marie was born in Missouri, just across the border from Iowa. When she was ten years old her family moved to Ottumwa; it's been her home off and on ever since. After graduating in 1950 from Ottumwa High School, Mae Marie enrolled at St. Joseph's School of Nursing. Students at that time lived in the nurses' residence, adjacent to the hospital. It was there she became acquainted with Sisters of Humility for the first time.

"Sister Mary Eulalia Warin taught anatomy to the first year students. Among my favorite instructors were Sr. Mary St. Jude O'Neil, who taught nursing arts and a 'younger' sister, Sr. Mary Bernard Vittetoe (Sr. Marie today) who taught

microbiology." (Sr. Marie, who at the time was not much older than her students, remembers Mae Marie, "She was a really good student, very diligent; it's heartwarming to know she's had such a wonderful career as a nurse. I'm not surprised!")

"Sr. Suzanne Wickenkamp was Director of Nursing at the hospital and we continue our friendship today. Sr. Miriam Clare Miller was in charge of the medical floor before moving to pediatrics and was so helpful to us. Sr. Catherine Marie Murphy was director of the surgical floor and was very strict. She had specific rules for putting away the linens and it had to be done perfectly. Consequently we spent a fair amount of time in the linen closet. It's funny. To this day, I fold my towels and wash clothes the same way! I had great respect and admiration for the sisters at St. Joseph's. As students we learned how to work. We knew how to handle every situation and could adapt to change. I've been employed in many different hospitals and settings and, because we were trained so well, I was always able to slip right in comfortably.

"My career has spanned 45 years from Ottumwa to Texas and back to Ottumwa. I've been a nursing instructor, a medical/surgical nurse and, in retirement, work as a seasonal nurse (November–March). I am indebted to the CHM sisters for my excellent education. They expected the best from us, and we worked diligently. They were strict but they knew how to have fun too. Holiday celebrations were really special. We all had great respect for the sisters; we knew first hand how much they cared about their patients and about us. I am forever grateful." ✦



Joyful Gifting!

Celebrate the blessings in your life and support the Sisters of the Humility of Mary.

Holidays, anniversaries, baptisms, birthdays, promotions, retirements, graduations, confirmations, good health and good friends are all wonderful occasions to commemorate by making a celebration gift.

Great for gift exchanges! It's so easy to do. There's no shopping, and you have the gratification that your gift supports the mission and ministries of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary who are responding to God's call in today's world.

Honor your friends with a tax deductible gift and we will send an acknowledgement to you and to your honoree on his/her special day.



On August 29, Sr. Mary Heinen (L) was honored on her 70th jubilee and Sr. Marcia Kearney (R) celebrated her 60th during a lovely gathering held at Bishop Drumm Retirement Center in Johnston, Iowa. There was much joy in a chapel filled with family, sisters and friends.

Our Hands are God's Hands

by Karen Brooke



Anne Johnson (R) is one of three expert knitters on hand to help at Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat during "Knit One, Pray Too."

Three years ago my friends, Anne Johnson and Ann Green, and I volunteered to facilitate a knitting retreat at Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat. It was an easy decision. Having been friends for 30+ years, we have shared our faith journeys, a love of knitting, and were experienced with a prayer shawl ministry. Sr. Joann Kuebrich named our program "Knit One, Pray Too" and we were ready to get started. We wondered if anyone would participate!

The response to our first session in Spring 2006 was overwhelming. Twenty-eight people registered for our new program, and more than half had never knit before; so there was a lot more teaching than praying that first day.

Our knitting retreats have grown and are ever-evolving. Three sessions (spring, summer and fall) are now offered annually at The Prairie. We've added quiet meditations in

addition to the prayer and friendly sharing. Many participants have taken our model back to their home faith groups and have begun prayer shawl ministries; some bring their own knitting groups to our programs. Many return again and again, bringing friends and family.

During our sessions we've watched prayer shawls, scarves, and baby blankets take shape. We've learned how to make felted mobius baskets, necklaces for gift giving, preemie caps and socks. We've prayed for family members and friends and woven wonderful new friendships. Knit One, Pray Too is a celebration of people—those who share their gifts and generosity, the miracle of each person, and the connections we make with God and each other.



There is a saying, "Our hands are God's hands." I believe that when we

Judy Awkerman and Evonne Welp share and compare midst much laughter and learning at The Prairie.

knit and pray for others, whether we know the person or not, we become acutely aware of the basic truth that God works through us when we care for friends and strangers.

We invite everyone—men and women—experienced knitters or those new to the craft—from all faiths and traditions, to join us for a day of knitting, fellowship and prayer at The Prairie. ✦

The Prairie Progress Report

- New board member Tom Streveler served as admissions director at Ottumwa Heights College and was an initial incorporator of New Horizons of Faith. He designed the first brochure for New Horizons. Tom now resides in Clinton.
- Torrential rains hindered efforts to correct erosion problems west of Prairie Heights. Guests, however, are enjoying the new look and design of the landscape.
- Generous gifts to the endowment and landscaping project, along with several memorials, were received. Gifts to the endowment, programs, beautification projects and operating budget are always welcome.
- The gazebo was refurbished and the Victorian House was reshingled.



Erosion solution: the new landscape design at Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat is nearly complete.

- Inquiries are coming in for programs and use of facilities for 2010. It will be another busy year.
- Add your name to the list and receive a 2010 Prairie Program Brochure. Contact Barb @ 563-529-3778. ✦



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Passages



Sister

Thomasine Muller

May 4, 1920 - August 19, 2009

Sr. Thomasine made her final profession in 1952. Her life's ministry was that of caring for others—especially children.



Sister

Anita Rose Grimes

June 7, 1915 - August 20, 2009

Sr. Anita Rose made her final profession in 1938. Her ministry of music found her teaching in Iowa and playing the organ at the Humility of Mary Center.



CHM Associate

Dolores Waltz

April 4, 1926 - October 17, 2009

Dolores became a CHM Associate after 28 years in the Congregation of the Humility of Mary.

To find memorials for our sisters visit the news section at
www.CHMiowa.org

Happy Thanksgiving



This month many of us will gather for a Thanksgiving meal with family and friends and give thanks to God for all the blessings we have received throughout the year.

Our current Thanksgiving Day customs have their roots in the Thanksgiving celebration of 1621 in Plymouth, Massachusetts, when the Pilgrims celebrated a three-day feast with the Native Americans. The purpose of the celebration was to give thanks for God's bounty upon the pilgrims with their first harvest. And so it continues: we still gather around the table to give thanks for God's goodness throughout the year.

Giving thanks is an integral part of our Catholic faith. The Scriptures are filled with passages urging us to give thanks for the gifts God has bestowed upon us. "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever." Psalm 118:1

We are grateful to you our friends and families for your prayers, your support and your love this past year. May your homes be blessed with an abundance of joy and peace. And may the warmth of God's gifts come into your hearts as you reflect on your blessings. Thank you and Happy Thanksgiving.

-Sisters of the Humility of Mary