



NEWS from the Northside

Reflections on 25 Years of Visitation

My memory of the Visitation Monastery of Minneapolis goes back to a summer day in 1989 as Sister Mary Frances Reis and I sat in a hearing room in front of the City Council's Zoning and Planning Committee. The Sisters, including Mary Frances, Karen Mohan, Mary Virginia Schmidt and Mary Margaret McKenzie, would be living in the same house on Fremont Avenue N.

That violated the city's zoning ordinance prohibiting unrelated adults from living in a single-family home. We argued, persuasively I thought, that the Sisters were more a family than many families related by blood. This was the first time I ever lobbied for anything, but I was no longer a reporter and now a journalism professor who could support a cause. We prevailed and the cause I supported would serve me for the next 25 years.

For many of them, I spent part of Christmas Eve with the Sisters who had been joined by Katherine Mullin and Suzanne Homeyer. It always seemed more like Christmas when I sat around the table with the nuns, who represented the gift of grace and the spirit of compassion.

I came when I was happy, when Kris and I got married. The Sisters always made success seem sweeter, and they reminded me that humility was the real virtue. I was so proud when I received their Cross of Affiliation, telling my old-fart buddies that I was now an honorary nun.

I came when I was sad, after Kris and I split. I was seeking comfort and solace; what I got was compassion and sweetness. When I walked away from the Girard Avenue house that afternoon in 2004, I knew I'd survive. The Sisters helped me avoid resentments or recriminations.



University of St. Thomas Senior Kathleen Hennessy and Advisory Council member Dave Nimmer look over the latest issue of News from the Northside. The two of them also serve as editors for the Visitation publication, which has won plaudits from many of you. (1991)

At the University of St. Thomas when I worked on a documentary about poverty, I came to the Sisters for names and numbers. They introduced me to an addicted single mother, a fragile young teenager and a struggling family of five, crammed into a house littered with boxes and debris.

After we got the pictures and told the story, I tried to help some of them by paying a few bills, offering a reference or finding a job. When nothing seemed to work and I got frustrated,

the Sisters reminded me that the real goal, the true gift, was my presence.

Just be there with them, they said. Be a companion.

That's what the Sisters have been for me – for 25 years. They are my companions on this journey. They offer me comfort. They make me unafraid. They help me to see the joy in life.

Dave Nimmer has had a long career as a reporter, editor and professor. He has no business card but has plenty to do.



www.visitationmonasteryminneapolis.org

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We are an urban monastic community. Please contact us for more information about our way of life.

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VisitationMonasteryMpls

You can read the newsletter online at our website. If you prefer this format, please contact the Sisters at vmonastery@aol.com.

Post 25 Years — Thinking Ahead

What will our future community look like?

We are aware that more and more lay people are deeply committed to the values and virtues of Visitation/Salesian spirituality but not necessarily to the vows.

For 25 years we have lived, deepened, evolved by continued reflection and discernment where we find the will of God. Our first endeavor to meet the above mentioned awareness we called The Visitation Neighbors, a group of men and women, living in community in our neighborhood and participating in our life as far as possible. That group evolved into The Visitation Companions, a broader based group of people now numbering about twenty, not necessarily residing in the neighborhood, but connected to the Monastery.

The “engagements” that were added two years ago include: The Monastic Immersion Experience, when women can come to live the monastic life with the Sisters for up to one year; The Visitation Internship Program when women or men can volunteer for one year to live and serve in the neighborhood.

Now we envision a Visitation community of laity alongside the monastic community of vowed religious who would embrace the will of God by living Jesus in the midst of our immediate neighborhood. They would have a life of prayer; would extend hospitality, embrace diversity, become self-sufficient, practice mutuality in leadership as they minister and serve; all done in LOVE. This group would enter into the ministry and activities the Sisters now have, join in the monastic prayer at times and share in the mission to be a prayerful presence in North Minneapolis.

The members could be single men or women, married, families with children, living in north Minneapolis, building on relationships established by the Sisters over the past 25 years.

So what will our community look like in the future?

By Mary Virginia Schmidt, originally from the St. Louis Visitation Monastery, is one of the foundeings members of the Minneapolis Monastery.

A neighborhood youth tries her hand at weaving. Certified SAORI weaver Chiaki O'Brien led weaving over the course of five days at St. Jane House. See "Community Update," page 3.



Community Update: Woven Fabric of Love

Our Companion to the Constitutions contains a lovely image to describe our Visitation way of life: *"We are called to LOVE rather than to austerity. Two virtues in particular form the warp (lengthwise threads on a loom) through which the woof (crosswise threads) of LOVE is woven. These are GENTLENESS and HUMILITY."*

This quote came to mind when Sr. Katherine and I participated in an afternoon of weaving at the St. Jane House with several neighborhood children, each of whom created a unique piece to take home. This workshop, under the gentle direction of certified SAORI weaver Chiaki O'Brien, was part of a five-day series.

Over these twenty five years in North Minneapolis, the Holy Spirit has gently guided us to weave a unique fabric of Gentleness, Humility and Love. The people in this community and our many friends have handled the shuttle with countless multi-colored threads to produce a most amazingly beautiful work of art! Our charism is alive and well here. Live Jesus!

The constants in this work of art are Presence, Prayer, Community, Eucharist, and Hospitality. The following examples are but a small sample of the threads woven into the whole over the past few months:

- A number of high school and college groups and individuals have come to experience our urban monastic community;
- Many come for prayer, Eucharist and fellowship along with neighbors who also join us;
- In keeping with our desire to share the riches of Salesian spirituality our popular Salesian Monday Nights, an ongoing discernment series on Following the Spirit, and women's overnight retreats have been well attended;
- Through our door ministry we are enabled to nurture relationships with neighbors, old and new, and to share Cub cards, tokens, groceries and a prayer;
- Supporting families is a priority for us; most recently we had a fun activity: Family Winter Olympics, complete with medals and closing ceremony! This is but one example of the outreach efforts often initiated by friends, volunteers and benefactors too numerous to list here.
- Recently we had to compromise our "all are welcome" policy when someone entered a first floor window, "cased the joint" and exited out a 3rd floor window landing in a snow bank when he/she realized someone was home! Thank you, Angels of protection!!!!
- Our health report: After 4 months of chemo for breast cancer, Sr. Karen is cancer free! Alleluia! The power of prayer and the excellent work of health care professionals got her/us through. Thank you! The rest of us are "hanging in there," go to the YMCA regularly, and claim good health a day at a time!

In conclusion, I refer you to Sr. Mary Virginia's article entitled "Post 25 Years: Thinking Ahead." We continue to weave our Fabric of Love!

S. Mary Frances, originally from our Monastery in Mendota, is a founding member of Minneapolis Visitation.



S. Katherine and a young weaver work together at the St. Jane House.

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"To be just is nothing more than to be
perfectly united to the will of God."

—St. Frances de Sales



Catholic Youth Camp (CYC)



Thank you for sharing
the gift of camp!

"When will it be summer?"
—CYC campers

Please consider sponsoring a camper for \$350.
This would be a great Easter Resurrection gift!

Call S. Mary Frances at 612-529-8215 or send your tax-deductible
donation to Visitation Monastery of Minneapolis by May 15 if possible.

Save the Date!



Capri Theater
Saturday,
October 4, 2014
5:30-7:30 PM

Join us for a
celebration!
The Visitation
Sisters have
been in North
Minneapolis for a
quarter century.