



# SERVITE SISTERS Today

Fall 2018

Servants of Mary - Ladysmith, Wisconsin - 715-532-6153 - [servitesisters.org](http://servitesisters.org)

## Servites Gather at International Conference in Philippines

Sisters Theresa Sandok and Barbara Thomalla attended the VIII International Conference of the Servite Family (UNIFAS) at the Carmelite Missionaries Center of Spirituality in Tagaytay City, Philippines, May 20–26, 2018. The theme of the gathering was “Servants of Mary at the Periphery: A New Call to Solidarity and Collaboration.”

Over 100 members of the Servite Family from 22 nations and five continents attended the meeting. Participants included Servite friars and sisters, as well as members of Servite secular institutes, the Secular Order of the Servants of Mary, the Association of Servite Schools, and various other Servite organizations. Simultaneous translation was provided in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Italian. Participants prayed in all five languages for the daily Liturgy of the Hours and Eucharist Liturgy.

UNIFAS president Father Gottfried Wolff, OSM, who is also the prior general of the Friar Servants of Mary, welcomed participants to the gathering. Commenting on the theme of the conference, he acknowledged that many Servites already serve at the peripheries, “but, to be honest,” he said, “we need to do more.”

Manila’s Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo, a fierce defender of human rights, gave the opening address. He told the group that “collaboration requires encounter, dialogue, and listening to all.” He urged his listeners not to be afraid to try out new paths to reach those at the peripheries and pointed to social media as one new way to spread the Good News.

On the second day of the conference, participants boarded buses and headed for the city of Manila

**Continued on Page 4**



U.S. representatives to the UNIFAS Conference in the Philippines, May 20–26, 2018. From left, Brother Arnaldo Sanchez, Ladysmith Servite Sisters Theresa Sandok and Barbara Thomalla, Father Michael Guimon, Secular Servites Deborah Nunes, Susan Weigand, and Paulette Martin, and Omaha Servite Sister Lisa Sheridan.

# President's Message

## An Encounter with God



Mary Alice Willems, OSM

I attended a funeral last week. The woman who had died was 96 years old. I knew she had outlived her friends and acquaintances. I wanted to go to be with the family as they blessed her on her journey to God. As I entered the church and walked up the aisle, I saw a small blonde person streaking toward me. She grabbed me around the waist, squeezed tightly, and said, "Grandma, I love you." I was surprised by this message but knelt and wrapped my arms around her. I said, "I love you, too." Bright eyes continued to look at me as I continued, "I am so happy for such a warm, loving welcome. Would you tell me your name?" Her quick reply was, "Grandma, you know my name."

Later I thought about the experience with a bit of awe. I knew I had an encounter with God. I was greeted with open arms, loved just as I am. There is no need for names. I am welcomed just as I am.

We moved to the pew and she shared with me the important things of her life. With joy she took out the treasures

### Editor's Note:

For this issue we invited Sister Mary Alice Willems, a member of the Servants of Mary Leadership Team, to pen the President's Message.

of her purse. And she spoke of her friends, who were not all nice. Fully open, not concerned about what I might think.

I thought of my nightly prayer when I call to mind the gifts that have come to me that day. I speak to God of my needs. I present the litany of those who have asked for prayer. I pray for the needs of the world and remember the lives of others. I pray for those who may have caused hurt. I place before God all the remnants of my day hoping for guidance and healing as I experience God's loving glance.

This event challenged me to love each person I meet, to trust them, to listen to their story. I know that God speaks to us in many ways. And that day God spoke to me through a child who blessed me and taught me how to bring God's abundant love to others.

Where have you met God today?

*Mary Alice Willems, OSM*

Sister Mary Alice Willems, OSM



# Wrapped in Love and Prayers

## *Servite Center's Prayer Shawl Ministry*

Over the last twelve years Servite Center for Life has gifted more than 400 people with a handcrafted prayer shawl. The shawls are given to people in times of sickness and sorrow, as well as joy and celebration.

The shawls are knitted and crocheted by an interfaith group of women who meet monthly at the United Congregational Church in Ladysmith, Wis. "Many blessings are prayed into every stitch," said Servite Center president Sister Marguerite Samz. "Newly completed shawls are blessed with a prayer and passed to each person present for silent prayer for the one who will receive the shawl," she said.

Each prayer shawl comes with a card saying: "May God who understands each need, who listens to every prayer, bless and keep you in tender loving care."

The shawls have been given to people locally, throughout the United States, and in such distant places as Haiti and India. Many expressions of gratitude have come from recipients of this special gift. One woman wrote: "I wanted to send you a note on how much I love my prayer shawl. When I took the shawl out of the box and my husband placed it on my shoulders, I felt like I could feel the prayers and love wrapped in it."



**Knit, Purl, Pray** – Sister Marguerite, far right, with other women making prayer shawls at a monthly meeting at the United Congregational Church in Ladysmith.



**Silent Prayer** - Secular Servite Maryann Luplow prays for the recipient of this prayer shawl.

**August Airs** – Sister Mary Dominica Effertz was one of several performers at an organ concert on August 12, 2018, at the Spooner, Wis. high school. Sister Mary De Lourdes Plourde gave this account of the event: "Sister Dominica really set the tone and spirit as she was the first on the program. She was accompanied to the microphone holding her music to her heart. She said she hoped her 86-year-old fingers would perform her two pieces, 'Toccata' and 'Triumphal March.' It was perfect! And everyone clapped and clapped as she picked up her music, holding it close to heart, and left one shoe behind." The Servite Sisters donated the organ to the high school when they closed their motherhouse some years ago.

# International Meeting in the Philippines

Continued from Page 1



UNIFAS conference participants, joined by local Filipino Servites, gather for a Servite March to visit places of Servite life and ministry in Manila.

no place to rest his head. Not only do we want to open our doors to them and offer hospitality and assistance, but we also want to identify the causes of such migrations and work to eradicate those causes.”

Before returning home, Sisters Barbara and Theresa stopped off in Vietnam for a few days. Their guide pointed out a building in Saigon that once housed Catholic Relief Services, where former

to meet some 300 members of the local Servite Family. Their first stop was the Muntinlupa Sports Complex, where they enjoyed a light lunch of local foods, including a popular coconut drink called buko juice, and where young Filipino sisters and friars entertained the group with cultural songs and dances. Nourished and rested, the group of Servites, now 400 strong, headed out into the blistering heat for a mile-long Servite March to visit places of Servite life and ministry. Led by a Servite school’s drum and lyre band and accompanied by a police escort, the group marched through the city streets with colorful flags of nations waving. Mothers with babes in arms, shopkeepers, and laborers came out to watch the procession pass by.

Servite Sister Audrey VanderLoop worked as a nutrition educator to several villages for a couple years during the Vietnam War. One stop on their tour was a visit to the Cu Chi Tunnels near Saigon, an elaborate network of underground passageways used as hideouts, living quarters, and supply routes for the Viet Cong. The exhibit included a variety of cleverly concealed gruesome booby traps constructed by the Viet Cong during the war to capture and torture their opponents. Sister Theresa said that the visit to the Cu Chi Tunnels opened her eyes “to the horrors our troops encountered in the jungles of Vietnam.”

Sister Barbara said she was amazed at the size and diversity of the Servite Family in the Philippines. “There are five different congregations of Servite sisters – four Italian and one Indian – with formation houses and ministries, two formation houses of friars, and hundreds of Secular Servites,” she observed.

Tagaytay City, site of the VIII UNIFAS Conference, is home to the Taal volcano, which is actually a volcano within a lake within a volcano, the smallest active volcano in the world.

At the close of the conference, participants affirmed a joint message to the universal Servite Family. In it they said: “At the peripheries, with our Mother, courageous Virgin, close to Christ being crucified in so many mendicants, migrants, often victims of injustice and oppression, homeless, and unemployed, we recognize the Son of Man who has



# *Jubilee:* **Three Sisters — 175 Years of Service**

## *Sister Mary Rita Thompson*

celebrated 65 years of religious profession this year. She was born in Minneapolis, Minn., on April 15, 1934. She entered the Servants of Mary on August 2, 1951, and professed first vows on June 22, 1953. She holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Mount Senario College in Ladysmith.

Her ministries include serving as an elementary school teacher in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and New Jersey; central supply aide at St. Mary's Hospital, Kewaunee; CNA hospital home care with St. Mary's Hospital, Minneapolis; home health aide, Amery; supportive home care with Northwoods Inc., Portage; live-in caregiver for the elderly, Amery and Minneapolis; parish visitor, Medford; communion services for nursing home residents, Wyocena; and volunteer at St. Vincent de Paul thrift store and homeless shelter, Portage.



## *Sister Mary Rosanne Fogarty*

celebrated 60 years of religious profession this year. She was born in Chicago, Ill., on July 4, 1939. She entered the Servants of Mary on August 15, 1956, and professed first vows on June 20, 1958. She holds a bachelor's in elementary education and social sciences from Mount Senario College, Ladysmith, and a master's in religious education from the University of St. Thomas, Houston.

Her ministries include serving as an elementary school teacher and principal in Minnesota, New Jersey, and West Virginia; religious education coordinator, parochial coordinator, and liturgical music director in West Virginia; massage therapist; music ministry volunteer at a women's prison in Florida; hospice volunteer in Florida; and volunteer with the St. Vincent De Paul Society in Rice Lake, Wis. She also served as a member of the Servants of Mary Leadership Team.



## *Sister Sharon Rae McCarthy*

celebrated 50 years of religious profession this year. She was born in Detroit Lakes, Minn., on April 22, 1941. She entered the Servants of Mary on August 15, 1967, and made her first profession of vows on August 16, 1968. She holds a bachelor's in education from St. Cloud State University and a certificate as a spiritual guide from the Franciscan Spirituality Center in La Crosse.

Her ministries include serving as an elementary school teacher in Minnesota and Wisconsin; occupational therapy aide with disabled children in Illinois and with the elderly in Idaho and Illinois; librarian at the Servants of Mary motherhouse and Mount Senario College; and spiritual guide. In 1996 the Leadership Team approved her request to live a contemplative life as a hermit.



# Wisconsin Nuns Organize to Address Future Needs

You don't need a crystal ball to know that religious life is changing. According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), the number of religious sisters has dropped from 180,000 in 1965 to 46,000 today. Male religious have experienced a similar decline in numbers, though not as steep as women. The number of religious priests and brothers has gone from 35,000 in 1965 to 15,000 today.

As numbers have declined owing to deaths and a dearth of vocations, the age of members has steadily increased. In 1965, for example, the Ladysmith Servite Sisters had 177 members with a median age of 42. Today they have 35 members with a median age of 83, ranging in age from 68 to 100. The trajectory is similar for other communities of women religious.

This reality presents a number of challenges for religious communities, not least of which is the shrinking pool of members available for leadership. The Servite Sisters addressed this issue some years ago by agreeing to allow leaders to serve unlimited consecutive terms. But this is just a stopgap measure. The

day will come when communities no longer have anyone to fulfill the roles of leadership and governance. What then?

Women's religious communities in Wisconsin have formed an organization to plan for that day and the intervening years. The organization is called the Wisconsin Religious Collaborative and was incorporated in the State of Wisconsin in April 2018.

The Wisconsin Religious Collaborative exists to provide a sustainable membership organization that promotes good stewardship by sharing resources and professional expertise in finance, management, pastoral care, governance, and other areas in order to sustain mission and meet the needs of individual religious institutes in Wisconsin and their members.

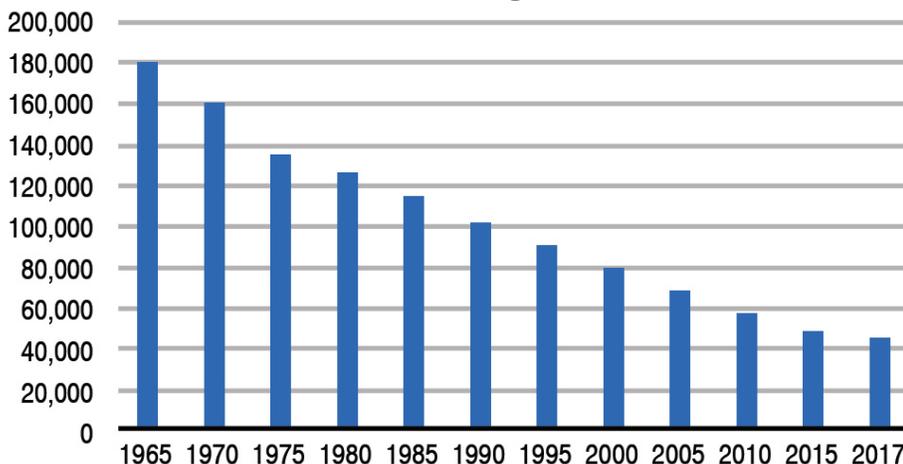
Nine religious communities, including the Ladysmith Servites, are founding members of the Collaborative.

The Wisconsin initiative has generated a great deal of interest nationwide and was recently featured in the National Catholic Reporter. Although religious communities have devised a number of ways to address leadership and governance issues associated with declining membership and advancing age, the Wisconsin Religious Collaborative is unique in bringing together a variety of communities to address these challenges together.

**Continued on next page**



**Decline in Number of Religious Sisters in USA**



Above:  
Day of Dreaming – Sister Sharlet Wagner, CSC, facilitates a discussion on creating a common archives for religious communities during an April 27, 2018 meeting at the motherhouse of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Notre Dame, Ind.

Chart at right:  
Source: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA).

# Sunflowers Bring Hope to Women in Tanzania



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Continued from previous page

## *Collaborative Archive Project*

In a separate but related initiative, the Sisters of the Holy Cross invited religious leaders and archivists from the Midwest to their motherhouse in Notre Dame, Ind., on April 27, 2018, for a conversation on the possibility of creating a common repository for the archives of religious communities. Many communities today are looking for a permanent home for their archives as they divest themselves of sponsored ministries and motherhouses that no longer meet their needs.

Sister Theresa Sandok, OSM, president of the Ladysmith Servite Sisters, was one of the more than 50 participants at the meeting. Holy Cross Sister Sharlet Wagner marveled at the attendance. “We had no idea how much interest there would be in this topic,” she said. “We would have been happy if even just 10 people showed up.”

Participants endorsed the idea of creating a common archive, as well as a heritage center where the story of women religious could be told through artifacts and displays. A steering committee is being formed to begin the planning process.

Many women in Tanzania, particularly in rural areas, live in abject poverty and are completely dependent upon men for every aspect of their lives. The country has no law against domestic violence, and the practice is widely accepted. Girls as young as 15 are frequently forced to marry, drop out of school, and start bearing children.

A group of women in Mungu Bariki are trying to change this situation with sunflowers. The women got together and started a sunflower plantation to produce cooking oil to support themselves and their families, and in this way lead more independent lives.

The Franciscan Sisters of St. Bernadette, a Tanzanian order, were impressed with what these women managed to accomplish with a small plot of land and a rudimentary oil pressing process. They realized that if the women had more land and a modern oil press they could produce more oil for their own use and sell the extra for added income.

The Sisters helped the women acquire more land and then turned to the Mary Alphonse Bradley Fund for a grant to purchase a sunflower oil press machine and to build a structure to house the machine, the seeds, and the processed oil. The grant came through last October, and the machine is now installed in the new building. This year’s crop of sunflower seeds, coming in at around two tons, is now being harvested and processed.

With the increased production and capacity, a new need has arisen – a pickup truck to transport the seeds from the fields and take the oil to market. The Sisters have once again appealed to the Mary Alphonse Bradley Fund for assistance, and the decision is pending.

The Mary Alphonse Bradley Fund is a ministry of the Ladysmith Servite Sisters. The Sisters started the Fund in 1998 with money invested from the sale of Addolorata Villa in Wheeling, Ill. Over the years the Fund has supported over 300 charitable projects worldwide.



# In Memoriam

## **Sr. Alice Henke, OSM 1923–2017**

Sister Alice Henke, 94, died on November 13, 2017, at Ladysmith Care and Rehab. She was born in rural Thorp, Wis., on October 30, 1923, to Emil and Anna (Balde-schwiler) Henke, the eldest daughter of eight children, one boy and seven girls. She joined the Ladysmith Servite Sisters in 1943 and made her first profession of vows in 1945.

She held a bachelor's in history from the University of St. Thomas and a master's in history from Loyola University Chicago.

She taught for 22 years in Catholic elementary schools staffed by Servite Sisters in Illinois, New Jersey, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. She taught history at Mount Senario College in Ladysmith, where she also served as Assistant Director of Admissions and Director of Alumni.

She was active in the Ladysmith area and especially in the Rusk County Historical Society, where she served as president, vice president, and member of the board. She chaired the committee that produced a 370-page history of Rusk County and co-edited the "Ladysmith 100 Years" souvenir book. She was also a member of the Rusk County Hospital and Nursing Home Auxiliary and Board.

Sister Alice served as archivist for the Servite Sisters for many years and authored a book on the early



history of the congregation called "A Branch Amid the Pines."

In 1998 a 32-unit residence for the elderly in Tomahawk, Wis., was named "Alice Henke Villa" in recognition of her work in history and education and for assisting disadvantaged rural people from northern Wisconsin obtain a college education.

She is survived by her sisters Ruth Rose of Onalaska, Dorothy Wozniak of Stanley, Sister Dolores Henke, OSM, of Onalaska, Marian Pabich of Eau Claire, many nieces and nephews, and the Servite Sisters, with whom she shared life for 74 years. She was preceded in death by her parents, brother Lawrence Henke, sisters Eileen Graham and Marie Henke, sister-in-law Evelyn Henke, and brothers-in-law Raymond Graham, Warren Rose, John Wozniak, and Jerome Pabich.

## **Sr. Sandra DeGidio, OSM 1943–2017**

Sister Sandra DeGidio, 74, died on December 20, 2017, at her home in Oak Creek, Wis. She was born in Cumberland, Wis., on February 12, 1943, to Nick and Jovina (Zappa) DeGidio. She joined the Ladysmith Servite Sisters in 1959 as a high school junior and made her first profession of vows in 1962.

She held a bachelor's in English from Mount Senario College and a master's in English from Marquette University. She studied liturgy at the University of Notre Dame and received a certificate in spiritual guidance from Siena Center in Racine.

She authored ten books, two videos, and over 100 articles in various theological, liturgical, and educational publications. Her most recent book, "In God's Embrace,"

**Continued on next page**





is a collection of prayers for health and healing.

She taught summer courses in family religious education, the sacraments, and liturgy at the University of St. Catherine, St. Paul; Regis College, Denver; St. Norbert College, DePere; Creighton University, Omaha; and Sacred Heart School of Theology, Hales Corners. She also taught in Catholic elementary schools in Deephaven and Roseville, Minn., and in Hillside, Ill.

She served as director of family catechesis, adult education, and liturgy at St. Joseph Parish, New Hope, Minn.; pastoral associate and director of religious education at Webster Area Catholic Churches; director of marketing services at Revere Healthcare, Cary, Ill.; and development director at Catholic Charities, Diocese of Rockford. Sister Sandy served three terms on the Servants of Mary leadership team, including two consecutive terms as president. She also served as the order's director of communications and development and chair of the Mary Alphonse Bradley Fund. She edited "Servite Sisters Today" for close to twenty years.

She is survived by her sister Florann (Bill) Phillips of Alamogordo, N.M., nephews Peter (Tari) Phillips of Alamogordo, N.M., Marc (Jennifer) Phillips of Asunción, Paraguay, and Joel (Kelly) Phillips of Orlando, Fla., and the Servite Sisters, with whom she shared life for 58 years. She was preceded in death by her parents.

## Chicks

(Below) Martha Smart, left, holds a little black chick for Sister Marguerite Samz to inspect, while Linda Reissner looks on. Martha brought a brood of chicks to show to the Sisters in Ladysmith last June before taking the hatchlings home to raise for laying hens.



(Above) Sisters Mary De Lourdes Plourde and Mary McDermott cuddle the tiny balls of fluff.

**Play Ball!** – Sister Mary Dominica Effertz throws out the first pitch at the opening softball game May 31, 2018, for the church league in Spooner and Shell Lake, Wis. When the St. Francis de Sales softball team asked Sister to throw the first pitch, she was, she admitted, “a bit reluctant to do it, because it was many, many years since we played ball at the motherhouse in the summertime.” With the help of her nephew Kevin, who practiced with her before the big day, she mustered the courage she needed to make the toss.





**Wigwam** – Sister Cecilia Fandel, left, helps build an authentic Ojibwe wigwam. “It’s hard work,” said Sister Cecilia, project coordinator. “We put in eleven hours the first day and have many hours to go.” Wayne Valliere, elder and cultural director at the Lac du Flambeau reservation, is guiding the construction. The 17-foot diameter willow hut will be part of an exhibit at the Rusk County Museum in Ladysmith to honor the Native Americans who have lived in the area since 1745. The finished wigwam will resemble this one (right) located at the Lac du Flambeau reservation.



**Celebrating Centenarian** – Sister Mary John VanderLoop holds a proclamation presented to her by Ladysmith mayor Alan Christianson during her 100th birthday party on June 5, 2018, in the Cameo Room at Ladysmith Care Community.

## Our New Look

You may have noticed that the front page of our newsletter has a new look. We thought that after ten years the masthead could use a face lift. The sharp new design is the work of Jean L. Merry of Countryside Marketing, the company that designs and produces our newsletter.

Servite Sisters Today has gone through a number of transformations since the first black-and-white issue rolled off the press in 1974. In 2008 the first full color issue appeared, and the following year we began posting the newsletter on our website, [servitesisters.org](http://servitesisters.org).

Through all these changes, the mission of the paper has remained the same as stated in that very first issue 44 years ago: “To keep up communication with you who are special to us” and “to enable you to keep abreast of the who’s, what’s, when’s, and where’s of our community.”



**Jubilee Dinner** – The Ladysmith Sisters hosted a dinner for this year’s jubilarians on August 21, 2018, at the Ladysmith Family Restaurant. Left, Sisters Kateri Guske, Sharon McCarthy, Dolores Henke, Virginia Schwartz, De Lourdes Plourde, and Cecilia Fandel. Right, Sisters Rosanne Fogarty, Mary McDermott, Marguerite Samz, Rosemary Fogarty, Lucy Daniels, and Geraldine Schulte.

**We are deeply grateful to you, our donors,  
and hold you in our prayers.**

**Sept. 1, 2017**

**Aug. 15, 2018**

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*In honor S. Mary John VanderLoop, OSM, S. Barbara Thomalla, OSM In memory of Servite Sisters who started and worked at St. Mary's Hospital, Kewaunee, Wis.*

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*In memory of John Hudson, Mildred & Richard Fandel*

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*In memory of S. Martha Kormendy, OSM*

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*In memory of S. M. De Sales Fitzpatrick, OSM*

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*In memory of Dewey Floberg, Greta Grace Floberg, Carmen Vacho, Tony Vacho, Sr., Carol Vacho, SSG Nathan Vacho*

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*In memory of S. Sandra DeGidio, OSM*

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*In memory of Paul Geo. Fuchs*

**Fuhrmann, Deacon Thomas & Sharon**  
*In memory of S. Sandra DeGidio, OSM*

**Fundak, Bro. Joseph M., OSM\***

**Gansen, Mary & Norbert**

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**Gatzke, Gayla**

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*In memory of S. Sandra DeGidio, OSM*

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**Hagen, Rev. Gerald A.\***

**Hall, Garry D.**

**Hammang, Phyllis\***

**Hanson, Christine\***

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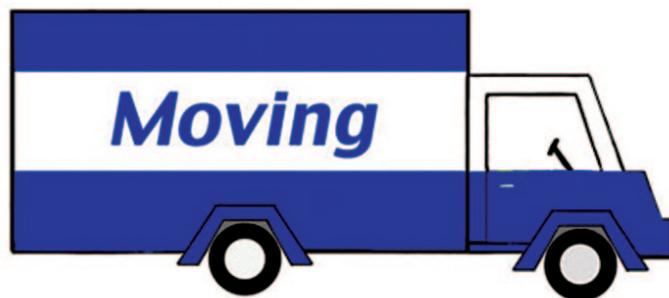
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*In memory of Albert Nieters*

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In memory of my parents & grandparents*

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- Winger, Carl R.**
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- Waldeck, Dennis J.\***
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- Wildenberg, Pat**  
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- Winger, Carl\***
- Winkel, S. Jovita, CSA**  
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- Wochnick, Mary**  
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- Young, Glenda M.**  
*In memory of S. M. Joan LeBlanc, OSM*
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## Ladysmith Hospital Marks Centennial

Rusk County Memorial Hospital, which started out as St. Mary's Hospital, celebrated its centennial on June 5, 2018.

It's hard to underestimate the value of a community hospital to people in the area, according to Sr. Theresa Sandok, OSM, President, Servants of Mary. This was especially true in the early part of the 20th century, when the main mode of transportation in rural areas was by horse and buggy along unpaved roads, and where the distance to a hospital could mean the difference between life and death, she said.

St. Mary's hospital opened its doors just in time to care for the victims of the 1918 flu pandemic. Over the years, the hospital expanded in size and complexity to meet changing health care needs.

"The Sisters who started the hospital would be amazed and pleased to see their healing ministry carried on by the



dedicated men and women who serve the hospital today," said Sandok, who was born at the medical facility.

In 1965, a 50-bed nursing home was built adjacent to the hospital with facilities for a larger and improved laundry and central heating plant. This new facility was named St. Joseph's on the Flambeau.

On September 1, 1973, Rusk County purchased the hospital and nursing home. The original structure, built in 1918, could not be approved for fire and safety standards, and the Sisters were unable to finance reconstruction. After the purchase, the county tore down the 1918 structure and erected a new building adjacent to the nursing home.

*Excerpts from an article by Luke Klink, Ladysmith News, June 7, 2018. Reprinted with permission.*

A century ago, the Servite Sisters opened St. Mary's Hospital in Ladysmith.

Rusk County purchased the hospital in 1973.



*At left – The Sisters raised a large garden that provided food for the hospital and convent. Seven white wooden crosses, marking the graves of seven Sisters, can be seen in the distance beyond the sweet corn in this 1950 photo. Today the garden is gone and the cemetery has expanded to house the graves of 118 Sisters and four priests.*