

Tacoma Dominicans respond to God's call

Jubilee Celebration for Tacoma Dominican Sisters

Sister Frances Cusack, OP (Mary Gerard) 60 years



Sister Frances Cusack, the eighth of nine children, was born in County Mayo, Ireland, to James and Ellen (Geraghty) Cusack. She was only two when her mother died. Her grandparents and an aunt raised her. She became acquainted with the Tacoma Dominican Sisters when one of them came to visit the family. After finishing school, she entered the Tacoma Dominican Community at Marymount, Tacoma in 1948. Following her first profession in January 1950, she received her degree from Central Washington State College of Education. She later studied at The College of the Desert in Palm Desert; Dominican College in San Rafael; Holy Names College in Oakland and Seattle University.

Sister Frances' classroom teaching included Holy Rosary School, St. Edward School and Assumption School, Seattle; Holy Cross School and Marymount Military Academy, Tacoma; St. Francis School, Bakersfield, and St. John the Evangelist School, Los Angeles. While teaching eighth grade at Assumption School, she also served as principal and as superior of the convent.

Never one to be idle, in Southern California Sister Frances was involved in CCD programs in the parishes where she lived and worked.

Sister Frances dedicated many hours to organizing food and

clothing banks for the poor in San Diego and in Adelanto. This work carried her to New York where she lived and worked with the homeless for several years. Returning to Marymount, she was the personnel and plant manager. Prior to moving to The Franciscan in Burien, she helped care for the sisters at St. Bernadette's, Seattle.

At St. Francis Parish she is a Eucharistic Minister, a hostess in funeral ministry and a sandwich maker for the poor. At The Franciscan Residence she responds to emergencies when the manager is absent.

Sister Frances says, *"As I reflect on my jubilee, I can't imagine that it is sixty plus years since I left my home in Ireland. The years have brought so many changes that I never even dreamed of and yet, the tenets of our lives have not changed. A special time in my ministry has been the years I've worked with the poor remembering that St. Dominic sold his books to care for the poor."*

Sister Cecilia Flores, OP (Mary Francene) 60 years

Sister Cecilia Flores was born and



raised in Bakersfield, California. She attended St. Francis High School which in 1947 became Garces Memorial High School. Following high school graduation, Sister Cecilia

traveled to Tacoma and entered the Tacoma Dominican Community.

After her First Profession in January 1950, she began a teaching ministry that spanned several years and several of our grade schools and three of our high schools. From 1950 – 1969, Sister Cecilia ministered to students and parents in St. Mary's Grade School, Centralia; Holy Rosary Grade and High School, West Seattle; Yakima Central Catholic High School, Yakima; and St. Francis Grade School and Garces Memorial High School in Bakersfield, CA.

"Returning to my roots in Bakersfield was a distinct pleasure knowing I was now teaching in a school where once I had been a student."

In the years prior to 1969, in addition to her regular classes, Sister Cecilia was assigned to different parishes to teach religious education classes.

In 1969 heeding the call of Vatican II for religious to reach out where needs were the greatest, Sister Cecilia moved to the state of Mexico, north of Mexico City and cared for 180 grade school girls at *Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos*, an orphanage. Here she collaborated with other sisters and lay persons.

"Upon my return from Mexico, from 1974 to 1985, I worked in the Lower Yakima Valley ministering to Hispanics in the Sunnyside, Toppenish, Mabton and Grandview areas. This included teaching children in bilingual education classes in Sunnyside and Mabton, and teaching adults English as a Second Language (ESL) class in collaboration with the Sisters of the Holy Names at Heritage College, Toppenish. I also worked through St. Aloysius Parish, Toppenish, visiting families in the parish and in nearby migrant camps, preparing children for the reception of sacraments, and young girls for

to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Quinceanera celebrations as well as families for Christmas Posadas. I also assisted with weekend retreats for young adults collaborating with Sister Maria de Jesus Ybarra, Director of Religious Education in the Yakima Diocese.”

In 1985 Sister Cecilia moved to California to join Sisters Roseann Cordova and Nora Murphy in San Ysidro where she ministered to local families through Casa Familiar, a non-profit service agency. *“I continue living in San Ysidro and am available to the local community as a volunteer. I now hope and pray that generous persons, open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will respond, carry on and expand the needed ministries”*

Sister Margaret O’Farrell, OP (Bernard) 60 years



Our own *Energizer Bunny*, Sister Margaret O’Farrell (Meg to family and friends) is still *going* after sixty years as a Tacoma Dominican. Born to Valentine and Anne O’Farrell, she was the third of nine children. When she attended the Presentation School in Terenure, Dublin, she held in her heart the desire to be a missionary in Africa. After meeting Sister Ursula, a Tacoma Dominican on a home visit, she chose to do her missionary work in the US.

Sister Meg entered the Tacoma Dominicans in 1948. She taught in the elementary grades in Seattle, Ellensburg, and Bakersfield, California. One of her first assignments was to teach at Holy

Rosary in Seattle. She also taught at Saint Edward School, Seattle. She received her Masters in Religious Education from Seattle University and, in 1970, became Director of Religious Education at Saint Monica Parish on Mercer Island. From there she went to parish ministry in Issaquah and then to Saint Thomas, Tukwila.

Sister Meg can still be counted on to help her Tacoma Dominican family with fundraising. In her honor, Saint Thomas holds an annual Sister Margaret Breakfast fundraiser to help meet the Tacoma Dominicans’ retirement needs.

Sister Meg’s nieces remember how much fun it was when she went back to Dublin on her first home visit. She seemed to have a song for every occasion and rode her bicycle (in full habit) around Terenure. As one of them remembers, *She was up with the lark and sang like a lark.*

Sister Meg loved moving around and meeting people. Friends she has made over the years stay in touch. Although she is unable to write very much these days, she keeps all her wonderful friends in her prayers. As she says, *“My life of ministry has taken a more contemplative turn. I have more time to read and pray. I’m never too busy to visit with friends.”*

Sister Celestine Bowens, OP (Margaret M.) 50 years



Sister Celestine Bowens was born on

September 18, 1939, the second of five children, to John and Catherine Bowens in Co. Roscommon, Ireland. She grew up on a small farm and attended the local elementary school. During high school, with the Irish Sisters of Charity, she came in contact with the Tacoma Dominicans and knew that God was calling her to enter religious life.

She entered Crosshaven in County Cork on July 31, 1957. In January of 1958, she and her companions traveled to Mt. St. Dominic in Tacoma, Washington. Following her First Profession on August 4, 1960, she began her ministry as an elementary school teacher at St. Francis School in Bakersfield, California.

“I also taught at St. Patrick School in Tacoma, Washington and at St. Therese School in Fresno, California. One of my greatest delights was teaching children to read and preparing them for Sacraments. Each new place brought people into my life who filled my pilgrim soul with a sense of wonder at the multifaceted face of God.”

After twenty years of teaching and relating to students and their parents, she felt another call to ministry, this time in the field of social services to the elderly and mobility impaired. In 1980 she began work at Masten Towers in Fresno and that began a thirty year love affair with the clients and staff which continues to this day.

Known as Sister Cellie her days begin around 7:00 AM and if she is lucky they conclude around 7:00 PM. During this time she might be found accompanying residents to doctors’ appointments, visiting a resident who is hospitalized, appearing in court with a resident, talking with family members, conducting a funeral, assisting the residents in finding local resources or supporting another staff person. On rare occasions, you might find her in her office but even then she is talking with or counseling residents.

In appreciation for her thirty years
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Our Dominican tradition of contemplation

at Masten Towers, the Board of Directors, Management and Staff dedicated the 11th floor dining room to Sister Celestine. Part of the plaque reads "...Honoring her passion to serve Masten Tower Residents."

Sister Celestine experiences this jubilee "as a time to pause in gratitude to God and celebrate all of God's countless gifts - a chance to recommit myself and to deepen my relationship with God, with the members of my Congregation and to ask God's continual blessings on the Tacoma Dominicans as together, we journey into the future."

Sister Celestine reflecting on her 50 years, "What a joy and blessing it is for me to be a Tacoma Dominican and to have the support and encouragement of the sisters. I see this jubilee as a culmination, a completion of a period of my life, and the beginning of a new opportunity to empower people with dignity, to serve with compassion and to love all of God's creation as set forth in the Beatitudes."

Sister Anna Murphy, OP (Margaret M. Murphy) 50 years



Sisters Anna Murphy and Winifred Gray

Sister Anna Murphy is the third youngest of ten children born to Margaret and Patrick Murphy in Wexford, Ireland. "I always considered myself lucky to be born one of the youngest because then I did not have as many responsibilities as the older children."

"My desire to become a religious sister began when I was about eleven years old. My religious upbringing by my parents and the example of dedicated teachers, The Sisters of St. John of God, were the people God chose to lead me to Him and to desire to dedicate my life to teaching and preaching the Gospel to God's little ones. I had no doubt about my vocation but a difficult time discerning which of the many religious communities in Ireland to enter. About this time Sister Amelia, a Tacoma Dominican, came to visit her cousin, Mother Columbanus, the principal of the convent school in Wexford that I attended. After meeting and visiting Sister Amelia all my questions about where to enter vanished."

In 1957 she entered the Tacoma Dominican novitiate at Mt. St. Dominic. In 1958 she received the Dominican habit and the name Sister M. Anna, a name she chose to keep even when the opportunity came to return to our Baptismal names.

In 1960, Sister Anna began a thirty-five year commitment to teaching primary age children. Her teaching assignments took her as far south as San Diego and as far east as St. Paul's School in Yakima. Her Seattle years include teaching at St. Edward School, Assumption School, St. Pius X School, and St. Alphonsus School. In California she taught at St. Vincent de Paul School, San Diego; St. Francis and Our Lady of Perpetual Help schools in Bakersfield, and in Los Banos at Our Lady of Fatima School. Sister Anna says, "she remembers and prays for all the children that she was privileged to have in the classroom and in her life."

In 1995 Sister Anna retired from the classroom and in 1996 with the blessing of the Tacoma Dominican Community began a new ministry of ministering to the elderly sisters. In the classroom she knew what she was doing between 9 and 3 whereas this new ministry required great flexibility

and uncertainty. But Sister Anna brought the same grace and wisdom to this ministry as she did the classroom. Among other tasks, her job description included helping sisters move from independent living to St. Joseph's Residence in Seattle, accompanying a sister to the emergency room when necessary, driving sisters to doctors' appointments and making trips to and from pharmacies. She made every attempt to be present when a sister was dying and attended to her spiritual and comfort needs. According to Sister Anna, "I am looking forward to a great welcome from my sisters when it is my turn to go home to my God in heaven."

Sister Anna reflecting on the past fifty years, "I certainly can see the presence of the Holy Spirit in all my ministries and in everything I have accomplished. My Tacoma Dominican Community has given me the love, joy, support, trust and encouragement I have needed in my ministry, and for this I say **FOR ALL THAT HAS BEEN WE SAY THANK YOU AND FOR ALL THAT WILL BE WE YES.**"

Sister Anna officially retired as Coordinator of Senior Sisters on January 1, 2010. Sister Dianne Crawford, SP, has been welcomed as the new Coordinator for Tacoma Dominicans at St. Joseph Residence. In the Fall issue, we will introduce you to Sister Dianne.



Jublarian Sister Cecilia speaks of the rich array of words that reflect her past 60 years: *thanking, praising, listening, responding, seeking, searching and celebrating.*