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JUSTICE

COMPASSION



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URSULINE SISTERS OF CLEVELAND

WINTER 2020 NEWSLETTER

The *Ursuline Sisters News* is published three times a year for friends and supporters of the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland.

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MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

Dear Friends,

The Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland have been moving, building, changing, adjusting, and finding new ways and means since we set foot in this country in 1850. Only with faith, friends and family is any of this possible. For example, last year we welcomed you into Merici Crossings to celebrate our new home with us. Now this issue comes to you from our new congregational office space at Eastpoint 1 in Mayfield Heights. St. Angela told us to get moving and risk new things. How grateful we are to have you as companions on this journey!



Sister Laura Bregar

St. Angela told us to get moving and risk new things. How grateful we are to have you as companions on this journey!

More important to us than any location is the heart of our mission so wonderfully illustrated in these pages filled with stories reflecting our long Ursuline history as well as our new-found responses to current needs.

You will read about service at Beaumont, an institution tracing its Ursuline heritage back to the late 19th century through Sr. Martha Owen who is currently a tutor there and in a reflection on the life of Sr. John Mary. And how wonderful to reflect on the gift of the Valerians, Merici Award winners and faithful friends over the decades.

At the same time our recent interns, Amber Miller and Aly Nahra, will share their experiences with us from the past year or so, new eyes, hands and hearts engaged in the Ursuline story. Renewed vitality also takes our sisters beyond the comfort of home and familiar institutions. You will meet Sr. Rosemarie Carfagna comforting babies born to mothers with addictions and Sr. Ellen Themes working her magic with refugees in need of language skills in a culture they long to know and embrace while cherishing their own.

No matter where we minister, live, pray and celebrate, we know that "if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Cor. 5:1) Thank you for sharing both our earthly buildings and our eternal hope with us. If heaven is a banquet, we would not to be there without you after all of the love and joy we have shared together in the reign of God present among us here and now.

Let us keep moving together, risking new things, relying on the God we meet in prayer and in one another – wherever our buildings might be!

Gratefully,

Sister Laura Bregar

Sister Martha Owen tutors Spanish and touches lives at Beaumont

By Sister Carla Murar

Sister Martha Owen loves tutoring Spanish at Beaumont High School two or three times a week. Freshmen and sophomores are the students on her schedule. Ordinarily, she will meet one-on-one with students. Scheduling varies according to the needs of the students and their instructors. They meet in the library. Often they come to get help preparing for a test. The reassurance that they can pass the test is frequently all they need to take the test with confidence. A bonus for students: Sister Martha also has a background in theology so sometimes she is able to help them with their theology papers.

One technique Sister Martha uses to make the tutoring process fun is singing songs in Spanish. The language teacher has asked Sister to teach Spanish children's songs accompanied by her guitar, including Spanish Christmas carols during the holiday season.

Another activity that has useful dividends in building the teacher-student relationship is storytelling. It is done in English and helps to build a rapport. This gives insight into how best the young women might be helped in their studies.

Preparation for ministry in El Salvador got Sister ready for working with the Beaumont women. One step in her Spanish language training in Costa Rica consisted of grammar lessons in large groups of 30 to 40 people for only an hour a day for a few weeks. Needless to say her education in the language had to continue in El Salvador. This happened in working with the farmers or campesinos. At first they could not understand one another. However, it didn't take long before Sister Martha was able to hear the nuances in the spoken grammar versus the formal language development to which she was exposed. After some months of gestures and listening, the people and Martha were talking easily with each other. This preparation in Salvador was a big help in her work with the students at Beaumont.

The words of the young women who benefitted from her tutoring illustrate an implicit understanding of this: the love and regard they have for Sister Martha. Here are a few of their remarks:



Sister Martha Owen and students take a break to smile at the camera.

"Sister Martha has such a contagious spirit. She is so kind and has such a sense of humor. I look forward to meeting with her every week and she is more than just a teacher. I would even call her a friend."

"Sr. Martha helps me understand Spanish. I love having conversation about my weekend with her."

"Sister Martha was so helpful to me in Spanish. She helps me with my vocabulary and helps me remember how to translate Spanish in fun and goofy ways."

"The few times that I have worked with Sister Martha helped me understand the faith of Sister Dorothy Kazel [Ursuline missionary killed in El Salvador in 1980] and really sparked an interest in her life for me."

Sister Rosemarie Carfagna offers comfort to infants in distress

By Sister Janet Moore

For well over a year Sister Rosemarie Carfagna has volunteered weekly at Rainbow Babies and Children Hospital in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). She holds infants who have very serious health challenges and who have very little parental involvement.

When asked what drew her into this type of work, Rosemarie cited three reasons. First, she was inspired by the example of Ursuline Sister Anne Cecile, who, at age seventy, decided to retire from education as an elementary school teacher and principal and chose instead to work for a year in a child care setting. That year stretched into seventeen more years during which Sister took delight in cuddling babies, calming them, putting them down for naps; even making a baby more comfortable with a fresh diaper brought her great joy. She never lost her soothing touch. A second reason for Rosemarie's choice was her own family who produced enough babies to offer her plenty of opportunity for babysitting, something that she genuinely enjoyed. Lastly a family friend who had served at Rainbow Hospital NICU in that volunteer capacity for over twenty years suggested the service to Sister Rosemarie and recommended her to them.

After having been accepted by Rainbow, Rosemarie underwent considerable training, not only to learn about the infants that she would be holding but also about security issues. Rosemarie's training also included security measures at the facility, what to do in case a disturbing incident should arise, and the persons always available to insure the safety of the babies.

Typically the babies that Sister holds are "premies" weighing about three or four pounds. Many of these babies are medically classified as NAS babies (Narcotics Abstinence Syndrome babies) and have to be withdrawn from the drugs (often opioids) to which their mothers were addicted when pregnant. A team of nurses, doctors, and

There is no substitute for the human contact of being held, cuddled, rocked, sung to or talked to.



Sister Rosemarie at work!

practitioners use carefully monitored medications for this purpose, but their duties don't allow them to just sit and hold babies. Because the infant's mother is struggling with her own problems, she often can't spend time with her child, so the hospital tries to fill the void. That is where people like Sister Rosemarie come in. There is no substitute for the human contact of being held, cuddled, rocked, sung to or talked to.

“This is the only place that I find it easy to practice patience. I’m not a patient person at all, but when I’m with these babies I can just sit an hour and not mind; you can compare it to contemplation, especially if they fall asleep. Nothing is happening.”

Babies are given to Sister Rosemarie with attachments: oxygen tubes in their nostrils, a feeding tube, and five electrodes on their little bodies that produce a continuous reading of the baby’s vital signs on a wall monitor. When she begins to hold a baby, the numbers on the monitor are usually in a very high range because the infant is in a hyper state. It takes a while for the infant to settle down. Rosemarie described the way she often rests the baby on her chest where she can feel the baby’s heart beat and the baby can feel hers. Sometimes she holds the baby’s head snuggled into the curve of her neck so the baby can experience the warmth of skin to skin contact. The infant can also feel as well as hear her singing or talking even when the infant appears to be asleep. Some babies let it be known that they would rather be bounced, sometimes vigorously, or swayed. Standing or sitting, Rosemarie readily figures out what will work with each one and responds to the infant’s needs. As the baby calms and the physical signs of anxiety decrease, the numbers on the monitor come down. A doctor may come in to check on the baby, but if the numbers are on a steady downward path, he will simply smile and pass by. Some days nothing is going to calm the child; that is the nature of addiction. The baby will scream, wiggle, and struggle and suddenly arch its back in such a way that the volunteer must hold firmly in order not to drop the child. Staff members are always encouraging and once the medication is administered at the carefully scheduled time, the baby is able to calm down.

Rosemarie readily agreed that this ministry has taught her some things not only about the babies but also about herself. “This is the only place that I find it easy to practice patience. I’m not a patient person at all, but when I’m with these babies I can just sit an hour and not mind; you can compare it to contemplation, especially if they fall asleep. Nothing is happening. You are holding them and rocking and nothing else is happening so it is very contemplative. Every mom does this, of course, but we don’t have that pleasure so it’s like being a mom.”

Although Sister Rosemarie usually holds a child for about an hour and then goes to another child, when a severely upset NAS baby is responding well in her care, it is not at all uncommon for the staff to allow Rosemarie to keep the same infant for her full three hour stint. They will also take note and often allow her to have the same baby on her next visit. Because some babies are in NICU weeks or even months, they can get to know when a volunteer who is holding them is someone familiar to them. When a baby who rarely has any visitors is having a hard day, it is helpful to have a volunteer or nurse on hand who knows the child and what the baby might want, such as a special mobile or white noise or a particular blanket. One day when Rosemarie stepped off the elevator wearing her volunteer vest, she heard an unhappy baby screaming; the nurse said to her, “Oh thank God you are here. You know where to go.”

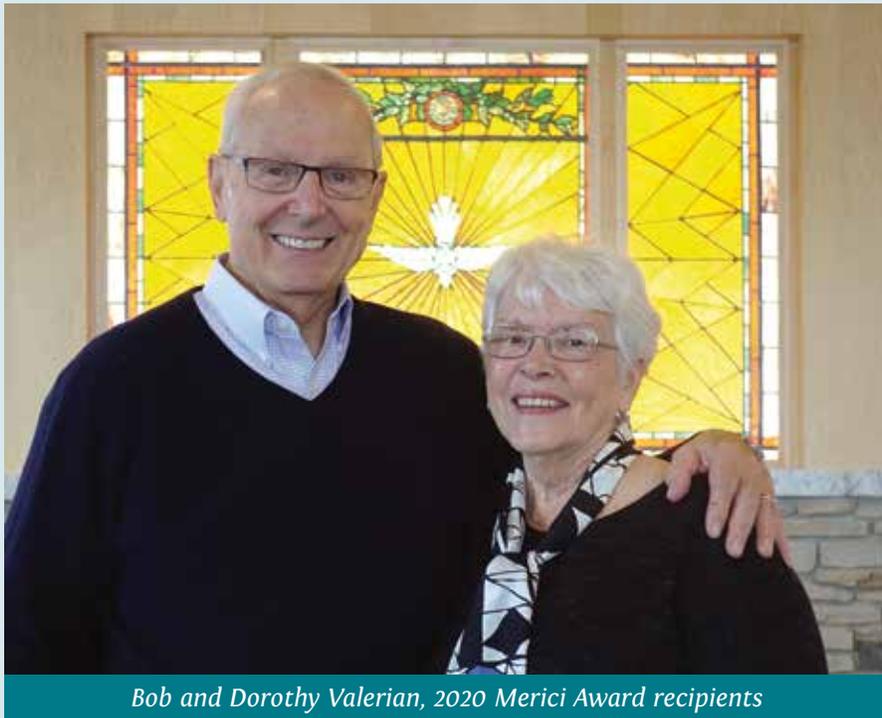
Sister’s eyes shine as she says enthusiastically, “I am exhausted at the end of a session because of the attention that it requires, but I like this so much; it is gratifying; it is direct service; it is very simple and natural; I don’t have to do any preparation; it is such a privilege to be able to care for someone in such need. It is really an honor because they are trusting us, not only the staff but the babies are trusting us. ... Some of these children don’t have much human contact unless someone like me sits with them. The nurses tell us, ‘The medicine can only do so much. The babies need the human person to make the medicine effective.’ I think Angela would probably be happy about the work I have chosen to do at Rainbow. Angela believed in seeing needs and responding to them.”

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BOB AND DOROTHY VALERIAN TO RECEIVE 2020 MERICI AWARD

By Mary Hobson Moran, Director of Marketing and Communications

When the Valerians come for a visit at Merici Crossings, their conversations are often politely interrupted with greetings from sisters wanting to say “hello”. They are members of the Ursuline family. This valued relationship with the sisters began many years ago and is a big reason why they will be presented with the 2020 Merici Award at this year’s Ursuline Derby Day, May 2.



Bob and Dorothy Valerian, 2020 Merici Award recipients

The Merici award was created in 2009 to recognize those who live and act in the spirit of Ursuline foundress Saint Angela Merici. Bob and Dorothy Valerian epitomize the Ursuline Spirit in everything they do. They share a passion for our mission, the same mission that St. Angela envisioned almost 500 years ago.

Dorothy’s Ursuline connection began in elementary school at Our Lady of Peace followed by high school at Beaumont School. After she and Bob married in 1965, her love of learning drove her to take classes at colleges in every location they lived, but she always knew she wanted a degree from Ursuline.

Bob received a Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service from Georgetown University 1964 and began United State Air Force active duty that same year. After nine years as a pilot

Bob and Dorothy Valerian epitomize the Ursuline Spirit in everything they do. They share a passion for our mission, the same mission that St. Angela envisioned almost 500 years ago.

in the USAF, the couple “came home” to Cleveland in 1973 where Bob attended law school and received his J.D. from Case Western Reserve University 1976. Bob is now retired after 34 years as a trial attorney.

Dorothy’s dream of an Ursuline College degree came true in 1977 when she received a BA in English. She went on to enjoy a career as a freelance writer and editor, and publicist

“Because we know who the Ursuline Sisters are, we know we can trust they will go where they are needed and where the spirit guides them and, as St. Angela says, ‘be ready for big surprises’.”

for Cleveland area nonprofit organizations. Dorothy returned to Ursuline College to earn a Master’s in Ministry degree in 1999 and is a certified lay ecclesial minister in the Diocese of Cleveland. She served as a Spiritual Care Coordinator at Hospice of the Western Reserve for many years. Now retired, she continues hospice ministry as a volunteer.

Bob and Dorothy are enjoying a very active retirement, traveling, hiking, and spending time with their three children and seven grandchildren. As busy as they are, they always seem to make time for the sisters. Bob graciously served as chair of the Ursuline Sisters Development Committee from 2014-2019 and they both served as co-chairs for the recent Ursuline Sisters’ Bold Faith Capital Campaign. They make commitments like this because they believe in the future of the Ursuline Sisters.

Dorothy explains that the sisters are more than just her former teachers and friends, they are mentors and leaders. She states, “Because we know who the Ursuline Sisters are, we know we can trust they will go where they are needed and where the spirit guides them and, as St. Angela says, ‘be ready for big surprises’.”

Bob nods his head in agreement with his wife and adds, “The Ursuline Sisters’ legacy lives on and continues to grow in all of the thousands of people they have come in contact with over the years, including us.”

Sister Susan Durkin, president of the Ursuline community, worked closely with Bob and Dorothy during the challenging and exciting process of the capital campaign. “The Valerians have been extremely generous with their time, talent and treasure,” said Sister Susan. “As long-time members of our Ursuline family, they are always willing to step in and help where they can, and they are always such a joy to have around. Their warm and joyful spirit is contagious.”

Congratulations Bob and Dorothy Valerian on an award well deserved!

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The call and the journey with Sister Ellen Themes

By Sister Dorothy Bondi

Sister Ellen Themes has been on her faith journey as an Ursuline Sister for 54 years. Reflecting on the call to serve others has led her to respond, not only to this initial call to be an Ursuline Sister, but also to the many ways in which she has been called to serve others in a variety of ministries.

These opportunities to serve in ministry have led her down many different and unique paths, paths she appreciates but never would have imagined. Join us as we reflect on this journey with Sister Ellen.

The idea of religious life was a recurring thought for Sister Ellen throughout her young life. Her positive experience and interaction with Sisters of Mercy in elementary school, the Sisters of St. Joseph in high school, and the Ursuline Sisters in college contributed to fostering her thoughts about a religious vocation. After three years of teaching and summers traveling in Europe and driving through the Southwestern States and Mexico, she was ready to make a "life choice."

She was especially drawn to the Ursulines mainly because of the friendship she enjoyed with Sister Genevieve and Sister Michael Francis. When she expressed her concern to Sister Genevieve: "I don't think I can pray all day," Sister Genevieve's response was simply, "Don't worry."

Living religious life in the community was, at times, easier than she expected, and at other times, harder. It was a time of great changes in the Church and in religious life, but her decision always felt good for her. She was comfortable, and appreciated the support of many within the community and outside the community.

The ministry path of choice for Sister Ellen was and continues to be in education, although this, too, took many different directions for her. Although she had some experience in teaching in junior high school, she definitely felt more drawn to high school, and even more to college. As a result, she received her PhD in Math Education and



Sister Ellen Themes

Statistics, and continued her teaching career at Beaumont High School, Villa Angela Academy, and then Ursuline College, for 25 years. Sister Ellen's dissertation was on "Women and Math Anxiety." She really enjoyed teaching, but was especially happy when she could help young women overcome the "intimidation" of higher math and actually enjoy their success. Sister Ellen continues to enjoy this ministry today as she continues to tutor high school and college students in Math.

The experience of helping young women with these feelings of anxiety led Sister Ellen to consider a different path. She thought about parish ministry, but was drawn, instead, to a healing ministry of art therapy.

While developing her skills in drawing, painting, and clay sculpture, she shared: "I felt I was becoming a different person and the one-on-one ministry was a better fit for my personality. Helping individuals express their feelings through art was powerful."

On this particular new path, Sister Ellen has ministered to the elderly, as well as to children, who are suicidal or homicidal. She has worked with individuals and groups of

"I felt I was becoming a different person and the one-on-one ministry was a better fit for my personality. Helping individuals express their feelings through art was powerful."



Israa (2nd from right) enjoys the company of her children, (left to right) Aws, Osamah, and Mays.

laywomen and religious sisters in the St. Angela Center, and in the former Sophia Center (Spirituality Center) in programs such as Artists' Way, Mandalas, and Visual Journeying. The therapeutic value of these sessions was very rewarding.

In working at Cleveland Clinic, going out to hospice, Stone Garden, Regina Health Center, and Light of Hearts Villa she has used her Art Therapy skills to help people deal with troubling emotions and difficult situations. What can be more life-giving than watching a child present a "Best Grandpa" award to his dying grandfather?

In keeping with St. Angela's Counsel, "To meet the needs of the time," Sister Ellen is called once again to extend herself—this time reaching out and ministering in various ways to a refugee family from Iraq who is struggling in many ways. This family has been in the United States now for three years and lives on the West Side of Cleveland in an area where a number of Arabic families live. The mother is in her 40's (her husband was killed by a bomb in Iraq). Her oldest son is in his mid-twenties. He works and attends Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C).

This young man and his mother take care of two other siblings, a sister in her early twenties who has cerebral palsy, and a brother in his late teens who also has cerebral palsy and a form of autism.

In keeping with St. Angela's Counsel, "To meet the needs of the time," Sister Ellen is called once again to extend herself—this time reaching out and ministering in various ways to a refugee family from Iraq who is struggling in many ways.

Originally, Sister Ellen was asked by the outreach organization US TOGETHER, INC., to do art therapy with the daughter, but she has also been reading and speaking English with the mother. Now, after two years, she speaks English almost fluently and plans to go to Tri-C in January while her two younger children are going to the Cerebral Palsy Center daily.

She does not eat a big lunch on Fridays, because she always enjoys eating a supper of Iraqi specialties with the family. Sister Ellen shared that when she has to leave, the daughter cries, "No, Bebe [grandma]," and they all laugh.

While reflecting on her current ministry with this Iraqi family, she ponders often on how much more they have given her than she could ever give to them.

As an Ursuline, Sister Ellen Themes knows that being aware of current signs of the times and being open to what God is calling us to do means going beyond ourselves, our comfortable way of being, and THAT is our path to the future.

Student interns work and learn with the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland

By Amber Miller, Marketing Intern

Ursuline College is working with the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland to provide hands-on internship experience for interested students. In the fall semester of 2019, Amber Miller and Aly Nahra worked closely with the Ursuline Sisters in the marketing and archive departments respectively.

Amber is a senior at Ursuline College who will be graduating in May 2020 with a Bachelor's in Business Management with regards to Public Relations. Her aspiration is to use her educational background to operate and cater a successful culinary business in the future. Amber's advisor, Instructor Kevin Flynn, made the connection between her, Mary Moran, Director of Marketing and Communications, and Cindy Johnson, Director of Development, in the Ursuline Sisters Development Office.

"I have always had good interactions with the sisters, and marketing is one of my strong points," said Amber, explaining why she took the internship. "I was excited to see what the opportunity held."

Amber's favorite task to complete is compiling data from social media and creating the online activity report every month. She gets joy from anything involving organization, so creating an organized report reflecting data from each individual post from Facebook and Instagram is among her strong suits. Amber also enjoys interacting with the Sisters to inspire unique content she could post online.

"They are always friendly, welcoming, and eager to listen when you need someone to brainstorm with," said Amber, regarding the Ursuline Sisters. "The sisters, staff, and student workers truly create a positive environment that is enjoyable to work in."

Aly graduated from Ursuline College in 2018 with a Bachelor's in Historic Preservation. She is currently enrolled in Kent State's Graduate School of Library Science and Archiving. Her career interests are to continue working in a field of history from archiving and museum work. Aly's undergraduate advisor, Dr. Bari Stith, made the connection between her and Sister Cynthia Glavac in the archives department.



Aly Nahra "sleeves" (in an archival-safe, acid-free polyester envelope) a very old copy of Bishop Rappé's will. In the lower left, on the table, is his passport (original copy).



Amber Miller chats with Sister Nina Vitale (seated) before snapping a photo.

"Archives are resources to preserve important history," said Aly, explaining what archives are. "We have items like old yearbooks from schools Sisters taught at, pictures from specific events, written pieces by or about Sisters, basically anything important that people would want to continue to have as a reference source."

When patrons request information or want to view something in the archives department, it was Aly's job to locate it. In order to find what was requested, the archivist must know the organizational system. Everything stored in archives are labeled and sorted similarly to how a library sorts their books; this makes the material easy to locate. Aly's favorite task to complete is going through old photos because it gives her a sense of what it was like to be in different time periods.

"Everyone is really nice and has always been welcoming from my first interaction here," said Aly, regarding the Ursuline Sisters. "They really try to place you in tasks that interest you rather than giving you something because it is convenient and needs to be done."

Remembering Sister John Mary Blaser

Sister John Mary Blaser's 70 years of service as an Ursuline ran the gamut from education to congregational leadership to financial administration to the ministry of prayer, each carried out with professionalism and dedication. The highly respected and beloved community member died November 5 – one week short of her 90th birthday – at Regina Health Center in Richfield where she had lived since August 2016.



Sister John Mary Blaser

Mary Virginia Blaser was born November 12, 1929, in Cleveland, the second youngest of nine children born to John and Emma (Dondelinger) Blaser. The Ursuline Academy of the Sacred Heart graduate entered the Ursulines September 8, 1947 from Christ the King Parish in East Cleveland, and professed final vows in 1953. She earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in mathematics from Ursuline College and the University of Detroit, respectively.

Sister John Mary began her teaching career at the elementary level, serving at St. Joseph (Collinwood), Our Lady of Peace and St. Catharine schools in Cleveland, St. Clare (Lyndhurst) and St. Francis de Sales (Parma). In 1968 she transitioned to secondary education at Beaumont School, first as a teacher and later as principal.

In 1980 Sister John Mary was elected to congregational leadership. Perhaps the most poignant memory of her eight-year tenure was traveling to Washington D.C. to identify the remains of Sister Dorothy Kazel who, with three other missionaries, was murdered in El Salvador December 2, 1980. Mother Bartholomew, Sister John Mary and the rest of the Council guided the congregation through that heart-wrenching chapter in Ursuline history.

In 1988 the congregation called upon Sister John Mary's mathematical acumen and tapped her for service as congregational treasurer, a position she held 15 years.

In her last years she pursued her interest in genealogy and began work on a family tree. She also returned to her education roots and provided tutoring services through the Ursuline Institute of Learning for students of varying ages. Just this past summer she assisted a young man with his study of calculus.

Sister John Mary will be remembered for her quiet way and for her tireless service to the congregation. She was a committed and faith-filled Ursuline, a dedicated educator and administrator, a loving sister and aunt, and a loyal friend.

She was preceded in death by her parents, brothers William, Charles, Eugene, John and Joseph, and sisters Barbara Blaser, Marjorie Krupansky, and Carolyn Elliot. She is survived by nieces and nephews.

Donations in Sister John Mary's name may be made to the Ursuline Sisters.

“Believe it for certain at death’s last moment you will receive the greatest gift of God’s own person. Take it for a fact also that then especially you will recognize me as your faithful friend.”

– 9th Counsel of St. Angela



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